

Original Research Article

The Relationship between Self-Efficacy, Professional Self-Doubt and Counselling Career Readiness in Counselling Trainees

Regina Vaz¹, Vaishnavi Kamat²

¹Post Graduate Student M.A. Degree in Psychology (Counselling) Smt. Manibhen M. P. Shah Women's College of Arts & Commerce (Autonomous), Mumbai

²Assistant Professor, Department of Psychology, Smt. Manibhen M. P. Shah Women's College of Arts & Commerce (Autonomous), Mumbai.

Corresponding author: Regina Vaz

Email – reginavaz.cps@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Background: In the field of Psychology, Post-Graduate students encounter challenges related to Self-efficacy, Professional Self-Doubt, and Career readiness. This study investigates whether Self-Efficacy and Professional Self-doubt Predicts Counselling Career Readiness among Trainees in Counselling Psychology.

Methodology: The participants in the study were 72 female psychology trainees aged 21 to 30, enrolled in their second year of Counselling Psychology Master's Program at a Mumbai-based university. Utilising the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE), Professional Self Doubt Scale (PSD), and Counselling Self Estimate Inventory (COSE), the study employed Regression Analysis to examine predictive relationships.

Results: Data analysis was performed using regression analysis to reveal that Self-Efficacy and Professional Self-Doubt Predict Counselling Career Readiness. Although a significant relationship between Self-Efficacy and Counselling Career Readiness was found, the relationship between Professional Self-Doubt and Counselling Career Readiness was found insignificant.

Conclusion: A positive correlation exists between Self-efficacy and Counselling Career Readiness, while a significant negative relationship exists between Professional Self-Doubt and Counselling Career Readiness

Keywords: Self-Efficacy, Professional Self-Doubt, Counselling Career Readiness, Counselling Trainees.

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INTRODUCTION

Imagine a room filled with ambitious counsellors, all driven by a desire to help individuals achieve better mental health and personal development. In exploring human emotions beyond academic materials and concepts, they are hindered by their inner conflicts of self-doubt and self-confidence.

The journey is about discovering a new sense of self and helping others who seek assistance. The study of psychology begins in the 12th grade and progresses from one paper in the curriculum to a Bachelor of Arts (BA) to a substantial six papers in the Third Year Bachelor of Arts (TYBA) in psychology. In India, obtaining a master's degree is necessary to practice psychology. With a certain demographic, there are more alternatives available for a master's degree. Following are the areas of specialization: clinical, counselling, industrial, forensic, and many others. Every university-based curriculum includes fieldwork or internship requirements that must be met.

The first-year counselling psychology master student's curriculum is based on practical and theories-based study. This journey helps them to discover their strengths, capabilities, and sense of purpose. As

they gain clarity on who they are and what they want to achieve, they are better prepared to embark on a successful career in counselling psychology.

In the second year, counselling psychology master's students generally find the beginning of professional training to be both extremely demanding and thrilling. The second-year master's student is impacted and occasionally overwhelmed by theories and research, clients, professors, supervisors, mentors, and the need for personal therapists, one's own life, peers and coworkers, and the social and cultural surroundings [1]. Master's students in psychology are also expected to concurrently develop useful counselling skills (such as active listening, probing and insight) and knowledge in a specific area of competence while simultaneously maintaining and communicating that information.

At this stage, a student's most important responsibility is meeting clients for the first time, which may be an important experience. When students meet their first clients, they may be preoccupied and anxious, frequently at a level of anxiousness that makes it challenging for them to focus, pay attention, absorb information cognitively, and recall what happened during the hour. Questions like, *"How do I interact with them or keep talking for a whole hour?"* may preoccupy and worry the students.

As a student progresses and compares their professional abilities with those of their peers, they become acutely aware of the importance of professional development. When comparing oneself to a highly skilled professional, even the most advanced student recognizes that there is always more to learn. Students may sometimes feel vulnerable and insecure, seeking confirmation from those more experienced or their peers. As practice develops, supervision can be very valuable in helping students see their growth as practitioners.

The LinkedIn post by a Trainee in Counselling Psychology grabbed my attention, describing her imminent transition to psychology status after completing Semester III. She reflects on the daunting nature of this impending transformation, posing questions about preparedness. The questions she asked everyone "How truly prepared are we? Academically, perhaps we are. Those who consistently excel in exams, practical, and class attendance have undoubtedly demonstrated their grasp of the theoretical underpinnings of psychology. But what of the calling? That inner voice, that yearning to make a positive impact on the world of mental health, how many of us are truly nurturing it? How many of us are actively molding ourselves into the empathetic, understanding practitioners we aspire to be?". She acknowledges the academic accomplishments of those who excel in exams and coursework but questions if they are nurturing their inner calling to positively impact mental health. The trainee observes peers who excel academically but struggle to apply their knowledge with empathy in real-world situations, expressing concern about the lack of emphasis on developing these crucial aspects of a psychologist's persona beyond academic achievements. She says "I'm not isolating myself by raising this concern. I can't help but wonder why, beyond theoretical frameworks, presentations, and exams, so little attention is paid to developing these crucial aspects of a psychologist's persona. Perhaps I'm missing something, but the prospect is undeniably unsettling". She says her entire batch is emerging as of becoming psychologists in a year. But are we truly nearing our goal, or are we lost in a desert mirage, chasing an illusion of completion and self-fulfillment [2].

Self-efficacy is a psychological construct that refers to an individual's belief in their ability to perform a specific task or achieve a particular goal [3]. Professional self-doubt is based on feelings of uncertainty, inadequacy or a lack of belief in one's professional skills and judgement [4]. Counselling career readiness denotes an individual's preparedness and suitability for pursuing a career in counselling. It encompasses the skills, knowledge, and psychological attributes required to effectively engage in counselling practices, often assessed through a combination of education, training, and practical experience evaluations [5].

In examining the intersection of self-efficacy and professional self-doubt with career readiness in psychology, a comprehensive understanding emerges from various studies.

A study underscores the importance of self-belief amidst formidable barriers, particularly during the pandemic, revealing a positive correlation between self-efficacy and confidence in future professional endeavors [6].

Another study contributes insights into the multifaceted nature of readiness for higher education and the workforce, highlighting diverse factors shaping students' preparedness [7]. Meanwhile, A study emphasised the nuanced role of maturity in bridging self-belief with practical career readiness,

emphasising its significance in navigating professional challenges [8]. On the other hand, research was conducted to delve into the intricate dynamics of professional self-doubt among therapists, illustrating its impact on therapeutic outcomes and advocating for a balanced self-perception. Complementing this, another study focuses on therapists' ongoing struggle with self-doubt, particularly in addressing specific disorders, thereby emphasizing the importance of continual self-assessment in therapeutic practice [9]. Transitioning to the experiences of trainees in psychology, the study found that trainee counselling psychologists experience burnout due to demanding training, leading to a loss of control, resentment, and masking of self-doubt. Burnout affects relationships and physical health, impacting self-efficacy and decision-making skills [10]. Another study identified self-critical perfectionism among psychology graduate students, leading to increased stress and burnout. Self-compassion played a crucial role in mitigating the negative effects of self-critical perfectionism [11].

A study also revealed a lack of comprehensive career support for undergraduate psychology students, with programs mainly focusing on graduate school applications. Integration of more career-focused content into psychology curricula is recommended [12].

A study also highlighted the importance of personal therapy in trainee counsellors' personal and professional development, emphasizing its role in navigating the complexities of the counselling profession [13].

A study found that mindfulness and self-compassion were positively correlated with counsellor self-efficacy and professional competency among doctoral trainees, emphasizing the importance of emotional intelligence in counselling education [14]. There is also research conducted that emphasized the need for targeted training and support to address gaps in middle school counsellors' career counselling skills [15]. Concerning supervision, a study showed that structured group supervision enhanced school counsellors' self-efficacy and counselling competency, suggesting the potential of supervision practices to improve counselling quality [16]. The review concluded that while studies offer valuable insights into self-efficacy variations among psychology students, there is a need for further research on the direct impact of self-efficacy and professional self-doubt on counselling career readiness.

METHODOLOGY

Research Question

The following were the research questions:

- Does Self-Efficacy Predict Professional Self-Doubt among Psychology Trainees?
- Does Counselling Career Readiness Predict Professional Self-Doubt among Psychology Trainees?
- Does Counselling Career Readiness Predict Self-Efficacy among Psychology Trainees?

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the study was as follows:

Alternate Hypothesis (H_1): There is a significant relationship between Self-Efficacy, Professional Self-Doubt and Counselling Career Readiness in Psychology Trainees.

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant relationship between Self-Efficacy, Professional Self-Doubt and Counselling Career Readiness in Psychology Trainees.

Operational definitions

- Self-efficacy as measured by the score on the General Self-efficacy Scale (GSE) by Schwarzer & Jerusalem [17].
- Professional Self-Doubt as measured by the score on the Professional Self-Doubt Scale (PSD) by Nissen-Lie and others [8].
- Counselling Career Readiness as measured by the score on the Counselling Self Estimate Inventory (COSE) by Larson & Suzuki [5].

Participants

Sample: The study carefully selected a group of 72 female participants aged 21 to 30 years old. Participants were specifically chosen from Second-Year Counselling Psychology Master's programs at Mumbai-based Universities including SNDT University colleges, Xavier's College, MMP Shah Women's College, Manibhen Nanavati Women's College and Joshi Bedekar College, among others who were currently engaged in internships.

Inclusion Criteria

1. Individuals within the age range of 21 to 30 were deemed eligible to participate in the study.
2. Participants residing in Mumbai.
3. Master's degrees in counselling psychology were required to participate, indicating expertise and qualification in the field.
4. Participants with internship experiences in various counselling settings, such as schools, colleges, non-profit organizations (NGOs), or community organizations, were included to capture a diverse range of career readiness perspectives.

Exclusion Criteria

1. Participants were required to provide informed consent willingly; those who refused to give informed consent were not eligible to take part in the study.
2. Students who were not enrolled in internship programs were not considered for participation in the study.
3. Hospital and clinical-based practitioners were excluded from the study, ensuring a focus on non-clinical, non-medical contexts within the field of psychology.
4. The participants were not supposed to be in therapy when filling out the Google form.

Participants in Third Year Bachelor of Arts (TYBA) and First Year Master in Psychology were excluded.

Sampling method

In this study, purposive and snowball sampling methods were employed. Both techniques fell under the category of non-probability sampling. Purposive sampling, also recognized as judgment sampling, was a method where individuals were specifically chosen based on predetermined criteria. The snowball sampling technique was intentionally employed, which began with a seed participant and expanded through chain referrals, making it valuable for studying hidden or hard-to-reach populations within social networks.

Instruments used:

The following were scales used in the study:

- **General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE):** The General Self-Efficacy Scale by Schwarzer & Jerusalem in the year 1995 assesses an individual's belief in their ability to effectively perform tasks in various situations. This confidence is evaluated through 10 items, measuring their conviction in task completion and goal achievement. Psychometrically, the scale has been proven valid, correlating positively with emotions, optimism, and work satisfaction, and negatively with depression, stress, health complaints, burnout, and anxiety. Its reliability, determined by Cronbach's alpha, ranges from .76 to .90, indicating internal consistency. Responses are scored from 1 to 4 (ranging from "Not at all" to "Exactly true"). The total score, ranging from 10 to 40, is calculated by summing all items, with higher scores indicating greater self-efficacy [17].
- **Professional Self-Doubt (PSD):** The Professional Self-Doubt Scale (PSD) by Nissen-Lie and others, in the year 2010 is a self-report questionnaire consisting of 9 items. Its primary purpose is to measure the uncertainty experienced by therapists, including psychologists and counsellors, regarding their ability to assist their clients. This scale is particularly useful in supervision and training settings as it normalizes self-doubt. The scale's reliability, evaluated through Cronbach's alpha, is 0.90. Responses are rated on a Likert scale ranging from 0 ("never") to 5 ("very often").

The total professional self-doubt score, ranging from 0 to 5, is calculated by averaging responses across the nine questions. Higher scores indicate higher levels of professional self-doubt [8].

- **Counselling Self Estimate Inventory (COSE):** The Counselling Self Estimate Inventory (COSE) by Larson & Suzuki in the year 1920 is a self-assessment questionnaire containing 37 items. Its purpose is to evaluate the self-efficacy of clinicians engaged in therapy, including psychologists, psychiatrists, counsellors, and trainees. COSE assesses five crucial aspects of counselling self-efficacy: micro skills performance, process awareness, handling challenging clients, cultural competence development, and self-values awareness. COSE captures clinicians' self-perception and confidence in providing counselling services. The questionnaire demonstrates high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.92-0.93 and a test-retest reliability of 0.83 over 3 weeks, indicating its robustness. Moreover, its validity is confirmed through strong concurrent correlations with variables such as esteem, state-trait anxiety, and problem-solving. COSE is a valuable tool for clinicians, facilitating reflective practice and supervision discussions regarding professional confidence and areas for skills improvement [5].

Procedure

Data was collected via purposive, conventional, and snowball sampling. A Google form including the consent form, demographic details, and the tools were sent to the participants via WhatsApp, email, and LinkedIn. Participants were given instructions and briefed about the objective of the study. They were instructed on confidentiality and asked to give their consent. The data was only used for research purposes and statistical analysis. The researcher's email information was provided. After collecting sufficient data, it was analyzed using Google Sheets.

Ethical Consideration

- Participants received clear explanations about the study's objective.
- Participants were assured that their data would only be used for research purposes.
- Participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point in time.

Statistical Analysis

The data for the study was collected from 72 Trainees in Second-Year Master's Counselling Psychology across Mumbai. The statistics used in the study were Multiple Regression analysis.

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of all the Variables

Variables	Mean	Standard Deviation	N
Self-Efficacy	28.29	4.25	72
Professional Self-Doubt	23.80	7.12	72
Counselling Career Readiness	135.37	21.12	72

Table 1 depicts the descriptive statistics, i.e., the mean and standard deviation scores for the variables of Self-Efficacy, Professional Self-Doubt and Counselling Career Readiness. In terms of Self-Efficacy, the mean score was 28.29 with a standard deviation of 4.25. Whereas the mean score for Professional Self-Doubt was 23.80 with a standard deviation of 7.12. In terms of Counselling Career Readiness, the mean score was 135.37 with a standard deviation of 21.12.

Table 2 depicts the results of the multiple regression analysis. The results indicate a significant regression model of $[F(2, 72) = 41.35, p < 0.001]$, with an R^2 of 0.54. This shows that Self-Efficacy and Professional Self-Doubt significantly predict and account for 54% of the total variance in Counselling Career Readiness.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis of Self-Efficacy, Professional Self-Doubt Predicting Counselling Career Readiness.

	R	R square	F	Significance Value	Df
Model Summary	0.738	0.54			
ANOVA			41.35	<0.001	2

DISCUSSION

The analysis conducted on the data concerning counselling career readiness in psychology trainees reveals several key findings. Most respondents were in their second year of study and the fourth semester of their master's program. Regarding internship duration, the majority completed either 6 months or 5 months. Almost all respondents reported currently being under supervision for their counselling training. The most common counselling settings reported were schools and non-profit organizations, followed by colleges and community organizations. Most respondents had worked with 10 or more clients during their internship, primarily engaging in individual counselling and to a lesser extent, group counselling. When it came to counselling formats, all respondents opted for in-person counselling, while a significant portion also utilized online counselling options, indicating a preference for both traditional and technologically-mediated approaches in addressing mental health concerns.

The results of the multiple regression analysis conducted provided a significant regression model that indicated Self-Efficacy and Professional Self-doubt Predicts Counselling Career Readiness among Trainees in Psychology. Specifically, the regression coefficients highlight significant relationships between Self-Efficacy, Professional Self-Doubt, and counselling career readiness. The analysis indicates that General Self-Efficacy positively correlates with counselling career readiness (1.5414, $p = 0.0015$), implying that higher levels of general self-efficacy are associated with increased readiness for a counselling career. Conversely, Professional Self-Doubt exhibits a significant negative relationship (-1.5781, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that higher levels of professional self-doubt are associated with decreased readiness for a counselling career.

Before diving into detailed backup, it's important to highlight key findings on counselling career readiness among psychology trainees. The analysis shows a strong link between factors like General Self-Efficacy and Professional Self-Doubt and readiness for counselling careers, revealing insights into trainees' professional preparedness.

A study was conducted to investigate the relationship between self-efficacy and career orientations among counselling trainees, highlighting the significance of self-efficacy in shaping the career paths of counselling professionals, which aligns with the paper's focus on self-efficacy as a predictor of readiness for a counselling career among psychology trainees [18]. A study compared career counselling self-efficacy among different types of counsellors, revealing distinct self-efficacy profiles across rehabilitation, clinical mental health, and school counsellors. Their findings underscored the significance of self-efficacy in facilitating clients' employment outcomes, offering valuable insights into self-efficacy variations among counsellor types [19]. While these studies may not directly replicate the research focus on counselling career readiness among psychology trainees, they enrich the discussion surrounding the role of self-efficacy and career decision-making within various educational and counselling contexts.

CONCLUSIONS

The research aims to understand whether Self-Efficacy and Professional Self-Doubt predict Counselling Career Readiness was examined using multiple regression analysis. The results provided a significant regression model, which indicates that Self-Efficacy and Professional Self-Doubt predict Counselling Career Readiness. Although a significant relationship between Self-Efficacy and Counselling Career

Readiness was found, the relationship between Professional Self-Doubt and Counselling Career Readiness was found to be insignificant.

The study offers valuable insights but is accompanied by several limitations. While the research highlights the predictive significance of self-efficacy about counselling career readiness, its reliance on a homogeneous sample of female trainees aged 21 to 30 from Mumbai-based universities restricts the generalizability of its findings. One of the demerits of online data collection includes the inability of the researcher to determine complete comprehension of the respondents of the questionnaires that they have answered. There is also time and effort that the respondent may not want to devote to clarifying while filling in the online forms which otherwise is done in physical data collection. The study had mostly respondents from Mumbai, thereby reducing its generalizability. To address these limitations, future research should employ larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and objective measures, and consider a wider array of contextual factors to foster a more comprehensive understanding of the factors shaping counselling career readiness among psychology trainees.

The study's findings on the predictive role of self-efficacy and professional self-doubt in counselling career readiness among second year Master's Counseling Psychology trainees offer significant implications for training programs and support initiatives. Firstly, recognizing the importance of bolstering general self-efficacy levels, interventions such as workshops and reflective practices could be integrated into training curricula to cultivate confidence and belief in trainees' abilities. Additionally, while the study found professional self-doubt to be insignificantly related to counselling career readiness, proactive measures should still be taken to address this issue. Tailored mentoring programs could provide invaluable support, fostering resilience and confidence among trainees as they navigate the challenges of their training. Integrating technology-enhanced learning opportunities and tele counseling training into curricula can better prepare students for the evolving landscape of mental health services. Continuous research and collaboration among stakeholders are vital for advancing the field and ensuring the provision of high-quality mental health support to individuals and communities.

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