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A Comparison of Occupational Stress Between Elementary and Secondary School Counselors

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A COMPARISON OF OCCUPATIONAL STRESS BETWEEN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL COUNSELORS

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A Thesis Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School
of Lindenwood University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to compare the occupational stress felt by school counselors at the elementary level to the occupational stress felt by secondary school counselors. Occupational stress is measured using the Occupational Stress Inventory Revised Edition (OSI-R). Participants in this study are employed school counselors randomly selected from the Directory of Illinois Public Schools and the Missouri School Directory. Analysis of the data is conducted using a 2-sample t-test of means to determine if the level of occupational stress differs in the two groups. Results of this study suggest that there is a difference in the occupational stress felt by elementary and secondary counselors in specific areas. Secondary counselors experience more occupational stress in the areas of Role Insufficiency, Role Ambiguity, and Role Boundary. Elementary counselors experience more occupational stress in the area of Physical Environment.

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Introduction

Chapter 1

Throughout the years a steady flow of research studies has focused on our educational system and specific educational issues. Pertaining to our educational system, these studies have discussed the general educational environment, its facilities, innovative school programs and their effect on student success and achievements, and the successful attributes plus failures of the administrators and teachers. Pertaining to teachers in particular, research studies have focused on teacher commitment, job satisfaction, intent to stay in the teaching profession, and the effects of the administration on teacher performance and satisfaction (Coladarci, 1986; Billingsly & Cross, 1992; Littrell, Billingsly & Cross, 1994; and Hutchison, 1997). During the 1980's and 1990's, educational research studies delved into work-related variables such as leadership, stress, role conflict, role ambiguity, and their impact on educational personnel.

School guidance counselors are also important educational employees within our educational system. Early educational research studies did little to focus on the role expectations or influence of guidance counselors, much less any stressors leading to their ineffectiveness as counselors. As a result of an educational reform movement in our country in the late 1980's, the roles and responsibilities of counselors evolved as school counseling programs became increasingly important (Murray, 1995). Presently, the school counselor is an integral part of the system composed of parent, teachers, administrators, and

community agencies working together to meet students' needs (Carns & Carns, 1997; Keys & Bemak, 1997).

Indeed, the school counselor is expected to have the skills and knowledge to address the personal, social, educational, and career needs of school-age children. For certain, the role of the school counselor has evolved from primarily providing guidance and career information to addressing the developmental needs of students, including their social, personal, educational and career needs (Bailey, Henderson, Krueger, & Williams, 1998). Unfortunately, as guidance counselors are helping professionals, they are especially susceptible and well-situated by their role expectations and responsibilities to suffer the signs and consequences of stress.

Today, school counselors have more demands and responsibilities included in their job descriptions. This increased workload is often difficult to manage in a week, much less a school term. Furthermore, recent research has shown that both elementary and secondary school counselors are confused regarding their actual role and function in the school. They are receiving conflicting messages and expectations from work superiors, fellow colleagues, and constituents (Coll & Freeman, 1997). In addition, counselors are expected to perform a wide variety of both administrative and clerical tasks, resulting in less time spent on the appropriate professional duties of guidance and counseling. Hence, research studies are now focusing on the stress felt by school counselors due to their increased responsibilities and consequent demands.

Statement of Purpose

School counselors' roles have changed from originally providing individual guidance and vocational information to today's job description: individual and group guidance, one-on-one counseling, consultation, coordination of services, referrals within the educational setting and the community, and quasi-administrative duties. As their roles have changed from a narrow to a broader, far-reaching focus, problems have arisen concerning role definition, role overload, role conflict, and role ambiguity. Consequently, stress has become a reality among today's school counselors at the elementary and high school levels.

School counselors are a special group of people who must understand the impact of stress upon their lives and the lives of their clients, mainly the students (Parker, 1982). Because school counselors are in the helping profession, dealing primarily with the delivery of human services, they must be on top of situations and be mentally and physically capable of providing the best services possible. Indeed, a counselor's behavior and subsequent effectiveness are quite dependent upon his or her ability to manage stresses and strains. Thus, this current study concentrates on the stress-producing factors for elementary and secondary school counselors. Any recognition of the presence of stress is a beginning step in improving the services of counselors and counseling departments.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that elementary and secondary school counselors report similar factors that lead to their occupational stress when comparing both groups

of school counselors. The presence of occupational stress is measured using the Occupational Stress Inventory Revised Edition (OSI-R).

Literature Review

Chapter 2

Historical Background

As part of the overall education system established by our forefathers in this country, guidance counseling is relatively new. The earliest counselors focused on guidance, concentrating on moral and especially vocational issues. In 1889, Jesse B. Davis, a high school principal in Detroit, Michigan, introduced guidance as a curricular component of each English class (Coy, 1990). By 1908, Frank Parsons, the "Father of Guidance," had introduced vocational guidance in Boston, Massachusetts, matching an individual's traits with a specific vocation. Meanwhile, Davis was including vocational and moral guidance in his newer program (Matthewson, 1962; Lawton, 1998).

Before and after the Great Depression, the measurement of personality traits and individual aptitudes was emphasized. By 1950, the guidance process was being linked to the sequential, developmental needs of an individual (Mathewson, 1962). With the launching of Sputnik in 1957 and the passage of the National Defense Education Act of 1958, secondary school guidance received federal dollars to increase the number of secondary counselors who would be able to guide college-bound students into math and science careers (Coy, 1990; Lawton, 1998). In the 1960's, the National Defense Education Act provided for the expenditure of federal funds at the elementary level to provide counseling programs that were to focus on the overall development of the individual student (Lawton, 1998). During the 1970's, secondary guidance counselors again focused

on career education. Throughout the 1970's and 1980's, a widespread understanding and acceptance of the rationale for developing elementary guidance and counseling programs continuously grew (Morse & Russell, 1988). In the 1980's, state regulations defined more clearly the function and role of guidance counselors to deliver services that would enhance student development and provide the following: staff development for teachers on counseling-related issues, consulting services for teachers and other school team members, and group and individual counseling (Coll & Freeman, 1997). Finally, school counseling gradually evolved into a myriad of services in the 1990's: counseling, consulting, scheduling, coordinating, testing, record-keeping, and administrative tasks (Lawton, 1998).

Defining School Counseling

School counseling has been defined as "a process whose underlying purposes are to facilitate the instructional process and the student's academic success" (Borders & Drury, 1992). In other words, the goal of school counseling has been to help students achieve well in school (Kaplan, 1997).

As educators, school counselors focus on helping students of all ages learn more effectively. Counselors understand that students benefit positively when guidance and counseling interventions prevent or remove obstacles to cognitive learning. To facilitate the achievement of this goal, school counselors provide the programs, services, and climate needed for not only student academic achievement but also student personal-social growth (Kaplan, 1997).

The school counselor possesses the knowledge and skills to develop a comprehensive and developmental counseling program that will be an integral part of eash student's educational program. To accomplish this task, the counselor should have the skills and knowledge for providing counseling, consultation, coordination, guidance, and referrals within the total educational program (Coy, 1999). In this way, the counselor promotes a positive, supportive, people-oriented school climate which values both students and teachers.

Presently, the school counselor's role has become more proactive, developmental, and preventive in its perspective (Israelashvili, 1998; Keys & Bemak, 1997). School counselors are emphasizing proactive interventions that will promote student preparedness for coping with life's daily hassles and major events (Israelashvili, 1998). School counselors now address important school climate and learning issues through developmental guidance and counseling programs that stress conflict resolution strategies, problem-solving skills, and appreciation for one's self and others. Counseling and guidance programs now teach students to use certain self-management techniques to override their emotions with logical and rational processes. Today's school counselors understand that upset students will not effectively attend to classroom instruction until they resolve and end internal distractions (Kaplan, 1997).

Responsibilities of Elementary Counselors

Elementary school counselors focus on the promotion of psychological development in all children in a preventive way (Miller, 1989). Accordingly, elementary school counselors report that more of their time is spent with the

guidance curriculum rather than individualized goal-oriented and vocational planning activities. The guidance curriculum allows the elementary counselors to teach life skills in hopes of preventing a myriad of developmental problems and difficulties (Hardesty & Dillard, 1994; Coll & Freeman, 1997).

Hence, classroom guidance is an important component of elementary school counseling. Counselors spend time in the classroom presenting preventive programs to reduce tobacco, alcohol, and drug abuse; reduce violence; and build interpersonal skills. Because such activities involve more interaction with the students and teachers, elementary counselors report high levels of their daily activities in the consultation and coordination areas such as consulting with teachers, parents, and community agencies plus the coordination of these groups to intervene in the life of a troubled student (Miller, 1989).

Small enrollment at the elementary school level places counselors in a critical role: aiding teachers to help children master the developmental tasks that are age-appropriate for them. This developmental guidance role has the counselor working with the classroom teacher to further develop the needs of the students and create more teacher awareness of developmental differences among children.

In the life of an at-risk child, an elementary school counselor can be a caring person who helps the teachers and other school staff address the needs of the child. An elementary school counselor is in a position to cause positive changes for at-risk children through individual, small group, and classroom guidance activities. They can also provide in-service programs, consult with teachers, and meet with parents who are more apt to seek help and be open to

suggestions for their children at this age level. Indeed, Hardesty and Dillard (1994) stated that "elementary school counseling is rooted in developmental models that tend to embrace a total life guidance approach" (p. 83).

Responsibilities of Secondary Counselors

At the high school level, school counselors focus mainly on the individual student and his/her academic concerns, post high school plans, and vocational choices. High school counselors report that more of their time is spent counseling students individually concerning future college placement plans and career choices, along with the never-ending scheduling of high school classes (Hutchinson, Barrick, & Groves, 1986). Consequently, high school counselors may be viewed to be more like administrators due to their administrative-like duties of scheduling and handling paperwork. Overall, individual counseling activities predominate at the high school level. Due to the individualized nature of high school counseling, high school counselors spend a limited amount of time on consulting and coordinating activities. Instead, these counselors concentrate more on individual planning with individual students, helping each student set his/her goals, plan, and manage his/her own learning, careers and life (Hardesty & Dillard, 1994). Indeed, high school counseling grew out of vocational counseling in which the main goal was to develop a vocational identity for each high school student.

Counseling and Stress

Stress is inevitable. It becomes a part of everyone's life, ranging from a small annoyance to a torrent of pressures which cause an unhealthy effect on that

person (Parker, 1982). In fact, stress and tension have always been associated with those involved in education. In particular, school counselors are considered to be a special group of people who especially need to understand the impact of stress upon their lives and the lives of those they counsel. Because counselors deal primarily with the delivery of human services, all counselors themselves need to be alert to stay on top of situations. They must remain mentally and physically capable of providing their clients, the students, with the best services possible (Parker, 1982; Butcke, Moracco, & McEwen, 1984). Consequently, it is extremely important for school counselors to recognize and understand the causes and presence of stress as a beginning step in improving the services of counselors and counseling departments (Parker, 1982).

Furthermore, stress and job satisfaction are negatively related: the more stressful the job, the more job dissatisfaction exists (Parker, 1982). Because stress leads to job dissatisfaction, it is important for school counselors to avoid stress as these councelors have the potential to influence so many young people. Stresssed counselors are not likely to serve as positive role models for students who are exploring careers and looking for guidance in relation to their abilities, needs, and interests (Wiggins, 1984). Instead, stressed counselors may become disillusional, disheartened, irritated, frustrated, and confused, resulting in the inability of these counselors to deliver their professional services in a competent manner (Olson & Dilley, 1988; Moracco, Butcke, & McEwen, 1984).

Research studies in the 1980's and 1990's began to address the presence and causes of stress in school counselors. Numerous studies indicated that the

stress felt by both elementary and secondary school counselors occurred in three prime areas: role overload, role conflict, and role ambiguity (Coll & Freeman, 1997; Moracco, et al, 1984; Stanciak, 1995; Parr, 1991). Further studies focused on the burnout of counselors, a condition resulting from too much stress and strain felt by the professional in his/her profession (Cummings & Nall, 1982; Kesler, 1990).

Role Overload

Role overload is an identified and researched factor leading to occupational stress. This primary stressor, also known as work or task overload, is the feeling that there is too much work to do in a limited amount of time (Sears & Navin, 1983). For counselors, role overload means having to be responsible for too many tasks for too many students in too little time. It means too many activities are required to be addressed without sufficient time, material resources, and personnel to adequately complete the large number of tasks. Also, it means that counselors must work after hours, on weekends, and at home to complete their caseloads, all without monetary compensation (Butcke, et al, 1984; Moracco, et al, 1984; Parker, 1982). When some of these tasks are not essential counseling activities but quasi-administrative duties, the stressor of role conflict is combined with role, or task, overload (Moracco, et al, 1984; Kendrick, Chandler, & Hatcher, 1994; Hutchinson, et al, 1986). To Greenburg and Valletutti (1980) from Butcke, et al, (1984), work overload may occur when the counselor works excessive or unusual hours, is forced to make major decisions without proper planning, or is

burdened with too many tasks to be completed within a reasonable amount of time (Butcke, et al, 1984; Moracco, et al, 1984).

School guidance counselors do stay busy. Whether it be at the elementary or secondary level, school counselors are often required to attend to large student populations, assess problems, develop treatments, do referrals, conduct classroom as well as individual and group guidance, consult with the teachers and parents about problem students, coordinate programs, supervise testing, act as mediators in a crisis, assume their quasi-administrative tasks, and handle newer, add-on jobs.

Combined with the multitude of pressures created by community expectations, special interest groups, the increased "at-risk" students with their specific problems, the demands on the curriculum, and any cutbacks, the result is an overloaded work schedule for school counselors, administrators, and their fellow colleagues (Tennyson, Miller, Skovholt, & Williams, 1989; Coll & Freeman, 1997). Indeed, all of these new and changing demands placed upon school counselors have not only required significant role adjustments from counselors, but also created an insurmountable work load.

Most counselors are aware that there is more to their counseling job than can be written down on a list. Also, most counselors are aware of the occupational stress caused by task or role overload. Since the sheer number of tasks to be accomplished is important to so many, the counselors themselves find it difficult to prioritize these tasks. Nothing can be eliminated from their "jobs to be done" lists and schedules. Instead, occupational stress occurs due to this overload

because it is impossible for counselors to perform all of the roles and functions that the various publics view to be important (Olson & Dilley, 1988; Gade & Houdek, 1993). In fact, it is possible that counselors themselves have added to their task overload: they cling to the old, well-known counselor roles, due to a lack of comfort and especially training, to meet the new roles. The resulting incongruency leads to their role overload stressor (Coll & Freeman, 1997). Clearly, the inability to meet the task demands of one's job is a source of stress.

The job expectations of counselors vary, though the majority of counselors practicing today are actually trained to work with students one-to-one. Today, many counselors are working with excessive caseloads and facing heavier student quotas. In 1995, the national counselor-to-student ratio for secondary counselors was, on average, 1 to 450 (Stanciak, 1995). In 1998, Education Week reported that public school counselors were assigned a student caseload ranging from 40 to 700 students each week. The American School Counselor Association says that 100 students is an ideal caseload, with a 1 to 300 ratio as the recommended maximum (Lawton, 1998). For other counselors, case overload means serving far too many students between two or more schools: a relatively more time consuming and less satisfying assignment (Kendrick, et al, 1994; Gade & Houdek, 1993). Furthermore, one study indirectly implies that counselors in larger schools experienced more stress due to work overload because the counselor to student ratio is possibly higher (Moracco, et al, 1984).

Role Conflict

Research has identified the job factor of role conflict to be another cause of occupational stress felt by school counselors. According to theory, role conflict occurs when the behaviors expected of an individual are inconsistent with his/her own expectations. This inconsistency causes the individual to experience stress because the expectations imposed on him/her are in conflict. Role conflict can be further explained as the resulting conflict that occurs when an organization provides relevant information about the role and responsibilities that actually conflict with the realities of daily professional life (Rizzo, House, Lirtzman, 1970; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997; Sears & Navin, 1983). For school counselors, this means that the activities and duties imposed upon them are counter-productive to carrying out their main counseling functions (Butcke, et al, 1984).

Role conflict is a reality for both elementary and secondary counselors who find themselves being pushed and pulled between conflicting messages from various role senders (Coll & Freeman, 1997). In fact, the lack of a clearly defined, consistent job role is a major cause of stress for school counselors (Kendrick, et al, 1994; Coll & Freeman, 1997; Studer & Allton, 1996).

Too often, school counselors receive conflicting messages about expectations from the American School Counselor Association and outstanding individual counseling practitioners. A general statement of overall responsibilities and appropriate job duties was outlined by the American School Counselor Association in both 1981 and 1990. Its statement suggests that school counselors enhance general student development, provide staff development for teachers on

counseling-related issues, consult with teachers and other school team members, and deliver group and individual counseling. However, Partin (1990), from Coll and Freeman (1997) suggests that school counselors should accomplish more group counseling while Tennyson, et al, (1989) state that counselors must focus more on promoting personal growth and development. Pertaining to the importance of accountability highlighted in the 1980's quality reform movement (Freeman & Schopen, 1991), school counselors should adjust their roles to accommodate systematic program assessment and evaluation. In addition, others (Freeman, 1994) maintain that school counselors should increase their role in the area of career development. To quote Frank Burnett, a former guidance counselor who is featured in Lawton (1998), "counselor education is focusing too much on a big umbrella of things" (p.34). In 1998, Nancy Perry, an executive director of the American School Counselor Association, states that school counseling has evolved to a "shopping mall of services" (Lawton, 1998). Because the school counseling profession cannot maintain a consistent role for its member to follow, role conflict results.

A report from the American Counseling Association titled "School Counseling: A Profession at Risk" (1987) noted that a major problem in school counseling is its lack of a clearly defined role for the counselor. It pointed out that some school districts have changed the role of the school counselor to one of the following: case manager of student learning, school climate coordinator, community services coordinator, computer technician, high level clerk, and other

roles not worthy of the school counselor role (O'Dell, Rak, Chermonte, Hamlin, & Waina, 1996).

As early as 1965, Lortie informed the counseling profession that continued role conflict/confusion would render school counselors' work ineffective, a stressful situation in itself. Drury (1984) (in O'Dell, et al, 1996) maintained that school counselors allowed school administrators and school boards to define their role (O'Dell, et al, 1996).

Bayerl and MacKenzie (1981) (in Olson & Dilley, 1988) discuss how add-on roles, resulting from social change and crisis, become a source of stress for these counselors. When communities become alarmed about drugs, physical and sexual abuse, children of divorce, and the rising adolescent suicide rate, these communities ask the schools to respond with prevention programs. At the same time, other counselor roles, or responsibilities, are not subtracted to make room for additional counseling commitments. Furthermore, school counselors have accepted add-on tasks not only because of their training and helping instincts, but also due to the fear of rising cutbacks in the profession. Thus, to further demonstrate their value, counselors have assumed quasi-administrative duties (Studer & Allton, 1996; Anderson & Reiter, 1995).

The anxieties of colleagues have become another case for role conflict resulting in stress for school counselors. Because counselors usually have good mental health and communication skills, colleagues seek the counselors' help to cope with the stresses and anxieties felt by the counselors' fellow employees. These school counselors already pressed for time are now faced with a stressful

role conflict dilemma: counseling students, their main function, or counseling fellow colleagues (Parr, 1991).

Ethical dilemmas are stressful role conflict situations for school counselors. They place the counselors in a no-win position. Dilemmas that pit counselors' professional ethics against the expressed wishes of others create successful role conflict situations. At times principals ask counselors to divulge confidential information that can place the trustworthiness of the counselors in jeopardy. Not divulging the requested information may cause the counselor to be viewed as disloyal (Parr, 1991).

Teachers who discover that they are discussed in a negative way by a student to a counselor may become defensive and angry, putting the counselor in the middle of a "teacher-student battle zone". Parents may perceive school counseling as an invasion or encroachment of their privacy, whereas the counselor cannot discourage self-disclosure in the personal counseling of their child (Parr, 1991). Adding to the counselor's stress is his/her "aloneness" - feeling alone due to being the only counselor in a school when incompatible demands are being placed on him/her (Parr, 1991).

A continued source of stress for school counselors that is directly related to role conflict is counselors performing non-professional duties: substitute teaching, supervising field trips, filling in for school secretaries, putting up bulletin boards, and ordering supplies (Parr, 1991; Sears & Navin, 1983). Too often, school counselors fall into a catch-all category that makes inadequate use of their special skills and talents (Lawton, 1998). School counselors were

concerned in the 1980's about performing duties that were counterproductive to counseling responsibilities: arranging of class schedules versus personal counseling with students and acting as disciplinarians or principals instead of trusted confidants (Parr, 1991; Stanciak, 1995). Pertaining to paraprofessionals' duties, Hardesty and Dillard (1994), as well as Coll and Freeman (1997), found that elementary school counselors performed less administrative –like duties and activities compared to secondary counselors who dealt with more administrative paperwork. Thus, it is not surprising that Harrison (1993), when writing about the "multiplicity of skills" (p. 198) of a school counselor, described school counseling as an "invisible" profession because school counselors do so much work that is unseen.

Role Ambiguity

Another identified job factor leading to occupational stress is role ambiguity. The different views that counselors, teachers, and principals hold about a counselor's role can be conceptualized as role ambiguity (Butcke, et al, 1984; Sears & Navin, 1983). Also, when an educator has insufficient information to carry out his/her professional responsibilities adequately, role ambiguity occurs (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997; Sears & Navin, 1983; Freeman & Coll, 1997; Rizzo, et al, 1970). Because of the lack of necessary information or clarity of the school counselors' job description from school to school and state to state, school counselors themselves may feel ambiguous about what their role really is (Sears & Navin, 1983; Studer & Allton, 1996).

Many teachers not familiar with the purpose of the school counselor may perceive that role to consist primarily of administrative duties, career counseling, and testing. More pointedly, some teachers perceive school counselors to be sitting in their offices drinking coffee, waiting for something to happen, or interrupting a teacher's class to meet with a student. Some teachers perceive a school counselor to be a scapegoat for the teachers' frustration and envy because counselors usually work with small groups or individuals while the teachers must manage large classes of students hourly each day (Parr, 1991). Furthermore, research suggests that poor relationships with colleagues within the organizational setting is positively related to perceived stress (Butcke, et al, 1984).

The rise in the number of students needing mental health services plus the limited availability and inaccessibility of community-based services have placed the school counselors in a difficult position – that of being the only professionals at hand in the school setting to offer help in the mental health area. While the counselors may seem to be the appropriate professionals, their clinical training may not be sufficient to adequately deal with the wide range and emotional depth of a student's mental health problem. Perceived by the administration and others to be the professional best prepared to resolve a student's problem, the counselor's insufficient training with mental health problems may lead to high levels of personal stress. (Keys & Bemak, 1997). Indeed, role ambiguity occurs in this situation as counselors question whether their intervention is appropriate and/or adequate for students in need of more extensive psychological help.

In a recent study by Studer and Allton (1995), professional school counselors from public, parochial, and vocational schools (K-12) indicate that school principals do not fully understand the role of the school counselor, thereby causing role ambiguity. These counselors pointed to low administrative support of the guidance program as compared to other educational programs. Too often principals and administrators view school guidance programs as auxiliary or "fringe" departments. In fact, the role of the school guidance counselor has been debated and even become a point of conflict between school administrators and counselors. Administrators feel that counselors are a part of the instructional staff, teachers feel that counselors are a part of the administration, and the counselors feel that they are somewhere in between the administrators and the teachers (Studer & Allton, 1996; Stanciak, 1995).

Discrepancies in the perception of the school counselor's capacity seem to exist more between the secondary counselors' role and function rather than with elementary counselors. Secondary counselors view counseling as an on-going process in which students are assisted to make decisions about their personal, social, and educational issues. Resolving such issues and/or concerns may result in greater academic efforts on the part of the student. However, secondary school principals are more focused on increasing student learning and achievement as the first goal of counseling. Again, the lack of a clearly defined role leads to the counseling stressor of role ambiguity (Studer & Allton, 1996; Kendrick, et al, 1994).

Elementary school counselors work in their schools to promote social and emotional development of students. However, the public does not always view this to be the primary function of the school. Hence, the hiring of an elementary counselor is perceived to be less essential and a luxury, but only if budgeting permits. Unlike secondary school counseling, elementary school counseling is not presently viewed in all states as essential for the proper development of the younger students (Hardesty & Dillard, 1994; Coll & Freeman, 1997). This public view is in direct contrast with the research evidence of early elementary school guidance writers who conceptualized a program model aimed at the prevention of unhealthy, early psychological development (Miller, 1989). Thus, elementary school counselors continue to experience occupational stress, due to role ambiguity, as others view them and their counseling function to be less valuable to schools compared to the day-to-day activity of secondary school counselors.

Parents of the children served may cause counselors to experience stress due to a lack of clarity about their work objectives as a counselor. Some parents view the work of school counselors as an invasion of their privacy: their children may disclose a family secret to the counselor during a counseling session. Other parents may want the counselor to spank their children for misbehavior or remove their children from specific teachers' classrooms. Lastly, some parents offer solutions about their child's problems that are inappropriate or inconsistent with a counselor's personal values or professional training (Parr, 1991). Furthermore, parents, along with business community representatives, often rate educational and occupational planning as more important functions of counselors whereas

counselors consider personal and group counseling to be their most important function (Olson & Dilley, 1988).

Burnout

Our American culture places great emphasis on production. No one is expected to stop producing or break down from the occupational stress of constant production. As a result, humans ignore the warning signs of stress. This denial allows the cumulative nature of stress to negatively impact on the emotional health of the human resulting in burnout (Kesler, 1990).

Burnout is a catchall term used as the resultant or ultimate effect of experiencing excessive, intense, and prolonged occupational stress. It is a term used to describe a syndrome of emotional exhaustion and cynicism that occurs in response to the stressors and strains of one's occupation or profession, caused by excessive job demands on that individual's energy and resources (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997; Cummings & Nall, 1982). In actuality, it is a feeling state manifested by a variety of symptoms and occurring in different degrees from person to person (Cummings & Nall, 1982). Associated with this complex phenomenon are a reduced professional commitment and ultimately the desire to leave one's profession.

In defining professional burnout, three components have emerged: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997; Kesler, 1990). Emotional exhaustion occurs when the individual feels he/she has nothing left to give to others on an emotional or psychological level. Depersonalization refers to the psychological detachment

and social distancing that disrupts both personal and professional life. Reduced personal accomplishment results when an individual feels that he/she is no longer effective in carrying out professional responsibilities (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

As burnout relates to the educational profession, it is a condition in which the stress factors underlying emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment seem insurmountable because the stressors occur so frequently and intensely. Professionally, these educators will feel that they have nothing left within themselves to give to their students. They may distance themselves from their students; develop callous attitudes toward students, parents and fellow colleagues; and may negatively view personal and professional events and/or develop cynical attitudes. Finally, the educator feels that he/she is not effective in performing his/her professional duties with students, parents, or fellow colleagues. In this process of "burning out", the educator perceives these events as a direct threat to his/her personal well-being and loses concern as well as respect and positive feelings for his/her students (Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997). Ultimately, this burnout leads to a deterioration in the quality of educational services.

Because guidance counselors are helping professionals, they are especially susceptible and well-situated by their role expectations and responsibilities to suffer the signs and consequences of burnout. Indeed, burnout affects counselors' emotional health. The depletion of a counselor's helpfulness leads to that counselor's helplessness. Where once there were strength and conviction, loss of

control is now evident. Instead of a willingness to assume the necessary responsibilities, there is guilt, anger, and anxiety from meeting only part of the responsibilities or from not wanting to meet them at all (Kesler, 1990).

Coping Strategies

Unlike teachers who find strength in numbers, school counselors are often alone as many schools employ only one. Acting alone, counselors must establish their credibility and authority by performing in a competent skilled manner each day. To accomplish their formidable tasks of being an expert on motivation, human relations, and learning, school counselors must have the necessary skills, personal security, and untiring perseverance to face and work through stressful occupational situations resulting from the demands of administrators, teachers, parents, and students (Parr, 1991).

It has been established that excessive stress is responsible for lower productivity at work, higher absenteeism, and increased illness, all resulting in poor job performance (Butcke, et al, 1984). Since stress is certain in everyone's life, coping strategies must be employed to handle the stressors and strains effectively.

Since the factors producing stress plus the strategies for coping with it are well-known and documented, the problem, then, is to recognize the signs, devise appropriate solutions, and implement them. Indeed, it is the individual who must ultimately become aware of his/her personal, stressful situation and assume the responsibility for developing and implementing appropriate stress management strategies.

Rationale

Studying the stress-producing factors for elementary and secondary school counselors is a necessary step in improving their services and counseling departments. Ultimately, as stated earlier, the individual must assume the responsibility for developing and using suitable stress management strategies (Olson & Dilley, 1988). The survival of effective counseling programs will come about through increased awareness of the stress factors influencing the effectiveness of counselors and their programs.

A productive school guidance program will better serve the students and the school community. A decade of research has shown that effective counseling programs can positively influence the affective, behavioral, and interpersonal domain of children's lives (Carroll, 1993). Consequently, it is imperative today that school counselors emerge from their traditional, supportive roles to assert the importance of counseling and guidance in the successful educational plan for today's students.

Conversely, stressors and strains may affect the ability of the school counselor to deliver his/her services in a competent manner since stress is linked to one's mental and physical health (Olson & Dilley, 1988). Stress is associated with psychological, behavioral, and physiological symptoms that may have a powerful impact on the counselor's physical and psychological well-being and on the counselor's performance (Moracco, et al, 1994). Indeed, counselors under a great deal of stress will display less ability to tolerate the demands of daily activities and sort out the frivolous demands from the crucial ones.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to compare the occupational stress felt by school counselors at the elementary level to the occupational stress felt by secondary school counselors. It is hypothesized that both elementary and secondary school counselors experience similar occupational stress. The presence of occupational stress is measured using the Occupational Stress Inventory Revised Edition (OSI-R).

Method

Chapter 3

Participants

Participants selected for this study were 50 elementary and 50 secondary school counselors. They were randomly selected from the Directory of Illinois Public Schools and the Missouri School Directory.

Out of the 50 elementary counselors selected and sent a packet of research materials, a total of 36 completed packets (72%) were returned. Respondents were 94% female (n=34) and 6% male (n=2). The average age of the 36 elementary counselors was 43.5 years with a standard deviation of 10.3. Of these respondents, 3% (n=1) held a PhD., 88% (n=32) had earned a Master's Degree in Guidance/Counseling, 6% (n=2) had a Bachelor's Degree, and 3% (n=1) did not indicate educational qualifications. The average number of years of experience was 9.14 with a standard deviation of 7.15. In comparing the ratio of elementary counselors to students, the ratio was 1 counselor to 423 students with a standard deviation of 124.2, suggesting a wide range in counselor to student ratio. The percentages of these counselors working in rural, urban, and suburban locations were 44% (n=16), 17% (n=6), and 39% (n=14) respectively.

Out of the 50 secondary counselors selected and sent a packet of research materials, a total of 35 completed packets (70%) were returned. Respondents were 51% female (n=18) and 49% male (n=17). The average age of these secondary counselors was 47.9 years with a standard deviation of 9.8 years. Of these participants, 3% (n=1) held a Master's "Plus" Degree, 94% (n=33) had a

Master's Degree in Guidance/Counseling, and 3% (n=1) indicated a Bachelor's Degree. The average number of years of experience was 14.6 years with a standard deviation of 9.7 years. When comparing the ratio of secondary counselors to students, the ratio was 1 counselor to 349 students with a standard deviation of 107.3, again suggesting a wide range in counselor to student ratio. The percentages of these counselors employed in rural, urban, and suburban communities were 52% (n=18), 11% (n=4), and 37% (n=13) respectively.

Instrument

Occupational Stress Inventory Revised Edition. The Occupational Stress Inventory Revised Edition (OSI-R) is a self-administering, paper-pencil inventory. Its test materials include an item booklet with instructions to the respondent and the 140 OSI-R items, a hand-scored rating sheet, and profile forms. The item booklet is divided into three sections, or domains, corresponding to the three questionnaires: Occupational Role Questionnaire (ORQ) with 6 scales and 10 items per scale; Personal Strain Questionnaire (PSQ) with 4 scales and 10 items per scale; and the Personal Resources Questionnaire (PRQ) which has 4 scales and 10 items per scale (Osipow, 1998).

The OSI-R uses the following responses and their numerical equivalents: Most of the time (5); Usually (4); Often (3); Occasionally (2); and Rarely or Never (1). This instrument has been found appropriate for a wide range of subjects employed in different fields.

Training for the administration and scoring of the OSI-R is not required. The OSI-R can be administered in both individual and group testing situations,

with the testing environment protecting the confidentiality of the respondents' item responses. The hand scoring is straightforward and requires the conversion of raw scores to T scores based on the appropriate norm table for the occupation chosen. If the occupational group is not listed and a similar occupation is not identified in the normative information, the administrator is instructed to use the norms from the total normative sample table (Osipow, 1998). For this study a counseling occupational group was not listed; therefore, the total normative sample table was used.

Originally, the OSI was developed for two primary reasons. First, it was to develop generic measures of occupational stressors that would apply across different occupational levels and environments. Secondly, it was to provide measures for an integrated theoretical model linking sources of stress in the work environment, the individuals' psychological strains due to work stressors, and the available coping resources to combat the effects of the stressors plus alleviate their strain. The OSI-R updates and provides normative data for gender and occupational categories, modifies several existing items, and introduces new items for each of the three OSI domains (Osipow, 1998). The OSI-R normative data were derived from a sample of 983 participants. The occupations of this normative sample were categorized to match as closely as possible the occupational groups defined by the Bureau of Labor Statistics (1996).

Reliability estimates for the OSI-R were conducted in two ways. Test-retest reliability data was computed from a 2-week period. The median coefficients for the ORQ, PSQ, and PRQ were, respectively, .61, .74, and .68. All

correlations between the two administrations were significant at the .01 level. The second reliability estimate used was an internal consistency analysis with the normative sample. Alpha coefficients for OSI-R total questionnaire scores were .88 for ORQ, .93 for PSQ, and .89 for PRQ (Osipow, 1998).

Validity data for the OSI and OSI-R are derived from factor analysis, convergent validity studies, correlational plus treatment studies, and studies of the OSI model. Since the correlation of items between the OSI and the OSI-R is relatively high, the two versions are similar enough to generalize validity from the original OSI to the OSI-R edition. Considerable agreement between the two forms resulted when data was collected from the same groups using both forms (Osipow, 1998).

The OSI-R appears to have specific, beneficial strengths. It is a concise measure of three dimensions of occupational adjustment: occupational stress, psychological strain, and coping resources. This inventory also provides a number of important applications for the trained mental health professional to identify the job roles producing stress and/or symptoms of strain; to implement programs for employee assistance, counseling, and career decision-making; and to measure the outcome and effectiveness of various interventions designed to reduce stress and strain. The OSI-R is easy to administer and score (Osipow, 1998).

With respect to this study, a weakness is the specific limitation of not including elementary and secondary teachers or school counselors in the norm

group. Therefore, caution needs to be used when interpreting the results of this study to avoid misinterpretation or misrepresentation of the OSI-R scores.

Procedures

This research study was descriptive in nature as it professed to determine that both elementary and secondary school counselors experience similar occupational stress. Data collection procedures involved randomly selecting 100 names of schools from the Directory of Illinois Public Schools and the Missouri School Directory. The participants chosen received a letter of introduction, demographic data sheet, and the OSI-R. A follow-up mailing was completed two weeks after the initial mailing, with an overall response rate of 71% (n=71).

Chapter 4

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Information is provided regarding the 14 scales of the OSI-R, divided into three domains: Occupational Roles Questionnaire (ORQ); Personal Strain Questionnaire (PSQ); and Personal Resources Questionnaire (PRQ). The individual scales of each domain allow a more exact analysis of current stressors, strains, and coping resources.

In Table 1, the individual scales of the ORQ are as follows: RO = Role Overload; RI = Role Insufficiency; RA = Role Ambiguity; RB = Role Boundary; R = Responsibility; and PE = Physical Environment. In this table the means and standard deviations of the T scores for the elementary and secondary counselor groups are presented as well as the results of the 2-sample t-test between group means on each scale of the Occupation Roles Questionnaire (ORQ).

Table 1. Results of t-tests and the T Scores for Elementary and Secondary School Counselors on the Occupational Role Questionnaire (ORQ)

Scales (ORQ)	Elementary Scores (n = 36)		Secondary Scores (n = 35)		2-Sample t-test	
	M	SD	M	SD	t-value	p
RO	56.80	10.30	58.90	10.60	-0.84	0.40
RI	41.40	5.70	44.50	7.30	-1.94	0.06*
RA	44.90	6.10	49.50	12.50	-2.00	0.05**
RB	46.40	8.40	52.10	12.90	-2.21	0.03**
R	50.10	8.20	52.30	7.60	-1.14	0.26
PE	43.70	3.90	41.80	2.40	2.54	0.01***

***p<0.01 **p<0.05 *p<0.10

The ORQ is a measure of occupational stress with higher scores signifying a higher degree of stress. The mean of the T scores at or above a 70 indicates a strong probability of maladaptive stress, debilitating strain, or both. The mean of the T scores in the range of 60-69 suggests mild levels of stress and strain. All T scores with a mean between 40-59 should be interpreted as being within the normal range. The mean of the T scores below 40 indicates a relative absence of occupational stress or strain. From Table 1 all means reported are within the normal range for the ORQ scales. The mean T scores for elementary counselors ranged from 41.40 to 56.78 while that of the secondary counselors ranged from 41.80 to 58.86.

In Table 1, the 2-sample t-test for Role Insufficiency (RI) indicates a statistically significant difference ($p<0.10$) in the mean scores between elementary and secondary counselors. The secondary counselors' higher mean score ($M=44.5$) indicates that these counselors think their professional skills and actual job requirements are less congruent compared to their elementary school counterparts.

Likewise, for Role Ambiguity (RA) in Table 1, there is a statistically significant difference ($p<.05$) between the means for the elementary and secondary counselors. Since the variance in the secondary counselors' scores was clearly higher for this scale, a 2-sample F test of Variance was run. A statistically significant difference ($p<.01$) was found to exist between variances for the 2 samples on the RA scale. Results of the t-test for this scale (RA) would seem to indicate that secondary counselors are much more unclear about job expectations

than elementary counselors. However, it is important to note that the secondary counselors' responses to this scale were also more widely varied.

Concerning Role Boundary (RB) in Table 1, there is a statistically significant difference ($p<.05$) between the means for the two groups of counselors. Due to the higher variance for the secondary counselors, a 2-sample F test of Variance was utilized to determine if there were differences. A statistically significant difference ($p<.05$) was shown to exist between variances for the two samples on the RB scale. Hence, utilizing t-tests for samples with unequal variances would seem to indicate that secondary counselors are experiencing more conflicting supervisory demands. Again, the secondary counselors' responses to this scale are more widely spread.

Finally, for the Physical Environment Scale (PE) in Table 1, there is a highly statistically significant difference ($p<.01$) between the mean scores for the two groups of respondents. Also, the difference in variance between these two groups on this scale is highly significant ($p<.01$). The higher variance for the elementary school counselors indicates greater variation in responses compared to their secondary counterparts. The higher mean for elementary school counselors indicates a greater likelihood that they experience more isolation and/or higher levels of noise, moisture, dust, heat, and cold in the workplace.

Table 2. Results of t-tests and the T Scores for Elementary and Secondary School Counselors on the Personal Strain Questionnaire (PSQ)

Scales (PSQ)	Elementary Scores (n = 36)		Secondary Scores (n = 35)		2-Sample t-test	
	M	SD	M	SD	t-value	p
VS	47.60	7.80	47.90	8.30	-0.17	0.86
PSY	46.20	7.50	47.70	11.40	-0.67	0.51
IS	46.10	6.40	46.30	9.20	-0.11	0.91
PHS	46.40	12.50	45.70	13.00	0.26	0.80

In Table 2, the individual scales of the PSQ are as follows: VS = Vocational Strain; PSY = Psychological Strain; IS = Interpersonal Strain; and PHS = Physical Strain. In this table, the means and standard deviations of the T scores for the elementary and secondary counselors are presented as well as the 2-sample t-test of the means on the Personal Strain Questionnaire (PSQ).

The PSQ is a measure of psychological strain with higher scores indicating a higher degree of occupational stress. The interpretation of the ranges of the mean of the T scores for the PSQ scales are identical to those of the ranges for the ORQ scales previously discussed. From Table 2 all reported means are within the normal range for the PSQ scales. The mean T scores for elementary counselors ranged from 46.10 to 47.60 while that of the secondary counselors ranged from 45.70 to 47.90.

In Table 2, for Psychological Strain (PSY), a 2-sample t-test did not reveal a statistically significant difference, although there was a trend toward

significance (p=0.51). However, it is important to note that the secondary counselors' responses to this scale are widely varied.

Concerning Interpersonal Strain (IS) in Table 2, a 2-sample t-test revealed no statistically significant difference, supporting that there was no difference between elementary and secondary counselors in their likelihood of engaging in frequent quarrels or reporting excessive family, spousal, or friend dependency. Again, the secondary counselors' responses to this scale were more widely spread.

Table 3. Results of t-tests and the T scores for Elementary and Secondary School Counselors on the Personal Resource Questionnaire (PRQ)

Scales (PRQ)	Elementary Scores (n = 36)		Secondary Scores (n = 35)		2-Sample t-test	
	M	SD	M	SD	t-value	p
RE	58.72	8.82	59.94	9.54	-0.56	0.58
SC	57.03	8.59	53.51	9.01	1.68	0.10
SS	54.50	5.85	54.03	7.98	0.28	0.78
RC	52.36	8.19	53.51	9.64	-0.54	0.59

In Table 3, the individual scales of the PRQ are as follows: RE = Recreation; SC = Self-Care; SS = Social Support; and RC = Rational/Cognitive. In this table, the means and standard deviations of the T scores for the elementary and secondary counselors are presented as well as the 2-sample t-test of the means for both groups on the Personal Resources Questionnaire (PRQ).

The PRQ is a measure of coping resources with higher scores representing a higher degree of coping resources to handle occupational stress. Scores below 30 indicate a significant lack of coping resources. Scores in the range of 30-39

suggest mild deficits in coping skills. Scores in the range of 40 to 59 indicate the presence of average coping resources. From Table 3, all reported means for the PRQ are within the normal range. The mean T scores for elementary counselors ranged from 52.40 to 58.70 while that of the secondary counselors ranged from 53.50 to 59.90. For Table 3, there were no statistically significant differences between the means of the two groups.

Summary of Results

Statistically significant differences appear to exist between elementary and secondary counselors when comparing their occupational stress. Although it appears that both groups in this study experience occupational stress within the normal range, statistically significantly higher degrees of stress were reported for the secondary counselors in three of the six scales concerning their occupational roles: that of Role Insufficiency, Role Ambiguity, and Role Boundary. Elementary counselors reported a higher level of stress on one scale, Physical Environment. Overall, the secondary counselors' responses to the Occupation Roles Questionnaire were more varied in two of the scales: Role Ambiguity and Role Boundary.

Concerning Personal Strain, both groups appear to experience similar amounts of strain. However, the secondary counselors revealed more varied responses for the scales of Psychological and Interpersonal Strains.

Regarding Personal Resources, no statistically significant differences appeared between the mean scores of the elementary and secondary counselors.

Discussion

Chapter 5

The results of this study indicate that occupational stress and personal strain are within the normal range for both elementary and secondary counselors. At the same time, the results of this study suggest that there is a difference in the occupational stress felt by elementary and secondary counselors in specific areas. Similar to previous research relating to the occupational stress felt by both groups of counselors, this study confirmed those findings (Coll and Freeman, 1997; Parker, 1982; Wiggins, 1984; Wisniewski & Gargiulo, 1997).

For both elementary and secondary counselors, significant differences appear to exist in specific areas. Secondary counselors experience more occupational stress in these areas: Role Insufficiency (RI), Role Ambiguity (RA), and Role Boundary (RB). Elementary counselors experience more occupational stress in the area of Physical Environment (PE).

When comparisons are made regarding Role Insufficiency, secondary counselors (n=35) report a poorer fit, or less congruency, between their skills and the job they are performing. Included in this area is a feeling that their career and future are not progressing as planned. Their needs for recognition and/or success may not be met. Feeling underutilized, these secondary counselors report a feeling of boredom.

There has been little literature related to the differences between elementary and secondary counselors regarding ambiguity: previous studies allude to school counselors in general experiencing stress due to Role Ambiguity

(Sears & Navin, 1983; Studer & Allton, 1996). However, the results of this study support the findings of Studer and Allton (1996) and Kendrick, et al (1994): discrepancies in role ambiguity exist more in the areas of role and function with secondary counselors compared to elementary counselors. Concerning Role Ambiguity (RA), on the Occupational Stress Inventory – Revised (OSI-R), secondary counselors report having an unclear sense of what is expected of them, how they should be spending their time, and how they will be evaluated. They also report no clear sense of what they should do to move forward in their careers. They appear to experience conflicting demands from the school administrations. Previous studies discuss the role of a secondary counselor being confused with that of an administrator (Studer & Allton, 1996; Stanciak, 1995) because secondary counselors are often seen as an assistant to the principal, completing clerical, supervisory, and administrative functions.

Concerning Role Boundary, this study indicates that secondary counselors appear to experience more stress compared to elementary counselors. In general, Coll and Freeman (1997) report that both elementary and secondary counselors feel pushed and pulled between conflicting supervisory demands and various role senders. More secondary counselors indicate stress due to having more than one person telling them what to do.

Pertaining to Physical Environment, the elementary counselors appear to experience more stress with this scale. Although there has been little literature related to the differences in the causes of occupational stress between both groups of counselors, the elementary respondents indicate in this study that they were

more concerned with the Physical Environment stressor. It is possible that they experience stress in this area due to not having adequate facilities and/or having to travel between schools with their guidance materials in tow. According to Kendrick, et al (1994) and Gade and Houdek (1993), serving two or more schools makes for a less satisfying assignment for counselors. Conversely, secondary counselors usually have adequate office space in their individual school's guidance department.

In conclusion, it is noteworthy to mention that while both groups of counselors show no statistically significant difference in their mean scores for Role Overload (elementary, M=56.8; secondary, M=58.9), both groups score at the higher end of the normal range. This seems to indicate that both elementary and secondary counselors experience role overload in the form of an increasing amount of paperwork with insufficient help and/or too many tight deadlines. Numerous studies indicate that role overload is an ever-increasing stressor for school counselors: (Sears & Navin, 1983; Tennyson, et al, 1989; Coll and Freeman, 1997; Gade & Houdek, 1993.)

Limitations

A number of limitations to this study need to be mentioned, and caution should be used when attempting to generalize the findings of this study. First of all, sampling limitations include using a limited sample population from a limited geographical region: the two states of Illinois and Missouri. Secondly, the demographic data indicated primarily Caucasian respondents. Thirdly, the racial composition of all the counselor respondents in the two states was not obtained

prior to this study; therefore, it cannot be stated with certainty that the sample is not racially representative. Another limitation with regards to the instrumentation is in the employment of a general conversion table for the total sample instead of a conversion table for a specific occupational group when converting raw scores to T scores. This was necessary as OSI-R has not completed a specific conversion table for school counselors.

Implications

The implications of these findings for school counselors experiencing occupational stress need to be addressed. Indeed, it is documented that stress and strain lead to poor job performance when the stressor is not removed and/or coping strategies are non-existent or fail the stressed individual.

Given the multi-causal nature of the problems facing the children today, school counselors must be physically strong and mentally alert to handle and help them. It makes more sense to have healthy and functioning school counselors providing their student patients with the best intervention strategies and guidance available.

While Role Overload did not appear to be significantly different for elementary and secondary counselors, the mean scores of both groups were in the higher end of the normal range, indicating that both groups feel that their job demands and expectations are great: they serve too many students in one or more schools, and/or have too many duties unrelated to guidance and counseling. Consequently, schools that continue to require their professional counselors to engage in professionally appropriate yet demanding roles while requiring them to

simultaneously engage in a variety of nonprofessional tasks may be causing a particular counselor's present level of stress to escalate which, in turn, leads to lower productivity at work, higher absenteeism, and increased illness, all resulting in poor job performance.

More secondary counselors are experiencing some stress categorized as Role Insufficiency, meaning that they do not see their present job skills as being adequate for their present duties. Without a doubt, this stressor is quite real for the school counselor's role has changed over time from a reactive, problem-centered, intervention focus to a more proactive, developmental, preventive perspective. Hence, it is imperative for counselors today to rethink their counseling role from a "school only" concentration to a broader multidimensional focus. Indeed, school counselors must become fully trained mental health professionals capable of independently managing any counseling role that may present itself within the student population of their respective schools.

Pertaining to the stressor of Role Ambiguity, characterized by the lack of necessary information for a given position, affected secondary counselors may need to devise a coping behavior to avoid the source of stress or to engage defense mechanisms to distort the reality of the situation. Eventually, this ambiguity should increase the probability that the affected counselor will become dissatisfied with his job, experience anxiety, distort reality, and consequently perform less effectively.

Role Boundary seems to be a more relevant stressor for many secondary school counselors who feel unclear about authority lines. Unfortunately, differing

perceptions about the role and subsequent duties of a counselor have become a point of conflict between school administrators and counselors because their functions are closely related. Without a clear understanding of the goals, development, duties, and maintenance of an effective school guidance program, this stressor will continue to promote confusion. As the role of counselors changes with educational reform, counselors need the administration's support of the school guidance program.

There seems to be a high level of agreement among administrators, parents, teachers, and counselors regarding the beneficial contributions of elementary school counselors. However, this study indicates that all is not well at the elementary level. While many states now have at least one counselor for every one to two elementary schools, elementary counselors are experiencing more stress in their Physical Environment compared to their counterparts at the secondary level. Presently, more secondary schools have multiple counselors and/or adequate facilities whereas more elementary counselors are given a "spot" in which to work when they are not on the road between schools. These "low counselor" states need to address the issue of too few elementary counselors and unsatisfactory counseling facilities. Indeed, early developmental interventions at the elementary level make more sense than waiting to provide more costly and often futile remedial assistance at the secondary level.

When stressful situations are never resolved or handled using appropriate coping strategies, professional burnout may occur. This condition is the result of cumulative stress. Since children believe what they see, burned out counselors

can hardly be effective in counseling and/or guiding their charges. Instead, these counselors do more harm than good because they appear to be negative role models to the students who are looking to them for guidance in relation to their abilities, needs, and interests.

Recommendations

Previous literature and current data suggest that school counselors undertake intensive efforts to change their stressful conditions resulting from Role Insufficiency, Role Ambiguity, and Role Overload. Stressed counselors must accept ownership of their situation and assume the responsibility for not only initiating and developing improvements within the school counseling arena, but also for becoming informed and implementing appropriate stress management strategies for themselves.

Both elementary and secondary school counselors need to make a case for a clear redefinition of their roles that also includes a reduced workload. Presently, this redefinition is documented by teachers demanding more classroom guidance, students demanding more one-to-one availability for guided career planning and counseling, two parent and more single-parent families seeking assistance in raising their troubled children, and the community expecting positive results.

School counselors must assume a leadership role in actively educating their administrations, school boards, fellow colleagues, and community members about the necessity and duties of their counseling roles. Counselors need to effectively verbalize and actively demonstrate how their work contributes to the overall school environment and the development of the students, and organize

leadership teams composed of counselors, administrators, teachers, parents, and community leaders to plan, review, and evaluate goals and successes. It is imperative that elementary counselors take proactive steps since early interventions are essential.

Counselors should establish better communications with their school boards with regard to their counseling functions. School boards should establish clear board policies about curriculum challenges to developmental guidance, counseling programs, counselor-student ratio, and school counseling itself. Collaboration with and education of school boards suggest that the assignment of non-professional tasks and excessive case loads for counselors need to be reduced or eliminated.

School counselors must inform the administration about their skills and training. Informed administrators should understand and appreciate the parameters and characteristics that are necessary to develop and maintain an effective school guidance program that should not interfere with the overall purpose of education. Administrators must recognize the usefulness of the shared administrative – school guidance team to develop strategic plans for productive school guidance programs as the administrator – counselor relationship functions for the good of the other as well as for the overall good of the school. Furthermore, the administration should promote the connecting of the guidance staff to the instructional staff to create new and beneficial working arrangements for all concerned. For example, school counselors might purposely tie their counseling strategies to improved classroom behaviors.

Counselors are to increase parent and community involvement. Specifically, counselors need to contact parent and community groups to assist them in the establishment of school-community partnerships that will increase external support systems outside the school setting.

School counselors themselves must be willing to equip themselves for their changing counseling roles. They must be willing to acquire a new set of skills as they redefine their role from a traditional, reactive, problem-centered intervention to a proactive, preventive, developmental approach. This necessitates counselor educators spending more time in the field assessing the needs of school counselors in order to prepare advantageous future course work and in-service programs.

Coping strategies to handle the inevitable stressors and strains must be readily available for school counselors. National and state organizations for counselors need to increase their efforts to provide information about the stress associated with the counseling profession. Preventive strategies for counselors to maintain realistic expectations of themselves and/or define their boundaries of professional identity need to be addressed.

Accordingly, school counselors must learn to employ effective professional coping strategies. They should employ their communication skills to deescalate conflicts and clarify issues through paraphrasing, redefining the problem, and self-disclosure of good intentions. Secondly, they should consult with trustworthy colleagues or former professors. Thirdly, stressed counselors

need to renew their skills, motivation, and spirit via attending workshops and reading pertinent journal articles (Parr, 1991).

To continue, school counselors must learn to cope by following specific guidelines of a personal nature. Joining a support group is therapeutic. Engaging in physical stress management techniques such as walking, jogging, swimming, and cycling relieve stress. In addition, counselors must use laughter, their jobs, and fun as natural healers (Parr, 1991).

This study is in no way to be considered a comprehensive comparison of the occupational stress experienced by elementary and secondary counselors. It has been an attempt to focus on the presence of occupational stress through an examination of documented stress-producing factors. Further studies need to be conducted to explore the continued presence, advancement, or reduction of occupational stress in the school counseling profession.

Appendix A

Demographics Sheet

The following information is needed for statistical purposes only, and will not be used for identification:

1. Gender: M F

2. Age: _____

3. Ethnicity: _____

4. Qualifications (i.e. degree and certification such as MS in School Counseling): _____

5. Number of years in school counseling: _____

6. Number of years in education outside of school counseling: _____

7. Number of students in your school: _____

8. Number of counselors in your school: _____

9. Ratio of students to counselors: _____

10. Number of teachers in your individual school: _____

11. Location of school (ex. Rural, Urban, Suburban): _____

12. Grade level served: _____ Elementary (K-6)

_____ High School (9-12)

13. Would you like a copy of the results? ____ yes _____no

If yes, please include your name and address: _____

_____

_____

14. Comments about statements in Item Booklet.
(Write on reverse side of this page)

15. Additional statements and/or questions.
(Write on reverse side of this page)

Appendix B

Item Booklet

This booklet is divided into three sections which contain statements about work situations and individual habits. You may be asked to complete one, two, or all three of the sections. Be sure to respond to all of the statements for each section you are asked to complete.

Begin by completing the information on the front page of your OSI-R Rating Sheet. Enter your name, age, gender, job title, and today's date. Now turn to page 3 for directions for completing your ratings.

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Section One (ORQ)

Make your ratings in Section One of the Rating Sheet

1. At work I am expected to do too many different tasks in too little time.
2. I feel that my job responsibilities are increasing.
3. I am expected to perform tasks on my job for which I have never been trained.
4. I have to take work home with me.
5. I have the resources I need to get my job done.
6. I'm good at my job.
7. I work under tight time deadlines.
8. I wish that I had more help to deal with the demands placed upon me at work.
9. My job requires me to work in several equally important areas at once.
10. I am expected to do more work than is reasonable.

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11. My career is progressing about as I hoped it would.
12. My job fits my skills and interests.
13. I am bored with my job.
14. I feel I have enough responsibility on my job.
15. My talents are being used on my job.
16. My job has a good future.
17. I am able to satisfy my needs for success and recognition in my job.
18. I feel overqualified for my job.
19. I learn new skills in my work.
20. I have to perform tasks that are beneath my ability.
21. My supervisor provides me with useful feedback about my performance.
22. It is clear to me what I have to do to get ahead.
23. I am uncertain about what I am supposed to accomplish in my work.
24. When faced with several tasks I know which should be done first.
25. I know where to begin a new project when it is assigned to me.
26. My supervisor asks for one thing, but really wants another.
27. I understand what is acceptable personal behavior on my job (e.g., dress, interpersonal relations, etc.)
28. The priorities of my job are clear to me.
29. I have a clear understanding of how my boss wants me to spend my time.
30. I know the basis on which I am evaluated.

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31. I feel conflict between what my employer expects me to do and what I think is right or proper.
32. I feel caught between factions at work.
33. I have more than one person telling me what to do.
34. I know where I fit in my organization.
35. I feel good about the work I do.
36. My supervisors have conflicting ideas about what I should be doing.
37. My job requires working with individuals from several departments or work areas.
38. It is clear who really runs things where I work.
39. I have divided loyalties on my job.
40. I frequently disagree with individuals from other work units or departments.

41. I deal with more people during the day than I prefer.
42. I spend time concerned with the problems others at work bring to me.
43. I am responsible for the welfare of subordinates.
44. People on-the-job look to me for leadership.
45. I have on-the-job responsibility for the activities of others.
46. I worry about whether the people who work for/with me will get things done properly.
47. My job requires me to make important decisions.
48. If I make a mistake in my work, the consequences for others can be pretty bad.
49. I worry about meeting my job responsibilities.
50. I like the people I work with.
51. On my job I am exposed to high levels of noise.
52. On my job I am exposed to high levels of wetness.
53. On my job I am exposed to high levels of dust.
54. On my job I am exposed to temperature extremes.
55. On my job I am exposed to bright light.
56. My job is physically dangerous.
57. I have an erratic work schedule.
58. I work all by myself.
59. On my job I am exposed to unpleasant odors.
60. On my job I am exposed to poisonous substances.

Section Two (PSQ)

Make your ratings in Section Two of the Rating Sheet

1. I don't seem to be able to get much done at work.
2. Lately, I dread going to work.
3. I am bored with my work.
4. I find myself getting behind in my work, lately.
5. I have accidents on the job of late.
6. The quality of my work is good.
7. Recently, I have been absent from work.
8. I find my work interesting and/or exciting.
9. I can concentrate on the things I need to at work.
10. I make errors or mistakes in my work.

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11. Lately, I am easily irritated.
12. Lately, I have been depressed.
13. Lately, I have been feeling anxious.
14. I have been happy, lately.
15. So many thoughts run through my head at night that I have trouble falling asleep.
16. Lately, I respond badly in situations that normally wouldn't bother me.
17. I find myself complaining about little things.
18. Lately, I have been worrying.
19. I have a good sense of humor.
20. Things are going about as they should.
21. I wish I had more time to spend with close friends.
22. I often quarrel with the person closest to me.
23. I often argue with friends.
24. My spouse and I are happy together.
25. Lately, I do things by myself instead of with other people.
26. I quarrel with members of the family.
27. Lately, my relationships with people are good.
28. I find that I need time to myself to work out my problems.
29. Lately, I am worried about how others at work view me.
30. I have been withdrawing from people lately.

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31. I have unplanned weight gains.
32. My eating habits are erratic.
33. I find myself drinking a lot lately.
34. Lately, I have been tired.
35. I have been feeling tense.
36. I have trouble falling and staying asleep.
37. I have aches and pains I can not explain.
38. I eat the wrong foods.
39. I feel well.
40. I have lots of energy lately.

Section Three (PRQ)

Make your ratings in Section Three of the Rating Sheet

1. When I need a vacation I take one.
2. I am able to do what I want to do in my free time.
3. On weekends I spend time doing the things I enjoy most.
4. I hardly ever watch television.
5. A lot of my free time is spent attending performances (e.g., sporting events, theater, movies, concerts, etc.)
6. I spend a lot of my free time in participant activities (e.g., sports, music, painting, woodworking, sewing, etc.)
7. I set aside time to do the things I really enjoy.
8. When I'm relaxing, I frequently think about work.
9. I spend enough time in recreational activities to satisfy my needs.
10. I spend a lot of my free time on hobbies (e.g., collections of various kinds, etc.)

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11. I am careful about my diet (e.g., eating regularly, moderately, and with good nutrition in mind.)
12. I get regular physical checkups.
13. I avoid excessive use of alcohol.
14. I exercise regularly (at least 20 minutes, 3 times a week.)
15. I practice "relaxation" techniques.
16. I get the sleep I need.
17. I avoid eating or drinking things I know are unhealthy (e.g., coffee, tea, cigarettes, etc.)
18. I engage in meditation.
19. I practice deep breathing exercises a few minutes several times each day.
20. I floss my teeth regularly.
21. There is at least one person important to me who values me.
22. I have help with tasks around the house.
23. I have help with the important things that have to be done.
24. There is at least one sympathetic person with whom I can discuss my concerns.
25. There is at least one sympathetic person with whom I can discuss my work problems.
26. I feel I have at least one good friend I can count on.
27. I feel loved.
28. There is a person with whom I feel really close.
29. I have a circle of friends who value me.
30. If I need help at work, I know who to approach.

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31. I am able to put my job out of my mind when I go home.
32. I feel that there are other jobs I could do besides my current one.
33. I periodically reexamine or reorganize my work style and schedule.
34. I can establish priorities for the use of my time.
35. Once they are set, I am able to stick to my priorities.
36. I have techniques to help avoid being distracted.
37. I can identify important elements of problems I encounter.
38. When faced with a problem I use a systematic approach.
39. When faced with the need to make a decision I try to think through the consequences of choices I might make.
40. I try to keep aware of important ways I behave and things I do.

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