

Predictors of Counselor-in-Training Students' General Self-Efficacy

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Abstract: Counselor's self-efficacy theory serves as having major implications for educators and researchers in the counseling field. The self-efficacy of counselors-in-training (CsIT) typically increases as they evaluate and integrate their experiences during their training program. One of the goals of counselor education programs is to understand how CsIT improve during their education to be efficient and effective professional counselors after they graduate. Hence, the purpose of this study was to examine predictive factors of counselors-in-trainings' self-efficacy. Seventy-eight counseling students (12 men and 66 women) participated in the study. Results of bivariate correlations and multiple regression revealed that mattering, resilience, empathy, and existential well-being were significant predictors of general self-efficacy. Our study sought to examine a conceptual framework of self-efficacy with resilience, mattering, empathy, and existential well-being serving as independent variables. The importance of evaluating self-efficacy is evident in the literature and this study adds to the current literature emphasizing on the positive psychology factors.

Keywords: self-efficacy, mattering, resilience, empathy, counseling students

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INTRODUCTION

The development of counselors-in-training (CsIT) is a fundamental aspect of counselor education. Students' level of self-efficacy is a factor contributing toward the development of counseling attitudes, skills and behaviors. In the past 30 years, the number of students who seek a counseling degree and plan to practice professionally has increased both nationally and globally counselor (Hohenshil, Amundson, & Niles, 2013). In parallel with the increasing number of students in counselor education programs, it is essential to better serve and know the factors affecting CsIT' self-efficacy and counseling qualities.

Self-efficacy as a concept is belief in one's capabilities to accomplish a task and is a concept of performance in many situations (Bandura, 1977). In Based on Bandura's (1977) social cognitive theory, there are four ways that self-efficacy may be enhanced: mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Mastery experiences are considered the most powerful in enhancing self-efficacy and in counselor training are associated with directly exposing the counselor trainee to what may be dramatized or real-life experiences in learning skills (Barnes, 2004). In vicarious learning, or through observing others, the authors postulate modeling can enhance counselor self-efficacy (Coskun & Coskun, 2018). Regarding verbal persuasion, the link is made by communicating progress feedback to trainees. Emotional arousal is addressed as anxiety in the counselor training literature and is listed as a predictor in counseling performance abilities.

Past research (Lam, Tracz, & Lucey, 2013; Melchert, Hays, Wiljanen, & Kolocek, 1996; Mullen, Uwamahoro, Blount, & Lambie, 2015) has indicated that counseling training can have a positive influence on perceived self-efficacy over time. The literature (Lam et al., 2013; Larson et al., 1992; Melchert et al., 1996) is in agreement regarding general self-efficacy being positively correlated with counselor training level and experience. These findings suggest self-efficacy cannot be acquired by simply obtaining more clinical field experiences while holding a master's or bachelor's degree. In other words, self-efficacy is a dynamic process and training is one of the key components. Following we reviewed the relationship between self-efficacy and positive psychology components, which are mattering, empathy, resilience and existential well-being.

Mattering

Elliott, Kao, and Grant (2004) define *mattering* as one's perception of being a significant part of the world. It is important to an individual's well-being to know they matter to others and that their existence is of some importance to the lives of others. Mattering is an important theme for the counseling relationship not only for clients, but also for counselors as well (Rayle, 2006; Sarı & Karaman, 2018). The literature emphasizes how counselors want to matter to their clients and if they are able to perceive they matter to others, this will bring greater meaning to their professional lives

(Curry & Bickmore, 2012; Elliott et al., 2004; Rayle, 2006). Research conducted by Rayle (2006) showed that CsIT should be exposed to the mattering experience, which is one's experience with others, so students can consider ways in which they can implement it in their own lives and in their counseling relationships.

Empathy

Empathy is a key component in the counseling relationship in order to contribute to positive client outcomes (Leppma & Young, 2016; Young Kaelber & Schwartz, 2014). Siyez and Savi (2010) conducted a study with counseling students in Turkey and found significant findings in the level of empathy and resilience resulting in higher self-efficacy among counseling students. Additionally, the researchers stated that empathy and self-efficacy are important in the development process of the counseling students.

Empathy is a multidimensional concept including cognitive and emotional aspects. In cognitive empathy, one is able to perceive another's personal experience without directly connecting emotional states of mind. In contrast, in emotional empathy, the latter is experienced and one's affective state is involved (Greason & Cashwell, 2009). Although counseling programs may try to expose counseling trainees to many mastery experiences to enhance self-efficacy, the majority of the training literature focuses primarily on observable empathic responses, such as mirroring and reflection of feelings (Greason & Cashwell, 2009). Rogers (1961) describes empathy as giving another this "freedom" as a necessary component of the counseling relationship. The components of empathy and self-efficacy are essential for counselors to better understand their clients. Therefore, assessing the construct of empathy when regarding self-efficacy in counselor trainees is noteworthy.

Resilience

Resilience, or stress-resistance, is the ability to adapt successfully regardless of the exposure to unusually severe life events (Masten & Garmezy, 1985). Although CsIT may not be exposed to exceedingly severe traumatic events directly linked to their counseling trajectory, they are a large adult population likely to face high levels of stress (Riise, 2011). When people are subject to stressful encounters, their cognitive processes decide on what the situation is, consequently, this process plays an important part in the perception one has in coping with stress (Li & Nishikawa, 2012). If cognitive appraisal is a perception-related process, then it is suggested to be a direct link between resilience and self-efficacy. In other words, resilience is conceptualized as the ability to respond in a flexible and resourceful manner to a range of social situations with different demands (Overbeek, Zeevalkink, Vermulst, & Scholte, 2010). This is a special consideration regarding counseling trainees as it can be suggested a higher level of existing resilience can have a positive correlation congruent to self-efficacy.

Existential Well-Being

Existential well-being can be defined as the conviction that one's life has meaning and influences and enhances individual self-efficacy, possibly in a similar way that mattering does. Counselors agree that spirituality and well-being are core components in human development (Cashwell, Glosoff, & Hammond, 2010; Myers & Williard, 2003). Lamis et al., (2014) reported that existential well-being, one of two identified components of spiritual well-being, was a significant predictor of health-related quality of life, depression, and suicidal ideation. The authors distinguished existential well-being in individuals as separate from those with a religious affiliation, but still hold meaningful values and strong beliefs.

Hardiman and Simmonds (2013) conducted a study among Australian counselors and psychotherapists to find relationships between spiritual well-being and clinician burnout, the results of their study indicated existential well-being as a predictor of burnout as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishments. Taliaferro, Rienzo, Pigg, Miller, and Dodd (2009) examined how religiosity and spiritual well-being related to the psychological dimensions of health and found that existential well-being had a stronger relationship with mental health than did traditional religious items.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

One of the goals of counselor education programs is to understand how CsIT improve during their education to be efficient and effective professional counselors after they graduate. Researchers (Barnes, 2004; Lambie & Sias, 2009; Mullen et al., 2015) suggest that counselors with higher self-efficacy provide better counseling services. In an attempt to move the field toward greater understanding of counseling students' self-efficacy, we use a conceptual framework that consists of mattering, resilience, empathy, and existential well-being. As such, we attempt to extend research with counseling students by focusing on how components of positive psychology and insight influence self-efficacy. As a result, we explored the following research question: to what extent does mattering, resilience, empathy, and existential well-being influence counselors-in-trainings' general self-efficacy?

METHOD

This quantitative study was conducted using an explanatory non-experimental design and a correlational design to evaluate research question. In this study, the relationships among resilience, mattering, general self-efficacy, and empathy were used to create a predictive model of existential well-being using a regression analysis.

Measures

Demographic questionnaire. A demographic form was designed to collect data related to participants' background. The self-report questionnaire included information on age, gender, ethnicity, and program of study.

Brief Resilience Scale. The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS; Smith et al., 2008) was developed to assess an individual's capability to bounce back from challenging life events. The BRS consists of three positively worded items (e.g., "I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.") and three negatively worded items (e.g., "I have a hard time making it through stressful events."). The BRS uses a 5-point Likert-type response format with values ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) (Smith et al., 2008). A higher total score corresponds to being more resilient than a lower score (Leontjevas, Beek, Lataster, & Jacobs, 2014). The instrument was adapted and validated in different languages (e.g. Turkish- Haktanır, Lenz, Can, & Watson, 2016; Spanish- Karaman, Cavazos Vela, Aguilar, Saldana, & Montenegro, 2018) and scores had moderate and strong internal consistency ranging from .78 to .82. Smith et al. (2008) reported a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of .92. For the current study, we calculated a Cronbach's alpha of .86.

General Mattering Scale. The General Mattering Scale (GMS; Marcus, 1991) was developed to assess the degree individuals believe how they are important to others. This 5-point Likert-type assessment yields a single scale score based on participant responses that range from *Very Much* to *Not at All*. Possible scores on the scale range from five to 20, with higher scores being indicative of a greater perception of mattering. Mattering is accounted for by participant responses to items such as "How important do you feel you are to other people?" and "How interested are people generally in what you have to say?" Rayle and Myers (2004) reported alpha coefficients for the GMS ranging from .74 to .86 among college students. For the current study, we calculated a Cronbach's alpha of .80.

General Self-Efficacy Scale. The General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995) was developed to assess a general sense of perceived self-efficacy with the aim in mind to predict coping with daily hassles as well as adaptation after experiencing all kinds of stressful life events. The GSE uses a 4-point Likert-type response format with values ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 4 (*exactly true*). The 10-item scale includes items such as "I can always manage to solve difficult problems if I try hard enough." and "If I am in trouble, I can usually think of a solution." Schwarzer and Jerusalem (1995) reported high Cronbach's alpha coefficients for scores on the GSE from .76 to .90, with the majority in the high .80s (Schwarzer, Mueller, & Greenglass, 1999). For the current study, we calculated a Cronbach's alpha of .88.

Existential Well-Being Scale. In the current study, we used the Existential Well-Being Scale (EWBS), which is one of the sub-scales of the Spiritual Attitude Inventory (SAI; Koenig, Paloutzian,

Pargament, & Wallston, 2009). The Spiritual Attitude Inventory was developed to measure an individual's spiritual well-being and comprehend their spiritual needs by the U.S. Army Center for Health Promotion and Preventive Medicine (Deepika & Jahnvi, 2014). The SAI scale includes 28 items such as "*In my life, I experience the presence of the Divine*", and "*I have questioned the power of God*" and four different validated scales which are Duke University Religion Index, Spiritual Well-Being Scale, Negative Religious Coping, and Multiple Health Locus of Control Scale. These scales assist professional clinicians in assessing spiritual belief systems, religious practices, sense of controls, purposes and meanings of life with regard to the perception of spirituality and religiosity (Hufford, Fritts, & Rhodes, 2010). Each scale has been measured to find out their level of consistency. The EWBS includes 10 items and uses a 4-point Likert-type response format with values ranging from 1 (*not at all true*) to 4 (*exactly true*). High Cronbach's alpha coefficients for scores on the EWBS ranged from .73 to .98 (Koeing, et al., 2009). For the current study, we calculated a Cronbach's alpha of .80.

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire. The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ; Spreng, McKinnon, Mar, & Levine, 2009) was developed to measure empathy. Spreng and colleagues (2009) addressed empathy as a primary emotion. The TEQ has 16 statements including characteristics of empathy, such as perception of emotion, emotion comprehension, appropriate sensitive emotional responses, and altruism. The 16-item scale includes items like "When someone else is feeling excited, I tend to get excited too" and "I become irritated when someone cries." The TEQ uses a 4-point Likert-type response format with values ranging from 0 (*never*) to 4 (*always*). The test-retest reliability score of .81 showed the instrument has good internal consistency. For the current study, we calculated a Cronbach's alpha of .77.

Participants

The study was approved by the institutional review board of the university. The sample in the study included 78 master's level counseling students from a single CACREP-entry level Counselor education program at a university in the Southwestern United States. The mean age of the participants was 32.55 years ($SD= 9.53$; range: 21-60 years), with one participant failing to respond to the demographic query. More women ($n=66$, 84.6%) than men ($n=12$, 15.4%) participated. Participants reported their program of studies as addiction ($n= 8$, 10.3%), school ($n= 11$, 14.1%), clinical mental health ($n= 37$, 47.4%), and marriage, couple and family ($n= 20$, 25.6%). One participant failed to respond to this demographic query. Participants identified themselves as White or Caucasian ($n= 37$, 47.4%), African American ($n= 3$, 3.8%), Asian American ($n= 2$, 2.6%), Hispanic or Latino ($n= 34$, 43.6%), and Other ($n= 2$, 2.6%).

Data Analysis

Statistical power analysis. We ran an a priori power analysis using G*Power 3.1.9.2 statistical power analysis program (Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, & Buchner, 2014) to compute the minimum number of participants necessary to establish a moderate effect size ($f^2 = .15$) at the .80 level given $\alpha = .05$. This analysis indicated that a sample size of 85 was necessary to detect a medium effect size between our predictor variables for estimating self-efficacy of master's level counseling students. However, we only reached 78 students and run a post hoc power analysis to estimate achieved power. The results ($f^2 = .85$, $\alpha = .05$) indicated that we achieved power at the .99 level in this study

Preliminary Analysis. First, we computed descriptive statistics and Cronbach's alpha values for each instrument used in this study. Then, we prepared the data for analysis in the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, Version 23 (SPSS; IBM Corporation, 2015), imputed missing data using the SPSS, and tested for the model assumptions including linearity between predictor variables and outcome variable, multicollinearity, the absence of outliers, homoscedasticity, independence of observations, and normality of residuals. Based on the corresponding outcomes, all the assumptions were met.

Primary Analysis. We examined the predictive role of mattering, resilience, existential well-being, empathy on self-efficacy using a simultaneous multiple regression model, which requires the predictor variables to be entered into the model simultaneously. We evaluated the percentage of explained variance related to each model by evaluating R^2 value in the *Model Summary* table. Regression coefficients and effect size were inspected.

RESULTS

The descriptive statistics for the instruments are presented in Table 1. A multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict self-efficacy of master's level counseling students based on their reported mattering, resilience, empathy, and existential well-being. The analysis yielded a statistically significant model, $F(4, 73) = 15.53$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .46$ indicating that model predictors accounted for approximately 46% of the change among self-efficacy scores. This finding indicates that the predictive variables together accounted for approximately 46% of change among participants' scores on the self-efficacy scale. Within the model, scores related to participants' resilience yielded the strongest positive relationship, $\beta = .382$, $p < .001$, 95% CI [.211, .552], $sr^2 = .15$, indicating that participants' resilience scores accounted for 15% of change in their self-efficacy scores. This can be interpreted as that participants who reported higher resilience also tended to report higher perceived self-efficacy. Scores related to participants' general mattering yielded the strongest negative relationship $\beta = -.39$, $p = .008$, 95% CI [-.675, -.105], $sr^2 = .055$, indicating that the amount of variance uniquely accounted for by mattering in the participants' self-efficacy scores was approximately 6%. This can be interpreted as

that participants who reported higher general mattering scores tend to report lower perceived self-efficacy scores. Scores related to existential well-being ($\beta = -.078, p = .111, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.018, .175], sr^2 = .02$) and empathy ($\beta = -.12, p = .055, 95\% \text{ CI } [-.003, .242], sr^2 = .028$) were not significant predictors of self-efficacy (see Table 2). Power was sufficient for this study, $1 - \beta > .99$; given the sample size of $n = 78$, statistical significance would be detected for moderate effect sizes, $f^2 > .15$.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Alpha Coefficients for all Study Variables

	Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Range	α
1	Self-Efficacy	23.78	3.84	16-30	.88
2	Resilience	22.40	4.16	12-30	.86
3	Mattering	8.03	2.52	5-15	.80
4	Existential Well-being	49.8	7.43	31-61	.80
5	Empathy	47.7	5.57	36-60	.77

DISCUSSION

The individual's process of self-evaluating and judging their capabilities throughout their life is associated to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy in the counseling field affects a Counselor's judgements, evaluation, and beliefs about their own capabilities as therapists (Seay, 2015). Seay (2015) indicated that the higher the Counselor's self-efficacy, the more likely the Counselor would feel competent when facing difficult client situations.

Table 2. Summary of Multiple Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Self-Efficacy

Variable	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>t</i>	<i>sr</i> ²	<i>F</i>	<i>R</i> ²
Change in Self-Efficacy						15.53	.46
Resilience	.382	.086	.413	4.462	.15		
Mattering	-.39	.143	-.256	-2.73	.055		
Existential Well-being	.078	.049	.151	1.61	.02		
Empathy	.12	.061	.174	1.951	.028		

Note. Dependent Variable: Self-Efficacy

In this study we examined the predictor role of resilience and general mattering in predicting general self-efficacy among counseling students. Our findings were consistent with previous research. Siyez and Savi, (2010) stated that resilience was a significant predictor of Counselor's self-efficacy among counseling students in Turkey. There are different life situations affecting counseling students, such as school, clients, and family related issues. These life situations can increase the level of stress and decrease coping skills (Li & Nishikawa, 2012). On the other hand, Riise (2011) also found that teaching counseling students how to adapt and cope with a stressful environment, helped them to be

highly resilient. Furthermore, following training counseling students were focused and able to handle both cognitive and emotional aspects of the problem.

Mattering is an important positive psychology construct for clients and Counselors (Rayle, 2006). As Elliott et al. (2004) stated it is important for individual's to know they matter to others, it enhances their well-being. Results of our study states that mattering and self-efficacy have positive relationship. When individuals perceive the importance of their presence in this world and feel matter by others, the levels of self-efficacy and life satisfaction increase. When we talk about Counselors-in-training, this takes more attention because Counselors' self-care and self-efficacy affect their work with their clients (Miller, 2001). Similarly, Rayle (2006) stated that Counselors are informed about mattering to clients as the clients. Mattering changes and strengthens the counseling relationship. Mattering brings greater meaning to Counselor's professional lives and Counselors will help the clients from the feelings of hopelessness and helplessness. The clients who perceive that their Counselors care for them tend to invest in the productive counseling process (Elliott et al., 2004; Rayle, 2006). During master's program, counseling students learn how to enhance mattering skills and perception via parallel processing with classmates, clients, and faculty through basic counseling process skills such as validation, and reflecting meaning and feelings (Curry & Bickmore, 2012; Elliott et al., 2004; Rayle, 2006). Facilitating mattering in self and clients helps and enlightens Counselors and clients to value their profession and therapeutic relationship.

After reviewing the literature, we found that empathy was significant predictor of self-efficacy (Greason & Cashwell, 2009; Siyez & Savi, 2010). Furthermore, empathy and self-efficacy are important components of Counselor development (Larson & Daniels, 1998; Leach, Stoltenberg, McNeill, & Eichenfield, 1997; Rogers, 1975). Previous research (Siyez & Savi, 2010) showed significant increase in the level of empathy resulted in higher self-efficacy among counseling students. However, our results were not consistent with this finding. The results indicated that empathy was not a significant predictor. A possible explanation of this can be that the participants of this study may not be visiting clients currently that could be a factor for the results of our study. In the past, researchers suggested empathy might be perceived differently in the counseling relationship and social settings, because counseling requires a communication of understanding to the other person (Greason & Cashwell, 2009; Leppma & Young, 2016; Rogers, 1961).

Additionally, our findings showed that existential well-being was not a significant predictor. The dearth of research on this topic limited our ability to make comparisons with other studies. However, Lamis et al., (2014) stated existential well-being was a component of spiritual well-being. Spirituality is considered to be a protective factor for the clinicians struggling with burnout, and other hazards encountered by clinicians (Brady, Peterman, Fitchett, Mo & Cella, 1999; Moon, 2002; Skovholt, 2001). In addition, high existential well-being may reduce emotional exhaustion (Hardiman

& Simmonds, 2013). Hardiman and Simmonds (2013) found that existential well-being significantly predicted emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishments scores among clinicians, Counselors and psychologists. The results of our study were not consistent with Hardiman and Simmonds (2013) in terms of participants' characteristics. While their participants were professional Counselors and therapists, our participants were master's students pursuing education and training in counseling. We believe that the findings of this study add on the literature and provide significant findings on self-efficacy, empathy, resilience, mattering, and existential well-being constructs.

LIMITATIONS

The present study stands to add to the empirical literature of self-efficacy of counseling students. However, several factors might have influenced the results of the study. First, one of the primary limitations of this study is the sample size. The sample was below the calculated priori analysis. This might affect the practical significance of the findings. Second, the sample was drawn from a university located in South Texas hence the results cannot be generalized with the population of the United States. Third, self-report measures have several disadvantages includes the possibility of desired responses and to respond to the questions according to the present situation by the participants. The participants of this study included both counselors-in-training who are currently enrolled in practicum and internship courses and enrolled in other courses of the program. Seeing clients regularly and taking practicum or internship courses would have manipulate the results in terms of existential wellbeing and empathy.

Implications and Future Directions for Research

Counselor's self-efficacy theory serves a major implication for educators and researchers in counseling field. Self-efficacy of Counselors-in-training increases as they evaluate their experiences during the master's program (Hohenshil et al., 2013; Seay, 2015). Counselor educators guide and mentor CsIT professional development throughout their master's program (Bernard & Goodyear, 2013), and self-efficacy is considered as one of the outcome consideration for the emerging Counselors and measured (Larson & Daniels, 1998). The counseling trainee's self-efficacy can be measured by Counselors Self-Efficacy Scale (CSES; Melchert et al., 1996) during the practicum and internship semester by Counselor educators to help the students understand the interpretation of scores and develop the required skills to help the clients. There are several factors influencing self-efficacy for CsIT, such as empathy, mattering, resilience, existential well-being, spirituality, and personality (Curry & Bickmore, 2012; Elliott et al., 2004; Greason & Cashwell, 2009; Hardiman & Simmonds, 2013; Rayle, 2006; Siyez & Savi, 2010). Our study sought to examine a conceptual framework of self-efficacy with resilience, mattering, empathy, and existential well-being serving as independent

variables. The importance of evaluating self-efficacy is evident in the literature and this study adds to the current literature emphasizing on the positive psychology factors.

Previous researchers have discussed the important factors influencing self-efficacy of counseling students with different variables. Mullen et al. (2015) conducted a longitudinal study and found the importance of self-efficacy during the preparation, process, and training of emerging Counselors. Positive psychology and elements of positive psychology develops within Counselors during their training program. The findings of our study suggest that future researchers should study self-efficacy with variables used in this study and develop a training program to help counseling students from burning out. Additionally, the research literature is limited with qualitative research orientation about burnout.

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