

Unveiling the Hidden Struggles and Repressive Coping among Counselors-in-Training

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Abstract. The path of counselors-in-training (CITs) toward professional development is marked by struggles that often go unnoticed, prompting them to develop strategies to navigate the journey. This qualitative-phenomenological study aimed to explore the hidden struggles and repressive coping mechanisms among CITs. Through purposive sampling, the researchers conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews with ten (10) CITs in SOCCSKSARGEN, specifically at General Santos City, Polomolok, and Koronoda City. Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, the results revealed that CITs struggled with role overload, occupational burnout, managing exceptional cases, attending to reluctant clients, multicultural challenges, identifying the appropriate counseling approach, working with many clients, and emotional residue. The study's findings also showed that CITs employed repressive coping strategies, including emotional regulation, immersing oneself, strategic coping, and diverting oneself through leisure activities. Recognizing these hidden struggles is crucial for CITs, as it cultivates awareness of the vulnerabilities in the mental health field. Thus, this study underscores the importance of equipping CITs with effective coping strategies to address these challenges, ensuring their well-being is safeguarded as they continue to guide others.

Keywords: Counselors-in-training; Hidden struggles; Repressive coping.

1.0 Introduction

Counselors-in-training (CITs) in their quest for professional development is a journey with forthcoming struggles often obscured but wield significant impact in the latter. In the Philippines, Republic Act No. 9258, also known as the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004, mandates that individuals must obtain a master's degree in guidance and counseling and then pass the guidance counselor's examination to become a licensed guidance counselor. Furthermore, counselors described their role as being present with clients through the use of active listening and reflection skills, which help clients gain a deeper understanding of themselves. This recognition of their role is further driven by their reasons, which fuel their purpose in guiding those in need. (Sharma et al., 2021, 2023)

However, CITs amidst this endeavor are not devoid of challenges. A study conducted by Cervantes et al. (2019) stated that challenges encountered by guidance facilitators in the Philippines were due to a lack of training, shortage of technology and efficacy, job mismatch, and counselor insufficiency. Moreover, CITs experience burnout, leading to psychological symptoms that include negative emotions, fatigue, and tiredness, which in turn affect their ability to complete their tasks (Cook et al., 2021). Additionally, CITs require consistent supervision

from their supervisors to enhance their skills and deliver effective counseling services (Tanhan, 2018). When CITs face challenges and need to maintain healthy psychological well-being, they may resort to repressive coping.

Furthermore, repressive coping, characterized by inhibiting one's emotions, shapes how CITs navigate the challenges they encounter. According to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2018), repressive coping is a way of inhibiting problems or struggles to maintain a false positive self-image (Exner et al., 2023). Further, Weinberger et al. (1979) defined repressive coping as a mixture of anxiety and defensiveness triggered by a stress-inducing event (as cited in Weber et al., 2021). It also reveals that repressive coping is characterized by denying the feeling of stress but being high on defensiveness, which results in poor health outcomes (Sinha, 2021). As counseling can be emotionally, psychologically, and physically demanding, it is crucial to determine how CITs employ repressive coping.

In locality, Filipino counselors also share the same struggles as other mental health professionals. Roxas et al. (2019) noted that mental health professionals, despite their expertise in problem-solving, are nonetheless susceptible to threats and unpleasant situations. A study conducted by Far Eastern University graduates highlighted the importance of self-care among guidance counselors, revealing that they often lack this aspect, which can result in mental exhaustion, burnout, and personal issues (Tan et al., 2024). Additionally, a study by Chin (2021) found that counselors unintentionally relive some of their clients' experiences after the session, which can cause them distress. With this, it is crucial to delve deeper into the well-being of CITs to provide them with awareness and support, as they represent the future generations of mental health professionals.

However, numerous researchers have conducted studies on CITs in Western countries, with a limited focus on Asian countries. Thus, the researchers highlighted the need to address the gap in the literature on CITs within the Philippines, which are geographically located in Region XII, specifically at General Santos City, Polomolok, and Koronadal. Furthermore, this study focused on exploring these areas to determine if the CITs in the locality encountered any struggles, particularly emotional, psychological, and social challenges. Additionally, the study aimed to fill the gap in understanding how repressive coping operates and how it is evident in the endeavors of CITs. Moreover, the results of this study may help expand our understanding of the mental health space, where awareness and opportunities are present. Therefore, a study conducted among CITs is vital, as the path to becoming guidance counselors is challenging, offering an opportunity to tell a story of their journey.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The researchers utilized a qualitative-phenomenological research design. According to J. Creswell and J.D. Creswell (2018), qualitative research design is a methodology to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups attribute to a social or human phenomenon. Moreover, a qualitative-phenomenological research design enabled the researchers to describe complex phenomena, particularly when the focus is on a human social experience (Alhazmi & Kaufmann, 2022). Also, the research process involves developing inquiries, gathering data in the participant's setting, analyzing the data by identifying themes, and evaluating the significance of the data; hence, the qualifications for a phenomenological approach (Creswell, 2008).

Additionally, the research design and its approach mentioned above were appropriate for the study, as they helped the researchers achieve the study's objectives, especially in unveiling the struggles CITs encountered and their repressive coping mechanisms in combating those particular struggles in their endeavors. As the Dovetail Editorial Team (2023) mentions, this approach enables researchers to understand participants' experiences, thoughts, and feelings regarding the variables being studied. Hence, the research design employed in this study enabled the researchers to identify the contemporary experiences of CITs, showcasing their realities of internal experiences and external responsibilities.

2.2 Research Participants

Selecting participants is crucial in determining the success of the research. Hence, this study used homogenous purposive sampling to select research participants. Moreover, purposive sampling involves selecting samples based on well-defined criteria relevant to the study, focusing on participants' skills, attributes, personalities, and behaviors (Obilor, 2023). Further, the researchers interviewed ten (10) CITs during data gathering. According to Alase (2017), the size of participants in a phenomenological study can be between two (2) and twenty-five (25). Therefore, the ten (10) participants selected for this study served as a bridge in providing accurate findings.

Correspondingly, researchers observed specific criteria when selecting participants to determine their suitability in the data-gathering procedure. The inclusion criteria are as follows: a CIT currently earning/earned a master's degree for guidance and counseling, a CIT is being supervised by a Registered Guidance Counselor (RGC), must have at least one (1) year of experience in counseling, and must be employed regardless of their age and sector whether in public or private institutions.

2.3 Research Instrument

The researchers developed a researcher-made interview guide, which was utilized as the primary data-gathering tool and validated by two Registered Guidance Counselors (RGCs) and one Registered Psychometrician (RPm). The said tool consists of a list of questions that the researchers would like to cover throughout the interview (Mauldin, 2020). Thus, the research tool consisted of thirteen (13) questions, which were classified into two (2) categories according to the variables. Seven (7) items focused on the hidden struggle of the CITs, and the other six (6) focused on repressive coping of the CITs. With this, the researcher-made interview guide helped the researchers throughout their face-to-face interviews. Further, to ensure the accurate capture of participants' responses, a smartphone was utilized to record the interviews. This approach made sure that no important insights were missed during the interviews.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

During the study, the researchers followed a series of steps. First, they secured a letter of approval from the dean and their thesis adviser to gather initial information from participants through informal interviews. Second, they conducted informal interviews with schools in the SOCCSKSARGEN region, specifically at General Santos City, Polomolok, and Koronadal City. Third, at the initial gathering of information, the researchers compiled the responses. Then, the researchers established the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Next, the researchers drafted interview guide questionnaires to explore the hidden struggles and repressive coping mechanisms among CITs. There are thirteen (13) guide questions regarding their hidden struggles and repressive coping mechanisms, which helped the researchers uncover the variables. Then, the tool has been validated by two (2) Registered Guidance Counselors (RGCs) and one (1) Registered Psychometrician (RPm). Subsequently, the researchers conducted pilot testing on three (3) CITs at General Santos City to test the validated guide questions, allowing the researchers to identify whether the questions were clear and compelling. The researchers obtained informed consent from the participants, clearly explaining the study's objectives and purpose, and obtained their permission to record their voices, ensuring that their participation was voluntary and not coerced. Then, the interviews were conducted individually and face-to-face at a time and place chosen by the participants. After obtaining the needed data, the researchers analyzed it using Braun and Clark's (2006) Thematic Analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis

The researchers utilized Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke's thematic analysis to identify patterns and existing themes. Thematic analysis sorts through data to find patterns (themes) and provides detailed descriptions of them (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Consequently, the thematic analysis consists of a step-by-step process, namely, familiarization, establishing codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, finalizing the themes, and discussing the themes (Labra et al., 2019). Furthermore, the flexibility of the thematic approach enables researchers to utilize the method effectively, particularly with participants from diverse backgrounds (Villegas, 2022). Hence, thematic analysis involves a rigorous process that allows researchers to elucidate the findings essential to the study.

Initially, familiarization entails repeatedly reading and actively analyzing the data, searching for underlying meanings and patterns in the participants' responses. Researchers meticulously scrutinize every detail obtained from the CITs through highlighting and other ways that allow researchers to become familiar with the data before proceeding to the next phase. Next, to establish codes, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data. They generated an initial list of concepts related to the intriguing aspects, especially CITs' hidden struggles and repressive coping mechanisms. In this phase, the researchers highlighted responses that could be a potential code; for instance, they asked about the CIT's repressive coping style. Any responses that appeared to be relevant were considered codes, such as integrating values, mind conditioning, and venting out. With this, researchers highlighted those codes that could form a theme. Correspondingly, searching for themes entails arranging diverse codes into potential themes and compiling all relevant coded data from the identified themes. For example, the codes indicate integrating values, mind conditioning, and venting. Depending on the researcher's decision, these codes can be generated for themes like strategic coping. Furthermore, researchers utilized tables and mind maps,

and created a name for each code along with a brief description to organize them. Moreover, reviewing themes involves two processes: reviewing and revising. To achieve this, researchers identified and refined the themes. Besides, reviewing involved scrutinizing all extracted data to determine whether a coherent pattern emerges. Next, revising entails assessing the validity of each theme to ensure that the potential thematic map accurately reflects the meaning evident in the data. To do this, the researchers carefully examined each theme and re-browsed through the extracts to confirm and assess whether a specific code aligned with a particular theme. In addition, the finalization of themes began when the researchers established a thematic map. Then, the researchers defined and refined the themes they presented in the analysis and understood the data within them. By defining and refining, they captured the essence of each theme and identified the concept that the theme represents. To achieve this, the researchers re-examined the collated data and organized it consistently. Finally, discussing themes involves thoroughly developing them, providing a comprehensive analysis, and writing up the findings. To achieve this, the researchers ensured a concise, coherent, logical, and informative text that avoids redundancy and provides interesting findings from the themes.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The researchers utilized informed consent to ensure that participants were fully informed about the potential risks and benefits of the study, as well as their right to withdraw. By doing so, the researchers' informed consent must contain the following: the participant can leave the study at any time, for any reason, or no reason at all; any possible risks or discomforts the participant may face; benefits the participant might receive; assurance that the participant's information will be kept private, with no personal details connected to the data after it is collected; a statement about any recordings (such as audio), and contact information for the researchers (Hartson & Pyla, 2012). The researchers provided a clear explanation of the study's objectives and purpose, ensuring that participants had a thorough understanding of their involvement in the study. Before the interview, the researchers encouraged participants to ask questions and clarify unclear instructions and information. By implementing informed consent, the researchers emphasized the importance of transparency and respecting participants' availability and rights throughout the study.

Confidentiality is essential in protecting the personal information of the participants, and it is the researchers' job to keep the data they collect private. According to Bos (2020), confidentiality refers to the protection of information that is private to the participants, and it is a principle that dictates they should not share it with others. The researchers handled the data and information, including the audio records, in password-protected storage and utilized Google Drive's restriction feature to prevent the disclosure of sensitive information and to avoid any misuse or misinterpretation of the data. Therefore, the research fulfilled its responsibilities to protect and handle the participants' information carefully.

3.0 Results and Discussion

This section presents the themes drawn out from the experiences of CITs concerning their struggles and repressive coping

3.1 Hidden Struggles of Counselors-in-Training

The researchers identified a total of eight (8) themes about the hidden struggles encountered by CITs, which are role overload, occupational burnout, managing exceptional cases, attending to reluctant clients, multicultural challenges, identifying the appropriate counseling approach, working with many clients, and emotional residue.

Role Overload

The first theme that emerged under the hidden struggles of CITs, based on the findings, is role overload. Apart from conducting counseling sessions, their various responsibilities contribute to the struggles they are dealing with, mainly because their responsibilities entail budgeting, coordinating with teachers, and conducting assessments. Participant 1 said:

*"Then, as a counselor and a program-in-charge, you have a lot more problems to deal with, like the budget, coordinating with teachers, because we also conduct *cough* a teacher's behavior inventory, so we have much work. It is not just limited to counseling sessions." (P1)*

Participant 5 mentioned that balancing graduate school activities and work entails having many activities that require completion within a tight timeframe, resulting in them experiencing a moment of laziness to work.

*"There were so many grad school activities, activities, surveys, *inaudible* activities, so everything that I needed to do had to be completed in one week. There were times when I felt too lazy to work." (P5)*

The study found that the role of CITs is not limited to counseling sessions, but also includes other responsibilities, such as allocating budgets, coordinating with teachers, and conducting teachers' behavior inventories. Moreover, while having their role as CITs, they strive to meet the demands of the graduate school activities, which affect their ability to work in the latter. Role overload occurs when an individual is assigned more responsibilities than they can reasonably manage within a given timeframe (Wikirefu, 2024). Moreover, role overload refers to a perception that the combined demands of multiple roles surpass one's time, energy, and capabilities, leading to difficulty in meeting expectations effectively (Becker, 2021). Thus, role overload is evident among CITs, disrupting their ability to balance their responsibilities and the demands of their challenges.

Occupational Burnout

The second theme that surfaced from the findings regarding CITs' hidden struggle is occupational burnout. CITs often find themselves overwhelmed with workloads, highlighting the difficulty in knowing where to focus. Participant 2 shared that:

*"Maybe at work, knowing that the tasks are divided into paperwork, counseling, teaching, doing the job, and giving instructions, it all leads to burnout, especially when it is all happening at the same time. You have something assigned to you, you have a counseling session, and you need to teach... You find yourself burning out because you do not know what to prioritize or where to focus. You have a demanding boss, a client who requires urgent attention, and students waiting for you to teach. So, the work itself *inaudible* is exhausting and it causes burnout." (P2)*

Furthermore, experiencing physical fatigue is apparent to CITs due to additional hours they rendered at work, which Participant 5 shared:

"Before, I used to work from 8 AM to 8 PM, and we would time out around 9 PM. The overtime was intense, and I would tell myself, I am not stressed. However, when the brain can no longer handle it, it shifts the burden to the body, causing it to feel the pain. So before, I had all kinds of aches – my back hurt, my head hurt – everything was hurting." (P5)

This study found that CITs experience occupational burnout as they exert intensive effort to finish various tasks related to their role. Additionally, this overwhelming workload often leaves them struggling to prioritize and experiencing body aches. Occupational burnout can lead to consequences that negatively impact an individual's physical and mental well-being, and also affect organizations by increasing absenteeism, decreasing performance, and increasing errors. (Suner-Soler et al., 2013 & Ochoa, 2018, as cited in Shoman et al., 2021). Furthermore, Tidy (2023) states that occupational burnout is an ongoing and accumulated emotional stress that can influence personal interactions with external forces. Despite their dedication to the profession, CITs are still vulnerable to occupational burnout in their work experiences.

Managing Special Cases

Managing exceptional cases is the third theme that falls under the hidden struggles of CITs. CITs have stated how challenging it is to deal with suicidal clients, particularly when the client has a history of engaging in behaviors that are harmful to themselves. Participant 5 mentioned that:

*"So, like I mentioned earlier about the suicidal cases, yes, they are tough to handle because I had one client before *pause*. There were times he/she would take six paracetamol tablets like that. Oh, is it okay to mention that? *giggles* Yes, before, I had one who took six tablets and then would cover his/her face with a blanket and stop breathing... that is when I struggled." (P5)*

Additionally, CITs faced challenges when working with clients diagnosed clinically due to the complexities of these conditions. According to participant 6:

"Nature of counseling cases, because here we have students diagnosed with bipolar disorder and major depressive disorder, so that is one of the challenging aspects of counseling. It is not easy to handle because... they are already diagnosed, so you need to rely on your patience and experience. Dealing with those kinds of clients will test you, especially with bipolar disorder, because you cannot always have a coherent conversation with them due to sudden mood swings. That is one of the struggles,

and also dealing with major depressive disorder.” (P6)

The struggles encountered by CITs in managing exceptional cases involve addressing the self-harming behavior exhibited by their suicidal clients and navigating the complexities of a particular clinically diagnosed client, which tests their patience. In these situations, CITs are often found to be vulnerable, highlighting the complexity of this challenge. Johnson (2021) emphasizes that handling clients, specifically those with bipolar disorder, is challenging because of the complex and unpredictable nature of their symptoms. Moreover, findings from a study conducted by Ignacio and Tudy (2020) indicate that managing clients with suicidal tendencies is quite challenging, emphasizing the vulnerability of counselors in this domain, stating their fears regarding their ineffectiveness in assisting suicidal clients. Therefore, cases like these are pretty challenging for CITs to handle, as they require intensive efforts due to their intricate nature.

Attending to Reluctant Clients

The fourth theme identified under the hidden struggles is attending to reluctant clients. CITs express how it is stressful when dealing with coerced clients, as counseling is unlikely to be effective without the client’s voluntary participation. Participant 7 shared her experience:

“If the students goes into a counseling session not hundred percent voluntary so since if it is not hundred percent voluntary so whatever you do there no it would affect the session or the counseling session so even your intervention will not be hundred percent good if ever it is not hundred percent voluntary so maybe at some time those student whom other people push to have this counseling session like that so it would be stressful.” (P7)

Furthermore, according to participant 4, the refusal of clients to be helped poses a challenge for CITs due to clients’ preconceived notions about guidance and counseling.

*“Because when you call a student, they are resistant. They will not come. Ma’am, what is my fault? *laugh*.” (P4)*

Attending to reluctant clients presents a significant challenge for CITs, as it affects the effectiveness of the counseling relationship and hinders client progress. The CITs revealed that they encountered coerced clients who attend counseling sessions without being entirely voluntary, which contributes to their stress. Additionally, they dealt with clients holding preconceived notions, which further complicates the counseling process. Yaman (2021) emphasized that managing resistance is crucial in fostering a strong therapeutic alliance. Hence, attending to reluctant clients presents challenges for CITs, for such resistance affects the counseling process.

Multicultural Challenges

The fifth theme that emerged under the hidden struggles of CITs is multicultural challenges. CITs faced struggles with religion and culture, especially in cases involving taboo incidents within their tradition, as shared by participant 8:

“Their culture also affects things. You have here Muslims, for example, and Catholic students in counseling, and they differ based on their culture. For example, I cannot tell a parent that they were referred to because of a kissing incident because it is taboo in their culture.” (P8)

Additionally, participant 6 mentioned that a linguistic barrier is an evident struggle during counseling sessions, as it hinders clear understanding between CITs and clients.

*“Communication, because... Ah, here in *****, communication is an issue. Why? Some of the students here do not understand Bisaya and Ilonggo; the only language they can understand is Tagalog and English.” (P6)*

The study found that culture and the difference in religion affect the CITs' approach to addressing client concerns. It is revealed that CITs take careful consideration to avoid escalating sensitive issues, particularly when these concerns involve topics that are taboo within a client’s culture. Furthermore, linguistic barriers exacerbate the struggles they face, particularly when clients only understand a specific language, which hinders clear understanding and resolution of their issues. Sivakumar (2024) states that CITs who encountered clients from different cultures may have expectations that sometimes conflict with the professional rules and boundaries that CITs must follow. Hence, the diverse cultures, traditions, and norms that CITs and clients bring into a session may

challenge counseling interactions.

Identifying the Appropriate Counseling Approach

The sixth theme identified under the CITs' hidden struggles is identifying the appropriate counseling approach. Throughout the interview, participant 1 expressed how applying the proper counseling technique is challenging for them when dealing with clients:

"Because if you do not widen your knowledge into counseling techniques, the life of your client will be in danger because you might be the one to blame since our problem here is the number of our clients... most of them are diagnosed, so what we can use for them, so that is the struggle especially if you are a counselor-in-training." (P1)

Additionally, participant 3 expressed how choosing the right words is difficult for them, especially to avoid harming their client's well-being:

"Struggling maybe, choosing the right words- Yes, because as you can see right, I am talkative, like I am loud, it is like I do not choose words no, but in terms of counseling, I try my best to choose the proper words that- that the students or client will not be hurt or feel bad, for me that is number one." (P3)

In the study, it was found that CITs experience difficulty in determining the most appropriate counseling techniques to apply to their clients. This difficulty arises from the complexity of each client's case, the need to protect their well-being, the process of rebuilding trust, and the challenge of determining suitable counseling techniques to apply. CITs demonstrate the skills they have learned during their education, working to move away from unprofessional habits, such as giving advice, and instead focusing on applying the theories and techniques they have studied; however, they still have limited experience working with the broader community and handling diverse issues (Ayadi, 2019). Therefore, it is apparent that CITs are vulnerable to shortcomings in counseling skills that are appropriate for their clients, especially if their objective is to provide optimal support.

Working with Many Clients

The seventh theme that emerged from the interviews with CITs, under the category of hidden struggles, is working with a large number of clients. Participant 1 shared how an overwhelming number of caseloads contributes to the struggles of CITs in a day:

*"When there are many clients, because when you cater to many clients every day for counseling, especially here at *****, *pause* sometimes we go beyond five or six... every day."* (P1)

Participant 4 pointed out the struggles behind accommodating numerous teachers' referrals.

*"That is what they used to say, that guidance counselors do not have any work, just sitting around *laugh*... They are unaware of the struggles behind it. Because, imagine, all the problematic students are referred to you. Just think about that. If a teacher has difficulty with just one student to follow up on, it is even harder when all the teachers refer their cases to you."* (P4)

In every counseling session, clients bring different concerns, which can be challenging for CITs, particularly on days when there are numerous clients. The statements gathered from the CITs revealed that encountering an overwhelming number of clients on a particular day presents difficulty for them. Additionally, it becomes challenging when several teachers refer their students to the CITs, which further hinders the achievement of optimal support. CITs are also at a higher risk of burnout due to the heavy demands of their clients and large caseloads (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021). Thus, working with multiple clients is quite challenging for CITs because it requires navigating diverse concerns while maintaining focus simultaneously.

Emotional Residue

The eighth theme under the hidden struggles of CITs is emotional residue. Furthermore, Participant 1 struggled to find means to release the negative energy absorbed from their clients.

"So, where do we release the negative energy that we absorb from our clients, so... that is what makes it the most challenging."

(P1)

Additionally, being the client's outlet is challenging for CITs, knowing that they aim to alleviate the client's concerns. Participant 3 shared that:

"Because if you become a counselor, you will be the filter; you will be the bowl for your clients. When we say bowl or filter, you are the one who absorbs everything, their pain, their worries, so that you can relieve them of that burden. You need to be there for them to share it with." (P3)

The study revealed that CITs are challenged in finding a way to release the absorbed emotional weight that clients bring into the counseling session. It is also demonstrated that CITs serve as outlets for their clients' feelings and concerns, creating an environment where clients can openly discuss their challenges. As a result of responding with empathy and trying to ease clients' pain, CITs can carry emotional weight even after their work ends (Da Silva & Mwangi, 2024). Therefore, this showcased that CITs experienced the by-product of emotional labor in counseling, where CITs serve as an outlet for their clients' concerns.

3.2 Repressive Coping of Counselors-in-Training

Researchers identified four (4) themes that reflect the different repressive coping strategies employed by CITs: emotional regulation, immersing oneself, strategic coping, and diverting oneself through leisure.

Emotional Regulation

The first theme that surfaced under the repressive coping of CITs is emotional regulation. Participant 1 strived for self-control to the extent that she may fail to recognize her problems.

"I control myself well whenever I encounter stress. I do not even know that I have a problem sometimes because they do not care about the emotion I am carrying or what I will feel, since we all have different problems in life. I also do not want to add to their problems. That is why whenever I have a counseling session, if I get drained from the counseling session, I need to be okay when I leave, and I do not carry it with me outside." (P1)

Even in moments of vulnerability, CITs maintain their professional stance by setting clear boundaries to cater to their clients effectively. Participant 2 mentioned that:

"I have to be ma'am towards them, I am just here if you ever need help, I am just here, that thing you had, you must hide your pain, like even if you are about to cry, you have to act like, 'Okay, how are you?' and so on, so maybe those are the instances." (P2)

Even when confronted with stressful situations, CITs regulate their emotions and diligently provide services to their clients, creating space for repressive coping strategies. In the study, CITs exhibit self-control, setting boundaries, and venting out, wherein they are found to have control over their emotional state while providing help to their clients. Having strong emotional regulation is crucial, especially in a supportive environment, which can also enhance one's ability to manage emotions, particularly in high-stress situations (Silvers, 2021). Additionally, in the field of counseling, when counselors perceive a situation as challenging, decreasing sensitivity to threats can help them manage their emotions and focus on their tasks (Langens & Mörth, 2003). Moreover, using emotional regulation can help individuals focus on positive emotional experiences in their lives, allowing them to respond positively to stress, which can promote emotional well-being (Boemo et al., 2022). Thus, CITs maintained professional composure, reflecting their level of emotional awareness, which helped them respond effectively in a counseling session.

Immersing Oneself

The second emerging theme of repressive coping is immersing oneself in activities. This theme highlights how CITs prepare themselves for a counseling session. Hence, participant 6 engaged in meditation.

"I meditate because I do not want to enter the counseling room, I do not want to talk, or I do not want to process my client if I am not stable." (P6)

Additionally, CITs engage in self-reflection, which helps them reflect on their experiences after a counseling session. Participant 7 shared that:

*"Make sure you have your rest. Sleep well. Good, ah, good moments of solitude, solitude *giggles* so we all need solitude of course to self-reflect especially if you have- you have been in a counseling session that was quite heavy, so you do not have to absorb all of it because you are still guiding, it is not a hundred percent your problem." (P7)*

Additionally, practicing mindfulness is one way for CITs to monitor their stress levels. Participant 9 mentioned that:

"Perhaps also mindfulness, one thing I do when I am confronted with stress, and I cannot escape the situation. I said that if it has been over three hours and I have not gotten out, I will start to get rattled. I have to breathe." (P9)

Given the struggles faced by CITs within their profession, immersing oneself allows CITs to connect with their internal state, which enables them to manage stress and improve their mental well-being. To lessen their burdens, CITs demonstrated the relevance of creating emotional, mental, and physical stability by utilizing meditation, mindfulness, and self-reflection. CITs engage in a mindfulness activity to help themselves transition from their busy professional roles to a reflective self-space, highlighting the importance of self-awareness in enhancing their skills and abilities, and promoting a mindful approach in counseling sessions (Banker & Goldenson, 2020). Immersing to oneself could contribute to counselors' personal and professional growth, and this could lead to positive counseling effectiveness as they were able to gain insights into their emotions; immersing oneself could give a reflective nature, which that could develop an understanding of internal processes, which can enhance their ability to improve their profession and provide practical guidance to their clients (Aprilia et al., 2024). Moreover, mental health professionals are also vulnerable to experiencing burnout; therefore, they need to prioritize their well-being and engage in self-reflective activities that can significantly enhance it (Richards et al., 2010). With the exposure of CITs to stress and heavy caseloads, engaging in self-reflective activities has been a crucial component in maintaining their composure.

Strategic Coping

The third theme, which emerged under the category of repressive coping, is strategic coping. This theme highlights how CITs employ specific strategies in response to the situations they encounter. Based on the gathered data, integrating values appears to be an effective approach for CITs in addressing the challenges they encounter. Participant 8 shared that:

*"To project what it means to be a Marist, that is probably the biggest edge. As a Marist counselor, I carry the feelings and values of a Marist, which makes me different. You have charisma *laugh* to be a Marist." (P8)*

Additionally, through mind conditioning, it enabled CITs to instruct their minds to withdraw their own emotions when they are in the presence of their clients. Participant 2 stated that:

"Perhaps you could simply instruct your mind to stop, to stop having feelings for me, because the person in front of me is more important, so please stop for now. I will deal with you later. Stop for now. I will prioritize them first." (P2)

The struggles faced by CITs enable them to establish effective coping strategies, which in turn allow them to be present and address their clients' concerns while also protecting their well-being. In combating a particular stressful situation, it is revealed that CITs adopt a specific coping strategy that corresponds to the situation itself. Additionally, when faced with an unavoidable and unpleasant experience, repressors tend to adopt more effective coping strategies and develop more effective ones (Langens & Mörth, 2003). Additionally, Prasertsri et al. (2011) noted that repressive coping is associated with the use of specific coping strategies. Further, repressors tend to engage with adaptive or maladaptive coping strategies in order to deal with stress (Carver et al., 1989; Egloff & Hock, 1997; Myers & Vetere, 1997; Furnham & Traynor, 1999; Myers & Dekakshan, 2000; Ceschi et al., 2005 as cited in Scholes & Martin, 2010). Thus, adapting to strategic coping enables CITs to move forward despite their adversities.

Diverting Oneself through Leisure

The fourth theme that surfaced under repressive coping is diverting oneself through leisure. CITs alleviate the stress they are dealing with through engaging in hobbies. Participant 10 stated that:

"Yes, actually, when I am stressed, especially when it comes to making reports for counseling, I divert my stress into dancing and my hobbies. I dance, like doing TikTok dances, and after that, when I feel okay again, I start over." (P10)

Furthermore, participating in recreational activities is a unique way for CITs to alleviate the stress they are facing. Participant 9 said that:

"Oh, I am an athletic person. I go running and register for marathons. I also run regularly, usually about five kilometers a day, depending on my stress levels. If I can, I will run ten kilometers because I can see the effects on my body and easily shake off the stress." (P9)

When faced with challenging situations, CITs involve themselves in various activities that allow them to redirect their attention away from those circumstances. In the study, CITs were found to engage in hobbies and participate in recreational activities as a way to alleviate the stress they felt. Individuals who adopt a repressive coping style actively employ behavioral or cognitive techniques to enhance their mood or divert their attention from negative emotions (Boden & Baumeister, 1997, as cited in Prasertsri et al., 2011). Additionally, Plante and Schwartz (1990) revealed that repressors utilize running and other hobbies as a means of distraction. Moreover, repressors gain from redirecting their focus away from negative emotions and concentrating on goal-oriented and self-protective behaviors (Coifman et al., 2007). As a response to the emotional toll of their work, CITs found themselves taking a necessary break by engaging in activities that they find fun and helpful in combating the difficulties they encounter.

4.0 Conclusion

Becoming a full-fledged counselor is not easy, as it requires rigorous effort, including taking on various responsibilities associated with the role and developing one's competencies. Moreover, seeking guidance from supervisors is crucial for CITs, as it helps them understand the things they can do, especially in dealing with exceptional cases, and determine which counseling techniques to apply.

Meanwhile, CITs have been challenged in attending to reluctant clients, which hinders their ability to establish a seamless counseling session. Additionally, the potential multicultural challenges exacerbate the struggles they face, particularly when working with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Additionally, compartmentalization among CITs plays a crucial role, particularly when working with multiple clients. Furthermore, counseling is a challenging profession, making it essential for CITs to find time to rest, which helps alleviate the occupational burnout and emotional residue they experience. Indeed, counseling can be emotionally, psychologically, and socially daunting, yet it does not hinder CITs from pursuing their endeavors.

In response to these challenges, CITs often resort to repressive coping. They employ cognitive and behavioral strategies, such as emotional regulation, immersion, strategic coping, and diversion through leisure activities. These strategies help CITs protect their clients from additional stress, prioritize their well-being, and maintain professionalism while meeting clients' needs. Repressive coping enables CITs to focus on external demands and avoid confronting their own emotions. However, CITs need to develop suitable coping strategies to prevent negatively impacting their quality of life.

Overall, this study makes a significant contribution to the field of psychology by highlighting the hidden struggles of CITs and their use of repressive coping. By raising awareness of these challenges, the study enhances understanding of how current mental health professionals are vulnerable to them, which are often overlooked. Additionally, by examining the coping strategies employed, the study promotes a deeper understanding of how CITs manage the psychological demands of their roles. This recognition not only enhances the understanding of the challenges faced by mental health professionals but also informs policies and practices that prioritize their well-being. Ultimately, the study contributes to a broader understanding of coping strategies in challenging environments and supports the advancement of psychological research and practice to meet the needs of mental health professionals better.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Enrico, serving as the group leader, meticulously oversaw every aspect of the study, ensuring that each phase ran smoothly and effectively. Accompanying him in this endeavor were his dedicated group members: Shanelyn, Kayne, and Kairielle. Each of them played a crucial role in the project, contributing equally by gathering relevant literature, refining the manuscript through thorough edits, and conducting insightful interviews that enriched their research. Providing invaluable guidance throughout the process was Darwin, the research adviser, whose expertise and feedback significantly enhanced the quality of the study and ensured its success.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

There is no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study.

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