

BURNOUT, COPING STRATEGIES, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AMONG COUNSELLORS-IN-TRAINING (CITS): A STUDY IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Burnout, coping strategies, and psychological well-being are critical aspects of a counsellor-in-training's (CIT) professional development. In the demanding field of counselling, CITs often face various stressors, making it important to understand the factors that affect their mental health and resilience. This study aims (1) To describe demographics characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity) among CITs, (2) To identify level of burnout, coping strategies and psychological well-being among CITs, and (3) To determine the relationships between burnout, coping strategies and psychological well-being among CITs. This study used quantitative correlational research design. The purposive sampling method was employed to select respondents, based on specific criteria relevant to the study's objectives. The data were collected using self-administered questionnaires to 406 counsellors-in-training in six universities in Malaysia. The set of questionnaires were divided into four parts measuring demographic characteristics of the counsellors-in-training, burnout, coping strategies, and psychological well-being. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 27th version was used to analyse the data collected for descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics indicated 61.1% reported a high level of burnout, and 51% reported avoidant coping usage and 52% reported a low level of psychological well-being. Pearson Correlation analysis revealed a moderate negative relationship between burnout and psychological well-being ($r = -.395$, $p < .01$). More specifically, weak negative correlations were found between exhaustion ($r = -.370$, $p < .01$) and cynicism ($r = -.152$, $p < .01$) with well-being, while academic efficacy showed a weak positive correlation ($r = .309$, $p < .01$). Additionally, avoidant coping exhibited a weak negative relationship with well-being ($r = -.254$, $p < .01$). In contrast, weak positive correlations were observed for approach coping ($r = .171$, $p < .01$), humour ($r = .210$, $p < .01$), and religion ($r = .257$, $p < .01$). The study's findings highlight the prevalence of burnout and the use of coping strategies, such as avoidant coping, among counsellors-in-training. The negative relationship between burnout and psychological well-being underlines the need for educational institutions to address burnout proactively. Additionally, the positive influence of approach coping, humor, and religious practices suggests that fostering these strategies could enhance CITs' well-being. These results contribute to the importance of creating a supportive learning environment that promotes the personal and professional growth of CITs, helping them develop effective coping mechanisms to mitigate burnout.

Keywords: burnout, coping strategies, psychological wellbeing

INTRODUCTION

Well-being has become an increasingly important aspect of mental health, garnering significant attention in recent years. It is a multifaceted concept that encompasses various dimensions of an individual's life, including physical, emotional, and social health. In the context of university students,

well-being refers to the overall state of health and satisfaction experienced during their academic journey (Lavelle, Benson, & Schmidt, 2019; Martínez-Monteagudo et al., 2021; Mello, Alves, & Basso, 2020). University students are particularly vulnerable to mental health issues due to the myriad demands associated with their academic and professional responsibilities. A study by Eisenberg et al. (2017) revealed that nearly 40% of university students reported experiencing significant levels of anxiety, while approximately 30% reported feelings of depression. Contributing factors to poor well-being among this demographic include academic pressure, financial stress, and social isolation (Mazzer Walsh & Abbott, 2021). Counsellors-in-training (CITs), a subset of university students, face additional challenges due to the nature of their professional preparation. CITs are individuals pursuing a degree or certification in counselling who are actively engaged in practical training under the supervision of licensed professionals. This hands-on experience in providing real-world counselling services is critical for their development as competent counsellors, yet it also places them in emotionally demanding situations. As a result, CITs not only encounter the typical academic and personal pressures experienced by university students but also face unique stressors related to their training and client care responsibilities.

Building on the understanding of burnout as a state of emotional, physical, and mental exhaustion caused by prolonged stress (Thompson, 2011), counsellors-in-training (CITs) are particularly susceptible to this condition. The demands of balancing academic, work, and personal responsibilities often place immense pressure on CITs, making burnout a critical concern. As they deliver counselling services under supervision, participate in outreach programs, and engage in professional development activities (American Counseling Association, 2014), CITs face unique stressors that impact their mental health, professional growth, and ability to provide effective client care. The training process, which requires the integration of theoretical knowledge with practical skills, further intensifies this pressure. Consequently, CITs are especially vulnerable to the emotional labour and professional stress inherent in their roles.

In this challenging environment, coping strategies play a vital role in determining how CITs manage these multifaceted challenges (Whitley, 2018). Research across various countries indicates that CITs utilize a range of coping mechanisms—from problem-focused strategies like time management and seeking supervision to emotion-focused techniques such as self-care and peer support (Aren & Pisal, 2022; Dye, Burke & Wolf, 2020). However, reliance on ineffective coping strategies such as avoidance or denial can worsen burnout and lead to a decline in psychological well-being and professional performance. The need for effective coping strategies is universal; however, the specific mechanisms employed can vary significantly based on cultural context.

In Malaysia, the field of counselling is gaining importance as mental health awareness increases. Yet CITs face distinctive challenges that can contribute to burnout. Cultural expectations and societal pressures often impose additional stressors on these CITs. Moreover, limited access to quality counselling supervision worsens their challenges. While many CITs employ coping strategies rooted in religious and familial values reflective of Malaysia's cultural context, they frequently struggle with burnout due to insufficient institutional and supervisory support. Addressing these challenges is vital not only for ensuring that CITs successfully complete their training but also for maintaining their psychological well-being (Ying & Hayes, 2020)

PROBLEM STATEMENTS

The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015–2025 (Higher Education) envisions the development of holistic, entrepreneurial, and balanced graduates who are intellectually, spiritually, emotionally, and physically harmonious (Ministry of Education, Malaysia, 2015). However, this vision faces significant challenges as university students increasingly grapple with health-related issues. The National Health and Morbidity Survey (2015) reported that 29.2% of Malaysians experience mental health issues, a sharp increase from 10.7% in 1996. More recently, the National Health and Morbidity

Survey (2019) indicated that 2.3% of Malaysians suffer from depression, highlighting the persistent prevalence of mental health challenges in the population.

This mental health crisis extends to CITs, who are particularly vulnerable to issues such as anxiety and depression. For example, Ng et al. (2024) found that CITs in Malaysia reported moderate to severe depressive symptoms, suggesting that those facing mental health challenges often experience compromised well-being. CITs must balance academic responsibilities with personal and professional demands (Aren et al., 2022; Clarke, 2022), while self-doubt about their counselling abilities can further erode their confidence (Johnson, 2020). Additionally, frequent exposure to clients with traumatic experiences can lead to compassion fatigue (Can & Watson, 2019), exacerbating the mental health burden. Mental health challenges among university students, including CITs, negatively impact academic performance and well-being (Aziz et al., 2019; Lim et al., 2017), and may even lead to tragic outcomes such as suicide (Cheong et al., 2021; Abdul Rashid et al., 2019). CITs often report feeling isolated and unsupported, which heightens their stress and burnout. Providing opportunities for CITs to express their concerns can alleviate anxiety during professional practice (Pirtle et al., 2019).

The demanding nature of CIT training further contributes to their mental health challenges. CITs are required to complete a total of 504 hours of internship, which includes 192 clinical hours (involving individual and group counselling) and the remaining hours allocated for non-clinical activities such as consultations, counselling-related programmes, professional development activities, guidance, psychological testing and assessment, record-keeping, treatment planning, counselling session reports, and other administrative tasks related to their organization. These diverse demands increase the risk of stress and burnout, particularly when students struggle to manage both their clinical and non-clinical responsibilities.

Burnout in helping professions is well-documented. For example, Obregon et al. (2020) assessed burnout among medical students and found that 40.3% of participants reported experiencing burnout, particularly in the domains of emotional exhaustion and cynicism. Further analysis indicated a correlation between burnout and the effectiveness of wellness initiatives, suggesting that burnout may diminish the impact of such initiatives on improving student well-being. Kastely (2021) similarly examined burnout risk among CITs, finding that CITs with higher self-efficacy and social support experienced greater personal accomplishment, reducing their burnout risk. However, younger CITs reported higher emotional exhaustion, and those involved in clinical coursework faced greater depersonalization, likely due to the emotional demands of direct client interaction. Yang and Hayes (2020) further identified work-related, psychotherapist-specific, and client-related factors as key contributors to burnout among mental health practitioners, with psychological distress, low self-efficacy, and lack of mindfulness as significant predictors of burnout.

In relation to coping strategies, Alosius et al. (2023) found that self-efficacy plays a key role in managing stress among counselling practicum students, with increased experience and confidence leading to lower stress levels. Kaya and Yağa (2022) found a positive and significant relationship between coping humour, psychological resilience, and psychological well-being among counsellors, suggesting that humour can serve as an effective coping mechanism to enhance mental health.

Despite the extensive research on burnout and coping strategies, there remains a lack of focus on how these variables specifically affect CITs in Malaysia. This study aims to address this gap by examining the relationships between burnout, coping strategies, and psychological well-being among CITs. Understanding these relationships will inform future interventions and contribute to a more supportive educational environment, ensuring CITs are better prepared for their future roles in delivering effective client care. Furthermore, future research should consider the cultural context of CITs across different universities and countries, as variations in training, support systems, and cultural expectations could significantly impact how burnout and coping strategies manifest among CITs. By incorporating a more global and culturally nuanced perspective, future studies could offer tailored interventions that address the unique challenges faced by CITs in diverse educational and professional settings.

OBJECTIVE

The purpose of this study has been following specific research objectives, which are:

1. To describe demographics characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity) among counsellors-in-training.
2. To identify level of burnout, coping strategies and psychological well-being among counsellors-in-training.
3. To determine the relationships between burnout, coping strategies and psychological well-being among counsellors-in-training

METHODOLOGY

A quantitative correlational research design was employed to identify predictive relationships by examining the associations between variables (Shaughnessy et al., 2014). This study investigated the correlation between burnout, coping strategies, and psychological well-being among CITs. A cross-sectional approach was adopted, wherein data were collected from a larger sample of the population at a single point in time (Shaughnessy et al., 2014).

The sample were 406 undergraduate and postgraduate in six universities in Malaysia. The purposive sampling method was employed to select respondents, as it is a non-probability sampling method that enables researchers to select participants based on specific characteristics or criteria that are most relevant to the research objectives (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018). This sampling method allows researchers to deliberately choose individuals who are expected to provide rich, detailed data or who possess specific knowledge or experience related to the study's focus. The sample was selected based on the criteria listed below to ensure the data collected is relevant and represents the population studied; i) respondents in universities that provide degree and master level counselling related programmes, with coursework, ii) counselling students that is currently undergoing internship or iii) counselling students that finished internship within 6 months.

Universities that provide degree and master level counselling related programmes were approached to conduct the research. As the respondents were scattered across Malaysia conducting their internship, the data was collected using self-administered questionnaires via google form. The set of questionnaires will measure demographic characteristics of the CITs, burnout, coping strategies, and psychological well-being. The set of questionnaires was divided into four parts, consists of:

- a) Demographic characteristics
This section comprises items related to respondents' age, gender and ethnicity.
- b) Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI): General Survey for Students (Schaufeli, Leiter, Maslach & Jackson, 1996)
The MBI-GS (S) comprises 16 items and three dimensions: exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy. Five items are related to exhaustion, five are associated with cynicism, and six are linked to professional efficacy.
- c) Brief – Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced Inventory (Brief-COPE) (Carver (1997)
The Brief-COPE is a 28-item self-report questionnaire designed to assess two primary coping styles: avoidant coping and approach coping. Additionally, the Humour and Religion subscales are considered distinct and are not categorized under either of the two main coping styles. Of the total items, 12 correspond to avoidant coping strategies, and another 12 relate to approach coping strategies, while the remaining 4 items are divided equally between the Humour and Religion subscales, with 2 items each.
- d) Psychological Well-being Questionnaire (PWB) (Ryff, 1989)

PWB is a multi-dimensional with 18 items. The dimension in the questionnaire consists of i) Autonomy; ii) Environmental Mastery; iii) Personal Growth; iv) Positive Relations with others; v) purpose in life; vi) self-acceptance. The items were divided equally with 3 items for each subscales, where 10 items should be reverse-scored.

Taking into consideration that the study involved human sample, there are certain ethical issues that need to be counted to protect their privacy. Prior to answering the google form, information of the research being conducted is explained and that the participation is voluntary and at any point in time during the data collection, they may refuse to continue. Information on how the data will be used, the anonymity to respect the respondents' privacy and confidentiality were also explained. The data collected will only be accessed by the researchers and all findings will be reported in general. By completing the google form indicates that the respondents consent to participate in the research.

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 27th version was used to calculate the data collected for descriptive and inferential statistics. The questionnaire was distributed to 563 respondents, of which 406 completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 72.11%. Normality testing was conducted to determine whether a data set has normally distributed values. The testing showed that the data were normally distributed. Descriptive statistics will be used for univariate analysis, to describe and summarise the findings. The analysis includes the frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, to describe the demographic characteristics, burnout, coping strategies and psychological wellbeing among CITs. Inferential Statistic in this study consists of bivariate analysis, which is Pearson correlation to answer the relationships between burnout, coping strategies and psychological wellbeing. The analysis assists in confirming or rejecting the hypothesis made about the relationships among variables in the current study (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007).

RESULTS

Findings for Research Questions 1: What are the Demographics Characteristics (Age, Gender, Ethnicity) of CITs?

Table 1.1 Descriptive Statistics Result for Demographic Characteristics (N = 406)

| Variables | N (%) | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Age | 406 | 25.36 | 3.66 |
| ≤ 22 | 14 (3.4) | | |
| 22 – 29 | 348 (85.7) | | |
| ≥ 29 | 44 (10.8) | | |
| Gender | 406 | 1.82 | .39 |
| Male | 74 (18.2) | | |
| Female | 332 (81.8) | | |
| Ethnicity | 406 | 1.25 | .68 |
| Malay | 343 (84.5) | | |
| Chinese | 33 (8.1) | | |

| Variables | N (%) | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------------|
| Indian | 24 (5.9) | | |
| Bumiputera Sabah | 3 (.7) | | <i>continued</i> |
| Bumiputera Sarawak | 2 (.5) | | |
| Bugis | 1 (.2) | | |

This study's first research objective is to identify the demographics characteristics (age, gender, ethnicity) among CITs. Based on **Table 1.1**, the result showed the average age of the CITs is 25 years old with 348 (85.7%) of the CITs were at the age range between 22 to 29 years old, followed by 29 years old and above (44 or 10.8%) and 22 years old and below (14 or 3.4%). The analysis also showed that 332 (81.8%) of the CITs was female while the remaining 74 (18.2%) were male. In terms of ethnicity, 343 of the CITs were Malay (84.5%), followed by 33 Chinese (8.1%), 24 Indian (5.9%), 3 Bumiputra Sabah (.7%), 2 Bumiputera Sarawak (.5%) and 1 Bugis (.2%) ethnicity.

Findings for Research Questions 2: What is the level of burnout, coping strategies and Psychological Well-Being among CITs?

Table 1.2 Descriptive Statistics of Burnout (N=406)

| Variables | N (%) | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Burnout | 406 | 52.02 | 12.49 |
| < (low) | 158 (38.9) | | |
| ≥ (high) | 248 (61.1) | | |
| Exhaustion | 406 | 19.88 | 5.45 |
| < (low) | 157 (38.7) | | |
| ≥ (high) | 249 (61.3) | | |
| Cynicism | 406 | 11.09 | 4.01 |
| < (low) | 220 (54.2) | | |
| ≥ (high) | 186 (45.8) | | |
| Professional Efficacy | 406 | 21.04 | 6.52 |
| < (low) | 193 (47.5) | | |
| ≥ (high) | 213 (52.5) | | |

Table 1.2 showed descriptive statistics of burnout among CITs. Findings on burnout reveal significant insights into the CITs, highlighting both total burnout scores and its subscales: exhaustion, cynicism, and professional efficacy. In terms of total burnout, 248 respondents (61.1%) reported high levels of burnout with the average score of 52.02 (S.D. = 12.49), while 158 (38.9%) had low levels, indicating that more than half of the respondents are experiencing significant burnout.

Looking at the exhaustion subscale, 249 respondents (61.3%) reported high exhaustion, while 157 (38.7%) experienced low exhaustion. This suggests that exhaustion is a prevalent issue among the respondents. The cynicism subscale shows a slightly different pattern, with a higher proportion of respondents (220 or 54.2%) reporting low levels of cynicism. However, 186 respondents (45.8%) still experience high cynicism, indicating a notable but less dominant presence of this aspect of burnout. The last subscale, which is, professional efficacy subscale, 213 respondents (52.5%) reported high levels of professional efficacy, while 193 (47.5%) experienced low inefficacy. This indicates that more than half of the respondents belief that they have the skills and confidence in their roles, contributing to the overall burnout. Overall, the findings showed that the aspect that contributes the most to burnout among CITs is inefficacy (Mean = 21.04) followed by exhaustion (Mean = 19.88) and lastly cynicism (Mean = 11.09). Table 18 showed the descriptive statistics of study variables in detail.

Table 1.3 Descriptive Statistics of Coping Strategies (N=406)

| Variables | | N (%) | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|--------------------------|-----------------|------------|--------------|----------------|
| Coping Strategies | Avoidant | 406 | 30.63 | 5.38 |
| | < (low) | 199 (49.0) | | |
| | ≥ (high) | 207 (51.0) | | |
| | Approach | 406 | 40.05 | 5.56 |
| | < (low) | 211 (52.0) | | |
| | ≥ (high) | 195 (48.0) | | |
| | Humour | 406 | 5.07 | 1.91 |
| | < (low) | 214 (52.7) | | |
| | ≥ (high) | 192 (47.3) | | |
| | Religion | 406 | 6.70 | 1.39 |
| | < (low) | 200 (49.3) | | |
| | ≥ (high) | 206 (50.7) | | |

Table 1.3 showed descriptive statistics of coping strategies among CITs. The findings provide insights into how they manage stress, based on four subscales: avoidant, approach, humour, and religion. For the avoidant coping strategy, 207 respondents (51.0%) reported high usage, while 199 (49.0%) had low usage. This suggests that a slight majority tend to engage in avoidant behaviours, possibly as a means of managing stress by distancing themselves from problems. In contrast, the approach coping strategy, which involves actively addressing stressors, was utilized by fewer respondents, with 195 (48.0%) reporting high usage and 211 (52.0%) reporting low usage. This indicates that slightly more CITs lean away from this proactive strategy.

For humour, 192 respondents (47.3%) reported high usage, while 214 (52.7%) had low usage. This suggests that a majority of the respondents do not rely heavily on humour as a coping mechanism. Lastly, religion is used almost evenly, with 206 respondents (50.7%) reporting high reliance on religious coping strategies and 200 (49.3%) reporting low reliance. This indicates that religion is a significant coping strategy for about half of the respondents. Overall, the findings suggest

that the coping strategy frequently used by CITs is approach coping (Mean = 40.05) followed by avoidant (Mean = 30.63). Between applying humour and religion in coping showed CITs frequently seek religion (Mean = 6.70) followed by humour (Mean = 5.07).

Table 1.4 Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Well-Being (N=406)

| Variables | N (%) | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|---------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-----------------------|
| Psychological Well-being | 406 | 53.43 | 15.33 |
| < (low) | 211 (52.0) | | |
| ≥ (high) | 195 (48.0) | | |
| Autonomy | 406 | 9.38 | 2.84 |
| < (low) | 172 (42.4) | | |
| ≥ (high) | 234 (57.6) | | |
| Environment Mastery | 406 | 7.93 | 3.15 |
| < (low) | 211 (52.0) | | |
| ≥ (high) | 195 (48.0) | | |
| Personal Growth | 406 | 7.35 | 2.77 |
| < (low) | 207 (51.0) | | |
| ≥ (high) | 199 (49.0) | | |
| Positive Relations | 406 | 9.73 | 3.38 |
| < (low) | 175 (43.1) | | |
| ≥ (high) | 231 (56.9) | | |
| Purpose in Life | 406 | 10.48 | 3.23 |
| < (low) | 174 (42.9) | | |
| ≥ (high) | 232 (57.1) | | |
| Self-acceptance | 406 | 8.56 | 3.46 |
| < (low) | 218 (53.7) | | |
| ≥ (high) | 188 (46.3) | | |

Table 1.4 showed descriptive statistics on CITs psychological well-being were based on the total score and six subscales namely autonomy, environment mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Total psychological well-being showed 211 respondents (52.0%) reported low levels with the average score of 53.43 (S.D. = 15.33), while 195 (48.0%) reported high levels. This indicates that nearly half of the CITs perceive their psychological well-being positively.

In terms of the psychological wellbeing subscale, the first being autonomy subscale, 234 respondents (57.6%) reported high levels of autonomy, while 172 respondents (42.4%) indicated lower autonomy. Regarding environmental mastery, which reflects one's ability to manage life's demands - particularly in the context of CITs' competence as counsellors - 211 respondents (52.0%) reported low mastery, whereas 195 respondents (48.0%) reported high mastery. The personal growth subscale revealed that 207 respondents (51.0%) experienced low levels of growth, while 199 respondents (49.0%) indicated high growth.

For the positive relations subscale, 231 respondents (56.9%) reported strong interpersonal relationships, compared to 175 respondents (43.1%) who indicated weaker relationships. When assessing purpose in life, an essential component of well-being, 232 respondents (57.1%) reported a strong sense of purpose, while 174 respondents (42.9%) expressed a lower sense of purpose. Lastly, self-acceptance showed lower levels among 218 respondents (53.7%), with 188 respondents (46.3%) indicating higher levels of self-acceptance, reflecting how CITs perceive their self-worth and overall self-regard.

Findings for Research Questions 3: What Are the Relationships between Burnout, Coping Strategies and Psychological Well-being Among CITs?

Table 1.5 Relationships Between the Burnout, Coping Strategies and Psychological Well-being among CITs

| Variables | Pearson Correlation | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------------------------|---------------------|-----------------|
| Burnout | -.395** | <.001 |
| Exhaustion | -.370** | <.001 |
| Cynicism | -.152** | .002 |
| Professional Efficacy | .309** | <.001 |
| Coping Strategies | | |
| Avoidant | -.254** | <.001 |
| Approach | .171** | <.001 |
| Humour | .210** | <.001 |
| Religion | .257** | <.001 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 1.5 showed correlation analyses to determine the relationships between the burnout and psychological well-being among CITs. Findings moderate negative relationship between burnout and psychological well-being, $r = -.395$, $p < .01$. As for burnout subscales, weak negative relationships were shown for Exhaustion, $r = -.370$, $p < .01$, and Cynicism, $r = -.152$, $p < .01$, whereas professional efficacy showed weak positive relationships with psychological well-being, $r = .309$, $p < .01$. The findings suggest a negative correlation between burnout and psychological well-being among CITs. Specifically, increased levels of burnout, including heightened exhaustion and cynical thinking, are associated with lower psychological well-being. Conversely, higher levels of academic efficacy correspond to improved psychological well-being among CITs.

Furthermore, the findings also showed correlation analysis to determine the relationships between the subscale coping strategies and psychological well-being among CITs. The findings revealed a weak negative relationship between avoidant coping and

psychological well-being, $r = -.254$, $p < .01$, whereas weak positive relationships were found for approach coping, $r = -.171$, $p < .01$, humour, $r = -.210$, $p < .01$, and religion, $r = -.257$, $p < .01$. This indicates that the more CITs utilise avoidant coping strategies, the lower the psychological well-being, whereas increased use of approach coping strategies, humour and religion, is associated with higher psychological well-being.

DISCUSSION

Burnout and Psychological Wellbeing

The findings on burnout and psychological wellbeing suggest a negative correlation between burnout and psychological well-being among CITs. Specifically, increased levels of burnout, including heightened exhaustion and cynical thinking, are associated with lower psychological well-being. Conversely, higher levels of academic efficacy correspond to improved psychological well-being among CITs.

This finding is similar with research by Cazolari (2020) that showed negative correlation between burnout subscales, namely exhaustion and cynical with World Health Organisation Quality of Life (WHOQOL – BREF), which is interconnected with their wellbeing. Wardle and Mayorga (2016) in their study on burnout CITs stated that 85.72% of postgraduate counselling students exhibited signs of burnout, either as a condition warranting attention or as a state in which they are actively experiencing burnout. This situation poses potential risks to their physical and mental well-being. Additionally, factors contributing to burnout include a decline in enthusiasm and compassion, challenges in managing the balance between academic, work, and personal responsibilities, and difficulties in maintaining clear boundaries between personal and professional roles (Thompson et al., 2011). Research by Lee, Hassan and Zaremohzzabieh (2021) focusing on burnout among working counsellors indicated a significant negative association between burnout and resilience, suggesting that counsellors with lower resilience levels are more susceptible to experiencing burnout. This implication can be extended to CITs, who share similar professional demands. Specifically, it can be inferred that those CITs lacking resilience may struggle to cope with the challenges encountered during their internships, thereby increasing their risk of burnout.

According to Gibson et al. (2021), counselors should actively engage in self-reflection to identify signs of stress and burnout. Parker et al. (2022) suggests that counselor education programs by the faculty can support this by modeling effective coping strategies, incorporating wellness activities into the curriculum, highlighting professional support systems, and promoting self-acceptance, including the acknowledgment of personal imperfections. Moreover, effectively managing responsibilities can enhance academic efficacy, which in turn contributes to improved psychological well-being. Another aspect to be looked upon is the role of supervisor in mitigating CITs burnout. Arifin, Mohd Noah, Wan Jaafar, and Zakaria (2019) emphasize the necessity for supervisors to provide clear guidelines and support to enhance CITs' understanding of their roles. This clarity is crucial in minimizing complications during professional practice, which can significantly mitigate the risk of burnout. By establishing structured supervision that delineates expectations and responsibilities, supervisors can help CITs navigate the complexities of their dual roles as students and emerging professionals. This proactive approach not only fosters a supportive learning environment but also equips CITs with the skills needed to manage stressors effectively. Ultimately, enhanced role clarity and support can lead to improved counselling competencies, reducing the likelihood of burnout and promoting overall well-being among CITs.

Coping Strategies and Psychological Wellbeing

Findings on coping strategies and psychological well-being indicates that the more CITs utilise avoidant coping strategies, the lower the psychological well-being, whereas increased use of approach coping strategies, humour and religion, is associated with higher psychological well-being. This finding similar from research by Fatima and Niazi (2024) that stated solution based coping strategies,

which is can be seen as a subset or type of approach coping is correlated with higher psychological well-being. The findings from Whitley (2018) highlight the critical role that coping strategies play in influencing the mental health and quality of life of therapy students. Specifically, those facing mental health challenges often report a lower quality of life and a tendency to engage in avoidant emotional coping, such as self-blame. These maladaptive coping mechanisms can aggravate stress and hinder the development of effective coping strategies. In contrast, adopting positive coping strategies is essential for enhancing psychological well-being among counsellors-in-training.

Implementing positive coping strategies can significantly improve the psychological well-being of counselling students. Establishing a robust social support network is one effective approach. According to Parker et al. (2022), having a network of friends, family, academic peers, and faculty members allows counsellors-in-training to express their emotions openly and seek guidance on potential solutions to their challenges. This support system can alleviate feelings of isolation and foster resilience, ultimately reducing the likelihood of burnout. Research by Riaz and Malik (2024) underlines the positive correlation between humour and well-being. Engaging in humour can uplift mood and provide relief in stressful situations, offering a valuable tool for counsellors-in-training to navigate the emotional demands of their roles. By incorporating humour into their daily routines, CITs can develop a more balanced perspective on stressors, which can enhance their overall quality of life.

Another effective method for improving coping strategies among CITs is the practice of mindfulness. Mindfulness activities, such as meditation and breathing exercises, have been shown to contribute to emotional stability, reduce tension, and improve sleep quality (Parker et al., 2022; Dye et al., 2020; Harvey, 2018). Although CITs may initially face difficulties, such as struggling to focus or manage negative thoughts during mindfulness exercises, consistent practice can lead to significant improvements in emotional regulation. For instance, Choo, Yusoff, and Mohd Said (2023) found that CITs who regularly engaged in mindfulness exercises reported feeling calmer and better equipped to manage anxiety over time. Furthermore, mindfulness is associated with increased self-efficacy, which indirectly reduces burnout by helping CITs feel more confident in handling challenges and stressors (Mustafa et al., 2023). As CITs develop greater control over their emotions and reactions, they become more resilient, which helps prevent the emotional exhaustion and depersonalization that are key components of burnout.

IMPLICATION OF FINDINGS

The study, involving undergraduate and postgraduate counselling students from six universities in Malaysia offering counselling-related programs, aimed to explore the relationship between burnout, coping strategies, and psychological well-being among CITs. The moderate negative correlation between burnout and psychological well-being underscores the importance of addressing burnout to enhance the psychological health of CITs. The findings offer practical value by helping CITs recognize their level of burnout, the types of coping strategies they employ, and their current state of psychological well-being. Such awareness is crucial, as it allows CITs to reflect on their personal experiences and make informed decisions about managing their mental health. The use of questionnaires to measure these variables provides CITs with the opportunity to identify which aspects of their well-being and coping mechanisms may require attention.

From a theoretical standpoint, the study contributes to the limited literature on the interplay between burnout, coping strategies, and psychological well-being specifically among CITs in Malaysia. By highlighting the relationship between these variables, the research fills an important knowledge gap in the field, particularly in the context of Malaysian counselling students. The findings also suggest that burnout has a significant impact on psychological well-being, supporting existing theories on the detrimental effects of stress on mental health and highlighting the need for coping strategies that promote well-being.

In terms of practical implications, the study suggests that training programs and institutions should prioritize early identification of burnout symptoms and offer resources such as counselling services, wellness workshops, and peer support groups. These initiatives can help CITs manage stress more effectively and foster a supportive environment where they can share coping strategies and experiences. Additionally, the findings suggest the importance of integrating wellness and mental health awareness into the curriculum to better prepare future counsellors for the emotional demands of the profession. Overall, this research provides both theoretical insights and practical recommendations, contributing to the development of strategies for improving the psychological well-being of CITs and supporting the ongoing development of the counselling profession in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the findings of this study highlight a significant negative correlation between burnout and psychological well-being among counsellors-in-training. The moderate negative relationship indicates that as burnout levels increase - particularly in terms of exhaustion and cynicism - psychological well-being decreases correspondingly. Conversely, higher academic efficacy appears to foster better psychological well-being.

Furthermore, the study underscores the importance of effective coping strategies in promoting psychological well-being. The identified weak negative correlation between avoidant coping and well-being suggests that reliance on such strategies can aggravate feelings of distress, while the use of approach coping, humour, and religious practices can enhance well-being. Overall, institutions providing counselling programs play a crucial role in facilitating this process by providing resources, modelling healthy coping techniques, and creating an environment conducive to self-reflection and personal growth. Addressing these factors is essential not only for the well-being of counsellors-in-training but also for the overall effectiveness of the counselling profession.

The study further emphasizes the significant impact of burnout and coping strategies on psychological well-being, contributing to the existing literature by addressing the knowledge gap surrounding these variables. However, it is important to note that the current research utilized a cross-sectional design, collecting data from the sample at a single point in time. As a result, the findings only reflect the psychological well-being of CITs during the data collection phase. Future research is encouraged to adopt a longitudinal approach to examine how fluctuations in burnout and coping strategies over time affect psychological well-being. Moreover, it is crucial for future studies to consider the cultural context, as the experiences and coping mechanisms of CITs may vary significantly across different universities or countries. Understanding these cultural differences can provide valuable insights into the effectiveness of specific coping strategies, such as humour and approach coping, in alleviating burnout among CITs, potentially leading to more tailored intervention strategies that resonate with diverse populations.

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