

Self-efficacy Levels of Candidate Counselors and Their Opinions about Areas of the Competency of Counselors

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KEYWORDS Adequacy. Counseling. Consultant. Self-sufficiency. Education

ABSTRACT The aim of this paper is to determine the level of the perceived self-efficacy of candidate counselors and to determine the areas of competency that psychological counselors should possess. A mixed method was used in research. Survey method and open-ended questions were used to collect data. Based on the quantitative data collected from 431 candidate counselors, it was observed that the perceived self-efficacy of the candidates is at a moderate level and have some self-confidence regarding their consultancy skills. According to the qualitative data, candidate counselors think that counselors must be competent in counseling skills, ethical issues, and managing sessions. However, according to the responses in all three areas, they see themselves as not being fully adequate. Considering that they are responsible for the children's educational, personal and social development, school counselors' positive perception of self-efficacy is important for the whole community.

INTRODUCTION

Each generation should grow up healthy if it is desired to build a healthy society. Regarding this, schools with all their units are in the service of the community. School counselors throughout counseling services try to contribute a healthy growth of all aspects for children and adolescents based on the comprehensive developmental guidance model. Therefore, the level of professional competence of school counselors should be at the desired level that is significant for the quality of services.

It is seen that the concept of one's perceived self-efficacy, which has been the subject of numerous studies, has also been researched in relation to psychological counselors in recent years. It is believed that the higher the level of one's perceived self-efficacy the more successful he/she would be in his/her psychological consultancy career. As mentioned by Cormier and Nurius (2003), a psychological counselor's self-perception of his/her self-efficacy might influence his/her job performance as much as it does the psychological counseling process.

As a person who introduced self-efficacy to the psychology, Bandura (1977a) indicated that it is the individual's self-efficacy expectation that determines how much he/she would endeavor, and how long he/she might resist, in the face of obstacles and negative experiences. In addition, he indicated that the more powerful the individual's perceived self-efficacy, the more

effective his/her efforts in the face of obstacles would be. Adapting this argument to the realm of psychological consultancy, Larson and Daniels (1998) define a counselor's self-efficacy as consultancy related behavior as part of the counseling process itself, as well as his/her perceived competency regarding his/her own capacity in terms of handling certain clinical cases. In other words, self-efficacy is important in the counseling process because it affects coping behavior (Allen and Brandley 2015).

The process of psychological counseling is mostly based on the notions of mutual confidence and cooperation between the counselor and the client. Also, as part of their consultancy education, courses for students about how the consultancy relationship should be established, as well as about the skills that a consultant should have. However, this basic education alone is not sufficient for the candidates to be trained as effective counselors. Without seeing that he/she can effectively apply his/her theoretical knowledge to practice, the counselor would not have sufficient self-confidence in his/her own self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1997b), there are four basic sources of perceived self-efficacy. These sources are enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Thus, efforts should be made to improve the perceived self-efficacy of the counselors by means of direct or indirect experiences. Because a counselor with a low level of perceived self-

efficacy would lose the client as he/she tries to deal with his/her own concerns regarding his/her own counseling skills, the counselor, instead of entering the world of the client, will deal constantly with his/her concerns regarding whether or not he/she would be effective in the counseling process. It can be summarized as positive experiences will support to increase self-efficacy of counselors.

Self-efficacy cannot be related only with counseling skills but job satisfaction as well. As Eksi et al. (2015) suggested, if a counselor feels inadequate about themselves during the counseling process (such as listening, summarizing, coping with involuntary client), it will lead him to feel unsatisfied with his job. Because feeling inadequate makes him/her do his job coercively.

As can conclude from all this information, a psychological counselor's perceived self-efficacy is directly related to his/her self-confidence in his/her consultancy skills. It can be said that a counselor's perception of self-efficacy starts with their education. This perception makes this subject very important to discuss at the academic level. Thus, candidate counselors should not only be given the necessary skills, they should also be given support in improving their perceived self-efficacy so that they can use these skills more effectively. Thus, it is vital to demonstrate the circumstances that improve the perceived self-efficacy of the counselors. For this reason, it would be useful for school counselors to be introduced their perceptions of professional competence starting from training period to support their professional development. It is thought that in light of the data obtained by this study, it will provide assistance for training consultants.

Objectives of the Research

The purpose of this paper is to determine the level of the perceived self-efficacy of candidate counselors and to determine the areas of competency that candidate counselors believe a psychological counselor should possess. In line with this main purpose, this study aims to find the answers to the questions below:

1. What is the level of the perceived self-efficacy of students studying at the Psychological Counseling and Guidance (PCG) department with regard to support skills, session management,

and handling challenges faced during the consultancy process?

2. Is there a statistically significant difference between the levels of the perceived self-efficacy of the students studying at the PCG department on the basis of the variables of gender, seniority at the college, hometown, and family income level?
3. According to the students in the PCG department, what are the competencies that consultants should have?

METHODOLOGY

Research Model

In this paper, a mixed method research was used. In studies utilizing the mixed method, quantitative and qualitative data are collected simultaneously. In this paper quantitative and qualitative data were also collected simultaneously with the goal of ensuring a more comprehensive analysis of the phenomenon, and of being able to make arguments based on more diverse data. The quantitative data of this study was collected using the descriptive survey method, while the qualitative data was collected using open-ended questions.

Study Group

The study group comprises 431 psychological counselor candidates enrolled at the Department of Psychological Counseling and Guidance (PCG) at the Girne American University (GAU) located in Northern Cyprus in the fall semester of 2013-2014. With the goal of collecting more reliable data, the method of taking samples from the universe was not utilized in the collection of the quantitative data. In the qualitative dimension of the survey, in order to demonstrate the different perceptions of the candidate consultants, 20 students were selected from every class level by utilizing a purposive sampling method. The purposive sampling technique was used that allows in-depth study of the conditions, is considered to have a wealth of information (Yildirim and Simsek 2011).

The response rate of the surveys administered to the psychological consultant candidates using the complete count method was seventy-five percent (431 people). 214 (49.7%) of the psy-

chological consultant candidates in the study were female, while 217 (50.3%) were male. In addition, of the students in the study, 110 (25.5%) were first-year students, 114 (26.5%) were second-year students, 105 (24.4%) were third-year students, and 102 (23.7%) were fourth-year students. On the other hand, 110 (25.5%) of the students were from a metropolis, 229 (53.1%) were from a city, and 92 (21.3 %) were from a town/village. 195 (45.2%) of the students stated that the economic situation of their families is good, while 236 (54.8%) indicated it to be moderate.

Data Collection

As a data collection tool, the Psychological Counselor Self-Efficacy Scale developed by Lent et al. (2003) was used in the study. The scale was adapted into Turkish by Pamukcu and Demir (2013), who also completed the validity testing of the scale. The 9-item Likert type scale comprising 41 items creates scores in three factors. The first factor is perceived as self-efficacy regarding helping skills (15 items), the second factor is perceived as self-efficacy regarding session management (10 items), and the third factor is perceived as self-efficacy regarding handling challenges faced during the consultancy process (16 items). The high score obtained from the scale indicates that the counselor has high self-efficacy in terms of coping with possible problems he/she will come across during his/her career. The internal validity of the original scale was calculated as .97. It was seen that for the sub-scales the internal validity coefficient ranged between .79 and .94. During the process by which the scale was adapted into Turkish, Pamukcu and Demir (2013) calculated the internal validity coefficient of the scale to be .98, and it was seen that it ranged between .92 and .95 for the sub-scales.

For the collection of the qualitative data, two open-ended questions were used. These questions were tested with three expert views to ensure the internal validity. The method for the preparation of these questions can be summarized as follows. The researcher carried out a pilot study on candidate consultants by obtaining expert views to test the internal validity of the questions. The responses obtained from the pilot study were also reviewed by three individuals who are field experts. Because it was seen that the questions reflect the candidate consult-

ants' self-efficacy perceptions, it was decided to use these questions in this study. The responses given to the questions by the students were reviewed by the researcher and two field experts, and issues of agreement and disagreement were determined. Accordingly, when the average was calculated to be eighty-seven percent in the analyses carried out in line with the reliability formula recommended by Miles et al. (2013), the questions were deemed to be reliable.

Data Analysis

For the quantitative data analysis related to the perceived self-efficacy levels of the candidate counselors, the frequency, average, and standard deviation were calculated. For statistics related to the sub-goal of the study, a t-test was applied to determine whether or not gender and the perceived economic situation of the family influenced self-efficacy levels. Also, for the analyses of variables such as seniority at the college and in the hometown, the One Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used, and in cases of statistically significant variance, a Scheffe test was applied to determine between which groups the variance occurred. The data obtained from the application of the scale was analyzed using the SPSS 20.0 (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software package. For the analysis of the qualitative data, a descriptive analysis method was used. Because this is a mixed research method, first the quantitative, then the qualitative findings were summarized.

RESULTS

Findings Related to the Qualitative Data

The first sub-problem of the study was constructed as, "What is the level of the perceived self-efficacy of students studying at the PCG department with regard to the helping skills, session management, and handling challenges faced during the consultancy process?" The findings related to the levels of the perceived self-efficacy of the PCG students are given in Table 1.

As can be seen from Table 1, the average of the scores obtained by the PCG students from the helping skills self-efficacy sub-scale is 5.89, while the average of the scores they obtained

Table 1: Averages and standard deviations of the scores obtained by students from the perceived self-efficacy scale

	<i>N</i>	\bar{X}	<i>ss</i>
Helping skills	431	5.89	1.31
Session manag	431	6.02	1.39
Challenges	431	5.37	1.36

from the session management self-efficacy sub-scale is 6.03, and the average of the scores they obtained from the challenges during the consultancy self-efficacy sub-scale is 5.37. The average of the scores that the candidates obtained from the scale as a whole was 5.72. Considering the fact that the highest score that the students can get from the scale is 9, it can be argued that the psychological consultant candidates have “some” or moderate confidence in their own self-efficacy. This means that counseling trainee participants need to believe in their own abilities. During their education, an average level of efficacy may be enough and this will be acceptable. But to be effective in real life situations with clients, a counselor needs to believe in his/her helping skills.

The second sub-problem of this study was constructed as, “*Is there a statistically significant difference among the levels of the perceived self-efficacy of the students studying at the PCG department on the basis of the variables of gender, seniority at the college, in the hometown, and family income level?*” Whether or not the levels of the perceived self-efficacy of the PCG students varied based on the variables of gen-

der and the perceived family income level was analyzed using the t-test, and the test results are given in Table 2.

As can be seen in Table 2, based on the t-test results, except for sub-scale of “the challenges faced during the consultancy process”, the gender variable did not result in a statistically significant difference [helping skills $t_{(429)} = 2.66$, $p < 0.05$; session management $t_{(429)} = 2.43$, $p < 0.05$; challenges $t_{(429)} = .99$, $p > 0.05$]. Based on the data at hand, compared to male students, female students have higher levels of perceived self-efficacy regarding helping skills and session management. In other words, female students have higher self-confidence in terms of helping their clients with regard to both sub-scales in the future. However, no statistically significant difference was observed between male and female students with regard to levels of perceived self-efficacy in relation to handling challenges during the consultancy process. Students of both genders have moderate levels of self-confidence in this area.

On the other hand, among the students who indicated the income level of their families as good or moderate, no statistically significant difference was observed between the sub-scales of perceived consultancy self-efficacy [helping skills $t_{(429)} = 1.35$, $p > 0.05$; session management $t_{(429)} = 1.32$, $p > 0.05$; challenges $t_{(429)} = 1.30$, $p > 0.05$]. In other words, it was found that the families’ income levels did not result in a variation between the levels of perceived self-efficacy among students, and that the levels of perceived self-efficacy in both student groups were similar. The results of the one-way analysis of vari-

Table 2: T-test results of the analysis of the perceived self-efficacy of the PCG students based on the variables of gender and the perceived family income level

	<i>Gender</i>	<i>n</i>	\bar{X}	<i>S</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>p</i>
<i>Helping Skills</i>	Female	214	6.05	1.29	2.65	0.00*
	Male	217	5.72	1.32	2.65	
<i>Session Manag.</i>	Female	214	6.19	1.38	2.43	0.01*
	Male	217	5.86	1.40	2.43	
<i>Challenges</i>	Female	214	5.44	1.35	.99	0.32
	Male	217	5.30	1.38	.99	
<i>Family Income</i>						
<i>Helping Skills</i>	Good	195	5.98	1.27	1.34	.17
	Moderate	236	5.81	1.34	1.35	
<i>Session Manag.</i>	Good	195	6.12	1.32	1.32	.18
	Moderate	236	5.94	1.45	1.33	
<i>Challenges</i>	Good	195	5.48	1.37	1.51	.13
	Moderate	236	5.28	1.35	1.51	

* $p < 0.05$

ance test (ANOVA) related to levels of perceived self-efficacy of the psychological consultants based on the variables of college seniority and hometowns are given in Table 3.

As can be seen in Table 3, the students' year of study at the college (seniority) [helping skills $F_{(429)} = .40$, $p > 0.05$; session management $F_{(429)} = 1.59$, $p > 0.05$; challenges $F_{(429)} = 1.81$, $p > 0.05$] or their hometown (metropolis, city, town) [helping skills $F_{(428)} = 1.79$, $p > 0.05$; session management $F_{(428)} = 1.34$, $p > 0.05$; challenges $F_{(428)} = .11$, $p > 0.05$] does not result in a statistically significant difference in terms of the level of perceived self-efficacy. In other words, no difference was observed between, for instance, first or third-year students in terms of the levels of perceived self-efficacy. The levels of perceived self-efficacy among students studying in different grades in the PCG department are at a moderate level, and are similar among students. Similarly, variations in terms of the hometown variable did not result in a statistically significant variation among the levels of perceived self-efficacy. The levels of perceived self-efficacy among students from a metropolis, city, or town are found to be similar.

Findings Related to the Qualitative Data

The main categories as determined by the responses of the students to the questions were,

having knowledge of consultancy skills (empathy, effective listening, being instantaneous, sincerity, respect), having knowledge of the ethical principles of consultancy and implementing them (unethical situations, ethical dilemmas), and session management skills (starting a session, closing a session, maintaining a session). The frequencies of the responses of the candidate counselors to the questions are given under the main themes title in Table 4.

Among the students who indicated that the most important competency that a counselor should possess is counselor skills, empathy skills were given the highest priority. One student stated his view as, "An individual lacking empathy skills can't be a consultant" (21). Under the main category of 'ethical principles,' which is the second area in which consultants are believed to have competency, "knowing what to do in the face of ethical dilemmas" ranked number one. With regard to this, a student said, "If you know what to do in the face of ethical dilemmas, you prove your competency in consultancy" (5). The most frequent response from students that indicated that counselors should have competency in managing a session effectively, was that the consultant should start the session effectively and end it in a timely fashion. An example of this is the following statement of a student, "If you can start a session effectively, you

Table 3: ANOVA test results related to levels of perceived self-efficacy of students based on the variables of college seniority and hometown

Class level		Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Helping Skills	Between groups	2.09	3	.69	.40	.75
	Within groups	744.10	427	1.74		
	Total	746.20	430			
Session Manag.	Between groups	9.32	3	3.10	1.59	.19
	Within groups	832.94	427	1.95		
	Total	842.27	430			
Challenges	Between groups	10.15	3	3.38	1.81	.14
	Within groups	796.76	427	1.86		
	Total	806.91	430			
Hometown	Between groups	6.21	2	3.10	1.79	.16
	Within groups	739.98	428	1.72		
	Total	746.20	430			
Helping Skills	Between groups	5.24	2	2.62	1.34	.26
	Within groups	837.03	428	1.95		
	Total	842.27	430			
Session Manag.	Between groups	5.24	2	2.62	1.34	.26
	Within groups	837.03	428	1.95		
	Total	842.27	430			
Challenges	Between groups	.42	2	.21	.11	.89
	Within groups	806.49	428	1.88		
	Total	806.91	430			

$p > 0.05$

establish confidence among the participants and ensure a smooth session. Similarly, you should use time effectively in ending a session, and shouldn't steal from the client's time and shouldn't prolong the session for no reason" (8).

Regarding the second question, the candidate consultants were asked in which of these areas cited they saw themselves as competent. The students stated that they felt competent in effective listening in the first category (sample statement: "I believe I will be listening to the client effectively because I realized that I could understand both verbal and non-verbal messages of the client correctly and understand his/her feelings" (46)), in having knowledge of ethical principles in the second category (sample statement: "I have knowledge of the ethical principles and standards outlined by Turkish Psychological Counseling Association and I believe that I will be able to act in line with these ethical principles" (33)), and in starting and closing a session the third category (sample statement: "I believe that I will be effective in starting and closing a consultancy session because, as I believe that this would increase client's confidence in us, I believe I will do it very well. I believe I have competency in establishing the process" (1)).

Table 4 can be summarized as, candidate counselors mostly think that a counselor should have competency in counseling skills first and it is seen in their responses, they feel competence in that area. When looking at the responses of students, ethics is the second component area of a counselor should have but they have mostly stated that they have competency in session management.

DISCUSSION

The concept of self-efficacy has been a main research subject in different disciplines such as

Table 4: Responses of candidate counselors to open-ended questions

1)	<i>Responses Given to the Question of "In Which Areas Do You Think a Counselor Should Be Competent?"</i>	<i>f</i>
	Counselor skills	370
	Ethical principles	126
	Session management	82
2)	<i>Which of the Above Mentioned Areas Do You Think You are Competent In?</i>	<i>f</i>
	Counselor Skills	198
	Ethical principles	86
	Session management	121

education and psychology in recent years. It is seen that, in the literature, there are numerous studies on the levels of perceived self-efficacy among teachers or candidate teachers from different specializations (Askar and Umay 2001; Akbas and Celikkaleli 2006; Unlu et al. 2008; Yenice 2012; Uysal and Kosemen 2013; Ay and Yurdabakan 2015). On the other hand, the perceived psychological consultancy self-efficacy of psychological consultants and candidate consultants has also been a major research topic in recent years (Larson et al. 1992; Tang et al. 2004; Gunduz and Celikkaleli 2009; Pamukcu and Demir 2013; Ozturk 2014; Eksi et al. 2015). However, different findings of numerous studies indicate a need for further research on different dimensions of this topic. The emphasis should be in particular on studies aimed at improving the perceived self-efficacy of candidate counselors studying at schools of psychological consultancy via a theoretical and practical training approach. Thus, both qualitative and quantitative studies should be planned.

The main purpose of this study was to demonstrate the levels of the perceived self-efficacy of psychological consultant candidates and to determine the numerous variables that influence their perceived self-efficacy. Based on the quantitative data collected, it was observed that the perceived self-efficacy of the candidates is at a moderate level and that psychological consultants have "some" self-confidence regarding their consultancy skills. The moderate level of the perceived self-efficacy of the candidate consultants maybe related to their not having enough opportunities to practice their skills. Looking at the undergraduate programs in Turkey and North Cyprus, it is seen that in both countries, the curriculum approved by the Higher Education Board is currently in effect. Also, it is seen that in this counselor education program as well, the emphasis is on teaching theoretical knowledge rather than giving students practical skills. Except for the course for "practical individual consulting", the program has no other courses aimed at practicing consultancy skills. In other words, in most cases the consultant candidates do not have enough opportunities to practice their skills, and they do not have the supervision opportunity either. But Cashwell and Dooley (2001) found that psychological consult-

ants with supervision opportunities had higher levels of perceived self-efficacy, while Tang et al. (2004) found that psychosocial consultants with longer periods of internship and more experience had higher levels of perceived self-efficacy, Gunduz and Celikkaleli (2009) found that psychological consultants with more experience had higher levels of perceived self-efficacy, and Ganske et al. (2015) found significant correlations between counseling experience and counseling self-efficacy. Findings of those studies indicate that counseling experience can increase the trust in one's own ability to use counseling skills and session management as well.

It was also found that the variables of the students' family income level, college seniority, gender, and hometown did not result in a statistically significant difference in their perceived self-efficacy. In other words, there is no statistically significant difference between the perceived self-efficacy of a student from a metropolis and a student from a town. A similar conclusion was reached for family income level and college seniority. In their study, Akbulut (2006), Cerit (2010), Yenice (2012), Uysal and Kosemen (2013) and Akkus (2013) showed that the college seniority variable did not result in a statistically significant difference in terms of perceived self-efficacy. Unlike those studies, Sahin (2015) found a significant difference between grade levels in favor of senior students. In this study, only the gender variable was found to result in a difference in perceived self-efficacy levels. Accordingly, female students have higher levels of perceived self-efficacy regarding their consultancy skills and session management skills compared to male students. In the literature, there are findings similar to those of the current study. For instance, Maldonado (2008) and Gunduz and Celikkaleli (2009) found that women consultants had a more positive perceived self-efficacy than men. These findings support the findings of the current study. However, it is known that there are different outcomes of gender variable in the literature (Larson et al. 1992; Sahin 2015; Kutluca and Aydin 2016).

According to the qualitative data obtained from the research, candidate counselors not only believe that a counselor should be competent in counseling skills, they see themselves competent in those skills as well. It is possible to think that this is because of their education. The curriculums of counselor training programs are the-

ory and skill based in North Cyprus. During the education, principles of counseling and counseling skills attach more importance than practice. When looking at the competency areas, which they believe that they have, ethics is seen in the third place. It may be associated with the ethics course has not yet being completed. According to that, the quantitative and qualitative data seem to support each other.

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that candidate counselors have a moderate level of self-efficacy with regard to support skills, session management, and handling challenges faced during the consultancy process. Self-efficacy levels for candidate counselors do not differ based on grade, students hometowns and family income level. The self-efficacy levels for female students are higher than male students regarding their consultancy skills and session management skills compared to male students. Besides that, candidate counselors think that counselors must be competent in counseling skills, ethical issues, and managing sessions. However, according to the responses in all three areas, they see themselves as not being completely adequate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Thus, it is believed that it would be beneficial to increase the number of practical courses that will allow the psychological consultants to practice their theoretical knowledge at the schools of psychological consultancy. Also, increasing the internship period from one semester to two semesters would allow the students to gain different experiences and to test and develop their skills with these experiences. As students practice their skills more, they would become more aware of their skills and how they can apply them, and this in turn would improve their perceived self-efficacy and pave the way for healthier and more effective consultancy services.

More research is needed to provide contributions for self-efficacy of school counselor who has a great importance on children and young people's personal, educational and professional development. This research is based on a limited number of variables. Research is renewable

with different variables such as the perceived attitude of parents, and choosing the department willingly or not. Moreover, it also draws attention to the small number of qualitative research on this subject. It is expected that data collected from qualitative research, which will be done with especially those who are studying in the last year and new starting professionals, will provide positive feedback for application programs.

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