

Influence of Existential Fulfilment on Job Burnout among Kenya Universities Professional Counsellors

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ABSTRACT:

The debate on the centrality of professional counsellors in the institutions of higher learning has been on the rise in Kenya. This has been partly because of psychological health providers being actively involved in capacity building in the profession through counselling, training, consultancy and supervision of other counsellors and trainees, and because of their role in student behaviour management on campus. In spite of this pivotal role in the mental health of universities, few scholars have exerted discretionary effort to studying the work and wellness of the professional counsellors in higher learning. This paper presents research output on the influence of existential fulfilment on job burnout among professional counsellors in universities in Kenya, with the view to adding on the existing literature on helping the helper. The study was descriptive and utilized a cross-sectional survey design. The target population 193 professional counsellors in 75 universities in Kenya and a census was conducted in data collection. Data were obtained using the Existential Fulfilment Scale (EFS) and the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI-HSS). Data collected was quantitative, therefore descriptive and inferential statistics were used in analysis with the aid of SPSS - 24. The response rate was 180 (94%). Existential fulfilment was moderate (EFS = 2.57; sd = 1.08) and job burnout was moderate (MBI = 2.2; sd = 1.77). In the final analysis, the findings of the study were that professional counsellors faced considerable burnout and in respect Human Resource Departments should strengthen staff psychological support programmes to militate against job burnout.

Key Terms: Professional Counsellors; Existential Fulfilment; Burnout Inventory

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Introduction

Referent literature indicates that professional counselling has been studied from its functionalist aspect – how it impacts on the society. This scholarship has, however, as a rule, eschewed the counsellor as a person. To capture the essence of counselling, it is significant to focus on the individual counsellor, with particular reference to work-related experiences. In this paper, the relationship between existential fulfilment and job burnout among professional counsellors in universities in Kenya is explored, with a slant towards adding on the literature that tries to help the helper in personal-professional work wellbeing. Research conducted in institutions of higher learning has not paid much attention to professional counsellors whose nature of work predisposes them to stress and job burnout. A review of related literature indicates that researchers concentrate on the relationships between existential fulfilment and job burnout (see Tomic & Tomic, 2011), as well as work engagement and job burnout (see Cole, Walter, Bedeian, & O’Boyle, 2012) in other settings which pose the need to focus on the work wellness of counsellors in Kenyan university setting.

Bakker and Cosa (2014) argue that despite technological development the world over, the incidence of job burnout continues to raise concern for both practitioners and researchers. This is supported by the findings in a global study that was carried out in 142 countries by Gallup (2013) on the state of work engagement in the workplace indicates that only 13.6% of employees worldwide are engaged at work, 61.7% are disengaged and 23.3% actively disengaged. However, a report on trends in global work engagement by Aon-Hewitt (2014) indicates that 22% of workers globally are engaged, 39% moderately engaged, 23% passive and 16% as actively disengaged. Gallup (2013) had done a survey that indicated that work engagement levels among employees vary across different global regions and among countries within those regions.

At the global level, Northern America (that is, the U.S. and Canada) have the highest proportion of engaged workers, at 29%, followed by Australia and New Zealand, at 24%. Across 19 Western European countries, 14% of employees are engaged, while a significantly higher 20% are actively disengaged. Aon-Hewitt (2014) report similar trends with Latin America having highest Work engagement levels at 31% followed by North America (27%), Africa/Middle East 23% and the least work engagement levels reported in Europe (19%). From the data by Gallup (2013), the highest proportions of actively disengaged workers are found in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and sub-Saharan Africa regions, at 35% and 33%, respectively. Job burnout is a person-specific variable that is related to work engagement and existential fulfilment. Work engagement is a significant indicator of work wellbeing which relates to existential fulfilment and job burnout in a circular causality continuum.

The interest in the relationship between existential fulfilment and job burnout stems from the view of healthy psychological functioning developed by existential and humanistic psychology. Frankl (1962) particular developed an existential perspective on job burnout with his psychology of meaning. He introduced the term ‘existential vacuum’ for a mode of existence without any meaning and purpose, prone to neuroticism and characterized by boredom and attempts to escape such boredom by distraction. The opposite, existential fulfilment, refers to a way of life full of meaning and purpose.

In a more and more secularized environment work has become a frequently chosen alternative source of meaning for life, especially for the idealistic and highly motivated individuals (Pines, 1996). They work hard because they expect their work to make their lives matter in the larger scheme of things and give meaning to their existence. Pines (1993) writes that the cause of job burnout lies in our need to believe that our lives are meaningful and that the

things we do are useful and vital. When individuals fail in these efforts, they are prone to job burnout. Job burnout emerges out of the experience of meaninglessness. In this framework Pines (1993) describes job burnout as growing out of a gradual disillusionment in a quest to derive a sense of existential significance from work.

Längle and colleagues (2003) explained the genesis of job burnout by referring to the concept of existential vacuum and fulfilment. Job burnout can be seen as a special form of existential vacuum, or as a deficit of fulfilment, which entails a loss of interest, a lack of initiative, and Emotional Exhaustion. Burned-out professionals are described as being extrinsically focused on objectives like influence, income, recognition, appreciation, and social acceptance that prevent them from freely dedicating themselves to their job and genuinely accepting the related responsibility.

Materials and Methods

The study adopted a cross-sectional survey design. The target population was all counsellors working in university settings. The saturated sampling procedure was applied to conduct a census among the respondents. Data was collected using a self-response questionnaire that contained items measuring existential fulfilment as well as job burnout. Data analysis was carried out using descriptive and inferential statistics with the aid of SPSS version 24. The levels of existential fulfilment were calculated from the Existential Fulfilment Scale to establish the overall scores for the respondents. The respondents' demographic characteristics were also factored into these calculations to determine the variation of the levels of existential fulfilment according to the demographic variables and thus get the true picture of existential fulfilment among Kenya universities professional counsellors.

The levels of job burnout were calculated from the Maslach Burnout Inventory to establish the overall scores for the respondents. Respondents' demographic characteristics

were also factored into these calculations to determine the variation of the levels of job burnout according to the demographic variables and thus get the real picture of job burnout among university professional counsellors.

Results

Demographic Characteristic

The modal age group of participant respondents was 41 – 45 years which accounted for 25% of the sample followed by 46 – 50 years who represented 18.9% while the least age group was over 60 years which accounted for 0.6%. Married respondents accounted for 78%, 17% were single, 3% separated and 2% widowed. This study established that 63.9% had a Master's Degree, 7.2% of the respondents have a doctorate, and 15% possessed a Bachelor's degree in counselling psychology. Public universities accounted for 60.6% of respondents while private institutions accounted for 39.4% of the total sample. This study established that 52.2% of respondents had been working at their station for a maximum of 5 years, 25% had for 6 -10 years and those who had been working in their university for more than a decade by the time of study accounted for 11.4%.

Existential Fulfilment

Operationally, existential fulfilment was defined as a composite variable derived from the mean score of non-missing university counsellors' response on 15 closed-ended question items on a 5-point Likert scale, namely: *Not at all relevant to me = 0; Somehow relevant to me = 1; Not sure = 2; Quite relevant to me = 3 and Fully relevant to me = 4*. A mean prevalence index of ≤ 2 out of the possible 4 points was taken to constitute low level, a mean index greater than 2 and less than 3 comprised moderate level while high existential fulfilment was derived from a mean index of more than 3. Table 1 presents the summary of responses of 15 items measuring existential fulfilment among Kenya universities professional counsellors

Table 1
Means and Standard Deviations of Counsellors’ Responses on EFS

Existential Fulfillment Scale (EFS)	Mean	S.D
I often feel uncertain about the impression I make on other people	1.51	1.45
I’ll remain motivated to carry on even in times of bad luck	3.1	1.05
I do a lot of things that I would instead not do	1.38	1.27
I feel incorporated in a larger meaningful entity	2.76	1.13
Deep inside I feel free	3.09	0.95
I think I am part of a significant entity	3.43	0.76
Even in busy times, I experience feelings of inner calmness	2.85	1.07
I often feel I have to prove myself	1.87	1.44
It is my opinion that my life is meaningful	3.6	0.77
I have experienced that there is more in life than I can perceive with my senses	3.44	0.88
I find it very hard to accept myself	0.76	1.3
I often do things because I have to, not because I want to do them	1.15	1.32
I think my life has such a deep meaning that it surpasses my interests	3.07	1.14
I approve entirely of the things that I do	3.09	0.85
My ideals inspire me	3.47	0.76
Mean index	2.57	1.08

It was observed from Table 1 that the mean index for responses on the EFS was 2.57 with a standard deviation of 1.08. This was taken to imply that university professional counsellors have a moderate level of existential fulfilment in life.

To establish the overall distribution of the levels of existential fulfilment among respondents, a composite variable based on the total scores of non-missing university counsellors’ response on 15 closed-ended question items on a 5-point Likert scale, namely: *Not at all relevant to me* = 0 to *Fully Relevant to me* = 4. The highest score that a respondent could register on the EFS was 60 points. The transition points for *low*, *moderate* and *high* levels of existential fulfilment were $\sum_{score} \leq 20$, $\sum_{score} > 20 \leq 40$ and $\sum_{score} > 40$ respectively. The results are presented in Figure 1.

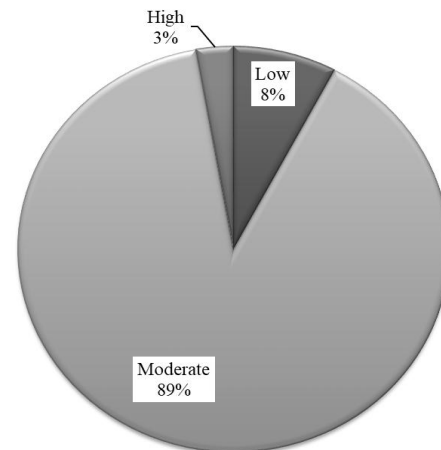


Figure 1: Distribution of Respondents According to Level of Existential Fulfillment

As observed in Figure 1.3, a mean of 89% of respondents scored between 20 and 40 to show that the majority of university professional counsellors were moderate on the Existential Fulfillment Scale.

Respondents’ Scores on Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI – HSS)

Job burnout was worked out as a composite variable derived from the mean score of non-missing university counsellors’ response on 22 closed-ended question items on a 7-point Likert scale, namely: *Never* = 0; *Almost never*

(A few times a year or less) = 1; Rarely (Once a month or less) = 2; Sometimes (A few times a month) = 3, Often (Once a week) = 4, Very often (A few times a week) = 5 and Always (Every day) = 6. A mean prevalence index of ≤ 2 out of the possible 6 points was taken to constitute low level, a mean index greater than 2 and less than 4 comprised borderline level while high Job burnout level was derived from a mean index of more than 4. Table 2 presents the summary of responses of 22 items measuring job burnout levels among Kenya universities professional counsellors.

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations of Counsellors' Responses on MBI-HSS

Maslach Job Burnout Inventory (MBI-HSS)	Mean	SD
I feel emotionally drained from my work	3.51	1.62
I feel used up at the end of the workday	3.11	1.7
I feel fatigued when I wake up in the morning and have to face another day on the job	2.85	1.84
Working with people all day is a strain for me	2.13	1.7
I feel burnt out from my work	2.95	1.57
I feel frustrated by my job	2.28	1.77
I feel I am working too hard on my job	2.58	1.59
Working with people directly puts too much stress on me	1.91	1.54
I feel like I am at the end of my rope	1.09	1.42
I can easily understand how my clients feel about things	2.76	2.07
I deal very effectively with the problems of my clients	2.38	1.95
I feel I am positively influencing other people's lives through my work	2.37	2.27

I feel very energetic	2.42	1.94
I can easily create a relaxed atmosphere with my clients	2.18	2.08
I feel exhilarated after working closely with my clients	2.96	1.97
I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job	2.25	2.1
In my work, I deal with many emotional problems very calmly	2.56	2.06
I feel I treat some of the clients as if they were impersonal 'objects'	0.98	1.43
I have become more callous towards people since I took this job	1.82	2.03
I worry that this job is hardening me emotionally	1.76	1.76
I don't really care what happens to clients	0.67	1.36
I feel clients blame me for some of their problems	0.9	1.19
Mean Index (n = 180)	2.2	1.77

It can be seen from Table 2 that the mean index of the counsellor responses on the MBI-HSS was 2.2 with a standard deviation of 1.77. This slightly above the transition point of ≥ 2 , which falls under the borderline range and it was, therefore concluded that university professional counsellors in Kenya were at risk of job burnout.

Respondents' job burnout levels were calculated as a composite variable derived from the total scores of non-missing university counsellors' response on 22 closed-ended question items on a 7-point Likert scale, namely: Never = 0; Almost never (A few times a year or less) = 1; Rarely (Once a month or less) = 2; Sometimes (A few times a month) = 3, Often (Once a week) = 4, Very often (A few times a week) = 5 and Always (Every day) = 6. The highest score that a respondent could register on the MBI-HSS was 132 points. The transition points for low, moderate and high

levels of work engagement were $\sum_{score} \leq 44$, $\sum_{score} > 44 \leq 88$ and $\sum_{score} > 88$ respectively. The results are presented in Figure 2.

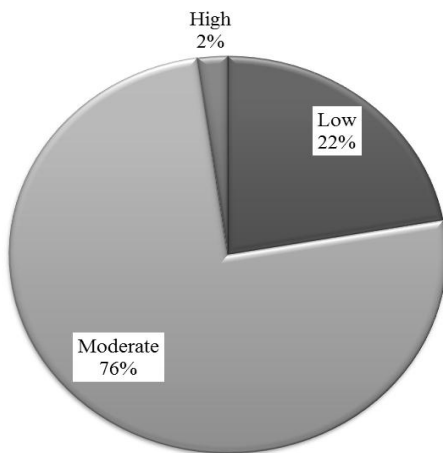


Figure 2 Distribution of Respondents according to Level of Job Burnout

Figure 2 indicates that 2% of the respondents were found to have high levels of job burnout, 76% were observed to present moderate job burnout and 22% registered low job burnout. This corresponds with the findings in Table 4.17 where it was observed that overall job burnout level for university professional counsellors was moderate. However, contrary to the expectation of the study, there 22% was a low percentage of professional counsellors who had low job burnout levels.

The Relationship between Existential Fulfillment and Job Burnout

To determine the relationship between existential fulfillment and job burnout among Kenya universities professional counsellors, a null hypothesis H_{01} : stating that at 0.05 significance level there is no statistically significant relationship between existential fulfillment and job burnout among Kenya universities professional counsellors was posited. This hypothesis was subdivided along the lines of

the three dimensions of existential fulfilment (Self-acceptance; Self-actualization and Self-transcendence) as well as components of job burnout (Emotional Exhaustion; Depersonalization and Reduced Professional Efficacy). The results are presented in Table 3

Table 3
Correlation Matrix for Existential Fulfillment and Job Burnout Dimensions

		1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Self-acceptance	Correlation Coefficient							
	Sig. (2-tailed)							
Self-actualization	Correlation Coefficient	.035						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.646						
Self-transcendence	Correlation Coefficient	-.068	.449**					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.364	.000					
Overall existential fulfillment	Correlation Coefficient	.208**	.454**	.450**				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.000	.000				
Emotional exhaustion	Correlation Coefficient	-.244**	-.037	-.055	-.132			
	Sig. (2-tailed)							

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.001	.625	.467	.077			
Reduced professional efficacy	Correlation Coefficient	-.016	.045	.159	*.234	.203		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.831	.545	.033	.002	.006		
Depersonalization	Correlation Coefficient	-.146	-.140	-.281	*.021	.133	.048	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.051	.061	.000	.779	.076	.519	
Overall job burnout	Correlation Coefficient	-.039	-.103	-.038	.084	*.207	*.567	.165
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.601	.169	.610	.263	.005	.000	.027

* $p < 0.05$; $p < ** 0.01$ (2-tailed).

Self-acceptance and emotional exhaustion presented a weak negative correlation coefficient of 0.244 ($P=0.00 < 0.05$). The observed correlation coefficient of 0.146 ($p=0.05 \leq 0.05$) between self-acceptance and depersonalization showed that the observed p-value lay at the threshold and therefore statistically significant. An observed weak negative correlation coefficient of -0.016 ($p=0.83 > 0.05$) between self-acceptance and reduced professional efficacy was not statistically significant. The statistical test between self-acceptance and overall job burnout yielded a correlation coefficient of -0.039 ($p=0.6 > 0.05$). The statistical test between self-actualization and emotional exhaustion yielded a weak negative correlation coefficient of -0.037 ($p=0.63 > 0.05$). Statistical tests between self-actualization and depersonalisation yielded a weak negative correlation coefficient of -0.281 ($p=0.00 < 0.05$).

It was observed that the weak negative correlation coefficient of -0.132 ($p=0.08 > 0.05$) between overall existential fulfilment and emotional exhaustion that was not statistically significant. The observed weak negative correlation coefficient of -0.021 ($p=0.78 > 0.05$) between overall existential fulfilment and depersonalization which was not statistically significant. An observed weak negative correlation coefficient of -0.234 ($p=0.00 < 0.05$) between overall existential fulfilment and reduced professional efficacy that was statistically significant. The statistical test between overall existential fulfilment and overall job burnout yielded a correlation coefficient of -0.084 ($p=0.26 > 0.05$) which was not statistically significant.

The findings in this study agree with a study by Tomic and Tomic (2008) where $n = 514$ principals and 215 teachers established that self-transcendence was significantly negatively related to depersonalisation ($\beta = -0.23$ ($p = 0.00$)). The findings of the current study support these observations in Tomic and Tomic (2008) research. The conclusions of this study also support observations on a survey by Tomic, Evers and Brouwers (2004) on existential fulfilment and teacher burnout that established that self-transcendence and depersonalisation had a weak negative correlation coefficient of -0.45 ($n = 215$) which was statistically significant at 0.01 significance level. The statistical test between self-transcendence and reduced professional efficacy yielded a weak negative correlation coefficient of -0.159 ($p=0.03 < 0.05$). The findings in this study are in agreement with the observations in a study by Tomic, Evers and Brouwers (2004) on existential fulfilment and teacher burnout where self-transcendence and professional efficacy had a weak positive correlation coefficient of 0.40 ($n = 215$) which was statistically significant at 0.01 significance level. Since this study reverse coded professional efficacy to reflect reduced accomplishment, the magnitude of the relationship does not contradict that of the study by Tomic and colleagues.

As observed in the correlation matrix, the existential fulfilment dimension of self-actualisation and self-transcendence were negatively correlated with self-acceptance and positively related to each other. All existential fulfilment dimensions in this research were positively correlated to overall existential fulfilment. Similarly, it was observed that all job burnout dimensions were positively interrelated as well as with overall job burnout. These findings agree with observations in the study by Loonstra and Brouwers (2009) that established that self-acceptance was negatively correlated to self-transcendence but significantly and positively related to self-actualisation. The same study established that all existential fulfilment dimensions were positively correlated to overall existential fulfilment.

Summary

The overall existential fulfillment levels among Kenya universities professional counsellors observed to be moderate based on the mean index for responses on the EFS (2.57; $sd = 1.08$). Among individual professional counsellors, 89% of respondents reported moderate levels of existential fulfillment. Overall job burnout among Kenya universities professional counsellors derived from the mean index of responses on the MBI-HSS was 2.2 ($sd = 1.77$) and therefore moderate. Among respondents, 76% registered moderate job burnout levels. Self-acceptance positively correlated with emotional exhaustion ($-0.244\{p = 0.00 < 0.05\}$), professional efficacy ($-0.016(p = 0.83 < 0.05)$), depersonalisation ($-0.146(p = 0.05 \leq 0.05)$) overall job burnout ($-0.039(p = 0.6 > 0.05)$). The existential fulfillment dimension self-actualisation correlated with job burnout dimension emotional exhaustion $-0.037(p = 0.63 >$

$0.05)$ professional efficacy $-0.045(p = 0.55 > 0.05)$ depersonalisation $-0.14(p = 0.6 > 0.05)$ and overall job burnout ($-0.103(p = 0.17 > 0.05)$) among university professional counsellors. Existential fulfillment dimension self-transcendence was correlated with job burnout dimensions emotional exhaustion $-0.055(p = 0.48 > 0.05)$ professional efficacy $-0.159(p = 0.03 < 0.05)$ depersonalisation $-0.281(p = 0.00 < 0.05)$ and overall job burnout ($-0.038(p = 0.61 > 0.05)$) among university professional counsellors. Overall existential fulfillment was correlated with job burnout dimensions emotional exhaustion $-0.132(p = 0.08 > 0.05)$ professional efficacy $-0.234(p = 0.00 < 0.05)$ depersonalisation $-0.021(p = 0.78 > 0.05)$ and overall job burnout $0.084(p = 0.26 > 0.05)$ among university professional counsellors

Conclusion

All dimensions of existential fulfillment were negatively correlated to job burnout dimension and therefore it can be concluded that existential fulfillment and job burnout cancelled each other among Kenya universities professional counsellors.

Recommendations

The study recommends that measures should be devised to strengthen existential fulfillment levels and university professional counsellors. This is in view that the two variables were negatively but not significantly related in the study, implying that higher existential levels predict low job burnout.

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