Burnout in NSW School Counsellors: How do years of experience, career-sustaining behaviours and mindfulness affect burnout levels?

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study was to determine correlations between years of service and burnout experienced by members of the New South Wales Department of Education school counselling service in Australia. The benefits of participation in mindfulness and career-sustaining behaviours on levels of burnout in the sample were also explored. The 138 participants each completed a burnout inventory, mindfulness questionnaire and career-sustaining behaviours questionnaire. The participants were allocated to one of three groups: highly experienced, experienced or inexperienced. Results indicated that, as years of experience increased, levels of burnout decreased. Participation in some, but not all, facets of mindfulness were found to increase as years of experience increased. Participation in mindfulness and careersustaining behaviours were associated with lower levels of burnout. Spending time with a partner/family and maintaining self-awareness were the two careersustaining behaviours that were found to have the largest positive impact on levels of burnout. However, additional research in this area is required to further elucidate the types of career-sustaining behaviours that have the mostpositive impacts on burnout.

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Keywords: Burnout, mindfulness, career-sustaining behaviours, school counsellor, psychologist, self-care, school counselling, education

Introduction

School counsellors working in an educational setting have many roles with a diverse range of tasks to be fulfilled in their position (Gunduz, 2012). As well as supporting students' academic, social and personal development, school counsellors are regularly involved in complex cases concerned with depression, anxiety, suicide, substance abuse, violence and trauma (Page, Pietrzak & Sutton, 2001). School counselling is a complex, ever-expanding role in which school counsellors not only provide support for students in the area of mental health, but administer psychological assessments, develop behaviour management interventions for the classroom and the playground, provide career and supportive counselling, and deliver professional development for teachers and colleagues (Barletta, 1996, cited in Campbell & Colmar, 2014). School counsellors not only work closely with students, they are in contact with parents, teachers, principals and external agencies on a regular basis, providing advice and working collaboratively with each of these groups (Paisley & McMahon, 2001).

Administration duties and paperwork can interfere with the counselling demands of the role and can be a source of job-related stress (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). This can lead to role conflict, which is defined in an original study by Kahn et al. (1964, cited in Thompson & Powers, 1983) as the presence of pressure to fulfill the duties of two or more roles at the same time, where focus on one role makes it more difficult to complete the other successfully. McKie and Colmar (2013) have identified an increasing trend over the past 30 years, where added pressure is being placed on school counsellors in Australia, with additional roles, skills and competencies expected in the profession, possibly adding to stress in the workplace. Young people in Australia are increasingly presenting with mental health issues and this has resulted in an increase in workload for school counsellors who provide support in schools for teenagers facing these issues (Campbell & Colmar, 2014). School counsellors are also supporting students from minority racial groups, same-sex attracted or gender-questioning students, and children and young people diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder, adding to the pressure of the role with such diversity (Campbell & Colmar, 2014). These factors have the possibility of increasing workplace stress, thus leading to the potential of burnout in school counsellors (Gunduz, 2012).

Literature review

What is Burnout?

Freudenberger (1974) was the first to use the term burnout, and defined it as extreme demands placed on personal resources resulting in the condition of physical and mental exhaustion (cited in Gunduz, 2012). Maslach and Jackson (1984) described the construct as "a prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job that was comprised of three dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment" (cited in Lent & Schwartz, 2012, p. 355). Emotional exhaustion is characterised by depletion of energy on a physical and emotional level, depersonalisation is demonstrating a lack of empathy and distancing oneself from clients, and personal accomplishment is the feeling of contentment and proficiency in one's job (Bardhoshi, Schweinle & Duncan, 2014).

Burnout involves exerting effort beyond one's capacity in work situations coupled with a belief that one does not have the personal resources to cope with it (Lent & Schwartz, 2012). Schaufeli and Greenglass (2001) describe burnout as a state of exhaustion on three levels – mental, physical and emotional – which has been the result of chronic engagement in work situations that are highly emotionally demanding, such as those undertaken by a school counsellor. Their definition is aligned with the constructs of the Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI; Kristensen et al., 2005), which assesses three elements of burnout: personal, work related and client related (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014).

Types of Burnout

In the current study, burnout was measured using the CBI (Kristensen et al., 2005). In this inventory, burnout is defined as "physical and psychological fatigue and exhaustion" (Kristensen et al., 2005, p. 196). Kristensen et al., (2005) created three separate measures of different types of burnout to be used in distinct domains.

Personal-related burnout is a generic scale that can be applied to any person, regardless of employment status, and measures the physical and psychological fatigue and exhaustion experienced by a person (Milfont et al., 2008). Work-related burnout is a result of a person's attribution of symptoms of physical and psychological fatigue and exhaustion to his/her work, but is not a causal measure (Kristensen et al., 2005). By comparing personal-related burnout and work-related burnout, it is possible to identify people who are psychically and psychologically exhausted due to non-work-related issues, such as health problems or family issues, and those whose symptoms are a direct result of work-related issues (Kristensen et al., 2005). Client-related burnout is directly related to the fatigue and exhaustion that is perceived by the person as strictly related to their contact with clients; in the context of the current study, the clients are students (Kristensen et al., 2005).

Burnout and School Counsellors

Burnout can have a negative effect on school counsellors on a mental, physical and emotional level and can permeate through many different areas of their lives, not just at work (Gunduz, 2012; Lloyd, King & Chenoweth, 2002; Schaufeli & Greenglass, 2001). Possible effects of burnout on school counsellors include poorer work performance (Bandura, 1986; Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Wright & Bonett, 1997), desire to quit one's job (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014; Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996), absenteeism (Brewer & Clippard, 2002), decrease in job satisfaction (Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996), physical and mental health issues, including depression, anxiety and substance abuse (Burke & Richardson, 1996; Huebner & Huberty, 1984), and the creation of a negative work environment, impacting on other workers in the organisation (Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).

Self-care

Engaging in self-care behaviours can help to reduce the risk of burnout in psychologists and health practitioners (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014; Lent & Schwartz, 2012). Self-care behaviours can come in a variety of formats, such as self-awareness (Skovholt, Grier & Hanson, 2001), receiving support from peers and mentors (Skovholt, Grier & Hanson, 2001), accessing supervision from a more-experienced practitioner or superior (Bardhoshi, Schweinle & Duncan, 2014) and seeking personal therapy (Norcross, 2000). Less-formal activities that focus on personal self-care in the areas of physical, spiritual, emotional and social wellbeing have been labelled as career-sustaining behaviours (CSBs; Stevanovic & Rupert, 2004). These activities can include developing interests outside the workplace (Hesse, 2002), exercise (Lent & Schwartz, 2012; Norcross, 2000), meditation and yoga (Schure, Christopher & Christopher, 2008), and utilising the support of friends outside the workplace (Lent & Schwartz, 2012).

Organisational Support

Research conducted by Bardhoshi, Schweinle and Duncan (2014) also discusses the moderating effects of organisational support on burnout. They define organisational support as the perceived support provided to the employee by the employer in order to perform one's job successfully, and the way the employee perceives their work to be

of value to the organisation (Bardhoshi, Schweinle & Duncan, 2014). Other research (Lambie, 2002; Yildrim, 2008) also identifies that organisational support has a significant relationship to school counsellor burnout, with Yildrim (2008) reporting a significant negative relationship between school principal support and burnout in school counsellors.

Mindfulness and Burnout

Mindfulness has also been studied in the context of burnout levels and promotes an attitude of curiosity and a non-judgmental awareness of one's present experiences (Cashwell, Bentley & Bigbee, 2007; Raab, 2014). Interventions based on mindfulness strategies, such as mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) have been used to reduce stress and anxiety (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014). MBSR is a standardised, eight-week secular meditation training program that helps individuals cope with stress and is often used to help reduce depressive symptoms (Greeson et al., 2015). For this reason, mindfulness courses are being taught in health care settings and training programs as a way of reducing workplace stress and burnout among counsellors and health care professionals (Irving, Dobkin & Park, 2009). Individuals who practice mindfulness strategies have been shown to be more aware of their thoughts and personal biases than those who have not practiced these strategies (Cashwell, Bentley & Bigbee, 2007). This increased awareness through the implementation of mindfulness strategies may increase a school counsellor's self-efficacy, and thus help to reduce burnout (Cashwell, Bentley & Bigbee, 2007). Raab (2014) also supports the importance of mindfulness interventions as an important potential factor in reducing stress and burnout.

Newsome et al. (2006) evaluated a 15-week, MBSR course that was integrated into the curriculum of a counselling graduate program that provided students with techniques and skills on self-care and a theoretical understanding of mind/body medicine and research. The course was both experiential (including practices such as hatha yoga, meditation, qigong and relaxation techniques) and theoretical – focusing on an introduction to mindfulness practice, and the application of mindfulness activities in psychotherapy and behavioural medicine (Newsome et al., 2006). Results from the study not only demonstrated positive outcomes for the students physically, emotionally, mentally, spiritually and interpersonally but also had a positive impact on their counselling skills and therapeutic relationships (Newsome et al., 2006). Most students in the study reported that they would aim to integrate mindfulness practices into their future professional counselling work (Newsome et al., 2006). This study has implications for the possible benefits of incorporating mindfulness-based courses for school counsellors into professional development activities as a way of potentially reducing burnout levels in the profession.

The present study is a replication of the study conducted by Di Benedetto and Swadling (2014) who investigated the relationships among burnout in Australian psychologists, work setting and years of experience in that work setting, and the practicing of mindfulness and career-sustaining behaviours. Di Benedetto and Swadling (2014) used a sample of 167 Australian registered psychologists working in both private practice and the public sector. They hypothesised that psychologists who have been working in their current workplace for a shorter time would show higher rates of burnout and psychologists who rated highly on mindfulness would

demonstrate lower levels of burnout (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014). The current study further contributes to this area of research by continuing the investigation into burnout, and aims to add to the current data by using a sample of members of the New South Wales Department of Education (NSW DoE) school counselling service. The purpose of the current study was to increase knowledge in the area of burnout among school counsellors and to use the findings to inform the development of possible future strategies and professional learning plans to reduce the risk of burnout in members of the NSW DoE school counselling service in the future.

Di Benedetto and Swadling (2014) used the CBI to measure burnout on personal, work-related and client-related dimensions, through utilising the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer et al., 2006) to measure a general tendency to be mindful and the Career-Sustaining Behaviours (CSBs) questionnaire (Stevanovic & Rupert, 2004,) which measures how important each of the behaviours are to the respondent in helping them function effectively and maintain a positive attitude to their work. Di Benedetto and Swadling (2014) found that high levels of burnout were reported among Australian psychologists. There was a strong negative relationship between mindfulness and burnout, and a low but significant negative relationship between years of experience in current work setting and burnout levels. Career-sustaining behaviour preferences only had weak relationships with burnout, which decreased after controlling for mindfulness. They concluded that developing strategies to increase mindfulness might prevent burnout in Australian psychologists (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014). A limitation of this study was the researchers' inability to draw conclusions about the specific CSBs that were independently linked to reduced burnout (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014). This was one of the reasons a replication of the study was warranted.

What effect do years of service, CSB's and mindfulness have on burnout?

The present study aims to investigate the relationships among burnout and self-care behaviours, career-sustaining behaviours, mindfulness,and years of service in NSW DoE school counsellors. Reducing burnout rates in school counsellors could potentially extend a person's career in the field, resulting in a higher quality service being offered in NSW public schools with more-experienced school counsellors in positions (Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014). The current study hopes to contribute to the current research on burnout and further highlight some of the potential risk factors to guide professional learning plans and to potentially provide information that may lead to additional improvements in the counselling service provided by the NSW DoE. This study also aims to investigate the relationship between burnout and specific CSBs and how mindfulness may impact this relationship. A further aim is to explore which specific CSBs may be associated with higher and lower levels of burnout and mindfulness in different groups of school counsellors, according to years of experience.

Previous research

The present study will examine whether there is a difference in burnout rates between highly experienced (11+ years of service), experienced (6–10 years of service) and inexperienced (5 or less years of service) school counsellors within the NSW DoE. Previous research in this area has produced mixed results. Naisberg-Fennig et al.

(1991) conducted a study to attempt to identify the personality traits which might be associated with an increased propensity to burnout. Their sample included 49 psychiatrists working in public mental hospitals. They found that burnout was negatively correlated with years in employment, but this result was not significant (Naisberg-Fennig et al., 1991). In their study, Garner, Knight and Simpson (2007) found that younger psychologists experienced more burnout. Lent and Schwartz (2012) investigated the relationship between burnout and clinical work setting, demographic characteristics and personality factors among a sample of professional counsellors in the United States working in inpatient settings, community health and private practice. Results for the relationship between burnout and years of experience were not significant, but a significant three-way interaction was found between burnout and counsellors' sex, race and years of experience, demonstrating that burnout could be the result of a complex interaction between a number of different factors, not just years of service (Lent & Schwartz, 2012).

Brewer and Clippard (2002) reported that younger therapists appeared to have a higher propensity for burnout than older, more-experienced therapists, possibly due to therapists with more years of service having lower and more-realistic expectations about their work than younger therapists. This was supported in a number of other studies (e.g., Huberty & Huebner, 1988, Maslach & Jackson, 1981, Moracco et al., 1984, cited in Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006) whose research found substantiation to support the proposal that younger therapists report higher levels of stress and burnout. In a study conducted by Ackerley et al. (1988) a negative correlation was found between number of years in direct service and emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation among a sample of practicing clinical psychologists employed primarily in human service settings, although number of years accounted for only a small amount of the variance. The results of Vredenburgh, Carlozzi and Stein's (1999) study support Ackerley et al.'s (1988) findings that age is negatively correlated with measures of emotional exhaustion and depersonalisation.

Results of previous research were limited to particular geographical areas and specific helping professions, making it difficult to generalise the results to all counsellors, including those working in the education system (Ackerley et al., 1988; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). The current study aims to address these limitations by replicating a study on burnout addressing a particular group of school counsellors in a specific geographical area in Australia to determine if any significant similarities or differences exist in the school counsellor burnout profiles of the sample in the current study and past study populations.

The present study will also examine whether NSW DoE school counsellors engage in more career-sustaining behaviours and mindfulness practices as their experience increases. As a result of the examination of previous research, it was found that more years of experience in direct service resulted in an increase in engagement in personal coping methods, which may help to prevent burnout (Lent & Schwartz, 2012). More-experienced therapists were found to be engaging in a number of self-care and CSBs and mindfulness activities, including: differences in work practices and expectations (Vredenburgh et al., 1999), conservation of emotional energy so as not to feel depleted (Ackerley et al., 1988), time spent in individual therapy (Ackerley et al., 1988) and positive interactions with colleagues (Lent & Schwartz, 2012). Evidence from previous research also supports the idea that school counsellors who

engage in mindfulness practices or career-sustaining behaviours experience lower rates of burnout than those who do not, regardless of years of experience (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014; Lent & Schwartz, 2012; McCollum & Gehart, 2010; Shapiro, Brown & Biegel, 2007). These studies suggest that engaging in self-care and career-sustaining behaviours and implementing mindfulness strategies can help to reduce stress, anxiety and depression, as well as improve general wellbeing which, in turn, could help to prevent burnout. The current study aims to identify the CSBs that are associated with lower levels of burnout, regardless of years of experience.

From the research examined, it is hypothesised that, among NSW DoE school counsellors, as years of experience increase levels of burnout will decrease. It is also anticipated that as school counsellors' experience increases, their engagement in CSBs and mindfulness practices will also increase. It is hypothesised that school counsellors who engage in mindfulness practices or CSBs will experience lower rates of burnout than those who do not, regardless of years of experience.

Method

Participants

The 138 participants in this study consisted of 105 females and 33 males who are currently employed as members of the NSW DoE counselling service. Of the three focus groups in the study, the inexperienced school counsellor group consisted of $n = 57$, the experienced school counsellor group consisted of $n = 25$, and the highly experienced school counsellor group consisted of $n = 48$. Participants were recruited through the NSW DoE staff email system. An invitation to participate in the study was sent to supervisors to disperse to members of their teams. Members of the school counselling service were then able to voluntarily participate in the study by following a link to an online survey. A mandatory requirement of the study was that participants must have been currently employed by the NSW DoE and been part of the Department's school counselling service.

Instruments

The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (CBI) (Kristensen et al., 2005) is a 19-item inventory. The CBI measures three sub-dimensions of burnout: personal, work related and client related. Personal burnout indicates the extent of psychological and physical fatigue or exhaustion felt by the participant. It contains six items (e.g., "How often are you physically exhausted?"). Work-related burnout measures the extent of psychological and physical fatigue or exhaustion perceived by the person connected to his/her work. It contains seven items (e.g., "Are you exhausted in the morning at the thought of another day at work?"). Client-related burnout measures the extent of psychological and physical fatigue or exhaustion perceived by the person connected to his/her work with clients. In this study the term 'client' will be replaced with 'student', as this is appropriate for the school context. This is in line with Milfont et al.'s (2008) investigation into burnout in New Zealand teachers. They found the name change did not significantly impact the reliability of the CBI. Student-related burnout contains six items (e.g. "Do you find it hard to work with students?").

The CBI (Kristensen et al., 2005) is scored on a five-point Likert scale: 1 (always or to a very high degree); 2 (often or to a high degree); 3 (sometimes or

somewhat); 4 (seldom or to a low degree); 5 (never/almost never or to a very low degree). The scale labels will be re-coded to the original inventory's format labels of 100 (always), 75, 50, 25, and 0 (never/almost never) with higher scores indicating more burnout. An average result of three or more on any sub-dimension indicates an increased risk of burnout. All burnout items will be shown together, but items from each sub-dimension will be intermixed.

The CBI has been shown to have high reliability for use in multiple different populations such as Australian psychologists (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014), New Zealand teachers (Milfont et al., 2008) and Australian dentists (Winwood & Winefield, 2004). The Cronbach's alpha scores for the subscales and the CBI include: personal burnout subscale (α = .87), work-related burnout subscale (α = .87) and client burnout subscale (α = .85) (Kristensen et al., 2005). The CBI was found to be highly reliable (19 items; α = .92) in the Australian psychologist study (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014). The CBI has also demonstrated very good concurrent and predictive validity (Kristensen et al., 2005).

The Career Sustaining Behaviours questionnaire (CSBQ; Stevanovic & Rupert, 2004) contains 34 items and measures how important each of the behaviours is to the participant in helping them function successfully at work and maintain a positive attitude in their workplace. They will rate these strategies on a seven-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (not at all important) to 7 (extremely important). Item scores are summed for a total CSBs score, with higher scores indicating participation in more CSBs. The CSBQ (34 items) was found to be highly reliable (α = .87) in a study of Australian psychologists (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014).

The Five Facets Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ; Baer et al., 2006) is a 39-item questionnaire that assesses mindfulness in daily living. It is scored on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never/very rarely true) to 5 (very often/always true). A total score is calculated by adding each item score with higher scores indicating higher levels in the mindfulness construct. It consists of five sub-dimensions of mindfulness: observing, describing, acting with awareness, non-judging of inner experience and non- reactivity to inner experience.

The *Observing* sub-dimension (α = .83) evaluates a tendency to observe or focus on external and internal experiences, such as emotions, thoughts, sensations and sensory stimuli. It contains eight items (e.g., "I notice visual elements in art or nature, such as colours, shapes, textures, or patterns of light and shadow"). *Describing* (α = .91) assesses the propensity to describe and categorise these experiences with words. It contains eight items (e.g., "I'm good at finding words to describe my feelings"). The *Acting with awareness* sub-dimension (α = .87) measures a sense of bringing full awareness and constant attention to the present experience or activity. It includes eight items (e. g. "I am easily distracted"). The *Non-judging of inner experience* sub-dimension (α = .87) measures a non-evaluative perspective toward inner experiences and cognitions. It contains eight items (e.g., "I make judgments about whether my thoughts are good or bad"). *Non-reactivity to inner experience* (α = .75) assesses the tendency to allow thoughts and feelings to surface then leave, without becoming stuck on them or becoming overwhelmed by them. It includes seven items (e.g., "I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them").

In a study of Australian psychologists, the FFMQ demonstrated high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha score of .92 (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014).

The FFMQ demonstrates high internal consistency and predictive validity (Baer et al., 2006). De Bruin et al. (2012) found good internal consistency for the FFMQ in a large sample of Dutch non-meditating students (α = .85) and meditating participants (α = .90). There are four single item questions that will allow participants to indicate the geographical location of their work setting, the
length of time they have been employed as a school counsellor, age and gender.

Procedure

This research project was approved by the relevant authorities and complies with all stated requirements. Participants were provided with a link to an online survey using SurveyMonkey. The survey took approximately 15–20 minutes to complete. After providing consent to participate, participants were then asked to confirm their employment status as members of the school counselling service employed by the NSW DoE. Following demographic questions, participants were then randomly presented with the CBI, FFMQ or CSBQ. The two single-item questions were presented in between the presentation of the remaining two inventories. The online survey presented items from the three instruments in an intermixed order to minimise social desirability bias or possible prompting effects.

Results

Data was imported into *SPSS* version 22.0 for analysis and data met assumptions for normality and homogeneity. Overall, low levels of student-related burnout, and elevated rates of both personal burnout and work-related burnout were found. Sixteen (12%) participants met the criteria for overall burnout (CBI score $\geq$ 50), 62 (45%) for personal burnout, 62 (45%) for work-related burnout and 43 (31%) for student-related burnout. Table 1 displays the means and standard deviations for the key study variables.

Participants were assigned to groups according to the number of years of service in NSW DoE schools. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to compare groups on engagement in CSBs, total mindfulness and total burnout. There were no significant differences between groups on engagement in CSBs, F (1, 136) = .210, p = .811, total mindfulness, F (1, 136) = .368, p = .693, and total burnout, *F (1, 136) = .034, p = .967*. Years of service had no significant effect on engagement in career-sustaining behaviours, mindfulness practices or burnout levels. Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to determine whether more-experienced school counsellors experience lower burnout levels compared to school counsellors with less experience. Significant weak negative relationships were found between years of experience and personal burnout, r (136) = -.18, p = .036, and years of experience and work-related burnout, r (136) = -.18, p = .045.

A weak, negative relationship was found between years of experience and student-related burnout, *r* (136) = -.022, *p* = .802, but the result was not significant. A weak negative relationship was found between years of experience and total burnout, *r* (136) = -.143, *p* = .104, but the result was not significant. Increased experience working as a school counsellor in NSW DoE schools had weak inverse correlations with only two types of burnout.

Table 1: Mean scores for years of experience, burnout and mindfulness subscales (*n* = 138)

	M	SD
Years of experience in primary work setting	9.84	9.11
Burnout		
Personal burnout	44.92	18.78
Work-related burnout	53.59	19.06
Student-related burnout	38.05	19.08
Overall burnout	33.61	13.28
Mindfulness		
Observation of present-moment experiences	16.06	5.83
Describing	22.07	4.71
Acting with awareness	16.85	4.95
Non-judging	22.12	6.70
Non-reactivity	13.96	4.21
Overall mindfulness	87.51	26.25

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to determine the relationship between the number of years of experience working as a school counsellor in NSW DoE schools and the mindfulness facets and overall mindfulness. This correlation was computed to determine whether school counsellors with more experience rated highly on mindfulness and experienced less burnout compared to school counsellors with less experience. Very weak negative relationships were found between years of experience and 'describing', r (136) = -.075, p = .398, and 'non-reactivity' to inner experience, r (136) = -.024, p = .788, but these results were not significant. Weak positive relationships were found between years of service and 'observing', r (136) = .039, p = .660, 'acting with awareness', r (136) = .090, p = .307, and 'non-judging' of inner experience, r (136) = .151, p = .086, but these results were not significant. Increased experience as a school counsellor in NSW DoE schools had a weak positive correlation with overall mindfulness, r (136) = .072, p = .418, but the results were also not significant.

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to determine the relationship between years of experience and engagement in CSBs. This correlation was computed to determine whether more-highly experienced school counsellors engaged in more CSBs and experienced lower levels of burnout compared to school counsellors with less experience. A weak negative relationship between years of experience working as a school counsellor in NSW DoE schools and engagement in CSBs was found, r (136) = -.090, p = .310, but this result was not significant.

Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between burnout subscales, overall burnout, mindfulness facets and overall mindfulness (Table 2). These correlations were computed to determine whether engagement in mindfulness could possibly be associated with lower levels of specific burnout and overall burnout. Significant low to moderate negative relationships were found between each burnout subscale and each facet of mindfulness, with the exception of the mindfulness facet 'observation' of present-moment experience.

Table 2: Intercorrelations among mindfulness subscales and burnout subscales (*n* = 138)

	Personal burnout	Work-related burnout	Student-related burnout	Overall burnout
Observation	-.16	-.03	-.15	-.16
Describing	-.30**	-.33**	-.28**	-.34**
Acting with awareness	-.58**	-.58**	-.47**	-.60**
Non-judging	-.38**	-.40**	-.30**	-.41**
Non-reacting	-.22*	-.11	-.20*	-.21*
Overall mindfulness	-.26**	-.17	-.25**	-.28**

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

There was a moderate to strong negative correlation between 'acting with awareness' and each burnout subscale and overall burnout. Significant moderate negative relationships were found between 'non-judging' of inner experience and each burnout subscale and overall burnout, as well as significant moderate negative relationships between 'describing' and burnout levels.

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to assess the relationship between burnout and CSBs (Table 3). These correlations were computed to determine the specific CSBs that might be correlated with lower levels of specific types of burnout and overall burnout. A number of significant low to moderate correlations were found. 'Maintaining a balance between your professional and personal life', 'Maintaining self-awareness', 'Engaging in quiet leisure activities' and 'Engaging in physical activities' negatively correlated with all subscales of burnout and overall burnout. 'Taking regular vacations' inversely correlated with work-related burnout, personal-related burnout and overall burnout.

'Reflecting on positive experiences' negatively correlated with student-related burnout, personal-related burnout and overall burnout. 'Spend time alone in self-reflection' and 'Putting aside thoughts of the students outside of work' negatively correlated with all subscales of burnout and overall burnout. 'Discussing work frustrations with spouse/partner/family' positively correlated with student-related and work-related burnout, as well as overall burnout.

A partial correlation was conducted, controlling for overall mindfulness, to determine whether the relationship between CSBs preferences and burnout was mediated by mindfulness levels (Table 4). Significant negative correlations were found between 'engaging in quiet leisure activities', 'spending time alone in self-reflection' and 'putting aside thoughts of the students outside of work' and all subscales of burnout and overall burnout. Significant negative correlations were found between 'maintaining a sense of control over work responsibilities', 'engaging in physical activities' and 'taking regular vacations' with personal-related burnout and overall burnout. Significant negative correlations were found between 'maintaining a balance between professional and personal lives' and 'maintaining self-awareness' and student-related burnout, personal-related burnout and overall burnout. Other relationships were no longer significant.

Table 3: Intercorrelations among burnout subscales and CSB (*n* = 136)

	Student-related burnout	Work-related burnout	Personal-related burnout	Overall burnout
Spending time with partner/family	-.09	-.05	-.09	-.10
Maintaining a balance between professional and personal lives	-.24**	-.23**	-.29**	-.30**
Maintaining a sense of humour	.14	.09	.14	.13
Maintaining self-awareness	-.32**	-.25**	-.28**	-.32**
Maintaining a professional identity	-.14	-.09	-.18*	-.16
Engaging in quiet leisure activities	-.32**	-.27**	-.25**	-.32**
Maintaining a sense of control over work responsibilities	-.11	-.08	-.17	-.16
Engaging in physical activities	-.25**	-.31**	-.33**	-.33**
Taking regular vacations	-.15	-.22*	-.27**	-.25**
Spending time with friends	-.04	-.07	-.03	-.05
Perceiving student's problems as interesting	-.17	-.11	-.11	-.15
Trying to maintain objectivity about students	-.18*	-.17	-.16	-.20
Varying work responsibilities	-.09	-.08	-.12	-.11
Reflecting on positive experiences	-.20*	-.14	-.19*	-.19*
Not feeling a sense of responsibility for students' problems	-.06	-.14	-.04	-.07
Reading literature to keep up to date	-.01	.00	-.05	-.05
Participating in continuing education	-.06	-.10	-.17	-.13
Spending time alone in self-reflection	-.34**	-.29**	-.32**	-.36**
Discussing work frustrations with colleagues	-.19*	-.05	-.08	-.13
Maintaining professional distance from students	-.06	-.11	-.11	-.11
Putting aside thoughts of the students outside of work	-.38**	-.36**	-.24**	-.34**
Seeking case consultation	-.14	-.05	-.06	-.11
Discussing work frustrations with spouse/partner/family	.23**	.19*	.15	.21*
Taking breaks between sessions	.08	.01	-.09	-.03
Maintaining regular contact with referral networks	.01	-.00	-.01	-.01
Turning to spiritual beliefs	-.06	-.04	.00	-.02
Limiting time spent with students	-.10	-.10	-.90	-.09
Using positive self-talk	-.02	-.03	-.11	-.07
Engaging in formal relaxation activities	.01	-.03	-.13	-.07
Participating in personal therapy	.02	.01	-.05	-.01
Discussing work frustrations with friends	.13	.12	.14	.15
Participating in peer support groups	-.01	.04	.04	.02
Receiving regular supervision	-.06	.01	.06	.00
Using substances to relax	.19*	.08	.06	.13

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 4: Partial intercorrelations among burnout subscales and CSBs, controlling for overall mindfulness ($n = 136$)

	Student-related burnout	Work-related burnout	Personal-related burnout	Overall burnout
Spending time with partner/family	-.07	-.02	-.06	-.07
Maintaining a balance between professional and personal lives	-.18*	-.16	-.22**	-.24**
Maintaining a sense of humour	.09	.03	.08	.08
Maintaining self-awareness	-.23**	-.13	-.18*	-.22**
Maintaining a professional identity	-.13	-.08	-.17*	-.16
Engaging in quiet leisure activities	-.26**	-.19*	-.17*	-.24**
Maintaining a sense of control over work responsibilities	-.13	-.10	-.20*	-.20*
Engaging in physical activities	-.11	-.17	-.19*	-.18*
Taking regular vacations	-.10	-.17	-.23**	-.20*
Spending time with friends	-.00	-.02	-.02	-.01
Perceiving student's problems as interesting	-.12	-.05	-.04	-.09
Trying to maintain objectivity about students	-.10	-.08	-.07	-.10
Varying work responsibilities	-.03	-.02	-.07	-.05
Reflecting on positive experiences	-.16	-.07	-.13	-.14
Not feeling a sense of responsibility for students' problems	-.01	-.09	-.02	-.01
Reading literature to keep up to date	-.03	.05	-.02	-.01
Participating in continuing education	-.03	-.06	-.14	-.11
Spending time alone in self-reflection	-.28**	-.21*	-.25**	-.30**
Discussing work frustrations with colleagues	-.19*	-.02	-.05	-.12
Maintaining professional distance from students	-.04	-.09	-.09	-.09
Putting aside thoughts of the students outside of work	-.35**	-.34**	-.19*	-.31**
Seeking case consultation	-.11	-.00	-.01	-.06
Discussing work frustrations with spouse/partner/family	.15	.08	.04	.10
Taking breaks between sessions	.12	.06	-.06	.01
Maintaining regular contact with referral networks	-.02	-.03	-.04	-.05
Turning to spiritual beliefs	-.02	.01	.06	.03
Limiting time spent with students	-.08	-.08	-.07	-.07
Using positive self-talk	.04	.04	-.06	-.01
Engaging in formal relaxation activities	.03	-.01	-.12	-.05
Participating in personal therapy	-.02	-.04	-.11	-.06
Discussing work frustrations with friends	.14	.13	.15	.17
Participating in peer support groups	-.04	.01	.01	-.01
Receiving regular supervision	-.05	.03	.09	.02
Using substances to relax	.13	-.01	-.03	.05

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)
* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

It was hypothesised that as years of experience increased there would be lower levels of burnout experienced by NSW DoE school counsellors. It was also hypothesised that more-experienced school counsellors would engage in more CSBs and rate more highly on mindfulness compared to less-experienced school counsellors. It was hypothesised that engagement in mindfulness practices and CSBs would be negatively correlated with all subscales of burnout and overall burnout. The current study found mixed results when testing the hypotheses examined.

Effect of years of experience on burnout levels

No significant differences were found between the three different groups – inexperienced, experienced and highly experienced school counsellors – when comparing the burnout subscales and overall burnout. It was hypothesised that as years of experience increased, levels of burnout would decrease. This was supported by the current research in the areas of personal burnout and work-related burnout. The results for the relationship between years of service, student-related burnout and total burnout were not significant. There was a much-smaller sample size in the experienced group compared to the highly experienced and inexperienced groups, which may have impacted on the findings of the current study in this area.

Although the current study found no significant differences between groups based on years of service, the findings of Naisberg-Fennig et al. (1991) demonstrated that participants who had more years of experience in their current work setting reported lower levels of overall burnout. These findings were also consistent with the replicated study by Di Benedetto and Swadling (2014). In earlier research (Ackerley et al., 1988; Vredenburgh et al., 1999), conflicting results were found when the correlation between years of service and burnout were examined. In the research conducted by Ackerley et al. (1988), it was found that years of experience was positively correlated with burnout, whereas in the study conducted by Vredenburgh et al. (1999) a negative correlation was found. Lent and Schwartz (2012) also found a negative correlation between years of service and overall burnout, but their results were not significant. Naisberg-Fennig et al. (1991) argued that neither race, sex nor years of experience alone have a significant effect on overall burnout, but it is a multifaceted collaboration of a number of different factors.

Results were mixed for the hypothesis that there would be a positive correlation between years of service and mindfulness. When examining the strength of the relationship between years of service and mindfulness the hypothesis was not supported in the areas of 'describing' and 'non-reactivity' to inner experience. Results for 'observing', 'acting with awareness' and 'non-judging' of inner experience did not support the hypothesis, as results in all areas were weak and not significant. An examination of the results for the relationship between years of experience and participation in CSBs found that the hypothesis was not supported and the results were not significant, suggesting a very weak relationship. A small sample size in the current study may explain the non-significant results. Future research with a larger population may produce more-pertinent results.

The current study produced mixed results when examining the correlation between years of experience and engagement in mindfulness and CSBs. Negative correlations were observed between years of experience and the mindfulness facets of

'describing' and 'non-reactivity' to inner experience and positive correlations were produced when examining years of experience and 'observing', 'acting with awareness', 'non-judgement' of inner experience and overall mindfulness. It should be noted that all these results were not significant. This was in contrast to the results found by Lent and Schwartz (2012) who found that as years of experience increased there was an increase in engagement in personal coping methods. The hypothesis that there would be an increase in engagement in CSBs as years of experience increased was not supported by the current study, reporting weak negative correlations between years of experience and engagement in CSBs and non-significant results.

The effect of mindfulness on burnout levels

In the current study, NSW DoE school counsellors scored somewhat lower on all facets of mindfulness and overall mindfulness when mean scores were visually compared with the sample of Australian psychologists in the research conducted by Di Benedetto and Swadling (2014). They hypothesised that psychologists who rated highly for mindfulness would show lower levels of burnout (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014). Although not significant, the results of the current study demonstrated a similar trend to the conclusions drawn by Di Benedetto and Swadling (2014) that higher levels of burnout were recorded in the areas of student-related burnout and work-related burnout and lower levels of mindfulness were observed. Evidence from previous research (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014; Lent & Schwartz, 2012; McCollum & Gehart, 2010; Shapiro, Brown & Biegel, 2007) support the idea that school counsellors who engage in mindfulness practices experience lower rates of burnout than those who do not. The results of the current study and previous research as mentioned above suggest that engaging in mindfulness activities may help to improve general wellbeing and reduce burnout levels among members of the NSW DoE school counselling service. However, the generally low correlations, along with non-significant differences, make this conclusion highly tentative at present.

The hypothesis that mindfulness and engagement in CSBs would correlate negatively with all subscales of burnout and total burnout was supported by the current research. Low to moderate negative relationships were found between mindfulness and burnout, except for the 'observation' item. Significant low to moderate negative correlations were found between engagement in CSBs and burnout. Mostly negative correlations were found between burnout and CSB preferences, although none of the results remained significant after controlling for mindfulness. These results would suggest that participating in particular CSBs may only have limited effect when attempting to reduce burnout levels.

Levels of burnout

When compared with the replicated study by Di Benedetto and Swadling (2014), on visual inspection, the mean scores attained in the current study for personal-related burnout and overall burnout appeared relatively similar. The mean scores obtained for personal burnout in the research conducted by Di Benedetto and Swadling (2014) were higher than those attained by Kristensen et al. (2005) among human service workers (cited in Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014). Somewhat higher levels of burnout were found among NSW DoE school counsellors in the areas of work-related burnout and student-related burnout, on a visual comparison with the sample of

Australian psychologists examined by Di Benedetto and Swadling (2014). Some explanations for these increased levels of burnout in school counsellors is provided by Bardhoshi, Schweinle and Duncan (2014) who predict that performing non-counselling duties, such as paperwork, rising job demands, role conflict and large caseloads significantly predicted burnout in their sample of American school counsellors. It could also be that the self-selecting sample was biased toward those who were more prone to burnout or those who were already experiencing burnout.

The current study found weak negative correlations with all subscales of burnout and overall burnout, but the results for student-related burnout and total burnout were not significant. A possible explanation for these findings is that school counsellors who are sensitive to burnout leave the profession within a short time frame, while psychologists who stay in the NSW DoE school counselling service become more resilient and are not affected as much by the symptoms of burnout (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014). Other reasons could include more-experienced school counsellors have lower and more-realistic expectations of themselves (Brewer & Clippard, 2002) and they engage in personal coping methods (Lent & Schwartz, 2012). To better understand the complexities of burnout within the school counselling service, longitudinal research is required to monitor and collate information about burnout across a counsellor's career. More-evenly represented groups of school counsellors and a larger sample size may have also produced more-pertinent results. It must also be mentioned that the population may not be a representative sample, based on the fact that this was a self-selecting study, which may have attracted participants who were more prone to burnout or who are already experiencing burnout.

Career-sustaining behaviours and burnout

In the current study, it was found that 'maintaining work/life balance', 'spending time with partner/family', 'receiving regular supervision', 'putting aside thoughts of students outside of work' and 'maintaining self-awareness' were the preferred CSBs for counsellors in the NSW DoE. Interestingly, the current study found that the CSBs 'spending time with partner/family' and 'receiving regular supervision' were not significantly correlated with burnout, and the latter was positively correlated with all subscales of burnout, except student-related burnout and overall burnout, although members of the NSW DoE counselling service preferred them. On visual observation, these preferred CSBs were somewhat similar to results found in the study conducted by Stevanovic and Rupert (2004) who found that 'sense of humour', 'spending time with a partner/family', 'maintaining work/life balance', 'maintaining self-awareness' and 'maintaining a sense of self-control over work responsibilities' were the preferred CSBs of participants.

The study conducted by Di Benedetto and Swadling (2014) found significant negative correlations between only 'maintaining a sense of humour' and 'engaging in physical activities' and overall burnout and these were of low magnitude. Due to the discrepancies in the above results, further research in this area is required to determine if there are any significant associations between engagement in particular CSBs and the reduction in burnout. From the research examined and the results of the current study, it can be tentatively stated that 'spending time with a partner/family' and 'maintaining self-awareness' could be viewed as being associated with reduced burnout levels and worthy of consideration for ways of avoiding burnout and

lengthening the career of members of the school counselling service in public schools in NSW. Further research in this area would be beneficial to support future professional development around self-care and burnout and in the development of professional plans.

Interestingly, weak positive correlations were found between burnout and the CSBs 'discussing work frustrations with spouse/partner/family' and 'maintaining a sense of humour' in the current study, but the result was only significant for the first CSB. Weak positive correlations were also found between the CSBs 'discussing work frustrations with friends', 'participating in peer support groups', 'receiving regular supervision' and 'using substances to relax' and three of the four burnout subscales and overall burnout. It should be noted that none of these findings were significant. This would suggest that preferences for the above CSBs may be associated with higher levels of burnout, but these results should be viewed with caution. It is possible that these CSBs items may be markers of burnout (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014). The weak positive and negative relationships found between CSBs and burnout, and the absence of demonstrable significant results for preferred CSBs from other studies, such as 'spending time with a partner/family', suggests that there is a limited effect in the engagement in specific CSBs to reduce burnout (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014). Regardless of this, Richards, Campenni and Muse-Burke (2010) found that participating in self-care activities can help to reduce the build-up of stress and improve general wellbeing' which, in turn, can reduce the risk of burnout.

In the current study, it was found that no CSBs were individually associated with reduced burnout after controlling for mindfulness. The CSBs 'maintaining a sense of humour', 'discussing work frustrations with spouse/partner/family', 'taking breaks between sessions', 'turning to spiritual beliefs', 'discussing work frustrations with friends' and 'receiving regular supervision' were found to be associated with increasing levels of burnout, but these results were not significant. This would suggest that participation in these activities could predict the causes of burnout or that these particular CSBs are unfavourable to school counsellors' overall wellbeing (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014). Due to the weak correlations detected and non-significant results, it is difficult to draw conclusions about this hypothesis without further investigation. This could be an area of focus in future research.

Significant moderate to strong negative correlations were found between the mindfulness facets 'acting with awareness', 'non-judging of inner experience' and 'describing' and the subscales of burnout and overall burnout. Significant low negative correlations were found between the mindfulness facet 'non-reactivity' to inner experience and 'overall mindfulness' and burnout. These results suggest that participation in mindfulness-based activities, such as those found in MBSR, could be beneficial in preventing and treating burnout (Cashwell, Bentley,& Bigbee, 2007; Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014; Raab, 2014). Further research into specific mindfulness-based interventions and techniques and their effectiveness in reducing burnout would be beneficial to further guide professional learning in this area for school counsellors. The strength of the correlations between mindfulness and burnout in the study by Di Benedetto and Swadling (2014) were replicated in the present study, affirming the benefit of practicing mindfulness-based techniques to reduce stress and prevent burnout.

Limitations of the current study and suggestions for future research

There were several limitations of the current study that are worthy of mention. The survey was distributed at a time when there were many changes taking place within the counselling service of the NSW DoE. Many members of the school counselling service were being moved from their current schools into new schools and even new teams, with a restructure in the service. At the same time, additional school psychologists were being appointed to the DoE. These changes could possibly have increased stress in school counsellors and the results may not be indicative of the general population, thereby compromising generalisability.

Data was collected by an online, self-report questionnaire through SurveyMonkey. These types of online surveys may attract a certain type of person, and it is difficult for the researchers to control the sample. Possible limitations of an online survey include that individual participants may submit a survey more than once, attention of participants cannot be monitored and participants do not have direct contact with the researcher(s) for clarification of questions and their meaning. Self-report measures also have limitations in that they rely on the honesty of the participant and can be affected by social desirability bias. Participants may not demonstrate a true understanding of items, they may lack introspective ability and participant's interpretation of rating scales can be very different. The affect of these limitations was attempted to be reduced by researcher availability for questions about the survey if required and arranging the item questions in random order.

The design of the current study could also be a limitation in that the items presented in the CBI were specifically designed for measuring burnout in the human service sector, and not exclusively for psychologists or school counsellors. The Likert scale format used in the CBI does not allow for more-detailed information to be collected about the intricacies of the cause of work-related stress in school counsellors working in public schools. Bardhoshi, Schweinle and Duncan (2014) found that performing non-counselling duties, such as paperwork, significantly predicted burnout. It is also suggested that increasing job demands, role conflict and large caseloads might also be a contributing factor to increasing levels of burnout in psychologists (Bardhoshi, Schweinle & Duncan, 2014). A longitudinal qualitative study could help to provide further information in this area about the relationship between burnout and specific aspects of a school counsellor's job.

As the survey was expected to be completed outside of work hours, it may have been likely that school counsellors with high levels of burnout did not participate in this study, so the current sample could be skewed towards participants who were experiencing less burnout. It is also possible that school counsellors who are experiencing burnout or who are sensitive to burnout may have left the profession early and are not included in this sample. Further research targeting school counsellors who have left the profession or the NSW DoE could address this limitation and provide information in this area.

Conclusion

Members of a school counselling service have a multifaceted role. They perform a diverse range of tasks (Gunduz, 2012), are involved in complex cases (Page, Pietrzak & Sutton, 2001) and work closely with a number of different parties, including parents, teachers, students, principals and external agencies (Paisley & McMahon,

2001). Pressure to fulfill the duties of all these tasks can lead to susceptibility to workplace stress and burnout (Gunduz, 2012). Effects of burnout on school counsellors can include poor work performance, a desire to quit one's job, absenteeism, a decrease in job satisfaction, physical and mental health issues, and the creation of a negative work environment (Bandura, 1986; Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Lee & Ashforth, 1996; Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996). The importance of understanding the complexities of burnout and effective strategies for reducing burnout is pertinent to supporting a school counsellor in their role (Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014).

Reducing burnout could potentially extend a school counsellors' career, resulting in more-experienced practitioners remaining in the profession for longer periods of time and providing a higher quality service to students attending NSW DoE schools (Brewer & Clippard, 2002; Di Benedetto & Swadling, 2014). Further study into the complex nature of burnout and the mediating factors of specific CSBs would benefit the current body of knowledge in this area and could potentially drive professional learning for school counsellors in the future (Lent & Schwartz, 2012). Di Benedetto and Swadling (2014) and the current study produced a degree of evidence suggesting that mindfulness strategies and techniques, such as that found in MBSR can potentially treat and prevent burnout in psychologists and school counsellors.

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