SCHOOL COUNSELLORS’ CHALLENGES, COPING STRATEGIES, and
PERCEPTIONS of SERVICE DELIVERY

by

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Abstract

This interpretive phenomenological study explored the challenges experienced by school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago from a wellness perspective, how these counsellors alleviated those challenges, and the counsellors’ perceptions of how those challenging experiences affected their service delivery. Specifically, 10 public school counsellors participated in the study. These counsellors were purposely selected, and Smith and Osborn’s (2003) Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was used to analyse the data. In addition, Roscoe’s (2009) Seven Dimensional Wellness Model was used as the framework for the study. The dimensions of this wellness model are: occupational, environmental, emotional, spiritual, physical, interpersonal/ social, and intellectual wellness. Counsellors reported that the challenges emanated from both organizational systemic issues and work/life balance issues. Among the strategies used were controlling those issues that were in their sphere of influence amidst those situations that they had no control over, and seeking support from supervisors, family members, and friends. Counsellors also concluded that low energy levels affected delivery of sessions during the challenging experiences. Counsellors’ perceptions of the quality of service delivery during the challenging periods revealed many areas for strengthening supports to students, such as making the case for additional professional resources and advocating for improving the literacy rates of students entering the secondary school system. Finally, while their earlier years as school counsellors were more difficult with respect to finding a balance between counselling and other duties, their current experience in terms of the types of issues that they are now encountering seems more challenging.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to school counsellors everywhere. Their advocacy for children helps to create a more just and peaceful world.
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Chapter One: Overview

Purpose

This study explored the challenging experiences of public school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago from a wellness perspective, the strategies used by these counsellors to alleviate those challenging experiences, and the counsellors’ perceptions of their service delivery during those challenging periods. In 1962, when Trinidad and Tobago obtained its independence from Great Britain, 20% of the 12-18 age group attended secondary school (Alleyne, 1996). Many of those students attended private secondary schools, which came at a cost. As such, the movement towards Trinidad and Tobago’s independence from Great Britain was also a movement towards universal secondary education (Alleyne, 1996).

During the 1970s, the School Guidance Unit was formed. This unit was responsible for supporting the educational movement by making sure that students did not drop out of school (Trinidad & Tobago Ministry of Education [T&T MOE], 2004). In 2004, services expanded under the newly formed Student Support Services Unit to meet the growing psychosocial demands and challenges that were emerging in the classroom. This Unit has since evolved to the Student Support Services Division (SSSD), a Division of the Ministry of Education. As such, school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago are currently mandated to refer or provide services, where appropriate, to students who are attempting to cope with personal/social issues
including mental health issues, drug and alcohol misuse, suicidal ideations, and acts of violence including gang violence, as these have become issues for the school system (Wayow, 2013).

In addition to providing personal/social support services to students, school counsellors also provide career and academic guidance. Understanding the experiences of these school counsellors is therefore critical because they could offer unique insights into the human capital development issues of Trinidad and Tobago. Moreover, understanding the experiences of these counsellors is also critical for safeguarding the well-being of the counsellors, and their students. Responding to these various needs, the purpose of this study is to identify the challenging experiences of public school counsellors from a wellness perspective, the strategies used by these counsellors to alleviate those challenging experiences, and the counsellors’ perceptions of their service delivery during those challenging experiences.

**Importance**

This study will augment existing research from other nations including Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, Turkey, and The United States, about school-counsellors’ challenging experiences (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Culberth, Scarborough, Banks- Johnson, & Solomon, 2005; Moyer, 2011; Stephan, 2005). The study also augments existing research on school counsellors’ self-care strategies (Christopher, Chrisman, Trotter-Mathison, Schure, Dahlen, & Christopher, 2011; Evans

Given that SSSD has been functioning for 10 years, this seems to be an opportune time for conducting this study. The results may be useful for Student Support Services Division, other educational policy makers, and for training of future school counsellors. More important, the results may benefit current and future school counsellors by assisting them to identify and to alleviate challenges to their well-being.

**Scope**

This study focused on the challenges experienced by Trinidad and Tobago public school counsellors from a wellness perspective, how they coped during those challenging periods, and their perceptions of their service delivery during the challenging periods. The study captured contextual data such as the school’s structure, leadership, caseload, and supervision opportunities. The study also explored these experiences in light of demographic information such as training and experience. The major component of the study, however, focused on the participants’ perceptions of their experiences.

Numerous aspects of the phenomenon of school counsellors’ challenges, coping strategies, and service delivery during the challenging experiences are outside the scope of this study. For example, the perspectives of students, teachers, supervisors, and other members of administration could have been included in the study. Although the above
may have made this study more comprehensive, having students, teachers, supervisors, and administration as participants may have led to decreased interest in counsellor participation or depth of sharing by those who agreed to participate. Moreover, examining the experiences of all these other potential participants would make the study impractical to complete within a reasonable period.

In addition, the study could have focused only on participants who were experiencing high levels of challenge at the time of their research involvement; however, interviewing participants who self-report that they are not functioning at an acceptable level would have resulted in an ethical dilemma for both the participant and the researcher. Specifically, professional codes of ethics require counsellors to support colleagues who may be experiencing symptoms of distress by urging them to seek help, but my role was as a researcher and not a counselling colleague. Moreover, counsellors also have the ethical responsibility to protect students by reporting on colleagues who are practicing while impaired. As such, I focused on participants’ reflective views of past challenges, coping strategies, and perceptions of service delivery during challenging periods. Finally, asking school counsellors to focus on challenges will invariably evoke mostly negative responses. The study only included some peripheral references to the counsellors’ positive programs and interventions because those aspects of the counsellors’ functions do not form part of this study.
Definition of Terms

Given that the audience of this study may include parents and other stakeholders in education, who may not be familiar with the field of wellness or school counselling, defining certain terms is important for clarity and contextual understanding. The following are the definitions of the identified terms:

**Burnout.** Burnout refers to a process that leads to emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and diminishing personal accomplishments (Maslach, 1993). Avoiding emotional exhaustion is particularly important because it is the major cause of burnout (Wheeler, Vassar, Worley, & Barnes, 2011). Moreover, emotional exhaustion renders the counsellor incapable of engaging with clients (Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001). Burnout is also characterized by “a loss of idealism, energy, interest in one’s work” (McCarthy, Van Horn Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, & Guzman, 2010, p.149), incompetence, the tendency to devalue clients, deterioration in one’s personal life, and experiencing emotional and physical exhaustion at work (Lee, Cho, Kissinger, & Ogle, 2010). Unchecked burnout could result in counsellor impairment (Lee et al., 2010).

**Compassion fatigue.** Figley (1995) described compassion fatigue as the gradual de-sensitisation to compassion, sympathy, or empathy over an extended period. Compassion fatigue may also result when educators become over-involved in a single traumatic event in the lives of students or their families (Robinson, 2005).
Distress. Stress is a natural response to life experiences; however, unmanaged stress, or distress, leads to physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioural, social, spiritual, or intellectual impairment (Yassen, 1995). Seyle (1974) explained that there are three stages of distress. First, there is the alarm stage, described as the fight or flight response to a threat. During this stage, the body is in a heightened state of alert and it is producing stress hormones. Next is the resistance stage, during which the body attempts to adjust to the threat. This adjustment can deplete one’s physical and mental resources. Finally, exhaustion occurs if the resistance stage persists for a long period. If exhaustion persists, it leads to reduced immune system functions and illness.

School counsellor. The terms, school counsellor, guidance counsellor, and guidance officer have been used over the years to describe the position held by school support staff responsible for three broad areas: academic, personal/social, and career support services to students. For consistency and clarity, the term used in this study to refer to these personnel is “school counsellor.”

Self-care. This concept refers to “a professional responsibility … [whereby] counsellors engage in self-care activities to maintain and promote their emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities” (American School Counsellors Association, [ASCA], 2005, p. 9). Self-care activities vary widely from person to person, but can include:

1. Managing stress, including managing one’s time and energy, exercising, nutrition, and getting sufficient rest (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft,
2. Cultivating and maintaining healthy working relationships (Finkelstein, 2009; Hettler, 1980; Young & Lambie, 2007);
3. Having a support system other than work relationships, such as family and friends (Sumerlin, & Littrell, 2011);
4. Finding meaning and purpose in work and life (Hettler, 1980);
5. Inculcating a daily routine of relaxation exercises (Christopher, Chrisman, Trotter-Mathison, Schure, Dahlen, & Christopher, 2011); and
6. Accepting that counsellors cannot fix everything (Evans & Payne, 2008) as there are limits to helping (Sheffield & Baker, 2005; & Skovholt, Grier & Hanson, 2001).

**Wellness.** Wellness fits into the definition of “realization of the fullest potential of an individual physically, psychologically, socially, spiritually, and economically, and the fulfillment of an individual’s role expectations in the family, community, place of worship, workplace and other settings.” (Bates & Eccles, 2008, p.15)

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation consists of five chapters. Chapter One has provided an overview of the study, focusing on its purpose, importance, and scope, along with definitions of key terms. Chapter Two presents the Literature Review, addressing previous research on challenges experienced by counsellors and how they dealt with
those challenges. Due to the dearth of existing research about school counsellors in the Trinidad and Tobago’s context, this review included studies conducted in Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, Turkey, and the USA. Chapter Three consists of a description of the methodology and the methods used, addressing both conceptual and procedural issues. Chapter Four consists of a description of the key findings and a discussion of their meaning in light of previous research. Finally, Chapter Five consists of a summary of the findings, a discussion of the limitations and implications of the study along with recommendations for future research.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

This study explored challenges experienced by Trinidad and Tobago’s public school counsellors from a wellness perspective, how counsellors coped during those challenging periods, and counsellors’ perceptions of how their service delivery affected their students and the wider school body during those challenging times. To establish the groundwork for this study, I reviewed the current literature on an on-going and regular basis throughout the data collection and data analysis phases of the study (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). The body of literature in this area is slowly expanding, but remains scant pertaining to the subject of school counsellors’ challenges, coping strategies, and perceptions of service delivery in general, and in Trinidad and Tobago in particular.

Given that there are no known studies on the wellness needs of school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago, studies, mostly covering the last 10 years, from Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, Turkey, and the United States, have been included in the review of literature. These studies addressed two major areas: (a) burnout in school counsellors (discussing the nature of burnout in the international school counselling context, a burnout typology, causes of burnout, and counsellor challenges); and (b) wellness and self-care in school and other counsellors (including characteristics and components of wellness, and barriers to wellness).

In 1996, the United States embarked on a five-year multi-staged national initiative to transform school counselling. The study included school counsellors, counsellor educators (including evaluation of graduate programs), students,
administrators, and other stakeholders in education. The focus was on school counsellors’ preparation programs and school counsellors’ practice (Martin, 2002). This nationwide focus on school counsellors’ training and practice seems to have ignited a proliferation of studies, which may account for the disproportionate number of studies from the United States, when compared with the other countries. Nevertheless, the groundwork for this literature review includes (a) the historical context of public school counselling in Trinidad and Tobago; (b) burnout in school counsellors; and (c) wellness and self-care in school, and other mental health counsellors. This review of the literature will therefore commence with a discussion of the historical context of public school education and counselling in Trinidad and Tobago.

**A Brief History of Public Education in Trinidad and Tobago**

After four and a half centuries of colonial rule, in 1962, Trinidad and Tobago attained its independence from Great Britain (Alleyne, 1996). At that time, only 20% of the 12 to 18-year-old age group attended secondary school: 11% attended government or government-assisted schools at no cost, and 9% attended private secondary schools, which came at a cost (Alleyne, 1996). Those primary school students who failed the secondary school entrance examination had the following options:

1. attend post-primary classes at the primary schools or primary centres for a 2-year period;
2. attend private secondary schools; or
3. leave the formal education system (Quamina-Aiyejina, et al., 2001).
Those students who went into the post-primary classes took the School Leaving Certificate Examination (SLCE). Those who passed the SLCE went to a secondary school. For those who failed the SLCE twice, that would have meant the end of their chances for public secondary education. The options that were available to those students who failed the SLCE twice would have been vocational education, informal apprenticeship, or private secondary schools (Quamina-Aiyejina, et al., 2001). These options were also available for students who failed the secondary school entrance examination, but who opted not to go to post-primary classes.

In the year 2000, Trinidad and Tobago achieved universal public secondary schooling (Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Education [T&T MOE], 2004). With universal secondary schooling, there was no need to continue with the post-primary classes and other transitioning structures for primary school students who were not successful at the secondary entrance examination (Quamina-Aiyejina et al., 2001). The decision to dismantle the transitioning structure from the primary school, however, may have been counter-productive to the country’s development. The argument of counter-productivity centers on the notions that the transitioning process catered to late bloomers, and that many of the students who failed SLCE twice became informal apprentices and eventually participated in society as entrepreneurs in their respective communities. These entrepreneurs functioned as plumbers, welders, painters, mechanics, electricians, hairdressers, barbers, dressmakers, carpenters, and in other trades occupations.
In contrast to the informal apprenticeships, the curriculum for those Trinidadians and Tobagonians who attended secondary school focused on robust training in Mathematics, Latin, Greek, French, English Language and Literature, English-History, and Geography. Some parents continued to view variations of this classical education as being superior when compared with a technical education or education with a Trinidad and Tobago’s focus (Alleyne, 1996). Subsequent to Alleyne’s classical curriculum observations, curriculum documents and text books with a Caribbean focus emerged. In addition, The Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC) replaced Cambridge University, England as the final evaluator of high school graduates’ examinations.

Although the classical curriculum has a place in the development of human capital, Alleyne (1996) has pointed out that it was not sufficient to educate the population to work in areas, which require both high and low level technical or business skills. Perhaps Alleyne’s observation was based on the three major goals of a classical curriculum: (a) the development of wisdom and virtue (b) the development of mathematics, language, thought, and speech facilitated through classical books, an integrated curriculum, and a focus on ideas, and (c) the notion that classical education is used to preserve and transmit western traditions to the next generation (Kern, 2015). Plaza (2004), has described the focus of technology education as understanding the way humans “create, produce, use, and assess human made artifacts … [it] has a mode of inquiry that focuses on the practices of invention, innovation, and design” (p.16). Alleyne has therefore pointed out that the country required skills to work in: agriculture, business, manufacturing, and the petroleum and petrochemical industries, which have
been the mainstays of the postcolonial Trinidad and Tobago’s economy (Alleyne, 1996). Attempts to address this anomaly are evident in the curriculum changes over the years to meet the changing labour needs of the country (Trinidad & Tobago Ministry of Education, 2004, 2008).

Alleyne (1996) explained that one of the major goals of the first, post-independence education plan (1968-1983) was to provide secondary school placements for all. This plan resulted in the implementation of the controversial Junior Secondary School System. This system operated on a shift basis with two separate schools using the same school building. The morning shift began at 7:30 am and ended at 12:15 pm and the afternoon shift began at 12:30 pm and ended at about 5:30 pm. This shift approach left masses of adolescents without adult supervision for many hours of each school day. Moreover, both teaching time and extra-curricular activities were limited at the Junior Secondary Schools. The social fallout of the Junior Secondary System, led to anti-social behaviours and delinquencies (Alleyne, 1996).

Educational reform, such as instituting the controversial Junior Secondary System or dismantling the transition structure from the primary school, has the potential for future positive or negative reverberations. In fact, the multi-generational fallout of educational reform on the crime rate of a society, whether positively or negatively, should not be underestimated. For instance, the intergenerational effect of comprehensive school reform in Sweden between 1949 and 1962 resulted in a reduction in the crime rate for generations (Meghir, Palme, & Schnabel, 2012). In contrast, the fallout from the implementation of the controversial Junior Secondary System in
Trinidad and Tobago resulted in delinquency (Alleyne, 1996). As such, although parents of working class families in Trinidad and Tobago were happy that their children were finally getting the opportunity to attend secondary school, this opportunity came at a social cost to families and to the entire society (Alleyne, 1996).

In addition to the fallout from the Junior Secondary System, other factors contributed to the social ills during the decades following independence. Given that the classroom is a miniature representation of the wider society, to understand the historical context of the challenges of school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago, one must also examine the wider society. Included in the post-independence events were arguably four major interruptions to human capital development.

First, there was the initial post-independence oil boom in the 1970s, which led to an increased spending in education (Karides, 2013). During the 1980s, however, the sharp drop in oil prices led to governmental austerity measures including mass unemployment, cuts in wages (Ott, 2000), and cuts in budgets for education and social services (Picard, 1996).

Second, in addition to the effects of austerity measures in the 1980s, Trinidad and Tobago had become a transshipment point for the illegal drug trade between South and North America (Ott, 2000). The fallout of this drug trade was devastating to families and, even more so, the youth of the country.

A third disruption relates to the aftermath of the 1990 insurrection, whereby, a radical Muslim group, The Jamaat al Muslimeen led by Yassin Abu Baker, took hostages in the country’s parliament. These hostages included the then prime minister. The
country was therefore in a state of terror for five days. This insurrection led to the destruction of parts of the capital city and resulted in a proliferation of illegal guns and gun related gang activity, entering the country for the first time (Laughlin, 2010). All these events contributed to increased criminal activity in Trinidad and Tobago (Ott, 2000). The possibility for intergenerational reverberations of these events on the current school system cannot be overstated.

Finally, in the decades following independence, there was an outward migration of Trinidad and Tobago’s tertiary level graduates. By 1998, 57.2% of tertiary level graduates left the country, and these graduates included teachers (Reis, 2007). By 2005, 75% of Trinidad and Tobago’s graduates were either studying or living abroad. This brain drain weakened skills, especially in the educational and medical sectors (Reis, 2007).

School Counselling: A Trinidad and Tobago Context

In the 1970s, the mandate for The Central Guidance Unit was to support students who were entering secondary school for the first time. The role of the Unit has since expanded (T&T MOE, 2004). To date, all public school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago work as part of the Student Support Services Division (SSSD), a division of the Ministry of Education. The role of SSSD began on January 29, 2004. Student Support Services Division comprises the former Central Guidance Unit and the former Special Education Unit. Student Support Services Division also includes a school social work component at the primary school level, and other professionals, such as school psychologists (T&T MOE, 2004).
The mandate of the division is to provide holistic supports and services to allow all students to reach their full potential. The Guidance and Counselling component of SSSD is an adaptation of the American School Counselors Association’s Model (Harris, 2013). School counsellors are therefore responsible for academic, career, and personal/social guidance delivered by way of group guidance, counselling, referrals, consulting, information dissemination, and assessment. Overall, the guidance curriculum unifies the guidance program (T&T MOE, 2013).

The Ministry of Education expected students and parents to benefit from programs delivered through SSSD in areas such as peer mediation, career guidance, and adolescent developmental issues. The major objective was to use crisis interventions to ensure that the child stayed in school, with the rationale being that education promotes social inclusion (T&T MOE, 2004). The curriculum also sought to address some of these issues with parents and students through Health and Family Life Education and moral development workshops. The transformed school curriculum also focused on technical and vocational education and the development of life skills (T &T MOE, 2004). With these goals, the roles and expectations of school counsellors seem to be continuously expanding.

This expansion of services hinged on the many social ills, which emerged in the school system. For example, responses to the 2007 Global School-Based Student Health Survey (GSBSHS), for Trinidad and Tobago, revealed that the current prevalence of alcohol use among students is 42.5%. The GSBSHS results were based on surveys completed by 2,969 students, ages 13-15 (Procope-Beckles, 2007). Procope-Beckles
explained that youth misuse of alcohol is a global issue, and this misuse of alcohol can result in developmental issues for adolescents, which can negatively affect the school environment. While alcoholism among the youth can affect the school environment, the above statistics seem staggering for Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, some educators may argue that any inference to a nationwide alcohol problem among the 13 to 15-year-old age group would require further evidence. Nevertheless, since one can infer from the above statistics, that almost 50% of youth ages 13 to 15 have an issue with alcohol, then school counsellors would have to identify and work with these students.

Another concern is truancy. Based on the 2007 GSBSHS, male students (29.1%) are significantly more likely, than female students (17.3%), to miss classes or leave school without permission (Procope-Beckles, 2007). Truancy will result in missed instruction, which can lead to students either dropping out of school or experiencing general academic failure. Truancy also creates the opportunity for anti-social behaviours including the use of drugs or alcohol and engaging in sexual activities.

In fact, the study also showed that some students are engaging in sexual activity at around the age of puberty when their bodies are still developing. Male students were more sexually active than female students (Procope-Beckles, 2007). Once again, school counsellors through the preventative agenda of the guidance curriculum, are expected to use psycho-education to disseminate information on human sexuality, including specific topics such as safe sex, sexually transmitted diseases including HIV/AIDS, unwanted pregnancies, sexual choices, and negotiation and assertiveness training.
Mental health issues among youth continue to be a global struggle (Procope-Beckles, 2007). With respect to mental health issues among students in Trinidad and Tobago, the 2007 study confirmed that in the 13 to 15 year-old age group, 14.7% of females, and 8.2% of males reported that they felt lonely most of the time or always during the past 12 months. Overall, 10.5% of the Trinidad and Tobago students surveyed always felt so worried about something that they could not sleep at night during the past 12 months. Moreover, 21.5% of students felt so sad or hopeless almost every day for two weeks or more in a row during the past 12 months that they stopped doing their usual activities. The study also revealed that 21.5% of females and 14.1% of males reported that they seriously considered attempting suicide during the past 12 months (Procope-Beckles, 2007). The Trinidad and Tobago statistics seem lower than worldwide figures of the GSBSHS, which suggests that approximately 20% of children and adolescents suffer from a disabling mental illness globally (Procope-Beckles). Nevertheless, school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago still have to be skilled and trained to be able to identify and either refer or support students exhibiting symptoms of mental health challenges.

There is recognition by the Ministry of Education that the current situation with respect to school violence is untenable (Kowlessar, 2012). The 2007 GSBSHS for Trinidad and Tobago confirmed that 39.8% of students were physically attacked one or more times during the past 12 months (Procope-Beckles, 2007). Crime and violence in schools have become a national security and health issue and the situation will only get worse if there are no immediate interventions, at a national level (Celestine &

Moreover, over 50% of students involved in school crime and violence in Trinidad and Tobago are afflicted with health problems including “depression; emotional, verbal, or physical abuse; mood disorders; and unresolved grief and loss (caused by witnessing/ experiencing the death of friends or family)” (Celestine & Jefferson, 2013, para. 4) These mental health challenges manifest daily in schools as “unrepressed anger, disrespect for authority, fighting, sexual misconduct, as well as acts of theft and robbery. The often-unseen impacts of these mental health problems are hopelessness, self-harm, suicidal thoughts, and suicidal attempts” (Celestine & Jefferson, 2013, para. 4).

Incidents such as fighting, bullying, and disrespecting authority develop as crises at schools. These crises have the potential to take school counsellors away from their initially identified functions, which include helping students with academic, career, and/or other developmentally related issues (T&T MOE, 2004). Moreover, time spent on these crises may also affect the counsellor’s ability to complete the preventative and developmental interventions of the guidance curriculum. It should also be noted that one disruptive child in a classroom could potentially affect the entire class.

Given that, 25% of the school population is at risk for failing in the system in Trinidad and Tobago (T&T MOE, 2004); school counsellors have the added responsibility to find ways to circumvent crises in this population, while maintaining the quality of service to the remaining 75%. This challenge becomes more acute since the movement to promote social inclusion translated into providing access to the regular
public education system for every child, regardless of their intellectual capacity (T&T MOE, 2004).

For the school year, 2013-2014, more school counsellors entered the system to reduce the incidence of problem behaviours, particularly at the secondary school level. It is projected that health and safety officers will also service all public secondary schools. Educational, behavioural, and clinical psychologists will also be available on a daily basis to work with students who have difficulties, and who have exhibited deviant and dysfunctional behaviours (Kowlessar, 2012) such as fighting, bullying, or disrespecting authority (Celestine & Jefferson, 2013). These issues add to the credence and timeliness of this study: to ascertain the challenging experiences and coping strategies of school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago and their perceptions of how their service delivery affected students and the wider school body during the challenging experiences.

**Burnout in the International School Counselling Context**

Given that there has been no previous research on Trinidad and Tobago school counsellors’ challenges, coping strategies, and perceptions of service delivery during challenging periods, the following review of available literature in other countries may provide some insights into this phenomenon. The review therefore begins with burnout in the school counselling context.

School counsellors have an obligation to preserve and maintain their own wellness (Evans & Payne, 2008), as well as legal and ethical obligations to those that
they serve (CCPA, 2010). In fact, the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association’s (CCPA) Code of Ethics (2010), mandates that “counsellors maintain high standards of professional competence and ethical behaviour, and recognize the need for continuing education and personal care in order to meet this responsibility” (CCPA, 2010, p. 8). Implicit in this description is the assumption that failure to manage personal care may result in some level of impairment including compassion fatigue, burnout, and distress (Figley, 1995; Maslach, 1993; Yassen, 1995).

More and more studies are revealing that burnout has become a challenge for the school counselling profession. In fact, 66% of 414 North Carolina’s public middle school counsellors reported high levels of emotional exhaustion, and 77% reported a moderate to high level of depersonalization (Stephan, 2005). Similarly, Wachter (2006) found that most of the school counsellors in another sample from North Carolina showed warning signs of burnout and 20% met the criteria for burnout. Moreover, continuous burnout can result in serious counsellor impairment (Lee et al., 2010). Moyer (2011) explained that burnout can lead to (a) low energy levels, (b) decreased resistance to illnesses, (c) pervasive feelings of pessimism and dissatisfaction, and (d) increased absenteeism rates. Furthermore, if a counsellor’s quality of work is below the acceptable standard and there are general feelings of depersonalization in interpersonal relationships, this counsellor may probably be exhibiting symptoms of burnout (Moyer, 2011).

In a phenomenological study, Sheffield and Baker (2005) explored how three female school counsellors from North Carolina felt when they experienced burnout at
different times in their careers. The counsellors reported having intense feelings of “frustration, boredom, incompetence, uselessness, lacking control and hopelessness” (Sheffield & Baker, 2005, p. 181).

In addition, the counsellors highlighted general feelings of “not doing any good for anybody … cutting students short, feeling inferior in every way, incompetent, unhelpful, not being able to solve the kinds of issues that were being presented, and even feeling a sense of dread” (Sheffield & Baker, 2005, p. 182). School counsellors also reported on their attitudes during the episodes of burnout. These attitudes included seeking other employment, not for advancement or for better financial security, but instead to ease the pain of burnout. Continuous thoughts of giving up and leaving consumed the counsellors and all three reported that they were just going through the motions at work. One counsellor reported “[you] get to the point where it is no longer fun coming to work or when you are just tired and you … shut the door and don’t want to deal with anyone, and that is when you are experiencing burnout” (Sheffield & Baker, 2005, p. 182). The general impression suggested that the counsellors did not feel that they were delivering the kind of program that they first envisaged or that they knew they were capable of delivering.

Compassion fatigue, or the gradual de-sensitisation to compassion, sympathy, or empathy over an extended period, is another hazard of care-giving professions (Figley, 1995). Compassion fatigue may also result when educators are overwhelmingly involved in traumatizing experiences of students or their families (Robinson, 2005). Burnout is perhaps as debilitating as compassion fatigue since it is manifested as
emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment (Maslach, 1993). Avoiding emotional exhaustion is particularly important because emotional exhaustion is the major cause of burnout (Wheeler, Vassar, Worley, & Barnes, 2011). Moreover, emotional exhaustion renders the counsellor incapable of engaging with clients (Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001).

A Counsellor Burnout Typology.

In attempting to identify predictable qualities in counsellors who succumbed to burnout, Lee, Cho, Kissinger, and Ogle (2010) studied 132 counsellors from the South Eastern region of the United States, of which 43.2% were school counsellors. They found clear “patterns of counsellor burnout that differentially influence counsellors’ self-esteem, job satisfaction, and locus of control” (p.135). Encouragingly, the most common grouping was the “well-adjusted counsellors” who scored the lowest on depersonalization and emotional exhaustion and the highest on personal accomplishment and job satisfaction. These counsellors also reported the second highest level of income.

The second cluster of counsellors reported average scores on exhaustion, a negative work environment, deterioration in personal life, and relatively high incompetence and high devaluing client scores. Their classification was “disconnected counsellors.” Although disconnected counsellors did not appear to be experiencing excessive exhaustion or significant deterioration in their personal lives, they reported the lowest income, lowest job satisfaction, and the worst self-esteem (Lee, Cho, Kissinger, & Ogle, 2010).
The final cluster, the “persevering counsellors,” was characterized by high exhaustion, a negative work environment, deterioration in personal life, and moderate to low scores on the incompetence and devaluing client’s subscale. Lee et al. (2010) pointed out that despite being dissatisfied with their jobs, these counsellors reported the highest income, more counselling experience, and the most positive self-esteem. While acknowledging limitations to generalizability, Lee et al. argued that if counsellors were to understand their typology, it might assist in taking preventative or curative steps with respect to burnout. In summary, burnout appears to be ameliorated to some extent by job satisfaction, personal accomplishment, and competence. Nevertheless, it is clear that burnout is a debilitating challenge for school counsellors and as such, a close examination of the causes of burnout among school counsellors is critical.

Causes of School Counsellors’ Burnout

School counsellors work in very dynamic environments and they are vulnerable to burnout and distress from a number of areas. The following are explications of the causes of burnout for school counsellors starting with inadequate supervision.

Inadequate supervision. Most organizations ensure that personnel at one level of the organization receive supervision from another level (Miles, Snow, & Charles, 2003). For school counsellors, however, many function without having the benefit of supervision. This lack of supervision is a significant predictor of burnout (Moyer, 2011). Moyer surveyed 382 school counsellors in Texas, USA. She found that 77% of the participants received only one hour of supervision per month, and many school counsellors reported not receiving any supervision at all since graduating. Increased supervision would alleviate the feelings of
incompetence, the lack of compassion, the frustration felt by school counsellors, and, by extension, reduce the chances for burnout (Moyer, 2011).

Similarly, Lambie (2007) surveyed 218 ASCA registered school counsellors and suggested that, “supervision may serve as an effective form of occupational support to combat burnout” (p.86). In addition, McMahon and Patton (2000) interviewed 51 school guidance personnel in Queensland, Australia and confirmed that supervision provides many benefits. In their study, these benefits included alleviating isolation, receiving support, accountability, debriefing, skill development, and personal development.

**Role conflict and ambiguity.** One way that supervision addresses burnout is by lending support for the roles that are appropriate for school counsellors (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006). Moyer (2011) explained that time spent on tasks outside of counselling was a significant predictor of school counsellors’ burnout. Over 50% of the participants reported that they spent 10 or more hours per week on tasks not related to their training and 74% reported spending more than five hours per week on those tasks. Exhaustion and incompetence increased as non-related tasks increased, and increased exhaustion and incompetence led to reduced empathy towards students and negative feelings at work and away from work. Stephan (2005) also reported that an increase in role ambiguity led to an increase in role conflict, and this increase in role conflict led to emotional exhaustion and negative views of the school.

Similarly, Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, and Solomon (2005) administered the Role Questionnaire (Rizzo, House, & Lirtzman, 1970) to 512 American school counsellors. The incongruence of counsellors’ expectations at graduation, and
what they actually encountered in the schools was the single most significant predictor of distress. Culbreth et al. (2005) argued that the internship period ought to have given school counsellors a real world experience, and that counsellor educators have a role in discussing the differences between the ideal and the real world. Moreover, efforts to define the appropriate roles of school counsellors have led to decades of struggles (Vaughn, Bynum, & Hooten, 2007). Three major questions, arguably, highlight the struggles to define the roles of school counsellors: (a) Is school counselling an extension of the school’s administration (Ross & Herrington, 2006)? (b) Should school counsellors be regular classroom teachers (Grant, 1960; Ivey & Robin, 1966; Pruffer, 1914; & Watley, 1965)? (c) Should school counselling emphasize an academic or a mental health focus (Martin, 2002; Perkins, Oescher, & Ballard, 2010)?

To understand how stakeholders rank the roles of the counsellors, Perkins, Oescher, and Ballard (2010) surveyed 353 key personnel from the United States about their perceptions of school counsellors’ roles. These personnel included elementary school counsellors, school principals, schoolteachers, and counsellor educators. The results revealed that the personal/social domain fell into the most important rating, by all stakeholders, this rating just missing the extremely important rating by .06 points. The academic counselling rated somewhat important and career counselling rated neutral. Based on their findings, Perkins et al., have suggested that “school counselors have certainly distanced themselves from the ‘guidance counselors’ of the past whose primary focus was on academic and career counseling” (p. 16).
This distancing from the past has highlighted another struggle for the American school counsellors. Perkins et al. (2010) have confirmed that both the American Counselor Association (ACA) and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES) currently view the school counsellor’s role as a mental health specialist. In contrast, ASCA continues to include academic and career counselling as domains for school counsellors (Perkins et al., 2010). Moreover, principals and teachers have accepted ASCA’s position and not the position of ACA or ACES. Perkins et al. have suggested that this incongruence between those who train school counsellors (counsellor educators) and those with whom the counsellors interact within the schools (teachers and principals) could lead to role conflict, with principals and counsellors having different expectations in the real world.

To understand the differences in perceptions between administration and school counsellors, with respect to the role of the school counsellor, Ross and Herrington, (2006) administered The Public School Counselor Role Ambiguity Questionnaire. This questionnaire was administered to 225 graduate candidates enrolled in principal preparation programs, and 309 counsellors enrolled in counsellor education programs in Texas, USA. The researchers asserted that the relationship between principal and counsellor is a complex one. As such, counsellors need to educate principals on the dangers of role drift and principals need to understand the boundaries of the counsellor’s role. This is significant as schools are very dynamic environments, and school counsellors’ priorities could easily shift in response to principals’ demands (Ross & Herrington, 2006).
With regard to shifting priorities, Ross and Herrington (2006) also explained that the principal could always call on school counsellors to manage unpredictable daily emergencies. Moreover, counsellors’ responsibilities may fluctuate with each emergency. Ross and Herrington referred to these fluctuations as counsellor role drift. With these unpredictable demands on the counsellors’ time, the counsellors engage in unrealistic roles of being everything to everyone, which results in work overload, frustration, and burnout. The counsellors themselves could unwittingly facilitate these results because when they engage in role drifts, whether consciously or unconsciously; teachers, principals, students, parents, and other staff begin to devalue the counsellor’s special training and the counsellor’s goals for the school (Ross & Herrington, 2006).

Given that school counsellors work in three very broad and open ended areas: personal/s social, academic, and career guidance and counselling, counsellors’ conception of their roles may also contribute to counsellor role drift. Brott and Myers (1999) argued that “the development of a professional school counselor identity … serves as a frame of reference for carrying out work roles, making significant decisions, and developing as a professional” (p.339). They further argued that school counsellors may be better equipped to determine their roles for providing services to students and the wider school community, “if the meaning-making framework in professional identity development … [of] school counselors … [is understood]” (Brott & Myers, 1999, p. 339). This suggestion may be useful for both counsellor educators and the counsellors themselves.
In their grounded theory study, Brott and Myers (1999) interviewed 10 school counsellors. Three of these counsellors were from the Caribbean. The remaining seven counsellors were from the United States. The results revealed that the basic problem was that counsellors needed personal guidelines to carry out their professional roles, and these personal guidelines focussed on the self-conceptualization of their roles as school counsellors. The role conception of these counsellors were influenced by a blending of (a) years of experience and knowledge of what was done before (b) whether working alone or sharing responsibilities with a co-counsellor and (c) the population being served and the expectations of administration. In general, role conceptualization is a process and not an outcome. The process begins in training and continues throughout one’s career (Brott & Myers, 1999).

Furthermore, Bardhoshi and Duncan (2009) surveyed 538 K-12 principals from rural South Dakota, USA about their perceptions of school counsellors’ roles. In order of importance the principals identified (a) crisis counselling; (b) peer relationships; (c) coping strategies and effective coping skills; (d) individual counselling; (e) assisting school principal with identifying and resolving student issues, needs, and problems; and (f) consultation, collaboration, and teaming as the order of importance of school counsellors’ roles. These roles seem to focus on the personal/social issues (Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009), which are more in line with ACES’ view of the school counsellor as a mental health specialist (Perkins et al. 2010). School counsellors are, however, responsible for a comprehensive developmental approach, which includes academic and career counselling (Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009).
In addition, Amatea and Clark (2005) interviewed 26 Floridian school administrators; although the school principals prioritized roles differently based on school level, the principals’ responses were generally in keeping with ASCA’s recommendations in four major areas. These areas include (a) the innovative leader, (b) the collaborative case consultant, (c) the responsive direct service provider, and (d) the administration team player. Principals in training in Chata and Loesch’s (2007) study also identified roles that were in keeping with ASCA’s recommendations. In their survey of 244 principals registered with the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) in the United States, participants were able to identify school counsellors’ roles. The authors suggested that this identification signifies that the principals have accepted the ASCA model.

Moreover, in Bardhoshi and Duncan’s (2009) previously mentioned study, while principals were able to identify some appropriate roles, they also identified inappropriate roles such as administering achievement tests, as appropriate roles for school counsellors. In addition, Kirchner and Stetchfield (2005) surveyed 42 administrators and 23 school counsellors from Tacoma, Washington, USA. The survey comprised both role-congruent statements and role-incongruent statements. While both groups almost equally, and appropriately, identified the role-congruent statements, the administrators were more likely to identify role-incongruent statements. These results suggest that administrators still identify inappropriate roles as appropriate roles for school counsellors. As such, although administrators are more aware of the general roles of school counsellors, identification and clarification of gaps in their understanding
of these roles may have to be an ongoing process (Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009).

Based on the above discourse, the struggles for American school counsellors appear to be two-fold. First, there seems to be incongruence between counsellor educators’ views of the role of the school counsellor when compared with the views of principals and teachers (Bardhoshi & Duncan, 2009). Second, while the principals in these studies seem to have accepted the ASCA model, some principals still perceived inappropriate roles as appropriate. These struggles could lead to barriers with respect to the principal-counsellor relationship. In fact, Finkelstein (2009) surveyed 343 principals and 1,957 counsellors from across the United States, and the areas with the potential to create the greatest barriers to the counsellor-principal relationship were identified as communication, respect, collaboration, and having a shared vision. Communication and respect were, however, the two most important components of the relationship.

**Case-loads: Counsellor to student ratios.** Another challenging area for school counsellors is workload and the ratio of students to counsellors. The American School Counsellors Association’s recommended ratio is 250 students to one counsellor. In the academic year 2008-2009, ASCA’s latest available statistics, 11 states reported ratios in excess of 500 students per counsellor. In fact, only five states reported within the recommended ratios (ASCA, 2010).

There is, however, some evidence that high ratios negatively affect school counsellors’ performance. Specifically, McCarthy, Van Horn Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, and Guzman (2010) identified frustration as a major theme among school counsellors who work with large caseloads and who found it challenging to meet all the needs of all
the students in their charge. In contrast, Moyer’s (2011) previously described study of burnout in school counsellors in the United States did not reveal a significant amount of variance with respect to students to counsellor ratios. These results seem to contrast with McCarthy et al.’s (2010) findings regarding frustration and being overwhelmed. On the one hand, McCarthy et al. confirmed that school counsellors reported paper work and students to counsellor ratios as the two items that were very to extremely demanding on the Classroom Appraisal of Resources and Demands (CARD-SC) scale. On the other hand, Moyer chose not to discuss the aspect of students to counsellor ratios because it did not account for a significant amount of variance in her study. The existence of these conflicting findings on the effect of caseloads on school counsellor burnout suggests the need for further research in this area.

**Precarious employment.** Another potential contributor to stress and burnout emerges when school counsellors are in precarious employment situations, such as working on year-to-year contracts, or part-time employment. Harris’ (2009) phenomenological study of eight school counsellors working in England reveals how precarious employment can affect school counsellors. These counsellors were part-time employees based on whether their respective school principals had sufficient funding available. One counsellor reported that at the end of a school year it was difficult to ascertain if that was the end of the contract. Not knowing what to expect in the near future, or how and if to end relationships with the students, was frustrating and stressful. Another counsellor reported, “I was doing either 2 1/2 or 2 days a week. It varied. If she [the principal] had extra money she’d ask me to do a term with an extra ½ day.
She’d have me seeing 15 children [per day]” (Harris, 2009, p.176). It is not surprising that the principals made huge demands on the counsellors for the hours of paid service. Nevertheless, the resulting precarious employment situation and work overload were clearly sources of distress for these participants.

**Demands, resources, and general job stress.** The demands of student-to-counsellor ratios and precarious employment are only two of the many overwhelming aspects of life for some school counsellors. Indeed, in Harris’ (2009) study, what added to counsellors’ frustration and stress is that they received very little in the way of resources, and their offices were often makeshift spaces that were inappropriate for counselling. Similarly, McCarthy, Van Horn Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, and Guzman (2010) surveyed 227 school counsellors from Texas, USA and found that “paperwork requirements, caseload size, daily program and administrative disruptions, school-wide testing and students with behaviour problems were the most demanding aspects of their jobs” (p. 146). At least 50% of the sample found the resources to be inadequate.

To obtain a better understanding of the demands placed on school counsellors, Falls and Nichter (2007) conducted a phenomenological study of four school counsellors from two urban high schools in South Western United States. The first theme to emerge was general job stress, which involved high demands from principals, teachers, parents, and students. These demands left the counsellors with very little control over their time. Changing district and federal policies left counsellors feeling stressed and frustrated. Generally, the counsellors reported feeling frustrated at having to implement new and insufficiently tested educational policies, which usually led to more turmoil.
For example, one counsellor questioned how much thought went into the No Child Left
Behind Act (2001) before its implementation. General stress and frustration also
emanated from having school counsellors located in administration, as students
associated the counsellors with the disciplinary team.

The second theme of Falls and Nichter’s (2007) study was role ambiguity. All
the counsellors in their study confirmed that their graduate training prepared them for
ASCA’s counselling requirements, but not for the demands and stress generated by the
clerical and administrative duties assigned in the real world. Role conflict, or the
continuous demands on the counsellors for the simultaneous completion of paper tasks,
was the third theme to emerge. Moreover, multiple tasks given simultaneously with
unrealistic demands meant that attending to one task led to not meeting the deadline for
the others. These counsellors also seem to, appropriately, attend to services to people
before attending to paper tasks. However, having to set aside already urgent paper
tasks to attend to parents or students added to counsellors’ anxieties and chronic stress
(Falls and Nichter, 2007).

The final theme involved work overload. All the counsellors reported that there
was too much work for the time allotted, the energy expended, and the support provided.
They also reported that work overload was a great source of chronic stress. The average
counsellor-to-student ratio in this study was 450 students per counsellor. Both new and
experienced counsellors reported that they felt stressed on a daily basis, and this stress
hinged on all that they did not accomplish. The apparent lack of support from their
administrators added to the school counsellors’ stress, as administrators continued to add
duties to the counsellors’ role without attempting to find out how they were coping (Falls & Nichter, 2007).

Finally, in another study of 1,280 counsellors from Florida, USA, Baggerly and Osborn (2006) found that counsellors experience chronic stress and job dissatisfaction when the roles are outside of ASCA’s recommendations. In fact, “Stress was found to be a negative predictor of career satisfaction and commitment for all school counselor respondents” (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006, Internal and External Motivational Factors, para, 2).

**Self-esteem, perfectionism, and coping styles.** Based on a study of 533 school counsellors from the USA, Butler and Constantine (2005) found that higher collective self-esteem, or the way school counsellors see themselves as part of a professional group, was generally associated with lower professional burnout. Furthermore, school counsellors employed in their roles for 20 years or longer reported higher levels of depersonalization than did their counterparts working fewer than 10 years. Counsellors with more than 30 years of experience reported fewer feelings of personal accomplishment when compared with their counterparts with fewer years of service.

Notwithstanding the perceived lower levels of personal accomplishment, school counsellors employed for longer periods also had well-established collegial relationships with a range of educators, and support from these educators may have acted as a buffer to emotional exhaustion and depersonalization (Butler & Constantine, 2005). Although there were “several significant, but very small, statistical effects regarding the relationship between components of collective self-esteem and burnout” (Butler &
Constantine, 2005, p. 59), higher private collective self-esteem was associated with greater feelings of personal accomplishment. It appears that school counsellors’ views of their social group membership might represent vital aspects of how they perceive themselves, both professionally and personally, and these views could act as a buffer against burnout (Butler & Constantine, 2005).

In addition to collective self-esteem, Adlerian lifestyle themes (perfectionism, self-esteem, age, level of service, and years of experience) may also affect school counsellors’ burnout. Watcher, Clemens, and Lewis (2008) surveyed 249 practicing school counsellors from one Mid-Western state of the United States. The study examined how Adlerian lifestyle themes affect school counsellors’ burnout. The results revealed a positive association between self-esteem and burnout, but a negative association between perfectionism and burnout. The authors argued that perfectionists have very low tolerance for role conflict and ambiguity. These counsellors therefore insist on having clear directions before they engage in their roles as school counsellors, and this may be what protects them from burnout. Measurement of the remaining lifestyle themes did not produce statistically significant relationships to burnout (Watcher, et al., 2008).

Finally, Wilkerson (2009) surveyed 198 American school counsellors and found that emotional-oriented coping was a statistically significant intrapersonal predictor of burnout. There was also a positive correlation between avoidance-oriented coping and personal accomplishment and a strong association between task-oriented coping and higher levels of personal accomplishment. Stephan (2005) argued, however, that with
the higher levels of personal accomplishment, task-oriented rural school counsellors from North Carolina, United States, distanced themselves emotionally from their students. Since self-efficacy is positively related to depersonalization as “very high expectations of oneself contribute to burnout” (Stephan, 2005, p.2), one wonders if the personal accomplishment resulting from avoidance-oriented coping was also at the expense of forming and maintaining relationships with students.

Section Summary: Burnout and School Counsellors.

In summary, while there are no known studies on challenges and self-care for Trinidad and Tobago school counsellors, exploring the causes and symptoms of burnout in other cultures provides some understanding of this phenomenon. The experience of burnout is prevalent in the school counselling profession, and it is often the result of numerous challenging experiences. These experiences include (a) inadequate supervision (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006; Lambie, 2007; McMahon & Patton, 2000; & Moyer, 2011); (b) role conflict and ambiguity (Falls & Nichter, 2007; Vaughn, Bynum & Hooten, 2007); (c) heavy caseloads (Baggerly & Osborn, 200 & Falls & Nichter, 2007); (d) job insecurity (Harris, 2009); (e) increased demands combined with decreasing resources (McCarthy et al., 2010); and (f) collective self-esteem (Watcher, Clemens, and Lewis, 2008).

Burnout is a challenge that can affect the occupational, environmental, spiritual, emotional, physical, social/interpersonal, and intellectual wellness of the counsellor. To understand the potential impairments of counsellors who are experiencing burnout and stress, it is necessary to examine the continuum of wellness. On this continuum,
counsellors could move along the four states on the continuum of wellness and these states are: “well, stressed, distressed, and impaired” (Lawson, Venart, Hazler & Kottler, 2007, p13).

**Potential Challenges of School Counsellors**

All counsellors have the potential to be well or to be impaired, and these are the two ends of the continuum of wellness (Lawson, Venart, Hazler, & Kottler, 2007). Lawson et al. encouraged counsellors to strive for wellness and to understand and identify where they are on the continuum, with the goal being to return to a state of wellness when one observes overwhelming stressors. Well counsellors enjoy balance in the domains of wellness: physical, emotional, social, spiritual, and intellectual. They also enjoy work/life balance and function with a high level of competence.

Counsellors who experience stressors in one or two areas of their lives are able to separate issues and as such, they continue to work competently. Distressed counsellors, however, will find it challenging to be present in the counselling sessions and so they will accommodate distractions such as accepting telephone calls. On the far end of the continuum are impaired counsellors. These counsellors will use their clients to satisfy their own needs and they may lack the capacity to connect and empathise with their clients. These counsellors also have the potential to be in breach of ethical codes or the law (Lawson, et al, 2007).

In addition, burnout and other work-related stress may lead counsellors to experience distress (Yassen, 1995). Yassen admonished, however, that counsellors must manage those stress responses before they develop into a disorder. Nevertheless,
while the discussion of stressors and their respective symptoms are separate, the self is indivisible (Myers & Sweeney, 2005) and the artificial separation of stressors in this literature review is to enhance understanding. Based on Yassen’s (1995) Stress Reaction Inventory, the following is an explication of how different kinds of stress symptoms may affect school counsellors’ ability to function.

**Potential Stress Symptoms Related to Yassen’s (1995) Stress Reaction Inventory**

**Cognitive symptoms.** Symptoms of cognitive stress include confusion, diminished concentration, apathy, rigidity, self-doubt, perfectionism, and poor decision-making (Yassen, 1995). School counsellors need to maintain a high level of cognitive functioning as they are constantly making professional judgments and decisions that directly affect the lives of students; therefore, poor or inappropriate judgments could have negative consequences. For example, reduced cognitive functioning could cause the school counsellor to miss critical information or clues such as students’ suicidal ideations (Christianson & Everall, 2009). Given the life-threatening nature of this issue, counsellors need to have optimal cognitive functioning when encountering these youth.

Professional judgment is also crucial in making decisions when a situation creates conflict between legal and ethical principles. For example, in the American case of Woodlock v. Orange Ulster (2006/2008), while the school counsellor advocated for her student, she did so outside of the law. The school counsellor lost both the case and the appeal and was dismissed (Stone & Zirkel, 2010; U.S. Court of Appeal, 2008). Since school counsellors work in very dynamic environments, optimal cognitive
functioning is critical in every decision that they make.

**Emotional symptoms.** With respect to symptoms of emotional stress, the counsellor may feel sad, helpless, powerless, anxious, angry, guilty, numb, depressed, hyper-sensitive, overwhelmed, panicked, and depleted (Yassen, 1995). If counsellors are experiencing symptoms of emotional stress, it may be difficult to identify “where clients’ issues end and theirs begin … [especially since] fear, anxiety, rage, despair, and alienation are epidemic in our stressful world” (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007, pp. 54-55). Furthermore, school counsellors are leaders and role models (Martin, 2002) and, as such, emotional stress, including feelings of powerlessness, may render them incapable of functioning, especially in positions of leadership and advocacy.

**Behavioural symptoms.** Behavioural stress symptoms include impatience, irritability, withdrawing, being prone to accidents, sleep deprivation, changes in appetite, and moodiness. Counsellors may also use negative coping behaviours such as smoking, drinking alcohol, or using other substances (Yassen, 1995).

**Spiritual symptoms.** With respect to symptoms of spiritual stress, counsellors may experience a loss of purpose, lack of self-satisfaction, pervasive hopelessness, boredom, and loss of faith in a higher power (Yassen, 1995). Martin (2002) explained that based on a nationwide survey of school counsellors in the United States, some respondents developed apathy and lack of interest in the future of their students. Similarly, those counsellors who are experiencing mid-life challenges asked themselves the following questions:
What is a person like me doing in a place like this? Should I be retraining to do something different? Am I effective at what I do? When will I ever be appreciated for all the hard work I do and am doing daily? Do my principal, students, parents, and teachers even know what I do? Do they even care? (Martin, 2002, p. 151)

Although these questions promote self-reflection, the potential symptoms of spiritual stress also highlight the need for self-care.

**Interpersonal symptoms.** Interpersonal stress symptoms may result in counsellors experiencing withdrawal, decreased interest in intimacy, mistrust, loneliness, and increased interpersonal conflicts (Yass, 1995). School counsellors are collaborators; they work with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the wider school community in an atmosphere of professionalism and trust (Martin, 2002). Kee Low (2009) added that the only way students would voluntarily use the counselling services is if they became familiar with the school counsellor. Kee Low (2009) also cautioned that, because teachers make up the largest group of professionals in a school, their cooperation is necessary for the successful implementation of the guidance and counselling program. In addition, Fox and Butler (2007) surveyed 415 students in five secondary schools in England, and their results pointed to the importance of the counsellor reaching out to the students as an effective way to encourage students to make use of the counselling services. Nevertheless, despite the importance of reaching out to teachers, some school counsellors experience relational difficulties with other staff members (Kee Low, 2009).
Interpersonal conflicts with other stakeholders in education are likely to interfere with a school counsellor’s work, as 99% of a sample of 245 school counsellors from North Carolina, USA reported that they have weekly consultations with teachers and administrators. In addition, 97% reported that they attend to family issues on a weekly or monthly basis and 97% reported involvement in crisis and conflict resolution weekly or monthly (Kendrick, Chandler, & Hatcher, 1994).

**Physical symptoms.** Symptoms of physical stress include increased aches and pains, fatigue, chest pains, elevated blood pressure, headaches, and visual difficulties (Yassen, 1995). Venart, Vassos, and Pitcher-Heft (2007) explained that the body usually sends warning signs, and ignoring these warning signs results in physical distress. For example, ignoring hunger pangs and working through lunch hours, or working late in an effort to pay attention to others is usually to the counsellor’s peril. Staying aware of body signals is important because tuning in to one’s body will allow counsellors to monitor their own needs, the needs of their clients, and the therapeutic relationship (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007).

Although there are no available studies on the impact of physical distress on school counsellors, the American Institute for Stress (2010) reported that approximately one million workers are absent everyday due to stress. One may therefore surmise that physical distress may affect school counsellors’ absenteeism/presenteeism, tardiness, leaving school early, or taking early retirement. Nevertheless, physical ailment solidifies another reason for counsellor-self-care.
Section summary: Potential impairments experienced by school counsellors.

In summary, all counsellors have the potential to be well or to be impaired. Lawson et al. (2007) encourage counsellors to manage stressors and to strive to stay in the well domain of the continuum of wellness: being well, stressed, distressed, and impaired. Managing stress is critical as burnout and other work-related stressors may lead counsellors to experience cognitive, emotional, spiritual, physical and social/interpersonal/behavioural distress (Yassen, 1995). Since there is no research on challenges and self-care for Trinidad and Tobago school counsellors, exploring the causes and symptoms of burnout in other cultures such as Australia, Canada, England, New Zealand, Turkey, and the United States, provided the basis for understanding this phenomenon.

While the various descriptions of the above stress symptoms are presented separately, the self is indivisible (Myers & Sweeney, 2007) and the separation of symptoms is only for clarity. Nevertheless, given that school counsellors may succumb to symptoms of distress, and there are no known studies on Trinidad and Tobago school counsellors’ wellness needs, the following explores self-care and wellness in counsellors from other cultures.

Self-care and Wellness in Counsellors

The following introduces the components, descriptions, and concepts of counsellor wellness. Roscoe’s seven dimensional components of wellness, the framework used for this study, are also discussed.
Components of wellness. Wellness is the view that the mind, the body, and the spirit are inseparable, impact on one another, and they are all important for a person’s well-being (Myers & Sweeney, 2007). Wellness is also a choice to take personal responsibility for one’s wellbeing (Ardell, 2010), and therefore wellness connotes taking a preventative approach (Lawson & Myers, 2011). Wellness is also on a “continuum of well, stressed, distressed, and impaired” (Lawson, Venart, Hazler, & Kottler, 2007, p13). Lawson and Myers added that compassion satisfaction, described as the joy experienced in doing good work, also contributes to counsellors’ wellness. Wellness is also functioning at one’s full spiritual, physical, emotional, social, and intellectual abilities (Dunn, 1977; Greenberg, 1985).

Palombi’s (1992) foundational definition of wellness. Palombi (1992) credited the foundational theoretical framework for wellness to the theories of Ardell (1977, 1982), Hettler (1980), Hinds (1983), Jourard (1963), Maslow (1968), Travis (1981), and Travis and Ryan (1983). Based on the work of these foundational theorists, Palombi described wellness as:

a lifestyle in which the individual assumes an active role in determining his or her level of wellness. A lifetime process with no definite end or beginning, the purpose of wellness is to increase the likelihood of healthier personality growth and to decrease the possibility of mental illness, physical illness, or both. (p. 17)

Concepts of wellness. In a recent review of existing models of wellness, Roscoe (2009) proposed that there are four shared concepts that appear consistently in the wellness literature. First, “both wellness and illness are needed to define the other:
without illness there would be no concept of wellness” (Roscoe, 2009, p. 217). Second, wellness is the complex, integrated, and interactive functioning of various dimensions of the self. Each dimension forms an integral part of the functioning and no one dimension is greater, lesser, or operates independently from the others. The wellness approach is therefore holistic and includes both the person and the environment. Third, wellness connotes the necessity of balance among the dimensions, which calls for self-responsibility and self-motivation. Finally, wellness is a continuous process and not an end state.

**Roscoe’s (2009) definition of wellness.** Many models of wellness include five similar components: social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual wellness (Roscoe, 2009). Roscoe suggested, however, that while environmental and occupational wellness are less frequently cited in the literature, these dimensions form additional crucial parts of a comprehensive wellness model. She further stated that occupational wellness and environmental wellness are distinct enough from the other dimensions to form separate dimensions. Moreover, the importance of environment (particularly work/life balance) to a person’s wellbeing adds to the credence of environment being a separate dimension. Similarly, a person’s occupation also contributes to one’s quality of life and identity and therefore ought to be included as a separate dimension. Roscoe therefore concluded that environmental wellness and occupational wellness are critical components of any holistic model of wellness.

Roscoe (2009) further explained that while spiritual wellness is a separate dimension, spiritual wellness could also be the pivotal point from which the other
dimensions emerge. Roscoe’s comprehensive holistic definition of wellness therefore comprises seven dimensions: occupational, environmental, spiritual, emotional, physical, social/interpersonal, and intellectual. Roscoe surveyed and integrated wellness concepts spanning over 40 years to derive the following definitions, which I will use as my framework for understanding wellness in the present study.

**Roscoe’s (2009) Seven Dimensional Model: The Framework for This Study**

My selection of Roscoe’s (2009) seven dimensional model for this study was based on my research question: What are school counsellors’ challenges, coping strategies, and counsellors’ perceptions of their service delivery during challenging experiences? Based on this research question, Roscoe’s inclusion of occupational and environmental wellness seems more aligned with the goals of my research study when compared with other models. Other models focus on fewer components of wellness or occupational and environmental wellness form parts of other dimensions.

**Occupational wellness.** Roscoe integrated the concepts of occupational wellness as follows:

Occupational wellness is the extent to which one can express individual values and gain personal satisfaction and enrichment from paid and nonpaid work; one’s attitude toward work and ability to balance several roles; and the ways in which one can use skills and abilities to contribute to the community. (Roscoe, 2009, p. 221)
Environmental wellness. The following is Roscoe’s (2009) integrated definition of environmental wellness:

Environmental wellness is the balance between home and work life, as well as the recognition of the individual’s impact on that environment. It is the reciprocal relationship between the environment and the individual in various roles and the individual’s relationship with nature and community resources. It includes one’s effort to improve the environment and community, as well as the extent of the control one has over that environment. (p.221)

Spiritual wellness. Roscoe (2009) explained that spiritual wellness seem to be the most surveyed aspect of wellness in the literature. Based on previous models, Roscoe provided the following integrated description of spiritual wellness:

Spiritual wellness is the innate and continual process of finding meaning and purpose in life, while accepting and transcending one’s place in the complex and interrelated universe. Spiritual wellness is a shared connection or community with others, nature, the universe, and a higher power. Additionally, spiritual wellness is the development of values and a personal belief system. (p. 220)

Emotional/psychological wellness. The following is Roscoe’s (2009) integrated description of emotional wellness:

Emotional wellness is generally conceptualized as awareness and control of feelings, as well as a realistic, positive, and developmental view of the self, conflict, and life circumstances. Common themes of emotional wellness are
one’s attitudes and beliefs toward the self and life (e.g., a positive and realistic self-concept, identity, and amount of self-esteem) and the awareness and constructive handling of feelings. An integrated conceptualization of emotional wellness includes the capability to manage one’s feelings and to act accordingly, along with the realistic assessment of one’s limitations. Emotional wellness is the ability to act autonomously and cope with stress, and the capacity to have fulfilling relationships with others. In sum, emotional wellness is an awareness and acceptance of feelings, as well as a positive attitude about life, oneself, and the future. (p. 218)

**Physical wellness.** Roscoe’s integrated definition of physical wellness is as follows:

Physical wellness is the active and continuous effort to maintain the optimum level of physical activity and focus on nutrition, as well as self-care and maintaining healthy lifestyle choices (e.g., use of medical services, preventative health measures, abstinence from drugs and excessive alcohol use, safe sex practices). Physical wellness also includes the perception and expectation of wellness, as well as the acceptance of one’s physical state (e.g., body image, disability). The definition focuses on an individual moving toward personal potential without comparing his or her progress with that of others, thus allowing for individual variation and circumstances. For example, an individual with a physical disability can be considered to be well by moving toward his or her own personal optimal level. (p. 219)
Social/Interpersonal wellness. The following are the integrated concepts of social wellness as described by Roscoe (2009):

Social wellness encompasses the quality and extent of interaction with others and the interdependence between the individual, others, the community, and nature. Furthermore, social wellness comprises the skills and comfort level one is able to express in the context of interpersonal interactions, as well as the motivation, action, intent, and perception of those interactions. Social wellness also includes the extent to which one gives support and how one receives support and the respect of others. In sum, social wellness is the movement toward balance and integration of the interaction between the individual, society, and nature. (p. 218)

Intellectual wellness. Finally, Roscoe (2009) defined intellectual wellness as follows:

Intellectual wellness can be defined as the perception of, and motivation for, one’s optimal level of stimulating intellectual activity. The optimal level of activity is achieved by the continual acquisition, use, sharing, and application of knowledge in a creative and critical fashion for the personal growth of the individual and for the betterment of society (p. 220)

Challenges to School Counsellors’ Wellness and Self-Care

Although there are few studies specific to barriers to school counsellor wellness, an exploration of barriers to wellness among professional counsellors and counsellor trainees may provide some insights. Witmer and Young (1996) argued that in understanding barriers to counsellor wellness, it is necessary to begin with the selection of students for counselling programs. This selection process is an ethical requirement
for counsellor educators, and follow-up screening and review of procedures are essential following admission into the program. In addition, the curriculum should adopt a wellness philosophy that inculcates in students a commitment to embrace and enhance their mental, emotional, social, physical, vocational, and spiritual well-being. Moreover, faculty ought to serve as role models of wellness (Witmer & Young, 1996).

Similarly, Yager and Tovar-Blank (2007) posited that training in wellness practices alongside training in counselling skills is critical. This combined training is vital because although counsellor educators try to inculcate a wellness philosophy in their students, their efforts for the most part are not successful (Roach & Young, 2007). Nevertheless, in their survey of 204 Masters’ of Counselling students from the South Eastern United States, (of which 82 were on the school counselling track), 52% reported that there was no specific wellness course in their program. In addition, none of the respondents reported on spirituality, gender, cultural identity, factors of thinking, work, positive humour, realistic beliefs, or leisure activities, and only five students completed the section on physical wellness on the research questionnaire (Roach & Young, 2007). Is it possible that these are areas of discomfort and therefore possible barriers to counsellor wellness?

Moreover, while the time allotted to graduate work may have prevented some students from eating well and engaging in an exercise regimen, these experiences also provide teachable guides for counsellor educators in terms of mentoring their students to learn how to keep the different aspects of their lives in balance (Roach & Young, 2007). Roach and Young further suggested that lack of personal development and counsellors’
reluctance to admit that they have a problem, which speaks to lack of awareness, are barriers to counsellor wellness.

Another issue that may contribute to school counsellors’ wellness is the lack of training to meet the demands of the school environment. Butler and Constantine (2005) explained that most of the courses for school counsellors in the United States focus on community counselling rather than issues specifically encountered by counsellors practicing in a school setting. In addition, textbooks do not highlight the types of stress that school counsellors’ experience. This is problematic because school counsellors encounter difficulties that are not present in other counselling settings, such as inappropriate roles (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Moyer, 2011) and demands from multiple stakeholders (Falls & Nichter, 2007).

Counsellor educators may also require ongoing professional development with respect to the ever-changing school populations. In fact, challenges relating to multiculturalism and lower socio-economic status may pale when compared with more life threatening and traumatising events. These events may include bullying that leads to suicide of gay students (Baird, 2011), gun violence (Fein, Carlisle, & Isaacson, 2008), students who misuse drugs and alcohol (Kendrick, Chandler, & Hatcher, 1994), third culture kids (Limber & Lambie, 2011) and students who are involved in self-mutilation (Watcher, 2006). Other potentially traumatising issues, that may reach the classroom setting include: parents and students who have loved-ones serving in the military, children whose parents are incapacitated or who lost everything including loved ones to natural disasters or war, sexual abuse perpetrated by online predators, and coping with
the negative aspects of the internet, such as cyber-bullying (Stebnicki, 2007).

School counsellors may respond to the issues of the ever-changing school populations using their counselling skills, especially the caring attributes of empathy and unconditional positive regard. Lawson, Venart, Hazler, and Kottler (2007) cautioned, however, that the qualities that are required to be an effective counsellor may also be qualities that result in compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and burnout. These impairments result when counsellors put their clients’ needs ahead of their own needs.

Balancing the required qualities of empathy and unconditional positive regard may be particularly critical for school counsellors because they report higher than average emotional exhaustion scores when compared with other counsellors (Wilkerson, 2009; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). Lawson (2007) added that school counsellors scored higher than their colleagues did in private practice on the Burnout and Compassion Fatigue Scales of the Professional Quality of Life Scale-Third Edition-Revised (Pro-QOL-III-R). Stephan (2005) also explained that although school counsellors usually report high self-efficacy scores, self-efficacy is also a strong predictor of emotional exhaustion and burnout. Moreover, school counsellors without social support reported higher levels of burnout when compared with school counsellors with support (Gunduz, 2012).

Skovholt, Grier, and Hanson (2001) agreed with Lawson, Venart, Hazler, and Kottler (2007) that counsellors’ continuous caring for others could result in emotional exhaustion and compassion fatigue, which manifest as the inability to engage with the next client. Skovholt et al. (2001) explained that compassion fatigue could lead to less
competent helping because counselling involves the cyclical caring process of forming therapeutic relationships, empathically engaging in the counselling process, then bringing that intimate connection to a mutually satisfying close. The impact of compassion fatigue occurs when the counsellor is unable to engage in the cycle, but attempts, instead, to function as normal and this continuous functioning in a debilitated state can lead to undue harm to both client and counsellor (Skovholt et al., 2001).

It is important to recognize, however, that the existing research was not conducted on the experiences of school counsellors working in Trinidad and Tobago. As explained previously, there are substantial historical and educational policy differences between Trinidad and Tobago and other countries cited in this literature review. Given that a number of the studies came from the United States, the assumption that the challenges to wellness identified in previous research are the same as those experienced by school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago would be unfounded. This is a research question, for which the answer lies with the public school counsellors of Trinidad and Tobago. Notwithstanding this assumption, convergent views between counsellors from Trinidad and Tobago and counsellors from other countries will be connected to the literature by way of in-text citations in Chapter Four, while discussions of divergent views will focus solely on the experiences of the Trinidad and Tobago school counsellors in the local Trinidad and Tobago’s context.

Dissertation Research

School counsellors face many challenges that could affect their wellness (Stephan, 2005). Research has already confirmed that school counsellors in Australia,
(McMahon & Patton, 2000), Canada (Christianson & Everall, 2009) England, (Harris, 2013, 2009), New Zealand (Evans & Payne, 2008), Turkey (Gunduz, 2012) and the United States (Moyer, 2011), have experienced challenges to their well-being at some time in their respective careers. There are no known studies of this phenomenon in Trinidad and Tobago. To address this deficit in the literature, the present research explored (a) the challenges experienced by Trinidad and Tobago’s school counsellors from a wellness perspective, (b) how these counsellors engaged in self-care to meet those challenging experiences, and (c) counsellors’ perceptions of how these challenges have affected services to students, and the wider school-body.

This study increases in importance because the role of school counsellors seems to be continuously expanding in Trinidad and Tobago (Kowlessar, 2012). School counsellors assist children who are attempting to cope with increasingly complex issues including mental health and personal/social issues. School counsellors therefore experience general job stress and high demands from parents, teachers, administration, and the students themselves (Falls & Nichter, 2007). If a school counsellor’s well-being is out of balance, this imbalance could result in symptoms of distress and may affect his/her capacity to function at work. This imbalance could also create the potential for harm to students; indeed, counsellor imbalance could disrupt the wellness goals of the whole school community (Stephan, 2005).

What is disconcerting is that the high demands and changing expectations of the profession leave many counsellors feeling emotionally and physically depleted when they attempt to meet all the expectations placed upon them (Williams, 2011). Failure to engage in self-care may result in compassion fatigue/vicarious traumatization,
burnout, and distress (Figley, 1995; Maslach, 1993; & Yassen, 1995). Moreover, with
the current educational climate, in which there is an increasing demand for school
counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago, school counsellors may feel obligated to work in
spite of the possibility of impairment. Considering this context, the following three
substantive questions guided my study:

1. What are school counsellors’ previous challenging experiences related to their
work?

2. What strategies have school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago used to
alleviate those challenging experiences?

3. What are these counsellors’ perceptions of how their service delivery was
affected during those challenging periods?
Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand the challenges experienced by Trinidad and Tobago’s school counsellors from a wellness perspective, how counsellors dealt with those challenging experiences, and counsellors’ perceptions of the effect of their service delivery during the challenging periods. As both Husserl (1931) and Heidegger (1953) asserted, it is only by going to the source of the experience that one can obtain an understanding of the essence or meaning of that experience. Given that I wanted to understand the experiences of Trinidad and Tobago’s school counsellors, and phenomenology seeks to understand what is occurring in the lives of persons experiencing a phenomenon, I selected interpretive phenomenology as the methodology for this study.

Phenomenology also allows the researcher to examine the phenomenon from different orientations (van Manen, 1997). I chose a psychological orientation because school counselling in Trinidad and Tobago is an extraction of the American School Counseling Association (ASCA)’s model (Harris, 2013), and American school counselling follows the professional dictates and ethics of counselling psychology. As such, in this study I adopted a phenomenological approach from a psychological orientation, as opposed to a social work, nursing, pedagogy, or other orientation.

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology used to conduct my dissertation research, including the phenomenological paradigm that I have selected; my personal perspective as a researcher; the process of data collection and data analysis; and ethical considerations associated with my research.
Research Paradigm: Phenomenology Philosophical Underpinnings

Edmund Husserl. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is considered the principal founder of 20th century phenomenology (Drummond, 2007). Specifically, Husserl’s phenomenology evolved as a radical deviation from traditional positivistic ideas, and moved instead towards the intuitive essence of an experience (Moran, 2000). Moran explained that this deviation is not to replace science, but instead for Husserl, phenomenology supports and clarifies science. As such, “experience becomes the evidence of knowledge” (Moran, 2000, p. 131). For Husserl, this evidence comes through transcendental reflection, a reduction that strips away the contingent, leaving the essence or transcendental subjectivity (Moran, 2000).

Husserl (1931) founded a field of science, of the eidetic essence, which focuses on experience or transcendental subjectivity, called phenomenology. Husserl argued that humans’ ability to self-reflect confirms a bigger ability: to use the medium of perception to set aside whom s/he is in the world, to get at a deep sense of self. With respect to perception and self-reflection, Husserl offered three concepts to consider before embarking on research: intentionality, noesis, and noema. Intentionality has to do with the ability of the mind to conjure up images. Noesis is the act of perceiving, memorizing, judging, thinking, and feeling, and what all of these acts of experiencing have in common are hidden meanings, yet to be recognized and drawn out. The noema then directs consciousness by way of reflective examination of specific objects thereby ascribing meaning to what one sees, hears, touches, feels, or thinks. As such, noema and noesis are always directly related. For instance, with noema it is what one remembers as opposed to
the act of remembering; or what one judges, as opposed to the act of judging.

The interplay of noema and noesis is constantly apparent in our lives (Husserl, 1931).

**Processes in Husserl’s approach.** Husserl (1931) also explained that the path to the comprehensive meaning, or essence, calls for looking and reflecting, allowing time to linger, then looking and reflecting again until one has a full appreciation of the experience. Each time one looks and reflects new meaning is discovered, and the more one looks and reflects the better acquainted s/he becomes with the parts as well as how the parts come together to make the whole. To obtain the full essence, one cannot focus on noesis and report on the physical aspect of what one is seeing, hearing, and reflecting. The decisive factor of recognizing the whole, however, is when one attempts to describe the whole. This delayed recognition of the whole, hinges on the notion that it is only through the actual description that unforeseen gaps appear.

Notwithstanding that it is description that allows for attaining the complete essence, Husserl acknowledged that “no intuitive apprehension of the essence of the Things can be so complete that a further perception could not bring something noematically new” (Husserl, 1931, p. 414). Researchers will therefore use all reasonable judgment to know when reflection results in data saturation of the essence of the experience, as this process could be unending. To illustrate, years after completing a study, the researcher could review the data and identify new information or reinterpret the data.

**Husserl’s three-step method.** Husserl’s three-step phenomenological method is based on the reduction to the subjective transcendental. Within this transcendental
state, a person holds in abeyance all of his/her values, opinions, and judgments about the research subject, thereby creating a state of pure consciousness or mental nothingness. Arriving at this state of pure consciousness represents steps one and two of the method. Husserl reconciled the challenges of achieving pure consciousness by suggesting that reduction of any prior consciousness, residual consciousness, egos, and intentions can be achieved by *epoché* or “bracketing”: the setting aside of all aspects of one’s awareness of the subject. In the state of pure consciousness the person has the capacity to immerse his/her conscious awareness in the subject, while discerning only the essential and immediate knowledge. This essential and immediate knowledge constitutes the essence to be described (Husserl, 1931).

**Husserl’s contribution to phenomenology.** Husserl has left “a vast sphere of research which has yet to be fully absorbed and criticized in the current philosophical debate” (Moran, 2000, p. 187), but he has contributed in many ways to the practice of research. In fact, “his greatest contribution lay in his careful mapping out of difficult terrain: [for instance] the structure of intentional acts, [and] the nature of meaning-intending and meaning fulfilling” (Moran, 2000, p. 189). His major criticism, however, is that “his description very quickly ran aground on the problem of interpretation” (Moran, 2000, p.189). As a result, many of his students moved away from his subjective descriptive approach and among these students was Martin Heidegger (Moran, 2000).

**Martin Heidegger.** While Husserl focussed on attaining knowledge through description of the subjective experience, for Heidegger phenomenology is the science of the being of beings, or ontology. In fact, Heidegger was “anti-subjectivist, anti-dualist,
and anti-intellectualist” (Moran, 2000, p.193). Heidegger (1953) concluded that, based on his investigation, the “methodological meaning of phenomenological description is interpretation and phenomenology of Dasein is hermeneutics” (p.35).

**Processes in Martin Heidegger’s approach.** Heidegger argued that there is a difference between the ontic and the ontological. The ontic is that insignificant but compelling enough idea that can obscure the researcher’s view from the real significance or the real being, the ontology of the experience (Heidegger, 1953). For example, the ontic could be the number of times a participant referred to a certain topic. The ontological, however, is the meaning behind, or the ‘why’ behind the participants’ repeated reference to the topic. Heidegger therefore differentiates between what a researcher may be seeing or hearing and what is behind what the researcher sees or hears: the being of the being or the Dasein.

Heidegger (1953) further argued that, “there necessarily belongs to the conceptual interpretation of being and its structures . . . a destruction—a critical process in which the traditional concepts, which at first must necessarily be employed, are de-constructed down to the sources from which they were drawn” (pp. 22-23). Heidegger described the process as “relatedness backward or forward” (Heidegger, 1953, p. 6). Based on Heidegger’s explanation, Moran (2000) sums up this circular thought flow by asking: “How can we learn anything new if we can only grasp it in terms of what we already know?” (p. 237). The method of going backward and forward is not unlike the hermeneutic circle: understanding the whole leads to understanding the parts and the understanding of the parts leads back to a new understanding of the whole. One cannot
understand the parts without the whole or the whole without its parts (Packer, 2011; Spinoza & Ratner, 1927).

**Heidegger’s contribution to phenomenology.** Moran (2000) has suggested that, “The influence of Heidegger on twentieth-century philosophy has been so enormous that it is almost impossible to measure it” (p. 245). Moran confirmed that most of Heidegger’s criticism came from his involvement with Nazism and his ideas on metaphysics. “Heidegger’s anti-subjectivist stance, can [however] offer a new model for understanding consciousness which escapes the problems of representationalism, [and] which has dogged philosophy of mind since Descartes” (Moran, 2000, p. 246). Moran confirmed that Heidegger’s destruction of classical texts and his focus on understanding the thought behind the thought led him to believe that questioning is the core of thinking. His movement away from rationalism, and analyzing text based on authorship or authority, in favor of questioning and deconstructing any text, led to him having many followers, including Michael Foucault and Hans-George Gadamer (Moran, 2000).

**Section summary.** To summarize, there are many differences between Husserl and Heidegger’s experiences with, and conceptualization of, phenomenology including the following:

1. Although Husserl is regarded as the founder of phenomenology, Heidegger is viewed as the Philosopher of the 20th century (Moran, 2000);
2. Husserl found that transcendental subjective evidence is the very best kind of evidence: Heidegger rejected subjectivity;
3. Husserl felt that to get to the essence and a deeper sense of self, worldly
influences had to be bracketed, while Heidegger argued that awareness of external
influences is critical, as it is only by acknowledging these influences and
deconstructing them down to their genesis, that one can really understand what is
behind the being;

5. Husserl felt that it is in describing the experience that gaps will appear, and it is
in attending to those gaps, that the whole experience is captured, Heidegger
argued that the way to achieve meaning of phenomenological description is
through interpretation, and with respect to the phenomenology of Dasein it is
through hermeneutics;

6. Husserl felt that achieving the whole meaning or essence depends on looking
and reflecting, and allowing time to linger, then looking and reflecting again,
until one achieves a full view through description. Heidegger argued, however,
that to understand the whole, one has to deconstruct it down to its parts and to
understand the parts one also has to understand the whole.

Heidegger (1975) acknowledged: “like every other scientific method,
phenomenological method grows and changes due to the progress made precisely with its
help into the subjects under investigation” (p. 21). This progression of methods is
evident in both the data collection and the data analysis of current phenomenological
studies.

**Progression of Phenomenological Research**

Although current data analysis techniques are modeled after Husserl’s descriptive
(Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) and Heidegger’s interpretive (Smith & Osborn, 2003)
approaches, methods of analysis have also evolved by orientation (van Manen, 1997). Given that the participants of this study are school counsellors, this study adopted an interpretive phenomenological approach from a psychological orientation, as opposed to a social work, nursing, pedagogical, or other orientation. I explored the experiences of Trinidad and Tobago’s school counsellors. This exploration included their challenging experiences, how they coped with those challenging experiences, and the counsellors’ perceptions of how their service delivery was affected during those challenging periods.

**Van Manen’s View of the Researcher**

Van Manen (1997) explained that the first activity for the researcher concerns being passionate about a phenomenon that holds serious interest and commits us to the world. One of the major aspects of advocacy undertaken by school counsellors is to highlight social and other injustices affecting some students, and to champion changes, especially for those students who are on behavioural and/or academic probation. Having these concerns and goals for research is one reason for selecting interpretive phenomenology for the current study.

Van Manen (1997) also described the researcher as a keen observer of the nuances of everyday life. In fact, van Manen cautioned that it is not only tuning to the phenomenon, but remaining open “in such a way that in this abiding concern of our questioning we find ourselves deeply interested in that which makes the question possible … [to the point] that we ‘live’ this question, that we ‘become’ this question.” (p. 43)
Descriptive and Interpretive Phenomenology

Phenomenological researchers in the field of psychology have adopted both interpretive (Smith & Osborn, 2003) and descriptive (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003) approaches to phenomenological psychological analysis. I have selected an interpretive approach based on the following rationale:

1. I am more interested in meaning and interpretation than in mere description and reporting of the counsellors’ experiences. As such, I accept that to get to the meaning of the counsellors’ experiences I had to include, rather than bracket, my extended world including my knowledge and experience with the phenomenon.

2. Interpretive phenomenology gave me the leeway to examine the participants’ transcripts. As Smith and Osborn (2003) suggested, Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allows the researcher to ask questions such as, “Is something leaking out here that wasn’t intended? Do I have a sense of something going on here that maybe the participants themselves are less aware of?” (p. 53). The answers to these questions add to a greater understanding of the phenomenon, a process that is not available with descriptive psychological phenomenology.

3. Finally, while I included the various themes that described the essence as required by the descriptive approach, I also incorporated discussion sections wherein I examined themes within and across the different cases, asked questions of the transcripts, made suggestions, and connected the counsellors’ experiences with the literature. My preference for the writing up of the study
aligns with the interpretive approach rather than with the descriptive approach.

**Researcher’s Perspective**

My orientation as a school counsellor may also be apparent in my study. As van Manen (1997) explained, the relationship between research and vocation, between theory and life are unavoidable. Van Manen (1997) argued that hermeneutic phenomenology also has a critical orientation as, “the thoughtfulness phenomenology sponsors are more likely to lead to an indignation, concern, or commitment that, if appropriate, may prompt us to turn to … [a] political agenda.” (p. 154)

Given that the self of the researcher enters into the process of conducting research (van Manen, 1997), it is important to understand some of who I am in understanding the methodology for this study. At the time of conducting this study, I was a PhD candidate at a Canadian university. In fact, all of my graduate training was at North American universities. With respect to experience, I brought to the study 2 years of experience working as a Trinidad and Tobago school counsellor at the K-6 levels and 2 years as a secondary school counsellor in the Bahamas. I also coordinated a government funded community program for young adults aged 17 to 25 in Trinidad and Tobago. Having taught Family Life and Sex Education in the Bahamas, I am also acquainted with many of the socio/personal issues that students are encountering, and by extension, the many challenges that school counsellors experience in assisting students. I have also worked as part of a multi-disciplinary team of professionals, and have attended many school counsellors’ meetings and workshops, where the discussion of self-care strategies was peripheral. Moreover, I have explored the literature on the
causes of school counsellors’ burnout, distress, and compassion fatigue, together with research on self-care strategies. As such, I bring both experience and understanding of the research context.

Before embarking on the interviews, however, I reflected on my own experiences with distress, self-care, and my perceptions of my service delivery during my challenging periods. I therefore acknowledge that the same valuable insights into school counsellors’ burnout, distress, and compassion fatigue along with self-care strategies that I bring to the study, could also be a disadvantage in conducting this research. This disadvantage could have manifested itself as biased judgments regarding research questions, results, and interpretation of findings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). Moreover, although I have very strong convictions about the value of providing guidance and counselling supports, especially for those students who may suffer social and other injustices, I know that I cannot allow my convictions to overpower the perspectives of the school counsellors who volunteered to participate in this research. In fact, I remained committed to ongoing critical self-reflection (Zahavi, 2005) and discussions with my supervisor (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008).

Data Collection Procedures

Participants and recruitment. I purposely selected counsellors from the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Education Student Support Services Division to take part in the study. Counsellors assigned to SSSD support both government and government assisted schools (schools managed mostly by religious boards) as opposed to the private school system. There are two levels of private schools in Trinidad and Tobago (a) The
International schools such as the Canadian managed Maple Leaf International School and the International School of Port of Spain situated in Westmoorings and (b) religious and other board schools that are not funded by the government. My decision not to select counsellors from the private school system hinged on two major realities (a) most private schools do not have school counsellors and (b) the ethos of the international and other such schools will not reflect the challenges of the public school system.

I therefore selected and interviewed 10 public counsellors who self-reported that they had experienced past challenges, which affected their ability to work at their full potential. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) have suggested that, in interpretive phenomenology, sample sizes can be as small as one (i.e., a case study), but are more typically between four and ten. More participants allow for variation of experiences, though sometimes at the cost of depth of analysis. Given that this study is a first step in understanding the phenomenon of school counsellors’ challenges, strategies, and perceptions of service delivery from a wellness perspective, I decided to prioritize obtaining understanding of the breadth of experiences of Trinidad and Tobago’s school counsellors.

I also accept the critical value of the reflective process and the temporal nature of the experience. As such, knowing that it is not possible to capture the experience as it is manifesting (van Manen, 1997) I have interviewed counsellors who have reflected on their experiences. During the interview process, I paid attention to both “what” and “how” the participants represented their reflections. With phenomenological psychological research, there are two relationships (England, 2012). First, the
relationship between the participant and the researcher results in a subject-subject relationship. Second, given that the phenomenon is school counsellors’ challenges and opportunities, a subject-phenomenon relationship also exists (Englander, 2012). Balancing between these two relationships was therefore critical to the quality of data collected. My awareness of these two relationships also helped me to stay on target as I acknowledged that the phenomenon was under investigation, and not the person.

**Inclusion/exclusion criteria for and demographics of participants.**

Inclusion /exclusion criteria for my participants consisted of limiting the study to persons who have experienced challenges while working as school counsellors in the K- 12 public school system in Trinidad and Tobago. While all, but one, of the counsellors work at secondary schools, two counsellors reported on challenges while they were at the primary school level. Seven counsellors hold Master’s degrees and three hold Bachelors’ degrees in Education or equivalent degrees. Six counsellors joined the Division from its inception in 2004 and the remaining four counsellors had at least three years of experience as school counsellors at the time of the interviews. I selected participants based on their willingness to self-report that they did experience challenges, and that they are now functioning at a high level. Three males and seven females from two of the eight school districts in Trinidad and Tobago took part in the study.
**Interview process.** Data were collected using multi-staged interviews, which lasted between one and two hours each. Smith and Osborn (2003) explained that even though the interview is co-determined, it remains advisable to prepare an interview schedule to ensure that researchers give deep thought to what they hope to uncover at the interview. Specifically, they explained that researchers will have the benefit of envisaging any difficulties such as problems wording a question or treatment of sensitive areas; and this foreknowledge allow researchers to be always present in the interview. I prepared and used a schedule for the interview including some possible prompts or follow-up questions (see Appendix A).

I met with participants just before the interview to explain the study, and I answered all of their questions. The counsellors then completed consent forms at the meeting that preceded the interviewing process (England, 2012; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). In addition, I collected information on the context of the counsellors’ experience regarding the schools’ background, leadership, caseloads, supervision, and demographic information such as training, and experience. All interviews were audio taped.

I conducted the interviews using a conversational manner by asking the participants to describe, in full, their experiences with the phenomenon (England, 2012; Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). The experiences ranged from when they first began working as school counsellors to three months ago, but the effect of some systemic challenges persists to today. The interview was open ended and the participants shared their experiences with the aid of judicious probing.
The structure of the interview generally followed the three substantive questions for the study: What are counsellors’ challenging experiences? What strategies were used? What are counsellors’ perceptions of service delivery during those challenging periods? Invariably, interlaced in their descriptions were occupational, environmental, spiritual, emotional, physical, social, and intellectual aspects of their experiences. I asked follow-up questions spontaneously, based on the responses of the interviewee, and with a focus on the research phenomenon. It is in asking these follow-up questions that I shifted from subject-subject to subject-phenomenon relationships. As such, while the questions focused on the phenomenon, the subject-subject relationship was always in focus (Englander, 2012; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

**Transcription Process**

Having completed the interviews, I then transcribed all utterances from all of the interviews. I also read and reflected on the text, setting it aside from time to time (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005), including during and after transcribing each interview. After transcribing the interviews, I replayed them to confirm that what I heard and transcribed matched the audio data. In terms of formatting the transcribed text, I used the American Psychological Association’s (APA) guidelines for written text, but with one exception: the use of Canadian rather than American spelling. In general, “rather than seeking standards and conventions, interpretive researchers rely on critical reflection and contextualized negotiation of method” (Lapadat, 2000, p. 210). As such, based on my research questions, the ethical requirements of the study, and the dictates of IPA, the following guided the validation and trustworthiness of my transcription process:
1. My first concern was to adhere to the confidential nature of my study (Daniel, Serovich & Mason, 2005). In this regard, I edited out any data that may have identified the counsellors or other educators, and I replaced those identifiable references with ellipsis points. In some instances, I summarized scenarios to enhance confidentiality. I also deleted information such as the gender of the participants’ children or activities specific to a particular participant. For example, in the Final Verbatim Table, instead of transcribing “son/daughter” I replaced same with “child” or third-party’s name(s) were changed to reflect either their position (e.g., supervisors) or they were described as educators. Similarly, rather than identify the type of religious text (e.g. the Buddhist Tri-Pitaka), I replaced the name of the religion with ellipsis and left the statement as simply religious text. I then critically examined the edited text for accuracy of the intended substance and meaning. Furthermore, I wrote all demographic information in a collective format.

2. I am also concerned about the way these professionals, as participants, would be interpreted. This concern hinges on the notion that evaluating verbatim oral contributions, in written form, may conjure unintended negative impressions of the speaker, in the minds of the readers. The negative impressions occur because readers usually use the rules of writing to evaluate text (Lapadat, 2000). I have therefore edited the text for both clarity and representation (Oliver et al., 2005). As Mondada (2007) explained, the evolution of a transcript “can involve adding but also subtracting details for the purposes of a specific analysis” (p. 810). For
this study, the objective of the analysis is to identify super-ordinate themes using verbatim extracts. In this regard, my edits included deleting repetitive phrases or statements and extraneous descriptions beyond the essence of the theme, as this extraneous information did not add meaning to the super-ordinate themes (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

3. Furthermore, given that the intent of my research question was to uncover substantive content of experiences and not mechanics in conversational analysis or to garner linguistic and language-value from the interviews (Oliver, Serovich, & Mason, 2005), I deleted all unnecessary or unintended utterances, and habitual words found in speech (Bucholtz, 2000) and these were replaced with ellipsis. Such words included “right,” “you know,” “am,” “um,” etc., and where necessary, I used brackets [ ] to insert conjunctions and or transitional phrases to maintain the coherence of the text. There were instances, however, where utterances were critical to the substance of the respective experience and so I did not delete those utterances. One example is the utterance “Haaa!” which in context added intensity of feelings to the transcribed text. In general, however, written features of discourse took precedence over oral (Davidson, 2009; Oliver et al., 2005).

4. Steps one to three of Smith and Osborn’s (2003) Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), guided my selection of verbatim text from the transcripts. Specifically, I selected only those texts from the transcripts that supported and added meaning and understanding of the research phenomenon. As Davidson (2009) explained, “selectivity needs to be acknowledged and explained in relation
to the goals of a study” (p. 38).

5. Finally, I noted intensity of feelings with exclamation marks, and I italicized references to third party utterances, along with meta-thinking and rhetorical questioning by the participants themselves.

Data Analysis Procedures

After transcribing the recorded interviews, I used Smith and Osborn’s (2003) Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method to analyze the data. IPA consists of four steps. For Step One, I read the transcribed material several times. While Smith and Osborn initially used pen and paper to identify interesting and meaningful statements, they also confirmed that this “can easily be done with the cut and paste functions on a standard word-processing package” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 72). I used the latter for this study, electronically highlighting interesting or significant statements. In general, I took note to get a sense of the participants through their responses.

I reread the transcript to identify emerging themes. I placed these themes in an electronic table (Appendix B) and rewrote them into concise phrases. In this regard, Smith and Osborn (2003) also suggested that:

This [IPA] is not a prescriptive methodology. It is a way of doing IPA that has worked for us and our students, but it is there to be adapted by researchers, who will have their own personal way of working. It is also important to remember that qualitative analysis is inevitably a personal process, and the analysis itself is the interpretative work which the investigator does at
In keeping with the flexibility of IPA, I have followed the four steps with one variation: I added two layers of headings throughout the entire analysis. First, the three substantive research questions: challenges, strategies, and effect on service delivery during challenging periods; functioned as umbrella headings over all superordinate themes. Second, the seven broad aspects of wellness: occupational, environmental, spiritual, emotional, physical, interpersonal/social, and intellectual were aligned with the respective and relevant superordinate themes. As prescribed by IPA, the next level of heading reflected the super-ordinate themes followed by the verbatim extracts of the participants. Smith and Osborn (2003) also suggested that:

IPA has a theoretical commitment to the person as a cognitive, linguistic, affective and physical being and assumes a chain of connection between people’s talk … their thinking and emotional state. At the same time, IPA researchers realize this chain of connection is complicated – people struggle to express what they are thinking and feeling, there may be reasons why they do not wish to self-disclose, and the researcher has to interpret people’s mental and emotional state from what they say. (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 54)

Although it is not always possible to have the correct interpretations of people’s mental and emotional states, during the process of interviewing, I paraphrased and summarized to ensure that my interpretations of what the participants said coincided with the meanings that the participants derived from their respective experiences. Perhaps because the participants were counsellors with a certain level of self-awareness, I found
that their emotional and mental worlds were very transparent: they explained exactly what the experience meant to them. My focus in interpreting was therefore to use expressions that could theoretically connect themes within and across cases, and at the same time safeguard the specific discourse of the participant as prescribed by IPA.

As Smith and Osborn (2003) further suggested:

The investigator [is] engaging in an interpretative relationship with the transcript. While one is attempting to capture and do justice to the meanings of the respondents to learn about their mental and social world, those meanings are not transparently available – they must be obtained through a sustained engagement with the text and a process of interpretation. (Smith & Osborn, 2003 p. 66)

In terms of how I conducted my IPA analysis, during the first stage, I treated the entire transcript as data. I also treated each transcript separately and I clustered themes that seem theoretically connected based on the respondents’ verbatim extracts as prescribed by IPA. The identification of themes formed part of the judgment used in the analysis and I was guided by two questions (a) is this information adding meaning and understanding? or (b) is this information just adding more storyline? In reviewing the clustered themes, a superordinate theme emerged and that theme was placed above the verbatim extracts. During Step Two, for each transcript, I identified super-ordinate themes and placed verbatim extracts under those themes. I deviated from Smith and Osborn’s protocol by adding two additional layers above the super-ordinate themes. For Step Three, I prepared a table with the verbatim extracts across cases clustering under the respective super-ordinate themes as prescribed by IPA. I then compared the themes with
the transcripts to ensure that they represented what the participants said. This process of analysis began with the first interview, in September 2013, and it continued through until the final submission of the document in February, 2015. As such, the process of analysis of the 10 interviews occurred over 17 months.

In Step Four, the writing process reflected the cluster of themes across cases under the respective super-ordinate themes as prescribed by IPA. The results and discussions were presented in a single chapter with the super-ordinate themes presented, discussed, and linked to the literature under the three substantive questions and the components of wellness. My discussions followed each super-ordinate theme. My discussions therefore took the form of a discourse as the themes were reconstructed as a narrative argument and interspersed with verbatim extracts from the participants, as prescribed by IPA. As always, I kept my interpretations/ discussions distinct from the participants’ extracts.

In presenting the data I prioritized the themes not only by its prevalence, but also by the theme’s capacity to add meaning and understanding to the phenomenon as prescribed by IPA. For instance, super-ordinate themes under the occupational heading appeared first, as this provided context and greater meaning for the themes that followed. Notwithstanding the variations made, I ensured that the writing process maintained the meaning inherent in the participants’ experiences as prescribed by IPA.
Validation and Rigour Procedures

To promote validity and rigour, I engaged in critical self-awareness of my experiences, biases, assumptions, judgment, and perceptions with the research topic to ensure that what belongs to me, the researcher, has been kept separate from what is being researched (Finlay, 2009). Next, I selected participants who had the requisite experience to be part of the study (van Manen, 1997). I also purposely selected 10 participants who exhibited variation with respect to experiences (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

During the interview process, I used three major validation strategies for the collection of data. First, I asked open-ended questions and used limited judicious probing to ensure full exploration and description of the experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2003). Second, I paraphrased back to the participants, to ensure that the meanings of the respondents were coordinated with my interpretations and I clarified interpretations as part of the interview process (McConnell, Chapman, & Francis, 2011). Third, I provided summary statements to further clarify and validate interpretations of large bits of data. During the analysis and interpretation of cases, I made sure that meaning and significance of an event came from the participants’ contexts. I also made sure that all verbatim quotes represented the substance and spirit intended by the participant (Smith & Osborn, 2003).

Notwithstanding participants’ intent, IPA also allows for asking critical questions of the texts (Smith & Osborn, 2003). I kept the meanings derived from these questions separate from the participants’ verbatim extracts, but I made sure that the meanings came from what the participants said. By having my supervisor and dissertation team
members audit the plausibility and coherence of the meanings derived from my questioning, credibility and trustworthiness were further enhanced (Larkin & Thompson, 2012).

Additionally, during the writing stage of the process and in keeping with the dictates of IPA, I kept the verbatim extracts separate from my interpretations. This separation provided a logical base from which to discern my interpretation of the data and the transparency in interpretation (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Following IPA’s four-step method was also critical in ensuring that the process and meaning derived from the data reflected acceptable and logical research protocol. Finally, I properly secured the data during and after the process of collection and presentation. As such, none of the recordings, electronic files, or data sheets were lost or damaged beyond recovery.

**Ethical Considerations**

Before conducting this research, I obtained ethics approvals from the Research Ethics Board (REB) of the University of New Brunswick. In this regard, I followed the 2010 version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. In keeping with this policy, all documents used for the interviews were submitted to the REB. I also obtained approval from the Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of Education Student Support Services Division. A letter was forwarded to the Division, and a signed copy of that letter approving the study was received.

Moreover, I obtained informed consent from the school counsellors themselves. In this regard, I discussed the study with the participants and they were invited to read the details of the study in both the invitation letter and the consent forms before agreeing
to participate. This study therefore did not involve any kind of deception and there were no inducements offered to the participants for participating in the study. The participants’ participation was therefore voluntary.

Although the counsellors were reporting on past experiences and so the risk of harm was minimal, I still monitored the interview to insure that the participants were comfortable while sharing their experiences. There was no evidence of discomfort during any of the interviews. They were also told that they could stop the interview at any time if they ever felt uncomfortable; they could take a break or refuse to answer any questions; or withdraw from the interview at any time for any reason. The counsellors were also assured that it is their right to withdraw any information provided, within one month after the interview. None of the participants withdrew from the study.

The participants were further assured that all consent forms with the original signatures of the participants and all coded data sheets would be safely secured at all times. The interviews were audio-recorded, and I have stored all recordings and other information collected in the study in a locked safe and password-protected computer hard-drives.

I used Pseudonyms to identify the participants in the transcripts and I removed or altered other uniquely identifying information. As such, there are no identifiable data on any of the transcriptions. Furthermore, there is no identifying information in the dissertation nor will identifying information be evident in any other reports generated from this study. After the study is over, I will destroy all recordings, and prepare a two-page summary of the results, conclusions, and recommendations stemming from the
study to email to those participants who provided email addresses. I will also email a copy of the dissertation to four participants who requested copies.

In general, there has been strict adherence to all ethical standards and assurances of confidentiality made to participants throughout the study. Finally, I will be keeping the interview transcripts and other sources of data in a safe place for future analysis and I will destroy them after 7 years.
Chapter Four: Results and Discussions

In this chapter I present the counsellors’ responses to the following three substantive research questions: (a) What challenges did Trinidad and Tobago school counsellors’ experience? (b) How did these counsellors cope with their challenging experiences? (c) How do counsellors perceive their service delivery during those challenging experiences? For ease of reference, the data is presented under the above three substantive questions and the seven broad wellness components: (a) occupational, (b) environmental (c) spiritual, (d) emotional, (e) physical, (f) interpersonal, and (g) intellectual.

Data on occupational challenges, strategies, and effects on service delivery during those challenging experiences form the first wellness theme of these results and discussions. There are, however, a disproportionate number of super-ordinate themes under the occupational component of wellness when compared with the other six components of wellness. These super-ordinate themes include (a) working at cross-purposes with administration, (b) counsellor-principal relationship barriers, (c) counsellor-teacher relationship barriers, (d) training and mentoring new counsellors, (e) unrealistic expectations, (f) lack of recognition and regard, (g) political constraints, (h) literacy levels of students entering secondary school, (i) lack of parental-cooperation, (j) lack of professional resources, (k) writing reports, (l) constraints in the physical environment, and (m) role confusion and general job stress. Participants’ verbatim extracts, which describes their challenges, strategies, and perceptions of service delivery, along with my discussion appear under each super-ordinate theme.
Occupational Wellness Challenges: Working at Cross-Purposes with Administration

Eva. In attempting to advocate for her students, Eva felt that the response from administration was not in the students’ best interest. Eva lamented, “It was awful! I think that was the beginning of my stress … I was so upset and … [the principal] said that I was over-stepping my boundaries as a guidance counsellor. It was just awful! I could not go back there!”

Anna. “The principal came to me as the guidance counsellor asking for solutions which I would have taken back … [to the principal]. They [administration] did nothing about [it] so … the problem … continued. At least try the solutions and if they do not work let us see what else we could put in place, but do not leave the solutions or the suggestions … and still clamber for help.”

Leah. “Information was coming to us saying [that] you cannot take the children out of the classroom. Now if you are in a primary school, which is back-to-back (blackboards partition some classrooms in smaller rural schools) and you are doing a guidance session, as interactive, fun, laughter, role-play, the noise will interrupt the whole school. [There is] a nice big tree with some benches outside, [and so] you can take the children, you can do role-plays, you could have a session. Somebody [in administration] says, you are not supposed to take the children out of the classroom, and those are some of the more managerial issues” [that we encountered].

Leah. “Our principal would say if you … [are] walking the corridors and you see an infraction, do not leave it, do not just say, Well I am the guidance counsellor so that you do not talk to the child about the nonsense … [but] sometimes for me to be effective as the counsellor I [do not] walk [down] the corridor.”
**Ben.** “The leadership changed [and] that was the worst thing that happened ... [The] style of leadership was not a consultative type of leadership. ... [The] style of leadership in my view was punitive and dictatorial. ... That was a very stressful time for me in guidance.”

**Miriam.** “My principal was one who would have dealt with situations and quickly refer. That is why I am saying that was ... [one] of the most stressful situations for me. [My principal] referred people to professional agencies and most times these things do not come to me they go straight to professional agencies, and when it comes back and nothing has been done [the principal] wants me to fix it [and] that has frustrated me. *You used the other agencies forgetting, [that] I used to say, but I am supposed to be the first response here,* and then when it certainly cannot be fixed then I become the one to try to sort out the mess and that certainly created some *Haana Disruption in me!* [I felt] frustrated you know [I] felt like okay well I do not belong here. I have no purpose here.

**Xyna.** [Administration is] “not guidance friendly. They do not understand ... our roles and functions because they say [that] we cause the students to misbehave. But the approach a guidance counsellor will take towards a situation would be different from a teacher, so what you [administration] have to do, you have to work with us.”

**Sophie.** Sophie helped administration to organize a parent session for students who were on academic probation to let the parents know that their children would not be able to continue in the school. Administration sent the parents up to the conference room. Sophie said, “The parents came to the conference room [and] I alone was there. ... [Later] when I went up [to the principal’s office]... the principal asked me why I did not send for her. I got upset, really upset! [As] I felt I was in a serious line of fire with
Occupational Wellness: Strategies for Working at Cross-Purposes with Administration

Eva. “I went into this mode of fighting for the students. I mean I was writing letters. … I went to … [other senior staff] for the student. I did everything I could possibly do … [and so] I would just continue to work with my students the best way … I could, to try to encourage them. I said if I did not go to the [staff] meetings … I would not have to take it so personal … I [also] believe that even if you touch one person you did a lot and I know that I touched more than one … [but] leaving was the best thing to do. To regroup and come back again with a different frame of mind.”

Anna. “I do what I can … and my motto is: if even it is one child I could help at the end of the day I think that is good.”

Leah. “Sometimes for me to be effective as the counsellor I need to … just not even try to walk the corridor because you see that nonsense going on there, I will have to get involved and then when the interaction, you know, so sometimes I really have to do that”

Ben. “I had to turn it into something … frivolous, yea … I think I spoke to a few people about [that person] … I probably asked people to pray, pray with me, help me pray for this situation because it was truly a disturbing thing to me. … It was awful! It was very difficult to do guidance … under that [person].”

Xyna. “Everything that happens I call up … [my supervisor] you know, everything, because … as long as it is not going how it supposed to go I will call her and tell her.”
Sophie. Sophie reflected on how she had previously handled the situation as she explained, “I told them [the teachers and administration to] give me the list of the students and I will call in the parents and that worked, so I was able to talk to the parents where their child situation is concerned and come up with a ... [solution].”

Occupational Wellness-Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences: Working at Cross-Purposes with Administration

Eva. Eva stopped attending administrative meetings dealing with students’ behavioural issues, and she eventually left the school.

Anna. “I took an almost hands off approach with that class. Not to say that I did not go and I did not do anything, but when they [administration and teachers] cry out for help and say, Oh the children are just so disruptive ... I did not take them on because they have solutions.”

Occupational Wellness: Discussion on Working at Cross-Purposes with Administration

Miriam’s intense frustration, the “Haaa!” the “Disruption!” generated by the apparent disregard for her services, and the reasons for Sophie’s “Really Upset” feelings, exemplify barriers to the proper functioning of the principal counsellor relationship. Although counsellors and principals both want to do what is best for the students, historically, there have been barriers to the effective functioning of this vital relationship. Research conducted in the United States found that many factors contribute to barriers, including lack of communication, collaboration, respect, trust, having a shared vision, and principals not understanding the roles and responsibilities of school counsellors (Finkelstein, 2009). Communication and respect, however, were the two most important
aspects of the counsellor-principal relationship (Finkelstein, 2009) and these two components are, arguably, the major areas of discontent reported by the counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago.

I find it interesting that Miriam referred to the outside agencies as professional agencies, because her role is the professional at the school and so, as the professional, she has pointed out that she has to be the first response. Moreover, sometimes school counsellors also have to be judicious about the interventions that some principals prescribe. Specifically, Leah’s judgment about when not to intervene represents a delicate balance that school counsellors navigate. This balance centres on the dual roles of school counsellors: on the one hand, the counsellor needs to be part of the behavioural management efforts of the school (Fox & Butler, 2007), but the counsellor also has a substantive empathic relational counselling role. The counsellor therefore cannot afford for the students to interpret the counsellor’s role as an extension of administration especially with respect to disciplinary actions (Clifford-Poston, 2006; Kee Low, 2009).

I believe that even when the counsellors have relationships with students a measured approach is justified to secure those relationships, especially if those students are adolescents. Rebuilding relationships with adolescents based on trust after some disciplinary episode is sometimes difficult and so counsellors, especially new counsellors, may find Leah’s judicious approach useful. As pointed out by Xyna, the approach a guidance counsellor will take will be different from perhaps the punitive expectations of administration, and that is probably one reason why at Xyna’s school there is the impression that school counsellors encourage the students to misbehave (Xyna).
Eva’s experience also highlights the issue of not having a shared vision with respect to advocacy. Arguably, the most critical repercussion in all of these cases seems to be the interruption of services to students.

Sophie’s experience, in particular, highlights a major concern for the tripartite relationship. This relationship among the school, the students, and the parents is one that requires great care. Honouring the trust that many parents place in schools to seek the best interest of their children, is of paramount importance to the proper functioning of the school; indeed, school personnel also expect that parents or guardians will themselves do what is best for their children. From my experience, the measure of a school’s success seems inextricably linked to the successful navigation of that tripartite relationship at a whole school level. In Sophie’s case, it appears from the treatment of those parents that they were not an integral part of the school family. This situation also brings into question whether the children benefitted from due process within the education system before this meeting to transition them out of the school. Why did Sophie feel that she was “in the line of fire” from these parents? In fact, the entire transitioning process appears to be working counter to the educational goals of the country and in particular, the goal to keep students in school (T&TMOE, 2004).

What I also find noteworthy is that Miriam and Xyna have questioned their roles in the school, but in reality, schools and indeed society as a whole in Trinidad and Tobago, are in need of these counsellors. To illustrate, societies in transition usually rely on the education sector to assist with the development of human capital, by ensuring that students at least complete high school. In this regard, Davis (1956) explained that:

in the United States during World War I, the demoralizing effects of easy money
and riotous living among youth who were leaving high school throughout the country, not to help the war effort nor for any feeling of patriotism, but for the money and the chance to spend it in ways not good for them. (p.203)

This situation with the youth led to a federal government intervention to have junior school counsellors do everything in their power to "keep youth in school and away from the temptations prevailing at that period" (Davis, 1956, p. 203). Similarly, in the relatively new democracy of Trinidad and Tobago, counsellors also have a strong mandate to ensure that students do not drop out of school (T&T MOE, 2004). As such, researching (a) the broader relational counsellor-principal dynamics in Trinidad and Tobago, and (b) a review of the process of transitioning of students out of the system, may be critical to the viability of the educational and societal goals of the country.

**Occupational Wellness Challenges: Counsellor-Principal Relationship Barriers**

In addition to the principals and counsellors working at cross-purposes, a similar theme emerged in the principal counsellor relationship. The following are the counsellors’ experiences:

**Anna.** “I am not sure whose idea it was but they [administration] put all the remedial students in one class ... [more than 25] of them, so needless to say there would have been lots of fights every day: behavioural challenges. [The school climate was] chaotic at times, very chaotic. ... The school administrators were promised extra remedial help, which they never got.”

**Leah.** “I had a really bad experience with a principal. It was public embarrassment in a ... meeting ... and I remember one of those times thinking *I really*
do not want to be back in that school. Because I am saying, you could come to me and let us talk if there is something that is an issue and … it was one of those times when things were happening in the school and you go to a meeting and you hear [the principal saying] I do not know what ... this counsellor is doing! I do not know what she is doing! You (reference to the principal) say you do not know what I am doing when you could simply ask, Miss what are the issues? What do you suggest? What can you bring? … Some of the issues may not even be guidance issues.”

Miriam. “There was one incident with a student and I think my principal lost respect for [me]. I was working with a parent [and my principal said], Miss, come here, I need you to deal with somebody right now. [I said okay, but] I am dealing with a parent. [Later, I went to the office] and realized [that the principal] had already taken over … [the other situation] and it [was] going in the wrong direction and there … [was] nothing [that I could have said] to change anything. So what is the use? That is how I felt! That is just one incident, but there are many other incidents like that: I made the decision you [the principal] were not around … then you come [and] you want to change things in a different direction. So it is like: Okay this is your school do whatever you want to do. You become powerless and I think that is what was frustrating me. When … [I feel] that [level of] frustration I just want to get out of this school because I am not making any statement. I am not doing anything.”

Xyna. “I have a serious issue with my principal. She likes to micro manage.”

Sophie. “Why is [the principal talking about my situation in public?] She knew that … [I was] going to classes in the night and in the next morning it is really tough.”
Occupational Wellness: Strategies for Counsellor-Principal Relationship Barriers

Anna. “I do what I can. I do sessions with the classes. I do one on one with the students who actually have some issue that ... they want to talk about”

Leah. “My spirituality I think is what keeps me grounded and smiling and able to bounce back quickly.”

Miriam. While it is not the ideal solution, Miriam resolved the immediate situation by telling herself, “okay this is your school, do whatever you want to do/you become powerless.”

Occupational Wellness-Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences: Counsellor-Principal Relationship Barriers

Ben. “So every time something happens, she [the principal at my new school asks me] what is happening with this? What do you think? What is that? So there is this whole trying to change the culture and the climate of the school that makes it a lot easier for teachers to interact with students in the classroom.”

Leah. “So that was one of the times I felt like … I do not want to do this job”

Ethan. “I love the [new] school because … anything that happens [the principal] includes me in everything, even things that [are] totally non guidance related ... [the principal] just wants me there ... [the principal] wants to hear my opinion on everything.”

Sophie. “At the start of the term I will have a meeting with my principal and explain ... what I plan to do with the students ... I will [also] ask [the principal] what [do] you want to see happen this term with the students? I ... [also discussed my personal challenges with her] so ... [the principal] knew about that situation.”
Occupational Wellness: Discussion on Counsellor-Principal Relationship Barriers

Both Ben and Ethan left their respective stressful schools, which would have meant either a disruption or termination of services to those students. Nevertheless, communication, collaboration, respect, trust, and having a shared vision are the major components of a successful counsellor-principal relationship (Finkelstein, 2009). Ethan and Ben now work in new environments where these components seem evident. The absence of these components, however, is also arguably at the centre of the other counsellors’ frustration and disaffection. For instance, Miriam had multiple experiences where the principal’s needs seemed to have superseded her own (Ross & Herrington, 2006). With increasing demands being placed on today’s school leaders (Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001) and school counsellors (Fall & Nicher, 2009), perhaps adopting a collaborative management style between administration and counsellors could be a solution to the time crunch (Young & Lambie, 2007). By using their negotiation and assertiveness skills, counsellors could also become their own advocates in assisting dysfunctional working environments (Young & Lambie, 2007). Counsellors could therefore take the lead role in diffusing any potential conflicts (Clifford-Poston, 2006).

Nevertheless, while both principal and counsellor have the shared professional responsibility to diffuse any conflicts, the school’s leadership also has a greater responsibility for keeping morale at an acceptable level by inculcating a positive school environment (Pepper & Thomas, 2001). Ethan and Ben seem to be working with transformational leaders whereby attempts to change the schools’ climates are evident.
These issues further reinforce the need for research into this vital relationship as it relates to the educational goals of Trinidad and Tobago.

**Occupational Wellness Challenges: Counsellor-Teacher Relationship Barriers**

In addition to barriers to effective principal-counsellor relationships, themes highlighting challenges in the teacher-counsellor relationship also emerged. The following are the experiences of the counsellors:

**Anna.** “One of the things that I told my supervisor was that I did not think the school needed a counsellor and I told her that because there are other teachers who counsel. The vice-principal [also] counsels. Maybe it is me, maybe I should say, *Hello! That is not your role or something,* but I do not like to be confrontational unless I really have to … so I think they just do not know where the boundaries are. Everybody thinks that they are counsellors. The teachers at my school … they like to know stuff. They just like to know, but not to help. So if they know they will whisper among themselves, they will tell … [this one], they will tell … [that] one … so it affects me somewhat … I told my supervisor I do not think they need a counsellor because they are all counselling.”

**Xyna.** “The teachers … [also] say, *you are doing nothing, you are contributing to the misbehaviour of the kids.* … [Those are] the two things. Sometimes they say you want to re-invent the wheel. So you might be planning something in your school and they are not in agreement with it so they say you are re-inventing the wheel. So the teachers do not understand.”

**Ethan.** “It is the teachers I have a problem with because we are the advocates for
a child. Sometimes teachers also pick on students and you would try to defend the child, and then you would be seen as the bad one … and sometimes the teachers they [are] just really mean. Some teachers [are] mean … they are just doing more damage. … Sometimes the tough love goes overboard … I mean I am telling you like it is and it is sad! It is sad!”

Sophie. “Some teachers do not understand guidance to some degree. … There was this staff meeting and one teacher … stood up [and challenged a decision that I made]… So I had to explain [my role] … [but] I felt like I was being attacked. I felt like I was not understood or my role as the guidance officer was not understood. … It made me feel a bit incompetent at what I do, and that did not feel very good. … Another contributing factor to the stress … is the fact that some of the teachers they do not go through the correct channels to get things done.”

**Occupational Wellness: Strategies for Counsellor-Teacher Relationship Barriers**

Leah. “My [new] principal insists on a lot of structure. She is a very organized person and she would ask teachers to find solutions. So a lot of times … instead of coming directly to me, they may set up a parent meeting with the child … and ask me to come to the meeting, [and] so they are looking for solutions instead of just dropping a paper in my lap. The teachers [also] … share issues/ problems … and of course, even among their peers, they can find solutions. If it is something to be referred of course they will do up the forms and send … [them] over to me.”

Ethan. “I love the [new] school because I get so much support from teachers, so much support.”
Sophie. “I had to deal with it professionally. So I listened to what she had to say and I went back to my office and I went, Wow!

Sophie. “Especially where teachers are concerned, I will listen to them and [I will insist that they fill out the form] I will say okay just full out the referral form … [and] when I get the form then I could handle it from there.”

Occupational Wellness: Discussion on Counsellor-Teacher Relationship Barriers

Anna’s experience justifies the notion that those teachers who do not have counselling training and who are not being paid to counsel students, ought not to provide counselling services as some teachers are driven by a need to know rather than a need to help. Historically, however, before there were specialized school counsellors, there were teachers who played a guidance role in support of their students (Pope, 2009). Moreover, more than 40 years ago, Musgrave (1972) posited that there are three ideal types of teachers. First, there is the academic teacher who focuses on disseminating knowledge in the subject area. Second, is the child-centered teacher who: “sees himself as teaching the child and not as teaching any particular subject. He … puts much more emphasis on the skills of teaching [rather] than on any subject matter … the child-centered teacher tends to be much more of a general practitioner” (p.226). Finally, there is the missionary teacher who sees him/herself as the societal equalizer who “aims to correct cultural deprivation” (p.229).

Although Musgrave (1972) cautioned that effective teachers continually reassess their roles based on their current social context, it may be easy to conceptualize how students who are experiencing personal/social issues would gravitate to Musgrave’s
missionary type teacher. I also argue that an efficient student-centered homeroom teacher may be an effective helper for his/her students, and an academic teacher could challenge students out of their comfort zones and assist them with higher levels of school success.

Leah’s experience highlights another important collaboration where teachers collaborate to work through some of the overlapping roles before taking the issue to the counsellor. Clifford-Poston (2006) explained that the two major reasons for a child’s referral to a school counsellor are academic progress and inappropriate behaviour; indeed, addressing these issues is well within the role description of a teacher. The overlap of responsibilities between teacher and counsellor seems unavoidable and collaborating with teachers may therefore be one way to have control over the counselling process. Teachers and counsellors may work together effectively by sharing educational and therapeutic skills to assist students with “emotionally based learning difficulties” (Clifford-Poston, 2006, p.30). This collaboration will also provide the space to ensure that there is no harm done to the students by the counselling processes of well-intentioned teachers. A good way to assist teachers to find solutions before bringing the form to the counsellor is to insist that teachers complete the referral forms before the counsellor sees the student (Sophie).

Since teachers are the largest group of professionals within a school, their acceptance of the guidance program is critical to its success (Kee Low, 2009). In fact, with respect to the counsellors’ success “[teachers] attitudes towards counselling … should not be underestimated” (Kee Low, 2009, p.72). Xyna’s experience confirmed some of the possible repercussions when teachers do not support the guidance program.
It may therefore be useful to conduct research into teachers’ attitudes towards
counselling in Trinidad and Tobago to ascertain how this vital relationship may be
supporting or disrupting the stated educational goals.

**Occupational Wellness Challenges: Training and Mentoring New Counsellors**

**Leah.** “In the early [days] the counsellors need … that mature person to walk
alongside them a little bit till they are comfortable. For me as an example I was a very
shy and reserved person. All the ambition [was] in my head. I was thrown in a big
school like this [about 1000 students] and … that is when you need your supervisor to
monitor, to manage, to understand the climate of the school. To say, *Okay this is a more
immature counsellor, do not put … [him/her] in this big big massive school*. If you want,
put them in one of the smaller secondary schools until they get into it; and those are some
of the things you need because I know how I felt.”

**Ben.** “I think the most stressful period of this work was … when [I] got into
guidance. … The area where the stressors were … [were] in the assessment area. You
do not have to be especially trained to diagnose, but at least you can say, *this looks like;
this seems similar to*. The other stress was [initially] going to work in a school by
yourself with a [large] school population not sure of how much intervention you could
give. … So [at the beginning], you are in guidance, but you are feeling like you are
walking on slippery ground because you are not sure of what you are doing and what
your interventions would be.”

**Ethan.** [Incompetence], “it is not a nice feeling. … I do not think training is the
problem because they send us on workshops with very good people. I would say it is me
wanting this person to change and me wanting this person to really wake up and smell the coffee”

**Sophie.** “When I started guidance ... every now and again that feeling of self-doubt would come up because it is like, *did I handle that situation right? I think I did:* that kind of thing. The level of stress was a lot because being a new guidance counsellor ... I did not have all the strategies to work around some of the situations.”

**Occupational Wellness: Strategies for Training and Mentoring New Counsellors**

**Leah.** “Well what they [the supervisors] try to do is more inside training so that they do a lot of prep before they [the new counsellors] are placed. ... The last batch that came ... they actually had them come along with us. I do not know if you will call it mentoring, but giving support.”

**Ben.** “We ... [since got] tests that we can administer to confirm to some level, ... [but] in terms of being able to offer help or offer somewhere to get help ... [that was] a stressful thing.”

**Adam.** “At our [monthly] meetings, [my supervisor] would discuss various aspects of your work and if you are having difficulty in some area you bring it to the meeting and she will explain it and everybody will have the benefit of that”

**Ethan.** “They have sent us on some pretty good workshops and we have learnt a lot ... we have been given a lot of good tools to use and it has helped.”

**Sophie.** “I had to do a lot of brain storming. I had to do a lot of calling around ... just talking with my supervisor, sometimes I was not able to actually determine *okay when I should slow down on the case load,* that kind of thing.”

**Zoe.** “I get a lot of help from my fellow guidance officers. We have a real
supportive team to help. … We have a real good team going … and that in itself takes away from the stress that you have to deal with at work.”

**Occupational Wellness-Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences: Training and Mentoring New Counsellors**

**Leah.** “You go into a classroom, with 30-40 pairs of eyes looking at you to do a session. To do an icebreaker, I have everything on paper, it is perfect … [but] when you get to the classroom that is a whole other thing, especially if you are immature in the field.”

**Ben.** “Seeing the behaviour … and not being able to help. That is frustration! You feel frustrated, you feel incompetent, you feel unfulfilled because the assessment [was the challenge]. You really could not give much help to students and their problems because you did not have the handle to do so. Maybe in the guidance you could spend time in the psycho-educational domain, but in the counselling segment very little, and also in the career development segment, very little [until we got the training].”

**Ethan.** [Earlier in my career] “if I was more competent I would be able to help the kids more. … I believe, I would be able to counsel them better. I would be able to say the right things or to zone into their problems faster and get them on the track to healing faster.”

**Sophie.** “Being kind of young in the service you do not really want to refuse anybody so you get another case and then you realize, _okay I am swamped_. You cannot deal with everything and then you realize, _I am stretched_ and that frustrates me and that causes stress because you cannot focus on this and that … it is like I want to do
Occupational Wellness: Discussion on Training and Mentoring New Counsellors

As Leah has stated, mentoring new counsellors, followed by ongoing supervision would reduce much of the uncertainty that counsellors feel (Loveless, 2010; Young & Lambie, 2007). Nevertheless, these counsellors have raised a serious question with respect to the training of school counsellors to meet the demands of the job. School counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago are responsible for four very broad and open-ended categories of services: advocacy, personal/social guidance and counselling, career guidance and counselling, and student academic success. Both Ben and Ethan experienced feelings of incompetence, but these experiences were before the training sessions. As such, there is evidence that SSSD are closing counsellors’ training gaps.

Zoe also highlighted the importance of having a supportive team. Consistent with organizational recommendations (ASCA, 2010; CCPA, 2010), the supervisors identified gaps in training and ensured that the counsellors received the required training. School counsellors’ professional development in the form of workshops, counselling conferences, other forms of continuing education, and the use of research data are ways to bridge the training gap and alleviate the negative impact on service delivery (Young & Lambie, 2007).

Ongoing education over the course of a school counsellor’s career is also important to meeting the challenges of an ever-changing school population (Baird, 2011; Fein, Carlisle, & Isaacson, 2008; Kendrick, Chandler, & Hatcher, 1994; Stebnicki, 2007; Watcher, 2006). Moreover, school counsellors’ continuous upgrading of skills is one
way to avoid career stagnation (Ronnestad & Skovholt, 2013).

Given that the four major responsibilities of a school counsellor (advocacy, personal/social, career, and academic counselling), are open ended, it is probably impossible for graduate schools to prepare school counsellors for every aspect of the job. As such, continuous training to fill knowledge gaps is perhaps part of effective school counselling.

**Occupational Wellness Challenges: Unrealistic Expectations**

Another occupational challenge refers to unrealistic expectations. Counsellors reported on their experiences as follows:

**Leah.** “[Administration and teachers] send the child to the guidance counsellor, and by the time you have one visit, *poof all the behaviours have gone through the door* because you have had a half an hour session with the child. So they [administration and teachers] have these unrealistic expectations to see immediate results, and that … [was a challenge]. You yourself [are] immature in the job, you [are also] going with all the expectations that you [are] going to change the world … *I am here now and I have that curriculum, and just send them and we are going to fix them.* You yourself, because you have all these theories in your head [you have unrealistic expectations, but], then you get to the real situation and you realize it is not … [what you had first envisaged].”

**Ethan.** “I was the guidance officer for two shifts [at a Junior Secondary] so that was stress by itself. The stress was having children come before you with problems. Actually, not that the children came before you, they were asked to go and see you, and children who are asked to come to see you and children who come to you willingly are
two different types of children: one acknowledges that he or she has an issue and one does not believe that he or she has an issue. … The teachers then expect you to be a magician, so the powerlessness is further compounded because you are guidance counsellor [and]… sometimes the teachers would expect you to be a magician to fix a child and you know you cannot do that.”

**Sophie.** “The stress on the job … is [mostly] the caseload because of the nature of the background of the students. Sometimes there are emergency cases [and] when that happens, and I am probably in the middle of doing a session or I am trying to deal with another case … I have to stop what I am doing to get to this and while I am dealing with this, the [other] situation is getting worse, so it is like how am I going to deal with all of this? … I think what [also] causes a lot of the stress is that as a guidance officer you wish you have … a secretary to get certain things done. … I have to do everything.”

**Occupational Wellness: Strategies for Unrealistic Expectations**

**Sophie.** “We had … a retreat and it really helped. I think we need to do that more often. It really really helped. I felt good. It is like *Oh My Gosh! Wow!* I felt good. I think we need to do more of that because I think she [my supervisor] recognized all of us started to complain about the stress.”

**Sophie.** “I came up with … a schedule: On … [day one] I would only do paperwork: so reports … letters to write, parents to call, administrative stuff. [On other days], I will do mostly classroom work and [so on]. That worked, but it does not happen rigidly [and] I have opted to asking teachers for classes as opposed to being time tabled.”
Occupational Wellness-Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences.

Leah. “As the problems come you feel overwhelmed ... I mean it is a period of feeling inadequate; a period of blame; a period of all those kinds of things that you go through until you come to the place of realizing I could only do so much with the child.”

Ethan. “So you have these children coming to you ... and you do not exactly know how to get them ... to change some of their behaviours. It was challenging and that frustrated me.”

Occupational Wellness: Discussion on Unrealistic Expectations.

Once again, gaps in training have entered the discussion in connection with expectations of self (Leah) and expectations from others (Leah, Ethan, & Sophie). In fact, the incongruence of counsellors’ expectations at graduation, and what they actually meet in the schools is the single most significant predictor of stress for new counsellors (Culbreth, Scarborough, Banks-Johnson, & Solomon, 2005). Both Leah’s and Sophie’s experiences highlight this dilemma.

The counsellors’ experiences with general job-stress are consistent with a study of American school counsellors as they also reported that they were left with very little control over their time due to similar demands (Falls & Nichter, 2007). Moreover, training did not prepare the American school counsellors for the demands and stress generated by the clerical and administrative duties that counsellors are assigned in the real world (Falls & Nichter, 2007). In this regard, Sophie has highlighted an interesting point; whereas, counsellors in agencies or private practice have support-staff, in the schools counsellors play multiple roles without support-staff. In contrast to ASCA’s
recommended ratio of 250 students to one counsellor, all of these counsellors work in
schools with populations of 500 to 1000 students. Fortunately, one supervisor
recognized the stress load of her counsellors and provided a productive outlet (Sophie).

**Occupational Challenges: Lack of Recognition and Regard**

**Leah.** “How do you measure the overall impact to say that it is your intervention
that helped this child move from 20% last year to 21% this year? Because sometimes
people can turn around in the same breath and say, *I do not know what you all are doing
in the school. I do not know.* [For example], when I went in … [that school] five and six
girls [were pregnant] at one time … and now for the last two years or so we have not
even had one pregnancy in school, not one. *Is it good for me? Who do they give credit
to?* To say, *Wow! We have not had not one girl coming to say Miss I am pregnant.*”

**Ethan.** “I feel that I am a Black Crow because they will die at their post
defending a realm that do not appreciate them and that is basically me … and that is how
I look at it.”

**Ethan.** “One of the other frustrating things is when school is out you still have to
go … and to sit in this place and these people will keep you there almost all day and … it
added to the frustration because *you know what? You work in the school too; you could
do with a break; you could do with a mental break.*”

**Sophie.** “Nobody really knows that I am under stress, they just know that once I
am on the compound, [it is] work. [It is] my children are this and my children are that,
and sometimes I feel as if I am being looked at as somebody who would solve all the
problems of the school. So every issue that comes up and it could simply be dealt with
at a disciplinary level they throw it in my direction as if I am supposed to wave a magic wand and fix the problem. As if I am the recycle bin! ... [And at] graduation nobody says, *Miss thank you so much for the work that you do.* So sometimes, I wonder if I am where I should be. Sometimes I feel not even compensated for the kind of work that I do. … On a whole in terms of what I do, I do not always feel appreciated for what I do where the whole … school … is concerned. I feel like if there is a problem send her by the guidance officer and when the issue is resolved it is like, good, life goes on.”

**Sophie.** “Sometimes I do feel tired. I honestly feel we do not get enough vacation days. I wish they would arrange our time such that we are like the teachers in the sense that when school close we close. I really wish that they would change that and at least give us some more days because we are mental health professionals, give us some other special leave … that would help us to rejuvenate.”

**Adam.** “We do a lot of work, but yet still on a daily basis on the News you are hearing about bullying. You are hearing about fighting. You are hearing about all kinds of negative behaviours and so on. I think we are overworked. There are some schools ... [without] guidance officers, and so the few guidance officers are the ones who have to try ... [to] make a difference. So we do a lot of work. We are overworked, but at the same time, we are not making a major dent ... so we need more resources … we need more personnel.”
Occupational Wellness-Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences: Lack of Recognition and Regard

Miriam. “I am at work, but I am just doing what is required. …I am not going overboard. … I said I have done enough and I do not think they appreciate [my efforts].”

Occupational Wellness: Discussion on Lack of Recognition and Regard.

Counsellors who share Miriam’s sentiments are perhaps describing what is indicative of presenteeism or being at work, but not producing to one’s usual ability (Johns, 2010). Although counsellors could be role models of self-motivation (Martin, 2002), most organizations also find ways to value their staff in tangible ways. Perhaps SSSD could adopt ASCA’s National School Counselling Week (ASCA, 2012) to highlight their work, conduct workshops and seminars for parents and students, and in general, use the week to build bridges within the school environment and with the wider school community. In fact, it may be useful to use the week as an annual school counsellors’ appreciation week.

With respect to the work year, school counsellors and their supervisors may have to be their own advocates for changing the policy (Young & Lambie, 2007) of working during July and August, when the teachers and students are on vacation. This change is to ensure that the counsellors get sufficient time to rejuvenate. While school counsellors usually report high self-efficacy scores, self-efficacy is a strong predictor of emotional exhaustion and burnout (Stephan 2005). Moreover, school counsellors suffer higher levels of burnout and emotional exhaustion than their counter-parts in agencies and private practice (Wilkerson, 2009; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). In fact, they have scored
higher than their colleagues in private practice on the burnout and compassion fatigue scales (Lawson, 2007). As such, school counsellors ought not to be compared with other mental health professionals who work throughout the year with fixed vacation days. I argue that it is counter-productive to have these counsellors committed to going into schools during the months of July and August. The students and teachers are on vacation, and the counsellors ought to be given the time to rejuvenate before the new school year begins.

Moreover, both Ethan and Sophie have described the reclusive world of some school counsellors (McMahon & Patton, 2000), especially if, as in their cases, they are the only counsellors at their respective schools. Perhaps this reclusive world hinges on the confidential nature of the job, and the need to manage students’ perceptions of the counsellor’s relationships with other staff members, including administration.

I sometimes wonder if persons outside of the helping profession have the perception that counselling is some kind of mysterious quick fix and counsellors are somehow above human frailty (Evans & Payne, 2008). These counsellors are also in a situation where the supervisor is not part of the immediate schools’ environments, and while that certainly has its benefits, it has drawbacks. One major drawback is when the counsellor is seen as an outsider rather than an integral part of the school structure. This situation is probably evident in Sophie’s experience. Finally, Adam’s lament concerns systemic problems of professional resources, parental support, politics, and economics as discussed in various parts of this chapter.
Occupational Wellness Challenges: Political Constraints

**Xyna.** “If … [they] decide … [they are] going to implement [student evaluation of teachers] … the union will … [push back and the ruling party] will lose the election. … So here we go, we [are] bouncing our heads all the time.”

**Ethan.** “I see large schools as a barrier to supervision … smaller schools allow for proper supervision. They still have problems, but it allows for greater supervision and management.”

**Ethan.** “As a guidance officer, there are so many things that you are just not sure of … you are not sure if you could talk about certain things not that it is taboo, but you just do not know … so you might just talk about it in a roundabout way.”

Occupational Wellness: Discussion on Political Constraints

Governments, through their respective MOEs, are responsible for the development of human capital; therefore, educational policies are inescapably political. Ideologies with respect to education reform may differ from one political administration to another, which will affect educational funding and other school policies. This changing ideology may account for **Ethan’s** concerns about the large schools and not knowing the acceptable rules.

The uncertainty about changing educational ideology is not unique to Trinidad and Tobago. In fact, school counsellors in the United States reported that stress and frustration came with changing district and federal policies as counsellors felt a lack of control. Generally, the American counsellors reported the frustration of having to implement new and insufficiently tested educational policies as these usually lead to
more turmoil (Falls & Nichter, 2007). In Trinidad and Tobago, governments have won elections based on promises for educational reform (Alleyne, 1996). Instituting new educational policies simply for political expedience, however, carries with it the potential for these policies to reverberate negatively or positively for many generations (Meghir, Palme, & Schnabel, 2012).

Given that school counsellors are relied upon to assist with the academic, career, and personal social issues of students, I argue that these professionals have superior knowledge of the issues with respect to the development of human capital. Moreover, the successes and failures within the walls of the schools can be used as measures for the future competencies and attitudes of the country’s human capital. For those school counsellors who have to institute policies that they may not fully understand or embrace, there ought to be recourse. This recourse through the hierarchy of the MOE may help to highlight issues and make recommendations for interventions before these issues become broader societal threats, as has been highlighted in the 2007 Global School-Based Student Health Survey for Trinidad and Tobago (Procope-Beckles, 2007).

**Occupational Wellness Challenges: Literacy Levels of Secondary School Students**

Anna. “They are first formers [Grade 7s] and … they cannot read … the few diligent ones would go [to class] and the others will continually stay and when they stay, they stay and fight, they stay and play, they stay and disrupt.”

Leah. “We deal with students who are what you call that in terms of the range of psychopathic behaviour and all those things. So the children would really be acting up crazy, of course, those students, for whatever mental reason or whatever it is may be
referred.”

**Ben.** “The student population was students who were placed under the 30% so they did not have the skills to read.”

**Adam.** “The catchment area, if I am to use one word it is *rough*, meaning that we get students here out of the SEA (Secondary Entrance Assessment) and generally I think it is more the low performing students in the SEA so it is a huge challenge”

**Ethan.** “Frustration is further compounded because what you as a guidance officer is called upon to do you cannot even do it because one, these students would not understand and two, you do not have the time anyway because you have to deal with all these other issues. I think it is children who are just being driven through the system so they will just go up in standards (grade levels) and they are just going through the motions. Nobody [is] really saying you [*are*] really not at that level yet so we need to *keep you back* … and then it comes time to move them up in standard, I mean, *where else will you put them? What else will you do with them?* It was also frustrating in that school because to pass for a Junior Sec you would have not done quite well at the entrance exam. That suggests, I do not want to say that they have a low academic ability; [because], it is possible that they were not groomed into making the most of their academic ability, but my point is when you go in front of a class to conduct guidance sessions they could not grasp it either, they could not follow.”
Occupational Wellness-Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences: Literacy

Levels of Secondary School Students

Anna. “I remember vividly that I was in a no-nonsense mood and I shouted at them and you could have heard a pin dropped. Those children were so quiet and a child said to me, *Miss you know I never heard you talk so loud.* It left me thinking, *maybe this is what they are accustomed to: people shouting at them.* That is so sad because it is almost as if you have to get on crazy for them to do what they know they [are] supposed to do.”

“When I am [feeling] stressed out or when I am feeling pressured, I guess I take a no-nonsense approach. … At those times … everything gets on my nerves so if you are talking and I watch you and … I take my eyes off … and you start talking again, you find on an ordinary day I may say, *what is happening to you why [are] you talking so much?* On a stressful day I would say, *you, stand up, when you think you could be quiet you could sit down!* So I guess even in my delivery when I am stressed it is different because I am less tolerant.”

Occupational Wellness: Discussion on Literacy Levels of Secondary School Students

Given that there are insufficient school counsellors to service every school, these counsellors are where, arguably, the greatest need exists. Nevertheless, they have highlighted a very serious tension in the education sector of Trinidad and Tobago: the question of equity versus quality (De Lisle, Seecharan, & Ayodike, 2010). Issues with equity are rooted in the elitist historical pre-independence (before 1962) period where there was exclusion of a large segment of the society from the formal education sector,
particularly at the secondary school level (Alleyne, 1996). On the other hand, post-
independence egalitarian education policies by respective governments may have
unintentionally contributed to students who cannot read. These policies may include the
instituting of the controversial Junior Secondary System (Alleyne, 1996) and the
consequences of dismantling the traditional transitioning process from the primary
school (Quamina-Aiyejina et al., 2001) to accommodate the secondary school for all
policy.

With respect to secondary school for all, while this policy addressed the question
of equity, perhaps it was at the expense of quality in relation to the rigor at the primary
school level. This rigor was associated with competing for one of the limited places at
the public secondary school level. This rigor was also evident with parents, teachers, and
the students themselves, as at that time, most students were invested in their education.

Alternatively, students whose parents could have afforded the tuition and fees at
private secondary schools would have paid for their children’s secondary education
(Alleyne, 1986). To accommodate for late bloomers, however, students who failed the
Secondary School Entrance Examination had the opportunity to stay in the primary
school for a further period of two years after which they would have completed the
School Leaving Examination Certificate (SLEC).

The SLEC gave the students two other chances to enter the public secondary
school system. Those who failed the SLEC twice either went to a vocational school or
became an informal apprentice (Quamina-Aiyejina et al., 2001) such as a plumber,
electrician, builder, painter, hairdresser, barber, and other such trades. Children who
could not read did not enter the secondary school system.
As such, despite the very charged and controversial views of equity versus quality, especially with respect to the notion of social inclusion, it may be productive to review, and where possible restore, the pre-secondary school for all transitioning structure. The present system is not fair to the students who cannot read. What do they expect from these children? Perhaps a study focussing on the voices and feelings of these children might evoke critical insights into their lived experiences.

In the current scenario, “many teachers in certain secondary schools have given up and do not bother to teach because the quality of students who have come from the primary schools is so poor that it's almost impossible to teach the syllabus” (Reddock, 2013, para. 4). In fact, Reddock argued that, “Primary school education needs to be revamped … if secondary and tertiary level education systems are to perform at their best” (Reddock, 2013, para. 5). Reddock (2013) lamented that:

In the past, when there was less expenditure on education, and fewer people attended high school, our primary school system was much more robust. ... The levels of education of students who left that primary school system were in some respects better than many of those coming out of the secondary school system today (para. 3).

In addition to the tensions of equity and quality, these counsellors’ descriptions of their experiences also highlight the very charged and controversial issue of the resources needed to implement universal inclusive education (Conrad, Paul, Bruce, Charles, & Felix, 2010).

Ten percent of the school population in Trinidad and Tobago is said to have learning disabilities (TTMOE, 2004). I argue that resources ought to be made available
to ensure that these students are supported; however, when 25% of the school population has been identified as having the potential to fail in the system (TTMOE, 2004), this raises a philosophical question. If schools are institutions of instruction and learning, is the regular school system the best place for children who are moderate or severely intellectually challenged? I argue that the regular school system ought to accommodate all children with physical disabilities, auditory, visual, or other health related issues. These issues may include mental health issues such as depression that do not result in severe long-term intellectual challenges; indeed, Trinidad and Tobago has a role model of inclusion through its first Prime Minister, Dr. Eric Williams, an Oxford University scholar, who functioned as Prime Minister with both visual and auditory challenges.

Nevertheless, Trinidad and Tobago has 12 public special schools and 21 private special schools. Yet, enrolment at these schools has been structurally declining because the regular school system is receiving these students (TTMOE, 2004). In some cases these students are placed in the regular school system without the required supports.

Notwithstanding these questions, I believe that children assessed as moderate to severely intellectually challenged ought to be in a learning environment where they could develop and thrive at their own pace and indeed given all opportunities to develop and participate in society to their full potential. I do not believe that that place is the regular secondary school classroom, especially when the required support services may not be in place. I think it is unfair to place those students in the regular classroom, even under the well-intentioned goal of social inclusion.

Moreover, Ethan has also pointed out a major issue whereby students advance from level to level whether or not they are equipped to handle the demands of the higher
level. In light of these observations, the issues for school counsellors seem multifaceted. First, and as Ethan has indicated, it is difficult to deliver the guidance curriculum to students who cannot read. Second, these counsellors are responsible for providing academic support for school success, but are these counsellors trained to support the academic success of students whose intellectual functioning is below what is required for academic success? Third, the counsellors are also responsible for alleviating the consequential behavioural challenges highlighted by Anna. How do these counsellors help students to achieve academic success and alleviate behavioural challenges within what appears to be the confines of systemic dysfunction? In particular, how do these counsellors find ways to support the 25% of students who are failing in the system, while supporting the other 75% of students?

The above systemic issues have the potential to deplete school counsellors’ resources especially their caring attributes of empathy and unconditional positive regard (Lawson, Venart, Hazler, & Kottler, 2007). Nevertheless, counsellors have an ethical responsibility to have a repertoire of strategies to draw from to manage their own wellness both on and off the school campus (Evans & Payne, 2008). These strategies may include (a) having a support system outside of the school environment (Sumerlin, & Littrell, 2011), (b) finding meaning and purpose in what they can actually do to help the children (Hettler, 1980) and (c) accepting that these issues are beyond the counsellors’ control (Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2011).

What is also noteworthy is that a major goal at the 1990 World Education Conference was to reduce illiteracy before the year 2000 (UNESCO, 1995-2010). Trinidad and Tobago was a signatory to that framework. At that time, however, the adult
literacy rate for Trinidad and Tobago was 96.90% and in 2010, the rate was 98.8% (World Health Organization, 2013). Based on the reports of these school counsellors with respect to the reading levels of their current students, I argue that the forecast of future adult literacy rates for Trinidad and Tobago, if left unchecked, may not be consistent with the 1990 and 2010 rates. Perhaps a review of what has changed in the education sector over the last 30 years and a return to what used to produce desired results may circumvent any future undesirable impact on the society with respect to illiteracy.

As The Mighty Sparrow admonished: “illiteracy is man’s greatest enemy ... [as] ignorance always increases risks” (Francisco, 1967). De Lisle et al. (2010) asked the question: “is the current education system seen as a help or a hindrance or do the planners envisage radical reform?” (p. 4). This is a serious question and these are serious challenges for school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago. One other possible solution for the challenges highlighted by these counsellors may reside within a broader societal discourse, by answering Ethan’s two critical questions: “Where else will you put them? What else will you do with them?”

**Occupational Wellness Challenges: Lack of Parental Cooperation**

**Anna.** “When the [parent] came, at the end of the conversation ... [the parent] promised that ... [the child will be taken to get help] ... but when they got home ... [the parent] forbade ... [the child] from ever coming back to me...and it really pained me that I could not do anything more for [the child]. ... It was a stressful situation.”

**Anna.** “Parents now are busier. Their priorities are skewed the child might have
the most expensive [pair of] shoes, the latest hairstyle, but they do not have the books that they need. If you ask them to get some tool or some instrument to do something, they cannot, and sometimes there are still the barrel children whose parents are away (abroad) and send them gifts and big suitcases, but they are not actually here. .... The children ... are mainly left up to their own devices, [and] so whether they study or not there is nobody there to see if they pick up a book. In some cases the parents are working shifts and different things so the parents are not actually there to say do this or do that.”

**Leah.** “When you [are] done [with] your session with them in the school, they have to go back to the existing problems in the home and then the parent is not cooperating so what you do with the child … is not being ... [followed-up] at home.”

**Miriam.** “I had a [student who was experiencing a serious personal crisis]. … I spoke with the [parent but there was no real support]. That … [situation] ripped me on the inside. … I try [now] not to be bombarded with this because ... I have to know how to limit … [and set a proper] boundary.”

**Ethan.** “What frustrates me more is that when you call the parents in or you call whomever they are living with, in, sometimes I do not feel that you get the support from the parents. A lot of the frustration comes from meeting some of these parents because you understand so much more. You understand why the child is like that, you understand that this child has nobody really and then they come to school and they misbehave, and you are like *God what to do?* I … compare them to the children who are doing well … and you look at the children who [are] doing well and you realize that there is someone supporting them, there is someone pushing them, [and] there is
someone who is giving them the love and attention that they need. [Moreover], it is just babies having babies so it is a lot of young clueless parents out here.”

**Occupational Wellness: Strategies for Lack of Parental Cooperation.**

*Anna.* “We would meet with parents independently and show them their [the students’] reports and try to reason with them [to] find out what is the problem [and] encourage them to assist more.”

*Zoe.* “I actually mended a lot of relationships with parent and child even though some of them, the parents, try like for a month or two, but it brought them some sort of relief. Others, there have been great improvement.”

*Zoe:* “My self-esteem workshop did work last time, and I saw some improvement with a good bit of students and I really would like to continue it.”

**Occupational Wellness: Discussion on Lack of Parental Cooperation**

In contrast to the elitist pre-independence period when education was a privilege, in the post-independence period, education has appropriately become a *right*. Notwithstanding this *right*, it is my position that universal secondary education ought to come with some responsibility attached. While there is a place for every child at the secondary school, this right creates problems when it is interpreted by some parents, some elementary school teachers, and some students to mean that preparation to perform at the secondary school level is no longer required.

Given that education is a right, T&T MOE supported parents by educating all children for free (Alleyne, 1996). This has since evolved to helping parents in many other ways including free books, free transportation, free meals, and free counselling.
(T&T MOE, 2013). One may question, *what then are the roles and responsibilities of some parents in educating their children?* For instance, Anna has lamented that some parents’ priorities “are skewed” and they do not seem to think that they need to buy school supplies. Miriam was trying to get the parents to work with the child. Ethan has observed that when he meets with parents of those children who are not doing well at school it is clear that the child does not have parental guidance, which leaves him to bemoan: “*God What To do?*” It may therefore be productive to review the historical, though well-intentioned, miscalculations of past educational reforms and ratify the next five years from a local historical perspective.

Anna also raised the issue of “barrel children,” which is a colloquial term for children whose parents have migrated, leaving the children with a relative. The parents then send the children barrels of goods mostly to compensate for their absence. In this regard, the literature shows that for some children there is healthy growth and development (Jokhan, 2007). For other children, however, the experience results in “depression, low self-esteem, which can lead to behavioural problems and these children are at increased risk of poor academic performance as well as interruption of schooling” (Bakker, Elings- Pels, & Reis, 2009, para. 3). With regard to these challenges, one can understand Anna’s concern. This is an area where counsellors may help by sharing their successful experiences in working with this population or get help by reviewing the literature on counselling this population.

Ethan’s reference to “it is just babies having babies so it is a lot of young clueless parents out here” seemed to have touched on both a contributing problem and a possible solution. The research on the negative economic and social impact of teenage
pregnancy is clear (Harden, Brunton, Fletcher & Oakley, 2009). In this regard, perhaps SSSD could organize an annual month long campaign over a few years focusing on prevention of future teenage pregnancies. This campaign could also utilize Leah’s previously referenced interventions. As Leah explained, “when I went in … [that school] five and six girls [were pregnant] at one time … and now for the last two years or so we have not even had one pregnancy in school, not one.” In addition, reparations in terms of support for the “young clueless parents” (Ethan) using Zoe’s previously referenced interventions to mend relationships between parent and child may also yield some desired results. In fact, SSSD has a great opportunity to document and share the successful interventions of counsellors perhaps in a monthly newsletter, a website, or by using webinars.

**Occupational Wellness Challenge: Lack of Professional Resources**

**Eva.** “A lot of the things that are needed to help children who have problems, the resources are not here, and [school counsellors] resort to what they could do. It was really, really frustrating … that was one of the first things that got me stressed out. In the primary school … the cases that I get are for children who need diagnostic help. They need to be assessed for some kind of learning disability and whatever and we do not have that here.”

**Anna.** “It could be another term or two or three or ten before we actually get [diagnostic support] … and so that situation was just really trying. Because you are trying to help the students and everywhere you turn you are getting blows. You are getting blows from administration. You are getting blows from … [the special teacher]
who is supposed to be testing them. *I felt like a hamster on a wheel: I was running and just going nowhere, just going around.* So that was one situation that … had me really feeling hopeless and wondering what is the use.”

**Adam.** “We had remedial teachers here who would work with students and try to see how they could help them …[but] now we do not have that so it is even … more challenging. So it is pretty … challenging it is extremely challenging. Sometimes you really want to help children and somehow you do not know where to go where to turn and so on. … [professional] resources sometimes can be challenging.”

**Zoe.** “I think there is need for more resources like psychologists to diagnose conduct disorders. … The waiting list to be interviewed or evaluated at the … [external clinic] is real long. You have to wait a few months three months I think before you get evaluated. By that time you do something real stupid.”

**Xyna.** “Another problem is that we as counsellors or officers we are not being truthful to ourselves because we know that we cannot do what we want to do! We know that! So it is not making sense when [our supervisor] calls her meeting and everybody [is] tapping themselves on the back. They did X and they did Y … We need to … [say that] … we need X X X see what you could do for us at the highest level because at present we do not have anything to work with.”

**Occupational Wellness: Strategies for Lack of Professional Resources**

**Ben.** “That [lack of resources] has been a catalyst for going to study. That pushes me to study. What we have discovered … [with] guidance, is that there are a number of behavioural problems [that] show up among children that the referral agencies
have not been able to manage. [When they do manage], they manage at a slow, very slow, slow, slow pace. If people like me could get the competence we could at least start a process of intervention and refer at the very last, but at least it gives me a better chance to understand what this child is experiencing and going through and also as a means to help teachers.”

Occupational Wellness: Discussion on Lack of Professional Resources

The participants explained that obtaining support services from professionals such as remedial teachers (Adam), and psychologists (Zoe) were major challenges. This lack of support may hinge on two major scenarios: (a) how governments allocate funding for these services, and (b) the tensions that exist for these professionals between working within the MOE versus working in private practice. In Trinidad and Tobago the original plan for Student Support Services Division was to have these supports under one umbrella (T&T MOE, 2004). Expanding diagnostic support services at SSSD is also critical, as the diagnoses by these professionals may identify what types of other professionals are needed to support the country’s students.

Perhaps it might be useful, and of equal importance, to rationalize the policy of secondary school for all, regardless of intellectual ability. This change ought to ensure that secondary school children are prepared for secondary school work or at least they will be able to read and comprehend at grade level. Quintilian (35-95 AD) cautioned that instruction has to match the child’s developmental stage (Murphy, 1987). As such, teach the child at the child’s current level giving new instruction only when the child has mastered the current level (Murphy, 1987). After 2000 years, is it possible that this
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wisdom is still relevant?

In addition, moving away from the deficit diagnostic model altogether and working with a more asset-based holistic ecological approach (The Search Institute, 2014) may increase the level of school success at the secondary schools. These two approaches taken in tandem may also reduce the need for diagnostic supports in the regular public secondary school system. There would still be a need for these professional services at the primary school level and at the other educational facilities.

Moreover, by sending students who cannot read to the secondary school, the unintended result may be very disillusioned and discouraged youth, especially when, by Form Three, these children are then told that they have to leave the school system (Sophie). There seems to be a need for a more humane and productive transitioning system from the elementary to secondary school, and from the secondary school to the world of work or higher education.

With regard to making the case for resources through their monthly meetings, perhaps Xyna’s suggestion about reporting challenges, as they are experienced may yield desired results. As such, perhaps these counsellors may consider having a segment of their monthly meetings to discuss and record specific cases where the lack of professional resources may have hindered their ability to function. This data can then strengthen the case for diagnostic and professional resources particularly at the primary school level.
Occupational Wellness Challenge: Writing Reports

**Ben.** “One thing that stresses me is when [my supervisor] starts to call for reports that for me is a stress. … [Reports could be used to] help to analyze what you do and where you are. It also helps you to plan what you are going to do in the future, and I have not seen the report being used in either way as a planning report [or] as an instrument to help design and to fix problems [and so it stresses me out to prepare a report that will not be used].”

**Adam.** “Sometimes all this set of reporting and writing and stuff like that … bugs me a bit. It bugs me a bit and it comes from the top and says we need to have this by so and so time and I want to be with the students and I want to do work with the students and so on. … It is a requirement [but] … sometimes it bugs me.”

**Ethan.** “There was a time when we had so much reports to do, it was really sad. It was reports and sometimes I have had supervisors and these supervisors were very anal about reports. I am also slightly anal so I would make sure and do my reports on time and everything, but it took a lot … [and] I have had supervisors who … added to the stress. … They used to micro manage a lot so they would, you know, reports had to be real tight.”

Occupational Wellness: Discussion on Writing Reports

Balancing the time allotted for doing paper work and attending to people could sometimes be a challenge as has been highlighted by Adam. Perhaps it might be useful for counsellors in Ben’s situation to revisit their suggestions with their respective
supervisors and find ways to use the report for the greater good. These counsellors may also agree that reports are necessary documents (CCPA, 2010). Furthermore, they may agree that preparing a monthly report is perhaps one of the few predictable aspects of a school counsellor’s job. Maybe, a review of the report’s format to make it more user-friendly, addressing especially the issues experienced by the counsellors, might alleviate this problem. It may also be useful to prepare the report as a working document during the month so that at the end of the month it is not so burdensome. For instance, creating a master file at the beginning of the month and updating it when the information is current, or using the daily log to prepare weekly reports, may reduce the burden at the end of the month.

**Occupational Wellness Challenge: Constraints of the Physical Environment**

**Anna.** “My office is at the back of … [another room]. Sometimes that is a deterrent, because they [the students] do not want to have to walk through … [that] room … to get to me. So that is a deterrent.”

**Leah.** “It is so challenging to really do proper counselling: the bell is ringing … you may not have a room like this that you could lock, and therefore there is the constant noise. … [The school] is not ideal to really talk about proper prolonged counselling at about six to eight sessions with a child [because of all the school disruptions]. One day … there is [a sporting event] … the next week the child is suspended, and the next week is exams … and then the term is finished.”

**Ben.** “You do not want to go in a classroom in that place because there is no air condition. I think we have to get more efficient with what we do with guidance … in
terms of having a nice little room an air-conditioned area where the children can come in … and you could engage with them in a private area without all the distractions around. I think the structure does not enable that … I sit in an office that is hot. It is really hot. It really gets to you. … This is a stressful thing: to come into a hot classroom and to come into spaces that do not enable what you want to do. You have to make do and the children cannot be given the kind of dignity that you want to give and the standards to dream and be creative and so on.”

**Ben.** “I think the architects did not think well about the design and they did not maximize the wind flow to keep the buildings cooler. … Building this way prevents all the wind from going over that way so therefore that segment of the school is very humid because of how this [school] is designed. Maybe you could design in the same direction or if it was designed with big arches in it then it would allow for wind tunnels, [and] so part of the problems of the school is the architectural design.”

**Ethan.** “What added to my frustration were the lack of an air conditioning unit in the office and the lack of a computer to do the reports and so on and to do research.”

**Zoe.** “In my school I am having issues with allocation of funds and getting funding for certain things and that is a bit stressful for me because I have a lot of nice dynamic programs that I would like to have a classroom like this where I could conduct them, and I do not. I have a really small office, [and] right now the A/C is not working, and imagine I have to conduct counselling. My computer is not working properly. Two years … [ago] I had requested a printer; and the principal keeps telling me *okay I am giving you this room* and when I got everything for the room only to find out that … other persons are sharing the room. … So I was real stressed out.”
Zoe. “My office is in administration. I have been talking about [this] for two years because, that is the next thing, in my room you could hear conversations. Also, when … [children] come to see me [administration]… will be [asking them] “What are you doing here? And they will… [chase] them [while saying] everybody has to come to see the guidance officer and sometimes children do not come to see me because they think I talk to the principal because, you know, our offices are so close by and we may discuss certain things.”

Adam. “I never had this room before. I had a little little office … and it was frustrating to sit in a little thing, a little cubicle like this, and you cannot do any work, and then sometimes when you go to the children in the classroom, the classrooms are hot. The children cannot get work done so that used to bother me, but eventually I got this facility.”

Occupational Wellness: Strategies for Constraints of the Physical Environment

Ethan. “Recently I got an air conditioned office.”

Adam. “Eventually I got this facility and I feel so happy now.”

Occupational Wellness: Discussion on Constraints of the Physical Environment

Having deterrents such as locating the counsellor’s office in administration has long been considered counter-productive to the role and function of the school counsellor (Falls & Nitcher, 2007). Anna and Zoe may consider raising this issue with their respective supervisors, as a major concern. In addition to the location of the office, counsellors’ files are also confidential and so sharing an office or a computer with other staff members is not an option, ethically speaking. In fact, from my experience it is
critical that counselling rooms are designed so that counsellors could function in a confidential atmosphere. The room also ought to be able to accommodate an individual, as well as small groups. I also believe that the room should be an emotionally safe place and so accessing the room cannot be a traumatizing experience for a child who is already experiencing some level of trauma (Anna & Zoe).

With respect to air-conditioning, Ethan’s and Adam’s new air-conditioned rooms suggest that this issue is getting some attention. Nevertheless, the issue of inappropriate counselling spaces adds unnecessary stress (Harris, 2009). As Ben said, “we have to get more efficient with what we do with guidance.”

Moreover, the concerns with hot classrooms described by Ben and the other counsellors raise broader questions about the effect of either architectural design (Ben) or climate change (Mosle, 2013) with respect to the temperature of the classrooms, and by extension on student success and overall behaviours (Anderson, 2001). School counsellors are intimately involved in those two areas. Mosle (2013) argued that “as temperatures rise, life will become more unpleasant for teachers and students in New York City schools, which remain open through June 26, and many of which do not have air-conditioning” (para. 1). Unlike New York City, Trinidad and Tobago is located close to the equator and most classrooms are not air-conditioned.

With regard to monitoring climate change in the Caribbean, the Caribbean Community Climate Change Centre (CCCCC, 2013), with the assistance of educators, is investigating the social impact of global warming. These efforts appear promising as they relate to this growing concern for the well-being of students and, by extension, the wider society. As Mosle (2013) cautioned, “It’s absurd to talk about inculcating 21st-
century skills in classrooms that resemble 19th-century sweatshops” (para. 4). Perhaps the time has come for Trinidad and Tobago to consider having “alternative energy solutions: wind-powered classrooms or grassy roof gardens that naturally lower building temperatures” (Mosle, 2013, para. 14) or as Ben has suggested, design buildings to capitalize on the wind flow. Hot classrooms are definitely a challenge for the counsellors, and for the students. Attending to hot classrooms is critical especially since research has already shown that heat leads to aggression (Anderson, 2001). Hot classrooms may therefore be a contributing factor to the aggression in the schools.

**Occupational Wellness Challenges: Role Confusion and General Job Stress**

Leah. [Referring to earlier in her career, Leah explained that] “Once a teacher was absent, you got called to go and to do supervision: to watch the class, or to baby sit the class. So according to what is happening, sometimes you may find those sorts of issues coming up as to what you are supposed to do on paper and … your actual role. [Moreover], those big situations … [such as suicidal ideations] are not in our purview to handle. Those things are referred. So of course in that aspect the role there is to refer, but then they [in administration would] say, *but you did not do anything with the child,* but your role there is not to counsel the child for mental health, [it] is to refer the child to get the mental health that he needs. … [Generally], I am … [also seen as the] dean of discipline, I am all those kinds of things.”

Leah. “We had different leadership … [and each leader] redefined our roles, so that we would have been operating [with one job description] and then [new leaders] … came, and said, *No, that is not your job spec, you are not supposed to be doing a, b, c, d, e f, g, that is not your function,* and so … [those changes] … threw us off.”
Anna. “It is the balance, because sometimes the parent comes, and it is not that I could say I have a class, just wait until I am finished or the class is [left] unattended.”

Sophie. “The stress on the job is the case load, because of the nature of the background of the students”

**Occupational Wellness: Discussion on Role Confusion and General Job Stress**

As Leah has pointed out, her understanding of her job description, and what she was actually required to do, early in her career, were incongruent. In fact, with respect to role ambiguity, Moyer (2011) confirmed that the amount of time spent on tasks outside of counselling was a significant predictor of school counsellors’ burnout. Anna’s and Sophie’s experiences with general job stress are also reflected in a phenomenological study by Falls and Nichter (2007). They confirmed that the constant demands on school counsellors’ time result in a situation where they are exposed continuously to chronic stress on the job. Finally, counsellors explained that when there is too much work for the time allotted, the required energy, and a lack of support, it all results in overwhelming stress or distress (Falls & Nichter, 2007).

The above explored the 13 super-ordinate themes of organizational wellness. In general, the many systemic issues experienced by these counsellors seem to interfere with (a) the expression of their values (b) obtaining personal satisfaction, and (c) contributing to improvements to either the wellbeing of their students or their respective work environments and these are three major areas of organizational wellness (Roscoe, 2009). Since systemic issues seem to be impediments to counsellors’ organizational wellness, SSSD may consider a review of these 13 issues to ensure the viability of the
educational goals. Having explored organizational wellness the following therefore begins the results and discussions on the remaining six components of wellness beginning with environmental wellness.

**Environmental Wellness Challenges: Work/Life Balance**

**Adam.** “It was really rough at that time. … It was an event that occurred outside of school, but it affected how I performed in school.”

**Leah.** “You come home with all these children’s issues and you are wondering *how you could help, what you could do* … because … [after] your session with them in the school, they have to go back to the existing problems in the home, and then the parent is not cooperating”

**Sophie.** “I think the first time the level of stress really went up was … after I started the guidance, because within … [those] … months, I started the Master’s … so I …[went] to school at night, and then worked in the morning, and I am also a single parent. … So I had to juggle all of that, [and] it was pretty stressful. I felt helpless because of my domestic situation … that feeling of helplessness, I felt that many times.”

**Miriam.** “In the beginning it was very difficult to use that line of demarcation, … [when] you see me in the supermarket … at church, … on the street, or in some sporting activity … do not ask me about … [school related concerns]. Your work was just travelling with you everywhere you go, until you … learn to put some measure of control in your life.”

**Zoe.** “Personal issues at home … that was a bit stressful, really stressful, and I guess that also affected my work in some way. … At that time … my school was in a
real chaos for those months, and then my personal life, and then my kids ... it was really overwhelming. That was the most stressful time of my life. Talking about it now, I thought it was behind me.”

Environmental Wellness: Strategies for Work/Life Balance

Anna. “Before I had ... [children] I would really take on things, but since I have them, and since I have to deal with them ... it just got better for me. So my family has actually helped me. My kids have actually helped ... with the stress.”

Leah. “[I came] to the place of realizing [that] I could only do so much with the child. The child also has to take responsibility for implementing the action, parents also, the school also, and you realize that once you have done your part, then, you could say: Okay this is enough for today let me go home ... and I leave. Once I reach home ... I am pretty good to go. ... The things that I have control over I am controlling those things, in the midst of what I do not have control over, and that is helping me come back in balance.”

Ethan. “[My supervisor] is a real amazing person because she tells us like it is, I remember so many things that she has told us. She told us things like: do not ever make this your life; have your life outside; this is just part of your life. She also understands how stressful [the job] is and every term we ... [have a social] and those things help. Those things really help.”

Ethan. “I have real friends. Friends who [I] can call ... and say I am feeling ... [down] and they would ... [be there for me]”

Sophie. “A ... friend became ... a support system for me so sometimes they will
… [help me] and I will just sleep, sleep, sleep because I was lacking that a whole lot.”

**Zoe.** “I had a life outside of my work. Work is not my life, so I have a social life. I have good friends, a great supervisor … so that helps me, [I enjoy] … dancing, exercising, hanging out with my friends, [and] talking with my parents: they were very supportive as well.”

**Zoe.** “I do everything for fun … hanging out … dancing, I go to the movies, [and] I carry the kids to the park almost every day. … Tomorrow I am going zip lining … [I do] kayaking, hiking, anything … I am usually up for anything and I like spontaneous limes” (social events).

**Miriam.** “[I] … have friends … I go to the beach, relax, and that is how … I deal with things generally. I am [also] very close to my family and I am not just talking about my immediate family: my husband and children, but … my extended family. We have always had a close niche so if something is happening … I speak to my brothers, [and] my sisters. Everybody knows: my aunts my uncles … and we share with each other, we laugh. So I think that family commitment, that family circle, that family group helps to keep you in that place of wellness.”

**Environmental Wellness-Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences: Work/Life Balance**

**Sophie.** “I did not want to talk to too many people because … I tend to be the one that … [other people] would call about … [their] issues. So eventually, I would shut down from everybody. I do not want to hear anything.”

**Sophie.** “Because I [sometimes] got to work late … they [the students] were
Discussion on Environmental Wellness: Work/Life Balance

These counsellors have highlighted two crucial aspects of work/life balance (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2013; Redmond, Valiulis & Drew, 2006; Singh, 2013; Sumerlin & Littrell, 2011) support from family and friends (Anna, Miriam, Zoe, Ethan, & Sophie) and having a supervisor who provides the necessary guidance for work/life balance (Ethan, Miriam, Zoe, & Sophie). These counsellors are able to recognize when they are not working at their full potential and they know what to do to regain a sense of balance. As Lawson and Myers (2010) suggested, high functioning counsellors spend time with family (Anna, Miriam, Zoe, Sophie), maintain a sense of humour (Zoe), maintain balance between professional and personal lives (Zoe, Leah, Ethan), and maintain a professional identity.

Work life balance for single parents is already problematic (Redmond, Valiulis, & Drew, 2006). Adding the demands of graduate work and being a single mother, as with counsellors in Sophie’s situation, must be very difficult. Counsellors, who share Sophie’s experience of upgrading their skills through night classes, may suffer the effects of work/life imbalance. The MOE may find it useful to take a position on this issue. It may be useful to have all upgrading of skills conducted over a few summers, as this may be a more productive way for counsellors seeking higher education to spend the months of July and August, as opposed to going to the schools when the children and the
teachers are on vacation.

**Sophie’s** experience of being the person who family members and friends turn to for support seems to be a hazard of the helping profession (Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001). Learning to say “no” to people who you care about when your own self care is in jeopardy is therefore a necessary skill for counsellors (Williams, 2011). **Sophie’s** self-awareness allowed her to recognize when she was overwhelmed and **Sophie** took the necessary self-care measures to regain her well-being.

Similarly, **Leah’s** realization that other stakeholders, including the child, also share in the responsibility of the child’s development is another way to achieve environmental wellness. As **Leah** explained, there were times when she was at home, but mentally, she focussed on finding solutions for students. When she accepted that she has done her part then she felt comfortable to leave work both mentally and physically as opposed to working late or being absorbed with students’ issues while she is at home.

Finally, **Miriam** has wisely and effectively dealt with an issue that is perhaps more common in small communities where the counsellor is well known in the community. For these counsellors, their work has the potential to reach parents in the grocery store; indeed, this practice has ethical and confidentiality implications. For example, discussing a student’s situation in a grocery store could result in an unintended breach of confidentiality with damaging consequences. The counsellor would be abdicating all control over what is said in this public place and s/he would be in breach of the professions’ code of ethics. Also, when some students see parents speaking with counsellors outside of the school setting, it sometimes affects the student/counsellor relationship as the student wonders if the counsellor is sharing his/her information. To
safeguard the counsellor/student relationship, counsellors have to manage any appearance of a dual relationship. As such, Miriam did what was ethically responsible by discouraging that practice from the beginning.

In general, balancing the multiple roles that these counsellors play both at work and away from work and the impact of the environment on their well-being including, the use of resources in the community; and having the knowledge that counsellors have limited control over the external environment (Roscoe, 2009) augurs well for counsellors’ environmental wellness. Having explored environmental wellness, the following are the counsellors' experiences with spiritual wellness.

**Spiritual Wellness Challenges**

**Eva.** “Sometimes feeling that I could not manage the types of issues that were presented [was stressful]. I do not want to say … [that I have a] loss of purpose, but hopelessness. Because I really feel … as guidance counsellors, we talk to the children, [and] we find out what their issues are, and then what? Where do they go? What can we do for them? They could listen to me, but the actual coping skills that you need to cope with the problems that are not changing, that we cannot change, what do we do? So you just feel so hopeless. I want to help everybody, but I cannot help everybody. You know what I am saying? You just feel hopeless. Because you know that at the end of the day there is really nothing you could do [but refer] … so it is pervasive hopelessness.”

**Anna.** [I question] “my purpose at this school, I was wondering: am I getting through to the children? Is it me perhaps or… would somebody else, a new face, be able to reach them in ways that maybe I can’t? … I was honestly losing my zeal. I was going
through the motions. … I guess … I was not feeling as though I was doing anything worthwhile. It is almost as though you are kicking against bricks … the hopeless feeling it comes from time to time and especially the last couple of months: that last term? Yes! *Most definitely!* [However, when] school closed and I got to rest a little, and reflected on why I really chose guidance … [that helped] and so the zeal is back.”

**Leah.** “I felt frustrated! Again I am questioning, *Can I do more? Is there something else I could do for this child? Is there some other institution we could get this child to? Is there some other available resource?* So you are running in your mind. *What else? What else? What else can I do to help this child?* And that [thinking] can go out of the gate with you, and you come back the next day with the same thing again.”

**Ben.** “I do not want to use the word frustration … [but I do feel] more powerless.”

**Miriam.** “I know [that] I am here for a purpose, but then when everything was going down I said, *Okay, well I think it is probably time for me to leave.* … I am thinking … I was just going through that period where … you are at that peak and you are coming down and I say: *Okay it is probably age, you are getting older.*”

**Xyna.** “There might be some things that you want to do and because of the attitudes of others, especially administration … you cannot do anything, so it is like your hands are tied because you really want to help the kids, but you cannot help them. The most you could do: You have to be there for them in the physical and in the spirit, but you just cannot [do anymore]. I get very emotional … depending on the situation, I will be extremely sad. If something [is] affecting a child, I become very sad when I cannot do anything about it.”
Ethan. “Powerless, I felt powerless. I felt powerless also because I do not believe that our system … has the support … for guidance officers to follow up. We do not have enough psychologists and therapists. [I was questioning] … What is the point of all this? What is the point? … You question if things are really getting better or worse. … You question if people really care when they say that they care.”

Sophie. “Sometimes I [ask myself] am I in the right job? Am I making sense? What is my purpose here? Am I just to be used when there is an issue? So sometimes I do not feel like this is my purpose, but other times I feel okay I am making headway here and I think that is what causes the stress. I am hustling to come here, and I do not feel appreciated.”

Spiritual Wellness Strategies

Eva. “By thinking about all the things that could go wrong that do not [go wrong]. In other words, [I am] being thankful for the things that are really okay with me. Because at the end of the day, I really have a lot to be thankful for, so, yes that is it, just putting in perspective all the things that are wonderful in my life.”

Eva. “Depending on my mood, the music will be Gospel music. I am not an overly religious/spiritual person. I am not. Sometimes I just sit there and I meditate and … [I] say thank you Lord for whatever it is that you did for me. Spiritually, every-day I must say that I do take a moment to … ponder my life and move on, you know, move on.”

Anna. “When I am really stressed I may not feel to talk, and at those times, music helps. There is a [gospel] song … and I … listen to that song over and over
again … I love … [another Gospel singer]. Both of them would have been really instrumental in calming my spirit. I do not know if you know his (one of the singer’s) story? If you know his story … [it] is kind of inspirational and it really helps to lift me, because if he could have gone through all that and still sing … then … whatever little thing you are going through it is like peanuts compared to what he might have [experienced]. I know now that things happen for a reason. I know that He [God] allows certain things, and there are lessons to be learnt from them, and I have a favourite text … and there are times when I am stressed when I reflect on that text and it really helps.”

**Leah.** “My spirituality I think is what keeps me grounded and smiling and able to bounce back quickly. From the time you get to a church service and you put your praise on: you cannot go to a service, get your praise on and then go back out stressed. It is not going to happen. I think that is what really keeps the internal peace. That is what it is: in the midst of the storm … that internal peace that says *hey everything is still under control* … that works for me.”

**Ben.** “I think … working with children is a calling, a spiritual calling, a calling from God, and a calling is an opportunity to serve. … That has been my logical spiritual approach … [and] this brings me satisfaction when students succeed when the boys want to read and do something better, this has been my satisfaction.”

**Ben.** “[I] kind of rationalize it, you kind of reframe, and, you know, you change your perspective, and you personalize the thing … to see somebody who was dealing with their stuff: maybe she had a bad day… All of that became part of dealing with the stress.”

**Miriam.** “Spiritually … everything I turn over to God: … I pray, I sing, that is it,
you know [that] I am at that level.”

**Xyna.** “I say my prayers, and I go to church. I take my long hour drive and I go up there and socialize and talk with my Pastor, and come back home and that is it.”

**Adam.** “Well I am a very churchy person and that is where I found solace. I went to God and so I found some comfort there.”

**Ethan.** “One of the things that ground me is that I believe I have experienced miracles in my life. Things that have happened to me that are truly unexplainable, and I could only say that there is something powerful out there, and that actually gives me hope.”

**Ethan.** “I listen to a lot of 80s music … [and religious] music as well helps … it is very enchanting, and it is relaxing, and I read a lot [of religious texts] and it helps.”

**Sophie.** “One of the things I still do … [is] go up to … [a church on a mountain] that is like heaven to me. I would just go and sit in my car. Sometimes I will fall asleep in the car just hearing the birds, the breeze, and just being there, and I will have my Bible. I would read the Bible and I will talk to God. … So that really helped, and once I go up there I feel spiritually pumped. I could face the afternoon now. I could face the night. I could face the week, so in terms of that spiritual component it really, really helped.”

**Zoe.** “There was a time when I really crashed, and church bailed me out and spiritually, it helped me a lot to catch back myself … I used to go to church every day.”
Spiritual Wellness: Effect on Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences

Anna. “So I will roll in and sometimes I would roll in late, and I even wanted to move. I felt maybe a whole new experience would just be better.”

Miriam. “I think I even added to it [my lack of drive] by just not doing anything and not standing up … you are there and you are just going through the motions, as they would say … So spiritually, I just say, okay, it is probably time for me to move.”

Ethan. “You do what you have to do … but it is like you are going through the motions. You are going through the motions.”

Sophie. “Since I came back, in terms of the stress, I told myself I will just stick to the basics and let the basics be as effective as possible and try to get fulfillment from that.”

Discussion on Spiritual Wellness

Miriam, Anna, Ethan, and Leah’s acknowledgement of just going through the motions during challenging experiences has captured the pervasive hopelessness expressed by most of the counsellors. In fact, these counsellors have experienced a range of what Sheffield and Baker (2005) have described as symptoms for burnout: frustration, uselessness, hopelessness, being unhelpful, wanting to leave, and going through the motions. This is critical as continuing to work without some form of self-care while experiencing these symptoms could eventually result in impairment (Williams, 2011).

Xyna’s lament, “If something [is] affecting a child I become very sad when I cannot do anything about it” is perhaps an example of compassion fatigue (Figley, 1995). As such, understanding that counsellors cannot fix everything (Evans & Payne,
2007) and that there are limits to helping (Sheffield & Baker, 2005; Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001), especially in those situations “that we cannot change” (Evans), is important for self-care.

Nevertheless, research on how school counsellors engage in self-care to promote their own wellness and prevent burnout is limited, and the strategies described by the Trinidad and Tobago counsellors will therefore add to this emerging body of literature. Two studies have revealed, however, that school counsellors do engage in self-care activities. For instance, Evans and Payne (2007) interviewed six New Zealand school counsellors who exemplified self-care practices and concluded that, although the job is high stress, counsellors themselves had an important role in preserving their own health and maintaining job satisfaction. All six counsellors developed positive attitudes for meeting the emotional demands of their work.

Responding to the question of where passion comes from, the unanimous response of participants in another study was spirituality (Sumerlin & Littrell, 2011). Generally, spirituality and religion were expressed as “a relationship, a calling, a purpose, spiritual gifts, spirituality as a help during challenging times, spiritual upbringing and non-religious spirituality” (Sumerlin & Littrell, 2011 p. 283). Based on their participants’ responses, spirituality also included exercise, being in nature, prayer, meditation, contemplation, evaluating personal values, charity, and hope that things will change during difficult times.

With respect to spiritual wellness, Cashwell, Bentley, and Bigbee (2007) explained that the process is both active and passive wherein “beliefs, disciplined practice, and experiences are grounded and integrated to result in increased mindfulness
(nonjudgmental awareness of present experiences), heart-fullness (experience of compassion and love), and soulfulness (connections beyond ourselves, p.66).” This definition is relevant to self-care, because having a mindful, soulful, and heart-full inner voice will leave no room for a counsellor’s focus on negative self-talk or negative attributes (Cashwell, Bentley, & Bigbee, 2007).

As such, sometimes self-care may mean questioning “if things [are] really getting better or worse” (Ethan) as within the answers to those questions may be the signs of distress (Yassen, 1995) and an opportunity to prevent burnout or compassion fatigue may be realized. Questioning may also help to put experiences in perspective (Eva & Leah) or as Ben has suggested, it helps to reframe or to change your perspective. Knowing that “there are lessons to be learnt” (Anna) from these experiences, also contribute to spiritual wellness. Moreover, while questioning one’s purpose and finding meaning in life augurs well for one’s spiritual growth, it is also important to remember that spiritual wellness is an ongoing personal process that leads to the inculcation of “values and a personal belief system ... [that connects the individual to the] community ... others, nature, the universe, and a higher power.” (Roscoe, 2009, p. 220)

Eva has also highlighted an important tension in the literature: One does not have to be religious to be spiritual, and so her meditation contributes to spiritual wellness (Cashwell, Bentley, & Bigbee, 2007). Equally important, the hope that Ethan receives from his experiences with miracles is also a manifestation of spirituality (Ingersoll, 1998). Nevertheless, having the support of a church community, and all that this entails (praying, singing, mutually supporting and accepting one another, sharing common values, listening to music, and private reflections), have been found to be a strong anchor
for one’s self-care (Sumerlin & Littrell, 2011). Having explored the counsellors’ experiences with spiritual wellness the following are the counsellors’ experiences with emotional wellness.

**Emotional Wellness: Challenges**

**Anna.** “Sometimes [I feel] anxious … the anxiety would come from wanting to do more, or wishing that there was something that you could do, but it is like your hands are tied, so you cannot, and that goes on to being powerless as well. Because [in] some situations we just cannot help and so you say: *What can I do? What can I do?* You are taxing yourself and you are wondering, *is there anything else I could have done or said?* You just get sad for the person because you know that they are hurting or they are going through something and you just wish that you could do something [other than referring them].”

**Leah.** “There are times when … there is one thing after the next, whether … fights [or] infractions … and before you could even try to get one issue resolved, [there is another crisis]. Those are the times I remember feeling stressed … those times are a bit stressful.”

**Ben.** “It was a stress-full period because I was angry. … Normally, [I am] very easy going, and placid and logical and trying to fix things … [but] when I get aggressive or when I begin to speak out at people, to me that is a stress trigger. I would say I was unhappy and dissatisfied and I felt trapped. I felt a little trapped because I did not have the power to really change … I actually told somebody I felt stuck in a place: cannot go forward or backward.”
Miriam. “There was a time when … it was very frustrating and you are like *I just think I need to get out of this place* … I was really emotionally drained. I do not think it happened in any other area, but it is just for here [this school] you did not feel the love or the connection emotionally. … You are here, and it is just like, *whatever!* I [am] just existing, kind of a thing.”

Xyna. “I get angry sometimes. … I get frustrated. That is the word. I get frustrated. I get angry… because I cannot do anything. We cannot do anything… *What do you think I could do? What I could do?* The most I could do is talk, and it will fall on deaf ears. *What am I doing here?*

Adam. “It is more a question of wanting to come to terms with this event that had occurred and it would preoccupy my time, just preoccupy my time, and it would just have me absorbed. There was not the desire to say go out and have a lot of fun and things like that, there was not that desire because [normally] I like to be outdoors.”

Ethan. “Sometimes I would be [at] home and I would be like: *I wonder what this child is doing. I wonder if this child is okay.* You understand? *I wonder if this child will ever get help.* Because I have … cases … that I reported … and I do not know if anything was done, and you are left wondering *if she will heal if she would get better, what is this going to do to her?* … When we report these things to the police and I will tell the children, I would say: *listen, I have to report it* and I will report it, and they hate you, and then you have to deal with that too. So sometimes all the child has is you, but they are vexed with you because you went and sold them out.”

Ethan. “It did … take a toll on me health wise, because I never had … [a certain health concern] before, and the thing is, it is not like I am saying the stress brought on the
… [health concern], it is an assumption because I never had it before, so I am assuming that the … [health concern is] a manifestation of the stress.”

Sophie. “I used to feel very drained. … Emotionally I was under a lot of stress and then having a young child … it used to be a challenge. … I never had a problem with moodiness until that period in time.”

Zoe. “Emotionally: [I was] depressed. I did not feel to go to work at all … [but] when I reached to work, it was fine. … When I reached to work my mind was occupied and I actually felt better.”

Zoe. “I was really furious and I was really hurt … [because] how [could] you [the principal] expect me to function in the school if you do not give me the resources, or I do not have the resources?”

Emotional Wellness: Strategies

Eva “I like music and eating. Those are my two stress relievers so when I feel really frustrated, I get my favourite souse (local dish) and then I listen to some music and try to not think about what is going on until the next morning when I have to deal with it again. I just have resolved within myself that this is the way it is, this is the way it is, this is the way it is, and until something is done differently, this is the way it is.”

Anna. “I really wish sometimes, that I could have more time for just me. I do not have enough me time. … I do not do enough me stuff for fun. I realized it is not worth it [but] self- talk works for me so … I would say: No you are not doing this, you are leaving this at work; you will deal with this tomorrow. I [also] reflect on why I got into the job in the first place … my motivation [is] helping young people, helping
children, helping students, [and] so … the ones that I could help, I help.”

**Leah.** “When I close [my office] door … [it is for] mental relaxation. Sometimes I just listen to music, but just that time where I could just exhale, works. Where I could just mentally block out all that is happening around and I could just come to that mental solace. I would say, for me, it is mental solace. I am good to go and it is like, you are recharged and I am good to face it … I say: *okay come on take a rest or whatever it is* … if I realize it is happening too often because of whatever is in the environment, like last term I realized I was feeling tired, physically. I was tired and of course that was leading to stressful situations and I decided, okay, I was up for vacation. I went on vacation. I took some time off. I got away from it I went back *YES! I’m good to go again.*”

**Ben.** “You go through what is called a mental compromise: you go through this thing that half a … [loaf] is better than none. I am a kind of an optimist. It is better than doing nothing, it is not ideal, but you could see if you get 30/40% you will make that do, but you really want more … you go through that kind of a self-conversation and you try to find some way not to let the frustration settle, because if it settles you will leave the job.”

**Ben.** “I used to have a lot of music in my office … so I would put on a little bit of music and listen to it and music always takes me to a different place. It always takes me away from some of the little issues that I have … [I also] sit and watch the ocean and that was a lot of therapy. So, there was always this and then of course the family. [I] have [a] supportive family: children who are engaging. Of course I am in the church, so I had plenty, plenty, plenty areas and outlets that could help me. I [also] go to the
hospital to visit sick people, sit with them and listen to them.”

**Miriam.** “When you see I close that door … [work] stays here … not that I am not caring, but I have to care about me because if I am not healthy then I cannot deal with what is there. So then you say, *okay, bamm*, the door is closed. I am not even focusing. Let me focus on me because I did not have that me time. … Now I appreciate me for who I am and find my time to rejuvenate … and to find my strength so that I could come in here with strength so I can work at what is happening.”

**Xyna.** “[I tell my supervisor] ‘I just cannot stay in that environment, I have to go’ so I … jump in my car. Sometimes I drive down to the beach, and I sit there and I watch the waves. … I do not swim or anything, I just sit in the car and look at the water because you know that is a way to calm your nerves [and] that is what I do. I am enjoying the students. I do whatever I can for them. I do not blame them for whatever they are going through. I do not blame them. I never blame them. I blame the parents or whoever have them in that situation, but I do not blame them … they are kids … and as an adult you have to provide for them.”

**Adam.** “I … [have an outdoor] hobby and sometimes I will take-off into … [nature] and I will spend a little time … and so there will be a certain little peace and comfort … and then … being in … [nature] you hear birds passing by, you feel the breeze blow, and the forest is a very cool place to be.”

**Adam.** “When I am off this job I do not think about this job. When I go home, maybe I am absorbed a little bit with the television, but family life? I enjoy family life. I enjoy my church community. *Holidays*? I am gone … and I do not even [talk with] anybody related to work until I come back.”
Ethan. “Usually I might call a friend and I would … listen to some positive songs [or] go [to] see a movie. I just do something to distract myself [to] give the mind a rest, and [to] let the mind kind of heal and work it out. I tend to use some of the things we use on students: that we tell students to use.”

Ethan. “I find … lately [that I am] better [able to] deal with stressful situations because I do not give things the importance that I use to give [them] … I also feel that I am better able to put a word to my feelings and that has helped also … I am better able to find the words to describe and identify where it is coming from and that has helped.”

Ethan. “There was a teacher … she was very motherly, a very kind-hearted woman and very maternal… so sometimes when I was feeling … (down) I used to just go and sit in …[her] room and we used to just talk about life and stuff. She was very spiritual also… and it used to be really nice and comforting. So I would seek out people … I would reach for a life line … because people showed me kindness, I believe I am more able to show kindness.”

Sophie. “There was one point in time I actually felt … [very low emotionally] and I am like, No! No! This is not me! … You need to see somebody! You need to take it down! Something is wrong somewhere. So I was still able to recognize when it is getting to that point; okay, good, you need to stop and do a self-check here, because you cannot be telling students how to manage their lives and you cannot manage yours. That does not make sense.”

Sophie. “I definitely went to counselling … if I have to be there for them (the students) I need also to see about me, so I went to counselling to help me with whatever I was going through at the time. I started taking care of me more, so every two weeks I go
for a massage to help me relax. I would stock up on a lot of chamomile tea. I made it a routine that … [once a week] I have to go and run. I still go to church. I am still very spiritually active. I go to the beach. Music is very important to me and it is one of the ways that I express myself: singing … I love music. It keeps me happy. … If I am not connected with nature I feel like if something is wrong … so now I make a conscious effort to be … smarter in how I get things done. Sometimes I do feel lazy and I wonder to myself: *am I being lazy or am I just taking it easy or am I just tired. I do feel tired, like tired!*

**Zoe.** “I was seeing a counsellor at the point in time so that helped me out.”

**Emotional Wellness: Effects on Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences**

**Leah.** “When those [stressful] times come … you find that sort of forcefulness comes out and then I check myself I say *hey why did you do that? Why did you respond like that?* … In interacting with the students that comes out as well, and normally for me my office is, as I said, a safe haven for students all the time. When I start to feel like *ahhhhh not today!* I lock my door … when I am going through that: I need my quiet time … so that is something I noticed as well.”

**Adam.** “I did not want to go to work because I had my own issues that I was dealing with, and I did not feel I could take on anybody else’s issues.”

**Ethan.** “If I walk into a class feeling … [down] and a child acts up I will let it go, but if I am feeling you know real good, today is a good day, and I walk into that class and they act up, tough love will come out. I am a strict guidance officer. I do not tolerate… I am kind of old school. I expect a child to display certain behaviours.”

**Sophie.** “[When I] feel overwhelmed I would feel drained. Emotionally, I
cannot really give emotionally to the children, so I feel like locking my door, but I cannot really do that, so I go to my car … or leave work a little earlier”

**Zoe.** “After a while it was really stressful and I did not have the energy to counsel anybody because sometimes I would have similar cases with relationships. … So I try to do more group guidance.”

**Discussion on Emotional Wellness**

The self is indivisible (Myers & Sweeney, 2004) and as with spiritual challenges, reflections of emotional challenges conjured images of hopelessness and powerlessness (**Anna, Ben, & Xyna**). Moreover, feeling sad, helpless, powerless, anxious, angry, guilty, numb, depressed, hypersensitive, overwhelmed, panicked, and responding inappropriately are all indicators of emotional distress (Yassen, 1995). Essentially, if counsellors are emotionally distressed it will be difficult to differentiate between clients' issues and their own (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007). As **Miriam** cautioned, “if I am not healthy, then I cannot deal with what is there.” This inability to differentiate is highlighted in **Zoe’s** experience of having similar relational issues as her students. **Zoe’s** self-reflection (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007) and self-awareness (Roscoe, 2009), however, were critical in recognizing and addressing her observations of self.

Similarly, when **Adam** said, “I had my own issues that I was dealing with and I did not feel I could take on anybody else’s issues” he was also demonstrating self-reflection, self-regulation, and self-awareness. As **Sophie** suggested, “you need to stop and do some self-check … because you cannot be telling students how to manage their lives and you cannot manage yours.” **Self-check** (**Sophie & Leah**) further suggests
that school counsellors also need to know their limitations (Cummins, Massy, & Jones, 2007) and withal; “self-checking” for emotional wellness is a perennial process (Roscoe, 2009). Sophie’s observation and self-regulation are even more critical given that school counsellors are leaders and role models (Martin, 2002).

Roscoe (2009) suggested that self-regulation, integration of feelings, and taking a positive approach to challenging situations, each contributes to emotional self-care. These are all suggestions that school counsellors give to their students and as Ethan said, “I tend to use some of the things … that we tell students to use.” As such, school counsellors may benefit from implementing their suggestions and interventions in their own lives (Williams, 2011).

Nevertheless, sometimes self-regulation might mean the awareness that a vacation is needed (Leah), listening to music (Eva, Leah, Ben, Ethan, & Sophie) or recognizing that more “me time” is needed (Anna & Miriam). Moreover, taking short breaks by locking the office door to relax (Leah & Ethan) or if you cannot lock your office door, do as Sophie said, “I go to my car.” This respite may be all that is needed at that time. Additionally, going to the beach (Ben & Xyna), going for a massage (Sophie), or using positive self-talk (Anna) are other productive methods for self-regulation. Similarly, accepting that “until something is done differently this is the way it is” (Eva), but “find some way not to let the frustration settle” (Ben) by perhaps “[taking]-off into … [nature] … [to spend] a little time” (Adam), “taking the half-day off” (Zoe) or “[leaving] work a little earlier” (Sophie) if you can, helps to regain one’s equilibrium.
Self-regulation is also about being consciously aware of when you are “feeling … [down] … [to] seek out people … reach for a life line” (Ethan); and finally, and perhaps more important, going for counselling (Sophie & Zoe). Personal therapy is indeed a good self-care strategy for counsellors to help them understand their own behaviours and to put life in perspective. It is also advisable for all counsellors to establish an ongoing relationship with a therapist so that they may have easy access in times of need (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007).

Ethan’s situation with respect to breaking confidentiality with his clients is not a legal or ethical dilemma. However, once that confidence is broken, counsellors in Ethan’s position may have a difficult task in rebuilding the trust of their students. Perhaps most school counsellors would attest to the fact that although adolescents always knew the limitations of counselling from the outset of the counselling sessions, some adolescents only seem to become conscious of these limitations when the counsellor needs to call in a parent, or worse, the police. What makes the situation even more difficult for school counsellors in Ethan’s position is that they would have to rebuild relationships with every other student who would have heard that Sir/ Miss could not be trusted.

Ethan’s strong empathic response to his clients may have also contributed to his emotional challenges, as the same qualities that are required to be an effective counsellor also result in compassion fatigue, vicarious trauma, and burnout (Lawson, Venart, Hazler, & Kottler, 2007). Moreover, a counsellor’s ability to empathize may lead to emotional exhaustion, as emotional-oriented coping was a significant predictor of burnout (Wilkerson, 2009). Balancing the required qualities of empathy, compassion,
and unconditional positive regard is more critical for school counsellors as they report higher than average emotional exhaustion scores when compared with their counterparts in agencies or in private practice (Wilkerson, 2009; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).

With respect to emotional wellness, Venart, Vassos, and Pitcher-Heft (2007) further explained that tuning into one’s emotion is critical for self-care. This inward tuning is achievable by spending time alone (Adam & Sophie), talking with others (Ethan, & Miriam), or looking at inspirational movies, and reading inspirational books (Miriam). Self-reflection and self-awareness are other techniques for emotional wellness (Anna, Sophie, Zoe, Leah, Adam, & Ben). Expressing emotion in a supportive environment is also encouraged. In addition, creating or adopting a method of self-monitoring and/ or self-evaluation of wellness is also critical (Eckstein, 2001; Myers & Sweeney, 2005; Yassen, 1995).

In general, the strategies expressed by these counsellors, including self-awareness, taking positive positions and perspectives, self-knowledge, and self-regulation (Roscoe, 2009), augurs well for their emotional wellness. Having explored emotional wellness, the following are the counsellors’ experiences with physical wellness.

**Physical Wellness: Challenges**

**Eva.** “If I could put my stress on a scale of one to ten, it was at an eleven. I was very frustrated. I would say that I really did feel tired a lot. I could feel my blood pressure rising, and I had headaches. My voice would get louder. I would get kind of nervous because I was so frustrated. And I talk with my hands naturally … so I would
talk with my hands at a speedy, you know, a quicker pace because I want you to understand what I am saying. You are not hearing what I am saying. I would get louder and [I] would get excited, you could see it in my motions.”

Anna. “Sometimes, honestly, from the time I rolled into school I got a headache. I would get up [and] I would be fine, and as soon as I got on the compound, I would have a headache. And I said: What, like I am getting allergic to this place, every time I come here my head hurts and so I realized [that] it was getting to me in more ways than one.”

Anna. “When I am stressed I eat. I did not sleep well because … [a suicidal student] was on my mind. So … [when] I am really stressed I may not sleep or I would not sleep well. I may fall asleep because I am tired, but then I would wake up and just be there thinking and thinking.”

Leah. “I [felt] very irritable. … [I also felt] a bit impatient, [and] maybe angry as well. Headaches are something that I know I get on and off if I get stressed. [Sometimes] I have a lot on my mind: it does not have to be stress. I know that sometimes I may just lie down and a lot of plans are running through my head because I do a lot of [mental] processing. … All kinds of things: what I have to do today, what I plan to do the next day, so I do a lot of processing.”

Ben. “One of the problems with stress for me is that it interferes with my sleep … and I do not know why I am up and I do not think it is because I am consciously aware … [but] the biggest challenge is to get the amount of exercise that I need.”

Miriam. “I think when you get into this office, this office is stressful. I come in and I try to eat my breakfast quickly. I do breakfast for everybody at home and I would not even have a chance to … eat breakfast … [I] will be working without eating lunch.
It is when I get home at night that I eat lunch or I eat something, so my eating was totally warped. I think … that there is so much to accomplish, there is so much to do. It is not that I am stressed and I cannot eat, it is just that there is so much to be done and it is like *okay I need to get this done and that is it.* I … did not sleep for very long. … My mind always used to race on so many things to be done. [I felt] fatigued, definitely physically tired.”

**Ethan.** “My sleeping is bad. My sleeping is really bad. Sometimes three or four hours of sleep and I do not know why; that is the thing, I just do not know why I just cannot sleep.”

**Sophie.** “I will try to do … the same amount of work that I need to do and yet still study, but that was not enough. I eventually got sick, and I got the flu often. That was pretty stressful. My energy level was pretty low at times because of the lack of sleep. … In terms of eating I ate late or at some weird times. I was snacking a lot or buying stuff a lot because … the time to cook … would be limited. Sometimes I would work through the whole lunch time … lunch would end, and I would have seen three children during the lunch time, and I did not eat, and I have a class to go to, so I might not eat until after work. So sometimes for the whole day, I would not have had lunch. Recently, I discovered that I developed a health problem as a result of accumulated stress. I would have suffered a lot of headaches. I did not know what was causing the headaches.”

**Zoe.** “I stopped eating. I lost a lot of weight. … I had headaches. I was not sleeping. … I even had chest pains. … I had memory loss and all kinds of stuff.”
Physical Wellness: Strategies

**Eva.** “If I could get something [to eat] … or going to the beach because I like to see water, the water makes me relax. Occasionally, I swim when I go to the beach, but other than that? No! No [exercise].”

**Anna.** “Apart from the exercise, which I am really working on to get consistent with, I ... adjusted my eating habits. ... I drink water or eat a fruit. ... I will drink water and will try to take my mind off of it because I know it is not healthy because it is like you are transferring … [the issue] into something else [and] after [eating] the chocolate … [the issue] is still there.”

**Anna.** “I love the beach it is very therapeutic. Sometimes just parking and looking at the waves is really, really therapeutic. Other than that it is just standing in the shower … it is kind of therapeutic. … [It is] almost like it massages my shoulders: when I am done I feel relaxed.”

**Leah.** “I have my machine, and I try to exercise ... I know that is critical for me. I try to exercise. I try to drink my water. I try to eat my fruits. ... I try now to have breakfast, but generally, I am working hard and playing hard.”

**Leah.** “What I find ... [that is] also very relaxing: [is] driving and listening to music. ... When I leave school I put on my music and I am driving. I mean ... it is like the unwinding time before I get home to put on another gear, to put on another hat: home hat … so the driving the mentally going over everything the mental detoxing. My music is on [and] I am singing. Something that I also find very, very relaxing is sometimes I go by the beach and just park up, and not even bathe just let the waves wash in ... I used
to find myself like on Sunday after church when all of it is over, I will go and sit down on the beach listening to the music. Again, it is like washing everything. An hour, two hours may pass, and then I will go home and I am good, and ready to start my week again.”

**Ben.** “Well, deep breathing, relaxation, stretching … singing … praying and so on … so I will do those kinds of things. Those are excellent stress relieving techniques.”

**Xyna.** [Exercise] … “I am always running.”

**Adam.** “I started to monitor my ... [blood sugar], and when I started to monitor, I also realized ... that my blood pressure was not in sync with somebody of my age and... I ... went on a diet. I [ate] more vegetables and things like that ... drank water. I gave up [alcohol] so I went on a diet of water and fruits and vegetables ... and since then my blood sugar and blood pressure has come back reasonably in line. So by ... getting that piece of news [from the doctor] it was like a reality check.”

**Ethan.** “When I am feeling really, really down I will do something to get myself out of it and one of the things that works for me is physical fitness. Every single day I do something fitness wise and I believe that I am addicted to serotonin and endorphins, yea, and it really … [takes] me out of the funk. I think exercise has actually saved me as a person.”

**Sophie.** “I am really trying so I am making sure that lunch time is lunch time. I mean last year I had to eat in my car, and when I was finished eating, I would probably take a five minute shut eye, relax a little bit, and then go back to my office, and see whomever I needed to see. So that really does not happen now. It might happen in isolated cases very, very far and in between. ... There is one lady, she is pretty senior,
and she always tells me *Miss you need to take care of yourself.* … [Another staff member] is like a father figure now because he would say *Miss [did] you eat your lunch? Miss go and eat! Stop what you are doing and go and eat!*

**Sophie.** “So I had to try and take it easy. I had to consciously make an effort to find relaxation techniques. [I had to] find ways to just slow down on an afternoon or manage the work stress during the day. So in terms of the health part I realized now I have to really, really take it easy.”

**Zoe.** “I decided to … [seek help] because it was really overwhelming. … and my sleeping eventually came back on stream. So it was just like a whole chemical imbalance that … needed to be regularized, so now I sleep fine. [When] I have to eat I will take it to my car, and go out of the school compound, eat and come back. I do not eat in school because students would come to see me.”

**Physical Wellness: Effects on Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences**

**Ethan.** “So if I walk into a class kind of feeling down, I will feel a kind of energy and the energy will be a draining one so I would leave at the end of that session feeling even more drained, and I just would want to go home… to get to the … [end] of the day.”

**Sophie.** “I remember … having a counselling session with a child … and I was struggling to stay up, literally struggling to stay up.”

**Sophie.** “Going into the classroom to do sessions, I would not be able to deliver with the energy that I am supposed to, so the session might turn out pretty boring, and obviously if it is boring you are cheating them. … My delivery was affected in the sense
that I would not have the amount of energy and zest and excitement to engage them with the session … obviously because of the stress that I was going through.”

**Discussion on Physical Wellness**

The human body usually sends warning signs of stress (Yassen, 1995) and it is the ignoring of these warning signs that leads to physical distress (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007). Three major warning signs experienced by the counsellors were headaches (*Anna, Leah, Sophie, and Zoe*), sleep disturbance (*Anna, Ben, Miriam, Ethan, and Zoe*), and disrupted eating patterns (*Anna, Miriam, Sophie, and Zoe*). Staying aware of body signals allows counsellors to monitor their needs, the needs of their clients, and the therapeutic relationship (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007). Disturbed sleep patterns in particular are critical because a lack of sleep affects judgment and increases the chances for illness (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007). For example, **Sophie** realized that her “energy level was pretty low at times because of the lack of sleep.” **Sophie**, however, had the self-awareness and the discipline to work on her health issues. Wellness is a choice (Ardell, 1977) and ignoring the signals for preventative care could be at a person’s peril. For example, **Ethan’s** lack of sleep may have contributed to him feeling down and to the low draining energy that he would sometimes take to class. Ethan also had the self-awareness to acknowledge and to rectify the situation. **Sophie** also confirmed that sometimes her low energy level affected her delivery.

In addition to monitoring obvious body functions such as changing eating and sleeping patterns, it is also important to monitor one’s body markers such as blood
pressure, blood sugar, and cholesterol levels (Roscoe, 2009). These markers are critical for self-care, which is evident with Adam’s experience of getting a medical check-up, which revealed that his markers were not ideal for his age. Sophie also highlighted the importance of “managing the work stress during the day” and Ben has suggested a number of techniques such as “deep breathing, relaxation, [and] stretching” (Christopher et al., 2011; Sumerlin & Littrell, 2011; Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007).

Finally, Sophie and Zoe have raised an important physical challenge for school counsellors: the disruption of eating to attend to students during lunch hours. On the one hand, the lunch period is a good opportunity to interact with students and to build relationships outside of the counselling atmosphere but, on the other hand, it is also important to eat. Zoe recommends, “do not eat in school because students would come.” Nonetheless, this situation is one of the hazards of being in such close proximity to potential clients, and it is perhaps one reason why school counsellors experience greater levels of stress when compared with their counterparts in agencies and private practice (Wilkerson, 2009; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006).

In general, while these counsellors have identified many challenges with their physical wellness they have also indicated that not only do they know the basics of becoming physically well, but there is evidence that most of them are already engaging in basic physical wellness activities. These basics include nutrition, healthy sleeping patterns, physical fitness, and preventative medical checks (Roscoe, 2009, p. 219). Moreover, these counsellors understand the importance of “moving toward his or her own personal optimal level” (Roscoe, 2009, p. 219). Having explored the counsellors’ experiences with physical wellness, the following explores the experiences of
interpersonal/ social wellness.

**Interpersonal/Social Wellness: Challenges**

**Ben.** “I think when you feel [that] there is a threat, when you feel threatened, when you feel somebody is trying to victimize … or trying to unnecessarily unduly make life and the desire to help difficult [you feel angry] … I think the anger [came] … from a kind of altruism because it is not really a personal anger. … My anger will be more towards what I see you trying to do [to] somebody else. It is interfering with the defenceless, those who cannot defend themselves, and so you feel a need to speak up and to shout and to say: Hey! … You are damaging innocent people. You should not be allowed to do that… I think that is the best way I could probably mentally process it.”

**Miriam.** “The job can be stressful, but one of the things that I think is that there is no networking per se with the other counsellors. … Some of the older counsellors would say: What we had before we do not have now because before you could have said: Okay, I could talk with this one; we sit down and we share. We say, I am doing this and it is not working, how do I do this? I mean we still do that with the older counsellors, but with those that … [just came] on board [no]. … So then you find that even if you want to share something, you do not say it … and that is something that I think should not be happening in a unit like this … because we deal with people and we need each other to build on and I do not think we have that. Others may differ, but this is from my … [observation]. Before you could … say, Hey so, so, so, so I do not get that, I do not get that anymore so [I] become very cautious on what [I] say and what [I] do.”

**Adam.** “In the early days [there] was that challenge … that [someone] … could
... make a report [to my supervisor on me] and that ... [person] would not have known whatever arrangement was made. ... That is one of the challenges I faced earlier on.”

**Interpersonal/Social Wellness: Strategies**

**Eva.** “At the time when I was going through the stressful times my main friends, my main social group, were guidance counsellors. So we just shared the moments and sometimes we would have lunch together and we would go to the beach and just talk ... and do it in a funny way: like make fun about it, so that way you know we could relieve the stress that kind of way. ... I could just sit with you and talk and laugh and joke with you and of course we have to snack on something ... [and] that is my social life. ... I have friends ... in the education field ... I think it always makes it easier when it is somebody that could relate: that you do not have to do all this extra explaining for them to get what you are going through.”

**Leah.** “When I realize [that] I feel like that I try not to have to interact with them [the students] because I realize: *Hey something is not going right there; you need a little time out*; so the angry responses maybe [with the] interacting and then you say: *Hey you should not have done that; you should not have said that* ... [when] I find I get into [a stressed state] then I have to say: *Okay let me go in my room and close my door and take a break*, because I realize that that may not be the best way to deal with it... I do a lot of introspection because you want children to feel comfortable enough to come to you when they are going through their issues.”

**Ben.** “There were conversations with leadership, conversations with my peers, and then there was me, seeking support.”
Miriam. “I avoid as ... [many] conflicts as possible, but when I say, avoid conflict, conflict is unavoidable, but you do not use the conflict to create friction, but you use the conflict in such a positive way so that is how I deal with conflict. So I try not to carry things to that, you know, and if anything has occurred that do not seem right, whether with family or whatever, I deal with it right away as much as possible.”

Adam. “So I spent my first two years here building relationships. … I understand the importance of the relationship in order to ... [function].”

Zoe. “My students actually made me feel better. … The energy that they bring: they were like there for me, in a way that they did not even know, I guess.”

Interpersonal/Social Wellness: Effects on Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences

Eva. “Now I do not even socialize with this batch of guidance counsellors.”

Miriam. “They (other counsellors) may be networking, but I am probably not part of it. I mean, you have one or two that you will network with, but for me, I just think there is a level of [mis]trust … I feel the friction, I see the pulling and tugging and that does not augur well, so then you find yourself in a little cocoon or in a little clique, which I do not like, because I just think that everybody should be able to be free and to share.”

Adam. “Imagine you are working with people and they are watching you in your eyes, smiling, laughing and talking to you, but you do not know if you could get stabbed in your back [betrayed].”
Discussion on Interpersonal/Social Wellness

Although interpersonal challenges or conflicts may present from time to time in any human setting, Miriam admonished that “that is something that … should not be happening in a unit like this [SSSD] … because we deal with people and we need each other to build us.” In fact, the desired approach is to provide support for colleagues’ professional work and development, but this support could only be accomplished if relationships have been nurtured (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007). This is evident in Adam’s experience with building relationships. In contrast, Ben’s experience of feeling threatened or having a fear of victimization, and Miriam’s observation of “friction … [and] the pulling and tugging” indicate how these reprehensions are counter-productive and ought to have no place in a helping environment. While “the job can be stressful” (Miriam), adding unnecessary interpersonal challenges to the daily work load results in counsellors becoming withdrawn (Mirriam & Adam), mistrust (Ben, Miriam, & Adam), and increased conflicts (Ben, Xyna, & Yassen, 1995). Moreover, with respect to interpersonal challenges, school counsellors are mandated to be collaborators, working with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the wider school community (Martin, 2002) in an atmosphere of trust.

Relationships with newer school counsellors also seem strained when compared with relationships among those who have worked together for a longer period (Miriam, Eva, & Leah). This may simply be an adjustment issue as it may be natural to trust people with whom you have associated for a longer period. As Eva has pointed out, “it always makes it easier when it is somebody that could relate: that you do not have to do
all this extra explaining for them to get what you are going through.” It may be difficult to have that level of comfort with a new member of the SSSD unit. Perhaps the leadership also has a responsibility to monitor the transitioning of new staff to ensure that morale is kept at an acceptable level and that a climate of cooperation continues to be highly regarded by both new and older staff.

Nevertheless, peer acceptance and using some of the same conflict resolution, communication, and assertiveness skills that counsellors teach students, may contribute to obviating this phenomenon in the future (Ethan). As Miriam has suggested, “if anything has occurred that does not seem right, whether with family or whatever … deal with it right away as much as possible.” After all, SSSD has an opportunity and perhaps an obligation to model harmonious working relationships based on mutual respect and cooperation (Roscoe, 2009).

Finally, with respect to interacting with students, perhaps Leah’s self-reflection and awareness helped her to observe when she is not interacting appropriately with students. When she notices this, she takes necessary steps to regain her balance. Leah knows that part of her role is to create an atmosphere conducive to students using the counselling services (Fox & Butler, 2007; Kee Low, 2009) and the quality of interactions with students outside of the counselling setting is perhaps critical in facilitating students’ future use of the services. In general, these counsellors seem to understand interpersonal wellness as a “movement toward balance and integration of the interaction between the individual, society, and nature.” (Roscoe, 2009, p. 218)
Intellectual Wellness: Challenges

**Miriam.** “I think in the beginning I used to take on work as everything, but I do not do that again. I will go home and think: *okay what is next?* It is as though the situation follows you wherever you go. It weakened me because ... [I] would have been so overburdened with everything that ... [I] carried it and ... [I] still [did not] get a solution [and so I went] ... back overburdened ... [to] add more burden to the burdens.”

**Ethan.** “When I am feeling kind of down I tell myself ... [negative] things, but then there will be another voice that kicks in ... *but what is wrong with you, you know,* like a tough love kind of voice kicks in.”

**Zoe.** “I had these thoughts right through in my head. I used to over think things too much. But I was seeing a counsellor at the point in time so that helped me out. Conflicts in my head, not with anybody else, so it was like a crisis in me actually ... I was just depressed over the situation, and it blurred my decision making and all that time I [was] teaching [a certain self-care class] ... and I used to try to use my techniques, but teaching it and acting it are two different things, but *my intellectual functioning*? I used to have ... serious issues with remembering stuff and concentrating.”

Intellectual Wellness: Strategies

**Leah.** “What we do we ... have debriefing once a month ... so it is expected that if you are having a rough day or time of month that we could vent.”

**Anna.** “Sometimes it is just going into my office between classes, ... to take ... [my] mind off of everything else and ... just free [my] ... mind.” ... Because I know stress kills, I try not to let anything bother me that much. I try not to take on anything.
If I get upset I will just find something to do that I know will relax me, something that
would take my mind away from it because it is not worth it, you know, having yourself
all worked up. Things like that, they get you sick, and so I just try my best not to take it
on.”

**Ben.** “Because during that time I was busy with my ... [other] projects, so I had
outlets. To me stress becomes collateral if you have something else, even if it is class-
work/or something else going on that makes it seem that it does not exist. So even
though it was there, I had all of this going … those things were pre-occupying my mind
and not [the stress].”

**Ben.** “I have a mantra that I use because I felt that there was a wanting-neglect
of boys. Boys who did not have fathers, boys who did not have direction, boys who
were underperforming, so I always maintain that even during the times of distress that
this is what I am here for: I am here to give some light to some little fellow. I spend a lot
of time reflecting. I do converse with myself ... I was reframing all the time, sort of
analyzing and looking at the various components and how they fit and what they were
like so ... I reflect.”

**Miriam.** “I read a lot, so I read and I would watch shows, that kind of thing.
Mentally I always try to think good thoughts.”

**Xyna.** “I do not stay on the negative too much because everything else will be
negative. So I try my best. I say, alright you have to do something for these children,
you have to make them laugh, you have to be there for them. So ... even though I know
... that ... I cannot give 100 percent because I cannot make a 360 degree change in the
situation ... I do not really ponder on ... *I cannot do anything and give up.*”
Adam. “I will be gone from this job and there will still be lots of issues to deal with, still lots of issues to deal with, so one needs to take a reality check ever-so often and say: *Yes! I am doing the best I can, but you know what? I am not Hercules. I am not Hercules.* Yes I want to do my best, but after I give my best there is nothing more I can do.”

Ethan. “You basically tell yourself that children are resilient … I do not want to say you are giving up, but you are saying: *you know what?* I cannot deal with this, but you are hoping that someone else [an agency] out there will reach that child.”

Zoe. “Actually believing that you know stuff like that happens … you just have to get over it … you just have to pick yourself up and recognize that you have an issue, and deal with it and that is what I did.”

Zoe. “I think … [seeking help] helped me mentally to clear up my thoughts. Before I used to worry over things now life is so much clearer, and I am engaged with a lot of extra-curricular activities with my kids so that kind of takes the strain off my brain.”

Zoe. “You have to keep telling yourself that it is not the immediate results. Later on in life you would see the results [for the students] because like all of us when we were young we made bad decisions and that is how we learn and that is how we grow … by the experiences … and I keep telling myself that one day what I said to them may have been a line, a word, or a paragraph or something that I may have said to them [that] would have impacted them later on in life. I did my part and I am contented with what I have done for them.”
Zoe. “If I save one child, it is a lot, because that one child would save other people, and that is how it is. That is how you have to view it. You cannot save the entire world; you could try, but when you make a difference in one person’s life, it is enough. It is a lot for them to change around, especially the environment that these children have to live in, physically. Even with their parents, the relationships that they have with their parents and how they treat them … [and] all they want at the end of the day is for somebody to love them you know: acceptance. And most of the times that is what they are lashing out about, the underlying issues are always that relationship with their parents, always, all, all cases, when they act out.”

Intellectual Wellness: Effects on Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences

Ethan. “I used to feel like I used to lose them like if I am in front [of] a class doing a topic I thought I was not effective enough. I was not patient enough. I used to rush through things just rush it through and not take my time to explain. I used to feel, for lack of a better word, I used to feel naked in the sense that children are very perceptive and they could sense things.”

Zoe. “I had a problem concentrating, so I do not think my delivery was as good as it is normally … because I would lose my train of thought. So I think it would have impacted my delivery. … After a while it was really stressful and I did not have the energy to counsel.”

Discussion on Intellectual Wellness

Ethan’s ability to catch himself with his “tough love voice” when he is engaging in negative self-talk is an important habit for school counsellors to inculcate. This habit
has the potential to reduce time spent on negativity thereby creating the mental space for creative problem solving or mental relaxation. This practice may also protect counsellors from spiralling into pessimism, cynicism, or gloom. Venart et al., (2007) added that cognitive benefits such as being able to quiet the mind and check in with themselves when the stress levels begin to elevate was also critical for counsellors’ wellness.

School counsellors need to maintain a high level of cognitive functioning because they are constantly making professional judgments and decisions. As such, poor or inappropriate judgments could have dire consequences. For example, reduced cognitive functioning could cause the school counsellor to miss critical information such as students’ suicidal ideations (Christianson & Everall, 2009). Seeking counselling when conflicts are in your head (Zoe) is a responsible reaction for managing counsellors’ intellectual wellness. Similarly, professional judgment is critical in making decisions when a situation creates conflict among legal and ethical principles (Stone & Zirkel, 2010; U.S. Court of Appeal, 2008).

Zoe raised an additional occupational hazard for counsellors: knowing the techniques without doing self-work may not result in wellness; instead, Zoe reported that she obtained genuine results only by attending counselling herself. By extension, counsellors may know all of the counselling theories and techniques, but that knowledge may not produce the desired results if self-work is not done.

Hettler (1980) suggested that the major goal of intellectual wellness is to utilize one’s resources including skills and abilities to live the best possible life. These resources may include debriefing (Leah), calling a friend to relax your mind (Anna),
finding distractions to “just free your mind” (Anna & Ben), controlling the things that you have control over, “in the midst of what …[you] do not have control over” (Leah), “spending a lot of time reflecting” (Ben), “always trying to think good thoughts” (Miriam), not “staying on the negative too much” (Xyna), “taking a reality check ever’ so often” (Ethan & Adam), “picking yourself up and recognizing that you have an issue and dealing with it” (Zoe), and sometimes the responsible response could mean seeking professional help (Zoe).

The strategies presented by these counsellors may promote the capacity for insight and creative problem solving, which are two major components of intellectual wellness (Venart, Vassos, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007). As Ethan has pointed out, when you have exhausted all efforts to help, simply accept that “children are resilient and life might present someone else in this child’s life who will tell them the words that need to be said to get them on track.” This acceptance, of course, will come only after referring the child to other professionals in the mental health field.

Venart et al., (2007) also explained that self-care begins when counsellors recognize and deviate from creating mental catastrophes, and by engaging in negative self-talk that contributes to being a workaholic. Moreover, mutual healing results if counsellors accept that they, like their clients, are not perfect beings. Clients can also help themselves heal and healing is, therefore, not solely dependent on what the counsellor does. Humour can also be used to change one’s perspective. Counsellors may therefore revisit the expressions of gratitude such as thank you notes to refocus their perspectives. Similarly, positive energy could be generated by keeping a success journal. When counsellors celebrate their personal accomplishments and the rewards of
the work; meditate and do yoga to quiet the mind; engage in life-long learning; or get involved in something greater than them, all these activities are self-care strategies (Venart et al., 2007). Finally, these counsellors have suggested many strategies for intellectual wellness. As Roscoe (2009) explained, intellectual wellness is not just about “the personal growth of the individual … [but it is also] for the betterment of society.” (p. 220)

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I have presented the reflected views of 10 Trinidad and Tobago school counsellors’ who are now working at a high level, but whose past lived experiences include work-related challenges; strategies used to maintain their wellness during challenging experiences; and their perceptions of how their own service delivery have been affected during those challenging experiences. In addition to the counsellors’ contributions, I have also contributed by providing discussions in response to the respective wellness experiences of the counsellors. My responses came from my experience as a school counsellor. In addition, and in keeping with IPA the discussion also included the available literature. In the next chapter, I summarize the findings and highlight the limitations of my research, implications for practice, and areas for further research.
Chapter Five

This chapter provides a discussion of the main conclusions from the findings of this study; the implications for practice; and possible directions for future research. The following briefly summarises the dissertation.

Dissertation Summary

In this interpretive phenomenological study, I explored the challenges experienced by school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago. I also explored the strategies used by these school counsellors to alleviate those challenges, and the counsellors’ perceptions of their service delivery during those challenging times. While counsellors reported that the challenges came from both organizational systemic issues and work/life balance issues, more challenges emanated from organizational systemic issues when compared with the other areas of wellness.

Among the organizational challenges they experienced were: (a) working at cross-purposes with administration; (b) barriers to relationships with principals, teachers, and parents; (c) lack of professional resources such as school psychologists; (d) the literacy levels of students entering the secondary school system; (e) political constraints; and (f) role confusion and general job stress. Challenges in the other areas of wellness include (a) pervasive powerlessness, (b) work/life balance issues, and (c) physical warning signs such as headaches and disturbed sleeping and eating patterns.

The second research question addressed how school counsellors coped with the challenging experiences. As a group, the participants reported strategies used on the job. Among these strategies were: (a) relaxation exercises e.g., deep breathing and stretching, (b) controlling those issues that are in their sphere of influence amidst those things that
they have no control over, (c) accepting that they are doing their best, (d) taking their lunch breaks even if it means leaving the school, (e) using their self-awareness to understand when their responses are out of character and finding ways to regain balance (f) gaining support from colleagues and supervisors, and (g) leaving the environment temporarily and in some cases permanently. Counsellors also reported on coping and self-care strategies used outside of the school setting: (a) going to the beach or other quiet place to rejuvenate; (b) listening to music (especially religious music); (c) being part of a church community; (d) praying, meditating, singing, being in nature, and going for massages; (e) seeking support from family members and friends; (f) having an active social life outside of work; and (g) having monthly socials with peers and going on retreats.

In terms of the third question of this study, counsellors concluded that during the challenging experiences their service delivery was affected in several ways, including (a) at times low energy levels would lead to poor delivery of guidance sessions, (b) being less tolerant of students’ behaviours, (c) not being emotionally or physically present for the counselling students leading to an inability to counsel or deal with students issues, (d) challenges with managing the heat and not wanting to go into hot classrooms or to work in hot counselling rooms, and (e) symptoms of presenteeism or being at work but not functioning at one’s full potential and sometimes absenteeism may occur.

The counsellors’ perceptions of the effect on service delivery during the challenging periods also revealed potential areas for strengthening support services to students. These areas include (a) improving relationships with principals and teachers, (b) making the case for additional professional resources, (c) accommodating for
counsellors who are upgrading their skills or giving the time during July and August for attaining higher education, (d) alleviating the incidence of presenteeism, (e) advocating to reduce illiteracy rates, (f) raising the issues of hot classrooms as they relate to the learning process, and (g) managing stress-related symptoms especially in situations where the source of stress is beyond the counsellors’ sphere of control.

Another important finding relates to the notion that, although school counsellors’ earlier years in practice were more difficult with respect to finding a balance between counselling and other duties, the types of issues that they are currently encountering are far worse than when they began. To illustrate, one current issue that did not exist for school counsellors 10 years ago relates to students’ use of the Internet for bullying, making or viewing pornographic materials, and entering risky chat rooms. This issue is problematic for school counsellors, as school counsellors themselves have agreed that they need further training in the use of technology (Grosshandler, 2012). Moreover, counsellors expressed both feelings of distress, such as frustration and hopelessness, along with attitudes of distress, such as presenteeism/absenteeism, and having thoughts of leaving the job.

A final intriguing finding with methodological implications is that IPA presupposes that “people struggle to express what they are thinking and feeling, there may be reasons why they do not wish to self-disclose, and the researcher has to interpret people’s mental and emotional state from what they say” (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 54). For this study, however, these counsellors seemed to have had a level of self-awareness that allowed them to describe their experiences and to articulate what those experiences meant for them. This level of insight could be due to their professional training as
counsellors, or perhaps because the ability to overcome challenges (which was one of the inclusion criteria for the study) is associated with increased self-awareness.

**Implications for Practice**

This study raises many critical issues for the practice of school counselling in Trinidad and Tobago. One central issue is improving relationships with principals (Finkelstein, 2009) and teachers (Kee Low, 2009; Clifford-Poston, 2006). When respectful and professional relationships are absent from a work-setting counsellors may be more likely to leave their respective schools, which would disrupt services to students. By extension, if counsellors and principals are working at cross-purposes or if principals and teachers do no fully understand the role of the counsellor, these relational and communication issues have the potential to derail the educational goals of Trinidad and Tobago.

Moreover, while there are attempts to provide school counselling services in all schools, there remain some schools in Trinidad and Tobago that do not have school counsellors. The schools initially selected for services are, arguably, schools identified as having the greatest need. As such, in addition to working with very challenging situations, in these high stressed schools, support and mutual respect among the various professionals (Finkelstein, 2009) will be paramount in providing optimal services to the nation’s children.

With regard to issues of scarce specialist professional resources, if students are not properly diagnosed then the counsellor will not be able to refer the child to the
appropriate professional. As such, making the case for additional professionals such as school psychologists seems critical. Although efforts to hire professionals such as psychologists may be beyond the sphere of influence of these counsellors, the voices of the school counsellors through their monthly meetings is one avenue for rectifying this dilemma. Counsellors may also make the case for more professional resources by placing additional notes in their case files specifically highlighting how the lack of resources has hindered the respective students. These notes from the different case files can then be used as evidence showing that the absence of professional resources is derailing the counsellors’ efforts.

On a related concern, the issue of school counsellors experiencing pervasive powerlessness also requires attention (Sheffield & Baker, 2005; Yassen, 1995). If counsellors are feeling that their efforts would never translate into changes and improvement in the lives of the students that they serve, how then are these counsellors contributing to the educational goals of the country? The systemic issues with respect to the social conditions of some students including the apparent lack of parental guidance may have to be continuously articulated. Addressing the systemic issues at the monthly meetings with the assurance that the counsellors’ experiences would be channelled through their respective supervisors to the hierarchy of the MOE may provide some hope for the counsellors. One thing is certain, the pervasive hopelessness and powerlessness described by most of these counsellors is untenable and it will affect the proper functioning of the SSSD and by extension the educational goals of the country.

In addition, the incidence of teenage pregnancy as described by at least two counsellors (Ethan & Leah) seems to be an area that requires sustained focus. Girls
who are mothers before completing high school may add to the cycle of poverty (Harden, Brunton, Fletcher, & Oakley, 2009), the illiteracy rate, and the crime rate of the country. Having a guidance program with a prolonged focus on teenage pregnancy may result in positive generational benefits for the society. **Leah** has reported on the success of her programs in reducing the rate of teenage pregnancy. Perhaps her strategies could be replicated at other schools to reduce the incidence of teenage pregnancy on a societal level.

Equally important, the technology exists for the sharing of indigenous best practices among school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago. This sharing may also be one way to reduce the training gaps. To illustrate, a counsellor who has successfully dealt with situations of self-mutilation may document his/her techniques and share these techniques by way of a webinar, or perhaps a newsletter. If counsellors’ successful efforts in all areas of guidance and counselling are captured and shared, perhaps this may alleviate some of the stress and pervasive powerlessness that counsellors experience.

Presenteeism, or being at work but not functioning at one’s usual potential (Johns, 2010), is perhaps one possible major repercussion of pervasive powerlessness. Based on this study, presenteeism manifests when the counsellors feel that both their presence and their efforts do not matter. Perhaps adopting ASCA’s National School Counsellors Week (ASCA, 2012), whereby the counsellors could showcase their work, where appropriate, or use the week as an annual school counselling appreciation week, might alleviate the incidence of presenteeism. In addition, the aforementioned strategies for reducing school counsellors’ sense of powerlessness may also be beneficial for reducing the incidence of
Moreover, counsellors’ programs and other silent preventative efforts contribute to the proper functioning of the school, but it appears that stakeholders recognize the reactive efforts rather than the proactive efforts. Silent efforts are those preventative or curative activities that school counsellors’ encounter, but do not report in an overt way. To illustrate, if a counsellor’s interventions prevent incidents of bullying and other such behaviours, resulting in the smooth functioning of the school, the counsellor may not receive any recognition for those efforts. Indeed, how can one measure or acknowledge something that never happened? Alternatively, if the counsellor does not have a preventative agenda, and there are incidents of bullying, which lead to school disruption, then the counsellor’s efforts may be of value to the school. Similarly, when a child is successful it is easy to acknowledge the efforts of the administration, the teachers, and the parents. The counsellor, however, who would have worked with the child to overcome his or her procrastination and other such habits, may not always be acknowledged as having contributed to the child’s success. If one can imagine these examples at a whole school level where the counsellor works with a multitude of students during the school year, but get no recognition for his or her contributions, then one may understand why school counsellors wonder about their purpose in the schools.

As Leah asked:

How do you measure the overall impact to say that it is your intervention that helped this child move from 20% last year to 21% this year? [For example], when I went in … [that school] five and six girls [were pregnant] at one time …
and now for the last two years or so we have not even had one pregnancy in school, not one. *Is it good for me? Who do they give credit to? To say, Wow! We have not had not one girl coming to say, Miss I am pregnant.*”

Leah’s concern is perhaps indicative of how school counsellors feel when their efforts are not acknowledged. It seems that it is only when the counsellor rectifies some major episode in the school that administrators acknowledge the efforts of the counsellor, and in some cases, not even those efforts are recognized. Having the week of appreciation and acknowledging the counsellors’ efforts during the year may solve the concern of lack of appreciation.

On the issue of counsellors who are upgrading their skills, perhaps allowing pre- established discretionary time for professional development on a case-by-case basis may yield a reduction in the disruption of services. The schools need these counsellors to be working at a high level of cognitive functioning, and the counsellors need to upgrade their skills. Although the Student Support Services Division has taken control of the situation by providing in- house training to fill the knowledge gaps *(Leah & Ethan)*, to accommodate for credentialing, perhaps the Division may collaborate with one of the universities to develop a graduate program that can be delivered via distance education or using a blended instruction strategy that minimizes disruption during the K-12 academic year. Managing the situation of counsellors upgrading their skills is important as some counsellors may be at work at the required time, but they may not function at their full potential and other counsellors may arrive late. Moreover, research has already shown that counsellors with more education enjoy higher levels of wellness when compared with their colleagues who are not upgrading their skills *(Roach &
Young, 2007). This situation of upgrading skills may require a review to ensure that there are no violations to the wellbeing of the counsellors or the students.

Another issue with implications for practice relates to the illiteracy rates of students entering the secondary school system. Counsellors feel that they cannot deliver the guidance curriculum if students cannot read. Illiteracy is therefore a serious concern for the counsellors and, as such, addressing the historical root cause (s) and generating possible solutions may be a project of interest for the Division, as it should be for the entire educational system in Trinidad and Tobago.

Yet another concern with implications for practice relates to hot classrooms. If counsellors are finding it so difficult to function in the hot classrooms, how then are students coping with the heat? Is it possible that the heat is contributing to the aggressive behaviours? Ben has suggested that the school architectural design may be the cause of the heat, and I wonder if climate change is not an issue to be explored. The possible effect of either climate change or architectural design on both the learning process and behavioural challenges in schools seems to be an area that requires attention for the wellbeing of current and future students, and other school personnel.

Finally, managing stress-related symptoms, especially in situations where the source of stress is beyond the counsellors’ sphere of control, is a practice of paramount importance. While the MOE provides an Employee Assistance Program for the counsellors, some of the areas of chronic work related stress seem to be systemic. As such, some counsellors seem to have resolved that they would do what they can, though wishing that they could do more for the students. This resolve is another reason why the systemic issues may need to be continuously articulated to the policy makers.
Limitations of the Study

The interpretation of the findings, of this research, hinges on several potential limitations. First, on reflection, including 10 participants in the sample, a number that is at the maximum end of the range recommended for IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009), led to an excessively lengthy Findings and Discussion section. Having six rather than 10 participants might have provided sufficient breadth, while potentially allowing for greater depth of the analysis of participants’ experiences.

Moreover, the length of the occupational wellness segment may appear to overshadow the other components of wellness and this disparity may also appear to some readers as giving more focus to occupational wellness. Perhaps the many systemic issues raised by the counsellors may account for the lengthy occupational wellness component when compared with the other areas of wellness. Alternatively, given that the counsellors were reflecting on their work-related challenges it is possible that aspects of the research process encouraged them to focus primarily on occupational wellness.

Other areas that were overshadowed relate to the challenges, strategies, and perceptions of service delivery with respect to providing services in the areas of career and academic counselling. These are two major areas of responsibility for counsellors, but not well addressed in this study. Counselling for the personal/social/behavioural domain, perhaps representing issues of the 25% of the school population who are at risk for failing in the system seems to dominate the report. Is this focus on the behavioural challenges of the 25% a reflection of current school counselling in Trinidad and Tobago? Is it therefore the case that the personal/social, career, and academic services
to the remaining 75% of students is somewhat overshadowed by the behavioural demands of the 25%? Ethan has hinted that:

Frustration is further compounded because what you as a guidance officer is called upon to do, you cannot even do it because, one these students would not understand and two you do not have the time anyway because you have to deal with all these other issues.

If school counsellors are integral to the development of human capital, how does the apparent lack of services to the 75% affect the life trajectory of those students? As such, the results of this study seem to suggest applications that are primarily relevant to one segment of the school population and one segment of school counsellors’ responsibility: students struggling with the personal/social/behavioural domain.

Finally, as with most qualitative studies, another limitation centers on transferability. Given that the participants were, arguably, from two of the most challenging school districts in Trinidad and Tobago, it is difficult to determine how applicable the experiences of these counsellors are to other school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago. Furthermore, the findings represent the experiences and perspectives of the counsellors. It is beyond the scope of this study to determine whether the counsellors’ perspectives are shared by other school personnel, such as principals, teachers, parents, and students. Additional research is needed to understand the phenomenon of school counsellors’ challenges, self-care, and perceptions of service delivery during challenging experiences from the perspectives of other school personnel.
Areas for Future Research

In general, three immediate areas for further research were identified. First, a study highlighting the impact of the counsellor-principal and counsellor-teacher relationships on the students, and by extension the educational goals of Trinidad and Tobago, may provide some important insights. There is some evidence that counsellors do have productive relationships with their principals (Ben, Leah, & Ethan) and with teachers (Ethan, Ben, & Zoe). As such, a future study highlighting the indigenous best practices that facilitates these positive relationships will provide important insights that may be replicated at other schools.

Second, it may be useful to conduct research with students who have left the system over the last few years, to understand how their life situations might have benefitted from professional services. Studying the lives of past students could strengthen the existing knowledge base in supporting current and future students, and it could be a catalyst for increased professional resources. Third, a study on wellness and self-care targeting all eight school districts and covering the seven areas of wellness as identified by Roscoe (2009): occupational, environmental, spiritual, emotional, physical, interpersonal, and intellectual, may provide greater insight into the phenomenon of school counsellors’ challenges, strategies, and perceptions of service delivery during challenging experiences.

Another area for future research relates to how climate or a school’s architectural design affects classroom temperature and the ability of students to function. Moreover, a
historical study on school reform over the last 30 years, as it relates to literacy levels and crime, may provide both context and indigenous solutions. Finally, while these counsellors have brought some understanding to their constraints, these counsellors are mainly from two educational districts in Trinidad and Tobago. As such, broader and possibly quantitative research is necessary throughout all districts to ascertain if the issues of powerlessness and hopelessness are district specific or if they are the consensus of school counsellors in Trinidad and Tobago. If the latter is the case, then that may signal that aspects of the guidance program need to be revised.

Asking school counsellors to reflect and report on their challenges will invariably evoke a number of negative responses. This study did not capture the positive programs, and interventions, that counsellors implement. As such, a study documenting the indigenous best practices for counselling students may therefore provide this important data.

In closing, while there are areas for improvement, particularly at the relational level, one thing is certain: these 10 participants are committed to their students and the school counselling profession of Trinidad and Tobago. The systemic issues seem to be structural barriers to the efforts of these counsellors, and addressing those issues will further promote the viability of productive school counselling in Trinidad and Tobago.
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Appendix A: Interview Protocols

Schedule 1: First Interview

Developing Rapport: Greetings and Introduction of researcher: Background; motivation for conducting the study; purpose of study; length of this interview (30 minutes) and length of second interview (one-two hours)

Introduction of Topic: School counsellors’ challenges, strategies and perceptions of service delivery during challenging experiences

Forms to be discussed and completed at the first meeting: (a) Consent form (b) Confidentiality Agreement

Information from Participant: (a) Age Range (b) Years of Service (c) Educational Level (d) Caseload (e) Hours of Supervision per month (f) School population

Staff description and school climate: Supportive, caring, autocratic other

Leadership:

Structure: Elementary; Middle; High; Religious: Catholic School Board etc.,

School’s background: perception of student catchment or wider community being served:
Continuing Rapport: ask about thoughts or questions about the first meeting: (I will double check the recording device to make sure that it is working properly)

Transitioning to interview: Well, let me begin by asking you how and when did you recognize that you were not working at your full potential?

Body of Interview:

A. (Substantive Question #1: Tell me about your challenging experiences as a school counsellor

Following from the transitioning I will pick up on lines to segue into getting insight into how the experience impacted the following areas:

(a) Physical: energy level, sleeping, eating, exercising, increased aches and pains, fatigue, chest pains, elevated blood pressure, headaches, and visual difficulties;

(b) Emotional: sad, helpless, powerless, anxious, angry, guilty, numb, depressed, hyper-sensitive, overwhelmed, panicked, and respond inappropriately, impatience, irritability, being withdrawn, accident prone, sleep deprivation, changes in one’s appetite, and moodiness;

(c) Social: withdrawn and experience decreased interest in intimacy, mistrust, loneliness, and there may be increased interpersonal conflicts;

(d) Spiritual: loss of purpose, lack of self-satisfaction, pervasive hopelessness, boredom, and loss of faith in a higher power;

(e) Environmental: work/life balance;

(f) Occupational: role conflict and ambiguity, work load, resources, stress, demands, work frustration;

(g) Intellectual functioning: confusion, diminished concentration, self-doubt, and poor decision-making;

(h) Depersonalization: avoiding students; devaluing students, or treating students like objects rather than people;

(i) General stress: low energy levels; reduce interest in work; feeling incompetent; feeling as if you are not doing any good for anyone; feeling that you could not manage the type of issues that were being
presented; deterioration in personal life; negative work environment; feelings of giving up; feeling a sense of dread or thoughts or actively looked for another job;

(j) Feeling less compassionate, sympathy, or empathy for students: blaming students for their situations; and

(k) Feeling a sense of dread or not wanting to go to work

**Transitioning to next topic:** *(Double check recording device for time and quality of recording)*

B. Substantive Question #2: What strategies did you use to restore balance to your life during those periods when you felt that you were not functioning at your full potential or how did you take care of yourself during those periods? (Physical, social, emotional, spiritual, environmental, occupational, and intellectual)

**Transitioning to next topic:** *Find a segue from the answer to Question #2 to transition to Question #3*

C. Substantive Question #3: what are your perceptions of how your service delivery was affected during those challenging experiences?

**Transitioning to closing the interview:** *Well, it has been a pleasure meeting with you and learning about your experience.*

**Closing the Interview**

I could tell that you are very passionate about_______ or From one colleague to another I have the deepest respect for all that you do knowing the challenges that we must overcome to keep our lives in perspective and balance.

Well, I should have all the information I need, but if I have any questions would it be okay to call you? What time of day is best to contact you? Thanks again for taking the time to meet with me and for sharing so deeply. Feel free to contact me if you think of anything else that may support the study, and if there is anything that I could do to help you, from one colleague to another, please feel free to ask.
Appendix B: Final Verbatim Table

**Occupational Wellness Challenges: Working at Cross-Purposes with Administration**

**Eva.** In attempting to advocate for her students, Eva felt that the response from administration was not in the students’ best interest. Eva lamented, “It was awful! I think that was the beginning of my stress… I was so upset and … [the principal] said that I was over-stepping my boundaries as a guidance counsellor. It was just awful! I could not go back there!”

**Anna.** “The principal came to me as the guidance counsellor asking for solutions … which I would have taken back… [to the principal]. They [administration] did nothing about [it] so… the problem … continued. *At least try the solutions and if they do not work let us see what else we could put in place,* but do not leave the solutions or the suggestions … and still clamber for help.”

**Leah.** “Information was coming to us saying [that] you cannot take the children out of the classroom. Now if you are in a primary school, which is back-to-back (blackboards partition some classrooms in smaller rural schools) and you are doing a guidance session, as interactive, fun, laughter, role-play, the noise will interrupt the whole school. [There is] a nice big tree with some benches outside, [and so] you can take the children, you can do role-plays, you could have a session. Somebody [in administration] says, *you are not supposed to take the*
children out of the classroom, and those are some of the more managerial issues” [that we encountered].

Leah. “Our principal would say if you… [are] walking the corridors and you see an infraction, do not leave it, do not just say, Well I am the guidance counsellor so that you do not talk to the child about the nonsense … [but] sometimes for me to be effective as the counsellor I [do not] walk [down] the corridor”

Ben. “The leadership changed [and] that was the worst thing that happened … [The] style of leadership was not a consultative type of leadership. … [The] style of leadership in my view was punitive and dictatorial. … That was a very stressful time for me in guidance”

Miriam. “My principal was one who would have dealt with situations and quickly refer. That is why I am saying that was …[one] of the most stressful situations for me. [My principal] referred people to professional agencies and most times these things do not come to me they go straight to professional agencies, and when it comes back and nothing has been done [the principal] wants me to fix it [and] that has frustrated me. You used the other agencies forgetting, [that] I used to say, but I am supposed to be the first response here, and then when it certainly cannot be fixed then I become the one to try to sort out the mess and that certainly created some Haaa Disruption in me! [I felt]
frustrated you know [I] felt like okay well I do not belong here. I have no purpose here.”

Xyna. [Administration is] “not guidance friendly. They do not understand … our roles and functions because they say [that] we cause the students to misbehave. But the approach a guidance counsellor will take towards a situation would be different from a teacher, so what you [administration] have to do, you have to work with us.”

Sophie. Sophie helped administration to organize a parent session for students who were on academic probation to let the parents know that their children would not be able to continue in the school. Administration sent the parents up to the conference room. Sophie said, “The parents came to the conference room [and] I alone was there. … [Later] when I went up [to the principal’s office]… the principal asked me why I did not send for her. I got upset, really upset! [As] I felt I was in a serious line of fire with parents.”

Occupational Wellness: Strategies for Working at Cross-Purposes with Administration

Eva. “I went into this mode of fighting for the students. I mean I was writing letters. … I went to … [other senior staff] for the student. I did everything I could possibly do … [and so] I would just continue to work with my students the best way… I could, to try to encourage them. I said if I did not go to
the [staff] meetings … I would not have to take it so personal … I [also] believe that even if you touch one person you did a lot and I know that I touched more than one … [but] leaving was the best thing to do. To regroup and come back again with a different frame of mind”

Anna. “I do what I can … and my motto is: if even it is one child I could help at the end of the day I think that is good”

Leah. “Sometimes for me to be effective as the counsellor I need to … just not even try to walk the corridor because you see that nonsense going on there, I will have to get involved and then when the interaction, you know, so sometimes I really have to do that”

Ben. “I had to turn it into something … frivolous, yea … I think I spoke to a few people about [that person] … I probably asked people to pray, pray with me, help me pray for this situation because it was truly a disturbing thing to me. … It was awful! It was very difficult to do guidance … under that [person].”

Xyna. “Everything that happens I call up … [my supervisor] you know, everything, because … as long as it is not going how it supposed to go I will call her and tell her.”

Sophie. Sophie reflected on how she had previously handled the situation as she explained, “I told them [the teachers and administration to] give me the list of the students and I will call in the parents and that worked, so I was able to talk
to the parents where their child situation is concerned and come up with a result.”

**Occupational Wellness- Service Delivery: Working at Cross-Purposes with Administration**

**Eva.** Eva stopped attending administrative meetings dealing with students’ behavioural issues, and she eventually left the school.

**Anna.** “I took an almost hands off approach with that class. Not to say that I did not go and I did not do anything, but when they [administration and teachers] cry out for help and say, *Oh the children are just so disruptive ...* I did not take them on because they have solutions.”

**Occupational Wellness Challenge: Counsellor-Principal Relationship**

**Barriers**

**Anna.** “I am not sure whose idea it was but they [administration] put all the remedial students in one class ... [more than 25] of them, so needless to say there would have been lots of fights every day: behavioural challenges. [The school climate was] chaotic at times, very chaotic. ... The school administrators were promised extra remedial help, which they never got.”

**Leah.** “I had a really bad experience with a principal. It was public embarrassment in a ... meeting ... and I remember one of those times thinking *I really do not want to be back in that school.* Because I am saying, *you could come to me and let us talk if there is something that is an issue* and ... it was one
of those times when things were happening in the school and you go to a meeting and you hear [the principal saying] *I do not know what ... this counsellor is doing! I do not know what she is doing!* You (reference to the principal) say you do not know what I am doing when you could simply ask, *Miss what are the issues? What do you suggest? What can you bring?* … Some of the issues may not even be guidance issues.

**Miriam.** “There was one incident with a student and I think my principal lost respect for [me]. I was working with a parent [and my principal said], *Miss come here I need you to deal with somebody right now.* I [said okay, but] I am dealing with a parent. [Later, I went to the office] and realized [that the principal] had already taken over … [the other situation] and it [was] going in the wrong direction and there … [was] nothing [that I could have said] to change anything. So what is the use? That is how I felt! That is just one incident, but there are many other incidents like that: I made the decision you [the principal] were not around … then you come [and] you want to change things in a different direction. So it is like: *Okay this is your school do whatever you want to do.* You become powerless and I think that is what was frustrating me. When … [I feel] that [level of] frustration I just want to get out of this school because I am not making any statement. I am not doing anything.”

**Xyna.** “I have a serious issue with my principal. She likes to micro
manage.”

Sophie. “Why is [the principal talking about my situation in public?] She knew that … [I was] going to classes in the night and in the next morning it is really tough.”

Organizational Wellness: Strategies for Counsellor-Principal Relationship Barriers

Anna. “I do what I can. I do sessions with the classes. I do one on one with the students who actually have some issue that … they want to talk about”

Leah. “My spirituality I think is what keeps me grounded and smiling and able to bounce back quickly.”

Miriam. While it is not the ideal solution, Miriam resolved the immediate situation by telling herself “okay this is your school, do whatever you want to do/you become powerless.”

Organizational Wellness- Service Delivery: Counsellor-Principal Relationship Barriers

Ben. “So every time something happens, she [the principal at my new school asks me] what is happening with this? What do you think? What is that? So there is this whole trying to change the culture and the climate of the school that makes it a lot easier for teachers to interact with students in the classroom.”

Leah. “So that was one of the times I felt like … I do not want to do this
“job”

**Ethan.** “I love the [new] school because … anything that happens [the principal] includes me in everything, even things that [are] totally non guidance related … [the principal] just wants me there … [the principal] wants to hear my opinion on everything.”

**Sophie.** “At the start of the term I will have a meeting with my principal and explain … what I plan to do with the students … I will [also] ask [the principal] what [do] you want to see happen this term with the students? I … [also discussed my personal challenges with her] so … [the principal] knew about that situation”

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### Organizational Wellness Challenge: Counsellor-Teacher Relationship

#### Barriers

**Anna.** “One of the things that I told my supervisor was that I did not think the school needed a counsellor and I told her that because there are other teachers who counsel. The vice-principal [also] counsels. Maybe it is me, maybe I should say, *Hello! That is not your role or something*, but I do not like to be confrontational unless I really have to … so I think they just do not know where the boundaries are. Everybody thinks that they are counsellors. The teachers at my school … they like to know stuff. They just like to know, but not to help. So if they know they will whisper among themselves, they will tell … [this one],
they will tell … [that] one … so it affects me somewhat … I told my supervisor I
do not think they need a counsellor because they are all counselling.”

**Xyna.** “The teachers … [also] say, you are doing nothing, you are
contributing to the misbehaviour of the kids. … [Those are] the two things.
Sometimes they say you want to re-invent the wheel. So you might be planning
something in your school and they are not in agreement with it so they say you
are re-inventing the wheel. So the teachers do not understand.”

**Ethan.** “It is the teachers I have a problem with because we are the
advocates for a child. Sometimes teachers also pick on students and you would
ty to defend the child, and then you would be seen as the bad one … and
sometimes the teachers they [are] just really mean. Some teachers [are] mean …
they are just doing more damage. … Sometimes the tough love goes overboard
… I mean I am telling you like it is and it is sad! It is sad!”

**Sophie.** “Some teachers do not understand guidance to some degree.
… There was this staff meeting and one teacher … stood up [and challenged a
decision that I made]… So I had to explain [my role] … [but] I felt like I was
being attacked. I felt like I was not understood or my role as the guidance officer
was not understood. … It made me feel a bit incompetent at what I do, and that
did not feel very good. … Another contributing factor to the stress … is the fact
that some of the teachers they do not go through the correct channels to get things
Organizational Wellness: Strategies for Counsellor-Teacher Relationship Barriers

**Leah.** “My [new] principal insists on a lot of structure. She is a very organized person and she would ask teachers to find solutions. So a lot of times … instead of coming directly to me, they may set up a parent meeting with the child … and ask me to come to the meeting, [and] so they are looking for solutions instead of just dropping a paper in my lap. The teachers [also] … share issues/problems … and of course, even among their peers, they can find solutions. If it is something to be referred of course they will do up the forms and send … [them] over to me.”

**Ethan.** “I love the [new] school because I get so much support from teachers, so much support.”

**Sophie.** “I had to deal with it professionally. So I listened to what she had to say and I went back to my office and I went, *Wow!*”

**Sophie.** “Especially where teachers are concerned, I will listen to them and [I will insist that they fill out the form] I will say okay just full out the referral form … [and] when I get the form then I could handle it from there.”
Organizational Wellness Challenge: Training and Mentoring New Counsellors

Leah. “In the early [days] the counsellors need … that mature person to walk alongside them a little bit till they are comfortable. For me as an example I was a very shy and reserved person. All the ambition [was] in my head. I was thrown in a big school like this [about 1000 students] and … that is when you need your supervisor to monitor, to manage, to understand the climate of the school. To say, Okay this is a more immature counsellor, do not put … [him/her] in this big big massive school. If you want, put them in one of the smaller secondary schools until they get into it; and those are some of the things you need because I know how I felt.”

Ben. “I think the most stressful period of this work was … when [I] got into guidance. … The area where the stressors were … [were] in the assessment area. You do not have to be especially trained to diagnose, but at least you can say, this looks like; this seems similar to. The other stress was [initially] going to work in a school by yourself with a [large] school population not sure of how much intervention you could give. … So [at the beginning], you are in guidance, but you are feeling like you are walking on slippery ground because you are not sure of what you are doing and what your interventions would be.”

Ethan. [Incompetence], “it is not a nice feeling. … I do not think
training is the problem because they send us on workshops with very good
people. I would say it is me ... wanting this person to change and me wanting
this person to really wake up and smell the coffee”

**Sophie.** “When I started guidance ... every now and again that feeling of
self-doubt would come up because it is like, *did I handle that situation right? I
think I did:* that kind of thing. The level of stress was a lot because being a new
guidance counsellor ... I did not have all the strategies to work around some of
the situations.”

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**Organizational Wellness: Strategies for Training and Mentoring New
Counsellors**

**Leah.** “Well what they [the supervisors] try to do is more inside training
so that they do a lot of prep before they [the new counsellors] are placed. ..... 
The last batch that came ... they actually had them come along with us. I do not
know if you will call it mentoring, but giving support.”

**Ben.** “We ... [since got] tests that we can administer to confirm to some
level, ...[but] in terms of being able to offer help or offer somewhere to get help
... [that was] a stressful thing.”

**Adam.** “At our [monthly] meetings, [my supervisor] would discuss
various aspects of your work and if you are having difficulty in some area you
bring it to the meeting and she will explain it and everybody will have the benefit
of that”

**Ethan.** “They have sent us on some pretty good workshops and we have learnt a lot … we have been given a lot of good tools to use and it has helped”

**Sophie.** “I had to do a lot of brain storming. I had to do a lot of calling around … just talking with my supervisor, sometimes I was not able to actually determine okay when I should slow down on the case load, that kind of thing.”

**Zoe.** “I get a lot of help from my fellow guidance officers. We have a real supportive team to help. … We have a real good team going … and that in itself takes away from the stress that you have to deal with at work.”

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**Organizational Wellness -Service Delivery: Training and Mentoring New Counsellors**

**Leah.** “You go into a classroom, with 30-40 pairs of eyes looking at you to do a session. To do an icebreaker, I have everything on paper, it is perfect … [but] when you get to the classroom that is a whole other thing, especially if you are immature in the field.”

**Ben.** “Seeing the behaviour … and not being able to help. That is frustration! You feel frustrated, you feel incompetent, you feel unfulfilled because the assessment [was the challenge]. You really could not give much help to students and their problems because you did not have the handle to do so. Maybe in the guidance you could spend time in the psycho-educational domain, but in
the counselling segment very little, and also in the career development segment, very little [until we got the training].”

**Ethan.** [Earlier in my career] “if I was more competent I would be able to help the kids more. … I believe, I would be able to counsel them better. I would be able to say the right things or to zone into their problems faster and get them on the track to healing faster.”

**Sophie.** “Being kind of young in the service you do not really want to refuse anybody so you get another case and then you realize, *okay I am swamped.* You cannot deal with everything and then you realize, *I am stretched* and that frustrates me and that causes stress because you cannot focus on this and that … it is like I want to do everything at the same time!”

**Organizational Wellness Challenge: Unrealistic Expectations**

**Leah.** “[Administration and teachers] send the child to the guidance counsellor, and by the time you have one visit, *poof all the behaviours have gone through the door* because you have had a half an hour session with the child. So they [administration and teachers] have these unrealistic expectations to see immediate results, and that … [was a challenge]. You yourself [are] immature in the job, you [are also] going with all the expectations that you [are] going to change the world … *I am here now and I have that curriculum, and just send them and we are going to fix them.* You yourself, because you have all these
theories in your head [you have unrealistic expectations, but], then you get to the real situation and you realize it is not… [what you had first envisaged].”

**Ethan.** “I was the guidance officer for two shifts [at a Junior Secondary] so that was stress by itself. The stress was having children come before you with problems. Actually, not that the children came before you, they were asked to go and see you, and children who are asked to come to see you and children who come to you willingly are two different types of children: one acknowledges that he or she has an issue and one does not believe that he or she has an issue. … The teachers then expect you to be a magician, so the powerlessness is further compounded because you are guidance counsellor [and]… sometimes the teachers would expect you to be a magician to fix a child and you know you cannot do that”

**Sophie.** “The stress on the job … is [mostly] the caseload because of the nature of the background of the students. Sometimes there are emergency cases. When that happens, and I am probably in the middle of doing a session or I am trying to deal with another case, … I have to stop what I am doing to get to this and while I am dealing with this, the [other] situation is getting worse, so it is like *how am I going to deal with all of this?* … I think what [also] causes a lot of the stress is that as a guidance officer you wish you have … a secretary to get certain things done. … I have to do everything”
**Occupational Wellness: Strategies for Unrealistic Expectations**

**Sophie.** “We had … a retreat and it really helped. I think we need to do that more often. It really really helped. I felt good it is like Oh My Gosh! Wow! I felt good. I think we need to do more of that because I think she [my supervisor] recognized all of us started to complain about the stress.”

**Sophie.** “I came up with … a schedule: On ... [day one] I would only do paperwork: so reports … letters to write, parents to call, administrative stuff. [On other days], I will do mostly classroom work and [so on]. That worked, but it does not happen rigidly [and] I have opted to asking teachers for classes as opposed to being time tabled.”

**Organizational Wellness- Service Delivery: Unrealistic Expectations**

**Leah.** “As the problems come you feel overwhelmed ... I mean it is a period of feeling inadequate; a period of blame; a period of all those kinds of things that you go through until you come to the place of realizing I could only do so much with the child.”

**Ethan.** “So you have these children coming to you … and you do not exactly know how to get them … to change some of their behaviours. It was challenging and that frustrated me.”
Organizational Challenge: Lack of Recognition and Regard

Leah. “How do you measure the overall impact to say that it is your intervention that helped this child move from 20% last year to 21% this year? Because sometimes people can turn around in the same breath and say, *I do not know what you all are doing in the school. I do not know.* [For example], when I went in … [that school] five and six girls [were pregnant] at one time … and now for the last two years or so we have not even had one pregnancy in school, not one. *Is it good for me? Who do they give credit to?* To say, *Wow! We have not had not one girl coming to say Miss I am pregnant.*”

Ethan. “I feel that I am a Black Crow because they will die at their post defending a realm that do not appreciate them and that is basically me … and that is how I look at it.”

Ethan. “One of the other frustrating things is when school is out you still have to go … and to sit in this place and these people will keep you there almost all day and … it added to the frustration because *you know what? You work in the school too; you could do with a break; you could do with a mental break.*”

Sophie. “Nobody really knows that I am under stress, they just know that once I am on the compound, [it is] work. [It is] my children are this and my children are that, and sometimes I feel as if I am being looked at as somebody who would solve all the problems of the school. So every issue that comes up
and it could simply be dealt with at a disciplinary level they throw it in my direction as if I am supposed to wave a magic wand and fix the problem. As if I am the recycle bin! ... [And at] graduation nobody says, *Miss thank you so much for the work that you do.* So sometimes, I wonder if I am where I should be. Sometimes I feel not even compensated for the kind of work that I do. … On a whole in terms of what I do, I do not always feel appreciated for what I do where the whole … school … is concerned. I feel like if there is a problem send her by the guidance officer and when the issue is resolved it is like, good, life goes on.”

**Sophie.** “Sometimes I do feel tired. I honestly feel we do not get enough vacation days. I wish they would arrange our time such that we are like the teachers in the sense that when school close we close. I really wish that they would change that and at least give us some more days because we are mental health professionals, give us some other special leave … that would help us to rejuvenate.”

**Adam.** “We do a lot of work, but yet still on a daily basis on the News you are hearing about bullying. You are hearing about fighting. You are hearing about all kinds of negative behaviours and so on. I think we are overworked. There are some schools ... [without] guidance officers, and so the few guidance officers are the ones who have to try ... [to] make a difference. So we do a lot of work. We are overworked, but at the same time, we are not making a major dent
... so we need more resources … we need more personnel.”

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<th>Organizational Wellness -Service Delivery: Lack of Recognition and Regard</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Miriam.</strong> “I am at work, but I am just doing what is required. I am not going overboard. I said I have done enough and I do not think they appreciate.”</td>
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<th>Organizational Wellness Challenge: Political Constraints</th>
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<td><strong>Xyna.</strong> “If … [they] decide … [they are] going to implement [student evaluation of teachers] … the union will … [push back and the ruling party] will lose the election. … So here we go, we [are] bouncing our heads all the time.”</td>
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<td><strong>Ethan.</strong> “I see large schools as a barrier to supervision… smaller schools allow for proper supervision. They still have problems, but it allows for greater supervision and management.”</td>
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<td><strong>Ethan.</strong> “As a guidance officer, there are so many things that you are just not sure of … you are not sure if you could talk about certain things not that it is taboo, but you just do not know … so you might just talk about it in a roundabout way.”</td>
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<th>Organizational Wellness Challenges: Literacy Levels of Secondary School Students</th>
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<td><strong>Anna.</strong> “They are first formers [Grade 7s] and… they cannot read… the few diligent ones would go [to class] and the others will continually stay and when they stay, they stay and fight, they stay and play, they stay and disrupt.”</td>
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Leah. “We deal with students who are what you call that in terms of the range of psychopathic behaviour and all those things. So the children would really be acting up crazy, of course, those students, for whatever mental reason or whatever it is may be referred.”

Ben. “The student population was students who were placed under the 30% so they did not have the skills to read.”

Adam. “The catchment area, if I am to use one word it is rough meaning that we get students here out of the SEA (Secondary Entrance Assessment) and generally I think it is more the low performing students in the SEA so it is a huge challenge.”

Ethan. “Frustration is further compounded because what you as a guidance officer is called upon to do you cannot even do it because (1) these students would not understand and (2), you do not have the time anyway because you have to deal with all these other issues. I think it is children who are just being driven through the system so they will just go up in standards (grade levels) and they are just going through the motions. Nobody [is] really saying you [are] really not at that level yet so we need to keep you back … and then it comes time to move them up in standard, I mean, where else will you put them? What else will you do with them? It was also frustrating in that school because to pass for a Junior Sec you would have not done quite well at the entrance exam. That
suggests, I do not want to say that they have a low academic ability; [because], it is possible that they were not groomed into making the most of their academic ability, but my point is when you go in front of a class to conduct guidance sessions they could not grasp it either, they could not follow.”

**Organizational Wellness- Service Delivery: Literacy Levels of Secondary School Students.**

Anna. “I remember vividly that I was in a no-nonsense mood and I shouted at them and you could have heard a pin dropped. Those children were so quiet and a child said to me, *Miss you know I never heard you talk so loud.* It left me thinking, *maybe this is what they are accustomed to: people shouting at them.* That is so sad because it is almost as if you have to get on crazy for them to do what they know they supposed to do.

When I am [feeling] stressed out or when I am feeling pressured, I guess I take a no-nonsense approach … at those times … everything gets on my nerves so if you are talking and I watch you and … I take my eyes off … and you start talking again, you find on an ordinary day I may say, *what is happening to you why [are] you talking so much? On a stressful day I would say, you, stand up, when you think you could be quiet you could sit down! So I guess even in my delivery when I am stressed it is different because I am less tolerant*’
**Organizational Wellness Challenge: Lack of Parental Cooperation**

**Anna.** “When the [parent] came, at the end of the conversation … [the parent] promised that … [the child will be taken to get help] … but when they got home … [the parent] forbade… [the child] from ever coming back to me… and it really pained me that I could not do anything more for [the child]. … It was a stressful situation.”

**Anna.** “Parents now are busier. Their priorities are skewed the child might have the most expensive [pair of] shoes, the latest hairstyle, but they do not have the books that they need. If you ask them to get some tool or some instrument to do something, they cannot, and sometimes there are still the barrel children whose parents are away (abroad) and send them gifts and big suitcases, but they are not actually here. …. The children … are mainly left up to their own devices, [and] so whether they study or not there is nobody there to see if they pick up a book. In some cases the parents are working shifts and different things so the parents are not actually there to say do this or do that.”

**Leah.** “When you [are] done [with] your session with them in the school, they have to go back to the existing problems in the home and then the parent is not cooperating so what you do with the child … is not being … [followed-up] at home.”

**Miriam.** “I had a [student who was experiencing a serious personal
Ethan. “What frustrates me more is that when you call the parents in or you call whomever they are living with, in, sometimes I do not feel that you get the support from the parents. A lot of the frustration comes from meeting some of these parents because you understand so much more. You understand why the child is like that, you understand that this child has nobody really and then they come to school and they misbehave, and you are like God what to do? I … compare them to the children who are doing well … and you look at the children who [are] doing well and you realize that there is someone supporting them, there is someone pushing them, [and] there is someone who is giving them the love and attention that they need. [Moreover], it is just babies having babies so it is a lot of young clueless parents out here.”

Organizational Wellness: Strategies for Lack of Parental Cooperation.

Anna. “We would meet with parents independently and show them their [the students] reports and try to reason with them [to] find out what is the problem [and] encourage them to assist more.”

Zoe. “I actually mended a lot of relationships with parent and child even though some of them, the parents, try like for a month or two, but it brought them
some sort of relief. Others, there have been great improvement.”

**Zoe:** “My self-esteem workshop did work last time, and I saw some improvement with a good bit of students and I really would like to continue it.”

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**Organizational Wellness Challenge: Lack of Professional Resources**

**Eva.** “A lot of the things that are needed to help children who have problems, the resources are not here, and [school counsellors] resort to what they could do. It was really, really frustrating … that was one of the first things that got me stressed out. In the primary school … the cases that I get are for children who need diagnostic help. They need to be assessed for some kind of learning disability and whatever and we do not have that here.”

**Anna.** “It could be another term or two or three or ten before we actually get [diagnostic support] … and so that situation was just really trying. Because
you are trying to help the students and everywhere you turn you are getting
blows. You are getting blows from administration. You are getting blows from
… [the special teacher] who is supposed to be testing them. *I felt like a hamster
on a wheel: I was running and just going nowhere just going around.* So that was
one situation that … had me really feeling hopeless and wondering what is the
use.”

**Adam.** “We had remedial teachers here who would work with students
and try to see how they could help them …[but] now we do not have that so it is
even… more challenging. So it is pretty … challenging it is extremely
challenging. Sometimes you really want to help children and somehow you do
not know where to go where to turn and so on. … [professional] resources
sometimes can be challenging. ”

**Zoe.** “I think there is need for more resources like psychologists to
diagnose conduct disorders. … The waiting list to be interviewed or evaluated at
the … [external clinic] is real long. You have to wait a few months three months
I think before you get evaluated. By that time you do something real stupid”

**Xyna.** “Another problem is that we as counsellors or officers we are not
being truthful to ourselves because we know that we cannot do what we want to
do! We know that! So it is not making sense when [our supervisor] calls her
meeting and everybody [is] tapping themselves on the back. They did X and they
did Y … We need to … [say that] … we need X X X see what you could do for us at the highest level because at present we do not have anything to work with.”

**Ben.** “That [lack of resources] has been a catalyst for going to study. That pushes me to study. What we have discovered ... [with] guidance, is that there are a number of behavioural problems [that] show up among children that the referral agencies have not been able to manage. [When they do manage], they manage at a slow, very slow, slow, slow pace. If people like me could get the competence we could at least start a process of intervention and refer at the very last, but at least it gives me a better chance to understand what this child is experiencing and going through and also as a means to help teachers.”

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**Organizational Wellness Challenge: Writing Reports.**

**Ben.** “One thing that stresses me is when [my supervisor] starts to call for reports that for me is a stress. … [Reports could be used to] help to analyze what you do and where you are. It also helps you to plan what you are going to do in the future, and I have not seen the report being used in either way as a planning report [or] as an instrument to help design and to fix problems [and so it stresses me out to prepare a report that will not be used].”

**Adam.** “Sometimes all this set of reporting and writing and stuff like that … bugs me a bit. It bugs me a bit and it comes from the top and says we need to
have this by so and so time and I want to be with the students and I want to do work with the students and so on. ... It is a requirement [but] ... sometimes it bugs me”

Ethan. “There was a time when we had so much reports to do, it was really sad. It was reports and sometimes I have had supervisors and these supervisors were very anal about reports. I am also slightly anal so I would make sure and do my reports on time and everything, but it took a lot ... [and] I have had supervisors who ... added to the stress. ... They used to micro manage a lot so they would, you know, reports had to be real tight.”

**Organizational Wellness Challenge: Constraints of the Physical Environment**

Anna. “My office is at the back of ... [another room]. Sometimes that is a deterrent, because they [the students] do not want to have to walk through ... [that] room ... to get to me. So that is a deterrent.”

Leah. “It is so challenging to really do proper counselling: the bell is ringing ... you may not have a room like this that you could lock, and therefore there is the constant noise. ... [The school] is not ideal to really talk about proper prolonged counselling at about six to eight sessions with a child [because of all the school disruptions]. One day... there is [a sporting event] ... the next week the child is suspended, and the next week is exams ... and then the term is
finished.”

**Ben.** “You do not want to go in a classroom in that place because there is no air condition. I think we have to get more efficient with what we do with guidance … in terms of having a nice little room an air-conditioned area where the children can come in … and you could engage with them in a private area without all the distractions around. I think the structure does not enable that … I sit in an office that is hot. It is really hot. It really gets to you. … This is a stressful thing: to come into a hot classroom and to come into spaces that do not enable what you want to do. You have to make do and the children cannot be given the kind of dignity that you want to give and the standards to dream and be creative and so on.”

**Ben.** “I think the architects did not think well about the design and they did not maximize the wind flow to keep the buildings cooler. … Building this way prevents all the wind from going over that way so therefore that segment of the school is very humid because of how this [school] is designed. Maybe you could design in the same direction or if it was designed with big arches in it then it would allow for wind tunnels, [and] so part of the problems of the school is the architectural design.”

**Ethan.** “What added to my frustration were the lack of an air conditioning unit in the office and the lack of a computer to do the reports and so
on and to do research.”

**Zoe.** “In my school I am having issues with allocation of funds and getting funding for certain things and that is a bit stressful for me because I have a lot of nice dynamic programs that I would like to have a classroom like this where I could conduct them, and I do not. I have a really small office, [and] right now the A/C is not working, and imagine, I have to conduct counselling. My computer is not working properly. Two years … [ago] I had requested a printer; and the principal keeps telling me *okay I am giving you this room* and when I got everything for the room only to find out that … other persons are sharing the room. … So I was real stressed out”

**Zoe.** “My office is in administration. I have been talking about [this] for two years because, that is the next thing, in my room you could hear conversations. Also, when … [children] come to see me [administration]… will be [asking them] “*What are you doing here?* And they will… [chase] them [while saying] *everybody has to come to see the guidance officer* and sometimes children do not come to see me because they think I talk to the principal because, you know, our offices are so close by and we may discuss certain things.”

**Adam.** “I never had this room before. I had a little little office … and it was frustrating to sit in a little thing, a little cubicle like this, and you cannot do any work, and then sometimes when you go to the children in the classroom, the
classrooms are hot. The children cannot get work done so that used to bother me, but eventually I got this facility.”

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<th>Organizational Wellness Challenge: Role Confusion and General Job Stress</th>
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<td><strong>Leah.</strong> [Referring to earlier in her career, Leah explained that] “Once a teacher was absent, you got called to go and to do supervision: to watch the class, or to baby sit the class. So according to what is happening, sometimes you may find those sorts of issues coming up as to what you are supposed to do on paper and … your actual role. [Moreover], those big situations … [such as suicidal ideations] are not in our purview to handle. Those things are referred. So of course in that aspect the role there is to refer, but then they [in administration would] say, <em>but you did not do anything with the child</em>, but your role there is not to counsel the child for mental health, [it] is to refer the child to get the mental health that he needs. … [Generally], I am … [also seen as the] dean of discipline, I am all those kinds of things.”</td>
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| **Leah.** “We had different leadership … [and each leader] redefined our
[new leaders] … came, and said, *No, that is not your job spec, you are not supposed to be doing a, b, c, d, e f, g, that is not your function*, and so … [those changes] … threw us off.”

**Anna.** “It is the balance, because sometimes the parent comes, and it is not that I could say *I have a class, just wait until I am finished* or the class is [left] unattended.”

**Sophie.** “The stress on the job is the case load, because of the nature of the background of the students”

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**Environmental Wellness Challenges: Work/Life Balance**

**Adam.** “It was really rough at that time. … It was an event that occurred outside of school, but it affected how I performed in school.”

**Leah.** “You come home with all these children’s issues and you are wondering *how you could help, what you could do* … because … [after] your session with them in the school, they have to go back to the existing problems in the home, and then the parent is not cooperating”

**Sophie.** “I think the first time the level of stress really went up was … after I started the guidance, because within …[those] … months, I started the Master’s …so I …[went] to school at night, and then worked in the morning, and I am also a single parent. … So I had to juggle all of that, [and] it was pretty stressful. I felt helpless because of my domestic situation … that feeling of
helplessness, I felt that many times.”

**Miriam.** “In the beginning it was very difficult to use that line of demarcation, ... [when] you see me in the supermarket ... at church, ... on the street, or in some sporting activity ... do not ask me about ... [school related concerns]. Your work was just travelling with you everywhere you go, until you ... learn to put some measure of control in your life.”

**Zoe.** “Personal issues at home ... that was a bit stressful, really stressful, and I guess that also affected my work in some way. ... At that time ... my school was in a real chaos for those months, and then my personal life, and then my kids ... it was really overwhelming. That was the most stressful time of my life. Talking about it now, I thought it was behind me.”

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<td><strong>Anna.</strong> “Before I had ... [children] I would really take on things, but since I have them, and since I have to deal with them ... it just got better for me. So my family has actually helped me. My kids have actually helped ... with the stress.”</td>
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| **Leah.** “[I came] to the place of realizing [that] I could only do so much with the child. The child also has to take responsibility for implementing the action, parents also, the school also, and you realize that once you have done your part, then, you could say: *Okay this is enough for today let me go home* ... and I leave. Once I reach home ... I am pretty good to go. ... The things that I have
control over I am controlling those things, in the midst of what I do not have control over, and that is helping me come back in balance.”

**Ethan.** “[My supervisor] is a real amazing person because she tells us like it is, I remember so many things that she has told us. She told us things like: *do not ever make this your life; have your life outside; this is just part of your life.* She also understands how stressful [the job] is and every term we … [have a social] and those things help. Those things really help.”

**Ethan.** “I have real friends. Friends who [I] can call … and say *I am feeling …[down]* and they would … [be there for me]”

**Sophie.** “A …friend became… a support system for me so sometimes they will… [help me] and I will just sleep, sleep, sleep because I was lacking that a whole lot.”

**Zoe.** “I had a life outside of my work. Work is not my life, so I have a social life. I have good friends, a great supervisor … so that helps me, [I enjoy] … dancing, exercising, hanging out with my friends, [and] talking with my parents: they were very supportive as well.”

**Zoe.** “I do everything for fun … hanging out … dancing, I go to the movies, [and] I carry the kids to the park almost every day. … Tomorrow I am going zip lining … [I do] kayaking, hiking, anything … I am usually up for anything and I like spontaneous limes” (social events).
Miriam. “[I]… have friends … I go to the beach, relax, and that is how ... I deal with things generally. I am [also] very close to my family and I am not just talking about my immediate family: my husband and children, but... my extended family. We have always had a close niche so if something is happening ... I speak to my brothers, [and] my sisters. Everybody knows: my aunts my uncles ... and we share with each other, we laugh. So I think that family commitment, that family circle, that family group helps to keep you in that place of wellness.”

Environmental Wellness-Service Delivery: Work/Life Balance

Sophie. “I did not want to talk to too many people because ... I tend to be the one that … [other people] would call about … [their] issues. So eventually, I would shut down from everybody. I do not want to hear anything.”

Sophie. “Because I [sometimes] got to work late … they [the students] were affected by ... [my tardiness].

Miriam. “Because you are not operating or functioning ... [at] your full capacity… you are operating at a snail’s pace. … It becomes overwhelming.”

Spiritual Wellness Challenges

Eva. “Sometimes feeling that I could not manage the types of issues that were presented [was stressful]. I do not want to say … [that I have a] loss of purpose, but hopelessness. Because I really feel … as guidance counsellors, we talk to the children, [and] we find out what their issues are, and then what? Where
do they go? What can we do for them? They could listen to me, but the actual
coping skills that you need to cope with the problems that are not changing, that
we cannot change, what do we do? So you just feel so hopeless. I want to help
everybody, but I cannot help everybody. You know what I am saying? You just
feel hopeless. Because you know that at the end of the day there is really nothing
you could do [but refer] … so it is pervasive hopelessness.”

Anna. [I question] “my purpose at this school. I was wondering: am I
getting through to the children? Is it me perhaps or… would somebody else, a
new face, be able to reach them in ways that maybe I can’t? … I was honestly
losing my zeal. I was going through the motions. … I guess … I was not feeling
as though I was doing anything worthwhile. It is almost as though you are
kicking against bricks … the hopeless feeling it comes from time to time and
especially the last couple of months: that last term? Yes! Most definitely!
[However, when] school closed and I got to rest a little, and reflected on why I
really chose guidance … [that helped] and so the zeal is back.”

Leah. “I felt frustrated! Again I am questioning, Can I do more? Is there
something else I could do for this child? Is there some other institution we could
get this child to? Is there some other available resource? So you are running in
your mind. What else? What else? What else can I do to help this child? And that
[thinking] can go out of the gate with you, and you come back the next day with
the same thing again.”

**Ben.** “I do not want to use the word frustration … [but I do feel] more powerless.”

**Miriam.** “I know [that] I am here for a purpose, but then when everything was going down I said, *Okay, well I think it is probably time for me to leave.* … I am thinking … I was just going through that period where … you are at that peak and you are coming down and I say: *Okay it is probably age, you are getting older.*”

**Xyna.** “There might be some things that you want to do and because of the attitudes of others, especially administration … you cannot do anything, so it is like your hands are tied because you really want to help the kids, but you cannot help them. The most you could do: You have to be there for them in the physical and in the spirit, but you just cannot [do anymore]. I get very emotional … depending on the situation, I will be extremely sad. If something [is] affecting a child, I become very sad when I cannot do anything about it.”

**Ethan.** “Powerless, I felt powerless. I felt powerless also because I do not believe that our system … has the support … for guidance officers to follow up. We do not have enough psychologists and therapists. … You question if things are really getting better or worse. … You question if people really care when they...”
say that they care.”

**Sophie.** “Sometimes I [ask myself] *am I in the right job? Am I making sense? What is my purpose here? Am I just to be used when there is an issue?* So sometimes I do not feel like this is my purpose, but other times I feel okay I am making headway here and I think that is what causes the stress. I am hustling to come here, and I do not feel appreciated.”

**Zoe.** “Spiritually, I would go on these spiritual highs and for one minute I would be super, super, in to church and then next minute I am partying. I am still kind of spiritual, but not as spiritual as that.”

### Spiritual Wellness Strategies

**Eva.** “By thinking about all the things that could go wrong that do not [go wrong]. In other words, [I am] being thankful for the things that are really okay with me. Because at the end of the day, I really have a lot to be thankful for, so, yes that is it, just putting in perspective all the things that are wonderful in my life.”

**Eva.** “Depending on my mood, the music will be Gospel music. I am not an overly religious/spiritual person. I am not. Sometimes I just sit there and I meditate and... [I] say thank you Lord for whatever it is that you did for me. Spiritually, every-day I must say that I do take a moment to ... ponder my life and move on, you know, move on.”
Anna. “When I am really stressed I may not feel to talk, and at those
times, music helps. There is a [gospel] song by Yolanda Adams, Lifted I Rise and I ... listen to that song over and over again ... I love Donnie McPerkin. Both of them would have been really instrumental in calming my spirit. I do not know if you know his [Donnie’s] story? If you know his story ...[it] is kind of inspirational and it really helps to lift me, because if he could have gone through all that and still sing ... then ... whatever little thing you are going through it is like peanuts compared to what he might have [experienced]. I know now that things happen for a reason. I know that He [God] allows certain things, and there are lessons to be learnt from them, and I have a favourite text ... and there are times when I am stressed when I reflect on that text and it really helps.”

Leah. “My spirituality I think is what keeps me grounded and smiling and able to bounce back quickly. From the time you get to a church service and you put your praise on: you cannot go to a service, get your praise on and then go back out stressed. It is not going to happen. I think that is what really keeps the internal peace. That is what it is: in the midst of the storm ... that internal peace that says hey everything is still under control ... that works for me.”

Ben. “I think ...working with children is a calling, a spiritual calling, a calling from God, and a calling is an opportunity to serve. ... That has been my logical spiritual approach ... [and] this brings me satisfaction when students
succeed when the boys want to read and do something better, this has been my satisfaction.”

**Ben.** “[I] kind of rationalize it, you kind of reframe, and, you know, you change your perspective, and you personalize the thing … to see somebody who was dealing with their stuff: maybe she had a bad day… All of that became part of dealing with the stress.”

**Miriam.** “Spiritually … everything I turn over to God: … I pray, I sing, that is it, you know [that] I am at that level.”

**Xyna.** “I say my prayers, and I go to church. I take my long hour drive and I go up there and socialize and talk with my Pastor, and come back home and that is it.”

**Adam.** “Well I am a very churchy person and that is where I found solace. I went to God and so I found some comfort there.”

**Ethan.** “One of the things that ground me is that I believe I have experienced miracles in my life. Things that have happened to me that are truly unexplainable, and I could only say that there is something powerful out there, and that actually gives me hope.”

**Ethan.** “I listen to a lot of 80s music … [and religious] music as well helps… it is very enchanting, and it is relaxing, and I read a lot [of religious texts] and it helps.”
Sophie. “One of the things I still do … [is] go up to … [a church on a mountain] that is like heaven to me. I would just go and sit in my car. Sometimes I will fall asleep in the car just hearing the birds, the breeze, and just being there, and I will have my Bible. I would read the Bible and I will talk to God. … So that really helped, and once I go up there I feel spiritually pumped. I could face the afternoon now. I could face the night. I could face the week, so in terms of that spiritual component it really, really helped.”

Zoe. “There was a time when I really crashed, and church bailed me out and spiritually, it helped me a lot to catch back myself … I used to go to church every day.”

Spiritual Wellness: Effect on Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences

Anna. “So I will roll in and sometimes I would roll in late, and I even wanted to move. I felt maybe a whole new experience would just be better.”

Miriam. “I think I even added to it [my lack of drive] by just not doing anything and not standing up … you are there and you are just going through the motions, as they would say … So spiritually, I just say, okay, it is probably time for me to move.”

Ethan. “You do what you have to do … but it is like you are going through the motions. You are going through the motions.”
**Sophie.** “Since I came back, in terms of the stress, I told myself I will just stick to the basics and let the basics be as effective as possible and try to get fulfillment from that.”

**Emotional Wellness: Challenges**

**Anna.** “Sometimes [I feel] anxious … the anxiety would come from wanting to do more, or wishing that there was something that you could do, but it is like your hands are tied, so you cannot, and that goes on to being powerless as well. Because [in] some situations we just cannot help and so you say: *What can I do? What can I do?* You are taxing yourself and you are wondering, *is there anything else I could have done or said?* You just get sad for the person because you know that they are hurting or they are going through something and you just wish that you could do something [other than referring them].”

**Leah.** “There are times when … there is one thing after the next, whether… fights [or] infractions … and before you could even try to get one issue resolved, [there is another crisis]. Those are the times I remember feeling stressed … those times are a bit stressful.”

**Ben.** “It was a stress-full period because I was angry. … Normally, … [I am] very easy going, and placid and logical and trying to fix things … [but] when I get aggressive or when I begin to speak out at people, to me that is a stress trigger. I would say I was unhappy and dissatisfied and I felt trapped. I felt a
little trapped because I did not have the power to really change ... I actually told somebody I felt stuck in a place: cannot go forward or backward.”

**Miriam.** “There was a time when … it was very frustrating and you are like *I just think I need to get out of this place* … I was really emotionally drained. I do not think it happened in any other area, but it is just for here [this school] you did not feel the love or the connection emotionally. … You are here, and it is just like, whatever! I [am] just existing, kind of a thing.”

**Xyna.** “I get angry sometimes. … I get frustrated. That is the word. I get frustrated. I get angry… because I cannot do anything. We cannot do anything... *What do you think I could do? What I could do?* The most I could do is talk, and it will fall on deaf ears. *What am I doing here?”*

**Adam.** “It is more a question of wanting to come to terms with this event that had occurred and it would preoccupy my time, just preoccupy my time, and it would just have me absorbed. There was not the desire to say go out and have a lot of fun and things like that, there was not that desire because [normally] I like to be outdoors.”

**Ethan.** “Sometimes I would be [at] home and I would be like: *I wonder what this child is doing. I wonder if this child is okay. You understand? I wonder if this child will ever get help.* Because I have … cases … that I reported … and I do not know if anything was done, and you are left wondering *if she will*
heal if she would get better, what is this going to do to her? … When we report these things to the police and I will tell the children, I would say: listen, I have to report it and I will report it, and they hate you, and then you have to deal with that too. So sometimes all the child has is you, but they are vexed with you because you went and sold them out.”

**Ethan.** “It did ... take a toll on me health wise, because I never had … [a certain health concern] before, and the thing is, it is not like I am saying the stress brought on the … [health concern], it is an assumption because I never had it before, so I am assuming that the … [health concern is] a manifestation of the stress.”

**Sophie.** “I used to feel very drained. … Emotionally I was under a lot of stress and then having a young child ... it used to be a challenge. … I never had a problem with moodiness until that period in time.”

**Zoe.** “Emotionally: [I was] depressed. I did not feel to go to work at all … [but] when I reached to work, it was fine. … When I reached to work my mind was occupied and I actually felt better.”

**Zoe.** “I was really furious and I was really hurt … [because] how [could] you [the principal] expect me to function in the school if you do not give me the resources, or I do not have the resources?”
**Emotional Wellness: Strategies**

**Eva.** “I like music and eating. Those are my two stress relievers so when I feel really frustrated, I get my favourite souse [local dish] and then I listen to some music and try to not think about what is going on until the next morning when I have to deal with it again. I just have resolved within myself that this is the way it is, this is the way it is, this is the way it is, and until something is done differently, this is the way it is.”

**Anna.** “I really wish sometimes, that I could have more time for just me. I do not have enough me time. … I do not do enough me stuff for fun. I realized it is not worth it [but] self-talk works for me so … I would say: *No you are not doing this, you are leaving this at work, you will deal with this tomorrow.* I [also] reflect on why I got into the job in the first place … my motivation [is] helping young people, helping children, helping students, [and] so … the ones that I could help, I help.”

**Leah.** “When I close [my office] door … [it is for] mental relaxation. Sometimes I just listen to music, but just that time where I could just exhale, works. Where I could just mentally block out all that is happening around and I could just come to that mental solace. I would say, for me, it is mental solace. I am good to go and it is like, you are recharged and I am good to face it… I say: *okay come on take a rest or whatever it is …* if I realize it is happening too often
because of whatever is in the environment, like last term I realized I was feeling
tired, physically. I was tired and of course that was leading to stressful situations
and I decided, okay, I was up for vacation. I went on vacation. I took some time
off. I got away from it I went back *YES! I'm good to go again.*

**Ben.** “You go through what is called a mental compromise: you go
through this thing that half a… [loaf] is better than none. I am a kind of an
optimist. It is better than doing nothing, it is not ideal, but you could see if you
get 30/40% you will make that do, but you really want more … you go through
that kind of a self-conversation and you try to find some-way not to let the
frustration settle, because if it settles you will leave the job.”

**Ben.** “I used to have a lot of music in my office … so I would put on a
little bit of music and listen to it and music always takes me to a different place.
It always takes me away from some of the little issues that I have … [I also] sit
and watch the ocean and that was a lot of therapy. So, there was always this and
then of course the family. [I] have [a] supportive family: children who are
engaging. Of course I am in the church, so I had plenty, plenty, plenty areas and
outlets that could help me. [I] also go to the hospital to visit sick people, sit with
them and listen to them.”

**Miriam.** “When you see I close that door … [work] stays here… not that
I am not caring, but I have to care about me because if I am not healthy then I
cannot deal with what is there. So then you say, *okay, bamm*, the door is closed.

I am not even focusing. Let me focus on me because I did not have that me time.

I may have had that me time with everybody else, but I do not think I had that me time: where I appreciated me for who I am. Now I appreciate me for who I am and find my time to rejuvenate … and to find my strength so that I could come in here with strength so I can work at what is happening.”

**Xyna.** “[I tell my supervisor] ‘I just cannot stay in that environment, I have to go’ so I … jump in my car. Sometimes I drive down to the beach, and I sit there and I watch the waves. … I do not swim or anything, I just sit in the car and look at the water because you know that is a way to calm your nerves [and] that is what I do. I am enjoying the students. I do whatever I can for them. I do not blame them for whatever they are going through. I do not blame them. I never blame them. I blame the parents or whoever have them in that situation, but I do not blame them … they are kids … and as an adult you have to provide for them.”

**Adam.** “I …[have an outdoor ] hobby and sometimes I will take-off into … [nature] and I will spend a little time … and so there will be a certain little peace and comfort … and then… being in … [nature] you hear birds passing by, you feel the breeze blow, and the forest is a very cool place to be.”

**Adam.** “When I am off this job I do not think about this job. When I go
home, maybe I am absorbed a little bit with the television, but family life? I enjoy family life. I enjoy my church community. Holidays? I am gone … and I do not even [talk with] anybody related to work until I come back.”

Ethan. “Usually I might call a friend and I would … listen to some positive songs [or] go [to] see a movie. I just do something to distract myself [to] give the mind a rest, and [to] let the mind kind of heal and work it out. I tend to use some of the things we use on students: that we tell students to use.”

Ethan. “I find … lately [that I am] better [able to] deal with stressful situations because I do not give things the importance that I use to give [them]… I also feel that I am better able to put a word to my feelings and that has helped also … I am better able to find the words to describe and identify where it is coming from and that has helped.”

Ethan. “There was a teacher … she was very motherly, a very kind hearted woman and very maternal… so sometimes when I was feeling ... (down) I used to just go and sit in ...[her] room and we used to just talk about life and stuff. She was very spiritual also… and it used to be really nice and comforting. So I would seek out people … I would reach for a life line… because people showed me kindness, I believe I am more able to show kindness.”

Sophie. “There was one point in time I actually felt … [very low emotionally] and I am like, No! No! This is not me! ... You need to see somebody!
You need to take it down! Something is wrong somewhere. So I was still able to recognize when it is getting to that point; okay, good, you need to stop and do a self-check here, because you cannot be telling students how to manage their lives and you cannot manage yours. That does not make sense.”

Sophie. “I definitely went to counselling … if I have to be there for them [the students] I need also to see about me, so I went to counselling to help me with whatever I was going through at the time. I started taking care of me more, so every two weeks I go for a massage to help me relax. I would stock up on a lot of chamomile tea. I made it a routine that … [once a week] I have to go and run. I still go to church. I am still very spiritually active. I go to the beach. Music is very important to me and it is one of the ways that I express myself: singing … I love music. It keeps me happy. … If I am not connected with nature I feel like if something is wrong … so now I make a conscious effort to be … smarter in how I get things done. Sometimes I do feel lazy and I wonder to myself: am I being lazy or am I just taking it easy or am I just tired. I do feel tired, like tired!”

Zoe. “I was seeing a counsellor at the point in time so that helped me out.”

Emotional Wellness: Effects on Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences

Leah. “When those [stressful] times come … you find that sort of
forcefulness comes out and then I check myself I say *hey why did you do that?*

*Why did you respond like that?* … In interacting with the students that comes out as well, and normally for me my office is, as I said, a safe haven for students all the time. When I start to feel like *ahhh not today!* I lock my door … when I am going through that: I need my quiet time … so that is something I noticed as well.”

**Adam.** “I did not want to go to work because I had my own issues that I was dealing with, and I did not feel I could take on anybody else’s issues.”

**Ethan.** “If I walk into a class feeling … [down] and a child acts up I will let it go, but if I am feeling you know real good, today is a good day, and I walk into that class and they act up, tough love will come out. I am a strict guidance officer. I do not tolerate… I am kind of old school. I expect a child to display certain behaviours.”

**Sophie.** “[When I] feel overwhelmed I would feel drained. Emotionally, I cannot really give emotionally to the children, so I feel like locking my door, but I cannot really do that, so I go to my car … or leave work a little earlier”

**Zoe.** “After a while it was really stressful and I did not have the energy to counsel anybody because sometimes I would have similar cases with relationships. … So I try to do more group guidance.”
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<th>Physical Wellness: Challenges</th>
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<td><strong>Eva.</strong>  “If I could put my stress on a scale of one to ten, it was at an eleven. I was very frustrated. I would say that I really did feel tired a lot. I could feel my blood pressure rising, and I had headaches. My voice would get louder. I would get kind of nervous because I was so frustrated. And I talk with my hands naturally … so I would talk with my hands at a speedy, you know, a quicker pace because I want you to understand what I am saying. You are not hearing what I am saying. I would get louder and [I] would get excited, you could see it in my motions.”</td>
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<td><strong>Anna.</strong>  “Sometimes, honestly, from the time I rolled into school I got a headache. I would get up [and] I would be fine, and as soon as I got on the compound, I would have a headache. And I said: <em>What, like I am getting allergic to this place, every time I come here my head hurts</em> and so I realized [that] it was getting to me in more ways than one.”</td>
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<td><strong>Anna.</strong>  “When I am stressed I eat. I did not sleep well because … [a suicidal student] was on my mind. So … [when] I am really stressed I may not sleep or I would not sleep well. I may fall asleep because I am tired, but then I would wake up and just be there thinking and thinking.”</td>
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<td><strong>Leah.</strong>  “I [feel] very irritable; … a bit impatient; [and] maybe angry as well. Headaches are something that I know I get on and off if I get stressed.”</td>
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Sometimes] I have a lot on my mind: it does not have to be stress. I know that sometimes I may just lie down and a lot of plans are running through my head because I do a lot of [mental] processing. … All kinds of things: what I have to do today, what I plan to do the next day, so I do a lot of processing.”

**Ben.** “One of the problems with stress for me is that it interferes with my sleep… and I do not know why I am up and I do not think it is because I am consciously aware … [but] the biggest challenge is to get the amount of exercise that I need.”

**Miriam.** “I think when you get into this office, this office is stressful. I come in and I try to eat my breakfast quickly. I do breakfast for everybody at home and I would not even have a chance to … eat breakfast … [I] will be working without eating lunch. It is when I get home at night that I eat lunch or I eat something, so my eating was totally warped. I think … that there is so much to accomplish, there is so much to do. It is not that I am stressed and I cannot eat, it is just that there is so much to be done and it is like *okay I need to get this done and that is it.* I… did not sleep for very long. … My mind always used to race on so many things to be done. [I felt] fatigued, definitely physically tired.”

**Ethan.** “My sleeping is bad. My sleeping is really bad. Sometimes three or four hours of sleep and I do not know why, that is the thing. I just do not know why I just cannot sleep.”
**Sophie.** “I will try to do … the same amount of work that I need to do and yet still study, but that was not enough. I eventually got sick, and I got the flu often. That was pretty stressful. My energy level was pretty low at times because of the lack of sleep. … In terms of eating I ate late or at some weird times. I was snacking a lot or buying stuff a lot because … the time to cook … would be limited. Sometimes I would work through the whole lunch time … lunch would end, and I would have seen three children during the lunch time, and I did not eat, and I have a class to go to, so I might not eat until after work. So sometimes for the whole day, I would not have had lunch. Recently, I discovered that I developed a health problem as a result of accumulated stress. I would have suffered a lot of headaches. I did not know what was causing the headaches.”

**Zoe.** “I stopped eating. I lost a lot of weight. … I had headaches. I was not sleeping. I even had chest pains. I had memory loss and all kinds of stuff.”

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<td><strong>Eva.</strong> “If I could get something [to eat] … or going to the beach because I like to see water, the water makes me relax. Occasionally, I swim when I go to the beach, but other than that? No! No [exercise].”</td>
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| **Anna.** “Apart from the exercise, which I am really working on to get consistent with, I ... adjusted my eating habits. … I drink water or eat a fruit. I
may chew a gum, chew it for a little, but if I am still stressed, … I will drink
water and will try to take my mind off of it because I know it is not healthy
because it is like you are transferring …[the issue] into something else [and] after
[eating] the chocolate … [the issue] is still there.”

**Anna.** “I love the beach it is very therapeutic. Sometimes just parking
and looking at the waves is really, really therapeutic. Other than that it is just
standing in the shower … it is kind of therapeutic. … [It is] almost like it
massages my shoulders: when I am done I feel relaxed.”

**Leah.** “I have my machine, and I try to exercise … I know that is critical
for me. I try to exercise. I try to drink my water. I try to eat my fruits. … I try now
to have breakfast, but generally, I am working hard and playing hard.”

**Leah.** “What I find … [that is] also very relaxing: [is] driving and listening
to music. … When I leave school I put on my music and I am driving. I mean…it is like the unwinding time before I get home to put on another gear, to put on
another hat: home hat … so the driving the mentally going over everything the
mental detoxing. My music is on [and] I am singing. Something that I also find
very, very relaxing is sometimes I go by the beach and just park up, and not even
bathe just let the waves wash in … I used to find myself like on Sunday after
church when all of it is over, I will go and sit down on the beach listening to the
music. Again, it is like washing everything. An hour, two hours may pass, and
then I will go home and I am good, and ready to start my week again."

**Ben.** “Well, deep breathing, relaxation, stretching … singing … praying and so on … so I will do those kinds of things. Those are excellent stress relieving techniques.”

**Xyna.** [Exercise] … “I am always running.”

**Adam.** “I started to monitor my [blood sugar], and when I started to monitor, I also realized … that my blood pressure was not in sync with somebody of my age and… I ... went on a diet. I [ate] more vegetables and things like that … drank water. I gave up [alcohol] so I went on a diet of water and fruits and vegetables ... and since then my blood sugar and blood pressure has come back reasonably in line. So by ... getting that piece of news [from the doctor] it was like a reality check.”

**Ethan.** “When I am feeling really, really down I will do something to get myself out of it and one of the things that works for me is physical fitness. Every single day I do something fitness wise and I believe that I am addicted to serotonin and endorphins, yea, and it really … [takes] me out of the funk. I think exercise has actually saved me as a person.”

**Sophie.** “I am really trying so I am making sure that lunch time is lunch time. I mean last year I had to eat in my car, and when I was finished eating, I would probably take a five minute shut eye, relax a little bit, and then go back to
my office, and see whomever I needed to see. So that really does not happen now. It might happen in isolated cases very, very far and in between. … There is one lady, she is pretty senior, and she always tells me Miss you need to take care of yourself. … [Another staff member] is like a father figure now because he would say Miss [did] you eat your lunch? Miss go and eat! Stop what you are doing and go and eat!”

**Sophie.** “So I had to try and take it easy. I had to consciously make an effort to find relaxation techniques. [I had to] find ways to just slow down on an afternoon or manage the work stress during the day. So in terms of the health part I realized now I have to really, really take it easy.”

**Zoe.** “I decided to … [seek help] because it was really overwhelming. …and my sleeping eventually came back on stream. So it was just like a whole chemical imbalance that … needed to be regularized, so now I sleep fine. [When] I have to eat I will take it to my car, and go out of the school compound, eat and come back. I do not eat in school because students would come to see me.”

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<td><strong>Ethan.</strong> “So if I walk into a class kind of feeling down, I will feel a kind of energy and the energy will be a draining one so I would leave at the end of that session feeling even more drained, and I just would want to go home... to get to</td>
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the ...[end] of the day.”

**Sophie.** “I remember ... having a counselling session with a child ... and I was struggling to stay up, literally struggling to stay up.”

**Sophie.** “Going into the classroom to do sessions, I would not be able to deliver with the energy that I am supposed to, so the session might turn out pretty boring, and obviously if it is boring you are cheating them. ... My delivery was affected in the sense that I would not have the amount of energy and zest and excitement to engage them with the session ... obviously because of the stress that I was going through.”

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<th>Interpersonal/Social Wellness: Challenges</th>
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<td><strong>Ben.</strong> “I think when you feel [that] there is a threat, when you feel threatened, when you feel somebody is trying to victimize... or trying to unnecessarily unduly make life and the desire to help difficult [you feel angry]... I think the anger [came]... from a kind of altruism because it is not really a personal anger. ... My anger will be more towards what I see you trying to do [to] somebody else. It is interfering with the defenceless those who cannot defend themselves and so you feel a need to speak up and to shout and to say: <em>Hey! ...You are damaging innocent people. You should not be allowed to do that...</em> I think that is the best way I could probably mentally process it.”</td>
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**Miriam.** “The job can be stressful, but one of the things that I think is
that there is no networking per se with the other counsellors. … Some of the older counsellors would say: *What we had before we do not have now* because before you could have said: *Okay, I could talk with this one we sit down and we share.* We say, *I am doing this and it is not working, how do I do this?* I mean we still do that with the older counsellors, but with those that … [just came] on board [no]. … So then you find that even if you want to share something, you do not say it … and that is something that I think should not be happening in a unit like this … because we deal with people and we need each other to build on and I do not think we have that. Others may differ, but this is from my … [observation]. Before you could…say, *Hey so, so, so* I do not get that, I do not get that anymore so [I] become very cautious on what [I] say and what [I] do.”

**Adam.** “In the early days [there] was that challenge… that [someone] … could … make a report [to my supervisor on me] and that … [person] would not have known whatever arrangement was made. … That is one of the challenges I faced earlier on.”

**Interpersonal/Social Wellness: Strategies**

**Eva.** “At the time when I was going through the stressful times my main friends, my main social group, were guidance counsellors. So we just shared the moments and sometimes we would have lunch together and we would go to the beach and just talk… and do it in a funny way: like make fun about it, so that way
you know we could relieve the stress that kind of way. … I could just sit with you and talk and laugh and joke with you and of course we have to snack on something … [and] that is my social life. … I have friends … in the education field … I think it always makes it easier when it is somebody that could relate: that you do not have to do all this extra explaining for them to get what you are going through.”

**Leah.** “When I realize [that] I feel like that I try not to have to interact with them [the students] because I realize: *Hey something is not going right there; you need a little time out*; so the angry responses maybe [with the] interacting and then you say: *Hey you should not have done that; you should not have said that* … [when] I find I get into [a stressed state] then I have to say: *Okay let me go in my room and close my door and take a break,* because I realize that that may not be the best way to deal with it … I do a lot of introspection because you want children to feel comfortable enough to come to you when they are going through their issues.”

**Ben.** “There were conversations with leadership, conversations with my peers, and then there was me, seeking support.”

**Miriam.** “I avoid as ... [many] conflicts as possible, but when I say, avoid conflict, conflict is unavoidable, but you do not use the conflict to create friction, but you use the conflict in such a positive way so that is how I deal with
conflict. So I try not to carry things to that, you know, and if anything has occurred that do not seem right, whether with family or whatever, I deal with it right away as much as possible.”

**Adam.** “So I spent my first two years here building relationships. … I understand the importance of the relationship in order to … [function].”

**Zoe.** “My students actually made me feel better. … The energy that they bring: they were like there for me, in a way that they did not even know, I guess.”

**Interpersonal/Social Wellness: Effects on Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences**

**Eva.** “Now I do not even socialize with this batch of guidance counsellors.”

**Miriam.** “They (other counsellors) may be networking, but I am probably not part of it. I mean, you have one or two that you will network with, but for me, I just think there is a level of [mis]trust… I feel the friction, I see the pulling and tugging and that does not augur well, so then you find yourself in a little cocoon or in a little clique, which I do not like, because I just think that everybody should be able to be free and to share.”

**Adam.** “Imagine you are working with people and they are watching you in your eyes, smiling, laughing and talking to you, but you do not know if you
Intellectual Wellness: Challenges

Miriam. “I think in the beginning I used to take on work as everything, but I do not do that again. I will go home and think: *okay what is next?* It is as though the situation follows you wherever you go. It weakened me because...[I] would have been so overburdened with everything that ...[I] carried it and ...[I] still [did not] get a solution [and so I went] ...back overburdened ...[to] add more burden to the burdens.”

Ethan. “When I am feeling kind of down I tell myself ... [negative] things, but then there will be another voice that kicks in ... *but what is wrong with you,* you know, like a tough love kind of voice kicks in.”

Zoe. “I had these thoughts right through in my head. I used to over think things too much. But I was seeing a counsellor at the point in time so that helped me out. Conflicts in my head, not with anybody else, so it was like a crisis in me actually ... I was just depressed over the situation, and it blurred my decision making and all that time I [was] teaching [a certain self-care class]...and I used to try to use my techniques, but teaching it and acting it are two different things, but *my intellectual functioning?* I used to have ... serious issues with remembering stuff and concentrating.”
Intellectual Wellness: Strategies

Leah. “What we do we ... have debriefing once a month ... so it is expected that if you are having a rough day or time of month that we could vent”

Anna. “Sometimes it is just going into my office between classes, ...to take ... [my] mind off of everything else and ... just free [my] ...mind.” ... Because I know stress kills, I try not to let anything bother me that much. I try not to take on anything. ... If I get upset I will just find something to do that I know will relax me, something that would take my mind away from it because it is not worth it, you know, having yourself all worked up. Things like that, they get you sick, and so I just try my best not to take it on.”

Ben. “Because during that time I was busy with my ... [other] projects, so I had outlets. To me stress becomes collateral if you have something else, even if it is class-work/or something else going on that makes it seem that it does not exist. So even though it was there, I had all of this going ...those things were pre-occupying my mind and not [the stress].”

Ben. “I have a mantra that I use because I felt that there was a wanting-neglect of boys. Boys who did not have fathers, boys who did not have direction, boys who were underperforming, so I always maintain that even during the times of distress that this is what I am here for: I am here to give some light to some little fellow. I spend a lot of time reflecting. I do converse with myself...I was
reframing all the time, sort of analyzing and looking at the various components and how they fit and what they were like so … I reflect.”

**Miriam.** “I read a lot, so I read and I would watch shows, that kind of thing. Mentally I always try to think good thoughts.”

**Xyna.** “I do not stay on the negative too much because everything else will be negative. So I try my best. I say, alright you have to do something for these children, you have to make them laugh, you have to be there for them. So … even though I know... that ...I cannot give 100% because I cannot make a 360% change in the situation… I do not really ponder on …*I cannot do anything and give up.*”

**Adam.** “I will be gone from this job and there will still be lots of issues to deal with, still lots of issues to deal with, so one needs to take a reality check ever-so often and say: *Yes! I am doing the best I can, but you know what? I am not Hercules. I am not Hercules.* Yes I want to do my best, but after I give my best there is nothing more I can do.”

**Ethan.** “You basically tell yourself that children are resilient … I do not want to say you are giving up, but you are saying: *you know what?* I cannot deal with this, but you are hoping that someone else [an agency] out there will reach that child.”

**Zoe.** “Actually believing that you know stuff like that happens … you
just have to get over it … you just have to pick yourself up and recognize that you have an issue, and deal with it and that is what I did.”

**Zoe.** “I think … [seeking help] helped me mentally to clear up my thoughts. Before I used to worry over things now life is so much clearer, and I am engaged with a lot of extra-curricular activities with my kids so that kind of takes the strain off my brain.”

**Zoe.** “You have to keep telling yourself that it is not the immediate results. Later on in life you would see the results [for the students] because like all of us when we were young we made bad decisions and that is how we learn and that is how we grow …by the experiences … and I keep telling myself that one day what I said to them may have been a line, a word, or a paragraph or something that I may have said to them [that] would have impacted them later on in life. I did my part and I am contented with what I have done for them.”

**Zoe.** “If I save one child, it is a lot, because that one child would save other people, and that is how it is. That is how you have to view it. You cannot save the entire world you could try, but when you make a difference in one person’s life, it is enough. It is a lot for them to change around especially the environment that these children have to live in, physically. Even with their parents, the relationships that they have with their parents and how they treat them…[and] all they want at the end of the day is for somebody to love them you
know: acceptance. And most of the times that is what they are lashing out about, 
the underlying issues are always that relationship with their parents, always, all, 
all cases, when they act out.”

**Intellectual Wellness: Effects on Service Delivery During Challenging Experiences**

**Ethan.** “I used to feel like I used to lose them like if I am in front [of] a class doing a topic I thought I was not effective enough. I was not patient enough. I used to rush through things just rush it through and not take my time to explain. I used to feel, for lack of a better word, I used to feel naked in the sense that children are very perceptive and they could sense things.”

**Zoe.** “I had a problem concentrating, so I do not think my delivery was as good as it is normally … because I would lose my train of thought. So I think it would have impacted my delivery. … After a while it was really stressful and I did not have the energy to counsel.”
SCHOOL COUNSELLORS’ SELF-CARE

Curriculum Vitae

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Education

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General Area of Dissertation Research: School counsellor’s challenges and opportunities as they relate to service delivery. Other research interests: Wellness and work/life balance; counsellors’ training and development; technology and counselling; and school counselling ethics and the law

2004 Master of Education, Guidance and Counselling
Brandon University, Brandon Manitoba: Practicum hours were completed at the Brandon Friendship Centre.

2004 Graduate Diploma (equivalent) Special Education Brandon University, Brandon Manitoba

2000 Bachelor of Science, Behavioural Sciences
Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan

Other Training

2003 Certificate: Youth and Drugs
Manitoba Addictions Foundations

2003 Certificate: Helping Relationships Facilitation Course
Canadian Mental Health Association

Employment History

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2010-2012 Research Assistant: Dr. Jose Domene, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton

2007-2009 Guidance Counsellor Secondary
SCHOOL COUNSELLORS’ SELF-CARE

School Grades 7-12 Family Life
and Sex Education Teacher
Grades 7-12
Bishop Michael Eldon School (BMES), The Bahamas
(American School Counsellors’ Association’s (ASCA) Model)

2004-2006 GuidanceCounsellor, Trinidad and Tobago Ministry of
Education, Student Support Services Unit with
Responsibility for four elementary schools in Tobago

2004 Co-ordinator: Ministry of Community Development,
Trinidad and Tobago Geriatric Adolescents Partnership
Program (GAPP)

2000-2001 English Teacher, Forms 1-5
St. Joseph’s College, Trinidad

1979-1997 The Royal Bank of Trinidad and Tobago

Development of Manuals

2009 Guidance and Counselling Procedural Manual
Anglican School Board, The Bahamas

2007-2009 Family Life and Sex Education
Course, Grades 7-12 Bishop Michael
Eldon School (BMES), The Bahamas

2004 Communication Skills
Geriatric Adolescents Partnership Program (GAPP)
Ministry of Community Development, Trinidad and
Tobago

Conference Proceedings

evolving task. Paper presented at the Annual Atlantic
Education Graduate Student Conference, Fredericton,
New Brunswick

comparative study of mature students’ initiation to the
PhD program at an Atlantic Canadian University. Paper
presented at the Annual Meeting of the Canadian Society
for the Study of Education (CSSE), Fredericton, New
SCHOOL COUNSELLORS’ SELF-CARE

Brunswick.


**Seminar and Workshop Presentations**

Rostant, J. (2005, April). *Helping Skills*. Twelve day training course delivered to attendees of the Tobago Mental Health Association Annual Training Symposium, Bacolet, Tobago.

Rostant, J. (2004, March). *Student achievement and school success*. Presentation to Catholic Schools’ Principals and Vice Principals Association, St. Augustine, Trinidad.


Rostant, J. (2003, October). *Helping Skills*. Twelve day training course delivered to members of the Brandon Friendship Centre, Brandon, Manitoba.

**Books and Monographs**


SCHOOL COUNSELLORS’ SELF-CARE

Publishing.

Scholarships and Prizes

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Scholarship and Prize</th>
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<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Delta Kappa Gamma World Fellowship</td>
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<td>2003</td>
<td>P.E.O. International Peace Scholarship</td>
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