



Bringing light to school counselors' burnout: the role of occupational identity suffering

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Abstract

This study aims to validate a predictive model of school counselors' burnout from occupational activities through *occupational identity suffering* (OIS). OIS is defined as the psyche battle between the individual's need for professional accomplishment and the inability to recognize one's profession in daily work duties. Tested among 269 guidance counselors working in school settings (Quebec, Canada), the model proposes that OIS is positively predicted by administrative work and negatively predicted by guidance and counseling activities. In turn, OIS should positively predict burnout. Results from structural equation modeling mostly support the model. Implications for prevention of school counselors' burnout are discussed.

Keywords School counselors · Burnout · Occupational identity suffering

Résumé

Faire la lumière sur le burnout des conseillers d'orientation en milieu scolaire: le rôle de la souffrance identitaire de métier Cette étude vise à valider un modèle prédictif du burnout des conseillers d'orientation en milieu scolaire à partir des activités professionnelles à travers la souffrance identitaire de métier (SIM). La SIM est définie comme une lutte psychique entre le besoin d'accomplissement professionnel de l'individu et l'incapacité de reconnaître sa profession dans les tâches quotidiennes de travail. Testé auprès de 269 conseillers d'orientation en milieu scolaire (Québec, Canada), le modèle propose que la SIM est prédite positivement par les tâches administratives et négativement par les activités d'orientation et de counseling. En retour, la SIM devrait prédire positivement le burnout. Les résultats de la modélisation

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par équations structurelles soutiennent en grande partie le modèle. Les implications pour la prévention du burnout des conseillers d'orientation en milieu scolaire sont discutées.

Zusammenfassung

Licht ins Dunkel des Burnouts von Schulberatern bringen: Die Rolle des Leidens der beruflichen Identität Diese Studie zielt darauf ab, ein prädiktives Modell des Burnouts von Schulberatern durch berufliche Aktivitäten durch berufliches Identitätsleiden (OIS) zu validieren. OIS ist definiert als der psychische Kampf zwischen dem Bedürfnis des Einzelnen nach beruflicher Leistung und der Unfähigkeit, seinen Beruf in den täglichen Arbeitspflichten zu erkennen. Das Modell wurde unter 269 Beratungsberatern getestet, die in Schulumgebungen (Quebec, Kanada) arbeiten, und schlägt vor, dass OIS durch Verwaltungsarbeit positiv und durch Beratungs- und Beratungsaktivitäten negativ vorhergesagt wird. Im Gegenzug sollte OIS Burnout positiv vorhersagen. Ergebnisse aus der Strukturgleichungsmodellierung stützen das Modell größtenteils. Auswirkungen auf die Burnout-Prävention von Schulberatern werden diskutiert.

Resumen

Alumbrando el burnout de los orientadores escolares: El papel del sufrimiento identitario ocupacional Este estudio tiene como objetivo validar un modelo predictivo del desgaste profesional de los consejeros escolares a través del sufrimiento de identidad ocupacional (OIS). OIS se define como la batalla psíquica entre la necesidad del individuo de realización profesional y la incapacidad de reconocer la propia profesión en las tareas laborales diarias. Probado entre 269 consejeros de orientación que trabajan en entornos escolares (Quebec, Canadá), el modelo propone que el OIS se predice positivamente por el trabajo administrativo y negativamente por las actividades de orientación y asesoramiento. A su vez, OIS debería predecir positivamente el agotamiento. Los resultados del modelo de ecuaciones estructurales en su mayoría respaldan el modelo. Se discuten las implicaciones para la prevención del agotamiento de los consejeros escolares.

Introduction

Burnout is defined as “a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job” (Maslach, et al., 2001, p. 397) and can be expressed by three core responses: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and reduced personal accomplishment. The consequences of burnout are manifold. For instance, it has been associated with lower job satisfaction and self-esteem (Lee et al., 2010; Maslach et al., 2001), work absence, impaired emotional, and physical and social functioning (Tuithof et al., 2017). Workers in people-oriented occupations, such as mental health workers, are particularly at risk of experiencing burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2016). Diverse studies from various countries (e.g., Australia, Hong Kong, and the United States) revealed that school counselors, who are recognized as mental health professionals, are particularly

inclined to experience burnout (King, et al., 2018; Shin et al., 2013; Wachter, et al., 2008). These professionals have central roles in schools as they promote academic achievement as well as students' social/emotional and career development (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012).

Various predictors of burnout among school counselors have been identified, both intrapersonal (e.g., perfectionism, Fye et al., 2018) and organizational (e.g., excessive job demands; Holman et al. 2019). Among these elements, counselors are particularly affected by role conflict (i.e., incongruent expectations about one's professional practice) and the assignment to non-guidance activities and inappropriate tasks such as administrative duties (e.g., Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Moyer, 2011; Wilkerson, 2009). These predictors of burnout also contribute to counselors' identity issues as the roles carried out in the work environment influence the development of one's professional identity (Cinotti, 2014). Indeed, several researchers underline that counselors are struggling to define their role (e.g., Paisley & McMahon, 2001).

To our knowledge, the direct influence of counselors' identity issues on burnout has not been explored despite the abundance of literature revealing the cooccurrence and the potential association between these two concepts. In order to gain insight into the elements that contribute to both identity issues and burnout, we propose a predictive model that allows for a better understanding of school counselors' adverse work experience. Based on a theoretical framework mostly inspired by the psychodynamic of work theory (POWT, Dejours, 2006), our model posited that the tasks performed by school counselors would lead to occupational identity suffering (OIS), which in turn would predict burnout.

Burnout among school counselors

Although there is a fluctuation in the prevalence of burnout or its dimensions across the various study samples, burnout affects school counselors to a worrisome level. Based on Maslach's conceptualization of burnout framework (Maslach et al., 2001), several studies show that counselors are likely to experience emotional exhaustion (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Lambie, 2007; Stephan, 2005; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). Higher scores on this dimension are particularly informative to detect the early stage of burnout (Maslach & Leiter, 2008). Addressing this issue could be not only beneficial for counselors themselves but also for students as counselors' experience of burnout influences direct student services (Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016) and the quality of delivered care (Michie & Williams, 2003). School counselors' positive influence with regard to students' exploration, development, and success can be threatened by burnout. It is, therefore, important to investigate the various aspects that elicit such a state among these professionals.

Predictors of burnout among school counselors

Several studies revealed that school counselors are exposed to multiple work practices and conditions that can lead to burnout. Among them, administrative tasks,

guidance and counseling activities, and years of experience are often mentioned, as is professional identity.

Administrative work

Various studies showed that the execution of administrative duties has been associated with school counselors' burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Holman et al., 2019; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Moyer, 2011). These tasks, which may include data entry, coordinating paperwork and updating clerical records, are classified as non-guidance activities and inappropriate duties (ASCA, 2012). Counselors who performed such tasks are also more likely to be unsatisfied at work than those who exerted tasks that are more closely related to their profession, such as providing counseling services to students (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Kolodinsky et al., 2009). Surveying more than 350 school counselors, Scarborough and Culberth (2008) noted that most of them wished to diminish the time allocated to non-guidance-related activities. Despite their aspirations, more recent studies revealed that school counselors still accomplished these tasks in their daily work. For instance, Tokmak and Özyürek (2018) uncovered that, on average, participants dedicated 20.4% of their time to non-counseling duties throughout the year. Goodman-Scott (2015) used the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (Scarborough, 2005) to determine the frequency that counselors were performing appropriate activities and "other" job activities (e.g., student registration), classified as inappropriate activities. Their results demonstrated that school counselors performed both appropriate and inappropriate activities moderately, i.e., reporting performing them occasionally to frequently. Moreover, it seems that reducing the amount of non-guidance activities along with other organizational factors may help diminish burnout among school counselors (Gnilka et al., 2015).

Guidance and counseling activities

Administrative work can limit the amount of time school counselors have available to assist students. The frequency of providing direct counseling and student services and of assisting with the curriculum, as well the percentage of time the participants report working directly with students, are negatively associated with burnout (Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016). Furthermore, Scarborough and Culbreth (2008) revealed that there is a discrepancy between how counselors spend their working time and their preferred practices: they want to increase the frequency of time spent doing counseling, consultation, coordination, and curriculum activities. According to the ASCA (2012), school counselors should dedicate a minimum of 80% of their time to tasks related to direct and indirect services to students. In a Turkish sample, Tokmak and Özyürek (2018) found that this ideal percentage was close to being attained with school counselors according 68% of their time to face-to-face (direct) interaction with students. In a study among members of the ASCA, only 59% of school counselors' time was related to direct services to students (Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016). Although interesting, these percentages reflect averages and could hide important disparities between practitioners. For instance, in a sample of counselors

from Arizona, fewer than 20% reported performing counseling activities more than half of the time (Kolodinsky et al., 2009). Overall, these findings indicate that the gold standard of 80% seems rarely attained, although performing guidance and counseling activities elicited greater job satisfaction (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Kolodinsky et al., 2009; Tokmak & Özyürek, 2018) and self-efficacy (Tokmak & Özyürek, 2018), which are associated negatively with burnout and its subdimensions (Gunduz, 2012; Mullen et al., 2018; Stephan, 2005).

Years of experience

Previous studies using American samples found that the number of years of experience in counseling was negatively related to general burnout (Thompson et al., 2014) or to its specific dimensions (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). However, King and colleagues (2018) did not find such an association among a sample of Australian school counselors. These authors suggest that the sources of burnout among Australian counselors may differ from the American counselors. Despite these divergent results, years of experience seems an important variable to control as more experienced counselors might be less vulnerable to burnout and more likely to practice as they wish, as work practices and conditions become more favorable with time (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008).

Professional identity

From a psychosocial perspective, influence of administrative work and hindered counseling duties on burnout could be understood as the result of tensions in the occupational identity dynamic. Indeed, many studies unveiled that burnout among school counselors can be provoked by role conflict (incongruent expectations about one's practice or incongruent mandates received from multiple sources), by role ambiguity (unclear roles in regard to responsibilities and expected performance; Stephan, 2005; Wilkerson, 2009; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006), and by a negative collective self-esteem (negative perception of their social group; Butler & Constantine, 2005; Yu et al., 2007). Yet, the roles implemented at work, such as the professional activities, and belongingness to a collective group, are both associated with one's professional identity (Alves & Gazzola, 2011). Considering this relation, we can expect professional identity to be an important psychosocial predictor of burnout. However, few studies have examined the direct effect of school counselors' professional identity as a whole on burnout.

A better understanding of the influence of professional identity issues on school counselors' burnout is needed. Firstly, investigating this issue seems relevant considering that research suggests that school counselors in North America are experiencing occupational identity issues (e.g., Burns & Cruikshanks, 2017; Mellin et al., 2011; Reiner et al., 2013). Alves and Gazzola (2011) described this identity crisis as "a serious sense of loss or confusion in whom you are professionally or what you do professionally" (p. 199). Secondly, there is evidence indicating that a vulnerable professional identity is related to burnout among other mental health workers, social workers (Geng et al., 2011), nurses (Sabanciogullari & Dogan, 2015), and

occupational therapists (Edwards & Dirette, 2010). It can therefore be hypothesized that occupational identity issues experienced by school counselors contribute to experiencing burnout.

Theoretical framework of the current study

The current study is based on the theoretical framework of occupational identity suffering, which was elaborated by Viviers (2016) through qualitative research conducted among school counselors. This framework was inspired by the psychodynamics of work theory (POWT, Dejours, 2006), the psychology of work activity (Clot, 2014) and the sociology of work (Osty, 2002). According to the POWT (Dejours, 2006), suffering constitutes a space of psychic struggle between a desire for self-fulfillment and the reality of work. Following Osty's (2002) idea of "desire for an occupation" (*désir de métier*), it is hypothesized that individuals have a self-fulfillment desire that is specifically related to their occupation. Certain tasks are therefore desirable from an occupational perspective: when they support the actualization of the values and social contribution of the profession, and when they are part of activities and standards valued within the occupational culture. These tasks allow recognition of one's profession in one's work activities (Clot, 2014). According to this theoretical framework, occupational identity suffering (OIS) describes the psyche battle between the individual's need for professional accomplishment and the inability to recognize one's profession in daily work duties. This distress results from the hindrance of actualizing professional activities that are coherent with the core of the profession, but also from a denial of one's expertise and social utility. Thus, OIS can be understood according to the following dimensions: (1) *professional disembodiment* refers to impediment (or hindrance) of actualizing professional activities that are coherent with school counselors' core profession, (2) *value conflict* arises when one's professional values are incompatible with the values endorsed by the workplace, (3) *hindered work quality* denotes the feeling of not being able to accomplish the work to the level of one's competencies and professional standards, and (4) *professional disrepute* involves school actors' misconception of school counselors, leading to a lack of acknowledgment and professional/peer denial of social utility. In short, by making it possible to theorize the subjective experience of work resulting from the inability to carry out tasks corresponding to one's desire for an occupation, or from the assignment of tasks that are undesirable from the point of view of the occupational culture, the concept of OIS and its inherent theoretical assumptions are likely to shed original light on the understanding of burnout among school counselors.

Purpose of the study

In sum, previous studies have determined that school counselors are likely to experience burnout and undergo identity issues. Extensive administrative work, the scarce amount of time allocated to guidance and counseling activities, fewer years of experience as well as psychosocial factors related to occupational identity (e.g., role

conflict and professional recognition) trigger several drawbacks, including burnout. Theoretically grounded and empirically derived from an exhaustive qualitative study (Viviers, 2016), the concept of occupational identity suffering could help capture the complexity of professional identity issues experienced by school counselors in their actual work settings and their impact on burnout.

This study aims to elaborate and validate a model that predicts school counselors' burnout via OIS. Our model assumes that, based on the occupational culture of school counselors, administrative tasks are undesirable while guidance and counseling tasks are desirable. Thus, our model suggests that OIS will be positively predicted by administrative tasks and negatively predicted by guidance and counseling tasks. In turn, OIS will positively predict a global factor of burnout, as well as its specific subdimensions (emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, positively; personal accomplishment, negatively).

Method

Participants and procedures

After the project received approval from the research ethics board of a Canadian university, an email was sent to all French-speaking school counselors working in private schools and public school boards (mainly high schools, vocational training and adult education centers) in the province of Quebec ($N=814$), Canada. Their correspondence was provided by the Quebec College of guidance counselors (*Ordre des conseillers et conseillères d'orientation du Québec*, OCCOQ). In this province, school counselors are part of a larger profession, guidance counselor, which is regulated by the OCCOQ, and professionals require the equivalent of a master's degree in this specific field of guidance to be accredited. The first invitation was sent by the research team, while the second and the third were sent by the OCCOQ and the federation of unions of education professionals of Quebec. These three bodies also sent two reminders one month later. Participants were invited to fill out an online questionnaire, which required approximately 1 h and 15 min to complete. The participation was credited as ongoing training hours recognized by the OCCOQ. Moreover, participants could benefit from a global portrait of their results. The study sample was composed of 269 school counselors (83.6% female), representing 33% of the study population. Participants worked in various school sectors: 56.9% worked in public high schools, 8.9% in private high schools, 19.0% in adult education, 8.2% in vocational training, and 7.1% in other school settings. The overall sample's average years of experience as a school counselor was 12 years ($SD=7.4$).

Measures

Except for the Maslach Burnout Inventory, all measurement scales were developed for this study in accordance with the theoretical framework presented. This choice was made to better grasp the context of school counselors in the province of Quebec,

where the definition of the guidance counselor's field and work division is quite specific (OECD, 2004). For instance, in Quebec, unlike other jurisdictions, the qualifications of guidance counselors are strictly protected, clearly defined and supervised by a professional body, as stated earlier. They include extensive training in counseling and advanced knowledge in occupational and educational psychology. However, guidance counselors are not required to have teaching experience, which is the case in many other provinces. The items were developed based on job descriptions and competency frameworks guiding the work of school counselors in Quebec and on the results of qualitative research on occupational identity suffering conducted by Viviers (2016). Following DeVellis (2016) recommendations, all measurement scales were developed and revised following precise steps by a select committee before conducting the content study according to the guidelines established by Rubio et al. (2003). A committee of 12 experts from various positions¹ evaluated the clarity, relevance and potential gender or ethnic biases of the items on the measurement scales. Using expert results and following content study guidelines (Grant & Davis, 1998; Lynn, 1988), the content validity index and the interrater agreement were calculated. Items having an unsatisfactory coefficient (<0.80) were removed from the scale or reformulated. All items' content and factor loadings for the newly developed scales are reported in the appendix.

Administrative work

Five items were used to assess administrative tasks (e.g., "*Helping the school principal with administrative tasks*"). Using a four-point Likert scale (1=*do not agree at all*, 4=*strongly agree*), the respondents had to indicate the extent to which they agreed with each item in regard to their daily performed tasks. Unless stated otherwise, this response scale applied to all current scales. The Cronbach's alpha shows good consistency ($\alpha=0.86$).

Guidance and counseling activities

Guidance and counseling activities were measured by three items, developed for the current study, that reflect school counselors' potential daily practice (e.g., "*Providing counseling services to students*"). Participants had to indicate their degree of agreement with each statement on the same four-point Likert scale ($\alpha=0.84$).

Years of experience

Participants reported the number of years they worked as a school counselor and were categorized in seven groups for analysis purposes (0 to 1 years; 2 to 4 years; 5 to 9 years; 10 to 14 years; 15 to 19 years; 20 to 24 years; 25 years and over).

¹ The committee was composed of five university professors who either have expertise in measurement or in school counseling, two members of the OCCOQ, two employees of the federation of unions of education professionals of Quebec, and three school counselors.

Occupational identity suffering (OIS)

The OIS scale measures four dimensions: Professional Disembodiment (4 items, $\alpha=0.90$; e.g., “*being assigned to inappropriate duties by the school principal*”), Value Conflict (5 items, $\alpha=0.86$; e.g., “*the values incorporated in school management contradict those endorsed by my profession*”), Hindered Work Quality (3 items, $\alpha=0.82$; e.g., “*having to compromise the quality of my work*”), and Professional Disrepute (3 items, $\alpha=0.82$; e.g., “*school counselor’s profession is socially devalued*”). The items evaluated, on a four-point Likert scale, participants’ agreement with particular feelings evoked from their current work experience. Higher scores reveal greater OIS. In the current study, OIS was estimated as a second-order factor. This structure was chosen for the sake of parsimony, considering that the four specific dimensions were highly correlated ($r=0.53$ to 0.71).

Burnout

Dion and Tessier’s (1994) French version of the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey (MBI-HS) was used to assess burnout. This instrument measures three dimensions: Emotional Exhaustion (9 items, $\alpha=0.89$; e.g., “*I feel emotionally drained from my work*”), Depersonalization (5 items, $\alpha=0.70$; e.g., “*I’ve become more callous toward people since I took this job*”), and Personal Accomplishment (8 items, $\alpha=0.57$; e.g., “*I have accomplished many worthwhile things in this job*”). In the current study, a 6-point Likert scale (1 = *never*, 6 = *every day*) was used. High mean scores on the first two dimensions and low mean scores on personal accomplishment indicate higher burnout levels. The current study’s Cronbach alphas for emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are comparable to the ones obtained by Dion and Tessier (1994) ($\alpha=0.90$ and 0.64 , respectively). However, personal accomplishment generated a lower coefficient compared to their validation study ($\alpha=0.74$).

Analyses

In order to test the proposed model, structural equation modeling was performed using Mplus 8.4 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998–2015) with the robust weighted least squares (WLSMV) estimator, which is recommended for ordered categorical Likert scales (Beauducel & Herzberg, 2006). In our study, most response scales only included four categories. Missing data ranged from 0% for years of experience to 5.9% for burnout items. A model-based approach was used to estimate missing data (see Allison, 2001), the full information maximum likelihood (FIML). The fit of all models was assessed using the following indices: chi-square statistic (χ^2), comparative fit index (CFI), the Tucker-Lewis fit index (TLI), and root mean square of approximation (RMSEA). Adequate and good fit are attained with values greater than .90 or 0.95, respectively, for CFI and TLI, whereas for RMSEA

values smaller than 0.08 or 0.06 are required to achieve adequate and good fit, respectively (Hooper et al., 2008; Hu, & Bentler, 1999).

Before testing the full proposed model, preliminary analyses were conducted to find the best measurement model for burnout variables. Although the Maslach Burnout Inventory is frequently used to operationalize burnout in various domains (Maslach et al., 2001), there is no sole established approach for representing its factorial structure. Recent findings demonstrated comparable or superior model fit for a bifactor model structure compared to other typical models, such as the second-order model or the three-factor model (Hawrot & Koniewski, 2017; Szigei et al., 2017; also see Mészáros et al., 2014). A central advantage of the bifactor model is to simultaneously estimate a global level of burnout together with the three specific subdimensions (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment). Hence, the factorial structure of burnout was represented by a bifactor CFA model in this study. The analysis showed good fit to the data [$\chi^2(344)=187$, $p<0.001$, CFI=0.968, TLI=0.960, RMSEA=0.061]. However, considering the limited number of participants and the complexity of the proposed model, which includes a bifactor component, factor scores ($M=0$, $SD=1$) for the burnout variables were extracted from this separated bifactor analysis before being integrated in the full model. This technique offers a partial control for measurement errors, considering that more weight is given to items with lower measurement errors (Morin & Marsh, 2015). Structural equation modeling (SEM) was then used to validate the proposed model, and indirect effects were tested following the bootstrap methodology and sequence suggested by Shrout and Bolger (2002), with 5,000 bootstrap specifications and 10,000 iterations.

Results

The full measurement model, including all variables (with factor scores for burnout constructs), provided a good model fit: $\chi^2(324)=599.621$, $p<0.001$, CFI=0.954, TLI=0.946, RMSEA=0.056. Correlations between all variables as well as descriptive statistics are provided in Table 1. Overall, participants were more likely to agree that they perform counseling and guidance activities (above-midpoint agreement score) than administrative tasks (below-midpoint score) in their daily practice. Average agreement score on OIS items was also below midpoint, suggesting that the perceived level of OIS is rather low. The score for emotional exhaustion was at the boundary of low and moderate levels of burnout according to the MBI normative scoring (Maslach et al., 1996). Low levels of burnout are identified for both depersonalization and personal accomplishment.

Fit indices from SEM (including predictive associations) were comparable to those from the measurement model: $\chi^2(329)=629.552$, $p<0.001$, CFI=0.950, TLI=0.943, RMSEA=0.058. The standardized regression coefficients are presented in Figure 1. OIS was negatively and strongly predicted by guidance and counseling activities and positively predicted by administrative work. However, the link between years of experience and OIS was not statistically significant ($\beta=-0.14$, $p=0.05$). In turn, OIS positively and strongly predicted the global factor of burnout

Table 1 Summary of intercorrelations, means and standard deviations for all variables

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Administrative work	–							
2. Counseling and guidance activities	-.30***	–						
3. Experience	.06	.00	–					
4. OIS	.33***	-.60***	-.12	–				
5. Burnout	.20**	-.35***	-.06	.55***	–			
6. Emotional exhaustion	.04	-.11	-.06	.35***	.00	–		
7. Depersonalization	.17*	-.22**	-.15*	.24***	.00	.00	–	
8. Personal accomplishment	.02	.07	.08	-.05	.00	.00	.00	–
<i>M</i>	2.23	3.01	11.74	2.11	20.20	15.88	4.23	40.43
<i>SD</i>	0.89	0.82	7.42	0.65	3.78	9.51	4.21	5.02

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$

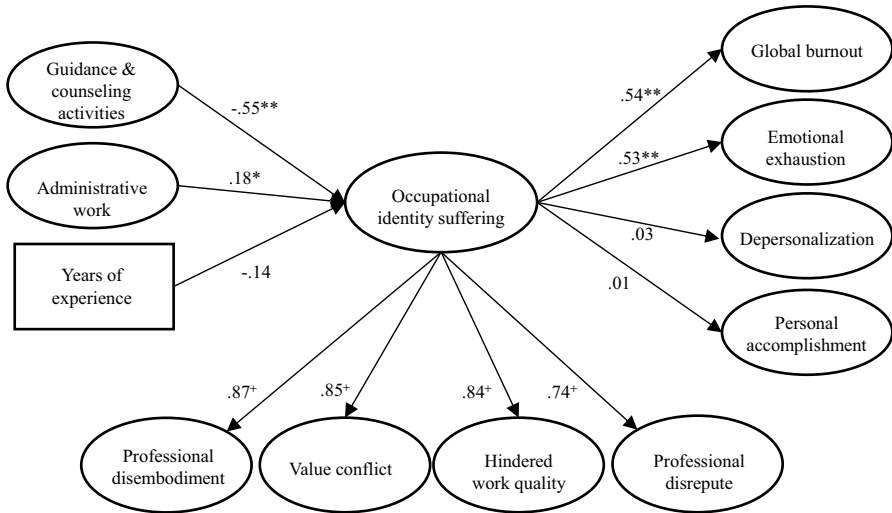


Figure 1 Final model with standardized estimates. Occupational identity suffering was estimated as a global second-order factor based on four first-order factors (professional disembodyment, value conflict, hindered work quality, professional disrepute). Burnout was treated as a bifactor model, including a global factor and three specific subdimensions are presented. These four factors are orthogonal. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; [†]second-order factor loadings

and emotional exhaustion, though no statistically significant associations were found with the depersonalization and personal accomplishment dimensions.

We further hypothesized that OIS would account for the associations between the performed tasks and years of experience and burnout. For this reason, 12 indirect effects were tested: guidance and counseling activities, administrative work, and years of experience were each tested via OIS with the global factor of burnout, and

with the three subdimensions of burnout. Overall, three statistically significant indirect effects were found. Guidance and counseling activities significantly predicted global burnout ($\beta = -0.30$, $SE = 0.07$, BC 95% CI $[-0.46, -0.18]$) and emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -0.29$, $SE = 0.10$, BC 95% CI $[-0.50, -0.13]$) via OIS. The indirect effect of administrative work on global burnout via OIS was also statistically significant; however, the association was small ($\beta = 0.10$, $SE = 0.05$, BC 95% CI $[0.01, 0.23]$). No additional significant indirect effects were noted. In addition, the results revealed no remaining indirect effect between the exogenous variables (guidance activities, administrative tasks, and years of experience) and global burnout, emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment.

Discussion

Previous studies suggest that the level of burnout among school counselors is negatively associated with performing counseling activities (Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016) but positively associated with performing administrative tasks (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Holman et al., 2019). Based on a theoretical framework inspired mainly by the psychodynamic of work theory (Dejours, 2006) and empirical literature on role conflicts (Wilkerson, 2009; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006) and collective self-esteem (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Yu et al., 2007), we hypothesized that the OIS, the feeling of being unable to recognize one's profession in daily work duties, was a variable that could explain the associations between the type of performed activity and burnout. Overall, our findings support the suggested model and are discussed stepwise in the following section.

First, results suggest that the more counseling activities the school counselors feel they are doing on a daily basis, the less OIS they experience. The inverse relationship is observed for administrative tasks, though a weaker association was noted. As other authors noted, these findings underscore the positive effect of "appropriate duties" and the negative effect of "inappropriate duties" on the subjective work experience (e.g., job satisfaction and commitment, Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Tokmak & Özyürek, 2018). The OIS concept allows to specifically link the subjective work experience to professional identity. The results support the premises of OIS: being assigned to inappropriate tasks conveys disregard and internal conflict, which hinder professional accomplishment and the ability to recognize one's profession in daily work duties. These results are also directly in line with those obtained by Viviers (2016) in a qualitative study showing that some school counselors demonstrate suffering as a result of the scarce amount of counseling services they are providing to students and the feeling of being a "quasi-administrator," as previously reported by Cinotti (2014). In other words, when the essence of their profession is constrained by the organization, suffering can arise. Based on the strength of the associations, it seems that performing appropriate tasks contributes even more to diminishing the levels of OIS than accomplishing administrative tasks contributes to increasing the levels of OIS. This result is consistent with a recent study showing that inappropriate duties, as measured by the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (Scarborough, 2005), do

not negatively affect school counselors' wellness (Randick et al., 2018). Interestingly, Bardhoshi et al. (2014) suggested that administrative tasks can be seen by school counselors as part of their job within a school team and even as opportunities to facilitate their own job. It is when these tasks are performed at the expense of counseling work that they can become a source of dissatisfaction or professional exhaustion.

Second, aligned with previous research revealing that a vulnerable occupational identity can lead to burnout (Edwards & Drette, 2010; Geng et al., 2011; Sabancıogullari & Dogan, 2015), our results indicate that OIS strongly and positively predicts general burnout as well as the specific dimension of emotional exhaustion. School counselors who experience a psyche battle between their need for professional accomplishment and their inability to recognize their profession in daily work duties (i.e., OIS) are more likely to undergo work stressors leading to burnout and feelings of emotional and physical depletion (i.e., emotional exhaustion). In line with previous studies and considering the four dimensions of OIS, these results heighten the importance, to prevent burnout, of having a work environment that 1- contributes to clear and appropriate professional roles (Wilkerson, 2009; vs. professional disembodiment), 2- fosters collective self-esteem (Butler & Constantine, 2005; vs. professional disrepute), 3- aligns organizational and professional values (Harris, 2009; vs. value conflict), and 4- enables (vs. hinders) quality of work. Hence, the organizational environment, which influences the possibility of personal accomplishment through appropriate activities, plays a crucial role in cultivating occupational identity.

A strong occupational identity can be viewed as a personal resource that may prevent emotional exhaustion (Geng et al., 2011). The lack of association between OIS and depersonalization or personal accomplishment demonstrates that school counselors who experience high levels of OIS may not necessarily develop cognitive distancing with their students and may continue to consider themselves as competent and effective beyond their general burnout level. According to the Maslach burnout model, emotional exhaustion, which is predicted by OIS, is considered as central and strongly identified with burnout (Maslach et al., 2001). This subdimension is the early stage of this syndrome and leads to the onset of depersonalization (Maslach et al., 2001). No significant effects are noted for depersonalization and personal accomplishment, which is inconsistent with our hypotheses and previous findings revealing associations between professional identity and burnout subdimensions (Edwards & Drette, 2010). Considering the psychodynamic of work theory (Dejours, 2006), it can be hypothesized that school counselors who experience OIS do not use defensive strategies, such as depersonalization, to contain suffering: If such strategies were used, they would feel less suffering. Regarding personal accomplishment, more research is needed to better understand this lack of a significant relation to OIS because this seems contradictory, according to our theoretical framework. Following these results, OIS might only be associated with the initial phase of burnout. Geng and colleagues (2011) underlined the crucial role of emotional exhaustion, which also emerged in our study. They only focused on this dimension of burnout in relation to occupational identity as they argued that professionals in human services are especially vulnerable to the consequences resulting from

emotional exhaustion. Therefore, this outcome suggests the importance of taking OIS into account in designing early interventions for preventing burnout.

Third, some indirect associations are found between the determinants and global level of burnout through OIS, enhancing the importance of the latter in counselors' experience of burnout. The findings uncovered that counselors' execution of guidance and counseling activities limits their sense of OIS, which then diminishes their global level of burnout. The opposite is true for administrative duties, which accentuate the feelings of OIS, leading to a higher global level of burnout. Contrary to previous research, which focused solely on the direct effect of counseling or non-counseling duties and burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Moyer, 2011; Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016), our results reveal that burnout could emerge as a consequence of the reaction (i.e., OIS) elicited by the amount of certain tasks, appropriate or not, in daily practice. Regarding the specific dimensions of burnout, the only significant indirect effect is found between emotional exhaustion and guidance and counseling activities via OIS. This indirect effect once again underlines the importance of these activities for preventing not only OIS, but also the experience of burnout altogether, as emotional exhaustion is the early stage of burnout. Engaging in preferred activities, that is, those endorsed by the profession, can strengthen professional identity and harbor emotional and physical resources.

Finally, with respect to the number of years of experience, the current study shows no significant effect on the subjective work experience, either on the OIS or indirectly on burnout. This is consistent with other recent studies on school counselors' burnout (Holman et al., 2018; King et al., 2018). Some studies show that years of experience are correlated with burnout, but that this relation is not significant when other variables are considered (regression analyses) (Thompson et al., 2014; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). This may be the case in our study. Indeed, it is noteworthy to mention that although not statistically significant, a weak and negative effect size ($\beta = -0.14$, $p = 0.05$) was observed between OIS and years of experience, in line with Scarborough and Culbreth (2008). More experienced counselors could still be less vulnerable to this type of suffering and further research could help sustain this assumption.

Implications for school counselors

The results indicated that in order to prevent burnout among school counselors, limiting the experience of OIS could be a beneficial approach. Our model suggests that this could be attained by favoring guidance and counseling activities and reducing the time allocated to administrative work. Hence, there is a need to focus on the workplace itself, considering that the development of one's occupational identity is greatly dependent on work experience and environment as well as on the roles and responsibilities implemented (Alves & Gazzola, 2011). More specifically, it seems important to implement actions that serve to establish appropriate professional recognition and roles. This would perhaps contribute to decreasing counselors' vulnerability to OIS and, subsequently, to burnout. Therefore, as proposed by many authors (e.g., Holman et al., 2019), advocating and educating school actors

(e.g., principals, teachers, parents and students) on counselors' appropriate functions and expertise should be considered as unavoidable actions to alter the present situation. Some principals and teachers can misconceive the appropriate roles of school counselors (e.g., Ruiz et al., 2018), and the latter hold low levels of perceived mattering in regard to their work (Rayle, 2006). These misconceptions and the lack of recognition limit collaboration and effective delivered services to the students and the school organization. Clarifying their roles should also help to improve school administrators' attitude and support toward school counselors, which has been found to influence their efficiency and effectiveness (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008) as well as their self-efficacy (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021). Addressing these issues can, thus, lead them to better assist with students' needs.

On this note, school administrators should reconsider the roles and tasks they attribute to their school counselors, as suggested by years of research on school counselors' roles and tasks discrepancies (e.g., Chandler et al., 2018). This is especially a concern in view of the increasing prescription of non-counseling duties to counselors as a result of accountability pressures and declining resources that school principals wrestle with (Stone-Johnson, 2015). They should foster counselors' preferred tasks, namely those that define their professional training. Moreover, Viviers and Boulet (2018) uncovered that communicating, explaining, and negotiating the professional role can increase well-being. Thus, establishing one's profession could not only diminish identity issues and burnout levels, but also contribute to positive manifestations. On the opposite side, accepting the prescription of tasks and intending to quit are associated with higher emotional exhaustion levels (Viviers & Boulet, 2018). Hence, these associations reinforce the need to take action.

Lastly, counseling programs need to consider the adversities present in the workplace and adjust their training accordingly. The results of Sabanciogullari & Dogan (2015) have shown that nurses' occupational identity increased following a program that aimed to enhance it through several themes, including a professional self-image development plan. Integrating this notion into counselors' training may help them begin their career with a stronger occupational identity. Solidifying their identity would be beneficial, as they would be better prepared for and resourceful in their work experiences that are known to elicit OIS. School counselors need to be prepared for the realities of the field (Goodman-Scott, 2015). As they are prescribed by their superiors to perform administrative duties, their training should also focus on developing strategies to enable them to efficiently implement non-guidance duties in a way that permits the preservation of their work essence.

Limitations and future research

Despite the novelty of this research regarding the exploration of school counselors' burnout, there are several elements to consider when interpreting the results. First, generalization of the findings is limited as the sample only includes school counselors from one Canadian province, namely Quebec. The literature presented earlier suggests that school counselors are confronted by similar contextual factors; however, their actual functions may vary across

provinces, states and countries. For this reason, a comparison between Canadian provinces and other countries should help identify the amplitude and the widespread phenomenon of OIS. Such research could further help determine and prevent the difficulties shared among school counselors. Second, in order to better capture the context of school counselors in the light of a theoretical framework based mainly on Dejours' (2006) theory of work psychodynamics, new scales were developed to assess OIS, administrative work, and counseling and guidance activities. Although these scales were built from the results of in-depth analyses of qualitative interviews, and confirmatory factor analyses were performed to ensure structural validity, future studies are needed to replicate these results and to test convergent and divergent validity with additional concepts. For instance, the concepts of illegitimate tasks (IL; Semmer et al., 2010) or occupational image dissonance (OID; Stoltz et al., 2013) could be used to test convergent validity as it presents some conceptual overlap with OIS, despite a different theoretical anchorage (e.g., IL: offense to the professional identity, OID: mismatch between idealized images or fantasies of the profession held by counselors-in-training and the realities of the workplace). Third, considering that the subdimension personal accomplishment has an internal consistency that is lower than the standard threshold, it may influence the interpretation of results in relation to this subdimension. Fourth, another limitation concerns the study method, as a cross-sectional study limits inferences of sequential models. Future research should, thus, focus on developing a longitudinal study to further validate the sequence proposed in the present study. Finally, considering recent studies showing the importance of caseload magnitude (school counselor-to-student ratio) in predicting burnout (Mullen et al., 2021; Bardhoshi & Um, 2021), it may be relevant to include this variable in testing the concept of OIS in a future study as a constraint to doing work aligned with professional identity.

Conclusion

The results of this study strengthened previous notions regarding school counselors' identity issues as well as shed light on the interplay involved in the presence of OIS and burnout. Our findings supported the importance of performing certain tasks at an appropriate frequency, considering that it is associated with counselors' OIS and it indirectly predicts the experience of global factor of burnout and emotional exhaustion via OIS. To our knowledge, there is no study that has noted the successive influence of performed tasks, OIS or identity issues and the experience of burnout. Furthermore, this study identified work practices and conditions that are associated with school counselors' positive state. The adjustment of school personnel's perspective regarding counselors' expertise and the prescription of appropriate roles may prevent counselors from experiencing detrimental feelings and enhance the quality and quantity of student assistance.

Appendix

See Table 2.

Table 2 Items contents and standardized parameter estimates for the measurement model (CFA) of newly developed scales

	λ	δ
Counseling and guidance activities		
Carrying out vocational guidance processes with students	.877**	.231
Providing guidance counseling	.867**	.249
Providing individual intervention with students	.828**	.315
Administrative work		
Enrolling students in his or her school	.786**	.382
Answering calls from outside the school for various inquiries about the school	.824**	.322
Enrolling students in another school during transfers	.788**	.379
Performing an administrative check of student report cards	.800**	.361
Supporting principals in carrying out administrative tasks	.864**	.253
Disembodiment		
... to do tasks that are not within the scope of my profession	.851**	.276
... to have to give up the work of guidance through all the mandates entrusted to me	.843**	.290
... to be assigned inappropriate tasks by principals	.891**	.206
... that my role as guidance counselor is being diverted for administrative purposes	.930**	.135
Value conflict		
... to work in a work environment that is not pleasant in terms of interpersonal relations	.660**	.565
... that my work of accompanying students is a waste of time in the eyes of school principals	.806**	.350
... to have to take actions that go against my professional convictions	.808**	.348
... that the management of the school is aligned with values that contradict those of my profession	.907**	.177
... not to work in an environment driven by the feeling of working for the same mission	.852**	.273
Hindered work quality		
... not being able to contribute to the guidance of young people as much as I could	.797**	.365
... to have to compromise on the quality of my work	.802**	.356
... of not being able to do my work according to the rules of art	.866**	.250
Professional disrepute		
... to constantly hear a discourse of devaluation of guidance around me	.737**	.456
... that a persistent misunderstanding afflicts the role of guidance counselors among school actors	.986**	.027
... that the profession of school counselors is socially devalued	.751**	.329
Occupational identity suffering (second order)		
Disembodiment	.870**	.436
Value conflict	.845**	.286
Hindered work quality	.846**	.285
Professional disrepute	.742**	.450

λ : Factor loading; δ : Item uniqueness

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

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Data availability Research material has been irrevocably anonymized, so the data is still available for further analyzes.

Code availability Not applicable.

Declarations

Conflict of interest Not applicable.

Ethical approval This study received approval from the Research ethics board of Laval University (# 2015-146/05-05-2016).

Consent to participate All participants filled out an electronic consent form, which detailed purposes of the study, the procedure, risks and inconvenients, as well as benefits of participating to the study.

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