



RESEARCH ARTICLE

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN FORMS OF COUNSELLOR SUPERVISION AND LEVEL OF BURNOUT  
AMONG VCT COUNSELLORS IN SELECTED COUNTIES IN KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Counselling is an emotionally draining occupation that expose counsellors to overwhelming levels of burnout. To overcome this inevitable professional hazard, the counselling profession provides for counsellor supervision as the mechanism to mitigate against high levels of burnout. Counsellor supervision takes three main forms including individual, group and peer supervision. This paper examines the relationship between relationship between the three forms of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors and seeks to establish which of the three forms of supervision has the greatest influence in managing the levels of burnout. Data was collected from a sample of 174 VCT counsellors in 13 counties which had the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence in Kenya. The chi square test and factor analysis were used in the analysis of data. The study established that a relationship existed between the three forms of counsellor supervision and levels of burnout among VCT counsellors. It also established that individual supervision counselling had the most significant influence on level of burnout followed by peer and group supervision respectively. The study recommended that VCT counsellors increase their frequency of counsellor supervision particularly individual supervision and that organizations dealing with VCT counselling should increase the number of counsellor supervisors in order to increase access to more intensive supervision, measures which would contribute significantly towards managing levels of burnout among the practitioners.

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INTRODUCTION

**Background of the Study**

Stress, emotional and physical ill health is common in human service organizations. Gerald & Gerald (2001) note that counselling is an emotionally- draining occupation. Their views are echoed by Bond (2007) who notes that there is always a risk of emotional burnout when working closely with the pains and problems of others. The British Association of Counsellors (BAC, 1998) acknowledges that by its very nature, counselling places a considerable demand upon the counsellor. Counsellors therefore need to be aware of their own vulnerability and monitor their well being. They should appreciate their human nature and seek help in their day to day and professional challenges. The counselling profession provides for a self care mechanism for the practitioners in the form of counsellor supervision. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP, 2004) defines counsellor supervision as a formal arrangement for counsellors to discuss their work regularly with someone who is more experienced in counselling and counsellor supervision. The task is to work together to ensure and develop the efficacy of the counsellor/ client relationship.

The agenda is the counselling work, and the feelings about that work, together with the supervisor's reactions comments and confrontations (BACP, 2004). Mearns (2004) says that counselling relies heavily upon the emotional health and development of its practitioners, and it is supervision which monitors and serves to maintain that health. Emphasizing the need of counsellor supervision Gerald & Gerald (2001) state that counsellors need supervision to help them resolve their own issues and avoid burnout in what is an emotionally draining occupation. They assert that as well as providing a sounding board for the counsellors' concern, a supervisor is in a good position to spot the onset of any symptoms of burnout and assist the counsellor in dealing with them. Corey, Corey & Callan (2007) suggest that supervision is perhaps the most important component in the development of a competent practitioner. Major associations for counsellors all over the world are in agreement that burnout in counselling is inevitable and for this reason they make counsellor supervision a compulsory part of their code of ethics. The provision for counsellor supervision is evident in the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), The Confederation of Scottish Counselling Agency (COSCA), The United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) University Psychotherapy and Counselling Association (UPCA) and the counselling division of the British Psychological Society (BPS). The British Association for Counselling has made it a requirement

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that all its members be in supervision regardless of their length of experience (BAC, 1998). In Kenya, the National Aids Control Programme has recommends at least one supervision session every two to four weeks and has put in place at least one counsellor supervisor in every district. Bond (2000) notes that there continues to be a growing interest in counsellor supervision in America and Europe as practitioners realize their vulnerability to burnout and as the cases presented to them grow in complexity. Figley (2002) recommends that a counsellor gets an opportunity to discharge the stress of material shared in the counselling sessions. BACP notes that insufficient supervision could be disruptive in other areas of the counsellors' life and in turn rebound on the quality of counselling. The association maintains that agencies and institutions should have their own criteria for supervision and provide supervisors from within the organizations. Different ways of carrying out supervision are described in the (BACP 2004) code of ethics for counsellors. These include individual supervision (one-on-one /supervisor-supervisee supervision, group supervision and peer supervision. Other scholars include self supervision as another form of supervision (Inskipp & Protor, 1993).

Individual Supervision, also referred to as one-on-one or supervisor supervisee supervision involves one supervisor and one supervisee. The supervisor helps the supervisee to develop efficacy in his/her counselling practice. Individual supervision has several apparent benefits. The supervisee and supervisor can decide to work on one issue without distraction (NASCO, 2002). It also offers ample time to discuss every session of counselling thus, the supervisor can be reasonably sure that he/she has an overview of supervisees' total case load. Importantly, one-on-one nature of counsellor supervision duplicates the one-on-one nature of most counselling and hence provides useful modelling as well as providing high degree of confidentiality (Collin & Windy, 1994). The study by Gachutha (2009) identifies enhanced focus, greater opportunity to examine progress, absence of competition and more security for better learning as advantages of individual supervision. Further, she observes that the personality of the supervisee is taken into account in individual supervision. However, the individual /one-on-one supervision has apparent limitations. Collin & Windy (1994) note that the supervisor and supervisee may share the same views closely and thus unconsciously develop a collusive relationship. The supervisee does not have the opportunity to compare his/her work with other counsellors. The supervisee receives the input of only one person which may be unhelpfully biased. Nevertheless individual counsellor supervision is the basic form of supervision and is the most highly recommended form by the British Association of Counselling (BAC, 1998b)

Group Supervision is the other frequently used format (Hollway & Johnson, 1995) and an effective method for exploration, trust building, personal and interpersonal growth. Powell, (2004) defines group supervision as a format in which a supervisor oversees a counsellor or a counsellor trainee's development in a group of supervisee peers. The recommended group size is usually four to six persons. This allows frequent case presentation by each group member. There is a wide range of ways of providing group supervision. The BACP, (2004) notes that at the end of the spectrum, the supervisor,

acting as the leader, takes the responsibility for apportioning the time between the counsellors, then concentrating on the work of individuals in turn. At the end of the range, the counsellors allocate supervision time between themselves using the supervisor as a technical resource. Group supervision has apparent benefits. It offers an opportunity to learn from the way in which fellow supervisee handle their cases. There is also a great deal of stimulation and variety of perspectives on each supervisee's cases. This variety of perspectives acts as a corrective against the single supervisor's biases or blind-spots. As well, the make-up of the group may provide useful opportunities for the role-plays to be experimented with. Group supervision may be very economical in training settings, in voluntary organizations or for those supervisees whose counselling work does not pay them much (Collin & Windy, 1994). On the other hand, group supervision cannot be without any demerits. In groups, there may be insufficient time for each supervisee's concern to be addressed in detail. Besides the supervisee may have too much opportunity to hide or minimize their difficulties. If left uncontrolled the variety of perspective may be experienced as bombardment of conflicting and un-helpful views. Confidentiality is also less protected in group supervision (Collin & Windy 1994). The limitations notwithstanding, group supervision presents an ideal situation especially when combined with individual sessions (Powell, 2004).

Peer Supervision is another frequently used mode of counsellor supervision. Powell, (2004) considers it an efficient means of providing feedback to counsellors. In peer supervision, three or more counsellors share the responsibility for providing each other's supervision within the group context. Despite the absence of the master clinician, depth of experience and learning, this adaptation offers counsellors inexpensive means of growth and input. However, it is not a substitute for a master level supervisor working with a less experienced counsellor but a means of supplementing the effort of overworked supervisors. Peer supervision assumes some degree of equality among the participants who function as colleagues. In peer supervision all participants share and discuss issues in a spirit of equality. This mutuality is difficult to achieve in a hierarchical title-conscious world of work. Like any other method, peer supervision has limitations. It is not recommended for trainees or newly qualified counsellors. Peers may be reluctant to confront each other and may lack the wider experience and perspective of supervision. Where peer supervision is the norm, it is essential that there be a clear understanding of where the final responsibility for the client's welfare rests (BACP, 2004).

### **Statement of the problem**

Considerable research has been carried out on the role of counsellor supervision in managing the level of burnout out among counsellors. Indeed there is overwhelming agreement that counsellor supervision is a prerequisite for effective practice of counselling and maintenance of the psychological well being of the counsellors and in turn for the maximum gain of the client. Professional organisations recommend that counsellors attend the various forms of counsellor supervision (individual, group and peer supervision). However research has not been carried out to examine the relationship between

the three forms of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among counsellors. It is of essence to determine this relationship in order to establish which of these forms of counsellor supervision has the greatest influence on level of burnout among counsellors. This study hopes to contribute towards enhanced understanding of the effect of various forms of counsellor supervision on level of burnout among VCT counsellors. This will hopefully assist policy makers and counsellors to determine which form of counsellor supervision to intensify in order to significantly reduce the level of burnout among the VCT counsellors which will in turn contribute towards counsellors' psychological well being and ultimately towards the client's welfare.

### Objective of the Study

The objective of the study was to determine the relationship between the following forms of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT Counsellors

- Individual supervision (supervisor-supervisee/one-on-one supervision).
- Group supervision.
- Peer supervision.

### Hypotheses

There is no statistically significant relationship between the following forms of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors:

- Individual supervision (supervisor-supervisee/one-on-one supervision).
- Group supervision.
- Peer supervisor.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study adopted the *ex-post-facto* correlation research design. It was carried out in selected VCT centres located in 13 counties namely Mombasa, Kwale, Kilifi, Tana River, Lamu, Taita Taveta, Siaya, Kisumu, Homabay, Migori, Kisii, Nyamira and Nairobi counties. An accessible population of 1050 VCT counsellors took part in the study. The sample size of 175 VCT counsellors was obtained using the coefficient of variation. The study took a coefficient of variation of 29% and a standard error of 0.02. Nassiuma (2000) says that a coefficient of variation of up to 30% is acceptable. While proportionate sampling was used to determine the number of VCT centres from which data will be collected in each county the actual VCT counsellors who participated in the study was obtained using simple random sampling. Simple random sampling is useful because it gives each member of the population an equal probability of being selected for the sample (Maclean & Wilson, 2011). A questionnaire was used to collect data from the VCT counsellors. The questionnaire included a burnout scale which was used to measure the VCT counsellors' level of burnout. The data collected from the questionnaires was organized, coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics including frequencies and percentages and inferential statistics mainly the chi-square test. The alpha level selected was 0.05. In any observed significance which was less

than the alpha, it was concluded that there was an association between the independent and the dependent variable, while that larger than the alpha value of 0.05 was taken as indicating no association between the variables. The Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17.0 software package was employed to facilitate analysis of data.

## RESULTS

This study tested the hypothesis stated that there was no statistically significant relationship between the following form of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors:

- individual supervision
- group supervision
- peer supervision

To test this hypothesis, scores on frequency of access to the three forms of counsellor supervision were compared with corresponding levels of burnout. The hypothesis was tested in three parts:

There is no statistically significant relationship between individual supervision and level of burnout among the VCT counsellors. The Chi-square test was used to analyze the relationship between individual supervision and level of burnout among the VCT counsellors. The results are summarized in Table 1 to 3

**Table 1. Observed and Expected Frequencies of Counsellor Supervision**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Once	77	35.0	42.0
Twice	18	35.0	-17.0
Thrice	1	35.0	-34.0
Four	4	35.0	-31.0
None	75	35.0	40.0
Total	175		

**Table 2. Observed and Expected Frequencies of Level of Burnout**

Level of Burnout	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
60-80 - HIGH	43	43.5	-.5
40-60 moderate	88	43.5	44.5
20-40 low	40	43.5	-3.5
below 20-very low	3	43.5	-40.5
Total	175		

**Table 3. Relationship between Individual Supervision and Level of Burnout among VCT Counsellors**

	Frequency of Counsellor Supervision	Individual Level of Burnout
Chi-Square	164.857	83.517
df	4	3
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000

As evident on table 3, the null hypothesis that stated that there was no statistically significant relationship between individual supervision and level of burnout was rejected on the basis of  $P < .05$ . It was therefore concluded that there was a statistically significant relationship between individual supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors.

**Relationship between Group Supervision and Level of Burnout among VCT Counselors**

A chi-square test was used to test the relationship between group counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors. The result obtained are summarized in Tables 4-6

**Table 4: Observed and Expected Frequencies of Group Supervision**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Once	153	58.3	94.7
Twice	11	58.3	-47.3
None	11	58.3	-47.3
Total	175		

**Table 5. Observed and Expected levels of Burnout among VCT Counsellors**

	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
60-80 - HIGH	43	43.5	-.5
40-60 moderate	88	43.5	44.5
20-40 low	40	43.5	-3.5
below 20-very low	3	43.5	-40.5
Total	175		

**Table 6. Chi- square Results for Relationship between Group Counsellor Supervision and Level of Burnout among VCT Counsellors**

	Level of Burnout	Frequency of group supervision
Chi-Square	83.517	230.446
Df	3	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000

Table 6 indicates that there was a statistically significant relationship between group supervision and level of burnout. On the basis of  $P < .05$  the null hypothesis was rejected. This means that a statistically significant relationship between counsellor supervision and level of burnout existed between group supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors.

**Relationship between Peer Supervision and Level of Burnout**

A chi- square test was used to test the null hypothesis that stated that there was no statistically significant relationship between peer supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors. Tables 7-9 displays the results.

**Table 7. Observed and Expected Frequencies of Peer Supervision**

Frequency	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
Once	43	35.0	8.0
Twice	18	35.0	-17.0
Thrice	10	35.0	-25.0
Four	8	35.0	-27.0
None	96	35.0	61.0
Total	175		

**Table 8. Observed and Expected Level of Burnout among VCT Counsellors**

Frequency of Peer Supervision	Observed N	Expected N	Residual
60-80 - High	43	43.5	-.5
40-60 Moderate	88	43.5	44.5
20-40 Low	40	43.5	-3.5
below 20- Very low	3	43.5	-40.5
Total	175		

**Table 9. Chi-Square results for Relationship between Peer Supervision and Level of Burnout among VCT Counsellors**

	LEVEL OF BURNOUT	Frequency of Counsellor supervision.
Chi-Square	83.517	155.086
df	3	4
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000

According to chi square results shown in Table 9, the null hypothesis that stated that there was no statistically significant relationship between counsellor supervision and level of burnout was rejected,  $p < .05$ . It therefore means that a statistically significant relationship existed between peer counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors. The analysis of data revealed that a statistically significant relationship existed between the three functions of counsellor supervision and level of burnout among VCT counsellors. The researcher was interested in determining which of the three forms of counsellor supervision had the greatest influence on level of burnout among the VCT counsellors To determine this, a factor analysis was carried out. An overview of the findings are presented on table 10-

**Table 10. Principal Component Analysis of different forms of Counsellor Supervision**

	Initial	Extraction
do you access individual supervision in your practice?	1.000	.661
do you access group supervision in your practice?	1.000	.263
how frequently do you attend peer supervision per month?	1.000	.562

**Table 11. Total Variance in Forms of Counsellor Supervision**

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	1.486	49.530	49.530	1.486	49.530	49.530
2	.913	30.450	79.979			
3	.601	20.021	100.000			

**Table 12. Component Matrix (a)**

	Component
	1
Frequency of individual supervision	.813
Frequency of group supervision	.513
frequently of peer supervision	.750

The results of factor analysis displayed on Table12 reveal that individual supervision was the most important component in determining levels of burnout (.813) followed by peer supervision(.750) while group supervision had the least influence on levels of burnout among VCT counsellors (.513). It therefore meant that individual supervision is the most valuable form of counsellor supervision and therefore counsellors need to be sensitized on the need to seek more of this service. However this would not be very practical given the high counsellor- supervisor ratio in Kenya. It would be of more practical value to enhance group and peer supervision. Although the results of the factor analysis reflect that group supervision ranked lower than peer supervision in terms of its influence on counsellor it is the view of the researcher that

with better delivery, it would yield better results than peer supervision in mitigating the level of burnout among VCT counsellor. A review of literature indicated that although peer supervision is the most cost effective form of counsellor supervision in terms of time and finances, a factor that would appeal to many developing countries, it has great limitations that may create apparent set backs for the VCT counsellors in mitigating their level of burnout. Peers may form a collaborating relationship and therefore fail to confront one another on critical issues. As well, peers may lack the expertise and experience that comes with a counsellor supervisor. As such the most viable option would be to enhance group supervision although it had the least influence on levels of burnout. Group supervision would be relatively cost effective, while offering the benefit of a supportive atmosphere from the peers and a professional input of a supervisor. As such higher frequencies of group supervision and minimizing the size of the groups would contribute significantly to reducing the levels of burnout among VCT counsellors.

### Recommendations

Since findings of this study reveal that there is a statistically significant relationship between the three forms of counsellor supervision and the level of burnout, it is appropriate to make the following recommendations:

- That VCT counsellors should attend the three forms of counsellor supervision in their practice.
- Counsellors should increase their frequency of individual supervision since it has the greatest influence on levels of burnout.
- Several factors affecting the effectiveness of group counselling should be looked into. These include minimizing the group size may be to an optimum of 8 members and increasing the frequency of supervision sessions. Counsellor supervisors should ensure equal participation of all members.
- Organizations working with VCT counsellors should increase the number of counsellor supervisors to enhance more access and intensive supervision which would play a vital role in minimizing levels of burnout among the counsellors.

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