CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter summarizes the problem, objectives, methodology, and the major findings of the study. In addition, theoretical and practical implications as well as implications for future research are included. Based on the findings, recommendations are made to help enhance counselors' resilience.

The Problem

People react to life's difficulties differently. Those with excellent mental health are resilient, agile, hardy, and thrive under pressure. They have stress-resistant personalities and learn valuable lessons from rough experiences. They are able to rebound from setbacks and come out stronger than before. The full-time counseling scheme in Malaysian schools is a new phenomenon. The counselors are working under tremendous stress, risks, and uncertainties. Despite this, the onus is on the counselor to perform no matter what his work environment is like. It is believed that counselors who are resilient are able to find ways of making things turn out well when they are hurt or distressed. As trained counselors, they are good at enhancing their clients' psychological well-being. Thus, it is interesting to investigate whether the counselors themselves are self-enhancing. Do they practice what they subtly preach to their clients? Those who don't, probably are a stressed lot and their job performance may be jeopardized. Those who do, probably are coping well despite the stressful working conditions and energy sapping commitments. The latter group of counselors had been the focus of this research study.

The psychologically resilient counselors are the ones who could continue to serve and perform satisfactorily under stressful circumstances. How resilient are school counselors in Malaysia? Who are these resilient counselors? What is their resiliency profile like? What factors best predict their resiliency? The main focus of this research is to seek answers to these main research questions.

The Objectives

This study was set out to achieve the following objectives:

- 1. To measure Malaysian school counselor resilience.
- 2. To identify resilient counselors among Malaysian school counselors.
- To establish a resiliency profile of school counselors in Malaysia based on the seven variables in Resiliency Attitudinal Scale (RAS).
- 4. To examine the effect of school environment on counselor resilience
- To investigate the influence of counselors' academic and professional qualifications on their resilience.
- To identify the predictors of counselor resilience among the seven variables in RAS.

 To examine if counselor resilience correlates with their self-efficacy and burnout.

Methodology

The research method and procedure were planned and executed to achieve the research objectives. The data were collected through the use of the Resiliency Attitudes Scales (RAS) (Biscoe, 1994), the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) (Schwarzer, 1992) and the Burnout potential Inventory (BPI) (Potter, 1998). The questionnaires with the instruments were sent to the respondents throughout the nation by mail. Out of the 1,061 questionnaires posted out, 615 were returned.

The data were entered, computed and analyzed in accordance to the research objectives. The computation of the Resiliency Index (RI) from RAS enabled the identification of resilient counselors. The computation of RI was done by multiplying the total score of items 1 to 72 by 10 and then divided it by 36.

To establish the profile of resilient counselors, the seven subscales of resiliencies strength indices of resilient and non-resilient counselors were computed. The seven indices were then ranked in an ascending order to obtain the profile. However, the discrimination of resilient counselors from non-resilient ones needed to be done first. Profiles of high resilient and low resilient counselors were also obtained. The findings were presented in the form of graphs as the model resiliency profiles of counselors in Malaysia. Comparisons were made between the profiles compiled.

To examine the effect of school environment on counselor resilience, *t*-test analyses and the one-way analyses of variance were carried out to investigate the RI difference between school counselors of boarding and non-boarding schools; urban and rural schools; boys', girls' and coeducational schools; technical, religious, Chinese, and normal schools; and academically low, average and high performing schools. Hypotheses 1 to 5 were tested for significant differences by setting alpha at .05.

In order to investigate the influence of counselors' academic and professional counseling qualifications on their resilience, one-way ANOVA with resiliency index as the dependent variable and counselors' academic and professional qualifications as independent variables were administered separately. The significant level was again set at alpha = .05. The same procedure was carried out using 2-tailed *t*-test to compare counselor resilience between graduate and nongraduate counselors; counselors with and without a professional counseling degree; counselors with and without prior working experience; and between experienced and inexperienced counselors.

To identify the variables among the seven components of resiliency that contribute most to the counselors' general resilience, the multiple regression procedure was applied. This was to select the most useful variables to predict counselor resilience. The prediction equation for general resilience was also obtained. In an attempt to investigate if resilience correlates with self-efficacy and burnout, the correlation coefficients were computed using Person Product-Moment Correlation Coefficient which took into account not only the subject's position in the group, but also the amount of his deviation above or below the group mean (Anastasi, 1998). Pearson rwas computed by setting the significant level at .05.

The Findings

The Malaysian school counselors are found to have a mean resiliency index (RI) of 71.95 with a standard deviation of 4.40. Male counselors are found to have a mean RI of 72.16 which is slightly higher than the female counselors' 71.65. Generally, the counselors are found to be resilient as the mean RI surpassed 70.00, the cut-off point set to discriminate resilient counselors from the non-resilient.

The proportion of resilient and non-resilient counselors are found to be 67.30% and 32.70% respectively. The resilient counselors were made up of 58.70% males and 41.30% females. As many as 55.07% of the resilient counselors were found in academically non-performing schools with the remainder 44.93% found in performing schools. In terms of school locations, 55.31% of the resilient counselors are found in rural schools and 44.69% are found in urban schools.

The overall resiliency profile for Malaysian school counselors is found to be Creativity, Morality, Initiative, Relationships, Independence, insight and Humor. The resilient counselors' profile is found to be Creativity, Morality, Initiative, Relationship, Independence, Humor, and Insight. The high resilient counselors' profile is found to be Creativity, Relationships, Morality, Initiative, Independence, Humor, and Insight. The resiliency profiles of male and female counselors are found to be identical. A comparison of their mean ranked scores was found to be of no significant difference.

The school environment, in terms of boarding and day schools; rural and urban schools; boys', girls' and coeducational schools; technical, religious, Chinese and normal schools; and academically low, average and high performing schools, was found to have no significant effect on counselor resilience. No significant difference in counselor resilience was found in none of the five school categorizations.

The one-way analysis of variance using RI as the dependent variable and counselors' academic qualifications as independent variables showed that there is a significant difference in counselor resilience based on their academic qualifications. Counselors with a master degree were found to have a significantly higher resilience than counselors with lower academic qualifications.

Similarly, it is also found that there is a significant difference in counselor resilience based on their professional counseling qualifications. Counselors with a bachelor degree and a master degree are found to have a significantly higher resilience than counselors with a diploma and a certificate in counseling.

A comparison of resilience between graduate and non-graduate counselors using t-test analysis yielded a significant mean difference. A comparison of resilience between counselors with and without a counseling degree also yielded a significant difference. However, comparisons of resilience between counselors with and without prior working experience were statistically not significant. Likewise, between experienced and inexperienced counselors.

Stepwise Multiple Regression using General Resiliency as the dependent variable found that Morality is the best single predictor of Malaysian school counselor resiliency. Morality alone explained about 24.70% of the total variance of General Resilience. The next best predictor is Creativity, which together with Morality account for 31.00% of the total variance of General Resilience. The third best predictor is Initiative, which together with Morality and Creativity contributed 34.20% of the total variance of General resilience. The last predictor was Relationship, which accounted for 1.00% of the total variance of 35.20%. The remaining 64.80% of the total variance was accounted by other variables which are yet to be identified through further research.

Finally, the counselors' resilience was found to be positively and significantly correlated with their self-efficacy. Whereas, it is found to be negatively but significantly

correlated with burn-out. All the seven resiliency components were found to be significantly correlated with self-efficacy and burnout.

Theoretical Implications

The theory of resilience stresses the importance of one's ability to recover quickly from disruptive change, illness, or misfortune without being overwhelmed or acting in dysfunctional ways. Highly resilient people thrive in situations that wear others down. To thrive means to gain strength from adversity without becoming a victim. Thriving also means to become better in circumstances that make others bitter (Al Siebert, 1996). However, despite individual uniqueness in responding to difficult situations or events, all highly resilient people have similar strengths and skills, which enable them to maintain their resiliency with very little fluctuation.

In this study, almost a third of Malaysian school counselors are found to be nonresilient which should be a concern to the counseling services in school. Fortunately, resiliency is a psychological strength, which can be nurtured and developed. What these counselors need is the necessary help and support by authorities concerned as well as their colleagues to foster and boost their resiliency. Even those who were found to be resilient need to constantly monitor their own resiliency to avoid any major fluctuations. It is also timely to remind ourselves in the counseling profession to take stock of our own well-being and that of our colleagues' as we strive to enhance our clientele's. In this way, we are able to safeguard the good image of this fledging profession in Malaysia. In the Malaysian school counseling context, the highly resilient counselors' profile could be emulated by the others to enhance their resiliency. The highly resilient counselors' profile is Creativity, Relationships, Morality, Initiative, Independence, Humor, and Insight. Generally. They are creative in collaborating and forging collegiality anchored by the morality to mutually enrich or enhance one another's development. They are also proactive, able to work quite independently, able to see the humorous side of things and events, and insightful.

Without disregarding the importance of interpersonal relationships in promoting one's resiliency, the theory of resilience emphasizes one's cognitive and affective capacity, which are intrapersonal in nature, to thrive well under stressful situations. This could be achieved through self-reflection, self-awareness, self-monitoring, positive selftalk which counselors normally, in a subtle manner, encourage their clients to practice in order to get out of their predicaments. In the same manner, the counselors themselves need to constantly practice what they preach to safeguard and promote their own wellbeing. The more discerning ones may want to practise other forms of self-therapy like bibliotherapy, humor therapy, and even laughter therapy.

Generally, the work culture has always been serious and solemn. There are not many counselors with a good sense of humor. Thus it is not surprising to find Humor to be ranked last in most of the profiles compiled. The ability the see the lighter, funny, sides of matters and to laugh at our own errors are rather remote. Since humor is rather cultural biased, it will take time to see this resiliency skill being used widely in Malaysia. Probably the counselor educators need to incorporate some sense of humor in their training sessions. After all, humor and laughter promote good health by relieving stress and releasing frustrations. When used appropriately, humor can diffuse volatile situations to facilitate rapport building. It also functions as a means of escape from the monotony of our daily regimens.

Practical Implications

It has been found that counselors who have a professional counseling degree tend to have a significantly higher level of resilience compared to their counterparts who do not have one. In this light, the on-going effort by the Malaysian Ministry of Education to upgrade the counselors' academic and professional credentials to at least a bachelor degree is highly laudable.

Both Kotler (1993) and Corey & Corey (1993) found that many counselors chose this profession with the noble intention of helping out others without really knowing the job demands and hazards. Similarly in Malaysia, many students, even post-graduate students, do not know what is expected of them in this profession. Thus, the counselor educators need to conscientiously develop their trainees' resilience in order for them to take on the challenges when they go out to the field after graduation. Putting them through a long-term resiliency program throughout their training is definitely an important option to be considered. Hopefully, this will help to reduce the proportion of non-resilient school counselors as found in this study.

In our compassion to care for others, we need to exercise a high level of self-care too. Undoubtedly, balancing self-care and other-care is often a struggle for counselors and others in the helping profession. The process of caring is made up of a series of emphatic attachments, active involvements, and felt separations. The ability to engage in this so called "caring cycle" is the main determinant of our success. However, the constant need to recreate the cycle of caring can lead to depletion and burnout (Skovholt, Grier, and Hanson, 2001). Thus, self-monitoring and self-renewal are essential processes that we need to be constantly engaged in to protect ourselves from succumbing to work demand and unrelenting pressure.

The counseling training programs are generally other-focused. This is consistent with the nature of counseling and the people in it. Most of the training hours are spent on how to take care of others, with relatively little attention given to care for the self. The important aspect of self-care, self-monitoring, self-renewal, self-enhancement, and to a certain extent self-therapy needs to be given more emphasis not only through academic exercises but practical, experiential sessions as well. This could probably be incorporated into the counseling theory course, group counseling, or the counseling ethics and issues course. This will help the students to find ways to resil under difficult situations, which is very much expected of them as role models to other people. This also concurs with the concept of focusing on the personality development rather than the problems. As it is, Malaysian school counselors seldom meet one another. It is time that more frequent formal meetings at the district, state and national level be held. The agenda of the infrequent meetings that were held have always been administrative in nature pertaining to the implementations of programs and activities. The focus or emphasis has always been on ways and means to provide better care and service to the clientele. The issue of counselors' personal wellbeing has always been side-stepped. The authority concerned at the Ministry of Education needs to be more sensitive about this. Such meetings should be used as a platform or forum for the counselors to forge collegiality, enhance collaborations, share their success, and probably ventilate their anger and frustrations professionally. In short, there needs to be a provision in such meetings for the counselors to self-reflect and take stock of their psychological wellness through group processes. They may even want to run a resiliency program for themselves!

For counselors who are showing signs of burnout and not performing to expectations as reported by school authority, help and support need to be given to put them back on track. Failing which, requests by such counselors to quit counseling should be given due consideration for the best interest of their clientele and the counseling profession. The shortage of trained counselors does not justify the insistence that they stay on. After all, in taking care of others' well-being, the counselors' well-being needs to be taken care of too.

Recommendations

The school counseling service has taken on a new dimension since its inception on a full-time basis in early 1996. The appointments of counselors were initially done on a rather ad hoc manner. The organizational structure of the service has been more in place in terms of hierarchy and accountability. The acceptance of the school authority and the response from the school community are also more encouraging now. This may be attributed to the hard work and continuous effort of the counselors despite their stressful working environment and hazy job prospect. However, the situation can be further improved if the professional network of the counselors is widened. As it is, there is only limited contact among them in their vicinity. In times of need for help and support, who can they turn to? Their colleagues in other neighboring schools may be as busy and caught up with their work. Besides that, the common issue of cases which need referral has not been dealt professionally enough in view of the bureaucracy. This has also caused some unhappiness among the counselors.

One way to address the situation is to appoint a senior counselor at the district, state and ministerial levels to specifically provide help and support to the counselors in schools. The appointees need to be senior not only in terms of service but also in terms of practical knowledge in addition to better or higher professional credentials. The present education officers in charge of student affairs at the district and state levels are unable to render much help and support to the counselors as most of them are not trained in the field of counseling. Further more, they are preoccupied with overseeing matters pertaining to student affairs. Ideally, the post of the senior counselor is accorded a promotion status with a higher grade of service with better remuneration and more authority. The job specifications need to be spelt out clearly so that the school counselors are better taken care of and the counseling service is improved.

Increasingly, counselors are upgrading their professionalism and in this study itself, there were 47 counselors who possessed a master degree in counseling. The expectations on counselors with a master degree have always been higher compared to their colleagues with a bachelor degree. Fortunately, as found in this study, these counselors are significantly more resilient than their other colleagues. This implies that they are coping and performing better. Thus, it is justifiable that their effort in upgrading their professionalism and job performance be acknowledged. If they cannot be promoted to the post of senior counselors with a better grade of service scheme, pay increments will go a long way in encouraging and motivating them to continuously upgrade their professional credentials. This will definitely help to improve the school counseling service and enhance the reputation and prestige of the profession.

In line with the implementation of the Counseling Act in Malaysia since 2000 whereby counseling can only be carried out by professional counselors who are registered with and licensed by the Malaysian Counselor Board, it is time that the Ministry of Education enforce a ruling to get their school counselors who have the necessary credentials and requirements to be registered and licensed. In fact, it will be commendable if an exercise is carried out to appoint school counselors only after they have been registered with and licensed by the Malaysian Counselor Board. This will ensure that school counseling is carried out by professional counselors and enhance the professionalism of school counseling in Malaysia. And professionalism is found to be positively correlated with efficacy and productivity.

The Malaysian government has placed a great emphasis on the development and implementation of information and communication technology. Almost all secondary schools in the country have been provided with computers. This enables the schools to get onto the information super highway via the internet. Unfortunately, the accessibility to the computers is limited at this stage. Many schools in the remote areas also find it hard to access the internet due to poor telecommunication infrastructure. Ironically, these schools are in a more dire need of getting connected to the outside world. For counselors serving in these remote schools, it would be great if they are provided with a computer which can access the internet. Besides easing their administrative chores, they can easily contact people in their network for help and support in times of need.

The idea of forming a Malaysian school counseling network through the web should be considered and initialized by the counseling authority concerned at the Ministry of Education. This will definitely enhance the counseling service and the counselors in many ways. When done professionally, this will help to put Malaysian school counseling on the cyber world map. The dynamics and potentialities of the internet network if tapped properly will definitely help boost the counselors' resilience. One way to do so is to go through the e-courses or programs on resilience as found in <u>www.thrivenet.com</u>, <u>www.ncrel.org</u>, <u>www.resiliencycenter.com</u>, <u>www.the-bright-</u> <u>side.org</u>, and many other related websites. The interaction and input from fellow counselors through net-meeting, on-line chat or forum may help them to be more selfreflective, receptive, adaptive, inventive and creative which are the essence of resilience.

The counselor training programs are other-care focused. The counselor trainees are expected to translate the other-care knowledge into self-care knowledge. The discerning ones are probably capable of doing that. The less discerning ones may risk being drifted and drowned in their caring for others. Thus, it is believed that the counselor training programs need to emphasize on self-care too. This will help the counselors to avoid depleted caring while prolonging their professional longevity.

Implications For Future Research

This was a quantitative study. The parameters of this study, as in any other quantitative study, could only capture the macroscopic representation of the phenomenon. Nonetheless, the findings could serve as an overall data base on school counselor resilience in Malaysia. Further research can yield more insights.

There are other important aspects of counselor resilience to be examined. One of them could be a follow-up study on resilient counselors using the qualitative approach which will definitely add more empirical findings to the body of research in this field. In this study, 147 counselors serving in rural, non-performing schools were found

to be resilient. Such rural, non-performing schools have generally been shunned by many

teachers and counselors due to the tremendous pressure they have to cope with. Thus, it

will be interesting and useful to conduct an in-depth, qualitative study on a few of these

counselors to understand their resiliency traits. This will provide insights pertaining to the

strategies employed by these counselors in bolstering and enhancing their resiliency.

This study used the Bahasa Melayu version of the 72-item Resiliency Attitudes

Scales (RAS) as the main instrument. It could probably be further validated using data from other samples such as teachers, school principals, medical officers, and other care providers. Besides further validating the instrument, similar research could also be carried out to study resilience of the subjects mentioned. This will enable comparisons be

made between the different caring and nurturing professions.

School counseling had been implemented for about four years at the point of data

collection. A repeat of this study five years from now will be just as interesting and

useful to examine counselor resilience since there have been so many rapid changes

taking place in schools. It is known that change is normally accompanied by anxiety and

stress. How well do the counselors resil?

Another possible study would be a longitudinal study on counseling students'

resilience at the beginning and at the end of their bachelor degree program. This will

enable an examination into the resiliency personality shift of the students, the change in

resiliency and other correlates. The findings on their trajectory development could serve as an indicator of the psychological preparedness of counseling students and provide insights into what needs to be improved in the counseling program.

As found in this study, resilience is highly correlated with efficacy. There have been many studies on effective schools by our local researchers but none on resilient schools. This could be another interesting avenue of research especially on schools which had a bad reputation but showed a marked overall improvement recently.

Conclusion

Despite the inherent limitations of this study, it has shed some light on school counselor resilience in Malaysia in terms of the counselors' level of resilience, their resiliency profiles, counselor resilience predictors, and the correlation with self-efficacy and burnout. In addition, the Bahasa Melayu version of RAS had been validated and could be used for future research..

With so much effort being placed in trying to improve the quality of school counseling service in Malaysia, the ultimate goal is to improve the students' overall wellbeing. Resiliency is a prominent feature in the counselors' work with their student clients. Further more, promoting self-resilience is closely in sync with the basic principles of counseling. The focus of the service has always been on the care receivers, namely, students. The counselors, on the other hand, are expected to deliver with limited

resources and constant on-way caring. Therefore, it is timely that some effort is spent delving into the wellbeing of the care providers, in this case, school counselors. I believe, healthy, resilient counselors are definitely more effective in helping their clients to overcome whatever obstacles that block their way so as to achieve optimal development.

Last but not least, it is hoped that this study would be an impetus for more comprehensive and detailed studies of a similar nature and topic of inquiry in the near future.