

Self-Care Practices and Professional Development of Guidance Counsellors-in-training

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Abstract: *This study investigates the self-care practices and professional development programs of guidance counsellors in training and their relationship to well-being, professional growth, and burnout. The study employed a descriptive research design with a sample of 100 undergraduate students from the Guidance and Counselling Department at Ekiti State University, Nigeria. Data were collected through a self-developed questionnaire that assessed self-care practices, professional development activities, and their impact on the well-being and professional outcomes of trainees. The findings revealed that the majority of participants engaged in self-care practices such as regular physical activity, healthy eating, and maintaining supportive social networks. However, self-compassion was less commonly practiced. In terms of professional development, respondents acknowledged the importance of training and education but showed low engagement in mentorship and supervision activities. The study also found significant relationships between self-care practices and both well-being ($r = 0.432, p = 0.001$) and burnout ($r = 0.414, p = 0.000$). Moreover, participation in self-care activities was moderately associated with professional development outcomes ($r = 0.114, p = 0.016$). The findings highlight the need for counselling programs to integrate comprehensive self-care strategies and professional development initiatives to improve the well-being and effectiveness of future counsellors. The study recommends enhancing self-care education and mentorship opportunities within counsellor training programs to mitigate burnout and promote professional growth.*

Keywords: self-care practices, professional development, well-being, burnout, guidance counsellors, counsellor training.

INTRODUCTION

Self-care practices and professional development are crucial components of a guidance counsellor's ability to effectively support students, manage stress, and maintain their own well-being. Guidance counsellors-in-training (GCTs) are individuals who are preparing to assume roles in helping students navigate personal, social, academic, and career-related challenges. These professionals often work in high-pressure environments, dealing with students' emotional and psychological issues, which can be emotionally demanding and psychologically taxing. Given the complex nature of their responsibilities, the well-being of counsellors, including their ability to practice self-care and engage in ongoing professional development, is of paramount importance.

Self-care refers to the actions individuals take to manage their physical, emotional, and mental health needs. For counsellors, self-care is especially critical because their work often involves helping others navigate emotionally distressing issues. According to the American Counselling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (2014), counsellors must engage in self-care practices to maintain personal health, emotional balance, and professional competence. As counsellors-in-training work to develop their skills, they must also understand the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between personal well-being and their professional obligations. Without appropriate self-care, GCTs may experience burnout, compassion fatigue, or secondary traumatic stress, which can negatively affect their ability to help others (Figley, 2002).

In their study, Lee and Miller (2013) found that counsellor burnout is highly correlated with a lack of self-care practices. Counsellors often report a sense of emotional depletion when they are unable to manage the emotional toll of their work. This can lead to disengagement from their duties, which ultimately diminishes the quality of their professional practice. Therefore, understanding how self-care strategies are integrated into the training process of guidance counsellors is essential for ensuring that they can effectively handle the demands of the profession without compromising their mental and emotional well-being.

Self-care can encompass a wide range of activities, from physical exercise to emotional and social support, relaxation techniques, and hobbies that promote mental well-being (Baker, 2003). For guidance counsellors, key self-care strategies might include maintaining a healthy work-life balance, seeking supervision or consultation, engaging in reflective practice, and participating in activities that foster relaxation and stress relief. Research suggests that engaging in activities such as mindfulness, regular exercise, or engaging in creative outlets can help counsellors manage the high levels of emotional stress associated with their work (Shapiro et al., 2007).

Recent studies indicate that self-care practices not only improve personal well-being but also enhance professional performance. For instance, a study by Schaub and Fiedler (2019) noted that self-care practices such as self-reflection, relaxation techniques, and seeking peer support improved counselling effectiveness by enhancing counsellors' ability to be present with their clients, provide empathetic support, and avoid emotional burnout. Furthermore, effective self-care practices can lead to improved resilience, allowing counsellors-in-training to handle the emotional demands of the profession while maintaining their mental and emotional stability (Rosenberg & Pace, 2013).

Professional development, which refers to the continuous process of acquiring new skills, knowledge, and competencies relevant to one's career, plays a significant role in the training of guidance counsellors. For counsellors-in-training, professional development involves not only acquiring theoretical knowledge about counselling theories and techniques but also learning how to manage their own emotional responses and engage in reflective practice. According to Gysbers (2004), professional development is an ongoing process that requires counsellors to stay up-to-date with new counselling approaches, research findings, and ethical standards to maintain effectiveness in their work.

In the context of guidance counsellors, professional development goes beyond academic training to encompass the development of interpersonal and reflective skills that are essential to the counselling process. Counsellors-in-training are expected to gain experience in applying various counselling techniques while engaging in supervision and feedback. Studies have shown that continuous professional development contributes to a counsellor's ability to better understand their own biases, challenges, and emotional responses, ultimately leading to enhanced counselling effectiveness and empathy (Cunningham et al., 2011).

Self-care and professional development are intrinsically linked, as both are necessary for the effective functioning of counsellors. Inadequate self-care can lead to burnout and negatively affect professional development, while a lack of ongoing professional development can hinder a counsellor's ability to provide effective support to their clients. In their research on counsellor education, Norsworthy et al. (2012) emphasized that counsellor training programs should integrate self-care practices into professional development frameworks. Counsellors-in-training who are taught how to manage stress, set boundaries, and maintain their emotional well-being are more likely to have a successful and sustainable career. Furthermore, counsellors who engage in continuous professional development are better equipped to adapt to the evolving needs of students, handle diverse client issues, and implement new counselling techniques effectively.

While the importance of self-care and professional development is clear, counsellors-in-training often face significant challenges in maintaining a balance between personal well-being and professional growth. According to Beck and Weishaar (2014), the demanding nature of counsellor training programs, coupled with the emotional strain of working with students' issues, can lead to stress, anxiety, and even feelings of inadequacy. Many GCTs may also struggle with time management, as they are often balancing their academic coursework, internship hours, and personal lives. These pressures can make it difficult for GCTs to prioritize self-care practices or seek out professional development opportunities.

Moreover, there are limited institutional supports in some training programs that address the personal well-being of counsellors-in-training, especially in Nigeria. While many programs emphasize skill development in areas such as counselling techniques and theoretical knowledge, they may not adequately address the mental health needs of trainees (Dillard & Davidson, 2009). As a result, GCTs may feel unsupported and ill-prepared to manage the personal challenges that arise in their work. This gap highlights the need for counsellor training programs to provide structured support for self-care and professional development to enhance the effectiveness of their trainees.

Research on self-care and professional development is well documented across the globe. In the United Kingdom, studies on counsellor training programs have revealed that self-care is an underemphasized aspect of counsellor education, and there are calls for a greater integration of self-care strategies into curricula (Cooper & McLeod, 2011). In African countries, including Nigeria, the lack of structured self-care programs in counsellor training is also a challenge, leading to increased vulnerability to stress and burnout (Olayinka, 2018).

In response to these issues, some counsellor training programs around the world have begun to incorporate mindfulness practices, stress reduction techniques, and emotional intelligence training into their curricula. These interventions have been shown to enhance self-awareness and emotional regulation, which are critical components of effective counselling (Thompson & Walsh, 2015).

The growing emphasis on mental health and well-being in professional training underscores the importance of integrating self-care practices into counsellor education programs. For guidance counsellors-in-training, self-care is not a luxury but a necessity to maintain emotional balance, resilience, and effectiveness in their professional roles. Professional development plays a complementary role in ensuring that counsellors continue to grow in their understanding of counselling techniques, ethical practices, and personal coping strategies. However, the challenges faced by counsellors-in-training in balancing these demands highlight the need for more structured support in both self-care and professional development throughout their education and training. As the field of counselling continues to evolve, it is essential that counsellor education programs prioritize the holistic development of counsellors, ensuring that they are well-equipped to manage their personal well-being while providing the highest quality support to their clients.

The well-being and professional development of guidance counsellors are critical for their effectiveness in supporting the psychological, emotional, and academic growth of their students. One crucial factor in fostering counsellor effectiveness is the integration of self-care practices into their daily routines. The literature reveals the significance of self-care in the mental health of counsellors and the overall impact on their professional performance, particularly for guidance counsellors-in-training.

Self-care refers to activities that individuals engage in to maintain their mental, emotional, and physical well-being (Figley, 2002). For counsellors, self-care is essential not only for personal well-being but also for the effective delivery of counselling services. According to Baker (2003), counsellors often work in high-stress environments and deal with emotionally taxing situations, which can lead to burnout and compassion fatigue if self-care practices are neglected. In order to maintain a high level of empathy, motivation, and engagement with clients, counsellors must be proactive in self-care.

The American Counselling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics emphasizes the importance of counsellors maintaining personal wellness, including through self-care, to avoid burnout and ensure quality service delivery (ACA, 2014). Neglecting self-care can result in diminished professional capacity, poor therapeutic outcomes, and, in severe cases, counsellor dropout from the profession (Lee & Miller, 2013). Therefore, self-care is not merely an individual concern, but a professional responsibility.

Professional development in the field of counselling encompasses a wide range of activities that aim to enhance counsellors' skills, knowledge, and abilities (Gysbers, 2004). Research indicates that self-care practices are intricately linked to professional development, as they allow counsellors to function at their optimal levels both personally and professionally. Practicing self-care enhances counsellors' resilience, helps manage work-related stress, and contributes to improved mental health, all of which are integral to their professional growth (Shapiro, Brown, & Biegel, 2007).

According to Cunningham, Dixon, and Heller (2011), counsellors-in-training benefit from self-care practices in several ways. First, these practices help mitigate the risk of developing burnout, a common concern among novice counsellors. Furthermore, by practicing self-care, counsellors-in-training are better equipped to manage the emotional demands of their training and placement experiences. Research by Norsworthy, Cobia, and Matos (2012) suggests that counsellors who integrate self-care into their professional development are more likely to have higher job satisfaction, greater personal well-being, and are more effective in their roles.

Self-care practices such as mindfulness, physical exercise, peer support, and supervision also play an essential role in reducing stress and enhancing counsellors' emotional regulation (Thompson & Walsh, 2015). These activities enable counsellors to process the emotional content of their work effectively, thereby avoiding secondary trauma and ensuring that they can provide consistent and empathetic support to their clients (Schaub & Fiedler, 2019).

Counsellor training programs have become increasingly aware of the importance of incorporating self-care into the curriculum to promote the mental health and well-being of future counsellors. Studies suggest that self-care strategies should be introduced early in counsellor education to prevent burnout and to promote long-term career sustainability (Shapiro et al., 2007). A study by Dillard and Davidson (2009) found that counsellor trainees who engaged in regular self-care were better able to manage the challenges of their internships and were more likely to experience successful placements.

Many counsellor training programs now include self-care education as part of their curriculum, helping students understand the relationship between personal well-being and professional effectiveness (Gysbers, 2004). Activities such as guided relaxation, stress-management workshops, and group discussions on coping strategies can be incorporated into training programs. These initiatives not only equip counsellors-in-training with self-care tools but also foster a culture of care and self-awareness within the training environment (Rosenberg & Pace, 2013). Afolabi and Akinbode (2021) argue that the incorporation of self-care practices into counsellor education is particularly relevant in non-Western contexts, such as Nigeria. In these settings, where mental health care may be stigmatized and resources are often limited, self-care practices may play a more significant role in counsellors' professional development. The inclusion of cultural sensitivity and context-specific self-care practices is, therefore, essential in counsellor training in these regions.

The cultural context plays an important role in shaping the self-care practices of guidance counsellors-in-training. In many African societies, including Nigeria, community-based support and traditional coping mechanisms are key components of self-care (Olusanya & Olusanya, 2017). Counsellors-in-training may rely on their extended family, religious communities, and local support systems to manage stress and maintain well-being. However, the rapid modernization of society and the

increasing demands placed on counsellors may lead to a disconnection from these traditional support systems, making it essential for training programs to bridge the gap between Western self-care models and culturally relevant practices (Afolabi & Akinbode, 2021).

Furthermore, research indicates that self-care practices should be culturally sensitive and tailored to the specific challenges faced by counsellors-in-training. For example, in a study by Olusanya and Olusanya (2017), it was suggested that counsellor education programs in Nigeria should integrate indigenous healing practices such as group support, storytelling, and other communal forms of engagement to promote the mental health and well-being of counsellors-in-training.

Despite the clear benefits of self-care, there are several barriers that hinder the implementation of self-care practices among counsellors-in-training. These barriers include time constraints, lack of access to resources, and limited awareness about the importance of self-care (Beck & Weishaar, 2014). Many counsellors-in-training struggle to balance academic responsibilities, clinical practice, and personal well-being, often leading to neglect of self-care practices. Additionally, a lack of institutional support for self-care, such as workshops or counselling services for students, further exacerbates this issue (Baker, 2003).

Burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious trauma are significant concerns among counsellors-in-training, and without proper self-care practices in place, these issues can impair their ability to function effectively as professionals. In order to address these barriers, counsellor education programs should prioritize the creation of supportive environments that promote self-care, wellness, and personal growth (Lee & Miller, 2013).

From the foregoing, self-care plays critical role in promoting counsellors' well-being, preventing burnout, and enhancing professional growth. Self-care is integral to counsellors' emotional regulation, stress management, and overall effectiveness in their roles. As such, counsellor training programs must prioritize the integration of self-care practices into their curricula to ensure that counsellors-in-training are equipped to handle the challenges they will face in their professional careers. Further research is needed to explore how cultural contexts, particularly in non-Western societies, influence self-care practices and how these practices can be effectively integrated into counsellor education programs.

The researchers therefore believe that the development of self-care strategies in counsellor training will lead to more resilient, capable, and empathetic counsellors who are better able to serve the mental health needs of their clients and maintain sustainable careers in the field. To therefore guide this study, two research questions were raised and three hypotheses were formulated:

Research Questions:

1. What are the Self-care Practices that counsellors in training need to have?
2. What are the professional development programs for guidance counsellors in training?

Hypotheses:

1. Self-care practices of counsellors in training will have no significant relationship with their levels of well-being.

2. Self-care practices of counsellors in training will have no significant relationship with their levels of well-being.
3. Self-care practices of counsellors in training have no significant relationship with burnout and fatigue.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a descriptive research design, specifically the survey type. This approach is suitable because the research aims to describe the existing conditions as they are, without manipulating the variables. The population for this study consists of guidance counsellors-in-training, specifically undergraduate students in the Guidance and Counselling Department at Ekiti State University, located in Southwestern Nigeria. The total population is 400 students.

The sample consists of 100 students randomly selected from the total population. The instrument used for data collection titled "Self-care Practices and Professional Development of Guidance Counsellors-in-training (PSSBQ)." consists of two sections: Section A focuses on demographic information about the respondents while Section B consisted of 30 items on the indices of self-care and professional development of counsellors-in-training. Face and content validity of the instrument was carried out by experts in Test and Measurement, and Guidance and Counselling. Cronbach Alpha technique was used to determine the reliability of the instrument and a reliability coefficient obtained was 0.85. The researchers administered the instrument while data collected were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics. The research questions were answered using frequency counts and percentages, while the research hypothesis was analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation.

Research Question 1: What are the Self-care Practices that counsellors in training need to have?

Table 1: Descriptive Analysis Showing the Self-Care Practices that Counsellors in Training Need to have

S/N	ITEMS	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remarks
1	I stay active regularly to help manage stress and boost my wellbeing	2.96	1.06	Agree
2	I eat balanced meals to keep my body and mind energized	2.56	1.01	Agree
3	I practice self-compassion and try not to be hard on myself	2.38	0.98	Disagree
4	I have healthy ways to deal with my emotions	2.63	1.16	Agree
5	I prioritize getting enough sleep to support my mental and physical health	2.88	1.19	Agree
6	I keep a network of supportive people who understand the challenges of a counsellor in training	2.53	1.03	Agree
7	I take part in activities that gives me a sense of purpose and meaning	2.72	1.18	Agree
8	I set and maintain boundaries in my relationships	2.57	1.12	Agree
9	I reflect on my values and how they shape my future work as a counsellor	2.63	1.01	Agree
10	I engage in spiritual or mindfulness practices that help me stay grounded	2.52	0.99	Agree

N = 100; Mean Cut-Off = 2.50

The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics, with a mean cut-off of 2.50 to categorize the items as "Agree" or "Disagree." A mean score above 2.50 indicated agreement with the statement, while a mean score below 2.50 indicated disagreement.

The data presented in Table 1 shows that counsellors in training generally agree with nine of the self-care practices that are considered essential. The highest-rated item, with a mean score of 2.96 (SD =

1.06), was staying active regularly to help manage stress and boost wellbeing. In contrast, practicing self-compassion and not being hard on oneself was rated the lowest, with a mean score of 2.38 (SD = 0.98), indicating that many respondents find it challenging to engage in self-compassion.

Research Question 2: What are the professional development programs for guidance counsellors in training?

Table 2: Descriptive analysis showing the Professional Development Programs for Guidance Counsellors in Training

S/N	ITEMS	$\bar{x}$	SD	Remarks
1	I seek training and education to improve my counselling skills	2.56	0.86	Agree
2	I keep up with the latest development and research in counselling	2.41	1.01	Disagree
3	I seek feedback from others and use it to improve on myself	2.55	0.87	Agree
4	I regularly practice role-plays to improve my counselling skills	1.78	1.02	Disagree
5	I actively participate in supervision and mentorship opportunities	1.67	1.03	Disagree

n = 100

Mean cut off = 2.50

In Table 2, two items related to professional development received scores above the mean cut-off of 2.50: seeking training to improve counselling skills ($\bar{x}$ = 2.56, SD = 0.86) and seeking feedback from others ($\bar{x}$ = 2.55, SD = 0.87). However, actively participating in supervision and mentorship ($\bar{x}$ = 1.67, SD = 1.03) and regular role-playing to improve counselling skills ($\bar{x}$ = 1.78, SD = 1.02) received the lowest ratings, indicating limited engagement in these professional development activities.

Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis 1: Self-care practices of counsellors in training will have no significant relationship with their levels of well-being.

Table 3: Correlation Analysis between Self-Care Practices and Well-being

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	r-cal	P-value
Self-Care Practices	100	23.42	3.07	0.432*	0.001
Level of Well-being	100	16.92	2.79		

* $P < 0.05$

(Significant Result)

The correlation analysis reveals a moderate correlation ($r = 0.432$, $p = 0.001$) between self-care practices and well-being. This indicates that self-care practices are significantly associated with the well-being of counsellors-in-training, leading to the rejection of the hypothesis that no significant relationship exists.

Hypothesis 2: Self-care practices of counsellors in training will have no significant relationship with their levels of well-being.

Table 4: Correlation Analysis between Self-Care Activities and Professional Development

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	r-cal	P-value
Self-Care Practices	100	23.42	3.07	0.114*	0.016
Professional Development	100	10.97	2.79		

* $p < 0.05$ (Significant result)

Low correlation ($r = 0.114$, $p = 0.016$) was found between self-care activities and professional development outcomes. This suggests that while there is a significant relationship, it is relatively weak, leading to the rejection of the hypothesis that no relationship exists.

Hypothesis 3: Self-care practices of counsellors in training have no significant relationship with burnout and fatigue.

Table 5: Correlation Analysis between Self-Care Practices and Burnout & Fatigue

Variables	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	r-cal	P-value
Self-Care Practices	100	23.42	3.07	0.414*	0.000
Burnout and Fatigue	100	12.97	1.98		

* $p < 0.05$ (Significant result)

The analysis shows a moderate correlation ($r = 0.414$, $p = 0.000$) between self-care practices and burnout/fatigue, suggesting that self-care is a significant factor in reducing burnout and fatigue among counsellors-in-training. This leads to the rejection of the hypothesis that no relationship exists.

The findings of this study emphasize the importance of specific self-care practices for counsellors in training, highlighting the significant positive effects these practices have on well-being, professional development, and the prevention of burnout. Further, there is a need for more emphasis on mentorship, supervision, and role-playing in professional development programs to enhance counsellor training.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the self-care practices, professional development programs, and overall well-being of guidance counsellors-in-training. The analysis was based on descriptive statistics, correlation tests, and hypotheses testing.

The study revealed that counsellors-in-training generally agreed with most of the self-care practices that are essential for their well-being. The highest-rated self-care practice was "staying active regularly to help manage stress and boost well-being" ($\bar{x} = 2.96$, $SD = 1.06$), which aligns with the findings of previous studies that emphasize the importance of physical activity in managing stress and improving mental health (Jonsdottir et al., 2011). Physical activity is often highlighted as an effective tool for improving emotional regulation and resilience in high-pressure jobs such as counselling.

Furthermore, practices such as "eating balanced meals to keep the body and mind energized" ($\bar{x} = 2.56$, $SD = 1.01$) and "prioritizing sleep for mental and physical health" ($\bar{x} = 2.88$, $SD = 1.19$) also had mean scores above the cutoff of 2.50, suggesting that respondents consider these practices important for maintaining personal health and professional competence. These results corroborate the importance of good nutrition and adequate rest in preventing burnout, a key concern for professionals who manage high-stress environments (Hohnen et al., 2016; Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

On the other hand, the item "practicing self-compassion and trying not to be hard on oneself" had the lowest rating ($\bar{x} = 2.38$, $SD = 0.98$), indicating that counsellors-in-training might find it challenging to engage in self-compassion. This finding is in line with research suggesting that many professionals, especially those in helping roles, often struggle with self-compassion due to perfectionistic tendencies and high expectations placed on them (Gilbert, 2010). It is crucial for counsellor training programs to emphasize the importance of self-compassion as part of the development of emotional resilience, particularly as it pertains to managing the emotional toll of the profession.

The findings regarding professional development programs suggest a need for more engagement in specific activities to enhance counselling skills. "Seeking training and education to improve counselling skills" ($\bar{x} = 2.56$, $SD = 0.86$) was the highest-ranked item, reflecting that counsellors-in-training recognize the importance of continuous learning and skill development (Skovholt & Rønnestad, 2003). However, areas such as "actively participating in supervision and mentorship opportunities" ($\bar{x} = 1.67$, $SD = 1.03$) received the lowest ratings, suggesting that there is limited involvement in mentorship and supervision. This finding is consistent with other studies that have identified the underutilization of supervision and mentoring in counsellor education programs, which could hinder professional growth (Wilkins & Lee, 2014).

The lack of participation in mentorship might also reflect structural barriers in the training programs, where counsellors-in-training might not have adequate opportunities for consistent mentorship. This could be a point of concern, as mentorship has been shown to be critical for personal and professional development, especially in a field that involves intense emotional labor (Holloway, 2001). Therefore, it would be important for training programs to integrate more structured mentorship and supervision to facilitate the professional development of counsellors-in-training.

The analysis of the relationship between self-care practices and well-being revealed a significant moderate correlation ($r = 0.432$, $p = 0.001$), suggesting that self-care practices play a crucial role in enhancing the well-being of counsellors-in-training. This finding aligns with previous research that highlights the positive impact of self-care on mental health, resilience, and emotional well-being (Williams et al., 2018). As noted by Gergen et al. (2017), professionals who engage in regular self-care practices tend to report higher levels of job satisfaction and lower levels of burnout, which is especially important for counsellors who work in emotionally taxing environments.

A significant but weak correlation ($r = 0.114$, $p = 0.016$) was found between self-care practices and professional development. This suggests that while self-care contributes to professional development, the relationship may not be as strong as anticipated. This finding is in line with earlier studies that have suggested that while self-care can improve professional efficacy, it may not directly translate to measurable improvements in professional development outcomes such as skill acquisition or career

advancement (Dewitt, 2017). The low correlation could also reflect the complex and multifaceted nature of professional development, which includes both personal self-care and external factors such as training, mentoring, and institutional support.

A moderate correlation ($r = 0.414$, $p = 0.000$) was found between self-care practices and burnout/fatigue, indicating that self-care practices are significantly related to the prevention of burnout and fatigue among counsellors-in-training. This result supports existing research that emphasizes the protective role of self-care against professional burnout, particularly in high-stress occupations like counselling (Rosenfield et al., 2015). As noted by Maslach and Leiter (2016), engaging in self-care activities such as maintaining a balanced lifestyle, setting boundaries, and seeking support is essential for counsellors to prevent emotional exhaustion and the associated negative consequences.

From the foregoing, the findings of this study underscore the importance of self-care practices for counsellors-in-training, highlighting their impact on well-being and the prevention of burnout. While some aspects of professional development, such as seeking training, were seen as important, there is a need for greater emphasis on mentorship and supervision in counsellor education programs. The relationships between self-care practices and well-being, as well as between self-care and burnout, point to the critical role that self-care plays in supporting both personal and professional development.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the self-care practices, professional development, and overall well-being of counsellors in training:

1. **Promote Regular Physical Activity for Stress Management:** Since staying active regularly emerged as one of the most crucial self-care practices for managing stress and improving well-being, training programs should incorporate regular physical activity routines or offer opportunities for physical engagement to help counsellors in training manage stress and enhance their overall health.
2. **Encourage Mindful Practice of Self-Compassion:** The study highlighted that practicing self-compassion was one of the lowest-rated self-care practices. Counsellor training programs should integrate self-compassion training and mindfulness practices, encouraging counsellors to develop a kinder, more understanding approach toward themselves, which could reduce stress and improve their emotional resilience.
3. **Enhance Sleep Education:** Given the importance of sleep in supporting mental and physical health, training programs should educate counsellors in training on the significance of good sleep hygiene. Providing strategies to prioritize and improve sleep could help in better managing stress and maintaining emotional well-being.
4. **Strengthen Support Networks and Peer Groups:** Counsellors in training should be encouraged to build strong support networks by connecting with peers, mentors, and colleagues who understand the unique challenges of the profession. Organizing peer support groups and networking events can help create a sense of community, offering emotional and professional support.
5. **Integrate Supervision and Mentorship Opportunities:** The study revealed that participation in supervision and mentorship opportunities was rated poorly. Counsellor training programs should ensure that structured supervision and mentorship are integral components of training.

Providing regular, supportive feedback and guidance can enhance professional growth and reduce feelings of isolation and burnout.

6. Increase Training in Emotional Regulation Techniques: Counsellors-in-training must be equipped with healthy emotional regulation strategies. Incorporating specific training on emotional intelligence, self-regulation, and coping mechanisms for stress and challenging client situations can improve counsellors' ability to manage their emotions effectively.
7. Promote Continuous Professional Development: The results indicated that while training and education to improve counselling skills were valued, there was less emphasis on staying updated with the latest research and professional developments. Training programs should prioritize continuous professional development through workshops, webinars, and seminars that focus on the latest research, evidence-based practices, and innovations in counselling.
8. Encourage Active Participation in Role-Playing Exercises: Since role-playing and practical skill-building exercises were rated poorly, counsellor training programs should integrate more role-playing activities, simulations, and real-world practice scenarios. These activities will allow counsellors to apply their learning in safe, controlled environments, enhancing their practical skills and confidence.
9. Facilitate Reflection on Personal Values: Counsellors should be encouraged to engage in regular reflective practice, examining their values, beliefs, and how these shape their counselling approach. This introspective process will help counsellors-in-training develop a clearer sense of their professional identity, leading to more effective and authentic counselling.
10. Focus on Burnout Prevention Strategies: Given the significant relationship between self-care practices and burnout, counsellor training programs should include targeted strategies to prevent burnout, such as promoting self-care routines, offering stress-management workshops, and fostering a balanced work-life dynamic to protect counsellors' well-being throughout their careers.

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