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Stressors and Stress Management of Counselors: Findings From Interviews of Professional Counselors

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Introduction

The management of work-related stress has become a topic of increasing concern over the past several decades. The profession of counseling is one area that has promoted the assistance of stress management in others. However, many counselors experience a great amount of difficulty in handling their own stress (Ross, Altmaier, & Russell, 1989). Stress may be a result of work or personal factors such as family issues, personality issues, or life events.

In order for counselors to continually be successful, it is necessary to continually maintain professional vitality and self-care. Finding balance between self-care and other-care is a constant struggle that helping professionals experience (Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001). If a counselor is unable to maintain the balance of self-care and manage stress, the occupational hazard of burnout may result (Maslach & Goldberg, 1998).

Since burnout and stress are so pervasive in a professional’s life it is an important topic of study. Maslach and Jackson (1984) defined burnout as the experience of long-term exhaustion and diminished interest, usually in the context of work. Distinctions have been made between job burnout and tedium and stress associated with one’s work. Burnout tends to be more pervasive, involving a lack of energy and enthusiasm at both home and the office. This phenomenon affects an individual’s life in a broad, all-encompassing fashion. It can have a devastating impact not only on work performance, but in one’s social and love relationships as well (Forney, Wallace-Schutzman, & Wiggers, 1982).

With stress playing a role in the experience of burnout, it is important to identify stressors and coping mechanisms relating to burnout. The purpose of this study was to identify stressors that professional counselors face when working with clients in different clinical settings and ways counselors deal with stress. The study also provides implications for both counseling professionals and counselor educators related to stress and stress management.
Methodology

Prior to the beginning of the research, approval was obtained from the Kent State Institutional Review Board. Following this, I received a list of agencies from a professor at the University of Akron. This list of agencies represented individuals who may be interested in participating in this research study. I next identified counselor work settings that would provide differing viewpoints. These included inpatient, outpatient, and private practice. Three professionals practicing counseling agreed to participate in this study. One counselor from each setting was included in the sample. Each of the counselors served various populations (i.e., clients with severe psychiatric issues, child and family issues, and general mental health related issues).

The first participant worked at a clinic serving both children and families. The second was employed at an inpatient psychiatric clinic. The third was a private practitioner working with individuals with a variety of issues. Upon contacting these individuals, I then sent each participant a statement that outlined the purpose of the research, as well as a sample of the informed consent forms to be completed. During the telephone call, I informed each individual that the interview would be audio-taped with the purpose of analyzing the data to include in a qualitative study. Each of the participants were knowledgeable, experienced in the field of professional counseling, and held at least a Professional Counselor (PC) license in the state of Ohio. Also, to enhance the credibility of findings, participants were sought who reflected a variety of perspectives and ranged from relatively new practitioners to practitioners nearing retirement (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

Generic qualitative description was used to discuss the stressors of professional counselors, how they dealt with these stressors, and a shared viewpoint of each of the counselors (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003; Sandelowski, 2000). Data was collected using a semi-structured interview approach. Interviews were recorded on a digital audio recorder in order to transcribe and index at a later time. The main questions that the interview included were meant to elicit the overall experiences and understandings of the interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The main questions included: “Please tell me what your position is at this location.” “Can you tell me what populations are served at this location?” “What types of self-care do you engage in?” “How can you tell when you’re starting to feel burnt out?”

The first question, “Please tell me what your position is at this location.” served as a tour question. This allowed for interviewees to discuss important parts of what they do at the location and what is involved in their work. Other more focused questions were intended to obtain particular information to answer the research question being studied (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Probing questions were also used in order for interviewees to expand previously touched upon areas when answering main question. Follow-up questions were also used for clarification. Occasionally new ideas were brought up by the interviewees and these were addressed through the use of follow-up questions that encouraged further discussion about the topic at hand. Finally, during the interview, the interviewer took short notes to prompt further questioning. An example of this occurred when one participant briefly mentioned “paperwork.” The interviewee was allowed to complete the thought she was describing and then the idea of paperwork was brought into focus.
Each interview lasted approximately 60 minutes. At the conclusion of the interview, the interviewer requested permission to contact the interviewee following the interview to clarify information, as well as to fact-check the transcription. After the interview each was either transcribed or indexed. This process served as the introduction to the data analysis.

Besides interviewing, a field journal was kept in order to document the process of completing the qualitative study. An analytic memo was also utilized to introduce emerging ideas and themes, providing the ability to identify themes and ideas that would be beneficial during the data analysis study (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006).

Analysis

The process of coding and analysis used in this study was modeled after a grounded theory approach (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Analysis began with the collection of data. From the beginning of the research, as interviews were being conducted, notes were collected to further explore topics as the interview progressed. The first step of the data analysis and interpretation consisted of the data preparation phase (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). A transcription of one interview was completed. For the other two interviews, indexed notes were utilized. The first step in this process consisted of fully listening to the entire interview one time in order to generate ideas. This generation of ideas served as a basis for when the indexed notes were completed on the second listen through. This allowed generation of hypotheses throughout the process of data analysis. It was found to be much easier to complete the process in this fashion, as opposed to other methods.

After completing the index notes and transcription, steps two and three began. These steps consisted of data exploration and data reduction (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006). Once the index notes and transcription were completed I completed an analytic memo, which lead to some rough ideas about what was occurring at this point in the research. The analytic memo helped point out themes that would be important to pay attention to in the data. Instances that were important to think about were highlighted and collected in the analytic memo. At this point, quotes were not the main focus, but rather ideas that fit together. This allowed for a picture of the data to be built up into theory and drew out tentative findings in the data.

Data was coded tentatively during this process as well. However, most of the data was coded once data collection completed. The reasoning for this was due to the small amount of interviews conducted in this study. Had there been more time to complete this study, data coding would have occurred throughout, but in this situation it made more sense to do this at the end and synthesize data together. Coding allowed data to be formatted into three distinct themes which were important. These themes were the key concepts that are concerned with burnout in counseling professionals. The process of coding the data follows. During data collection, descriptive codes were found within the data. These descriptive codes included: feelings toward work, feeling drawn to the helping professions, importance of having choices, stressors, paperwork, managed care, issues with other entities, coping, work environment, and colleagues. After the initial analysis of the data, a set of key concepts was generated. The purpose of these categories was to take a more analytical look at the experiences of the counselors. Categories of
literal codes consisted of a dedication or calling to the profession of counseling, stressors related to work, and ways to cope or deal with stress. Categories were labeled in a topical fashion in order to interpret the statements made in the interviews. Themes shared between each of the three participants were made up of the categories.

During the process of data collection and analysis, two processes were utilized to ensure trustworthiness of the findings. The first method was used was triangulation, specifically, investigator triangulation. This study was completed as a portion of the requirements for a doctoral level qualitative research course, and through the class there was access to other individuals outside of the study who could analyze data and provide feedback regarding coding, interpretation, and analysis. The second method of establishing trustworthiness of this research was member checking. Member checking was conducted during the process of interviewing by providing summaries to the interviewees about what was recently discussed in order to allow the interviewee to clarify or agree with the summary. This was done throughout the interview process as well, but not extensively. Since this was an issue, the possibility of post-interview member checking was discussed with the interviewees, who agreed to participate. Therefore, following the interpretation and analysis, these findings were provided for the interviewees to review. Following this review, there was clarification of ideas and statements which allowed for a better interpretation of the findings.

Findings

Dedication/Calling to Counseling

Each participant was employed in a different work setting. Regardless of setting, each participant stated he or she felt as though this type of occupation was their “calling”. The first example of such a statement is provided by Angela, a practitioner working in a child and family guidance agency:

I feel like this is what I was meant to do. I’ve always wanted to help others, even since I was younger. Now that I’m employed in this field, I feel as though I have a lot to offer people and I feel like it is important that I continue to help in this area. I’m very compassionate with those that I work with, and notice that they all have unique needs that only certain people can meet. I’m also very stubborn, and want to make sure I am doing the most I can for each client that I have.

I do additional work that some in the agency here do not. I don’t bill sometimes, just because I want to be able to continue to provide services like phone calls to discuss the status of adolescents or to run groups and spend some extra time if I want. I want to be able to help those who are searching for help. It seems unfair for me not to assist them if they are in need.

Angela stated that she feels she has something to offer clients and is very willing to help them however she can. This characteristic was echoed by another of the participants. Jeremy stated that:
I feel like I have too much to offer to this population, but sometimes it’s not taken advantage of because of insurance companies not paying and such. I know that I wouldn’t want to do any other job, but I sometimes wonder if I should continue with my private practice or be a supervisor at another agency. It’s a different environment to be in that position. I just don’t know if it would be the same as what I do now, because I like to be involved with people and to help.

Although Jeremy struggles with some aspects of being involved in private practice work, he feels that he is benefiting the clients through doing this work. Jeremy states that he feels as though he has a lot to offer to people in need and he knows he does not wish to do another job, but has had some second thoughts regarding this decision.

Finally, Theresa is employed at a crisis center which also houses psychiatric inpatients. Theresa stated that:

I have a choice, and I’m exercising my choice, so I’ll be retiring a little sooner than I had originally planned and it feels right for me and peaceful. I’m peaceful about it and I know that right around the corner, I won’t know what it is til I let go of this job, so I’m stepping out in faith here. But this experience here has been incredibly valuable to me and I’m saying that, not because the tape is on, I really mean that. I really enjoy working here and most of the time I really feel like it’s a privilege to work with these folks. I did go through a short period of time a few years ago where I felt “What am I doing here?” because some people are in such survival mode, what am I doing with my skills here when people here are so into just the basic needs, you know. I finally realized, get a little humility, and that precisely whatever skill I have is what’s necessary here.

Theresa will be retiring shortly, however, she notes that she feels privileged to work with those she has worked with, and even when things were difficult, she realized that the skill that she has is what is necessary for the client population she serves.

The above examples demonstrate dedication to counseling and a feeling that each of them possesses the precise skills necessary to work with certain populations. In a profession where there is such pressure because of the careful work that is done with clients, individuals may feel drawn to this type of work. It is because of these dedicated individuals that the profession is ever-growing and changing. Those who were interviewed for this study found that, although there are portions of the work that they do not enjoy, they feel as though this work is exactly what they should be doing. This is something that came as little surprise, because it has been focused on by counselor educators for some time. Although not all professional counselors may feel this way, I believe that these findings are representative of some counselors who are practicing in the field.
Stressors Related to Work

Throughout the interviewing process, common stressors were identified by each of the participants. One such stressor is paperwork. Many occupations require individuals to complete work-related paperwork, but recently there has been an increase in the amount of paperwork that counseling professionals must complete. This paperwork is required for treatment planning, documenting sessions, and receiving third-party reimbursement. Each of the individuals included in this study identified paperwork as being a particularly stressful part of the job.

Theresa, a counseling professional who has been in the field the longest out of any of the participants identified paperwork as a “necessary evil.” She stated during her interview that “Paperwork necessary for billing becomes a large portion of the job. We don't have a choice, though.” She also stated “It’s frustrating working in this system.” These two statements are examples that support the idea that paperwork is stressful because it is identified as being something required that is outside the scope of actual counseling. However, the amount of paperwork has consistently and significantly increased. A final example of this stressor during Theresa’s interview follows:

Paperwork is required for each client. But there has to be a trade off of time somewhere. I've lost time to do groups. Then they want to change the treatment plan and make it more specific and more precise. This requires more time.

These very powerful remarks suggest great difficulty around paperwork. However, Theresa is not alone in her experience. Both Jeremy and Angela feel the same stress from the increasing amount of paperwork. Excerpts from their interviews are included below. The first example is taken from the interview with Jeremy, who describes his experience in private practice.

I accept insurance, as well as cash payment for services. I would prefer to do things only using cash payment because of the difficulty that insurance companies provide to be reimbursed for services.

There is a stack of paperwork for every single client that I see just to receive payment, and sometimes I do not even receive my entire fee for service because of this.

It's hard to stay on top of notes within a reasonable period of time, and even when I do that, my payment may sometimes be a month late coming. It would be really difficult if I didn't have other sources of income because of this.

The paperwork is my least favorite part of this occupation. It would be much better if I didn't even have to bother with all of the jumping through the hoops just to get paid for a service I'm providing.
I feel like sometimes I'm not compensated for what I deserve because of the hassle that goes into this.

Jeremy’s statements convey the frustration and struggle with paperwork that is necessary in the field of counseling. Jeremy discussed struggling to continue in his private practice because of this aspect of the work. His statements are reflective of what many private practitioners experience.

The last portion of evidence pointing toward paperwork being a significant stressor in the experience of professional counselors comes from Angela. Angela is a relatively new practitioner who has already identified stress derived from the amount of paperwork she is required to complete. Angela stated during her interview that “paperwork leads to even more work” and that she takes home work with her regularly in order to keep up with the amount of paperwork required. The pressure on her includes a restrictive time limit on paperwork needing to be turned in to her supervisor. The amount of time allowed is 7 days, which may seem like quite a while, but Angela is working roughly a 50 hour work week, not allowing much free time. Having this additional stressor has led Angela to feeling burnt out on the work, but she also explains she has taken steps to reduce this acquired stress from her primary occupation.

As evidenced in excerpts taken from the interviews conducted, paperwork is one major stressor experienced regardless of work setting. The curious thing about this finding is that although it is a significant stressor, it is also a necessary one, and increasing as time moves forward. From this, I question that if this issue is present in agency work as well as private practice, what can be done? This is not an answer that is within the scope of this research, but would be important to address in future research as well as in advocacy work among counselors.

Paperwork was not the only mentioned stressor. Another stressor that is important to discuss is that of pressure. In this study, pressure refers to the pressure that supervisors and insurance companies put onto counselors.

A very powerful statement was indentified in Theresa’s interview. She stated,

The system seems a bit schizophrenic itself and doesn't make sense sometimes. It's hard to function within this system. Then we wonder why it's not really working. How can you do more with less when you've done more with less? You work the hardest you can to produce and something changes and it’s impossible to meet what you did before.

These words are very strong in relation to the pressure that she is put under from those in power at the agency. Theresa also suggested throughout her interview that this pressure has led occasionally to micro-management and individuals prematurely exiting employment from the particular agency in which she works. The thought that enough pressure can be put on an individual to make him or her leave or retire is very concerning. This is information that is important for counselors to consider. The culture of the work environment can be one that is either stable or unstable. The latter can cause enough stress to alter a professional’s career and life.

Angela provided information similar to Theresa. In this case Angela did not describe the pressure as vividly as Theresa, but the pressure is felt by Angela as well. In
her experience, the agency put her under a great deal of pressure, and there was also assumed pressure she was feeling. Angela discussed not taking time for herself in the very beginning of her employment with the agency. She described feeling as though she had a lot to prove because of her age and perceived inexperience. This may have been a pressure Angela put on herself, but she describes in the following quote that this was not only an internal struggle.

My case load was quite large, the agency continued to schedule me clients even though they knew that there was no way I could see them within a given week. I was under pressure to continuously take new clients because I was the only full-time worker in the areas that I specialize in. It's difficult to say no, because I feel that everyone that seeks help should get it, but I think the agency could help me out somehow.

This statement not only describes the pressure Angela feels from the agency and herself, but also alludes to the previous theme mentioned. Angela’s dedication to the people she is working with also allows for further pressuring.

Finally, Jeremy felt similarly to both Angela and Theresa. Jeremy doesn’t have anyone at his private practice directly pressuring him. Rather, he has insurance companies to deal with in his private practice. The pressure felt is similar by Jeremy’s account. Jeremy is required to complete paperwork in order to be paid. Since counseling in private practice is Jeremy’s livelihood, it is necessary for him to be compensated as well as help people. The fact that he does not receive adequate reimbursement in some cases, and is required to complete a great amount of paperwork in order to do so is one source of stress. Another comes from the need for things to be documented appropriately. Jeremy discusses how difficult it can be to conform to requirements in order for the insurance company to accept his claim: “If I don’t do everything just right in my case notes, treatment plans, then I don’t get paid. Simple as that. The claim gets bounced back to me and I have to take the loss.”

The pressure resulting from forces that are seemingly out of the counselors’ control is another aspect of working as a counselor that leads to stress. This stress could potentially be a contributor to burnout, leading to a variety of consequences. Some such consequences include changing occupations, agencies, or even retiring from work altogether.

The above are simply two examples of the significant stressors that affect counselors each day in the work that they feel drawn to and enjoy doing. Within the constraints of this study these are the only sources of stress that will be discussed in depth. It is important to mention other stressors that affect counselors.

Other stressors identified from the interviews include: long work hours, too many clients, and feeling as though satisfaction of the work is not comparable with the stress involved. These issues are important to consider when examining the stressors that are brought about by the practice of counseling in a professional setting and counselors should be mindful of these stress-inducing factors.
Common Methods Used to Cope with Stress or Reduce Stress

The final theme that emerged from this study was methods used by counselors to cope with stressors associated with their profession. Previous research has identified suggestions for counselors dealing with stress from work (Osborn, 2004). Many of these suggestions were commonly used by the counselors in this study and will be addressed in the following paragraphs.

The first way of coping was to “take some time off.” All three of the counselors interviewed for this study stated that time off either is or would be beneficial in reducing the stress that is accrued from daily work in counseling. A similar coping method was taking time away from work during work hours. Theresa stated the following:

I know it makes a difference for me when I get out, because if I eat and work through lunch it’s, you know, you need a break to refresh yourself and there was a time when I would take a walk every day through the neighborhood here and that’s the best thing.

Theresa is describing that it was very beneficial for her to take some time during work hours to get away from work. She mentions taking a walk; exercise has been found in previous literature to be very beneficial for counselor and other helping professionals (Osborn, 2004; Skovholt, 2001). Theresa was very enthusiastic when discussing it. She made sure to stress the importance of this time away from work for her. Angela also described “getting out.”

At twelve o’clock we take off and go out to lunch together. Sometimes we talk about work and sometimes we don’t. That’s an hour where I can take some time away from my desk and laugh and talk with people. Sometimes just being able to vent is helpful.

Angela’s description of going out for lunch with coworkers is an example of how she has taken time away from work to benefit her. She uses the word “helpful” in the previous quote, which supports the idea that time away from work help reduce the stress and pressure of everyday work.

Another important factor in reduction of stress was something that was out of the individual’s control, but appeared very important to each participant. The idea of a cohesive, supportive work environment, including colleagues and supervisors, demonstrated that the environment can be not only a pressure, but also a support when stress is high.

Angela stated that “Minus a few people, the environment is cohesive. This provides support when it is necessary.” Theresa and Jeremy also discussed this importance. “Helpful coworkers, working as a cohesive team makes things much easier” is a point Theresa discussed in her interview. Jeremy stated that,

I share my office with another counselor who works with a similar population. It makes it good because I have another person to bounce ideas off of and to provide support for times when I really need it. I have to say that sharing this makes it a lot easier than if I was to “go it alone”. It
can be difficult when being a counselor and not having anyone to turn to in private practice and that happens a lot.

These statements suggest that if a counselor feels as if he or she is “going it alone” things can be very difficult. It would be of interest to examine this idea in a fully realized qualitative study because important information regarding work environment could be gained.

Other Factors That Provide Support

The aforementioned strategies for support in combating stress were not the only ones identified in this study. Participants also expressed that religious and spiritual values were helpful in dealing with work stressors as well as in life in general. Also, involvement with family was a factor that played into the reduction of stress. This was mentioned by both female participants in the study. It is not the intention of the researcher to undermine the importance of these issues and therefore they are mentioned to be noted for future consideration.

Discussion

Maslach and Jackson (1984) suggested that burnout is rooted in people-oriented, helping professions. These professions may also be known as “high touch professions.” This grouping includes medical professionals, teachers, and mental health professionals. Research conducted by Skovholt, Grier, and Hanson (2001) discussed that those who engaged in these professions were concerned with the development and health of individuals other than themselves. They identified that counselors appeared to have been drawn to the profession because of certain personal characteristics such as caring, compassion, and a desire to help others. The tentative findings of this research on counselors suggest that themes emerging from this data are important to focus on in future research.

There were three major themes identified through this research: stressors related to work, a dedication or calling to counseling, and common methods used to cope with stress or reduce stress. Work-related stress is very common amongst counseling professionals and others in high-touch professions (Forney et al., 1982). This qualitative study suggests data that agrees with such research. The counselors interviewed for this study experienced a great deal of work-related stress. The findings of this research showed that the majority of counselors interviewed felt that the stress related to counseling had more to do with organizational factors than client-related factors. For example, paperwork is one stressor that is viewed as highly demanding but also a necessary component of current counseling practice. Functioning within the work system was also a stressor identified. The counselors interviewed suggested that it was difficult for them to function within the system with agency pressure, a force that seems to be out of the counselors control, leading to a great deal of stress. Other stressors included long work hours, too many clients, and a feeling that the satisfaction derived from the work (likely due to the aforementioned stressors) is not equal to the amount of stress involved in completing the work.
Stress and burnout are serious problems affecting professional counselors. Stress and burnout may also be detrimental to counselors’ well-being. Zastrow (1984) defined stress as a demand, situation, or circumstance which disrupts an individual’s equilibrium and initiates the stress response. This study examined factors affecting stress and found that stressors are present on a continual basis at work and contribute to stress experienced by counselors. This research has several implications for counselors who work in a variety of work settings.

The importance of self-care has been restated in the findings of this research. Self-care is not only important for counselor longevity and stress reduction, but the topic is also discussed in Section C of the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics. Section C addresses professional responsibility (ACA, 2005, p. 9) and states that “counselors engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities.” This research identified activities that were utilized by counselors in order to reduce and manage stress (e.g., take some time each day to get away from work). Counselors may be facing very heavy work schedules that include the work stressors mentioned previously, however, one study participant walked during her lunch break in order to re-center herself for the remaining work day as well as to de-stress from what had already occurred. This type of activity could be considered a restorative activity that is important to personal self-care. Restorative activities include exercise, meditation, sharing feelings with a friend, seeking regular supervision, spending time in leisure activities, or drawing upon spiritual resources. It is important to note that each of these restorative activities for self-care was mentioned by study participants. It is important for counselors who are trying to find a balance of wellness to become assertive. It is suggested for counselors to actively engage in restorative activities in order to avoid the consequences of high stress.

The importance of self-care has implications for counselor educators as well as professional counselors. Due to findings of the present study suggesting that counselors are experiencing a great deal of work-related stress, it is important that counselor educators are providing counselors with the skills of effective stress reduction techniques in order to cope with the high stress associated with people-work. Counselors in training are often taught how to use stress reduction techniques with clients, however, the knowledge of these methods is not enough to guarantee application of these techniques to the self. Training in stress reduction skills would best be facilitated by opportunities to actively practice these skills. For example, counselor training programs have built-in stressful experiences such as comprehensive and licensure examinations, practicum, and internship. Each of these provides an opportunity to assist counselor trainees in awareness of their reactions to stress and to suggest methods of stress reduction that work best for each individual (Savicki & Cooley, 1982).

Implications for both counselors and counselor educators have also been identified. Social support and time away during the day have been identified as a significant factor in the reduction of stress. It may be necessary for counselors to learn these skills, and counselor educators are shouldered with the responsibility to teach these skills. Counselor educators could assist students in identifying appropriate areas of social support that could be utilized. In this study, social support was identified as being an area that was beneficial for coping with the stress of working as a counselor. A work environment that is cohesive and includes colleagues and supervisors who are open to
providing feedback and emotional support is important for counselors. Identifying those within the work environment who may provide support is necessary for counselors to be able to access and utilize this area of support. Counselor educators could assist in this goal by discussing with students ways to approach colleagues to seek out appropriate support. Counselor educators also could develop appropriate skills by identifying the importance supervision plays in seeking support in the work environment (Savicki & Cooley, 1982).

Finally, this pilot study suggests that some individuals feel particularly drawn to the profession of counseling. The participants in this research discussed their feelings toward the profession, their clients, and their colleagues. They stated that they felt as though they had a duty to serve individuals. This finding is consistent with the common belief held by high touch professions that human contact is essential for health and well-being throughout development. Being drawn to the high touch profession of counseling may also be viewed in an alternative way when discussing stress. Individuals drawn to counseling (i.e., as a calling) could potentially experience work stress more than those who see their work as simply “a job.” Alternatively, these counselors could be more committed because of feeling drawn to the profession. In this sense, counselors who have similar feelings as those in the present study may be more dedicated to self-care and managing stress. This is an interesting implication for counselors due to the notion that if the counselors feel drawn to the work, they are less likely to want to pursue another field, and therefore wish to work through the difficulties to continue in their field of choice. This is an area that would benefit from further research to determine more in depth if this may be the way in which counselors who feel drawn to the profession envision their dealing with stress.

Implications of this study are consistent with those of other studies examining stress of mental health professionals. This study determined, through interviews, factors specifically identified as stressors for counselors. The present study reinforces the importance of self-care for counselors. It provided viewpoints from three different professionals who varied in their years of experience, age, and work setting. The findings are useful for counselors, counselor educators, and possibly others who work in high touch professions. These findings encourage counselors to recognize significant stressors, and identify methods of coping with those stressors.

Conclusion

The completion of this study provided a wonderful learning experience from the standpoints of both a student and a counselor. The information gathered reflects points that are supported by other empirical research, with a richer amount of detail to each individual’s unique experience. While some aspects of the research were a bit difficult (specifically scheduling times to meet within each person’s busy schedule), overall the experience was rewarding and one unlike any experience this researcher has had. The interview process was easier than initially thought, and this was a pleasant surprise. Also, the examination was a process that allowed for creativity and an interaction with data that created a myriad of ideas.

Although there were some time constraints to finish this study, and there was a small sample of participants, this study serves as an excellent starting point for future
work in the area. Also, the project could be expanded when time permits. Since much more information was gained than could be included in this paper, it would be interesting to focus specifically on one theme in great detail in order to provide a different perspective on the research that is already out there. The limited time to complete this study reduced the chance to go in depth in any certain area, as well as an opportunity to obtain a larger sample.

References

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