

THE IMPACT OF NON-COUNSELING DUTIES ON BURNOUT: A SINGLE CASE STUDY OF PROFESSIONAL SCHOOL COUNSELORS

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ABSTRACT

The assignment of non-counseling roles to school counselors is considered to be a source of stress and to be among the many factors that play a part in counselor burnout. The purpose of this qualitative single case study was to describe and understand from the perspective of professional school counselors, how and why the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout among sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors in the United States. The theoretical frameworks supporting this study were role theory, work stress theories, and burnout theory. Purposive sampling approach was used to recruit 17 professional school counselors serving grades six through 12 in public schools in the USA, who were members of the ASCA, engaged in non-counseling duties, and who self-reported experiencing burnout in their positions. The research questions posed explored how and why professional school counselors believe the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout, and strategies used to manage burnout. Through triangulation of data from the interviews, focus group and participants' self-reflection journals, some related themes were revealed across all three data sources. The theme, stress related symptoms was revealed as the strongest across all data sources. Eleven of the 11 (100%) interview participants and six of the six (100%) focus group participants discussed the theme stress related symptoms. The findings may be instrumental in ensuring that professional school counselors advocate for a greater involvement in making decisions regarding assigned tasks in the school.

Keywords: Burnout, Case Study, School Counselor, Role Theory, Work Stress Theories, Burnout Theory, and Non-Counseling Duties.

1. Introduction

Numerous studies show that effectively implemented school counseling programs can be of great benefit to the students and the school (Fye, Miller, & Rainey, 2017; Mau, Li, & Hoetmer, 2016).

However, studies also continue to show that professional school counselors are burdened with non-counseling duties that interfere with the school counselors' roles (Bardhoshi, Schweinle, & Duncan, 2014) and cause counselors a lot of stress and dissatisfaction (Burnham & Jackson, 2000).

The present study is a qualitative case study that examined professional school counselors' perspectives on how and why the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout among sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors in the United States. It will expand on the existing literature on role theory (Biddle, 2013) by shedding more light on counselor burnout experience and the assignment of non-counseling duties, which in part is due to the confusion surrounding the role of the school counselor. The theoretical perspective that role ambiguity and role conflict can lead to stress and invariably to burnout (Celik, 2013) guides the current study.

2. Background of the Study

The role and functions of school counselors have been of major concern since the 1980s (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2012). Over the years, changes in the educational system have resulted in changes in the school counseling profession, particularly in the roles counselors perform (McCarthy, Van Horn Kerne, Calfa, Lambert, & Guzmán, 2010). The school counseling began as vocational guidance in the late 1800s with the sole purpose of preparing students for the world of works in a society that was changing from an agrarian to industrial society (Loesch & Ritchie, 2009). Cinotti (2014) reported that the vocational guidance was later expanded with more focus on educational services and by the 1960s through 1970s, counselors were providing counseling services.

The No Child Left Behind bill of 2002 required the schools and school personnel to be accountable for the students' achievements which were measured by standardized test scores (Loesch & Ritchie, 2009). With this also came a shift in the professional school counselor's responsibility. Due to these changes, it became difficult for stakeholders to understand clearly the roles and functions of school counselors (Ruiz et al., 2018).

To clarify the roles and functions of the school counselor, the American School Counselors' Association (ASCA) developed the ASCA National Model in 2003. This model has since been revised several times, with the most recent revision at the time of this study being in 2012. Despite the development of the ASCA model, some key stakeholders within the school setting including students, teachers, and administrators are still not clear on the roles of the school counselors and the counseling profession continues to struggle with role ambiguity and role conflict (Ruiz et al., 2018).

The assignment of non-counseling roles to school counselors is considered to be a source of stress and to be among the many factors that play a part in counselor burnout (Bardhoshi, 2012; Bardhoshi et al., 2014). Moyer (2011) found that the number of hours spent on performing non-guidance duties predicted burnout among counselors. Even though there are studies on the various factors that predict school counselor burnout, there is a limited and dated body of research on the assignment of non-counseling roles and school counselor burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Moyer, 2011). Existing studies have used the quantitative method (Moyer, 2011) and the mixed method (Bardhoshi et al., 2014) to study the burnout phenomenon among school counselors. This study adopted a qualitative single case study to examine in depth how and why the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout among sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors in the United States.

4. Research Questions

The study posed the following research questions:

RQ1: How, from the perspectives of sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors, does the assignment of non-counseling duties influence burnout?

RQ2: Why do sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors believe that the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout?

RQ3: How do sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors explain strategies to manage burnout caused by non-counseling duties assigned to them?

4. Theoretical Foundations and/or Conceptual Framework

The current study was guided by role theory (Biddle, 1986), burnout theory (Maslach & Jackson, 1981), and work stress theory (Karasek, 1979).

4.1 Role theory: Role theory “is a science concerned with the study of behaviors that are characteristic of process, within contexts and with various processes that presumably produce, explain, or are affected by those behaviors” (Biddle, 2013, p. 4). The role perspective came into existence in many disciplines in the late 1920s and early 1930s (Biddle, 2013). The insight on role theory was highlighted differently and independently in the early 1930s by three main proponents; Ralph Linton an anthropologist, George Herbert Mead a social philosopher, and Jacob Moreno a psychologist (Biddle, 2013). Ralph Linton pioneered the functional approach in 1936. The focus of this approach is on the characteristic behaviors of individuals within a social system and the characteristics of behaviors in relation to the functioning and maintenance of the social structure.

Differences have existed between the early proponents and contemporary proponents in the ways role term has been used. Some of the various versions of role theory use the term “role” to suggest characteristic behaviors (Biddle, 1986) and others use it to describe social parts that are played by individuals (Biddle, 1986). The term “role” has also been defined to center around scripts for social behavior (Biddle, 1986). Biddle’s (1986) version of role theory forms the foundational theoretical perspective for the current study, as it effectively amalgamates the underlying commonalities of the previous versions whilst removing the ambiguity of role definition. Biddle used the concept of role to refer to characteristic behaviors because human beings behave differently and predictably depending on their social identities and the situation. Social context determines roles and their characteristics.

Partly contributing to the confusion surrounding the role that school counselors play is the way in which role constructs are operationalized. In his seminal work, Biddle (1986) highlights organizational role theory, the role one plays as part of an organization- being different in that there are dual social systems that a person occupies in this model. The role then, writes Biddle (1986), is a reflection of “both the official demands of the organizations and the pressures of informal groups” (p. 73). This model of overlapping group dynamics, both formal and informal expectations can be leveraged to understand the social structure of schools; the context in which school counselors are expected to play their designated roles. School counselors are typically part of the governance structure of the school, led by the principal that consists of administrative, teaching, and adjunct staff.

In the current study, role theory was used as a lens to understand the appropriate role of the professional school counselors in middle and high schools who were members of ASCA. A key concern was the burden of non-counseling related demands on school counselors’ time.

4.2 Work stress theories: Stress and burnout are intimately related. However, both concepts and theories are slightly different and as such are addressed separately herein. While professional school counselors have inherently stressful job duties, increasing their duties beyond what is deemed appropriate or normal can lead to increased job-related stress levels.

As with the concept of role theory, there are different definitions of stress, which can lead to confusion. However, they are all structured around a common set of components that are connected in a relationship that is process-oriented (Dewe et al., 2012). Among the different perspectives of work stress theories are the person-environment fit (P-E Fit), job-demand-control (JDC), cognitive behavioral, emotional overload, equity, and conservation of resources theories (Dewe et al., 2012). For the purpose of this study, the person-environment fit and job-demand-control theories particularly, the job-demand-control-support model, are reviewed, as these are the most applicable to a professional environment.

According to Edwards and Cooper (1990), the person-environment (P-E) fit model of work stress is widely accepted with the P-E fit concepts being incorporated in other organizational stress researchers. Lewin in 1951 conceptualized the interactions between the individual and the environment as essential in understanding people's affective, cognitive, and behavioral reactions and this line of thought provided the foundation for the P-E fit perspective of work stress (Dewe et al., 2012). The proponents of the P-E fit model argue that stress results from the degree of fit between an individual and the environment and not directly from the individual or the environment (Devereux, Hastings, & Noone, 2009). Also relevant to the research topic is the burnout theory, which is discussed in the next section.

4.3 Burnout theory. There is a consensus in the literature on burnout occurring as a result of chronic work stress (Maslach, 2003; Zhou, Yong, & Danling, 2014). The current study used the burnout theory as a framework to conceptualize issues of counselor burnout and the assignment of non-counseling duties. Using data on burnout studies, Maslach and Jackson (1981) designed the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) in which three different concepts, Emotional Exhaustion, Personal Accomplishment, and Depersonalization, were incorporated to measure aspects of the burnout syndrome in a wide range of human service workers. There are three different versions of the Maslach Burnout Inventory, the MBI-HSS for human service workers, the MBI-ES for teachers and administrators, and the general MBI-GS for non-human service workers (Maslach et al., 1996). The burnout theory provides a basis for the current study for exploring how and why the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout among professional school counselors.

4.4 Towards a model of interactions between burnout, role demand, stressors, and job conditions

The emergent interactional model is visualized in Figure 1.

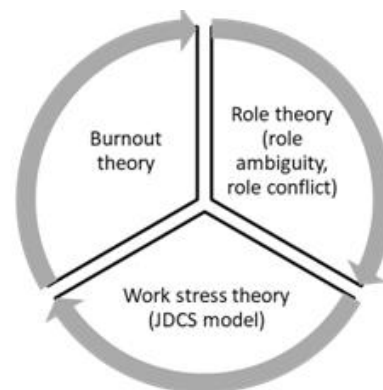


Figure 1. Interaction between burnout, role demand, stressors, and job conditions.

Individuals are likely to experience role ambiguity, role conflict, and work overload where there is a poor fit between the individual and the environment (Devereux et al., 2009). Mismatch between the individual and the environment can cause individuals to experience strain, which may result in a stress response whenever they experience physical and psychological symptoms (Devereux et al., 2009). Studies suggest the school counselors incur high levels of stress as a result of the conflicting and ambiguous job roles with which they are faced (Burnham & Jackson, 2000; Culbreth et al., 2005; Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016).

Interestingly, it was also shown that role ambiguity and role conflict both of which relate to discrepancies between employee and employer role descriptions and leading to a P-E fit mismatch, were associated with increased stress levels and employee burnout (Devereux et al., 2009). Thus, highlighting the interconnected concepts of stress theory and burnout theory, in relation to work environment, stress, and burnout.

5. Literature Review

For this literature review, an exhaustive search through numerous databases was conducted to survey the existing literature. The search was limited to peer reviewed or scholarly articles and academic journals from the year 2014 to 2019. To gain foundational knowledge of the burnout phenomenon, some searches were also done to include dates before 2014.

5.1 Roles of professional school counselor

The focus of the current study was to understand how and why professional school counselors believe the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout. The professional school counselor is a certified/licensed educator with a minimum of a master's degree in school counseling (ASCA, 2012). Professional school counselors work in the elementary, middle, and secondary school settings where they are expected to address the needs of all students through the development and implementation of a comprehensive school counseling program that focuses on the academic, career, and personal/social aspects of counseling (ASCA, 2012).

The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Program (CACREP) recommends that a school counselor is expected to earn 48 semester hours of graduate study in related courses including professional orientation and supervised experiences. However not all preparation programs for school counselors are CACREP accredited and some states allow graduates from those programs without CACREP accreditation an alternate route to certification (Moyer & Yu, 2012), thus highlighting that credentialing requirements for a school counselor are not the same in all states.

In addition to the educational background requirements of counselors differing depending on the location, the professional school counselors' role constantly evolves in response to political, social, and economic dictates (Wimberly & Brickman, 2014). The professional school counselors' roles differ from region to region, school district to school district, and from school to school (Cigrand et al., 2015). The roles of the school counselor in the different school levels (elementary, middle and high) are differentiated based on the developmental stages of students' growth and needs (ASCA, 2012).

When developing a Comprehensive School Counseling Program (CSCP) the foundational and delivery components usually go hand-in-hand, as the effective delivery depends on how the foundation is developed. Counselors are expected to ensure that students' outcomes are the main focus of the program, paying attention to their academic, career, and social/emotional development. To successfully implement this service to students and other stakeholders, the suggested delivery system includes direct student services in which the counselor interacts with the students. The direct service encompasses the school counseling core curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive service.

The core curriculum involves a well-designed lesson that provides all students with the necessary skills, attitudes, and knowledge and helps students acquire needed competencies. The core curriculum should be presented in collaboration with others in the classroom or group settings. Through individual student planning, counselors assist students to establish personal goals and plans by putting in place systemic activities on an ongoing basis (ASCA, 2012). Responsive services are designed to meet the students' immediate needs or concerns with activities delivered through individual counseling, small groups, or crisis response in which students are provided some assistance as they deal with emergencies.

The other aspect of the delivery component is indirect student services, whereby counselors provide these services by working with others to support student achievement (ASCA, 2012). This may be done through referrals, consultation, or collaboration. With a strong foundational program in place and a guideline for the successful delivery of the program, the management and accountability of the program can be addressed.

With the enumerated functions of the school counselor, it is easy to see that time management could negatively affect the delivery of an effective CSCP. Thus, to assist administrators in proper assignment of duties to counselors and to ensure that counselors use their time efficiently, the ASCA articulates activities that are regarded as appropriate and inappropriate for them (Table 1).

Table 1: Appropriate and Inappropriate Duties

Appropriate Activities for School Counselors	Inappropriate Activities for School Counselors
Individual student academic program planning	Coordinating paperwork and data entry of all new students
Interpreting cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests	Coordinating cognitive, aptitude and achievement tests
Providing counseling to students who are tardy or absent	Signing excuses for students who are tardy or absent
Providing counseling to students who have disciplinary problems	Performing disciplinary actions or assigning discipline consequences
Providing counseling to students as to appropriate school dress	Sending students home who are not appropriately dressed
Collaborating with teachers to present school counseling core curriculum lessons	Teaching classes when teachers are absent
Analyzing grade-point averages in relationship to achievement	Computing grade-point averages
Interpreting student records	maintaining student records
Providing teachers with suggestions for effective classroom management	Supervising classrooms or common areas
Ensuring student records are maintained as per state and federal regulations	Keeping clerical records
Helping the school principal identify and resolve student issues, needs, and problems.	Assisting with duties in the principal's office
Providing individual and small group counseling services to students	Providing therapy or long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorder
Advocating for students at individual education plan meetings, student study teams and school attendance review boards	Coordinating school wide individual education plans, student teams and school attendance review boards
Analyzing disaggregated data	Serving as a data entry clerk

Note. Retrieved from <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/home/appropriate-activities-of-school-counselors.pdf>

Notably, many of the tasks categorized as “inappropriate duties” for school counselors are rather tedious and present no added value when put in context with the delivery or management of an effective CSCP. The performance of inappropriate or non-counseling duties represents a source of stress and burnout to counselors. To properly explore this premise, a discussion of these inappropriate duties, the possible reasons for them being assigned to counselors, as well as the nature of stress and burnout and how they pertain to professional school counselors, was further investigated to clarify the field and justify the need for this research.

5.2 Non-counseling duties

Table 1 revealed some duties classified by ASCA as inappropriate counseling duties. These non-counseling duties were specifically identified because professional school counselors regularly

engage in some of these duties, thus adversely affecting CSCP delivery. Some non-counseling duties counselors perform include testing, administrative assistance, identifying and tracking special populations such as students participating in the special education program, the gifted and talented program, and the at-risk programs (Wimberly & Brickman, 2014); organizing parenting programs, and being involved in students' discipline (Ahmad, Khan, & Mustaffa, 2015). The non-counseling activities usually assigned to school counselors are lunch duty, bus duty, substitute teaching, administering achievement tests, and registering students (Moyer, 2011). Some of these non-counseling duties include master scheduling, substitute teaching, conducting state mandated testing, lunch duty, clerical duties which are outside the mandated ASCA appropriate counseling duties.

5.3 Role ambiguity

Role ambiguity occurs when one is confronted with unclear work situations (Bowling et al., 2017). Role ambiguity occurs when expectations are not sufficient to guide behavior (Biddle, 1986). Usually, role ambiguity means that people are uncertain about what is expected or required of them, how the demands will be met, and how they are expected to behave (Papastilianou, Kaila, & Polychronopoulos, 2009). Role ambiguity has been an issue since the inception of the guidance program and has continued to this day (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). The school counseling profession has come a long way from its inception as vocational guidance in the early 1900s (ASCA, 2012). During its early years, there were concerns about the nature of school counseling and services program. These early concerns later shifted to concerns about the role and functions of the school counseling.

Various decisions were made at different times for roles such as coordinating, counseling, consultation, advocacy, collaboration, and accountability (ASCA, 2012). As a result, changes were made through the years to the role and functions of the school counselor (Burnham & Jackson, 2000). The ASCA National Model clarified the roles and expectations of the school counseling profession and recommended that professional school counselors implement a comprehensive school counseling program to promote academic achievement for all students (ASCA, 2012). Despite the publication of the national model, there continues to be confusion about role functions for professional school counselors, and the most important challenge for school counselors centers on the debate over role definition (Paisley & McMahon, 2001).

5.4 The relationship between role ambiguity and job stress

Two main concepts from the role theory are role conflict and role ambiguity. Studies have indicated that role conflict and role ambiguity are contributors to job stress among school counselors and have been linked to burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Culbreth et al., 2005;

Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008). DeMato and Curcio (2004) suggest that role ambiguity may result in the assignment of non-counseling duties. When expectations, responsibilities, and objectives are not well defined for workers, role ambiguity occurs and ultimately leads to job stress (Karimi et al., 2014). Thus, Gillet, Fouquereau, Lafrenière, and Huyghebaert (2016) reported that role ambiguity can be reduced through role clarification, role negotiation, and involvement in decision making regarding the roles. There is a direct correlation between role ambiguity and job stress. This claim is justified by a recent quantitative correlational study conducted by Karimi et al. (2014).

Karimi et al. (2014) found that role ambiguity, role conflict, and work overload were correlated with occupational stress. Their study implies that role ambiguity contributes to job stress. Karimi et al.'s (2014) study ties into the subject of the current study because it explores the impact of role ambiguity on job stress. Karimi et al.'s (2014) result is consistent with a quantitative study by Yunus and Mahajar (2015) who reported a significant and positive relationship between role ambiguity and burnout.

5.5 Role conflict

Role conflict is defined as the simultaneous occurrence of two or more incompatible expectations for a person's behavior (Biddle, 1986). Role conflict usually occurs when employees play multiple roles. When role conflict happens, it becomes difficult for the individual to meet the expectations of others. Often, principals and other stakeholders like teachers, parents, and students have conflicting expectations regarding the role of a school counselor (Mason & Perera-Diltz, 2010). There is abundant evidence that school counselors experience role conflict in their profession. Counselors are burdened with non-counseling tasks that interfere with their counseling duties (Moss, Gibson, & Dollarhide, 2014).

5.6 The relationship between role conflict, job satisfaction, and burnout

Professional school counselors are faced with multiple job demands, which invariably result in role conflict. Despite the role conflict, studies found that professional school counselors are generally satisfied with their jobs (DeMato & Curcio, 2004; Wilkerson, 2009). However, there are some who have linked counselor burnout to role conflict and ambiguity (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006) and have suggested that role ambiguity may result in the assignment of non-counseling duties which also has been linked to school counselor burnout (Bardhoshi, 2012; Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Moyer, 2011).

Abbas et al. (2012) found that role conflict and role ambiguity significantly affected burnout in the area of lack of accomplishment. In addition, Abbas et al. found that those staff members who had stayed longer than five years on the job experienced burnout more than those with less than

five years working experience had. Abbas et al.'s (2012) study implies that role conflict is a significant predictor of stress and burnout.

5.7 The relationship between burnout and job demands

Melamed, Armon, Shirom, and Shapira (2011) conducted a study to explore the impact of changes in workload, job control, and social support on levels of burnout. Melamed et al. (2011) found a reciprocal association between workload, job control and support, and burnout. Melamed et al.'s (2011) study implies that workload, job control, and support are significant predictors of burnout. Baka (2015) showed agreement with Melamed et al. (2011). Baka (2015) found that high job demands predicted high job burnout. Bria, Spânu, Baban, and Dumitrascu (2013) found that burnout was correlated with job demands. Bria et al.'s (2013) conclusion is consistent with Baka's (2015) research that suggests that burnout is correlated with job demands. Thus, there are similar points of view concerning the relationship between burnout and job demands. The highlighted studies clearly demonstrate a link between job demands and burnout.

5.8 The relationship between burnout and perceptions of job control and autonomy

Karasek's (1979) demand control model (DCM) suggests that strain is highest in jobs with high job demands and low control. Studies show that job autonomy is positively associated with job satisfaction (Skaalvik&Skaalvik, 2014). In contrast, people are more prone to job stress if they have no autonomy. Day, Crown, and Ivany (2017) asserted that an effective way for organizations to make resources available for the employees is by giving them control over aspects of their job. In support, Park et al. (2014) indicated that increasing the degree of job control an individual has might reduce negative outcomes and increase a feeling of personal accomplishment. Kim (2016) also cited the amount of perceived autonomy as one of the common organizational factors that predict burnout among music therapists.

5.9 The effect of the assignment of non-counseling duties on counselor burnout

Falls (2009) used the School Counselor Activity Rating Scales (SCARS) to measure the frequency with which participants performed non-counseling duties. Findings suggest that the assignment of non-counseling duties is positively related to higher levels of job stress and burnout in the area of exhaustion and deterioration in personal life. Organizational variables were positively related to counselor burnout. The assignment of non-counseling duties is positively related to higher levels of job stress and burnout in the area of exhaustion and deterioration in personal life. Findings also suggest that organizational variables are positively related to counselor burnout.

Moyer (2011) found that the assignment of non-counseling duties significantly affected counselor burnout. Moyer's (2011) conclusion is similar to Falls's (2009) research that suggests the assignment of non-counseling duties contributes to counselor burnout. Thus, there are similar points of view concerning the effect of the assignment of non-counseling duties on counselor burnout. Moyer (2011) found that the number of hours spent on non-counseling duties was a significant predictor of burnout in all areas (deterioration in personal life, incompetence, work environment, emotional exhaustion, and devaluing clients) among counselors. Moyer's (2011) study implies the assignment of non-counseling duties is a significant predictor of counselor burnout.

5.10 Coping strategies

Coping can be defined as the thoughts and behaviors the individual uses to deal with external and internal demands of situations or events they perceive to be stressful (Folkman et al. 1986). Mindfulness-based interventions (MBIs) have been known to reduce stress and improve well-being (Beshai, McAlpine, Weare, & Kuyken, 2015). Beshai et al.'s (2015) findings suggest that mindfulness-based programs that are customized for the needs of teachers can be effective in reducing stress and boosting mindfulness, wellbeing, and self-compassion.

Kettunen, Vuorimaa, and Vasankari (2015) showed other ways of coping with stress, their finding suggests that use of physical activities can be effective in reducing stress. Yoga, relaxation, and social support have also been used as coping strategies for reducing stress (Ancona & Mendelson, 2014; Salami, 2011). Sánchez-Moreno, Roldán, Gallardo-Peralta, & De Roda (2015) confirmed the importance of informal social support as having a potential buffering effect on burnout. Another aspect of stress coping mechanisms is to evaluate the attributes of a person or job, which inherently have high stress risk levels. Salami (2011) evaluated the relationship of personality traits, social support, and job stress to burnout among higher education teachers. The findings suggested that teachers who demonstrate stronger social support structures were less burned out compared to those who had weak or no social support structures.

5.11 Knowledge Gap

Many researchers have examined factors linked to school counselor burnout (Gnilka, Karpinski, & Smith, 2015; McCarthy et al., 2010; Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016; Mullen & Lambie, 2016; Wilkerson, 2009). However, very few to date have specifically explored the relationship between burnout and the assignment of non-counseling duties among professional school counselors (Bardhoshi, 2012; Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Falls, 2009; Moyer, 2011). Of note, none of these studies on counselor burnout and the assignment of non-counseling duties focused entirely on the perspectives of professional school counselors.

Scholars have not studied how and why professional school counselors believe that the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout, and how counselors manage any burnout or stress they may be experiencing. The goal of this study was to fill the gap by describing and understanding how and why professional school counselors believe the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout among sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors in the United States and how counselors manage any burnout or stress they may be experiencing, by using a single case study design.

6. Research Methodology

A qualitative methodology was used in this study. The qualitative methodology was most appropriate for the study because it allowed for a thorough understanding of the nature of the phenomenon (Baskarada, 2014). To acquire detailed information, open-ended questions that required participants to explain the burnout phenomenon were asked.

Semi-structured interviews, focus group, and self-reflection journals were used to obtain data on the burnout phenomenon. The study made use of a single case study design. Thus, the case for the current study was ASCA. The boundaries for the case include members who have experienced burnout. The unit of analysis was ASCA. The context was ASCA members across the United States in sixth through 12th grade level public schools that have experienced burnout. The phenomenon studied was professional school counselor burnout as linked with non-counseling duties. Organization (ASCA), geographic location (United States), and counselors who were employed in sixth through 12th grade level public schools and who had experienced burnout bound the case. A time of two and a half months in which the study was conducted also bound the case.

The sample consisted of 17 school counselors serving grades six through 12 in public schools in any geographic area of the USA, who were members of the ASCA, who have engaged in non-counseling duties, and who self-reported they had experienced burnout in their positions. The sampling method for this research was a purposive sampling, the researcher applied the homogeneous purposive sampling method. In this study, the focus is on a specific subgroup (professional school counselors) that shares the same characteristic of being sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors encountering burnout due to non-counseling duties.

The instruments used to gather the data included interview guide, focus group protocol, and self-reflection journals. These instruments were reviewed by an expert panel of three with a doctorate degree and practicing in the field. Feedback received from the expert panel review guided the revision of these instruments as required.

To ensure credibility, serious consideration was given to the focus of the study, which helped in the decision on the participants to recruit for the study and the approaches for gathering the data. Participants were also asked to go over the transcripts of the activities in which they were involved to verify if the information they provided was accurately reported and if they reflected their viewpoints. To achieve dependability the study used NVivo, a qualitative data management tool to store and organize data during the data collection and analysis process in this study allowed for the production of a comprehensive trail of decisions made during the process. Dependability was also achieved through the use of different data collection tools.

In the current study, transferability was achieved by providing a clear and distinct description of the phenomenon being studied to allow for an understanding by the readers and enable them to compare context of this study with other contexts while confirmability was achieved in the current study by extensively documenting the data collection and analysis steps in the study.

The interviews were conducted via phone and lasted between 30 and 60 minutes. Participants were required to answer all 11 questions. An audio recorder was used to record the interviews. For the self-reflection journals, participants were given a timeline of one week within which they were required to write down their experience or how they felt whenever they were assigned non-counseling duties.

A focus group was also used to collect data. Out of the 19 potential participants, six who were willing to participate in the focus group were recruited. These six were not part of the individual interviews. This focus group was conducted and moderated through telephone conference.

Data from all sources were collected, organized, and stored in a safe place in a locked cabinet in a private home office. Digital data were stored on a password-protected computer locked in the researcher's private home office.

6.1 Ethical Considerations

The current study complied with the Belmont Report (Belmont Report, 1979) regarding ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research by ensuring that participants were treated with utmost respect and that their rights were protected.

To ensure participants' confidentiality, participants were provided with unique IDs instead of using their names and limited identifying information was obtained from participants. In order to secure site authorization, as a member of the association, the researcher sent an e-mail to the board members requesting permission to recruit participants through the ASCA community and permission to conduct the study with ASCA members was granted.

6.2 Data Analysis

The researcher transcribed raw data from the interviews and focus group. The researcher listened to the recorded interviews and focus group discussion several times while transcribing to ensure that the data were correctly transcribed. The transcribed data were then sent to participants through the mail for member checking to ensure that data were accurately transcribed and that they represented participants' views.

To answer the research questions, data were collected and analyzed using Miles and Huberman's 1994 recommendation for data reduction, data display, conclusion drawing and verification. Organizational tools for the data included tables, charts, and graphics. Data from all sources of evidence were sorted, categorized, and coded to allow for a structured and manageable database.

To successfully link the research questions directly to the data, a set of initial list codes were created by going through the transcript several times to familiarize with the content. The researcher read six random transcripts to identify initial codes that would answer the research questions. Initial coding was done response-by-response to identify relevant codes in each response given by the participant. Key phrases, ideas, explanations, views, and concepts relevant to the research questions were underlined.

A codebook was also developed to help in the data analysis. A definition, inclusion criteria, and exemplary quote were assigned to each theme. The definition explained what the theme meant. The inclusion criteria clarified circumstances when the theme should be used. An exemplary quote was included in the codebook to be used as a reference to guide the coding process. All transcribed transcripts were imported into a folder in NVivo, a qualitative data management software that allows the researcher to conduct the analysis in a methodological manner. Partial responses were not coded. This was done to ensure that the full context of the question and response were captured.

Coding stripes were applied during the coding process to ensure that codes were assigned to both the main question and the complete response. The focus group transcript was coded using the same codebook that was used for the interview transcripts. Codes were assigned to each question and response. Coding stripes were used in the same manner as was used for interview transcripts. The self-reflection journals were also coded using the same codebook that was developed to analyze the interview transcripts. This was done because the codebook was designed in order to answer the research questions. Coding stripes were used in the same manner as was used for interview transcripts.

A theme reference report was generated for each theme and exported to Microsoft Word. The report included text across all the transcripts that were assigned to a specific theme. A reference

percentage is included in the report to indicate the amount of the text that was assigned to a specific theme relative to the entire transcript. Each theme reference report was used to develop a synopsis of the predominant themes communicated by the participants.

7. Research findings and Conclusions

The research questions in this study guided the investigation of how and why the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout among sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors in the United States. Results from the individual interviews, focus group, and participants' self-reflection journal provided an in-depth understanding of the burnout phenomenon. After careful review and analysis of data collected in the study, several themes emerged that addressed the three research questions of the study.

7.1 Themes from interviews

Seven themes were revealed in the data collected from the individual interviews. Table 2, shows themes from the individual interviews data.

Table 2: Themes From Individual Interviews

Themes	Sources Mentioned	Interview Participants Mentioned	Percentage of Interview Participants Mentioned
Having stress related symptoms	12	11	100%
Taking time to recharge	12	11	100%
Overwhelmed with job demands	12	11	100%
Having stress related signs	11	11	100%
Use of social support	9	9	82%

Avoiding stressors	7	7	64%
Lack of control over job demands	7	7	64%

Note. “Sources Mentioned” depicts the number of times theme was mentioned in the data sources and the Interview Participants Mentioned depicts the number of interview participants that discussed the theme.

7.1.1 Themes from focus group

Six participants participated in the focus group discussion and several themes were revealed from the data collected. Table 3, shows themes from the focus group.

Table 3: Themes From Focus Group

Themes	Sources Mentioned	Focus Group Participants Mentioned	Percentage of Focus Group Participants Mentioned
Having stress related symptoms	9	6	100%
Taking time to recharge	7	6	100%
Overwhelmed with job demands	12	6	100%
Having stress related signs	5	4	67%
Use of social support	4	4	67%
Avoiding stressors	4	4	67%

Note. “Sources Mentioned” depicts the number of times theme was mentioned in the data sources and the Interview Participants Mentioned depicts the number of interview participants that discussed the theme.

7.1.2 Themes from self-reflection journals

All 17 participants (11 interview and 6 focus group participants) made a total of 31 journal entries. Five themes were revealed from self-reflection journals in the data collected (Table 4).

Table 4: Themes From Self-Reflection Journals

Themes	Sources Mentioned	Participants	Percentage
Having stress related symptoms	38	17	100%
Taking time to recharge	23	13	76%
Having stress related signs	5	4	24%
Lack of control over job demands	4	4	24%
Overwhelmed with job demands	3	3	18%

Note. Sources Mentioned depicts the number of times theme was mentioned in the data sources and the Participants Mentioned depicts the number of participants that discussed the theme.

7.1.3 Research questions and themes’ alignment to findings and data sources

Table 5: Research Question and Theme Alignment to Findings and Data Sources

Themes	Individual interviews	Focus group	Self-reflection journals
RQ1: How, from the perspectives of sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors, does the assignment of non-counseling duties influence burnout?			
Having stress related symptoms	X	X	X
Having stress related signs	X	X	X
RQ2: Why do sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors believe that the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout?			

Overwhelmed with job demands	X	X	X
Lack of control over job demands	X	-	X
RQ3: How do sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors explain strategies to manage burnout caused by non-counseling duties assigned to them?			
Taking time to recharge	X	X	X
Use of social support	X	X	-
Avoiding stressors	X	X	-

Note. X indicates that theme was revealed in data source. – indicates that theme was absent

7.2 Discussion of Research Questions

RQ1: How, from the perspectives of sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors, does the assignment of non-counseling duties influence burnout?

RQ2: Why do sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors believe that the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout?

These two research questions complement each other; as such, they are discussed together. Respondents discussed the experience (RQ1) and the underlying reason (RQ2) of burnout caused due to the assignment of non-counseling duties as closely connected, where they impact each other. The following section reports professional school counselors' lived experience of burnout. The themes discussed include (i) having stress related symptoms and (ii) having stress related signs.

Theme: *Having stress related symptoms.* All 11 (100%) study participants across all data sources described stress related symptoms, which indicated to them that they were experiencing burnout symptoms. Stress related symptoms were experienced both emotionally and physically. Some participants described emotional symptoms they were having as feelings of being overwhelmed, resentful, anxious, angry, depressed, depleted, emotionally drained, spent, and irritated. Participant 7 emphasized on emotional symptoms in the following quote:

“Because the truth is that mentally it makes me feel exhausted and sometimes it is depressing, I feel depressed at times because I am not able to catch up and the feeling of demoralize, it is just depressing.”

Several participants also described aches and pains as part of the stress related physical symptoms they experience as a result of performing non-counseling duties. Particularly, they mentioned back pain, neck pain, fatigue, and exhaustion. Headaches were a common physical symptom the participants experienced due to burnout.

Theme: Having stress related signs. The theme having stress related signs was revealed across all data sources. Participants acknowledged that their attitudes towards counseling changed as a result of the assignment of non-counseling duties. Some of the participants claimed that as a result of their spending so much time on non-counseling duties, they were no longer excited about their job as counselors and even considered changing jobs or careers. Participants also talked about changes in work performance. Respondents indicated that they no longer perform their job with the same effort as when they initially became counselors. Some of the participants admitted staying away from work as a result as a result of burnout.

Participants in the study described how they reacted or wanted to react when they experience burnout as a result of the assignment of non-counseling duties. These reactions range from staying away from people to becoming easily irritated. Participant 4 put this clearly in the statement below:

Avoidance I would say. To explain that is that when I'm feeling overwhelmed I try to avoid my colleagues. And different things going on when I'm stressed I try to stay in my office and do what I need to do. Other than that, maybe a little aggravation I would say.

Participants also indicated that their personal life suffered in some areas as a result of taking work home to complete or staying longer hours at work. This imbalance, they suggested, caused them a lot of distress. Participants in Bardhoshi et al.'s (2014) study suggested that the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout because of the adverse personal and professional effects from performing them. Participants in this current study have indicated that the frequent assignment of non-counseling duties affects counselors in many ways both personally and professionally. According to the participants, their initial reason for taking up the counseling profession was to help students, but with the constant assignment of non-counseling duties, they are being pulled away from the kids. Participants believed constant assignment of non-counseling duties takes away from time needed to service the kids and causes professional counselors to lose excitement about their jobs. This has led several participants to consider changing jobs or careers.

Participants believed they did not perform their job with the same effort they had when they initially became counselors because of the assignment of non-counseling duties and the burnout counselors experience as a result. Several of the participants talked about calling off from work,

or at least harboring the thought of not going in to work, to avoid being assigned non-counseling duties that contributed to burnout. These findings are in line with Maslach and Jackson's (1981) definition of burnout as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.

Theme: Overwhelmed with job demands. One hundred percent of both the interview and focus group participants believe that they are overwhelmed with job demands as a result of the assignment of non-counseling duties, which according to them, increases their workload. Eighteen percent of the journal entries indicated this belief as well. The responses from participants are in line with findings of prior studies and established that assigning non-counseling duties to professional school counselors increases counselors' workload and in turn influences burnout. Prior studies show that school counselors who perceived to be experiencing greater stress also reported more work demands like additional paperwork, coordination of large scale testing and caseloads as compared to counselors who perceived to be experiencing less stress (McCarthy et al., 2010; Mullen, Blount, Lambie, & Chae, 2017).

From several of the participants' perspectives, a counselor's job is very demanding and counselors need 100% of their time to be able to do their jobs effectively. This complements the findings by Edwards, Grace, and King (2014) which suggested that one of the barriers counselors experience in the course of carrying out their duties is not being able to use 100% of their time in counseling activities. Tied to this perspective from the participants is their belief that non-counseling duties divert attention away from counseling duties, even during critical times of student need. Non-counseling duties compromised the counselors' duties and seemed to take precedence over counseling duties.

The research findings show that, most of non-counseling duties included menial tasks like bus duty, record keeping, hall monitoring and test administrator, and they are viewed by counselors as time-consuming; as a result, counselors often have to work extended hours to complete their workload of counseling and non-counseling duties or even have to take work home. Findings from prior studies (DeMato & Curcio, 2004; Moyer, 2011) suggested that spending extended time doing non-counseling duties contribute to counselor burnout. Thus, findings from the current study parallel the findings on previous findings on the assignment of non-counseling duties and counselor burnout.

Theme: Lack of control over job demands and powerlessness. Several participants from the current study described how they felt defeated and powerless in controlling or preventing the non-counseling duties that they were assigned. Holman and Grubbs (2018) imply that counselors perceive they experience burnout because they lack control over the assignment of non-counseling duties. This is supported by JDCS model of work stress which suggests that stress

develops as a result of the interaction between the perception of work demands, perception of control, and the perception of the degree of support received (Devereux et al., 2009).

RQ3: How do sixth through 12th grade level professional school counselors explain strategies to manage burnout caused by non-counseling duties assigned to them?

Answers to this question were found in all three data sources. Strategies mentioned by participants during the course of the interviews and focus groups were similar to those used in the self-reflection journals to manage their feelings while performing non-counseling activities. Three main themes emerged from the data collected. The themes include (i) taking time to recharge, (ii) use of social support, and (iii) avoiding stressors. Participants described strategies they use to manage burnout that they were experiencing. Participants claimed the social support they received from others helped them in implementing burnout management strategies. Other strategies included taking breaks to recharge which included taking a walk, mental exercises, physical activities, spiritual activities, meditation, yoga, breathing exercises, and prayer. Findings by Salahi et al. (2014) also substantiate these strategies employed by participants in this study. Participants in Salahi et al.'s 2014 study were reported to have used physical exercise, self-talking, relaxation, and support from others to cope with burnout.

As part of the avoiding stressors strategy, several of the participants talked about not taking work home as a tactic to deal with burnout. A few of the participants in this study talked about speaking up for themselves and learning to say "no" when assigned non-counseling duties as a way of preventing burnout from performing non-counseling duties. Participants also discussed having to explain their workload to administrators upon the assignment of non-counseling duties or proactively speaking with the principal or assistant principal about their job duties to prevent a recurring situation for the next school year. One participant even talked about helping the principal identify ways that other people could help with these non-counseling duties. There was also a suggestion for ASCA to advocate on counselors' behalf to prevent excessive assignments of non-counseling duties.

7.3 Significance of findings

An analysis of data collected from the individual interviews, focus group, and self-reflection journals answered the research questions and provided an in-depth understanding of the burnout phenomenon. While there have been a few studies on counselor burnout (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Holman et al., 2018; Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016), there is no known study on the assignment of non-counseling duties and counselor's burnout using a qualitative single case study. Findings from this qualitative single case study contributed to filling the gap in literature on the issue of the assignment of non-counseling duties and counselor burnout. The findings also advanced

scientific knowledge by providing a detailed and an in-depth understanding of how and why professional school counselors believe the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout.

7.4 Implications

The data collected in this study provide an explanation on how and why the assignment of non-counseling duties influences burnout among professional school counselors. There are several implications important for the advancement of scientific knowledge as well as for counselor burnout and how school administrators assign duties to counselors. Through qualitative inquiry, this study provides tangible examples of the type of non-counseling duties, their impact, and the burnout experienced.

7.4.1 Theoretical implications

The theoretical lens for this study employed a confluence of Biddle's (1986) role theory, work stress theories, and burnout theory. The application of Biddle's (1986) role theory to ascertain the manner in which a professional understands their role in their profession allows for a deeper look at the way the person understands their personal as well as external expectations on how the job is to be performed. This was evident in this study as was divulged by participants during the focus group that administrators do not seem to know what the role of the professional school counselor is as their job description and the tasks they are assigned continued to change from time to time. Too much time spent in non-counseling duties may create a role conflict between counseling and non-counseling assignments, roles, and objectives.

Job demands-control-support (JDACS) model (Dewe et al., 2012) was the appropriate model for the current study. JDACS suggests that stress develops as a result of the interaction between the perception of work demands, perception of control, and the perception of the degree of support received (Devereux et al., 2009). The current study revealed that professional school counselors believe that a counselor's caseload is demanding, since their caseloads often consist of hundreds of students. They are pulled from time to time to do other jobs, and they receive little or no support from the administration.

The current study used the burnout theory as framework to conceptualize issues of counselor burnout and the assignment of non-counseling duties. Data collected from the current study revealed that professional school counselors experienced all three dimensions of burnout. Several of the participants acknowledged being emotionally exhausted and feeling defeated and drained. Some of them discussed how they became detached and withdrawn as a result of burnout. Some of the participants also discussed how they began to doubt their job efficiency.

7.4.2 Practical implications

This section contains a discussion and suggestions based on the following categories: implications for professional school counselors, implications for school administrators, and implications for counselor educators.

Implications for professional school counselors

The findings from this study indicated that professional school counselors experience burnout when assigned non-counseling duties. To avoid high levels of burnout, Demerouti (2015) suggest that individuals use strategies that would allow them to change or adjust to their work as burnout experiences are usually associated to work. Results of this study supported the need for professional school counselors to communicate to the administrator what their role according to ASCA entails and also highlight the benefits of their program to the administrator.

Professional school counselors constantly advocate for their students. They should also use the same skills to advocate for themselves regarding the constant assignment of non-counseling duties. School counselors should be able to effectively communicate their roles and responsibilities to the principal. Cigrand et al. (2015) suggested that the role of the professional school counselor can be established by discussing with the administrator at the beginning of each school year and presenting to the administrator, a detailed counselor's tasks expectations.

Implications for school administrators

Literature indicated that the greatest barrier to the implementation of counseling programs and interventions by counselors is the inability of counselors to use 100% of their time in implementing counseling programs and interventions (Edwards et al., 2014). This was also found to be the case in the current study as participants discussed their lack of control over their job demands and attributed this as a reason for their burnout. Therefore, administrators should try to understand the appropriate counseling roles as defined by ASCA and the right number of hours counselors should spend working with students. ASCA could also offer opportunities for professional development for school administrators and school district directors of school counseling. In addition, ASCA could develop standardized guidelines for assigning roles to school counselors for administrators.

Implications for counselor educators

Findings from the current study show that professional school counselors experience burnout as a result of the assignment of non-counseling duties. The practical implication of this finding is

that educators should inform counselors of the different formal and informal assessment measures available to them that will help them in maintaining their wellness.

Findings from the study also show that professional school counselors believe they are powerless in controlling or preventing the non-counseling duties they are assigned. The implication of this findings is that counselors should be trained on advocacy, not only on advocacy for the students they service but also on how to advocate for themselves to have a say in the tasks they are assigned and in how to perform their duties.

7.4.3 Future implications

This study yielded results that provided new insight into the issue of counselor burnout and the assignment of non-counseling duties. In addition, the study shed some light on the strategies professional school counselors used to cope with burnout brought on by the assignment of non-counseling duties. However, the study did not provide a point of comparison with professional school counselors serving grades K-5. It is therefore not known if professional school counselors in grades K-5 experience burnout differently from professional school counselors used in the current study. The study also provided findings for a sample of professional school counselors who are members of ASCA. It is likely that experiences of professional school counselors who are not members of ASCA may differ from the experiences of those who are members. It is also likely that a different sample may employ different strategies in coping with burnout experienced as a result of the assignment of non-counseling duties. These new insights offer several future directions for research in this topic. The current study could therefore be replicated using a different sample.

Finally, the study utilized a pre-data questionnaire to determine participation eligibility. The questionnaire only gathered limited information regarding the participants. It would therefore be of some importance to collect information about the age of participant, the number of students in their caseload, and whether or not they have any health impairment. Pieces of information like these may have yielded different findings or shed more light on the findings.

7.5 Strengths and weaknesses of the study

One of the strengths of this study is the use of qualitative research which allowed for a deeper, richer explanation, and understanding of the mental and emotional as well as physical toll school counselors experience in their roles. One other strength of this study is the use of the case study design. The case study design helped to increase the reliability of the research findings, allowed for in-depth analysis to gain greater insight into the burnout phenomenon, and helped strengthen the validity of the study (Yin, 2014). Another strength of the study is in the use of the purposive

sampling. Through a purposive sampling, a greater depth of information was obtained using a smaller number of carefully selected cases (Patton, 2015)

The use of a case study design means that the findings may only reflect the perceptions of professional school counselors who are members of ASCA. Another weakness surrounds the researcher's inexperience with qualitative research and the thematic analysis process in particular. Additionally, the researcher may not fully explain or understand the thoughts and feelings of study participants despite taking the extra measure of giving the transcribed data to participants for member checking.

7.6 Recommendations for future research: Research on the assignment of non-counseling duties and counselor burnout is relatively limited. To expand the available knowledge base, several factors from this study could be examined in future research studies. Following are some recommendations for future research.

1. The first recommendation based on the findings of this study is for replication of this study with a population of counselors who do not belong to any professional bodies as this group of counselors may have different experiences.
2. The current study used the qualitative single case study design; future design should use a qualitative multiple case study design to explore counselor burnout and the assignment of non-counseling duties.
3. This study also recruited participants who are employed in the middle and high schools in the United States. A new study can enlarge the scope of participation by involving counselors in the elementary schools as well.
4. A new study can replicate the current study using counselors from charter and private schools only.
5. Further research may also be conducted to explore how professional school counselors can better limit the amount of non-counseling activities they are assigned to limit the level of burnout they may experience.
6. A new study may factor in culture to find out the impact, if any, differences in culture may have on the outcome of the study.

7.7 Recommendations for future practice. In addition to the recommended future research, there are several recommendations for practice that were identified in this study. Based on research findings, it is recommended that professional school counselors practice self-care to help them cope or manage burnout. School administrators may also consider including yoga or

mindfulness during professional development program as a part of employee wellness training for the alleviation and prevention of burnout.

Consistent with other studies (McCarthy et al., 2010; Mullen, Blount et al., 2017), this study also found that professional school counselors experience burnout because the assignment of non-counseling duties increases their workload and cause them to have extended work hours. It is therefore recommended that administrators use the findings to make informed decisions regarding the assignment of appropriate duties to professional school counselors and adhere to the right number of hours professional school counselors should spend working with the students.

Participants also believed high work demand and their lack of control over the assignment of non-counseling duties influences counselor burnout. This finding is supported by Holman and Grubbs, 2018, McCormack et al., 2018 and Steel et al., 2015. Based on this finding, it is recommended that the role and the responsibilities of the professional school counselor should be communicated clearly between the administrator and the professional school counselor and the professional school counselor should be given some control over duties to be performed. Along with this, school administrators need to stay connected with the implications of these non-counseling duties in terms of the workload for professional school counselors.

The current study highlighted the prevalence of the assignment of non-counseling duties to professional school counselors and yielded insights into professional school counselors' perspectives on how and why the assignment of non-counseling duties influence burnout among professional school counselors serving grades six through 12 in the United States. The significance of the results to future research may lie with the strategies for reducing and preventing counselor burnout due to the assignment of non-counseling duties among professional school counselors.

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