

## Counselors Perceptions of the Benefits of Counseling Supervision: A Panacea for a Secure World

Jane Metumi Kiarie\*

School of Education, P.O. Private bag - 20157 Kabarak University

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### Abstract

Counseling supervision has consistently been recognized by the counseling profession as an essential component in the development of competent counselors and the delivery of therapeutic services. The purpose of this study was to explore counselors' perceptions of the benefits of counseling supervision in their work with clients, from a self-reported survey. The literature review highlights a paucity of research in this area. The study employed a survey research using a mixed method design, in a field study of 105 practicing counselors accredited by the Kenya Counseling and Psychological Association. Data collection combined Likert scale and open-ended questionnaires. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics and factor analysis with varimax rotation, with the aid of Statistical Package for Social Scientists (SPSS) 12.0. Varimax rotation converged in three iterations resulting in two factors as also supported by the scree plot generated. Factor one was a combination of professional growth and competency, while factor two was on managing stress and burnout. The two factors explained 58.499% of the variance of perception. Qualitative findings indicate that supervision benefits include: professional growth and development, feedback and support as well as a mechanism for managing burnout. The study contributes to the knowledge of factors that can be leveraged on in promotion of counseling supervision as a panacea for a secure world psychologically. The results suggest that future research should explore linkages between demographic variables of gender, frequency of supervision, experience as a counsellor and adequacy of supervision session; with the perceived benefits of counseling supervision. More specifically an exploration of push and pull factors influencing counselors' adoption of counseling supervision should be explored.

**Keywords:** Counselors; Counseling Supervision; Supervisors; Benefits of Counseling; Counselors Perceptions

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### Introduction

Supervision is defined as unique professional relationship between a supervisor, supervisee, and the clients they serve (Corey, 2003). Practitioners in the counseling field are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of clinical supervision in their counseling career (Usher and Borders, 1993), not just as a vital tool for counselors-in-training but for its relevance for practicing counselors who deal with heavy caseloads, challenging working conditions, and a wide array of client issues (Cormier & Hackney, 2005). On the practical front, counseling supervision is a new concept whose adoption requires a harmonized implementation strategy, if its benefits are to be realized by counselors in Kenya. This brings the counselor into sharp focus in the process. However, one significant barrier to the acceptance and use of counseling supervision has been the little awareness and negative perception about the benefits and the role of counseling supervision in the practice. What seems to be problematic is that counselors continue to offer counseling services without seeking supervision. This is detrimental to both the counselor and the client receiving the service.

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\* Email: [kiariejane@gmail.com](mailto:kiariejane@gmail.com)

## Objectives of the Study

This study sought to explore counselors perceptions of the benefits of seeking counseling supervision in their practice. Hence, an examination of the following objectives was required:

1. To explore counselors perception of the benefits of seeking supervision;
2. To explore counselors perception of the adequacy of time spent in counseling supervision;
3. To explore the frequency of attendance of supervision by counselors; and
4. To obtain suggestions on how counseling supervision services can be improved in Kenya.

## Benefits of Counseling Supervision

The literature suggests that Counseling Supervision is an essential component to the development of competent counselors and the delivery of ethically sound therapeutic services (Bernard & Goodyear, 2004; Herlihy, 2006). It is essential in developing and maintaining clinical competence (Page & Wosket, 2001). McMahon and Patton's (2000) posit that counseling supervision is perceived by counselors as beneficial in: addressing professional isolation, support, emotional well-being, stress reduction, burnout prevention, skill development and stagnation prevention leading to quality services to clients.

Further, Connor (1999) asserts that training and supervision do positively influence confidence, self-awareness and understanding others more sensitively and accurately. Similarly, Worthen and McNeill (1996) summarizes the outcomes of good supervision as: strengthened supervisory alliance, increased confidence, refined professional identity, increased therapeutic perception and increased ability to conceptualize and intervene.

The supervisor's job is primarily to create a relationship and environment in which the supervisee can learn essential skills that then transfer into the therapeutic exchange with clients (Holloway, 1995). Furthermore, supervisors help supervisees to connect the science and practice of counseling psychology (Holloway & Wolleat, 1994). According to Cobia & Pipes (2002), supervision may be used with counselors who need specialized or remedial training and guidance. Through supervision, counselors may feel increasingly empowered in their interpersonal effectiveness (Holloway, 1995) and are likely to feel more supported in their work with clients (Kennard, Stewart, & Gluck, 1987). Counselor supervisors have the duty to review and enforce ethical principles with their supervisees (Borders & Brown, 2005; Holloway, 1995).

The literature regarding supervision suggests that counseling supervision is important as it helps strengthen and maintain competence and allows for remediation and individualized skill building. In addition, supervision specifically helps gain and maintain competence and adherence to ethical and legal standards of practice. Similarly, supervision help counselors enhance job satisfaction and decrease career burnout. With the benefits highlighted, practicing counselors should be encouraged to seek counseling supervision regularly for effective practice.

## Methods

The study employed survey method utilizing purposive sampling, to a sample of practicing and accredited counselors. Mixed method research design was employed to examine the perceptions of practicing counseling about counseling supervision (Creswell, 2003). The counselors were accredited by the Kenya Counseling Association, and could provide field based experiential information on counseling supervision. Questionnaires were sent to 105 respondents, with 93 effectively filled questionnaires returned, yielding a response rate of 97.65%.

## Instrumentation

The survey method was used as a research approach to obtain data from practicing counseling and accredited counselors. The instrument was developed by the researcher based on the factors identified in the literature review. The instrument required the respondent to fill demographic information on gender and the years they have practiced as counselors. Further information was sought on the frequency of attendance to counseling, duration of the supervision session and their rating of the adequacy of the counseling supervision session.

In order to obtain quantitative data on the benefits of counseling supervision, a Likert scale based eleven items anchored from 1= never to 5 = always was administered. The last section of the instrument had an open-ended question that elicited responses on their views on what should be done to improve counseling supervision services in Kenya.

## Data Analysis

Data analysis employed the use of descriptive statistics ( means, standard deviations, ranges, percentages ) which were calculated for each of the major variable of the study. Further, the internal consistency reliability coefficient for the attitude towards counseling supervision scale were calculated. Exploratory factor analysis of the scale elicit principal factors that determine the attitude towards counseling supervision scale.

The open-ended question required the respondents to provide suggestions on how counseling supervision can be improved in Kenya. The responses were analyzed using an interpretive content analysis method (Giarelli and Tulman, 2003) which allows the ideas to be counted and described by grouping them based on their conceptual similarity. Each grouping was given a name that reflected the major theme and coding done.

## Findings and Discussion

Out of the 93 respondents, 71% (n=66) were female and 29% (n=27) were male; the number of years of practice as a counselor was as in Table 1.

Table 1. No of years of practice as a counselor.

	Frequency	Valid Percent
1-5 years	48	51.6
6-10 years	32	34.4
11-15 years	8	8.6
16-20 years	3	3.2
over 20 years	2	2.2
Total	93	100

Most of the respondents 86 % (n=79) had been in counseling practice for less than 1 year, with only 5.5% (n=5) having practiced for over 15 years. This implies that most of the counselors had little experience in the counseling profession.

The respondents were asked to state the frequency of attendance to supervision sessions. The results are as in Table 2

Table 2. Frequency of attendance to Counseling Supervision sessions

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Every week	20	21.5
Every 2 weeks	25	26.9
Every month	26	28
Once every 3 months	11	11.8
Twice a year	6	6.5
Once a year	5	5.4
Total	93	100

The data suggests that most of the counselors 76.3% (n=71) attend supervision at least once a month. This implies that most practicing counselors receive counseling supervision on a regular basis and hence adhered to the counseling regulations that require practicing counselors to attend supervision at least once per month.

Further, the respondents were asked to state the duration of the counseling sessions. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Duration of Supervision Session

	Frequency	Valid Percent
Less than 60 minutes	29	31.2
60 minutes -2 hours	58	62.4
More than 2 hours	6	6.5
Total	93	100

The data suggests that most of the counselors 93.5% (n=87) attend counseling supervision sessions that last between 1-2 hours. This suggests that longer counseling sessions were avoided by counselors.

The respondents were asked to rate their perception of the adequacy of counseling supervision session time. The results are in Table 4.

Table 4: Rating of Adequacy of Counseling Supervision session time

	Frequency	Percent
Very Adequate	13	14
Adequate	65	69.9
Not adequate	15	16.1
Total	93	100

Most of the respondents 83.9% (n=78) rated the counseling supervision session time as adequate, with only 16.1% (n=15) perceiving the session time as being inadequate.

The perceptions of counselors towards supervision was measured using an instrument generated by the authors. The scale was anchored from 1=Never, 2= rarely,3= sometimes and4 = always. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5: Attitudes towards counseling supervision.

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
An avenue for professional growth and development	93	4.54	0.618
Gives me renewed confidence in handling client issues	93	4.49	0.686
Provides me with feedback on my counseling work	93	4.49	0.619
Provides me with support in counseling	93	4.45	0.715
Helps generate new ideas and strategies related to counseling	93	4.39	0.708
Helps promote my personal well being	93	4.38	0.82
Provides a chance to interact with other professional counselors	93	4.34	0.84
Gives me information that might be useful in counseling	93	4.27	0.724
Provides motivation and a sense of purpose	93	4.17	0.855
Opportunity for de-briefing	93	4.15	0.932
A mechanism of managing stress and burnout	93	4.03	0.84

Most of the respondents scored the items between “often” and “always” on the Likert scale. The item with the highest mean was for “*An avenue for professional growth and development*”

Bernard and Goodyear (2004) posit that counselling supervision serves three essential purposes: enhancing the professional competence of the supervisee, monitor the quality of counselling offered to the client and serving as a gatekeeper to the profession of counselling. The findings of the study agree with this assertion by Bernard and Goodyear (2004) in that the eleven items can be grouped to fit the three broad themes. The enhancing of professional growth and competence of the supervisee was the most important benefit of the counselling supervision process.

## Discussion

Casile, Gruber and Rosenblatt (2007) ably summarize the importance of counselling supervision as:

*Prudent counselors need supervision to ensure that their clients receive appropriate and effective treatment and that they continue to engage in personal and professional development, a hallmark of being a professional counsellor (p 4).*

This statement is fully supported by the findings of the study, as most of the counsellors state that counselling supervision provides them with feedback on their counselling work, generates new ideas and strategies dealing with client issues all aimed enabling the client receive quality services from the counsellors.

The respondents stated that counseling supervision serves as a “mechanism of managing stress and burnout”. This agrees with the findings of (Hancox, Lynch, Happell, & Biondo, 2004) who posit that counselor supervision has profoundly positive effects on the level of burnout and job satisfaction in the helping professions. Counselors who attend regular supervision will have decreased work-related stress and strain (Hancox, Lynch, Happell, & Biondo, 2004).

The respondents further stated that counseling supervision “Gives me renewed confidence in handling client issues” (M=4.49, S.D. =.686). This is consistent with the findings of (Gray, Ladany, Walker, & Ancis, 2001), who assert that supervision helps to increase counselor self-confidence in handling clients.

The respondents also stated that counseling supervision “Provides me with feedback on my counseling work” (M=4.49, SD=.619). Such feedback will ensure that the supervisee is engaging in sound ethical practices (Campbell, 2006) which affect the supervisee’s level of ethical competence and, consequently, increases the quality of service delivery to the client (Cormier & Bernard, 1982; Herlihy, 2006). This agrees with the findings of Borders & Brown (2005) who found that counseling supervisors role model and provide ongoing evaluative feedback to supervisees.

Other respondents stated that counseling supervision “Provides me with support in counseling (M=4.45 S.D. =.715). This is consistent with Lawton (2000) who identified the supervision space ‘as a haven where the counselor's frustrations, anxieties and shortcomings would be accepted, soothed or resolved’ p. 33

Supervisees engaged in supervision will likely be encouraged to examine issues of informed consent, dual relationships, confidentiality, and ethical service provisions (Cormier & Bernard, 1982; Borders & Brown, 2005). Supervisors have the opportunity to provide training to supervisees and can engage in practice activities regarding ethical issues (Cormier & Bernard, 1982)

Further to the provided potential benefits of counseling supervision, the respondents gave other ways that they benefit from counseling supervision as:

- Helps make theories practical in an effective way
- A moment to get unstuck in many sticky issues
- Gate-keeps the profession and protects clients

This agrees with Pearson & Piazza (1997) who stated that supervisors also serve as gatekeepers to the profession, as they are responsible for keeping unethical practitioners away from the profession and away from clients.

#### Factor Analysis of the attitudes towards counseling supervision scale

A principal component factor analysis utilizing Varimax rotation with Kaiser Normalization was conducted on the eleven items of the counselors’ perception of the benefits of counseling supervision scale, in order to determine the principal components of counselors’ perception. The data was first tested for its appropriateness for use with factor analysis. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (KMO) of 0.842 supported the use of factor analysis. The Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was significant at  $p < 0.01$ .

Extraction communalities are estimates of the variance in each variable accounted for by the factors (or components) in the factor solution. It can be interpreted as an underestimation of the reliability coefficient (Schumacker and Lomax, 2004). The small value for the item “*chance to interact with other professional counselors*” of.344 suggested that it did not fit well with the factor solution, and should possibly be dropped from the analysis.

Factor analysis using Varimax with Kaiser Normalization resulted in a two factor rotated component matrix as presented in Table 4.6

Table 6: Rotated component matrix using Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

Item	1	2
Gives me renewed confidence in handling clients	<b>0.833</b>	0.264
An avenue for professional growth and development	<b>0.759</b>	0.183
Provides me with feedback on my work	<b>0.704</b>	0.231
Helps generate new ideas and strategies	<b>0.697</b>	0.049
Gives me information that might be useful in counseling	<b>0.655</b>	0.368
Provides me with support	<b>0.614</b>	0.347
Opportunity for de-briefing	0.171	<b>0.854</b>
A mechanism of managing stress and burnout	0.174	<b>0.813</b>

A similar criterion as used by Igbaria et al. (1995) was used to interpret the rotated factors were each item should load 0.50 or greater on one factor and 0.35 or lower on the other factor. The rotation converged in three iterations resulting in two factors. Factor 1 was a combination of professional growth and competency, while factor two was on managing stress and burnout.

The two factors had a cumulative 58.499% of the variance, with the first factor explaining 35.321%

The two-factor structure was also supported from the scree plot generated as shown in figure 1.

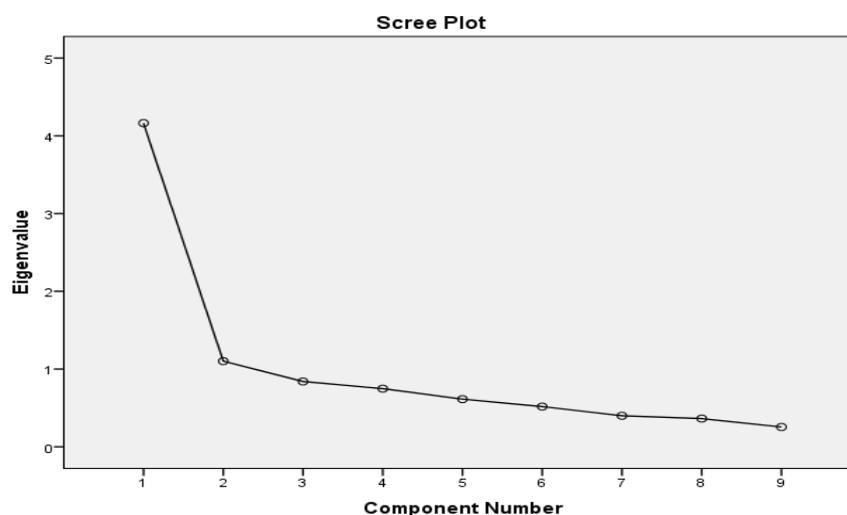


Figure 1: Screen plot of components of benefits of supervision scale

The results of the open-ended question eliciting responses on how counseling supervision can be improved in Kenya, was tabulated based on the frequencies for each of the themes as in Table 7.

Table 7: Frequencies of responses on how counseling supervision can be improved in Kenya

Major Theme	No. of Respondents
More counseling supervisors should be trained	91
Train more counseling supervisors in all counties not just Nairobi County	90
Make it compulsory for all practicing counselors to attend counseling supervision	89
Make counseling supervision accessible to all counselors in Kenya	82
Provide a web list of all counselor supervisors for ease of accessibility	62
Provide policy and legislation on counseling supervision	47
Make organizations dealing with counselors aware of the need for counseling supervision	25
Establish a counseling supervision association to accelerate the networking and interaction of counselor supervisors	13

Most of the respondents suggested the need for more training and registration of counseling supervisors. This suggested a possible void in the institutionalization of counseling supervision in Kenya, which has not been filled. The lack of a clear legal framework in which to operationalize the recommendation may hamper the process of registration of counseling supervisors. Further, the suggestion that it should be made compulsory for all practicing counselors to attend counseling supervision may also be limited due to lack of awareness, supporting regulations and legal framework guiding the practice of counseling supervision in Kenya.

## Summary and Recommendations

The purpose of the study was to explore the perceived benefits of counseling supervision from a self-reported survey of practicing counselors. This study contributes to the knowledge of the factors that can be leveraged on in the promotion of counseling supervision in Kenya. The results from the present study must be considered as preliminary, as few studies have similarly examined the benefits of counseling supervision in a developing country like Kenya. The findings must be replicated in future investigations before firm conclusions can be drawn regarding the relative significance of counseling supervision among counselors. This study could be further developed by surveying a wider range of counselors especially those not accredited by the Kenya counseling Association but are involved in some form of counseling. An area to explore in more detail is the perception of counselors who have not taken to counseling supervision.

This paper provides considerable support for the arguments made in prior counseling supervision research but also raises some interesting questions, which need to further research. The results of this study suggest that future research needs to explore the linkages between the demographic variables of gender, frequency of supervision, experience as a counsellor in years and the adequacy of supervision session with the perceived benefits of counseling supervision. More specifically an exploration of significant determinants of perceived benefits of counseling supervision among counselors should be explored. Further, validation and refinement of the

benefits of counseling supervision scale should yield interesting findings and add to the body of knowledge in counseling supervision.

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