

CIVIL SERVANTS' INTENTION IN SEEKING COUNSELLING SERVICES

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INTRODUCTION

Moving along with the trend of globalization, mental illness has become a worldwide issue. To date, there are more than 450 million people in the world suffering from mental illness (Sheri & Town, 2015). According to Sheri and Town (2015), 1 in 5 Malaysians are suffering from psychological disorders. Correspondingly, a rise in suicide rate from 5.4 per 100,000 populations in 2010 to 5.8 per 100,000 populations in 2015 has been witnessed in Malaysia (The Statistics Portal, 2018).

According to Calcia, Bonsall, Bloomfield, Selvaraj, Barichello and Howes (2016), stress is the major cause for mental health problems. This is especially true and obvious among the workforce (Bilal, Ali, Naim, Ali and Ashmat, 2014). There are 53% of employees reporting that they are facing more stress, while 59% say their jobs are the cause of stress (The Isosceles Group, 2017). In particular, Malaysia civil servants are one of the most stressed groups because they need to be multi-tasking in their works (Bilal et al., 2014).

One way to tackle this issue is through seeking professional psychological treatment, such as counselling service (Bower, Knowles, Coventry & Rowland, 2011; Prins, Verhaak, Bensing & Meer, 2008). However, many Malaysians are either reluctant or not consider seeking counselling helps to solve their psychological relevant and mental health issues. According to Bavani, Mohan and Sorooshian (2012), the concept of counselling is not yet widely accepted by Malaysian society. People are afraid of prejudice by others due to the insufficient of knowledge and understanding about counselling service.

Surprisingly, scant research has been done to investigate the issue. Although previous studies have investigated factors influencing counselling seeking intention, majority of them utilized students as their sample (Bohon, Cotter, Kravitz, Cello & Fernandez y Garcia, 2016; Chan, Yeoh, & Migin, 2016; Givens & Tjia, 2002). Therefore, their result cannot be generalized into the working adult context. In view that Theory of Planned Behavior by Ajzen (1991) has been well-known for understand consumer decision making, thus this study aims to look into the counselling seeking phenomenon through three factors exhibited by Theory of Planned Behavior, which are attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, and intention.

LITERATURE REVIEW

America Counselling Association (ACA) defined counselling as "an application of mental health, psychological or human development principles, through cognitive, affective, behavioral or systemic intervention strategies, that address wellness, personal growth, or career development, as well as pathology" (King & Stretch, 2013). Counselling is a service process which aim to help people aware of their own problems and acquire suitable methods in managing personal problems, especially those pertinent to psychology and mental (Sevinc, Tasci & Demir, 2012).

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Currently, the use of counselling services in Malaysia is very much under-utilized by Malaysians, especially the civil servants who are reported to be a significantly stressed population (Bilal et al., 2014; Chan et al., 2016; Jasmani & Abdul Jumaat, 2011; Workplace Wellness Assessment Malaysia, 2017; Wong, Wong, Tam & Bonn, 2018). According to Wright (2014), counselling can be useful to help individuals in learning different strategies and techniques for stress management. In particular, research done by Briner (1997) and Hill (2000) has confirmed the effectiveness of counselling service in work-related stress context.

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) has been widely applied in counselling context. Among the important factors proposed in Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) included, intention, attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control. Intention means the desire of individuals to act or do something in the future (Chan et al., 2016). Attitude is referred as an individual's assessment of the future outcome of whether it is positive or negative for he/she to carry out certain behavioral (Fishbein & Ajzen 1975). Subjective norm is the social pressure perceived by an individual, referring to the necessity for he/she to conduct a certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Perceived behavioral control refers to the perception of an individual whether it is easy or difficult for him/her to perform certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Previous study such as, Abamecha, Godesso and Girma (2013) have used Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to predict the intention to involved in Voluntary HIV Counselling and Testing (VCT) among 336 health professionals in Jimma zone, Ethiopia. They found that attitude, subjective norm, and perceived behavioral control are significant predictors the intention. Similar studies have confirmed the finding (e.g. Kakoko, Åstrøm, Lugoe, & Lie, 2006; Leong, Mohammad Shatar, Mohd Ibrani Shahrimin, & Leow, 2015; Mtenga, Exavery, Kakoko, & Geubbels, 2015). However, the level of counselling service seeking intention among Malaysia civil servant is still unknown. Thus, there posed a gap for this study to examine the level of civil servants' intention to seek counselling services. Meanwhile, three factors, namely the level of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control in Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) are included to provide a more comprehensive view in this study.

METHODOLOGY

The data was collected among the civil servants who work in Putrajaya. This study used a simple random sampling method in selecting respondents. Respondents from four ministries located at Putrajaya were approached, and self-administrative questionnaires were administered face-to-face with the help of enumerators from ministry. The minimum sample size was 382, calculated using table of sample size determination by Krejcie and Morgan (1970). A total of 450 questionnaires were distributed but 54 were discarded due to incomplete answers, resulting in 396 useable responses.

The measurement for attitude and subjective norm toward counselling services consisted of 10 and 7 items respectively which adapted from Mackenzie, Knox, Gekoski and Macaulay (2004). Perceived behavioral control was measured using 7 items adapted from Mackenzie et al. (2004) and Conner, Sheeran, Norman and Armitage (2000). 7 items adapted from Chan et al. (2016) were used to measure intention. All the items were measured using seven point Likert scale ranging from "1" = Strongly disagree" to "7" = "Strongly agree". Construct reliability for all the factors in this study were above 0.7, above the acceptable threshold suggested by Nunnally (1967).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Demographic Characteristic of Respondents

The demographic characteristics of respondents were illustrated in Table 1. The data shows that there are slightly more than two-third of the respondents (71.0%) are female and 29.0 percent are male. The big percentage differences between male and female may due to the fact that there are more female employees in the public sector than male (Public Service Department, 2018). The distribution of respondents' age groups is approximately the same except for group of 20 to 24 years old (14.6%) which presents the least number of respondents because most individuals within this age group are still in the age of studying.

Besides, there are 95.5 percent of Malay respondents, 2.0 percent of Indian, 1.5 percent of Chinese and 1.0 percent of respondents from other ethnic groups. The result is sensible as Malays are the largest ethnic in Malaysia and majority of them serve in public sector. In term of education level, most of the respondents possess diploma degree (35.9%) and SPM degree (31.2%). More than half of them earn between RM 1001 and RM 3000 monthly. Only 1.3 percent of respondents earn RM 7001 and above monthly.

Counselling Services Usage Pattern

Table 1 has shown that most of the important people to respondents never use counselling services (61.6%). Experience of important people to respondents in using counselling services may relate to respondents' experience in using counselling service. Correspondingly, it has been shown that majority of respondents (82.2%) have never use counselling services. Among those who have used counselling service, family issue (36.8%) appears to be the most discussed issues of respondents, followed by career issue (25.0%) and relationships issue (14.7%). Some other issues discussed in counselling service are related to spirituality, personality, depression and education.

Table 1:
Demographic Characteristics and Counseling Services Usage Pattern of Respondents (n = 396)

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	115	29.0
Female	281	71.0
Age Group		
20-24	58	14.6
25-29	81	20.5
30-34	86	21.7
35-40	85	21.5
41 and above	86	21.7

Ethnic		
Malay	378	95.5
Chinese	6	1.5
India	8	2.0
Others	4	1.0
Education Level		
Secondary school	124	31.2
Diploma	142	35.9
Degree	107	27.0
Masters	23	5.8
Doctor of Philosophy	-	-
Income Group		
RM 1001 – RM 3000	266	67.2
RM 3001 – RM 5000	103	26.0
RM 5001 – RM 7000	22	5.6
RM 7001 and above	5	1.3
Experience using counselling services		
Yes	68	17.2
No	328	82.2
Issues discussed when using counseling services (n = 68)		
Family	25	36.8
Career	17	25.0
Relationship	10	14.7
Personality	4	5.9
Depression	4	5.9
Education	4	5.9
Spirituality	4	5.9
The experience of surrounding people using counseling services		
Yes	152	38.4
No	244	61.6

Level of Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)'s Factors

The degree of the attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control and intention in the context of the counselling services has been examined. Each factor was categorized into three levels: low, moderate and high.

Attitude

Table 2 shows the respondents' level of attitude in the context of counselling services. Based on the result, almost all the respondents (93.7%) hold a neutral level of attitude towards counselling services. There are 5.1 percent of respondents has low level of attitude and only 1.3 percent of respondents has high level of attitude with the counselling services. Therefore, it is concluded that there were neutral level of attitude among civil servants with the counselling services. Drawing on Mehrley and McCroskey (1970), an individual will initially holds a relatively neutral attitude toward a certain things. While, Chong, Mohamad and Er (2013) had stated that mental health services is regarded as a young industry in Malaysia and the knowledge of mental health service is low, explaining the reason civil servants hold neutral attitude toward counselling services.

Subjective Norms

Based on Table 2, slightly more than two-third of the respondents (66.4%) has moderate level in subjective norm and the remaining 33.6 percent of respondents has low level in subjective norms. Hence, it can be speculated that the most of the civil servants were not influenced very much by the opinions from important people surrounding them. This may be due to the reason that adult tending to defend their autonomy, mitigating the influence of opinions from their surrounding people (Rickwood, Deane & Wilson, 2007).

Perceived Behavioral Control

As shown in Table 2, for perceived behavioral control, slightly more than half of the respondents (50.3%) were having low level of perceived behavioral control the rest were having moderate level of the perceived behavioral control in the counselling service context. None of the respondents indicated high level of perceived behavioral control regarding the use of counselling services. This shows that majority of respondents are either perceived moderately difficult or very difficult in using/seeking for counselling service. To explain, Burton and Turrell (2000) has pointed out that "lack of time" is one of the most commonly reported barriers for working adults to involve in certain activities.

Intention

The level of civil servants' intention to use counselling services has been shown in Table 2. Based on the result, there are only one-third of the respondents have moderate level of intention with the counselling service. The remaining two-third of the respondents has low level of intention to use counselling services. Therefore, it is implied that most of the respondents are not interested to use counselling service in solving their psychological related problems. Compared to the study of Chan et al. (2016) which used student sample, this study found that civil servants demonstrate lower level of intention to use counselling services. This may be due to that adults are more sensitive to stigma related to mental health problem and have more social factors to be considered in using counselling services, in line with Chen and Kok (2015) and Mackenzie et al. (2006) who proposed social stigma as the main barrier for counselling service use.

Table 2:
Level of Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)'s Factors

Level	LOW	MODERATE	HIGH
Attitude	1.3%	93.7%	5.1%
Subjective Norms	66.4%	33.6%	-
Perceived Behavioral Control	50.3%	49.7%	-
Intention	67.7%	32.3%	-

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the result shows that civil servants have neutral level of attitude with the counselling services. This indicated that civil servants have a neutral attitude with counselling service and it may be due to lack of understanding with the concept of counselling services. Besides, the result also discovered low to moderate level of subjective norm, reflecting that civil servants are less likely to be influenced by opinions from important people surrounding them regarding the use of counselling services. Next, the study also found low to moderate level of perceived behavioral control and intention to use counselling service among the civil servants. This indicated that civil servants perceive counselling service to be difficult to access which may be due to many factors, such as money, time, and location. Also, civil servants are unlikely to use counselling service when they face psychological problems. Taking into consideration the fact of low perceived behavioral control, it can be assumed that low intention may be influenced by the perceived behavioral control. Thus, this study provides implication for both consumers and service providers (counselor) in enhancing their understanding and knowledge regarding the level of attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, and intention towards the use of counselling service among civil servants.

Along with the result, service providers may carry out several approaches to increase the level of attitude among civil servants with counselling services. For example, service providers or government agencies may organize awareness campaign and other kind of engagement programs to promote counselling service, thereby not only creating awareness and understanding towards counselling service but also eliminating the prejudice and bias towards the service. Moreover, in view that consumer perceive difficult to access counselling service and have low intention to use counselling service, more resources should be provided, such as subsidize consultation fee for counselling services, prolong office hours of counselling services, and provide detailed information through a wider range of communication channels. Future research should investigate the influencing factors in counselling services seeking intention among Malaysia civil servants sample since there is a lack of relevant study conducted in Malaysia.

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