WEST UNIVERSITY OF TIMIȘOARA
The Faculty of Sociology and Psychology
The Doctoral School of Philosophy, Sociology,
and Political Science

DOCTORAL THESIS

**The meaning that is given by experienced
school counsellors to clinical supervision and
its contribution to the consolidation of their
professional identity and sense of self-efficacy**

Supervisor:
Prof. Alexandru NEAGOE , PhD

Candidate:
Irit FRÖHLICH (RAN)

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Summary

Research rationale - This study focuses on the contribution of supervision to experienced school counsellors in Israel. The purpose of the study is to examine the significance of clinical supervision for experienced counsellors and its contribution to the formation of their professional identity and sense of self-efficacy when working with at-risk adolescent pupils in Israel.

The goals of the current study are: To deepen the understanding regarding the clinical supervision provided to experienced school counsellors in Israel. To understand the contribution of clinical supervision to consolidating the professional identity of experienced school counsellors. To examine the contribution of clinical supervision to the sense of self-efficacy of experienced school counsellors working with at-risk youth.

Most therapeutic professions provide supervision as a matter of routine. Supervision plays a significant role in the professional development of professionals, including school counsellors (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Powell, 1993; Watkins, 1997). The goals of supervision in the counselling professions include a) to encourage counsellors to grow and develop; b) to increase counsellors' sense of confidence; and c) to promote counsellors' professional accountability, service and programs (Ladany & Bradley, 2011).

In university training programs for school counsellors, supervision is an essential and fixed component that supports the process of professional consolidation and encourages processes of reflection and self-awareness (Baggerly & Osborb, 2006; Borders, 1994; Oberman, 2005). Most experienced counsellors receive no clinical supervision after receiving their counselling license (Erhard, 2014). Researchers have emphasised the importance of providing lifelong supervision as a tool that encourages growth and development (Crutchfield & Borders, 1997; Powell, 1993; Watkins, 1997)

Studies indicate that counsellors who did not receive supervision reported a heavy workload, burnout and involvement in multiple non-counselling tasks (Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Leuwerke et al., 2009). At the same time, surveys indicate that the number of counsellors who receive supervision is much smaller than those who request it (Page et al., 2001; Studer & Oberman, 2006; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). Although surveys have indicated an increasing trend in the number of counsellors who receive supervision over the years, there is still a discrepancy between the number of counsellors seeking supervision and the number of whose who receive it (Page et al., 2001; Studer & Oberman, 2006; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). Most studies on supervision focused on the training stage of counsellors, and there is a gap in knowledge with regard to studies that focus on the needs of experienced counsellors and the existing

supervision processes (Borders & Cashwell, 1992; Fall & Sutton, 2003; Magnuson, 2002).

Studies conducted in the US by Kolodinsky, Draves, Schroder and Lindsey (2009), Roberts and Borders (1994), Sutton and Page (1994) and Baggerly and Osborn (2006) mentioned the benefits of receiving supervision. These include responding in a way that is more adapted to the needs of the pupils (Page et al., 2001), enriching one's professional experience (Agnew et al., 2000; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006), the development and expansion of counselling skills (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006) and higher quality counselling skills (Bradley & Kottler, 2001). Also, a more precise definition and clarification of counselling skills (Benshoff & Paisley, 1996) and the development of ethical sensitivity (Henderson, 2009).

Clarifying the unique needs of experienced counsellors is part of the current study's aim. Researchers note the need of experienced counsellors to enhance their understanding, work and consciousness (Harries & Spong, 2017). Experienced counsellors are anchored in the school system, which generates organisational pressures and conflicts (Seashre Luis & Lee, 2016; Maitels & Tubin, 2022). At the same time, counsellors are more aware of transference and countertransference processes that occur within their relationships and also wish to retain their professional position, which will allow them to preserve the relationships and also contribute to their professional and personal development (Walsh Rock,

2018; Harries & Spong, 2017). This, side by side with the desire to be professional and accountable in their work with the pupils and to prevent the possibility of harm to the counselees (Buckingham, 2012) .

Consolidating one's professional identity is one of the goals of the supervision process. According to Studer (2006), professional identity is an ongoing process that begins when a school counselling student enters a graduate program and continues to evolve throughout his or her career. One's professional identity is the framework in which one performs a professional role, makes significant professional decisions and develops into a competent professional (Brott & Myers, 1999; Upton, 2012).

Studies noted an association between indistinct professional identity and the counsellor's ability to perform his or her role efficiently within the challenging reality. Hence, supervision is an important element in consolidating one's professional identity and clarifying the goals of the role (Gibson, Armon & Magen, 1995; Walsh-Rock, 2018; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Dollarhide & Moss, 2010).

Another concept examined in this study regarding supervision is the sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy refers to how we perceive our ability to perform a specific behaviour that leads to the desired result. Self-efficacy is assumed to affect one's sense of commitment and the counsellor's willingness to cope with tasks (Beggerly & Osbon, 2006). Several studies

have focused on the effects of supervision on self-efficacy (Cashwell &Dooley, 2001; Baggerly & Osborn, 2006). Cashwell and Dooley (2001) found that clinical supervision was significantly related to higher levels of self-efficacy.

The research method - Three questions accompany this research: What meaning do school counsellors give to the process of clinical supervision? How do experienced school counsellors perceive the contribution of clinical supervision to the consolidation of their professional identity? How do experienced school counsellors perceive the contribution of clinical supervision to their sense of self-efficacy when working with at-risk youth?

This study is based on the **qualitative paradigm** and on the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) approach (Osborn & Smith, 2015). This type of research attempts to comprehend how the participants understand their world (Osborn & Smith, 2015). The IPA method places much importance on the researcher and his or her attempt to understand the participants and the inner dynamic created during the interviews that are part of the research (Osborn & Smith, 2015). At the same time, to examine the findings of the qualitative study with regard to issues brought to the supervision by experienced counsellors as well as their expectations of the supervision process, a survey was conducted among a wider population of school counsellors (N=78) and the study

presents descriptive statistics regarding the prevalence of the phenomenon.

Research participants - The study focused on 20 experienced school counsellors who had been working for five or more years at various schools in Israel that serve at-risk youth with a varying prevalence: vocational schools, residential homes, and mainstream schools, and who receive supervision once a month from various mental health supervisors (psychologists, social workers, experienced counsellors) based on a local decision.

The research sample in the current survey consisted of N=78 participants. Of all counsellors in the sample, 72% were from the rural district. The rest, 28%, were from other districts (northern, central, Jerusalem). The research population does not reflect the entire population of school counsellors in Israel, but it allowed observation of a group of counsellors of whom most receive supervision to different extents and in various manners as part of the local supervision policy in the district.

The main research tools were semi-structured interviews, where two interviews were conducted with each respondent in order to enhance understanding of the respondent and of the phenomenon. In addition, a survey was held among N=78 school counsellors to examine the research results among a wider research population.

Data analysis - The analysis of the interviews was based on the thematic analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Shkedi, 2003, 2011). Qualitative nominal data from the survey was coded and then descriptive statistical analyses were performed to offer a general view of the sample characteristics and data distribution.

The research findings - Three categories emerged from the interviews: The element of clinical and administrative supervision, topics that arise in supervision in relation to professional identity, Internal and external variables that affect self-efficacy.

With regard to the element of clinical and administrative supervision, counsellors seek continuous and stable supervision based on their relationship with the supervisor. They seek a supervisor with extensive clinical experience, who will appreciate them as professionals and allow them to feel that they can learn from him. The study noted three types of supervisors: experienced school counsellors, psychologists and social workers.

Counsellors look for a safe place where they can receive support and empathy for their difficulties, regulate themselves, examine their point of view, validate their work and learn more about new subjects and tools in the field of counselling. This was also confirmed by the survey.

In the survey, 96% (Ninety-six percent) of the counsellors stated that they seek additional perspectives, 65% stated a desire for space for deliberation, 51% spoke of organising their thoughts, and 30% stated that they wish to receive approval for actions they took.

Counsellors use supervision to regulate themselves and to expand their understanding and awareness. In the survey, 39% (thirty-nine percent) of the counsellors indicated a wish to better understand their feelings, and 51% indicated that they use supervision for purposes of emotional ventilation.

The counsellors in the survey indicated a desire to continue developing and to receive new tools for counselling interventions; 81% (eighty-one percent) indicated this and 55% indicated a desire for new knowledge.

Although experienced counsellors know how to conduct themselves in various crisis events, they are occupied with questions concerning optimal coping with different risk situations of students (suicide, sexual assault, drugs and alcohol) and raise questions surrounding the events and reporting issues in supervision.

A fact that was also noted in the survey was that 65% of counsellors with 5-30 years of experience brought to the supervision consultations regarding irregular events and risk situations, and 68% (sixty-eight percent) noted that they brought consultations

regarding pupils. Experienced counsellors are aware of the complexity of the relationship within they are functioning and the transference relationships that take place in it, and want to deepen their understanding of this issue.

In the survey, 48% (forty-eight percent) of the counsellors indicated that they are busy with dilemmas concerning relationships. Experienced counsellors are more concerned with ethical issues, which is a result of deeper understanding of the complexity of events. In the survey, 28% indicated that they are occupied by ethical issues.

Regarding topics that arise in the supervision in relation to professional identity, the findings indicate that the supervision is a space that allows counsellors to examine their perception of their role, as well as their work style and pattern. Also, to develop systemic observation in order to better understand the organisation in which they function.

Organisational and personal variables have an impact on the ability of the counsellors to perform systemic work. At the organisational level, cultural (values), as well as a centralised management style made it difficult for counsellors to work systemically. On a personal level, the findings also indicated that a specific group of counsellors (7) have difficulty working with teachers and management due their feeling of insecurity and fear. These counsellors

indicated the need for a great deal of support from the supervisor to motivate them to act.

All counsellors stated that they are occupied with defining the boundaries of accountability in their the work and asked questions regarding procedures, laws and ethics. Fifty percent of the counsellors in the survey indicated that they bring to the supervision questions regard responsibilities. They are occupied with forming distinctions between themselves and their colleagues in the organisation. The supervision helps them normalise the situation and create a clear role definition, as well as expand the discourse around this subject.

Regarding internal and external variables that affect self-efficacy, counsellors speak of the sense of competence that grew over the years and was supported by the supervision. In addition to these data, the findings indicate that counsellors who have difficulty accepting their weaknesses and are anxious and occupied with their place in the organisation, find it difficult to give up the appreciation of their environment and deal with criticism and conflicts with authority figures, as well as dealing with changes and with new tasks.

Conclusions - Experienced counsellors view the supervision as a place that allows support and self-observation, validates their work and gives them a sense of confidence in their work. Counsellors' performance is a result of the organisational structure

in which they work, as well as of their personality. Working with at-risk youth raises many professional dilemmas, as well as the need for constant supervision.

Counsellors who receive supervision feel more professional and considerate in their work. Experienced counsellors are engaged in formulating their role throughout their professional lives. Counsellors with an anxious attachment pattern find it difficult to perform the variety of tasks that the role requires, and the presence of a supervisor is critical to their functioning.

Experienced counsellors are troubled by organisational problems and the relationships in which they function. Supervision makes it possible for counsellors to not remain alone with their distress, especially when there is no team of counsellors. Experienced consultants engage in the integration of the personal and the professional self.

Recommendations - Counselling inspectors should take into account that experienced counsellors need supervision in order to enhance their professionalism, maintain their sense of self-efficacy, and consolidate their professional identity. Moreover, they need a deep view of the counselling contents and a connection to themselves. Experienced counsellors are a group of counsellors with unique needs and attention must be given to their professional support throughout their years of work. Counsellors' length of

experience should be a parameter in building such a program to enable a more unique response to their needs rather than adding an extra burden to their work. Experienced counsellors know what they want and need and they are diverse. A wide range of options for supervision should be offered (group, individual, workshops), allowing counsellors to choose the type of supervision they need in a permanent continuous setting with a constant figure, in order to allow in-depth processes.

Moreover, the possibility of mapping counsellors' needs can also be efficient. According to this study, for some counsellors the presence of a supervisor is crucial in order to work efficiently and connect once again with their sense of self-efficacy.