

Work Values of Malaysian School Counselors: It's Implication on School Counseling

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Abstract: Problem statement: Work values have been widely studied in management areas, among students and nurses. One can easily obtain literatures on these populations. One may face some difficulties when searching for literature on work values of counselors. **Approach:** The current study intends to explore the work values of Malaysian school counselors, specifically and to determine if their work values differ based on gender, level of education and experience as counselors, school location and size of school population. **Results:** Their work values were measured using a 60 items work value instrument. The overall mean of counselor's work value was 3.71 (SD = 0.43). There was a significant difference of work values between male and female counselors. **Conclusion:** Work values were found to be associated with age, experience and academic qualification. No correlation was found between work values and location of school and size of school.

Key words: Vocational behavior, work values, school counselors, school counseling, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

Malaysia is progressing to become one the world's most developed nation. A majority of her population is educated at least at the secondary school level, thus resulting in dual-career family system. Such a system has changed the way children are being raised. Many of these dual career family systems employ maids to help them with household chores and at the same time help the family with the job of raising their children. Thus, as social and emotional support from the parents dwindle, many children face an increased amount of stress and pressure at an early age. Such stress and pressure may be reduced with the help of school counselors.

Counseling is a process in which one person helps another person to understand and solve some problem that he or she encounters in a better manner. Some of the goals of counseling are to promote personal growth and to prepare students to become literate and motivated workers, caring family members and responsible citizens. The quality of secondary school counseling programs is a direct reflection of the counselors who are hired to lead them (Beale, 1995). According to Lapan *et al.* (2007) and Stone and Dahir (2006), professional school counselors play a vital role in maximizing student success. The ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003) for school counseling programs suggests that school counselors must be most concerned with the comprehensive needs of students. The suggested that school counselors must be skilled in

addressing students' personal, social and career needs, which in turn directly affect academic success. This is a tough job that one has to undertake and the most important element for the success of the task rests on the counselor himself or herself. It is the way they view their jobs as a counselor. It is what they expect or want from the job as a counselor. In essence, what is their work value? Work values have been widely studied in management areas, among students and nurses. One can easily obtain literatures on these populations. However, one may face some difficulties when searching for literature on work values of counselors.

Work values refer to what a person wants out of work in general and also what components of a job are important for their work satisfaction (Elizur, 1984). Work value as defined by Brown (2002) was the satisfactory outcomes that individuals expect to achieve through their participation in work activities. According to Judge and Bretz (1992), work values are representative of the values that individuals hold and how these are applied to work setting. Brief (1998) and Frieze *et al.* (2006) believed that it is an outcome people desire and should be attained through work. According to Dose (1997); Meglino and Ravlin values and work values are related to job satisfaction, motivation, commitment and job performance. Dose (1997) reiterated that employees' perceptions of preferences in the workplace are largely influenced by work values, which will then influence employee attitudes and behaviors. Many writers believe that work values are composed of two distinct categories,

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the extrinsic and intrinsic values. The extrinsic work values focus on the outcomes of work, while the intrinsic work values focus on the process of work (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Several major career development theorists have recognized that values play an important role in career counseling and in the career decision-making process (Dawis, 2001; Holland, 1997; Super, 1980). Theorists of career development such as Dawis (2001), Holland (1997) and Super (1980) believed that values are important in career counseling and in the career decision-making process. Similarly, Luzzo (2000) believed that a work value is critical to the career counseling process with college students (Luzzo, 2000). According to Judge and Bretz (1992), Ravlin and Meglino (1987), students' work values are significant in their decision-making process and as noted by Knoop (1994), there is a relationship between work values and job satisfaction. Work values have been shown to significantly predict career choice and the congruence of work values with work environment has been shown to exist.

Dawis (2001) identified values as a predominant factor that influences vocational behavior. One's value determines the types of career one will plan for and the preparation one needs to make. Likewise, a counselor will need to know his or her clients' value in order to provide an effective career counseling or guidance. One of the values that are important in the world of work is the work value itself. According to Dawis (2001) and Elizur (2004), work values are what a person wants out of work in general and also the components of a job that are important to their work satisfaction. School counselors as posited by Finch *et al.* (2001) and Kuranz (2002) assume a broad range of responsibilities. Among others, the responsibilities include providing individual and group counseling, conducting psycho-educational outreach with a large number of student bodies, providing educational testing and academic advising, completing various administrative tasks and engaging in clinical supervision of school counselor trainees. As such, a school counselor should have a positive view about the profession. Thus, it is important to know the work values of Malaysian counselors since work values are very much related to work performed by the counselors.

Purpose of the study: After reviewing literatures on research related to counselors and counseling in Malaysia and elsewhere, the author could not identify any research that had focused on the work values of counselors, although work values among school

counselors is an important aspect that needs to be studied. Thus, the purpose of the current study is to explore the work values of Malaysian school counselors and to determine if their work values differ based on gender, level of education and experience as counselors, school location and size of school population.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants: There are 2237 secondary schools in Malaysia with a student population of 2,326,297. Approximately 74,000 teachers and 4000 counselors are employed at the secondary level. As of July 2009, 1749 counselors are registered with the board of counselors and of those, 1219 are licensed. For the present study, a total of 500 counselors were randomly chosen to participate.

Procedures: Data were collected from 443 school counselors, who were randomly selected. Questionnaires were mailed to all the selected subjects and each of the subjects was required to return the questionnaire using a self-addressed stamped envelope in two weeks time. Initially, a total of 500 school counselors were mailed the questionnaires. However, only 443 questionnaires were useable as some of the samples did not return or returned as incomplete questionnaires. The incomplete questionnaires were discarded.

Instruments: Just as work values have been defined differently, so have the methods of evaluating work value measurement (Furnham *et al.*, 2005). For example, work value has been measured using a 24-items instrument (Elizur, 1984), the Minnesota Importance Questionnaire (Lofquist and Dawis (1971), a 34-item work value instrument by De Cooman *et al.* (2008) and the most popular measurement is Super Work Value Inventory (1970). This shows that there is no specific instrument that has been consistently used to assess one's work value.

The major variable of the study is work values. Work values were measured using an instrument consisting of 60 items developed based on various work value instruments. Subjects were asked to indicate the importance of a variety of work values on a five-point scale ranging from unimportant at all (1) to very important (5). The reliability estimate of the entire instrument ascertained using Cronbach alpha was 0.946. Besides, counselors were also required to provide answers to questions related to gender, work experience, level of education, location of schools and student population in the school.

RESULTS

A total of 500 school counselors were randomly selected to participate in the study. However, data analysis was done based on 443 usable questionnaires. The participants of the present study are composed of 43.9% male and 56.1% female school counselors. Their ages ranged between 24 and 55 years old with a mean of 38.48 years (SD =7.78 years). About 82% of them are holders of a bachelor’s degree and 15.8% are holders of post-graduate degrees. For those with a bachelor’s degree, the majority (75%) majored in counseling. About 14% were from the field of psychology.

Their experiences as school counselors ranged between 1 to 22 years with a mean of 6.34 years (SD = 3.47 years). Majority of the counselors who participated in the study worked in schools located in rural areas (54.2%), 20% of them worked in schools located in urban areas and 24.4% worked in schools located in small town areas. They worked in schools consisting of about 450-2892 students. The mean number of students was 1225 (SD = 521). In Malaysia, counselors are also trained to teach. While their undergraduate major is guidance and counseling, they also have to have a minor. This is to enable them to teach while in schools. The findings showed that 27.5% of the counselors teach and 70.4% of them perform the counseling job alone. The number of counselors in schools ranged between 1 and 5 persons with the majority of the schools having two counselors (43.1%) and about 26% of the schools having three counselors and 20.3% of the schools having only one counselor.

The overall mean of counselor’s work value was 3.71 (SD = 0.43). Factor analysis was conducted on the 60 work value items of Malaysian school counselors. Maximum Likelihood estimation with Varimax rotation was selected. The results of the factor analysis showed the presence of 10 distinct factors. The reliability estimates for the 10 factors ranged from 0.79-0.94. The 10-factor solution explains 57.03% of total variance.

A t-test result ($t=1.96, p = 0.051$) showed that work values did not differ significantly, based on gender. Both male and female counselors do have positive work values. There was a significant correlation between age and work values ($r = 0.112, p<0.05$). Older counselors do have positive work values compared to younger counselors. The findings also showed that work values are associated with experience as counselors ($r = 0.177; p<0.01$) and experience as teachers ($r = 0.125; p = 0.011$). The findings of the study also showed that work values differ based on academic qualification, whereby counselors with post-graduate qualification obtained a significantly higher work values mean scores compared to counselors with only under-graduate qualification (Table 2). Regardless of where the counselors work.

Table 1: Mean and standard deviations of work values by gender

	Gender	N	Mean	SD
Work values	Male	188	3.77	0.45
	Female	239	3.68	0.43

T (429) =1.861, p = 0.051

Table 2: Mean and standard deviations of work values by academic qualifications

	Academic qualifications	N	Mean	SD
Work Value	Post-graduate degrees	69	3.92	0.42
	Bachelor degrees	350	3.68	0.43

T (430) = 4.28; p = 0.000

Table 3: Mean and standard deviations of counselors work values by location of schools

	N	Mean	SD
Rural areas	240	3.73	0.45
Small towns	108	3.84	0.38
Urban areas	90	3.75	0.38

F (2, 435) = 2.03; p = 0.13

Their study values do not differ. Location of school does not affect the work values of school counselors [F (2, 435) = 2.03; p = 0.13] (Table 3). No significant correlation was found between school size and work values of counselors.

DISCUSSION

There is a substantial body of research on work values in management and organizational setting, but there is a scarcity of research that address work values of school counselors. When trying to locate research and articles on work values of school counselors, the authors were not able to locate a single research article that specifically addresses the issue of work values among counselors, though work values are important in guidance and counseling works. Work value has been associated with job outcomes such as commitment, satisfaction and intention to leave the job. According to Vecchio (1980); Trompenaars (1993); Black (1994) and Huff and Kelly (2004), work values are important in determining the individual work expectations, their behavior in response to specific work environment and the likely performance of their work roles. Thus, one with positive work values will display positive work behavior and consequently the desired outcomes such as high satisfaction and high commitment to the organization. Counseling profession needs counselors who are highly committed to their job. This is so because the counselor’s job has a significant effect on students’ future. If counselors do not have positive work values, it will of course impact their commitment, which will then impact the services provided to the students. Thus, it is very important for the Ministry of Education in Malaysia, the major employer of school

counselors to ensure that school counselors do see their jobs positively. According to Viola (1977), an understanding of managerial and/or employee values has much to do with the effectiveness, efficiency and morale of the organization. Furthermore, authors such as Vecchio (1980); Trompenaars (1993) and Huff and Kelly (2004) agreeably noted that work values are seen as important in shaping both individual expectations of work, their responses to specific work situation and likely performance within a specific work role. Connor and Becker (1975) argued that values have implications for conflict, communication, organizational performance and managerial action, which will result in absenteeism, tardiness and experiences of negative emotion (Salovey and Rodin, 1991). The consequence of these negative behaviors will affect the counseling services to students.

The purpose of this study was to assess work values among school counselors in Malaysia. Overall, counselors seemed to have moderately positive work values with a mean of 3.71 on a five-point scale. It will be more desirable if the mean score is much higher to show that Malaysian counselors do really have positive work values. From the study, it was found that the experience correlated significantly with work values and level of academic qualification also contributed to the work values of school counselors. Those with post-graduate qualifications obtained a significantly higher mean score on work values compared to those who only possessed a lower level of qualification. The existence of correlation between work values and academic qualification suggests that one's work value may be improved as a result of attending advanced courses. This finding is similar to those of Pohjanheimo (1997), whereby the author discovered that there was an association between work values and level of education. A study by Furnham and Karani (1985) also showed that work beliefs and values are related to education. Johnson and Elder (2002) study, the results also indicate that any change in job values is influenced by the level of education. Thus, it is reasonable to encourage school counselors to take an initiative to further their education. However, a study by Askun *et al.* (2010) showed that educational level has no effect on work values.

The existence of an association between work values and experience suggests that work values may be improved with experience and it is not unchangeable. These findings are in accordance with what was suggested by Brown and Crace (1996) and Rokeah (1973). According to them, work values presumably govern experience, yet experiences may serve to modify the salience of values over time. Thus, a fairly good assumption can be made that experience will make counselors appreciate their job in a manner that

will make them want to work harder toward students' development. In a study of job values in American men, Mortimer and Lorence (1979) concluded that work experience plays a major part in the changes in job values.

Although studies by others showed that work values differed significantly by gender, the present study shows that the work values of both male and female counselors do not differ significantly. In a study of high school students in Finland, Verckasalo (1996) discovered that work values of boys differ from those of girls at least in some aspects. Similar findings were discovered by Pohjanheimo (1997), whereby there was a relationship between gender and work values among work-age population in Finland. Other studies by Duffy and Sedlacek (2007); Sinisalo (2004) and Furnham and Karani (1985) also showed some associations between work values and gender in some aspects of work values.

With positive work values, it is hoped that they will perform to the best of their ability to guide and counsel students in making the right educational and career decisions. Not only that, as a result of committed guidance and counseling service provided by the counselors, the desire of the government to produce students having all round development will be achieved and this will transform the country into a knowledgeable and economically aware country. The role of a school counselor is critical in fulfilling the aspirations of a nation. It is the counselor who will guide students in their educational and occupational choices. Feller (2003) indicated that school counselors and school counseling programs play key roles as schools need to prepare students who can successfully transition to the next level, whether it is a college, a technical institution, or a job. For that to happen, school counselors must see themselves as performing a task that will affect the development of the entire nation. It is they who advice students about the courses to take and the kind of preparation that is needed for the courses that the students plan to enroll into. It is therefore very important for the counselors to view their jobs positively and it is also important for the employer to keep the employee work values in mind. According to Chu (2007), a clear understanding of employee work structure helps employers develop effective HR policies that meet employees' needs and achieve satisfactory work outcomes in areas that their employees value the most. This is indeed a very important step that needs to be considered by the employers because as has been reiterated by authors such as Vecchio (1980); Black (1994) and Huff and Kelly (2004), work values are important in shaping both the individual expectations of work, their response to specific work situations and likely performance within a specific work role.

CONCLUSION

From the study it can be concluded that:

- The counselors' value their study positively. However, a much more positive view is needed to ensure that counselors do their jobs in a full-hearted manner. This is not to say that at the moment they do the job half-heartedly, but it can be improved further
- It was also found that the level of education correlated significantly with work values. Thus, it is suggested that counselors should make an effort to further their education at the post-graduate level. Through enrollment in post-graduate education, more relevant information, knowledge, skills about counseling and guidance can be acquired. This will help them improve the delivery of guidance and counseling services
- Work values do not differ based on gender. Both male and female counselors exhibit the same level of work values

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