Individual Stress Factors (ISFs) Faced by Guidance and Counseling Teachers (GACTs) in Malaysia: A Conceptual Overview

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Abstract: Guidance and Counseling Teachers (GACTs) play a crucial role in nurturing students' growth and well-being in primary and secondary schools in Malaysia. Yet, they face various stressors that can affect both their professional effectiveness and personal welfare. This review highlights six main individual stress factors (ISFs) that pose significant challenges for GACTs; role conflict, role overload, role ambiguity, harassment, responsibility for people, and the pace of change. By acknowledging these stressors, educational institutions can create targeted support systems. These interventions can improve the well-being of GACTs, enhance the quality of counseling services they provide, and ultimately benefit the entire school community at both primary and secondary levels.

Keywords: guidance and counseling teachers, GACTs, ISFs, harassment, pace of change, responsibility for people, role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload.

I. INTRODUCTION

Guidance and counseling services are pivotal for the holistic development of primary and secondary school students (Simbolon & Purba, 2022), addressing their academic (Supriyanto *et al.*, 2020), emotional (Blake, 2020), and social needs (World Health Organization, United Nations Educational, 2021). According to Arumugam *et al.* (2021), Guidance and Counseling Teachers (GACTs) play a crucial role in delivering these services in Malaysia. However, the varied and demanding nature of their duties often subjects them to significant stressors such as role conflict, overload, ambiguity, harassment, responsibility for people, and the pace of change (ISFs). To mitigate these challenges, it is essential to provide GACTs with enhanced institutional support (Agustin *et al.*, 2020). This support could encompass measures like reducing their workload, ensuring access to continuous professional development opportunities, and fostering a supportive school environment that acknowledges and values their contributions (Bersan et. al., 2024). Through these initiatives, the well-being of GACTs can be significantly improved (Muqodas *et al.*, 2020), thereby enhancing the quality and effectiveness of counseling services for students and fostering a nurturing and enriching school environment for all stakeholders (Sessoms, 2020; Henry & Bryan, 2021; Yildiz, 2021).

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

An in-depth examination of Individual Stress Factors (ISFs) and Guidance and Counseling Teachers (GACTs) in Malaysia has provided valuable insights through extensive secondary research. This thorough analysis has not only deepened the understanding of the unique stressors faced by Malaysian GACTs but also unveiled the intricate links between effective counseling methods and student achievements. The study highlights how these connections inform well-founded conclusions, emphasizing the pivotal role of policy interventions and community involvement in enhancing the efficacy of GACTs. By synthesizing data from various sources, the literature review underscores the importance of

supportive measures for the continuous development of GACTs. Additionally, it has identified significant research gaps, presenting opportunities for future studies to further explore ISFs and their impact on GACTs. This comprehensive review consolidates existing knowledge, setting the stage for future research and practical applications, and serves as an invaluable resource for academics, policymakers, and practitioners committed to improving the effectiveness of GACTs by addressing ISFs in Malaysia.

III. METHODOLOGY

The primary focus of the conceptual paper was to conduct a literature review of previous studies on Guidance and Counseling Teachers (GACTs) and Individual Stress Factors (ISFs) in Malaysia. The study encompassed the systematic examination of diverse databases, such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and ResearchGate. The primary search terms included "guidance and counseling teachers", "GACTs", "ISFs", "harassment", "pace of change", "responsibility for people", "role ambiguity", "role conflict", and "role overload".

IV. INDIVIDUAL STRESS FACTORS (ISFS)

According to Schuler (1980), stress is a broad reaction to different types of demands. Hall & Mansfield (1971) define stress as an external force that affects a system, whether it is an organization or an individual. According to Rochette *et al.* (2023), stress is characterized as the discrepancy between an individual's abilities, job requirements, and desires compared to what the workplace provides. According to Caplan (1975), stress is defined as any factor in the work environment that presents a danger or risk to the individual. Margolis *et al.* (1974) employ Cannon's (1929) notion of physiological homeostasis to delineate stress as a workplace circumstance that disturbs an individual's psychological or physiological equilibrium. According to Emuchay *et al.* (2020), stress is characterized by the existence of situations that cause stress, in which individuals engage with their environment. According to Sharma & Pal (2021), Walters (2020), and Ogazi *et al.* (2022), stress is an automatic bodily response that can disrupt the body's physiological equilibrium. Stress refers to a variety of intense and unpleasant stimuli that result in physiological, behavioral, and subjective reactions to stress. It encompasses the interplay between individuals and stress stimuli, creating a cohesive system. Stress is a subjective condition that is impacted by physical requirements, environmental circumstances, and social situations, which can potentially be detrimental and beyond one's control (Agorastos & Chrousos, 2022). The concept of individual stress factors (ISFs) encompasses six distinct elements: role conflict, role overload, role ambiguity, harassment, responsibility for people, and the pace of change. These components will be further explained in the following section.

A. Role Conflict

The role conflict experienced by Guidance and Counseling Teachers (GACTs) in Malaysia is a complex issue, which highlights the challenges associated with their dual responsibilities. The research identifies multiple crucial elements and difficulties. Initially, GACTs frequently encounter role conflict as a result of their dual obligations to offer both academic guidance and personal counseling. This leads to conflicting demands on their time and resources (Alexander *et al.*, 2022). Geesa *et al.* (2022) assert that efficient fulfillment of these responsibilities relies heavily on effective collaboration with other school staff. Furthermore, the role conflict experienced by GACTs has a substantial impact on their psychological well-being (Blake, 2020). It is crucial for individuals to develop and put into practice coping strategies in order to preserve their mental well-being and guarantee their ability to deliver counseling services of excellent quality. These strategies encompass stress management techniques, seeking social support, and professional development opportunities (Mahomed *et al.*, 2019). Furthermore, GACTs encounter difficulties in cultivating mental health literacy among both students and staff. This encompasses addressing limited understanding of mental health conditions, prevailing prejudices, and inadequate societal assistance. It is crucial to tackle these challenges in order to ensure the efficient provision of counseling services and to promote the mental well-being of the school community (Yulianti *et al.*, 2024). Furthermore, attempts have been made to modify assessment tools, such as the Teacher Role Survey Instrument created by Maes and Anderson, in order to gain a deeper comprehension and assessment of the role conflict encountered by GACTs in Malaysia. These tools assist in pinpointing particular areas of conflict and in creating focused interventions (Maes & Anderson, 1983). The Teacher Role Survey is a tool used to assess a teacher's locus of control. To effectively address the role conflict experienced by GACTs in Malaysia, a comprehensive approach is necessary. This approach should involve effective collaboration, psychological support, enhanced mental health literacy, and the utilization of adapted assessment tools to identify and alleviate specific conflicts.

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B. Role Overload

Becker (2021) defines role overload as a widespread difficulty in which the requirements of a job exceed an individual's capacity to handle them efficiently. Guidance and Counseling Teachers (GACTs) in primary and secondary schools often encounter this problem as they balance multiple responsibilities, including providing top-notch counseling services, handling administrative duties, and assisting students with their academic and personal growth. The resultant workload can induce a sense of being overwhelmed and adversely affect their efficacy in each role they assume. In order to alleviate role overload, various strategies can be implemented. These include delegating tasks to distribute responsibilities more evenly, offering time management training to improve productivity, and establishing realistic workload expectations to ensure that duties are manageable (Alves, 2024). According to Poulose & Dhal (2020), adopting these measures can enhance the efficiency of GACTs in fulfilling their diverse responsibilities while also promoting a healthier equilibrium between work and personal life. Prior studies have emphasized various crucial factors and difficulties associated with role overload among GACTs. A significant challenge lies in the multiple roles and responsibilities that they frequently handle, including but not limited to being a counselor, consultant, facilitator, change agent, coordinator, assessor, and career development provider. Participating in multiple job responsibilities and tasks can lead to role overload (Tang & Vandenberghe, 2021). An additional noteworthy concern is the elevated student-teacher ratios, as certain schools allocate a minimum of 500 students per Guidance and Counseling Teacher. The high student-teacher ratio intensifies the burden of responsibilities and requires efficient management and cooperation with other school staff, including homeroom teachers and principals (Wahyudi, 2017). In addition, leadership challenges are also a factor, as GACTs must effectively manage obstacles such as leading experienced teachers and maintaining a balance between administrative responsibilities and their teaching and counseling duties. These challenges can lead to role overload and stress among these specialized educators (Tahir *et al*., 2024). To tackle these complex problems, it is necessary to implement comprehensive strategies and provide support systems that enable GACTs to carry out their responsibilities efficiently while also taking care of their own well-being.

C. Role Ambiguity

The existence of role ambiguity among Guidance and Counseling Teachers (GACTs) in Malaysia presents a substantial obstacle to their capacity to effectively fulfill their duties (Yousefi & Abdullah, 2019). In accordance with Fye *et al*. (2020), the following points explicate various aspects and challenges associated with role ambiguity, which pertains to a dearth of clarity in delineating roles and responsibilities. This matter frequently causes perplexity among GACTs regarding their precise roles and responsibilities within the educational system. The lack of clarity can lead to difficulties in effectively delivering counseling services and supporting students. GACTs may experience difficulties in defining their identity and comprehending essential counseling principles and techniques, resulting in ambiguity regarding their responsibilities (Ridley *et al*., 2021). Dhal (2023) states that GACTs need comprehensive training and professional development programs to acquire the necessary skills and knowledge. Education institutions should provide specialized courses designed to improve teachers' comprehension and application of guidance and counseling services. Minimizing uncertainty about job responsibilities and improving overall performance are essential results that can be attained through this. No text has been provided. To improve professionalism and facilitate ongoing growth, it is crucial to prioritize professionalism and engage in continuous professional development. Maximizing the effectiveness and responsibilities of GACTs is crucial. In order to mitigate role ambiguity, it is crucial to offer teachers ongoing assistance and training to ensure they remain well-informed about current counseling practices and emerging trends (Nurhayati, 2018). Furthermore, the implementation of collaboration and support systems is essential. Efficient cooperation with other school personnel, such as homeroom teachers and principals, is crucial for successfully handling the duties of GACTs. A supportive environment can effectively reduce job role uncertainty and empower teachers to focus on their primary responsibilities (Wahyudi, 2018). In order to address the issue of role ambiguity among Guidance and Counseling Teachers in Malaysia, it is necessary to implement a comprehensive strategy. This strategy should include clearly defined role definitions, specialized training, tailored assessment tools, ongoing professional development, and strong support systems within the school environment. Implementing these measures is essential for enhancing the effectiveness of guidance and counseling services and fostering the welfare of both GATCs and students (Zakaria *et al*., 2024).

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D. Harassment

Einarsen *et al*. (2020) define harassment as a personal stressor that generates a detrimental encounter for individuals in their professional environment. It can appear in different forms, such as verbal abuse, biased remarks, or even physical force. Harassment has extensive repercussions that go beyond immediate discomfort. It can lead to long-lasting psychological suffering, decreased job fulfillment, and potentially serious health issues. Creating a favorable and thoughtful work environment is essential to prevent harassment and ensure the safety and value of all employees. Organizations can efficiently tackle and reduce instances of harassment by implementing clear and specific policies, providing training on appropriate workplace behavior, and promoting transparent communication (Rayner & Lewis, 2020). By fostering a workplace culture that promotes respect and inclusivity, organizations not only protect the welfare of their employees but also enhance overall productivity and morale. Moreover, it is imperative for leaders to establish a standard by demonstrating behavior that demonstrates unequivocal intolerance for any form of harassment (Tinkler & Zhao, 2020). The harassment experienced by GACTs in Malaysia is a significant problem that has a detrimental impact on their professional and personal welfare. The harassment experienced by these educators is influenced by various factors, including workplace bullying. Special education teachers in Malaysia, including those in guidance and counseling roles, report higher levels of workplace bullying compared to their counterparts in general education. Inadequate administrative support plays a significant role in fostering workplace discontent and harassment (Catherine *et al*., 2022). Institutional and administrative barriers, lack of institutional support, inconsistent responses from colleagues, and fear of negative repercussions from the community and parents contribute to an environment conducive to harassment. These obstacles impede teachers from efficiently addressing and countering harassment in the workplace (Bancroft & Greenspan, 2023). To effectively combat the harassment experienced by GACTs in Malaysia, it is necessary to implement a range of measures. These measures should include enhancing administrative support, ensuring that institutions respond consistently and effectively, and fostering a work environment that is both safe and supportive. Minimizing harassment is essential for the welfare of educators and the efficiency of the educational system.

E. Responsibility for People

An individual's responsibility for others is a significant source of workplace stress (Havlovic & Keenan, 2020). For example, GACTs feel anxious because they hold the belief that the school counselor bears the sole responsibility for students' achievements. If the student fails, the school counselor will assume responsibility for the outcome. The intense sense of responsibility can lead to a significant emotional and psychological burden, as the counselor may feel obligated to ensure the success of every student. Over time, the accumulation of this excessive pressure can potentially result in burnout, anxiety, or even depression (Sun *et al*., 2023). GACTs require access to supportive resources and networks in order to effectively cope with the stress they encounter (Guthier *et al*., 2020). Furthermore, fostering a collaborative environment where responsibility is shared among educators, caregivers, and learners can aid in alleviating the burden on any individual. Recognizing that student success is a joint effort can greatly reduce the stress experienced by GACTs, allowing them to carry out their duties more effectively and with increased personal fulfillment. It is essential to consider the inclusion of self-care practices for GACTs. Advocating for scheduled intervals of rest, motivating involvement in educational opportunities for career advancement, and nurturing involvement in activities that improve mental and emotional health can result in substantial benefits. Mindfulness techniques, such as meditation and deep-breathing exercises, are efficacious strategies for stress management (Toussaint *et al*., 2021). Dixon & Buckley (2020) propose that fostering a culture of open and honest communication in schools allows counselors to openly share their concerns and seek help when needed. Peer support groups, supervision, and mentoring programs are essential in aiding counselors in navigating the challenges they face. Recognizing and celebrating even small achievements and advancements is essential for maintaining a positive outlook. Acknowledging the diligent endeavors and steadfast dedication of school counselors not only boosts their motivation but also emphasizes the significance of their role in shaping the future of students. By comprehensively considering these factors, we can create a more enduring and nurturing environment for GACTs, ultimately enhancing the entire educational ecosystem.

F. Pace of Change

Schilling *et al*. (2012) state that the world of work is continuously changing and undergoing various shifts and transformations due to global phenomena like technological advancements, increased accessibility, and improved communication. These transitions are anticipated to endure in the future. As a result, there are many changes and

uncertainties in the professional domain. Technological advancements are transforming multiple industries and giving rise to new and innovative work methods. Change is an ongoing phenomenon and careers in the current era are more diverse than in the past. As people's professional paths become more diverse and disconnected, it is crucial for them to continuously develop and acquire new and diverse skill sets. In light of the inescapable nature of change in the contemporary work milieu, organizations must embrace strategic alterations in order to effectively adapt to their evolving surroundings. In the current professional environment, the capacity to develop and adjust is a crucial necessity. Change can be initiated by external stimuli or as a consequence of intentional strategic choices made by the company (Hotho, 2008). Organizational change often leads to a transformation of the organization's identity when a new vision is introduced. Moreover, not all modifications result in desirable consequences. Change is made easier when the organizational identity has the ability to adapt and develop. The future presentation's success and the employees' willingness to embrace the change are pivotal factors (Kuusela & Kuittinen, 2008). Schilling *et al*. (2012) stress the significance of prudently handling organizational change, as companies ought to preserve their proficient employees. Research suggests that professionals frequently encounter difficulties when trying to adjust to new work methodologies, leading to a feeling of discomfort regarding their professional identity. This can lead to the exodus of highly skilled employees from the company. Professionals, as stated by Schilling *et al*. (2012), possess valuable knowledge that is a vital asset to a company. Their individual expertise is a crucial asset that enhances the efficiency of the company they work for. Organizational change encompasses the alterations made to current strategies and work routines that have a substantial influence on the organization. The study of organizational change is a prominent topic in the social sciences, driven by the need to enhance our comprehension of the ongoing phenomenon and the underlying causes behind it. Oftentimes, change is instigated by individuals in lower positions, suggesting that the changes originate from the managerial level of the company (Wee & Taylor, 2018). Resistance to change is the existence of unfavorable attitudes and opposition to proactive endeavors aimed at implementing change initiatives. Organizational change scenarios often provoke resistance to change. The employees may have a limited understanding of the reasons and logic behind the change, which can result in a lack of motivation towards the change. Individuals who exhibit resistance to change express doubt and skepticism toward the change initiatives implemented by managers (Blanca & Ramona, 2016).

V.   CONCLUSION

GACTs in Malaysia are subjected to a variety of individual stress factors, which significantly affect both their well-being and their efficiency. Educational institutions have the ability to improve the support that they offer to GACTs by first gaining an understanding of the individual stressors that include role conflict, overload, ambiguity, harassment, responsibility, and the pace of change (ISFs) and then addressing these stressors. Putting into action the strategies that have been suggested will not only improve the health and happiness of GACTs, but it will also improve the quality of guidance and counseling services that are provided to students.

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