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Original Article

Mindfulness and Counsellor Self-Efficacy among Pre-Service Counsellors in a South-Western Nigerian Tertiary Institution

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Abstract. This study examined the correlates between mindfulness and counselling self-efficacy among the pre-service counsellors. The study used a total sample of 200 final year students in the Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling Adeyemi Federal University of Education, Ondo, Nigeria. Two standardized and validated scales were used for the collection of data (mindfulness scale, $r = 0.71$; counsellor activity self-efficacy scale, $r = 0.72$). Three research hypotheses were raised and answered at 0.05 level of significance. The findings indicates that: a significant correlation was found in the mindfulness and counselling self-efficacy of the participants, significant difference also exists in the levels of mindfulness and counselling self-efficacy of the participants, with high mindfulness performing better than the moderate and the low mindfulness. Results further reveals the participants mindfulness was the same irrespective of their gender. Implications of mindfulness on counselling self-efficacy of students at all levels generally and some effective ways of promoting of mindfulness were suggested.

Keywords: Mindfulness, Counselling self-efficacy, Gender

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Introduction

Counsellor self-efficacy is a crucial factor for pre-service counsellors to be well prepared upon entering the profession to work effectively with clients and providing good quality services. Counsellor self-efficacy has been the focus of many researches in the past couple of decades. It is defined as one's beliefs or judgments about his or her capabilities to effectively counsel a client in the near future (Larson & Daniels, 1998). The concept describes the degree to which a counsellor considers self as capable of counselling activities. Studies have demonstrated a high correlation among counsellor self-efficacy, positive counsellor and client outcomes (Larson & Daniels, 1998). Researchers have found that counsellor self-efficacy is positively related to counsellor training level and experience (Bischoff, Barton, Thober, & Hawley, 2002; Tang, Addison, LaSure-Bryant, Norman, O'Connell & Stewart-Sicking, 2004). It has also been shown to be associated with counsellor development (Leach, et al., 1997), and expectations of counselling outcomes (Sipps, Sugden, & Faiver, 1988). Hence, counselling self-efficacy is a major factor to be considered in training of counsellors.

Unfortunately, counsellor self-efficacy of pre-service counsellors is greatly hindered by several factors with their attendant grave consequences to the society. For instance, in the training of counsellors, researchers have found that current counsellor education methods are effective in teaching discrete behavioural skills such as reflection of feelings and attending

behaviour (Hill & Lent, 2006). However, less is known about the development of internal (such as cognitive) counselling skills. Literature (such as, Bentley, 2007; Al-Darmaki, 2004) suggests that there is little guidance in counsellor education on how to prepare students in the habits of mind and ways of being, such as attention control and empathic understanding. At this point, self or personal development is required from every counsellor trainee as not all skills particularly cognitive skills can be learnt in the classroom or laboratories. It appears that a conceptualization of how these essential skills develop is less clear and, as of yet, less researched. The role of mindfulness for this development is less known, accepted or researched.

In the last two decades, mindfulness has become the focus of considerable attention by a large community of clinicians and to a less extent, empirical psychology. Mindfulness has been described as a process of bringing a certain quality of attention to moment-by-moment experience (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Practices designed to cultivate this type of awareness have been used for thousands of years to help train the mind to stay non-judgmentally focused on the present moment and to increase compassion (Germer, 2005; Kabat-Zinn, 1990, 1994, 2003; Olendzki, 2005). According to Silananda (1990), mindfulness in Buddhist tradition occupies a central role in a system that was developed as a path leading to the cessation of personal suffering. Mindfulness in contemporary psychology has been adapted as an approach to increasing awareness and skilful responding to mental processes that contributes to emotional distress and maladaptive behaviour.

Researchers and clinicians have applied the techniques of mindfulness to the treatment of such physical and mental health issues as fostering tobacco cessation (Asuzu, & Agokei, 2012), depressive relapse (Ma & Teasdale, 2004) and generalized anxiety disorder (Semple, Reid, & Miller, 2005) with significant results. In addition to client training in mindfulness, a number of scholars have suggested that counsellor mindfulness may be an essential ingredient of clinical practice that cuts across all theoretical orientations and that mindfulness training and practice may be an untapped resource for developing core counselling skills as well as the person of the counsellor (Fulton, 2005; Morgan & Morgan; 2005; Walsh & Shapiro, 2006).

Further, mindfulness practices provide opportunities to gain insight into the nature of thoughts and feelings as passing events in the mind rather than inherent aspects of the self or valid reflections on reality (Segal, Williams & Teasdale, 2002). Mindfulness is considered a capacity available to everyone, although individuals differ in their propensity or willingness to be mindful (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2003). Both conceptual and empirical literature suggest that mindfulness practice helps to increase attentive presence, acceptance, empathy, and self-awareness, as well as reduce stress (Bishop et al., 2004; Brown & Ryan, 2004; Fulton, 2005; Shapiro, Astin, Bishop & Cardova, 2005; Valente & Marotta, 2005).

Empirical research suggests that mindfulness-based interventions hold promise for a variety of outcome objectives, including counsellor training (Adeyemo & Agokei, 2011). These findings suggest that mindfulness may be an important tool for cultivating attentional competencies, which are relevant in counselling. Mindfulness practices may help counsellors attend completely even when the session feels tedious or boring. Furthermore, because counsellors need to pay attention to both internal and external stimuli, broad awareness techniques such as mindfulness may be more helpful in cultivating this attentional capacity than strict concentrative practices.

Although current mindfulness research suggests some links between mindfulness and key counsellor-training outcomes (Shapiro et al, 2005), there is little research specifically on counsellor mindfulness. In a state of mindfulness, the emphasis is simply on noticing either internal or external experience without making judgments, reacting in habitual ways to the stimulus, or elaborating on the meaning of the event (Bishop et al., 2004). As these are all skills that are considered fundamental for effective counselling (Orlinsky, Grawe & Parks, 1994), the use of mindfulness training in counsellor education holds promise as an important tool for facilitating the development of potentially increasing counselling self-efficacy.

The purpose of this study is to find out the correlation between mindfulness and counsellor self-efficacy; and in addition examine whether gender difference exist in mindfulness among counsellors in a population of Nigerian pre-service counsellors. To achieve the purpose of this study the following hypothesis were generated; (1) There will be no significant correlation between mindfulness and counsellor self efficacy, (2) There will be no significant difference in the counsellor self efficacy of the participants based on their level of mindfulness (low, moderate and high), (3) There will be no gender difference in the mindfulness of the participants.

Method

The study adopted a causal descriptive research design approach. This does not involve the manipulation of any variables.

Population

The population for this study was all counselling students in Adeyemi College of Education who were in their final year and those who have completed the mandatory six weeks counselling practicum exercises. This population was 282 counsellor trainees who are currently registered students in the Department of Educational Foundations and Counselling in the School.

Sample and Sampling Technique

The sample for this study was randomly 200 randomly selected final year counselling students in Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo State. The participants were consisting of 73 males and 127 females. The participants' age ranged from 21-30 years with mean age of 25.5.

Instrumentation

Two validated and standardized scales were used in this study. Below is their description. The Counsellor Activity Self-Efficacy Scale (CASES): The scale is a 41 item self-report measure of counselling self-efficacy developed by Lent et al. (2003). It consists of with a 10- point likert-type scale in which respondents rate their confidence from 0 (no confidence at all) to 9 (complete competence). The CASES has been reported to have a high reliability with a Chronbachs alpha of 0.97 (Lent et al., 2003). A pilot test with pre-service counsellors from a university other than those in this study produced a scale alpha of 0.72.

Mindfulness scale: The measure was the 20 item Mindfulness scale by Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, and Toney, (2006). Typical examples of the items are: "I make judgments about whether my thoughts are good or bad", "I criticize myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions". It has a reliability coefficient of 0.7 using cronbach-alpha method. The scale demonstrated at 0.71 two-week test re-test reliability coefficient for this study

Procedure

The researcher personally distributed and collected the completed questionnaire from the participants. Permissions were obtained from significant authorities to facilitate the process. Participation in this study was strictly voluntary, and no incentives were offered. Participants were adequately informed of confidentiality and the need to be precise and

truthful in filling the questionnaire. The questionnaires were then filled and returned by the participants after adequate understanding.

Design or Data Analysis

Data were analyzed, using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to determine the relationship among the variables investigated. Analysis of variance, multiple comparison and t-test statistical tools was also used.

Result

The results of the analysis are presented as follows:

Hypothesis 1: There will be no significant correlation between mindfulness and counseling self-efficacy

Table 1. Correlation between mindfulness and counseling self-efficacy

Variables	N	X	SD	r	p
Mindfulness	200	52.1	11.4	0.71	<0.05
Counseling self-efficacy	200	177.8	10.6		

Table 1 above shows that there is significant positive correlation between mindfulness and counseling self-efficacy with $r = 0.71$. This implies that the more the mindfulness with the participants procrastinate the more their counseling self-efficacy.

Hypothesis 2: There will be no significant difference in the counseling self-efficacy of the subjects based on their level of mindfulness (Low, Moderate and High).

Table 2. Level of Mindfulness and Counseling self-efficacy.

Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean squares	F	P
Between Groups	409.42	2	204.71	26.91	<0.05
Within Groups	1498.62	197	7.61		
Total		199			

Table 2 above shows that there is a significant difference in the level of mindfulness and counseling self-efficacy of the participants with $F_{obs} = 26.91$ at $P < 0.05$ with 2 degree of freedom. To identify the mindfulness group that has a better counseling self-efficacy over the other, t-test analysis was carried out in pairs. The result is shown in table 3. From table 3 below high mindfulness had a mean counselling self-efficacy of 174.61 and a standard deviation of 8.47 while moderate mindfulness had a mean of counselling self-efficacy of 172.67 and a standard deviation of 9.34. The difference between the mean values of the two groups (1.94) is statistically significant at 0.05 levels. This indicates that a significant difference exists between the counseling self-efficacy of high and moderate mindfulness with high mindfulness performing better than the moderate mindfulness. Furthermore, data on the counseling self-efficacy of high mindfulness ($x = 174.61$, $SD = 8.47$) were compared with those of low mindfulness ($x = 172.53$, $SD = 8.11$). This analysis showed a mean difference of 2.08, which is significant at 0.05 levels. This indicates that the counselling self-efficacy of high mindfulness as measured by their counselling self-efficacy were better than those of low mindfulness ($P < 0.05$). On the other hand, another comparison of the mean counselling self-efficacy of moderate mindfulness ($X = 172.67$, $SD = 9.34$) and low mindfulness ($X = 172.53$, $SD = 8.11$)

showed a mean difference of 0.14 which is not significant at 0.05 level. This perhaps suggests that the counselling self-efficacy of moderate and low mindfulness is not different despite that the moderate mindfulness recorded a higher counselling self-efficacy than the low mindfulness.

Table 3. Multiple comparison of counselling self-efficacy of participants and their levels of mindfulness.

LEVEL OF MINDFULNESS	NO	X	SD	Mean difference	Std. error	P
Low Mindfulness	81	172.53	8.11	0.14	0.142	<0.05
Moderate Mindfulness	72	172.67	9.34			
Low Mindfulness	81	172.53	8.11	2.08	0.278	<0.05
High Mindfulness	57	174.61	8.47			
Moderate Mindfulness	72	172.67	9.34			
High Mindfulness	57	174.61	8.47	1.94	.111	<0.05

Hypothesis 4: There will be no significant gender difference in the mindfulness of the participants.

Table 4. Gender difference and Mindfulness.

Variables	No	X	SD	df	t.obs	t. crit	P
Male	73	50.5	8.74	198	1.332	1.96	<0.05
Female	173	52.22	9.48				

From the result in table 4, it shows that the hypothesis of no gender difference existing in mindfulness between male and female is accepted. This is because the calculated t, (t.obs) 1.33 is lesser than the t critical, (t.crit) 1.98. This implies that both male and participants exhibit the same level of mindfulness with its attending influence accordingly.

Discussion

The result of this study provides significant insight to the relationship between mindfulness and counselling self-efficacy. The first hypothesis tested that there is no significant correlation between mindfulness and counselling self-efficacy was not supported. In other words, the result indicated that there is a significant correlation between counselling self-efficacy and mindfulness. The result of this study is in congruence with prior studies (Adeyemo & Agokei, 2010, 2011; Bentley, 2007) that found mindfulness technique to be fostering counsellor self-efficacy. Adeyemo and Agokei (2011) noted that this effectiveness of mindfulness in fostering counsellor self-efficacy could be traced to direct outcome of the internal behaviours of intentionally and non-judgmentally attending to the present moment. This meta-mechanism overarches other hypothesized mechanisms of change, including exposure, self-regulation and self-management, values clarification, relaxation, and acceptance (Baer, 2003; Shapiro et al., 2006).

The result of the study also indicated that there is a significant difference between mindfulness and counselling self-efficacy, with student with high mindfulness having a higher counselling self-efficacy than participants with moderate and low levels of mindfulness do. This has a very significant implication for the quality and number of students that will be available for counselling studies. This result is easily explainable bearing in mind that conceptual and empirical literature suggest that mindfulness practice helps to increase attentive presence, acceptance, empathy, and self-awareness, as well as reduce stress. In a state of mindfulness, the emphasis is simply on noticing either internal or external experience without making judgments,

reacting in habitual ways to the stimulus, or elaborating on the meaning of the event (Bishop et al., 2004). At this point, insight into the nature of thoughts and feelings as passing events in the mind rather than inherent aspects of the self or valid reflections on reality are gained. An adequate, relaxing and potentially successful approach to client's challenge is developed for the counsellor. Questioning, probing, reflecting, counter-transference, para-phrasing are easily and readily made by the counsellor in synchrony with the client's challenge. As these are all skills that are considered fundamental for effective counselling (Orlinsky et al., 1994), little wonder that with high mindfulness levels a potentially increased counsellor self-efficacy among pre-service counsellors is gained.

The hypothesis that gender would have an effect on mindfulness was not supported by the result. The result indicated that mindfulness is independent of gender. This means that both male and female exhibit mindfulness in like manners. It is pertinent to note that gender exerts considerable influence over motives to teach including counselling considering it is an educational centeredness and focus. Females are encouraged into the counselling profession because it is regarded as undemanding, feminine and compatible with domesticity. The daily work schedules appear convenient, and the holidays are long, allowing more time with their children. Hence, most women become counsellors because of a sense of job compatibility, less work demand seems much easier a schedule. However, mindfulness as shown in the result above has no significant compatibility with being male or female as it is a phenomenon that transcends counselling. Mindfulness is noted to be the gap between perceiving and responding appropriately, a trait requisite for accurate empathy. The ability to attend to and experience the client on a deeper level would improve as this basic task becomes automatic. Therefore, the combination of being able to non-judgmentally and be purposively attentive which is not peculiar to being male or female offer plausible explanation for the finding.

Conclusion

A review of the literature reveals that in counsellor education, insufficient attention has been paid to cultivate the internal "habits of mind" and cognitive skills necessary for sustainable counsellor efficacy. In view of this, counsellor education programmes leave much cognitive skill development to chance with grave consequence resulting in production of ill-equipped counsellors with poor self-image, incompetence, hostile environment where clients feel unsafe, unwelcome, unaided, misguided and potentials untapped. This study investigated the correlates of mindfulness and counselling self-efficacy of pre-service counsellors. Being efficacious to a large extent describes the typified performance of the counsellor. In other words, counselling self-efficacy emphasizes mastery and performance competence with clinical finishing accruing from the belief of efficaciousness. Despite the numerous factors that impede the positive development of counselling self-efficacy, this study has shown that with increasing levels of mindfulness, counselling self-efficacy among pre-service counsellors can be increased.

Mindfulness fosters the mental space necessary to reflect on values more objectively. Mindfulness practice is a systematic mental training in noticing when attention has strayed from the present moment, sustaining attention on all aspects of the here-and-now, and quietening the mental noise of subjective analysis, elaboration, or negative self-talk. This is further emphasized in the counselling relationship which tests the ability of the counsellor to actively and non-judgmentally attend to a client. When counselling students engage in mindfulness periodically especially with their day to day activities, observing and modifying their use of being mindful, counselling self-efficacy may be increased to the maximum for optimum functioning in counselling. Therefore, mindfulness holds a significant benefit in counsellor education and should be promoted.

Conclusion

The study concludes that mindfulness significantly influences counsellor self-efficacy among pre-service counsellors in Nigeria. Participants with higher levels of mindfulness demonstrated greater confidence, self-regulation, empathy, and competence in counselling activities compared to those with moderate or low mindfulness levels, while gender was found to have no significant effect. These findings underscore that mindfulness fosters essential internal skills—such as attentional focus and emotional balance—that enhance counsellor effectiveness beyond traditional training. Therefore, integrating mindfulness practices into counsellor education programmes is recommended to strengthen self-awareness, reflective capacity, and professional readiness among future counsellors.

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