

BAR-ILAN UNIVERSITY

**Examining School Counselors' Psychological
Empowerment as a Mediator between Principals and
Counselors Perceptions and Counselors' Withdrawal
Behaviors in Schools**

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Abstract

The school is an organization, in which reciprocations exist between the school-principal and the school-counselor. The intensity of this interaction has experienced a rising trend in the last decade. This trend is derived mainly from the development of the counseling profession, and from the education system reforms that are expressed by providing the principal and the school educational staff the responsibility and authority to design and implement the educational policy in school.

Earlier studies indicated the importance of the dynamics between the school-principal and school-counselor, and emphasize that an examination of the school-counselors and school-principals' concepts regarding the quality of this relationship may enable to better understand the counselor's attitudes and behavior within his role. The purpose of this study is to examine the differences and correlations between counselors' and principals' perceptions of the quality of their relationship, the perception of the counselor's role and the perception of the violation of their 'psychological contract' by the school counselor - to the perception of the psychological empowerment of the counselors and to the relations between the above and the counselors' behaviors which are considered as negative and called withdrawal behaviors, such as lateness, absenteeism, tendency to leave, versus ethical behavior which is considered as positive and called organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) among counselors.

The research was based on a quantitative method and was conducted among school counselors and principals in Israel, from all kinds of levels (primary, middle and high school) and from different sectors (Jewish and Arab). The sample included 113 pairs of counselors and principals from 113 schools.

The data analysis included reliability and validity tests, descriptive statistics of each measurement and inferential statistics in order to examine the various perceptions. In addition, the analysis included the exploring of several alternative models using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) method, in order to try and suggest the optimal model for explaining the counselors' and principals' perceptions and the counselors' attitudes and behaviors. The analysis was carried out by both SPSS and AMOS software programs.

As for the research hypotheses, H1 was confirmed. The findings indicated that there are significant differences between the counselors' and principals' perceptions regarding the counselor's role, its content and the frequency of fulfilling their related tasks. It seems that principals are expecting the counselors to perform more curriculum, coordinating and counseling activities, than the counselors actually perform.

H2 was partially confirmed. The findings indicated that principals grasp the quality of their mutual relationship as better than the counselors do, but no other significant differences in the other parameters were identified.

H3 was mostly confirmed. The findings indicated that as higher the principal perceived counselor-principal relationship is, in most of its indexes, the disparity between the counselors' and principals' perceptions of the counselor role is smaller. As for the counselors, the findings show correlation only to the consultation part of the counselor's role.

As opposed to H4, the findings indicated that there are no significant differences between counselors who serve only as counselors and those who had additional jobs/roles, in regard to their organizational citizenship behavior towards the students and towards the school. However, a significant difference was found between these groups, in regard with

their organizational citizenship behavior towards the school staff. Those counselors who had additional jobs had higher OCB towards the staff.

H5 was partially confirmed. The findings indicated that there were positive correlations between the different dimensions of the perceived principal-counselor relationship and the different dimensions of the counselor's psychological empowerment. Another outcome of the research was that as smaller the gap between the principals' and counselors' perceptions regarding the "curriculum" activity of the counselor's role was, the more empowered the counselors felt. Similar trends were found regarding perceptions of other counselor's role dimensions, but they were less significant.

H6 was partially confirmed. It was found that the more the counselor experienced breaching and violating of the psychological contract between him and the principal, the less he felt psychological empowerment.

H7 and H8 target was to examine the relationship between psychological empowerment and ethical behavior within the organization. In oppose to the hypothesis, the findings indicated that several dimensions of the psychological empowerment reduced OCB and increased lateness and absenteeism.

H9 was partially confirmed. The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) findings indicated that there is a partial mediating effect of psychological empowerment on the correlation between the counselor perceived psychological contract and the frequency of lateness. The direct relationship and the indirect relationship were found as insignificant but the disparity between them was significant. Similar trend was identified regarding the partial meditating effect of psychological empowerment on the correlation between the level of

congruence between the principal's and counselor's perceptions of the counselor's role, and the frequency of lateness.

The research highlights the importance of the principal-counselor relationship dynamic and the importance of coordinating their expectations in regard with the counselor's role. The main conclusion is that not all withdraw behaviors are necessarily reflections of negative perceptions and attitudes of the employee. Respectively, OCB is not necessarily a reflection of positive perceptions and attitudes of the employee. There can be other explanations for the appearance of lateness and absenteeism. For example- the counselor has worked overtime and tried to balance it by taking a day off or by starting his work later than he was expected to.

Also, there can be other explanations for the decreasing of OCB among counselors. For example- the counselor may have had an addition role outside school so he aimed his behaviors into his other roles. According to this, we can conclude that the OCB is not necessarily the opposite behavior of withdraw behaviors.

Theoretically, the research enables to design a model which examines the interaction between the school-principal and the school-counselor, and the way that this interaction might affect the school counselor's psychological empowerment and his behavior in school. While other researchers have examined a similar model among teachers, this research is focusing on counselors. Additionally, there was a methodological attempt to increase the possibility of examining circumstantial correlations by using a method that occurs at discrete time intervals, to ensure that data is not prone to methodological biases.

Implementation wise, the research highlights the importance of promoting and cultivating the school counselor-principal interaction, within the school and throughout their professional training. Furthermore, these findings might provide insight for principals and supervisors on how to decrease negative behaviors of school counselors and how to promote positive ones.