

SELF-EFFICACY AND CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: CHALLENGES FOR YOUNG COUNSELORS IN DEALING WITH GEN Z

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ABSTRACT

Generation Z, known as digital natives, brings new dynamics to the counseling landscape. Young counselors face unique challenges in understanding the characteristics of Gen Z, who are prone to mental health issues such as anxiety and stress, and expect flexible, technology-based services. This article examines the role of self-efficacy and continuous professional development as essential foundations for young counselors to address these challenges. Strong self-efficacy enables counselors to believe in their ability to provide effective services, while continuous professional development ensures the relevance of counselors' competencies with changing times. Through a literature review, this article discusses the characteristics of Gen Z, the challenges faced by young counselors, the importance of self-efficacy, and implementable strategies for continuous professional development. The aim is to provide guidance for young counselors to deliver relevant and effective guidance and counseling services for Generation Z.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, Professional Development, Young Counselors, Gen Z, Challenges



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1. INTRODUCTION

Rapid technological advancements and social changes have shaped the unique characteristics of Generation Z, individuals born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s (1). This generation has grown up with unlimited access to information and digital technology, making them digital natives who are highly skilled in navigating and interacting within the online world (2). However, despite their digital proficiency, Generation Z also faces a variety of challenges, including a growing prevalence of mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress, often triggered by social media pressures and cyberbullying (3). This phenomenon calls for counseling approaches that are both adaptive and innovative.

In the context of guidance and counseling, young counselors play a crucial role in guiding and supporting Generation Z. However, this role is accompanied by a range of complex challenges. Young counselors must not only possess a deep understanding of the psychological and social characteristics of Generation Z, but also demonstrate technological literacy and adapt to innovative counseling methods, such as cyber counseling and telecounseling (4). The gap between traditional counseling approaches and the needs of Generation Z who value speed, personalization, and digital connectivity has become one of the major obstacles in counseling practice. Therefore, self-efficacy and continuous professional development are essential for young counselors to effectively and relevantly fulfill their professional responsibilities in this era.

Self-efficacy, defined as an individual's belief in their ability to successfully perform a task or handle a particular situation, is a key determinant of a counselor's effectiveness (5). Counselors with high self-efficacy tend to be more persistent, proactive, and resilient when dealing with the complexities of clients' problems, including those of Generation Z clients, who often exhibit unique psychosocial dynamics (6). Furthermore, continuous professional development (CPD) ensures that counselors continuously update their knowledge and skills in response to societal changes and the evolving needs of their clients (7). This article aims to provide an in-depth analysis of how self-efficacy and continuous professional development can equip young counselors

to address the unique challenges posed by Generation Z, while also offering strategic recommendations for effective counseling practice.

2. RESEARCH METHODS

The writing of this article employs a literature review method. This approach involves the collection, analysis, and synthesis of information from various relevant scholarly sources, including journal articles, books, and conference proceedings published between 2015 and 2026. These sources were selected based on their relevance to the concepts of self-efficacy, continuous professional development for counselors, the characteristics of Generation Z, and the challenges faced by young counselors in providing guidance and counseling services to Generation Z. Data collection was conducted through academic databases such as Google Scholar, SINTA, ResearchGate, and other scientific journal portals.

Data were analyzed qualitatively using a descriptive-analytical approach. The collected information was identified, classified, and synthesized to uncover key themes, relationships among concepts, and practical implications for counseling practice. The analysis focused on developing a robust theoretical framework and presenting arguments supported by scientific evidence from the existing literature. This approach aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the role of self-efficacy and continuous professional development in the context of counseling services for Generation Z.

3. RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Characteristics of Generation Z and Challenges for Young Counselors

The Generation Z (born between 1995 and 2010) exhibits several prominent characteristics that are highly significant in the context of counseling. They are true digital natives, having grown up with unlimited access to technology, the internet, and social media. Communication is often conducted online, and they expect information and services to be delivered quickly and be easily accessible (2). They possess strong multitasking abilities; however, this sometimes comes at the expense of maintaining focus on a single task for an extended period. They are also goal-oriented, value flexibility, and are open to diverse perspectives and inclusivity (8). Nevertheless, behind this digital proficiency, Generation Z is also vulnerable to mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and stress, which are often triggered by social media pressure, cyberbullying, and uncertainty about the future (3) (9). Furthermore, they tend to seek validation from their social environment, particularly through online platforms, which can influence their self-concept and emotional well-being.

The challenges faced by young counselors in working with Generation Z are diverse and multidimensional. First, the digital divide requires counselors not only to possess technological literacy but also to be able to integrate technology ethically and effectively into counseling practice, such as through telecounseling or cyber counselling (4). Counselors need to understand the dynamics of online interactions and how these influence Generation Z clients. Second, adapting counseling methods is essential, as traditional approaches may be less effective for Generation Z, who prefer interactions that are more engaging, personalized, and relevant to their digital experiences. This may involve the use of visual media, interactive applications, or communication platforms that are familiar to Generation Z.

Third, issues of trust and openness are crucial, given that Generation Z is accustomed to online anonymity. Counselors must create safe spaces, both physically and virtually, that encourage openness and facilitate the development of strong therapeutic rapport. Fourth, managing expectations is important because Generation Z often expects instant solutions and rapid results. Counselors need to help them develop a realistic understanding that counseling is a process requiring time, commitment, and effort. Finally, professional demands require young counselors to remain up to date with trends, language, and issues relevant to Generation Z, while also demonstrating a high level of competence amid increasing expectations from both clients and the professional community (10).

3.2. Self-Efficacy of Young Counselors

According to Albert Bandura (5), self-efficacy refers to an individual's belief in their ability to organize and execute the actions required to manage prospective situations. In the context of counseling, counselor self-efficacy refers to counselors' confidence in their ability to successfully perform counseling-related tasks, such as establishing therapeutic relationships, conducting assessments, designing interventions, and facilitating client change (11). For young counselors, self-efficacy is particularly important because it influences how they approach complex counseling tasks, especially when working with Generation Z, whose unique characteristics and specific challenges require adaptive and effective counseling strategies.

Counselors with high self-efficacy tend to be; **More Confident:** They believe in their ability to handle a wide range of client issues, including the most challenging ones, and are not easily intimidated by the complexity of Generation Z cases (12). **More Persistent:** They do not give up easily when faced with obstacles or setbacks in the counseling process. Instead, they view such challenges as opportunities to learn, grow, and adapt. **More Proactive:** They actively seek innovative solutions and are willing to experiment with new

approaches that may be more suitable for Generation Z clients, such as integrating technology or utilizing creative counseling methods. **More Resilient:** They are able to recover from difficult experiences, effectively manage professional stress and anxiety, and learn from mistakes to improve their counseling practice in the future.

The sources of counselor self-efficacy can be derived from four primary factors (5); **Performance Accomplishments:** Direct experiences of successfully helping clients strengthen counselors' beliefs in their own abilities and effectiveness. **Vicarious Experiences:** Observing the success of other counselors, particularly peers or mentors, can enhance counselors' confidence that they too can achieve similar success. **Verbal Persuasion:** Encouragement, positive feedback, and support from supervisors, colleagues, or clients can reinforce counselors' confidence in their professional capabilities. **Physiological and Emotional States:** Effectively managing stress, anxiety, and emotional exhaustion can significantly influence perceptions of self-efficacy. Counselors who feel calm, emotionally balanced, and competent are more likely to possess higher levels of self-efficacy.

Developing strong self-efficacy equips young counselors with the mindset and confidence needed to navigate the dynamic nature of counseling in the Generation Z era. It enables them to innovate, adapt to emerging challenges, and deliver meaningful and impactful counseling services.

3.3. Continuing Professional Development

Continuous Professional Development (CPD) is a systematic and ongoing process aimed at maintaining, enhancing, and expanding a counselor's professional knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout their career (7). In the context of counseling Generation Z, CPD is essential to ensure that counselors remain relevant, adaptable, and effective amid rapid changes in society, technology, and clients' needs. An effective CPD model for young counselors should be holistic in nature, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions of professional development (13).

The CPD strategies that young counselors can implement to effectively work with Generation Z include; **Digital Literacy and Counseling Technology Training:** Participating in workshops, courses, or certification programs on the use of online counseling platforms, mental health applications, digital assessment tools, and the ethical use of social media for educational and intervention purposes (4)(14). This also includes understanding privacy concerns and ethical issues in online counseling.

Clinical Supervision and Mentoring: Engaging in regular supervision sessions with experienced senior counselors or mentors. Supervision provides opportunities for reflective practice, constructive feedback, guidance in handling challenging cases (particularly those involving Generation Z), and emotional support to help prevent professional burnout (15).

Self-Reflection and Mindfulness: Regularly reflecting on counseling practices, identifying strengths and areas for improvement, and practicing mindfulness to manage stress, enhance self-awareness, and maintain a healthy work-life balance (16). Reflective journaling can serve as an effective tool in this process.

Participation in Professional Communities: Joining professional associations, online discussion forums, seminars, or conferences to exchange experiences, learn from peers, and stay informed about the latest research in counseling, adolescent psychology, and Generation Z characteristics (17).

Advanced Education or Specialized Certification: Pursuing advanced academic degrees (e.g., master's or doctoral programs) or obtaining specialized certifications in relevant areas such as career counseling for Generation Z, digital crisis counseling, multicultural counseling, or trauma counseling. This enables counselors to develop deeper expertise in specific areas of interest and need among Generation Z clients.

Research and Publication: Engaging in research and scholarly publication activities can help young counselors continuously develop critical thinking skills, evaluate and improve their professional practices, and contribute to the broader body of knowledge in the counseling field (18).

CPD is not merely about acquiring new skills; it is also about strengthening professional ethics, enhancing empathy, and developing the ability to build strong therapeutic relationships with Generation Z clients. Through a commitment to continuous professional development, young counselors can continuously improve themselves and provide high-quality, relevant, and impactful services that contribute positively to the well-being of Generation Z.

4. CONCLUSION

Self-efficacy and continuous professional development are two essential foundations for young counselors in addressing the complexities of Generation Z. The characteristics of Generation Z as digital natives who are vulnerable to mental health issues, social media pressures, and expectations for fast and personalized services require counselors to be adaptable, innovative, and confident in their professional

abilities. Self-efficacy equips counselors with the confidence, persistence, proactivity, and resilience needed to navigate the unique challenges of counseling Generation Z clients. Meanwhile, continuous professional development ensures that counselors possess up-to-date knowledge and skills, including digital literacy, the ability to adapt counseling methods, and a deep understanding of Generation Z's dynamics.

By integrating strong self-efficacy developed through successful experiences, observation, verbal persuasion, and effective emotional management with a commitment to continuous professional development through training, supervision, reflective practice, and participation in professional communities, young counselors can become effective agents of change. They will be better equipped to guide Generation Z toward psychological well-being, optimal self-development, and the ability to navigate the complexities of the modern world. This article recommends that counseling education institutions and professional organizations intensify their efforts to facilitate the development of self-efficacy and continuous professional development (CPD) among young counselors, particularly in responding to the challenges of the Generation Z era.

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