

National Survey of School Guidance Counsellors and Their Professional Supervision

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Abstract

School guidance counsellors were surveyed in order to explore their unique and complex role and the professional supervision they access. Two hundred and thirteen school guidance counsellors responded to an online survey sent to all secondary and area schools in Aotearoa New Zealand. The focus of the survey was twofold: first, to gather information about school guidance counsellors, the schools in which they work, and their participation in counselling supervision; and second, to examine the delivery, functions, and primary goals of their professional supervision. The results indicate that two-thirds of school guidance counsellors who responded are women, 90% are over 40 years of age, and 94% take part in professional supervision; while the latter figure is encouraging, the 6% who do not take part in supervision are a matter of concern. It is hoped that this report will stimulate further discussion and research into the professional status of school guidance counsellors so that the demanding work they do can be better understood and supported.

Guidance counsellors have been employed in secondary schools in Aotearoa New Zealand for nearly fifty years, yet despite this, systematic research into their working lives and needs is limited, with even less known about the supervision they receive. The purpose of this study was to explore the nature of the role of school guidance counsellors, with specific regard to the extent to which they access supervision. To understand the reasons that school counsellors might access supervision, it is important to appreciate the unique nature of their position in the education setting.

School guidance counsellors

Policy and provision

The management, provision, and role of guidance and counselling have changed dramatically over the fifty years that counsellors have been employed in the school sector. Significant alterations in the structure and management of secondary schools have occurred as a result of changes in government policy, education management reform, and social and economic changes. Two policy documents—the Picot Report (Picot, 1988) and *Tomorrow's Schools* (Ministry of Education, 1988), legislated with the Education Act (1989)—ushered in an era of self-governed, self-responsible, accountable schools (Leane, 2000). The implications of the changes for school guidance counsellors have included a move away from their regulated, prescribed management in the 1970s, where training was mandated and each secondary school had a designated guidance counsellor (Hermansson & Webb, 1993). Although Boards of Trustees have a legal obligation to provide an environment that is safe both physically and emotionally (Ministry of Education, 2005), and counsellors play a significant part in ensuring this within each school, currently, the employment of counsellors is optional for schools and this has resulted in reduced provision (Alison, 2004; Crowe, 2006). Employment conditions and job descriptions are at the discretion of school Boards of Trustees; thus, wide variations in the scope of school guidance counsellors' roles are apparent (Agee & Dickinson, 2008), and few Ministry of Education guidelines are evident. According to Crowe (2006), “the effectiveness of guidance programmes has been compromised, with the work of guidance counsellors going on mostly unnoticed, often with little acknowledgement or recognition of its value” (p. 24).

Counsellor role and client issues

The role of school guidance counsellors is varied and demanding (Manthei, 1999). They provide counselling for individual students, family/whānau groups, and teachers. In addition to counselling for personal problems, educational issues, professional or career issues, and crisis counselling, they may be involved in student advocacy and mediation, restorative justice processes, arranging referrals and liaising with outside agencies, as well as school-wide and management-related responsibilities such as policy development, pastoral care leadership, and the delivery of programmes (Ministry of Education, 2009). Many counsellors are responsible for administering entry tests for new students, visits to contributing schools, and the orientation of new students, as well as possibly having a teaching component in their role (Miller, Manthei, & Gilmore, 1993).

Young people are faced with complex societal, cultural, economic, technological, and global changes (Agee & Dickinson, 2008). Students present with wide-ranging issues, from daily “hassles” to major life events including truancy, bullying, body image problems, depression, and suicide attempts. Depression is a relatively common occurrence according to a survey of the health and well-being of secondary school students, where significant symptoms of depression were reported by 7% of males and 15% of females (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2008).

In 1999, Manthei reported that the most frequent student problems brought to counselling included career decisions, family problems, educational problems, peer conflict, and disruptive behaviour. The most frequently presenting problems may well have changed in the intervening ten years. Trauma, such as sexual and physical abuse, suicide, sudden death, or violence adversely affects one in five young people. For many young people, risky behaviours such as binge drinking, drink driving, drug abuse, and unsafe sexual activity are features of their lives (Adolescent Health Research Group, 2003, as cited in Agee & Dickinson, 2008). Combining these with other major life issues such as divorce, relationship problems, teen pregnancy, abortion, and sexual identity development, it is clear that school guidance counsellors regularly deal with intense, complex counselling scenarios (Manthei, 1997). In the words of one school counsellor:

Many of our clients represent a virtual layer cake of social, educational, personal, family and psychiatric misfortune. Many are in the too hard basket for many agencies who give up because of no shows and lack of co-operation. Schools don't have a choice. School counsellors have to be there for their clients. (Manthei, 1997, p.32)

An unknown quantity: How many counsellors work in schools?

The number of people employed as school guidance counsellors is unknown. At the time of this research (2008), it was not possible to access a reliable database listing school guidance counsellors or the schools that employ them. According to the Ministry of Education-hosted website Te Kete Ipurangi, 472 schools have secondary school-aged students. However, it cannot be assumed that there are 472 school guidance counsellors, as school size and management policy determines staffing, and some schools may have several counsellors while others may not have any.

Previous research and survey data provide an indicator of the potential numbers of school guidance counsellors. A comprehensive survey of school counsellors in 1997 elicited 212 replies (Manthei, 1998). The most recently published survey of school

guidance counsellors, conducted by the Post Primary Teachers' Association (PPTA) in 2004, elicited 256 responses (Alison, 2004). In 2006 there were 301 school guidance counsellors who were members of the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC) (Crowe, 2006), while 310 school guidance counsellors responded to an unpublished survey by NZAC (James Shepherd, personal communication, November 2, 2008). It is reasonably safe to assume that between 300 and 400 people are employed in a school guidance counsellor role, although on the basis of the number of schools with secondary-aged students, it is possible that the figure is actually between 400 and 500. This lack of comprehensive statistical information about counsellors in schools would appear to be another example of the degree of marginalisation of this group of professionals by the Ministry of Education.

School guidance counsellors are working in an increasingly complex role within school systems, in which they maintain demanding caseloads of clients presenting with challenging issues. Professional supervision is therefore an integral ethical and professional necessity (Feltham & Dryden, 1994).

Supervision

Supervision in the context of this study refers to the regular, ongoing relationship with a trained, experienced professional as a primary resource to maintain and develop safe, ethical, and effective practice (NZAC, 2002). Supervision is a source of personal support and professional mentoring, as well as serving as a conduit for professional and personal learning, and providing a process of accountability to the profession (*ibid.*). Supervision may also be termed clinical supervision, professional supervision, or counselling supervision, and the term "consultation" is sometimes used.

Supervision is recognised internationally as a mechanism for providing counsellor education; it develops competence and contributes to a counsellor's professional identity (Kazantzis, Calvert, Orlinsky, Rooke, Ronan, & Merrick, 2009). Professional associations, including NZAC, have therefore made regular supervision an ongoing requirement for membership, whether one is qualified or in training (Carroll, 2007; NZAC, 2002). The frequency of supervision may be dependent upon the developmental level of the counsellor, caseload demands, and personal stressors (NZAC, 2006). In Aotearoa New Zealand, Manthei's (1999) survey revealed that an overwhelming majority (92%) of school guidance counsellors accessed supervision and that 53% attended supervision at least fortnightly, with the average being once every three weeks.

While supervision is recognised as a critical component of practice by professional bodies such as NZAC, the Ministry of Education is less forthcoming. Scant reference

to supervision is made aside from some guidance in the form of a scenario provided in a Performance Management Systems document:

A secondary school has a guidance counsellor who either:

- *is a member of a professional organisation, for example, the New Zealand Association of Counsellors (NZAC); or*
- *is abiding by a professional code of ethics and the requirements of the job description. In this instance, the code requires the guidance counsellor to participate in external professional supervision.* (Ministry of Education, 2009)

However, there is no compulsion for school guidance counsellors to join an association such as NZAC, nor is there a governing or guiding body within the education system for school guidance counsellors (Crowe, 2006).

The overall purpose of supervision is the professional development of the counsellor and the welfare of the client. Professional supervision can contribute to effectiveness, counter burnout, increase confidence and competence, and aid development, by breaking down professional isolation and providing counsellors with personal support, professional mentoring, and the opportunity to reflect on their practice. “This process of thinking and reflecting becomes an experiential one that accommodates the whole person—feelings, mind, body and spirit” (Agee, 2008, p. 2). Through this process, the effects of stress are mediated (McMahon & Patton, 2000). Conversely, a lack of supervisory support can not only increase stress but can also intensify negative feelings, resulting in less effective practice and growing feelings of role dissatisfaction for school counsellors (Somody, Henderson, Cook, & Zambrano, 2008).

The relationship between the counsellor and his or her supervisor serves as a protective measure for counsellor, client, and employer. A trusting, open relationship influences the issues raised and the level of honesty and depth of their exploration. A weak or superficial bond between counsellor and supervisor exposes the possibility of risk (Kaiser, 1997). Failure to ensure the quality and appropriateness of the counsellor’s work can have dire ramifications, as evidenced in a report of an investigation conducted by the Health and Disability Commission (2006) where failure to abide by the NZAC Code of Ethics in regard to breaking normal counsellor/client boundaries resulted in a finding in favour of the complainant, the client, and a \$40,000 fine incurred by the school counsellor.

As a process, supervision is complex, and its delivery takes on a variety of forms, models, and styles (Carroll, 2007), as represented in Table 1.

Table 1: Types of supervision (adapted from Carroll, 2007; NZAC, 2006).

Type of supervision	Description
Self-supervision or internal supervision	Supervisee uses a range of steps to examine own counselling processes in a systematic, reflective manner. Preparation for other forms of supervision rather than a replacement.
Face-to-face, one-to-one supervision	Involves one supervisor and one supervisee. Generally regarded as the most popular form of supervision. Often a requirement of training. Systematic and highly educational.
Face-to-face group supervision	Covers a wide range of supervision practices, including using group processes as a basis for learning, or working with individuals within a group.
Peer or co-supervision (one to one or group)	Individuals take turns at being supervisor and supervisee. Models vary but may include a mixture of goal-setting, taped session evaluation, discussion of readings and case presentations. Used mainly by experienced counsellors who have a desire to share experiences and knowledge.
Telephone and video link	Generally one-to-one or co-supervision conducted by telephone or video link.
Internet and email supervision	Online text based supervision.
Cultural supervision	Accessed when counsellor is working with a person from a culture different to his or her own.

Various models define and describe similar functions of supervision under different names. For example, the educative function of supervision (Kadushin, 1976, as cited in Carroll, 2007) has also been described as formative (Proctor, 1988) and developmental (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006). The following general descriptors encompass the various models:

Educative function: This is the ongoing development of counsellors' competencies in terms of skills, knowledge, and understanding, in order to work effectively with clients. It includes counsellors' awareness of their own reactions to clients and other ways of working with them (Copeland, 2005).

Restorative function: This is the containment aspect of supervision, whereby

counsellors are encouraged to consider the impact on self from their work with clients' distress and pain, and to take the time to deal with their own emotions and reactions (Carroll, 2007; Copeland, 2005).

Administrative function: This is essentially the “quality control” of counsellors' work and encompasses all aspects of their accountability and their responsibility for client welfare. This function ensures that the ethics and standards of the profession are upheld (Carroll, 2007; Copeland 2005; NZAC, 2002). By attending to the professional development, counsellor support, and administrative oversight functions of supervision, counsellors develop professional competence, professional identity, and personal integrity (McMahon & Patton, 2004).

The learning process is further enhanced by formulating supervision goals in a clear and meaningful manner. Attending to goals will assist in mediating the effects of professional and/or geographic isolation—stress, burnout, and performance fatigue—as well as monitoring practitioners' professional well-being and competency (Crowe, 2006; McMahon & Patton, 2000). Goals will also vary according to counsellors' experience, knowledge, and competency (Feltham & Dryden, 1994) and may include professional support, professional networking, validation, rejuvenation and re-energising, developing skills and techniques, client-specific guidance, fulfilling training or professional requirements, debriefing, and personal development.

In Aotearoa New Zealand, we know little about the supervision that school guidance counsellors access, the functions they regard as important, and the goals they focus on. The current study sought to obtain information about guidance counsellors and the schools in which they work, with particular attention given to their participation in professional supervision.

Research method

Participants

The research population included all of the school guidance counsellors from the 472 Aotearoa New Zealand secondary and area schools. Two hundred and thirteen potential participants responded to an online survey; however, two indicated that they did not consent to participate, a further four were eliminated as they indicated they were not in a counselling role, and six respondents exited the survey prior to completion. Therefore, while a total of 201 school counsellors completed the survey, 207 provided useable data. In order to participate in the online survey, respondents were required to be in a counselling role in a New Zealand school and to give their consent. As there was not

an accurate database or figures available to provide reliable information about the number of school guidance counsellors employed in Aotearoa New Zealand schools, it was not possible to determine the ratio of school guidance counsellors who responded to the survey compared with those who did not. Population responses and reliability of returns cannot therefore be commented upon with accuracy.

Access to participants was obtained via the Ministry of Education website, Te Kete Ipurangi. Three of the school categories were selected: Composite Year 1–15, Secondary Year 7–15, and Secondary Year 9–15. All 472 school email addresses were exported to the SurveyMonkey.com address book. School guidance counsellors were not emailed directly, as there is no national database of their addresses; in addition, such an action would breach the national anti-spamming laws, whereby all recipients must agree to receive communications from the sender. Twenty-three schools opted out, and email messages to three schools bounced or were undeliverable. Two hundred and sixty-two schools did not respond.

Instrument and design

The research instrument, a survey questionnaire, was created and accessed through SurveyMonkey (<http://www.surveymonkey.com>). This research tool was developed originally in 1999 by Finley, Sorem, and Swartley (K. Wilson, personal communication, October 13, 2008), and enables people to create their own surveys. Responses are submitted online, and may be viewed live on the website and exported to Excel spreadsheets to enable table and graph development. According to Wright (2005), SurveyMonkey.com is among the top 20 online survey services available, with a range of features including online support and modest costings, and it contains filters to manipulate data for analysis.

In order to answer the research questions, a questionnaire was constructed, entitled “Survey of Professional Supervision of Guidance/School Counsellors.” The survey had 23 questions designed to collect quantitative data, along with a small amount of qualitative data in the form of additional comments. The rationale behind the construction of the survey was to add to the body of knowledge both in terms of demographic information and detail regarding supervision in a format that allowed easy access and response. Types of questions used included multiple choice with single or multiple answers, matrix of choice questions, Likert-type questions and rating scales, and comment text boxes. Where a list of choices was provided, a randomising feature of SurveyMonkey was utilised.

SurveyMonkey.com has a number of features that allow the user to ensure that ethical standards are maintained. When data are entered into the survey and sent, they are collected by a web-link collector. This ensures that respondents' IP addresses and identifying information are not saved; thus, they have complete anonymity. Participants may exit the survey at any time and decline to answer all questions except the consent question and the eligibility question. Participants can be provided with a link to access online summaries of the data collected at the completion of the collection period. All data are to be stored for five years. The completion of question 1 and the return of the survey implied consent.

Questions were constructed so as to elicit minimal emotional response, allowing the respondents to enter the survey, spend up to five minutes answering questions, and complete with minimal disruption. The rationale for the timeframe was that emails are generally cleared promptly and responded to at the time of initial reading. SurveyMonkey.com recommended that send-outs should occur early in the week, as it increases the likelihood of response.

Data analysis

The SurveyMonkey.com program automatically computes data, providing frequencies and percentages for each component. As the surveys are submitted, results are tabulated immediately. The program allows for direct database connectivity and has inbuilt data quality checking, enhancing reliability. Results were compared with other studies to determine similarities and differences.

Results

The survey focused on two types of information about school guidance counsellors—first, demographic information about them and the schools they worked in, and second, information regarding their supervision. The total number of counsellors responding to each question varied and is shown as N in parentheses. Percentages are based on the total number of counsellors who responded to each question, and have been rounded to the nearest whole number. Full tables of all results are available from the authors.

Overall, 207 respondents provided useable data, although six participants did not complete the entire survey. The actual population size is not known, but this may represent 207/500, or approximately 41%.

Demographic information about school guidance counsellors

School guidance counsellors (N = 207) were most frequently women (66%). The range of ages of school guidance counsellors (N = 206) was between 20 and 69 years, with the median age being 50–59 (50%). Counsellors over 40 years of age and less than 70 years of age accounted for 90% of respondents, indicating an uneven spread of counsellors across the age groups. Years of employment ranged from less than one year (7%) to over 20 years (11%), while one counsellor indicated that he or she had been in employment for less than one week. The majority of school guidance counsellors had been employed between one and nine years (48%), with the median range being five to nine years (27%).

Qualifications and professional memberships

The majority of the counsellors indicated that they had a counselling qualification (87%) or were currently in training (7%), yielding a total of 94% of school guidance counsellors as either qualified or working towards a qualification. A small portion of respondents indicated that they did not have a counselling qualification (6%). The largest group of school counsellors who had achieved a qualification had a Master of Counselling degree (44%). Those with a qualification at a graduate or postgraduate level accounted for 79%, of which 2% were at PhD level. A number of respondents (N = 13) had “other” qualifications, in education (e.g., Master of Education degree, which were in fact likely to be specialisations in Counselling), social work (e.g., Post Graduate Diploma in Social Work), or psychology (e.g., Master of Educational Psychology). A range of other qualifications obtained included Graduate Diploma in Psychotherapy, Alcohol and Drug Studies Diploma, and Certified Addiction Counsellor. Of those working towards completing a qualification (N = 29), most were aiming to finish their Master of Counselling degree (N = 8) or Post Graduate Diploma in Counselling (N = 8). In addition to specific counselling qualifications, 80% of school guidance counsellors (N = 206) were registered teachers.

Most school guidance counsellors were affiliated with a professional body—NZAC (69%), and/or PPTA (62%). Counsellors were also members of a range of other associations, including the Aotearoa New Zealand Association of Social Workers (ANZASW), the New Zealand Psychological Association (NZPA), the New Zealand Educational Institute (NZEI), and the Drug and Alcohol Practitioners’ Association Aotearoa New Zealand (DAPAANZ). A small number of counsellors (11%) did not belong to a professional body; therefore, 89% of school guidance counsellors who responded belonged to a professional body or association.

The numbers of school guidance counsellors employed per school varied. The vast majority of schools had one school guidance counsellor employed full-time (N = 105) or part-time (N = 53). Although statistically insignificant, it is interesting to note that four counsellors indicated they were in schools that employed four or more counsellors. A variety of other arrangements included chaplain, job share, voluntary counsellor, trainee, kaiāwhina or kaitaunaki, and contracted counsellors or therapists.

Demographic information about schools

School guidance counsellors (N = 204) came from a spread of small schools with rolls of up to 499 students (28%), medium-sized schools with 500–999 students (34%), and large schools with 1000–1499 students (23%), with only 15% from very large schools (more than 1500 students). The majority of schools (N = 202) were secondary schools years 9–15 (61%), with secondary schools years 7–15 recording 28% and composite schools years 1–15 accounting for 10% of respondents. More counsellors were employed in co-ed schools (75%) than single-sex schools (25%). Of all the counsellors (N = 201), 92% were in state schools, with 8% in private schools. The decile rating (N = 199) of schools varied, with the two largest groups being decile 9 and 10 (26%) and decile 5 and 6 (25%). Deciles 3 and 4, and 7 and 8, accounted for 20% and 19% respectively, while decile 1 and 2 schools only accounted for 11% of counsellors who responded to the survey. Proportionally, each decile rating accounts for 10% of schools.

Supervision

According to the survey, school guidance counsellors (N = 203) who receive supervision (94%) vastly outnumber those who do not (6%). Among the small number of counsellors (N = 12) who stated they did not receive supervision, the reasons were varied: do not wish to (17%), unable to locate a suitable supervisor or supervision model (33%), geographic remoteness (17%), and unable to fund supervision (8%).

Counsellors who did receive supervision (N = 185) on average accessed it every two to three weeks (74%). A further 22% of counsellors accessed supervision monthly; therefore, 95% of supervised school guidance counsellors reported attending supervision every two, three or four weeks. A drop-down comment box allowed for additional information to be added about the frequency of supervision. Comments included reference to additional phone supervision or additional supervision if required, access to cultural supervision, peer supervision, and combinations of supervision. One counsellor illustrated the way access to supervision could be affected

by location: “two hours/month depending on availability of supervisor. I also have to travel 1 hour 20 min each way to access supervision.” Most respondents (N = 189) felt the frequency of supervision was adequate (95%). From a contrasting perspective, one respondent commented, “Not sure what supervision means.”

The delivery method of supervision (N = 189) varied, with the most common being face-to-face, one-to-one supervision (94%). Many methods of supervision were utilised, including peer supervision (23%), telephone supervision (12%), group supervision (11%) and, to a lesser degree, email supervision (3%), internet supervision (1%), and video-conferencing supervision (1%).

Counsellors (N = 186) rated the educational component (enhanced competency) as the most important function of supervision (47%). This was closely followed by respondents who indicated the administrative function of supervision (ensuring ethical practice) was the most important (46%), while the restorative function of supervision, where counsellors express and deal with their own emotions, was rated as most important by 17% of counsellors.

Respondents (N = 188) expressed varied opinions when it came to the primary goals of supervision. They were asked to indicate the level of agreement they had as to what were the primary goals of supervision. The goals were listed as professional supervision, professional networking, validation, rejuvenation and re-energising, developing skills and techniques, client-specific guidance, fulfilling training or professional requirements, debriefing, and personal development. The spread of results indicated that most counsellors agreed or strongly agreed that all the listed goals were primary goals of supervision. The goals that attracted the strongest levels of agreement (strongly agree) were professional support (74%), client-specific guidance (60%), debriefing (54%), developing skills and techniques (54%), and rejuvenation (50%). There was agreement that personal development (45%), validation (45%), fulfilling training or professional requirements (44%), and professional networking (39%) counted as primary goals. The levels of neutrality, disagreement, and strong disagreement were not statistically significant, although it is worth noting that 7% disagreed with the inclusion of both professional networking and fulfilling training or professional requirements in the primary goals of supervision.

Discussion

The survey yielded interesting demographic information about school guidance counsellors in Aotearoa New Zealand and about the schools in which they are employed. Care must be taken when extrapolating these findings, however, as the

estimated response rate, characteristics of those who chose to respond, and the means of delivery of the survey may have affected the results.

Utilising an online survey service introduces a range of factors that may impact on the respondents. Most notable is the requirement to email school administrators with a request in the subject line to forward the email to the school guidance counsellor; a direct mail-out would perhaps have enhanced the possibility that the survey was indeed placed in front of the person intended. As with any survey, there is also a possibility that some may have been completed by a non-school guidance counsellor. Some firewall constraints prevented the delivery of the survey in some schools: a total of eight surveys were undeliverable. These technological issues, such as firewall constraints, are difficult to avoid. However, inclusion of an email contact allowed participants with technological difficulties to be assisted.

Non-respondents may have decided not to participate because they did not receive supervision. It may therefore be fair to say that the data may be skewed, as those who were receiving supervision may have been more inclined to participate. These factors need to be taken into account when interpreting the results.

Respondents to this survey were predominantly women who were over 40 years of age, representing a change from a decade ago when the gender split was 50/50 and those aged over 45 years accounted for 50% (Manthei, 1998). Over half of the respondents had more than ten years' experience in the profession and the majority had a postgraduate qualification in addition to being registered teachers. However, numbers of counsellors who are also registered teachers would appear to have declined from 95.6% a decade ago (Manthei, 1998) to 80% in 2008. Overall, the data suggest that Aotearoa New Zealand has a well-qualified, experienced group of professional school guidance counsellors.

Most respondents to the current survey were employed in state co-educational schools. These findings are in alignment with the recent PPTA survey of guidance counsellors (Alison, 2004).

It would appear that many school guidance counsellors in Aotearoa New Zealand recognise the value of belonging to an organisation that represents their professional interests. High proportions are members of a professional body such as NZAC (69%) and PPTA (62%), representing little change from Manthei's (1998) survey. However, given that just over 30% of the respondents were not members of NZAC and potentially 53% of the school guidance counsellor population did not respond to the survey, there is reason to believe that the proportion of membership is not as generous

as the data would suggest. This is of concern, as no other body offers school guidance counsellors access to such relevant professional development and resources, and it also means they are not practising under NZAC's Code of Ethics.

School guidance counsellors participating in the Aotearoa New Zealand national survey reportedly access supervision at a significantly high rate. Although the survey did not specifically look at the reasons why school guidance counsellors access supervision, it is clear from the high levels of uptake that supervision is greatly valued. This is evidenced by the 94% of respondents who accessed regular supervision; this result is in alignment with the survey conducted by Manthei (1998), wherein 92% of respondents accessed supervision. While it is generally a compulsory feature of training, that is not the reason why so many are accessing supervision, as the majority of respondents (87%) were already qualified counsellors. This is not surprising, however, given the way in which supervision is viewed as an essential aspect of safe practice in the local context. Unlike the United States, where supervision is mandatory only in training contexts, counsellors in New Zealand who are members of NZAC are required to engage in professional supervision throughout their careers.

Two of the functions of supervision were considered to be of greatest significance: the educative function, which is concerned with competency, and the ongoing development of therapeutic skills, knowledge, and understanding (Copeland, 2005). The administrative function was also highly regarded. This function serves as the quality control of counsellor work, concerned with all aspects of accountability, ethics, and professional standards (Carroll, 2007). Interestingly, the containment or restorative function of supervision was seen as less important.

When considering the primary goals of supervision, many agreed that the professional support offered by supervision was an important feature. The provision of client-specific guidance and the development of skills and techniques were regarded as important goals, as was the opportunity to debrief and rejuvenate. Supervision assisted in remediating the effects of professional isolation, reduction of stress, and prevention of burnout. The more traditional approach of face-to-face, one-to-one supervision was clearly preferred by school counsellors who responded to the survey, with only a small percentage taking advantage of electronic technology for supervision.

Recommendations and conclusion

As a group of professionals who have some unique needs in terms of the nature of their employment and its professional demands, it is worthwhile to consider areas for

future research. One possible topic could be gauging the resilience of school guidance counsellors in relation to their sense of professional isolation and professional identity within the education sector. It may also be timely to explore the level of agreement around issues regarding the need to be more fully recognised as a professional group, both within the Ministry of Education and by NZAC. In addition, a significant proportion of school guidance counsellors seem to be within a decade of retirement age. Consequently, it would also be timely to consider retention and recruitment initiatives for the future.

Aotearoa New Zealand's school guidance counsellors are well-qualified and experienced. They are accessing supervision in a professionally responsible manner, providing them with an essential source of support. Quality, ethical practice, and competency are considered important functions of supervision. With professional association membership, school guidance counsellors can also benefit from advocacy, ongoing professional development, and professional credibility (Bauman, 2008). Crowe (2006) discussed the lack of national guidelines and standards for school counsellors and the need for a body such as the Ministry of Education to provide support, advice, or guidance once again, as the Department of Education did prior to the advent of Tomorrow's Schools.

Perhaps we should also be looking to NZAC and to the possibility of compulsory membership for counsellors working in schools, in order to provide a mandate for the Association to advance the cause of school guidance counsellors, as part of its ongoing work as primary advocates for counsellors and professional standard-setters. With NZAC (2007) currently considering registration under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act (Ministry of Health, 2008), school guidance counsellors may achieve the sought-after guidelines, professional standards, supervision provisions, and professional identity, and as a consequence, remediate many of the current concerns.

Meanwhile, those who do not belong to NZAC, or to any professional body, and those who do not access supervision at all, are a concern. There is an ethical imperative to bring these counsellors "under the wing" of professional supervision, and of the Association, to ensure the safety and competence of their practice.

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