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The use of online text based technologies as a medium for employee counselling: perceptions of online counsellors

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THE USE OF ONLINE TEXT BASED TECHNOLOGIES AS A MEDIUM FOR EMPLOYEE COUNSELLING: PERCEPTIONS OF ONLINE COUNSELLORS

A research report presented to

The Department of Social Work

School of Human and Community Development

Faculty of Humanities

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In partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree Master of

Arts by coursework and research report in the field of Occupational Social Work

by

PRECIOUS P. S. MAGOGODI

August 2017

DECLARATION

I acknowledge that this report is my own unaided work, and that I have given full acknowledgement to the sources utilised.

Name: Precious Magogodi

Signature: 

Date: 17 August 2017

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b) My family, my Sonshines, Warona and Oarena… your love and laughter ignite my every step
c) To loveLife, for an awesome work space enabling my professional growth
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e) Thank you to my study partner sisters, Maki and Maphuti you are simply the best!
f) A special thank you to SADAG staff who participated in this study and to management for allowing me to conduct the study in their organisation.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this research report to the resilient spirit of women who continue to rise, to thrive despite

the odds being stacked against them,

to women grounded in their personal power;

in You,

I found my inspiration and stepped into My own personal power☺

ABSTRACT

Technology is ubiquitous and presents an opportunity for the psychosocial profession to explore and expand the platforms through which counselling and support for employees is offered. The aim of the research study was to explore the perceptions of counsellors regarding the use of online text technologies as a medium for intervention in the workplace environment. Mobile technology globally and in South Africa is growing rapidly, people are connected to information and services more than ever before. More services are being offered and marketed through the use of online technology mediums; these include professional services for mental wellbeing counselling support. Recognising that this is a relatively new field of study, it is valuable to gain insight from experienced counsellors regarding the use of online text based technologies for counselling specifically for workplace environments. Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is used as a framework that it explains how the object of study being text based counselling technologies are used currently characterised by highly mobile social media use. This study employed a qualitative approach and was contextualised to a specific organisation, the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) because it offers online counselling interventions which include specific programmes for workplace environments on mental health. Purposive sampling was used to select a total of eight counsellors with experience using online text based mediums and two key informants representing management of the organisation. Individual face-to-face interviews were conducted using two semi- structured interview schedules. Thematic content analysis was used for interpretation of the data. The findings show that counsellors do not prefer to use text based online counselling technologies for serious mental health issues. Results indicate that though online text based technologies are relevant as part of employee wellness services in the workplace, the platforms are more suitable for containment, information and referral purposes. Recommendations from the study are for further research to inform standards of practise and formalised and structured training is required for counsellors.

Key words: Online text based counselling, Face-to-face counselling, Mental Health, Synchronous, Asynchronous counselling, Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

ACA: American Counselling Association

CHAT: Cultural Historical Activity Theory

EHWP: Employee Health and Wellness programme

ICAS: Independent Counselling and Advisory Services

IM: Instant Messaging

SADAG: South African Depression and Anxiety Group

UK: United Kingdom

UNAIDS: Joint United Nations Programme on HIV and AIDS United Nations

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction to the study

This study looks at the perceptions of counsellors regarding the use of text based counselling technologies as intervention medium for employee counselling. Recognising that this is a relatively new field of study, it was valuable to gain insight from counsellors who have experience with online technologies for counselling working with mental health. This has offered rich insight in understanding the use of online technologies for workplace wellness programmes, training and preparedness of practitioners in adapting practise for relevance with technological advances.

1.2 Statement Problem and Rationale

The traditional way of face-to-face counselling is no longer the only option for effective interventions of the helping process within the workplace (McLeod, 2008). The emergent culture of mobile texting, online surfing and socialising on social network spaces (Online Safety, 2008) suggests that to remain relevant with the evolving communication behaviours and technological advances, counselling interventions need to be able to adapt to the different mediums used for communication. Innovations in the use of online counselling have been used in the global north but this practise is new in South Africa and has not gained popularity for interventions in workplace settings as compared to other parts of the world (Wright, 2002).

This study was conducted with counsellors working at the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) which is a non-profit organisation specialising in offering mental health programmes and services since 1995 for different age groups including teens and adults (C. Chambers, personal conversation, March 17, 2015). The organisation was selected as a case study because their services are offered through different intervention mediums which include face-to-face support group interventions, Employee Assistance Programmes for workplace environments and a 24/7 call centre for telephonic counselling. Of particular interest to this study, with the increasing need for mental health services, SADAG has recently added text based counselling via email and popular social media chat applications such as Facebook and twitter for information. Other non-profit organisations such as loveLife, Lifeline and Childline have also introduced text based counselling as a result of increased communication via mobile chat based platforms however these other organisations only focus on children and youth issues

The concern around this growing trend of introducing text based counselling technologies for mental health interventions is the limited understanding; and consequently research needs to be conducted to comprehend the views of counsellors on their experiences in adapting to using online mediating technologies. The curriculum and training of professional counsellors at universities is primarily focused on traditional face-to-face method of counselling with limited or no attention to other online communication mediums. Albeit so, Wood and Griffiths (2007) highlight the problem with many different types of online therapy concerning their quality and the fact that most of these therapy mediums operate within self-regulated settings. Lagos (as cited in Wood & Griffiths, 2007) asserts that any new developments in online therapy need to be researched for their efficacy, sensitivity and therapeutic potential. It is thus of importance for this study to determine the readiness and preparedness of counsellors in using online mediated platforms for their interventions within the workplace.

According to Coles (2003) workplace counsellors need to know how to deliver effective help for employees and the importance of evaluating their interventions and the value within workplace environments. In this regard, it becomes imperative for occupational social work practitioners to review employee counselling services for their relevance to the needs of the new generations within the workplace. These generations are more techno savvy, are globally connected and more tolerant of diverse cultures (Grail Research, 2011). Their work and personal lives exist in virtual spaces that are not defined by geographic boundaries.

This study presents the perceptions of counsellors regarding the use of text based counselling technologies as intervention medium for employee counselling.

1.3 Research Question

This is a qualitative study and the researcher intended to gain insight and understanding on views of counsellors with experience using online text based counselling technologies as a medium for workplace interventions. The main research question in a qualitative study is defined as "statement about what the researcher wants to find out and stem directly from the problem perceived or experienced" (Holloway & Wheeler as cited in Alpaslan, 2012, p.8). As such for the purpose of this study, the research question was; what are the perceptions of counsellors regarding the use of online text based technologies as a counselling medium within the workplace?

1.4 Primary aim of the study

The primary aim was to explore perceptions of online counsellors using online text based technologies as counselling medium for workplace interventions.

Secondary objectives of the study

Secondary objectives entail the process that the research undertook to achieve the aim as outlined earlier. They are as follows:

- To explore experiences of online counsellors regarding the use of online text mediated workplace interventions
- To investigate tensions and constraining factors regarding the use of online technology mediated platforms
- To explore the skills used by online counsellors when conducting counselling for workplace interventions
- To investigate affordances of using text based technologies as a medium of work place intervention.
- To discover ethical considerations in conducting online text based mediums for workplace interventions.

1.5 Research Methodology

The study used a qualitative approach which was explorative in nature to produce detailed information so as to gain rich insight on counsellor perception on the use of online text based technology for therapeutic interventions. Newton (2012) says qualitative research approach is not a predetermined process; it thus seeks insight to better understand what is being studied. According to Ritchie, Spencer, Bryman and Burgers (1994), "qualitative methodology yields rich, in-depth and complete data because of the close involvement of the researcher in the process" (Ritchie et al, 1994: p.87). This approach works well within Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) framework and it explains how the object of study being text based counselling technologies are used in the current dispensation characterized by high mobile social media use.

A case study research design was used because it is explorative and allows for in-depth analysis of a specific captive system. As such, the study was conducted with online counsellors working

with SADAG. The organisation was specifically selected as a case study because it offers employee wellness programmes including use of online text mediated platforms to workplace environments. Other organisations specializing on employee well programmes have limited their service offerings to face to face and telephonic mediums. As such, SADAG as a case study allowed the researcher to explore a phenomenon within its context to enable the multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood (Braxter & Jack, 2008).

1.6 Organisation of the Report

The report is organised as follows;

Chapter 1 introduces the topic of the study, statement of the problem and rationale of the study. The chapter also outlines the primary aim as well as the secondary objectives of the study, then concludes with briefly describing the research methodology employed.

In Chapter 2, the report presented a review of literature that gives insight into the broad context in which technology has been used as a medium for therapeutic interventions. The chapter begins by discussing online text based counselling globally as a new phenomenon and how it keeps developing as influenced by mobile and social media technology advancements. The chapter moves on to discuss the state of mental health in the workplace and the interventions employed to support employees. It presents some of the challenges experienced by employees and the impact on productivity in the workplace. It further looks at the utilisation of Employee Assistance Programmes by employees and the mediums used to access the support services offered. Following from this, the chapter examines the communication intricacies for counsellors involved in offering counselling via online mediums. The skills, training and preparedness of the counselling profession within the South African context for text based support mediums in the workplace. The chapter explores the ethical issues for consideration and implications involved. In this chapter Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) is used as a framework because it explains how the object of study being text based counselling technologies are used in the current dispensation characterized by high mobile social media use.

Chapter 3 discusses the research design and methodology utilised in this study. This includes discussions on the research paradigm utilised, the research population and sampling methods employed, the data collection methods used, the steps followed in analysing the data and the

limitations and delimitations of the research design and methodology. The chapter concludes by specifying ethical considerations that guided the study.

Chapter 4 is the presentation and discussion of the findings of the study. Themes that emerged from the data analysis are presented and discussed in detail under the main objectives of the study.

Finally, in *Chapter 5*, a summary of the key findings is discussed regarding the use of online text mediated interventions by counsellors. The findings show that counsellors do not prefer to use text based online counselling technologies for serious mental health issues. The results indicate that though online text based technologies are relevant as part of employee wellness services in the workplace, the platforms are more suitable for containment, information and referral purposes. The chapter concludes by pointing out recommendations for future research in this area.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This section begins with the broad context in which technology has been used as a medium for therapeutic interventions for mental health in the workplace. The concept of online text based counselling technologies is referenced using findings from similar international and local research studies. It points out to the arguments presented by different scholars and the concerns raised on using online text based counselling mediums. It mainly explores the preparedness of professional counsellors for using online mediums of intervention in dealing with mental health issues presented within the workplace along with ethical considerations of the profession. The section concludes with presenting Cultural Historical Activity (CHAT) theory as the theoretical frameworks used to guide the study.

2.2 Online counselling

Online text based counselling is defined as provision of counselling using communication over the internet which includes the use of email or chat based applications (Wright, 2002; Jones & Stokes, 2008). This does not include online audio and video links that already exists in the United States. Online text based counselling is relatively new with limited studies done in the United Kingdom to reference from (Wright, 2002). The use of technology in therapy was first experimented with in the 1970's in the UK with computer programmes that simulated person centred therapies (Hanley & Reynolds, 2009). These researchers further say that the recent innovations in computerised cognitive behaviour therapy for treatment of mild to moderate depression and phobias, has become a recent innovation in the therapeutic world which has attracted much attention in research (Kaltenthaler, et al., 2004; Marks et al.as cited in Hanley & Reynolds, 2009).

The advancements in technology continue to present a variety of channels through which communication occurs and presents an opportunity for the psychosocial profession to explore and expand the platforms through which counselling support for employees is offered. Wright (2002) refers to published work by a clinical psychologist, Alfred Lange based in Amsterdam issued case studies of work with patients using designed writing to overcome trauma and symptoms of post-traumatic stress (Lange, as cited in Wright, 2002). He set up what he termed

"interapy", which refers to a website that provided online mediated communication between research participants and therapist. The findings indicated positive outcomes, though it was in a controlled environment (Lange et al. as cited in Wright, 2002). In this regard text based counselling is likened to narrative therapy for its success as a therapeutic medium. Journal therapy has evolved into different forms of successful self-help innovative therapies (Wright, 2002).

Research conducted by South Africa Social Media Landscape (2014) indicates that internet and mobile technology is growing rapidly, people are connected to information and services more than ever before. In 2007, National Statistics in the UK noted a significant increase of 61% of households with access to the internet (Hanley & Reynolds, 2009). Other studies cited indicated that 60% of the internet users preferred to seek help online for mental health problems (Mori Poll, as cited in Hanley & Reynolds, 2009). Thus indicating the demand for psychosocial support through online mediums by employees.

Maree (2013) argues that the needs of the 21st century worker have changed as influenced by changes in the workplace. She says workers today are feeling separated and secluded by the changes and uncertainties in the workplace, and assert that professional counsellors require the theoretical, practical skills and guidelines to be able to provide help for clients to connect these changes and uncertainties to their own advantage. According to Baruch, (2004); the term protean is used to refer to the 21st-century workplace circumstances; this means the employee's ability to remain resilient and to cope with the effect of innovative technologies and new concepts of work (Baruch, 2004; Hall, 1996). In this regard, technological advances in communication facilitates different ways of accessing employee wellness services given the 21st century workplace circumstances as outlined above. Hartung (2013) states that the connection between a person's work and their mental health have become more appreciable: Individuals confront career planning, work entry, job search, job loss, work inopportunity, work stress, and work adjustment in an era of severe economic meltdown and "dejobbing" where job roles are changing. Given the above stated dynamics that impact on mental health as stated by Hartung (2013), emphasis is put on the importance to understand the changing needs in workplace environment when designing and implementing employee wellbeing programmes including mental wellness in the workplace.

2.3 Mental Health in the workplace

Modern life expectations and pressures that face employees can sometimes become overwhelming which may lead to mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. Mental health is defined as "a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community" (World Health Organisation, 2014).

Counselling in the workplace is a key component for organisations that recognise the importance of supporting and encouraging the wellbeing of employees. The diverse counselling approaches used by professional counsellors within different settings are influenced and informed by the needs of the organisation that has employed them for the services. Traditional Employee Assistance Programmes have evolved from offering support for issues around mental health and substance abuse; the programmes are currently inclusive of the promotion of health and wellness for employees, Employee Health and Wellness Programmes (EHWP) (Harrison, 2009). Client organisations are looking for programmes that can be made available to all employees, be cost efficient and easily accessible. Cost factors should not result in compromised standards and the importance of confidentiality in counselling is emphasised. It is supposed to be a voluntary service where employees have the choice for self-referral. A comprehensive employee wellness program needs to include support for the employee, contribute to a healthy work environment, enrich the business value and enhances overall mental health is most appealing for client organisations (Harrison, 2009).

Changes in the workplace that require a mental shift in the way systems and processes have been done might increase employee vulnerability and result in stress related anxieties for employees. These kinds of changes in the workplace also affect professional counsellors who might have had to adapt to using mediums such as online text based counselling. Loue (2016) asserts that "mental health care providers, including social workers are increasingly relying on the internet to provide information to clients/patients, to seek advice about patients, to provide mental health treatment, and as part of an ongoing supervisory or consultant relationship"(Loue, 2016, p 21)

A study on depression in the workplace in South Africa, was conducted by SADAG in 2014. The aim of the research was to get better insights of how many employed South Africans experience depression, understand awareness levels of employees about depression, and how the condition is dealt with within the workplace (SADAG, 2014). Employees with cognitive

symptoms reported their work performance with depression being far lower and poor as compared with employees with depression who did not experience cognitive symptoms. The study indicates that people whose mental status is more affected by the condition feel more incompetent at work as compared to those who struggle more with emotional feelings of helplessness. The study further reports that workers with cognitive symptoms were also more likely to have taken time off for their depression. An interesting highlight from this study points to the negative impact on productivity related to issues of absenteeism in the workplace while ill, as well as continuing to work whilst ill. There is a need for easily accessible supportive and efficient resource systems to assist employees in coping and prevent long term physical and mental problems.

Easily accessible supportive systems may improve chances of employees making use of the service and getting required support earlier which result in better performance at work. Brief short term interventions for psychosocial support are becoming the norm in a fast paced working world. The traditional way of face-to-face counselling is no longer the only option for effective interventions of the helping process within the workplace (McLeod, 2008). A study was conducted in a Japanese company to examine how health counselling email was used in the workplace (Kurioka, Muto, & Tarumi, 2001). It compared four health counselling methods; telephone, face to face, email and ordinary mail. The findings indicated that email counselling was the second most used method by employees in their 20's and 30's and dealt with health issues at primary prevention as opposed to employees in their 50's who preferred face to face counselling. The study concluded that email counselling was useful for younger employees with the assumption that the younger employees had a higher level of technology literacy as compared to their older colleagues

Some practitioners and researchers who advocate for online counselling assert that it may not be equalled to face-to-face counselling (Grohol, 1999; Jones & Stokes, 2008)). The main difference that the client has more control on the session thus reducing the power relations where (Cohen & Kerr, 1998). Furthermore interpretation of what the client expressed in written form is of importance and that is what the counsellor needs to understand by entering the client's mental construct (Wright, 2002). Text messages are to some extent devoid of many visual, auditory and sensory cues.

2.4 The use of online text based counselling technologies in South Africa

In South Africa it seems that more of civil society organisations are embracing mobile social network technologies to scale up on their reach, messaging and social impact. For instance Childline, loveLife and MobieG have integrated the use of text based counselling in partnership with Mxit since 2010. Organisations specialising on Employee Wellness programmes such as Independent Counselling and Advisory Services (ICAS), The Careways Group and others on the other hand seem reluctant to introduce text based counselling and have mainly made use of telephone counselling as a service offering. Telephone counselling helplines are also experiencing technological advances where they started off with landlines, using 0800 free services. Currently cell phone penetration is increasingly higher with SA ranked as the number one country with cell phone penetration at 140% of the population (On Device Research, 2014). This means almost every person owns or rents a mobile phone. With this telecommunication changes helplines introduced "Please call' line to adapt with technological advances regarding cell phone penetration trends. Schlosser (2002) says cell phones are central to the modern workplace and are used prolifically in business and social life. She noted that cell phones were used innovatively, and that individuals generally adapted the technology to suit their lifestyle (Schlosser, 2002).

As a result of the advances in online communication networks, studies have confirmed an increase in online therapy (Stofle, 2001). In March 2009, Childline in South Africa became affiliated with MXit Reach and has been rendering online mobile counseling to MXit Reach users. LoveLife launched same mobile based counselling in June 2013 to offer information and text based mobile counselling to young people. Lifeline SA has also been using online text based counselling via email for several years. Studies are clearly showing that distance counselling is preferred and used by some clients (McLeod, 2008).

The types of clients preferring online text based counselling include younger employees entering the job market for the first time. Evidence in studies done in the UK indicate that more young males prefer accessing mental health services online as compared to women (Wright, 2009). Furthermore Wright (2009) reports that statistics indicate high risk of suicide with young males (Wright, 2009) hence their preference for accessing mental health services via online mediums. People with time pressures and family responsibilities such as single parent households may experience difficulty to make time for private face-to-face interventions. Furthermore, counselling via text is far more discreet than speaking over the phone - especially

for people living in crowded circumstances and needing to deal with socially sensitive issues. A study conducted by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2014), also attests to the popularity of online mobile counselling mediums among younger people in their teens. Young people experiencing difficulties seem to find the convenience and privacy afforded by helplines or through the internet more attractive as compared to having to seek face to face help (Kelly & Jorm, 2007).

The above literature shows that it is imperative that an occupational social work practitioner needs to consider comprehensive counselling services to cater for the different needs and preferences of employees who live in an era greatly influenced by virtual lives created by advances in technology (Jones & Stokes, 2008).

2.5 Counselling Interventions in the workplace

Counselling has evolved as a profession and requires one to acquire specific set of skills and techniques to be an effective counsellor. The early days of social work saw counselling as the cornerstone of the profession. For occupational social work, individual counselling is seen as a starting point and gate keeper to introducing other forms for workplace focused interventions. According to McLeod (2008) workplace counselling has increased, over 75% medium and large companies in UK and North America provide counselling services for their employees. He asserts that this service is appreciated by users and impacts positively for the client and the organisation (McLeod, 2008). According to the authority body of the American Counselling Association (ACA) "Counselling is the application of mental health, psychological or human development principles, through cognitive, affective, behavioural or systemic interventions, strategies that address wellness, personal growth, or career development, as well as pathology" (ACA, 2014). Online counselling is defined as therapeutic intervention using internet medium i.e. email, to connect the client and the counsellor (Rochlen, Zack & Speyer, 2004, p. 270).

2.5.1. Face-to-face counselling

Face-to-face counselling is the traditional method that mental health is offered in. For the purpose of this study its defined as an in person helping process to assist an employee client about living, discovering better ways of dealing and coping with personal problems from work and at home (Cole, 2003) This type of counselling will always be necessary and cannot be compared with emerging online therapy mediums as some mental health conditions such as severe depression cannot be treated from a distance (Jones & Stokes, 2008). Some clients may

be sceptical and question the preparedness of counsellors in South Africa to provide online text based counselling. Face-to-face therapeutic interventions often require time away from the office. Some of the problems for low utilisation of face-to-face interventions when linked for service as raised by employees include lack of time, little benefit, unsupportive management and mistrust of employer motive (Kirk & Brown, 2003).

2.5.2. Telephone Counselling

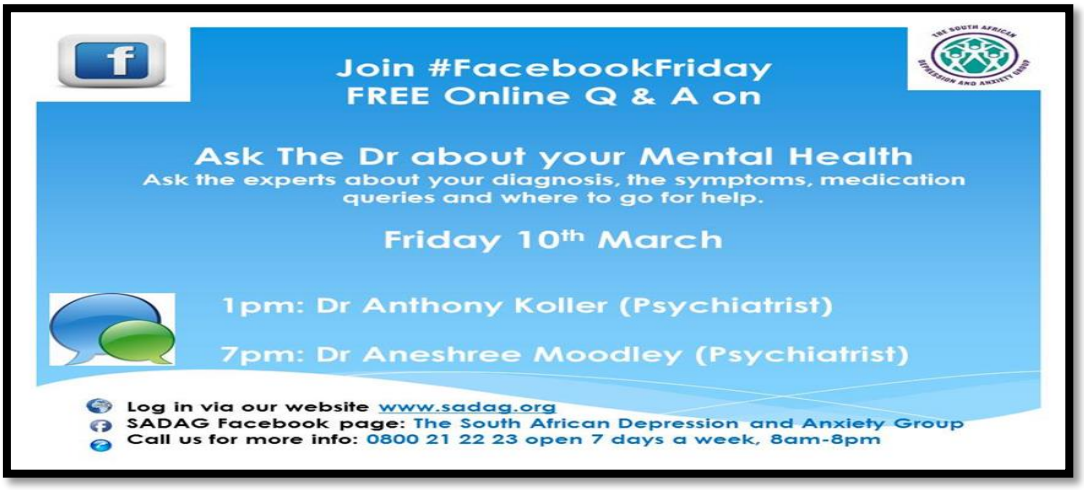
Telephone counselling in South Africa became popular in the early 1980's introduced by Lifeline in response to high suicide rates experienced at the time. Most organisations that specialise in employee wellness programmes include telephone counselling as a key service for corporates and their employees. According to Jacobs and Roodt (2011) & Holman (2003), Modern call centres exist because of the benefits they offer to workplace environments. These benefits include value proposition on existing functions, improved customer service and new streams of generating revenue. As such, Call Centres are seen as a cost effective way of offering information and psychosocial support (Holman, 2003). The client saves on travelling costs for consulting a counsellor whereas the organisation saves on logistics of office space required for face-to-face counselling. More people are able to access the services rendered because the call centre environment is capacitated to handle higher volume of callers (UNAIDS Best practice, 2002). Telephonic counselling is mostly appropriate for therapeutic interventions based on short term solution focused models. Often the client requesting counselling support through telephonic medium needs immediate resolution of the issue being presented (Rosenfield, 2013). Where longer term interventions is sought, referral and linking with other resource systems is facilitated.

2.5.3 Text based synchronous and asynchronous counselling

Online text based counselling mediums have potential to offer access for counselling service to employees via their mobile phones. It is a synchronous method to communicate with the employee client online in real time using Instant Messaging (IM), which allows for the exchange of text messages, (Stieger & Goritz, 2006). This offers immediacy of response which has close resemblance to telephonic and face-to-face interaction. Asynchronous on the other hand is when the interaction is not in real time. The client and the counsellor have time to reflect, process and clarify their communication before responding (Hanley &Reynolds, 2009). This is often defined by turnaround times as specified by organizational operations. Below is

an example of how the online text based mediums are used by SADAG to promote and offer their information and counselling services to their clients. See figure 1 below.

Figure 1: Screenshot of SADAG's use of online text mediums- Facebook Friday Live Chat on Mental Health



The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (2017)

This medium of counselling has raised some ethical concerns as compared to some of the important dynamics involved in face-to-face counselling interventions. The main concern for online text based counselling is the inability of the counsellor to observe nonverbal cues from client due to lack of visual or auditory sensory aids (Jones & Stokes, 2008). Another concern raised involves the possibility of client misinterpretation of written information/explanation which could compromise the helping process and have legal implications for the online counsellor (Hanley & Reynolds, 2009). There have also been counter arguments to this effect. Grohol, (2001) asserts that the effectiveness of psychotherapy is firstly dependent on the communication that needs to happen and the relationship established between the client and therapist. He argues that these two components are the most crucial and the mediums of intervention utilised, do not pose any less or more difficulty than the other. That said, online counselling has continued over time to gain prominence within the helping profession.

Another study was conducted in a Japanese company to examine how health counselling emails were used in the workplace (Kurioka, Muto, & Tarumi, 2001). It compared four health counselling methods; telephone, face-to-face, email and ordinary mail. The findings indicated that email counselling as the second most used medium by employees in their 20's and 30's and dealt with health issues at primary prevention as opposed to employees in their 50's who preferred face-to-face counselling. The study concluded that email counselling was useful for

younger employees with the assumption that the younger employees had a higher level of technology literacy as compared to their older colleagues (Kurioka et al., 2001).

2.5.4. Relevance of online text based counselling in SA.

The social media space provides an opportunity to review how employees are supported on social issues impacting on them. The growing demand for online services indicates that online counselling becomes relevant medium to reach out to more people needing mental health interventions (Dowling & Rickwood, 2013). It is anticipated that the number of internet users would increase significantly from 18.5 million during 2015 to 24.5 million by 2020 (van Zyl, 2015). The increasing use of mobile communication, the internet and social networks can make important and critical information readily accessible to people and to create platforms for discussion and participation on matters that affect them. Data costs in South Africa are a concern at a ceiling of R2 per mega bite albeit decrease as reported by some research (van Zyl, 2015).

There are other views that have argued for the use of technology within the counselling profession (Hansen & Neuman, 1997; Reardon & Loughead, 1988; Sampson, 2000). This refers to online applications used by counsellors for assessment and testing which have improved efficiency, record keeping, and storage of data generated through these activities (Hansen & Neuman, 1997; Reardon & Loughead, 1988; Sampson, 2000). The main point in this argument is that counselling practice traditions can be improved and further strengthened by technological advances and change. Counsellors can learn and enhance their counselling skills using technology as it advances (Sharf & Lucas, 1993).

The semiotic school of thought refers to communication as a fusion of signs, symbols and messages relayed with an expectation of specific response (Sharf & Lucas, 1993). The semiotic theoretical frame of reference focuses on text; how a variety of codes have developed as influenced by the dynamic needs of society and culture. It talks to three main areas of study namely: Syntactic; Semantic and Pragmatic. The reader or receiver of the text message is important in how they interpret the message. In this regard the counsellor being the receiver of the text message needs to have correct interpretation and assessment of intervention required.

2.5.5. Roles of counsellors

There are universal principles and ethical frameworks that govern the practice of professional counselling and are applicable in all settings. Firstly it is important to understand that as a

counsellor you are there to serve the clients' needs (Corey, 2009). The counsellor helps clients find satisfaction in their lives Corey (2009). Secondly the counsellor needs to be aware of their professional ethics and code that regulate decision making. These will also be influenced by the policies and standard operating procedures of the employer organisation. According to Jones and Stokes (2008), online counselling such as face to face counselling, is a conversation between client and counsellor and the nature or success thereof is determined by the relationship formed. This means the role of the online counsellor is to build rapport to enable successful intervention in helping client resolve their issues. The next ethical issue pertains to right of the client to informed consent. "By educating your clients about their rights and responsibilities, you are both empowering them and building a trusting relationship with them" (Corey, 2009, p.61). This creates a permissive environment for effective helping process. Confidentiality need to clearly communicate as the cornerstone of therapy and it helps in building trust and rapport. Mental health in South Africa is a serious concern with increasing numbers of people presenting with mental health problems (Rouillard, 2013). A myriad of complexities associated with low socio –economic, barriers to treatment and negative social issues greatly impact on the mental health status in South Africa (Rouillard, 2013). The role that counsellors need to assume for mental wellness through the use of technology is as equally important as it enables ease of access to mental health services. Important to note when using online mediated platforms is ensuring that the working space is reflective of a professional standard and good practise. There should not be interruptions or distractions that compromise the process of helping (Jones & Stokes, 2009).

2.5.6. Ethics and principles for text based counselling technologies

Firstly some professionals are still sceptical and raise concerns about the readiness of the helping profession for online text based counselling technologies (Jones & Stokes, 2009). Curriculum and training of professionals is focused on traditional methods and has not included online text counselling. According to findings in a study conducted by Finn and Barak (2010), counsellors do not have formal training or supervision for online practise, as such most have limited knowledge on regulations for online practise.

The person centred approach underpins therapeutic interventions and is possible with using text based mediums. Building rapport between client and counsellor in cyberspace is developed through being able to connect to the mental construct via written word (Wright, 2002). Other

approaches that have been successfully used for computer mediated therapy include cognitive and behavioural therapies.

In addition another key concern involves observing nonverbal cues, this can become stressful for the counsellor who is not confident with their analysis and interpretation of the on screen written words (Wright, 2002). This kind of uncertainty is manageable in face-to-face interactions where the counsellor is able to observe non-verbal cues. In a telephonic interaction this is also possible through listening to the tone of voice used by client. This Wright (2002) refers to as an "impoverished, less alive working alliance" (Wright, 2002, p. 289)

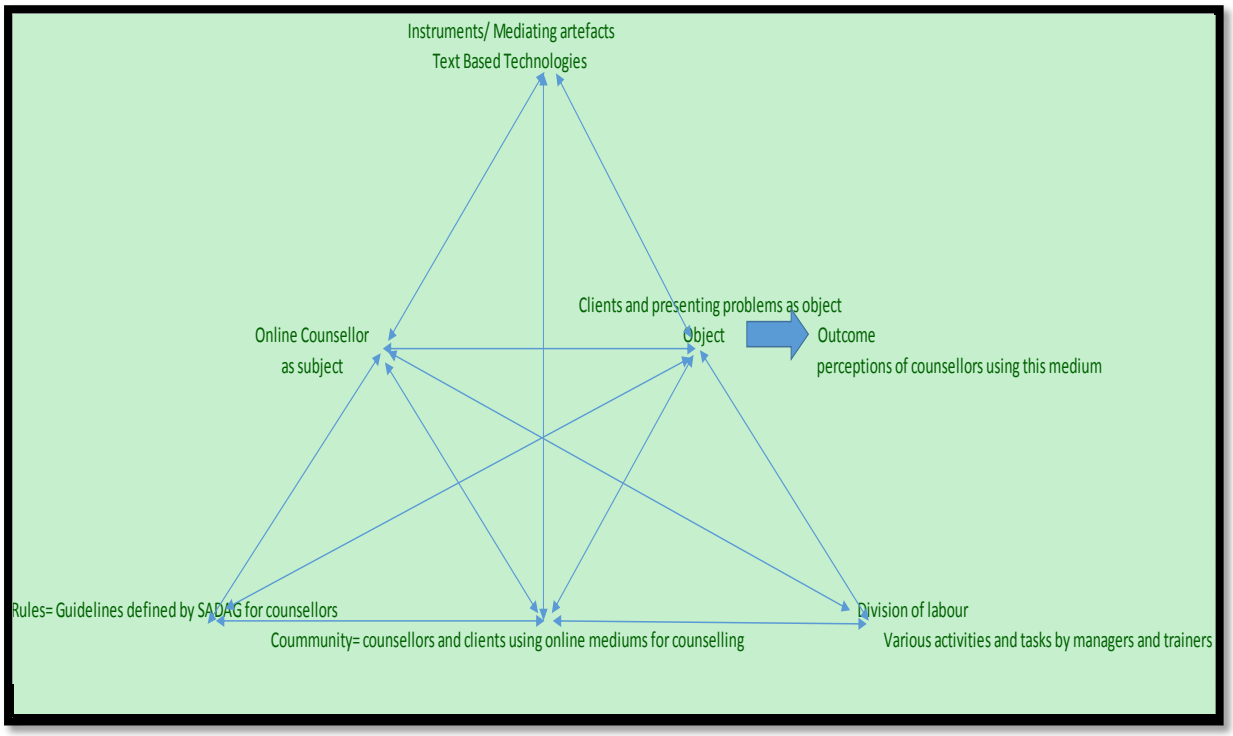
The policy on protection of personal information act POPI Act, (2009) intends to provide regulations in the processing of personal information which in turn has implications for the counselling profession (retrieved, http://www.popi-compliance.co.za/). The POPI Act is not very explicit for mental health therapy however it is clear that any personal information of people need to be protected. Online technologies are high risk and compromises confidentiality of client's information (Wright, 2002). Counselling practitioners understand that they are obligated to protect client confidentiality which includes client information stored in any medium.

2.6 Theoretical underpinnings of the study: Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

This study used the Cultural Historical Activity Theory (hereafter referred to as CHAT), mainly focusing on Activity Theory (AT) as its main theoretical framework. CHAT was developed from the work of Vigotsky, Leontiev and by Engestrom (Roth, Radford & LaCroix, 2012). CHAT is described as an interdisciplinary approach to obtain insights about human learning and development associated with the Soviet Russian psychologists, Vygotsky, Luria and Leontiev (Roth, et al. 2012). In this regard, this theory considers the use of the tool which is text based online technologies within the counselling system and is holistic in the examination of the various sub-systems that make up the bigger system. The activity theory helps to analyse and explain activity as it evolves over time. CHAT is often used in the workplace environment to discover how people use tools and material to complete tasks (Edwards, 2011) and was therefore suitable for this research as it explored perceptions of counsellors when conducting text-based counselling for employees in an online platform. The focus of analysis was on the experience for online counsellors and the tensions that result from

the use of the medium as experienced by counsellors. See diagram illustration below that follows:

Figure 2: Diagram illustration of how CHAT was applied in the study



CHAT diagram: Activity system (Bury, 2012)

Figure 2 above illustrates how CHAT was used as the theoretical framework of the study. The counselling of clients is complex and messy and in many ways unclear, using CHAT one is able to examine the various tensions that exist within the various parts of the activity system. The system becomes even more complex when tools such as a mobile communication device (the tool) is used to transmit the counselling to the employees who is experiencing stress, challenges and concerns in the workplace. CHAT is a descriptive framework that considers an entire activity system beyond just one user. Here the activity which is the provision of counselling is mediated through online technologies as a result of technological advancements in the 21st Century. This results in division of labour as different tasks need to be undertaken by the community of practitioners in the development, management and implementation of the activity of counselling (Nardi, 1996). Furthermore, activity theory assets that activities are facilitated through the use of culturally established tools (Ryder, 2004). For example, the tools being used are online counselling platforms such as email and chat applications via mobile devices across generations and across different geographic locations (World Wide Worx,

2014). These are mediums designed and influenced by the technocratic culture that is predominantly used for communication and for easy access to information.

Activity Theory recognises the thought processes to internalise and externalise the use of tools, as well as the outcome transformation or development from the interaction. As illustrated above, CHAT basically implies that activity needs to be understood in context with understanding the role of signs, symbols and artefacts and all of these occur within a community or context. CHAT theorists argue that human experience is shaped by the tools and sign systems they use. Changes and improvements in activities within workplace environments are best explained using CHAT to understand how technology mediated change and the implementation of technologies are impacted (Roth, et al., 2012). This is proven in the changing communication patterns over time, e.g. from face-to-face counselling to telephonic, online counselling and mobile text based counselling. These are communication and social skills developed out of interaction in the environment and with each other.

CHAT talks about relation between subject and object; online text based counselling technologies act as the mediation tool used to facilitate the desired outcome of a counselling relationship (Roth, et. al., 2012). For this study, CHAT addresses technology in counselling as a mediating tool which is used by counsellors. The research seeks to understand perceptions of counsellors as the subject of the study on using mediating tools i.e. online technologies, for counselling as the human activity. It seeks to explore the tensions that have resulted in using these tools. It further seeks to understand how the internalisation and external interaction processes impact on this community (Ryder, 2004). It implies that an activity occurs within a social context, which in this study is the era of emergent social networks and virtual spaces that greatly influence communication behaviour.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on discussing the research paradigm utilised, the research population and sampling methods employed, the data collection methods used, the steps followed in analysing the data and the limitations and delimitations of the research design and methodology. The chapter concludes by specifying ethical considerations that guided the study.

3.2 Research Approach

This study used a qualitative approach and was contextualized to a specific organisation, which is SADAG because the organisation uses online mediated counselling methods and specializes on mental health issues. The study seeks to explore experiences and perceptions of online counsellors currently using forms of online technologies as a counselling for medium. As argued by Newton (2012), qualitative research approach is not a predetermined process; it seeks insight to better understand what is being studied. Ritchie, et al. (1994), also agrees and says "qualitative methodology yields rich, in-depth and complete data because of the close involvement of the researcher in the process" (Ritchie et al, 1994, p.87). This approach works well within CHAT framework as well as it explains how the object of study being text based counselling technologies are used in the current dispensation characterized by high mobile social media use. The study seeks to understand how the perceptions of counsellors on the use of technology as a phenomena that has influenced patterns of client communication within the helping profession. According to Mason (1996, p. 4), the qualitative research approach "is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced or produced." While Auerbach and Silverstein (2003, p. 1) define "qualitative research as research that involves analysing and interpreting text and interviews in order to discover meaningful patterns descriptive of a particular phenomenon."

3.3 Research Design

The research design is the overall plan that outlines how the study was conducted (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). As such, a case study research design was used because it is explorative and allowed for in-depth analysis of a specific captive system, in this regard being counsellors working for SADAG. Babbie and Mouton (2001) further assert that an exploratory study serves to

> *(1) satisfy the researcher's curiosity and desire for better understanding, (2) to test feasibility of undertaking a more extensive study, (3) to develop*

> *methods to be employed in any subsequent study, (5) to determine priorities for future research, and (6) to develop new hypothesis about an existing phenomenon"* (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p. 80).

While this research study is confined to a specific organisation, it still stands to have significant contribution towards gaining insight on an area that does not have much information on the use of online text based mediums for counselling in the workplace specifically in South Africa. Mason (1996) says the research design helps to develop some understanding of how and why particular research methods and data sources are going to assist the researcher address the research questions. In this regard a case study research design allows the research to capture the meaning and experiences of social beings within the context of their environment. As a result the researcher mainly used interview method to generate the research data.

According to Eisenhardt (as cited in Rowley, 2002) the case study strategy is "particularly well suited to new research areas or research areas for which existing theory seems inadequate" (Rowley, 2002, p. 16) The area of study is relatively new in South Africa and there has not been much studies done to understand the perceptions of professionals regarding the appropriateness of using online text based mediums for counselling mental health wellness in workplace settings. Gillham (2000) says it is about seeing it from the perspective of those involved.

3.4 Research Population

A population sample is a representative subset of subjects of the population to be studied which in this study were counsellors from SADAG with experience using online counselling. This study gathered data from a representative sample of ten participants out of a population of twenty counsellors employed by SADAG at the time of the study. Two of the participants represented management as key informants in the study. These were the population sample which were units of analysis that were utilised to generate data. First, the researcher defined the criterion used to select the population sample that participated in the study. Understanding the nature of the population from which the sample was drawn enabled the researcher to develop meaningful social explanations (Mason, 1996). The inclusion criteria for sampling required for the participants to be professionally qualified counsellors and should have had at least six months experience specifically in using online text based counselling or information.

3.5 Sampling

Purposive sampling was used to select a total of eight lay counsellors with experience using online text based counselling from SADAG. Using purposive sampling allows for specific selection of sample population with experience in text based counselling, which means the participants are an appropriate sample to provide informed insight based on their knowledge and experience (Patton, 2002; Shaw & Holland, 2014). This sampling strategy was most suitable for this study because it permits the researcher to select units of analysis that are appropriately linked to the research questions being asked (Bryman, 2008). Initially the researcher had planned to have a sample comprising of 10 participants with professional qualification in counselling. However, challenges were experienced in finding the planned sample because of the following dynamics; participation was voluntary which resulted fewer counsellors availing themselves as participants, the area under investigated was an under-researched area which made it difficult to find participants with the necessary knowledge and experience on the topic. As such, the sample comprised of eight participants and two key informant participants. As argued by Sandelowski (1995), the appropriateness of the sample size lies in the quality of information obtained from the sample. As such the size of the sample was determined by the quality of information gathered from the participants.

3.6 Research Instrumentation

The researcher made use of two semi structured interview schedules as data collection instruments (See Appendix E & F). The first semi structured interview schedule was developed for online counsellors as primary participants in the study and the second was developed for key informants. The semi structured interview schedule was a guide for the researcher which enabled the researcher to probe and explore where follow up was necessitated (Strydom, 2005). The researcher considered the following key elements in the design of the interview schedule as suggested by Ritchie and Lewis (2003); firstly that a semi-structured interview combines structure with flexibility in which the interviews are based on a topic guide to cover specifics issues or topics. The interview schedule still provides allowance to be adapted to the interviewee's knowledge and experiences. Second, a semi-structured interview comprises of open-ended questions to allow interviewees to freely express when responding to questions.

The research instruments were pretested with one online counsellors from Lovelife, who was not a participants in the study. A Lovelife counsellor was selected for the pre-test because of the similarity of online counselling mediums and staff employed to offer counselling by loveLife and SADAG. The process of pretesting the research instrument enabled the researcher

to check for any errors that need to be corrected and if it would be understood by participants. There were no changes effected on the research instrument, the counsellors from loveLife experienced no difficulties understanding the instrument.

In order to further support data collected using the interview instruments, additional information was also requested from the organisation pertaining to statistical reports on utilisation of the service and any other documentation related to their policies and processes related to the subject matter under study. The documents were used to support data gathered from participants and to cross reference with other literature used for the study.

3.7 Research Methodology

3.7.1 Method of data collection

To ensure that rich data was collected, individual face-to-face interviews were conducted using semi- structured interview schedule (See Appendix E and F). The method of face-to-face interviewing was most appropriate as it enabled the researcher to get depth of meaning because the research was primarily focused in gaining insight and understanding (Gillman, 2000; Ritchie & Lewis 2003). The face-to-face method of collecting data enabled the researcher to build better rapport with participants and observe gestures that enhanced communication and helping with further probes.

The researcher also requested for reports and any other documents used by the organisation that are related to online based text counselling and information dissemination. In preparation for each of the interviews, the researcher communicated with the operations manager beforehand via email to set and confirm a date for the interviews. The researcher also sent the operations manager the participant information sheet to share with the selected participants so that they are familiarised with the study and its purpose and objectives.

During face to face interviews, the researcher explained and read through the information sheet with each participant before commencing the interview. The researcher explained the nature and purpose of the study to the participants including issues of voluntary participation, confidentiality and requested permission for audio recording of the interviews.

3.7.2 Method of data analysis

The study used the thematic content analysis for interpretation of the data. The method looks at recurring themes in the data collected (Anderson, 2007). It is often used on interview transcripts and answers to open ended questions on questionnaires. Braun and Clark (2006) allude to the fact that what counts as a theme in analysis of the data is something that captures

important aspects of the data in relation to the research question. The following steps for analysis as described by social research writer (Anderson, 2007) were used in the analysis of the data; first by preparing data and transcribing recorded interviews into text. The researcher transcribed all recordings into text using a spreadsheet. Secondly reading the transcribed text and noting emerging themes. Thirdly sorting and organising topics in different categories where a spreadsheet was used for categorising the identified themes. For these steps the researcher categorised responses according objectives of the study and noted emerging. The fourth step is to examine the themes and evaluate their meaning; then reviewing the text carefully for similarities and differences of data for each proto-theme; this involved reviewing all material and data focusing on any underlying meanings of the theme for contextualisation; The final step was to report each theme using some quotations from the interview to illustrate its clear meaning. This method of data analysis was chosen because it allowed the researcher to mentally process the data and to see the connections between the research questions and the data. Braun and Clark (2006) also attest that in the analysis of data, a theme is that which captures crucial aspects of the data in relation to the research question. As such the researcher developed sub questions to each objective to ensure that the correct data is collected related to the objectives of the study. Throughout this process, the researcher engaged with literature that was relevant to the data analysis.

3.7.3 Trustworthiness of the study

To ensure trustworthiness of the study, the researcher followed the criteria as outlined by Babbie and Mouton (2001). The criteria includes credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of the study.

Credibility:

This refers to the extent to which the findings represent reality Babbie and Mouton (2001). The researcher conducted face to face interviews with participants to gain in-depth understanding of counsellors' perceptions regarding the use of text based workplace interventions. Key informants to obtain additional information to support or refute comments made by the respondents. The researcher further looked for multiple sources of information such as prior studies and reports to enhance credibility of the study (Tuckett, 2005). The researcher's supervisor was also consulted for review throughout the process to enable the researcher to develop coherent argument and explanation of the research design and findings (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability:

This means the extent to which the findings of the study can be applied to or other context with other similar respondents (Babbie & Mouton 2001). The researcher provided ample contextual information on the organisation as the case study and the phenomena under study to assist the reader with any inferences. Furthermore purposive sampling was utilised so as to gain rich insight of the study, counsellors with experience using online mediums were the main source of data for this study. In-depth notes were kept on the research processes followed.

Dependability:

It refers to the consistency in findings of the study (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). It means the study should be able to have similar outcomes if repeated within same context with similar participants (Holloway & Holloway, 2011). Records of data analysis have been kept and made available to the supervisor to check for dependability of the study and ensure adherence to appropriate research practice.

Confirmability:

This aspect is defined as "the degree to which the findings are the product of the focus of the enquiry and not of the biases of the researcher" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001, p.278). The researcher used recorded audio tapes, notes and all documents to ensure confirmability of the study. The supervisor had the opportunity to check all records and transcriptions of data collected.

3.8 Ethical considerations

3.8.1 Voluntary Participation

The researcher is cognisant of the ethical considerations that need to guide all processes of the research. Voluntary participation is of importance in research as it assures potential participants that their participation is voluntary and that they may feel free to withdraw at any time from the research without consequences (Babbie, 2011). Participants were made explicitly aware that participation in the study is voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any point. The participants were further provided with an information sheet that detailed the purpose of the study (See Appendix C). This ensured that the participants understood that their participation was voluntary and had the right to withdraw from the study if they so wished

3.8.2 Informed consent

Informed consent is an important ethical norm that confirms granted permission by research participants after they have understood the purpose of the research and its background (Brynman, 2008) .

The researcher sought permission from the employing organisation first before approaching the individual participants. A written permission letter from the operation manager of SADAG was given through email to the researcher to conduct the study with SADAG as a case study for this research (See Appendix B). Furthermore, the researcher requested participants in the study to sign written consent granting permission to partake in the study and indicating that they are aware of the purpose and procedure of the study. In the case of telephone interviews, the participants agreed to participate verbally indicating that they understand the purpose and procedure of the study.

3.8.3 Avoidance of harm

Avoidance of harm refers to importance for researchers to "anticipate and guard against consequences for research participants which can be predicted to be harmful" (Bryman, 2008, p. 118). In this study the researcher did not foresee any physical or emotional risk for participating in this study. Participants were however informed of an independent counselling referral services made available for them should they be affected negatively as a result of participating in the study.

3.8.4 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity are ethical principles that highlight the need to protect the identity of research participants. Anonymity is accomplished when neither the researcher nor the respondents can identify a given response with a given participant (Babbie, 2011). In this study the researcher guaranteed confidentiality to participants and highlighted that the research supervisor would be the only person to have access to the information collected. Given that the interviews were recorded, anonymity was guaranteed through using pseudonyms in the final research report to ensure that the identity of participants is not compromised.

3.8.5 Feedback to participants

This is a principle used in research to show gratitude to participants and provide them with preliminary findings of the study. The feedback on preliminary findings also benefits the participants who have contributed to the research and may find some of the results useful in some way (Babbie, 2011). The researcher will ensure that feedback on research findings will be provided to the organisation and participants of the study.

3.8.6 Submission of proposal for ethics clearance

Before undertaking the research study, ethics clearance from the University of the Witwatersrand ethics committee non-medical was granted to the researcher. This is an important requirement for all researchers that wish to conduct a research study. A copy of the ethics clearance is attached as Appendix A to this research.

3.9 Limitations

The researcher is aware of possibility of reflexivity, which includes keeping a journal to record the process and the researcher's reflections of the research process. This is intended to guard against researcher own bias as their current work may pose conflict of interest in the study. The issue of bias in qualitative research is affirmed by Sarantakos (1998) who states that it is almost inevitable for bias to occur given the researcher's closeness to the data.

When using qualitative methods, there are specific limitations which need to be considered and taken note of. Those limitations include; loosing focus and moving away from the original objectives of the study in response to the changing nature of the context under which the research is conducted; having conflicting conclusions based on the same information depending on the personal characteristics of the researcher; as such replicatication of a study is very difficult (Anderson, 2010). As a result, the researcher believes that the findings can be used for further research in other contexts with similar dynamics as the organisation used in this research as a case study. Furthermore, as experienced in this study, the process to collect data and analysing consumes significant amount of time and can be financially costly for the researcher. The researcher ought to have grounded to obtain the targeted information from the respondent. Consistency and reliability of the study may be compromised because the researcher can employ different probing techniques and the respondent can choose to tell some particular stories and ignore others.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter the researcher presents findings of the study and further engaged with the themes that emerged from data analysis. The themes are discussed in relation to the objectives of the study. The first objective was to explore experiences of online counsellors regarding the use of online text mediated workplace interventions which exclude video chat and skype mediums. The second objective was to investigate the constraining factors regarding the use of online text based workplace interventions. The third objective was to explore the skills used by the online counsellors when conducting text based counselling for workplace interventions. The fourth objective being to discover ethical considerations in conducting online text based mediums for workplace interventions. And the last objective was to investigate affordances of using text based technologies as a medium of work place interventions. Pseudonyms have been used throughout the research report.

Table 1: Profile of participants (N=10)

Demographic Factor	Sub- Category	No.
Gender of participant	Male	1
	Female	9
Total		10
Age of participant	21 - 30 years	5
	31 - 40 years	2
	41 - 50 years	3
Experience using online text mediums for counselling and information	3 - 12 months	3
	1 - 3 years	2
	4+ years	3
Participants representing management	Key informant	2

A total of ten participants were interviewed, three of the participants had media studies formal qualifications and two of the participants were qualified psychologist and three were studying towards completing undergraduate degrees in the social sciences. The three participants with media studies were mainly responsible for working on social media platforms which included face book, twitter and emails at SADAG. Their role includes coordinating content and counselling for the different social media platforms, assessment and referral of client requests from the social media platforms, information dissemination and sometimes basic counselling where a client insist on not being referred to a professional counsellor.

Three of the participants were employed as counsellors, they provide counselling telephonically and via online text mediated platforms of the organisation. The fourth participants was a supervisor who oversees all counsellors, the daily operational processes and quality assurance of the call centre. She also conducts counselling on telephonic and online text mediums. An additional two participants represented management as key informants in the study.

4.2 Exploring experiences of online counsellors regarding the use of online text mediated workplace interventions.

The point of departure in this study was to determine the level of experience that the participants had with using online text based technologies. With this objective it was important to determine the type of formal qualifications background of the participants and the depth of practical experience they had using online text mediums. From the data gathered in this study, it showed that SADAG had counsellors with different educational backgrounds and varying levels of experience in using online mediums for information and counselling. Three of the participants had qualifications in media studies and mainly worked with social media platforms i.e. Facebook and Twitter. The other two participants were either still studying towards completion of a degree in the social sciences but had completed short counselling courses and more than one-year experience in the counselling. Then there were three professionally qualified psychologists with more than two years practising experience and working at SADAG. The following themes were explored to get better insight on counsellors' experience with online mediums.

4.2.1 Counselling experience on text based mediums

From the sample, it was clear that participants working on social media platforms had the limited work experience as well as qualifications in counselling. The experience of participants with media studies background, ranged from three months to six months working on text mediated technologies at SADAG. Online counselling is a relatively new field and there is no legislation governing this type of counselling and guiding on the type of formal qualifications required. The counsellors on the other hand had more experience as they had been employed by the organisation longer. Two of the counsellors had been working for five years respectively whereas with the other two participants, one had two years and the other participant had three years' text based counselling experience. The experience in counselling skills is also evident in the level of comfort and confidence expressed by the participants. Those respondents with media studies background were younger and expressed greater confidence using online for informational purposes. One of the media studies participants had this to say:

> "*I am pretty comfortable with using Facebook whether its personal capacity or work I am pretty comfortable using Facebook and Twitter and nobody has ever threatened me in any way, nobody has ever said SADAG I will do this to you, it's never like that"(Tshego, 23).*

In comparison, participants with counselling skills on the other hand expressed discomfort and to a certain extend do not trust their competence using text mediated platforms for counselling. One of the more experienced counsellors expressed this:

> "I *was saying that I was very uncomfortable with that because when I speak on the phone somebody can hear my emotions, and it's easier to interpret even from someone who is distressed they can feel you. With texting I can be watching TV and laughing while you are talking about suicide. How can you actually see that I care and I am taking your problem seriously? Secondly words don't have emotions; I can say I am very sorry for your loss and can say that with a huge smile on my face. So I don't find that contact and when someone is already depressed, they are already very sensitive, there can be that one word that doesn't sound too right and you actually make things worse than actually solving the problem. When you've got direction over the phone you can always direct no that's not what I meant I meant it differently. So there is that direct contact where things can be rectified and explained further than just words thrown into a person "(Jane, 35).*

The participant above clearly articulates her preference to rather provide counselling service telephonically as compared to using text based online mediums. The participant goes further to explain the nonverbal cues and undertones that are difficult to assess or listen when using text based mediums. Another participant counsellor also agreed about being uncomfortable and not confident using a text based medium and said:

> "*I think because I have not been trained on it correctly I do feel uncomfortable using it, you will find people when calling them back asking can you reply in a text message? And that's where a lot of my issues come up. I don't not know how to correctly use the medium for counselling "(Ntozi, 27).*

CHAT as the theoretical framework used for this study; recognises the internalisation and externalisation of cognitive processes involved in the use of tools, as well as the transformation or development that results from the interaction (Ryder, 2004). The participant, Ntozi makes it clear that she finds it difficult to transition her counselling skills from telephonic voice to text medium. This results in division of labour as different tasks need to be undertaken by the community of practitioners in the development, management and implementation of the activity of counselling (Nardi, 1996). Furthermore, in this study text mediated platforms are predominantly a current phenomenon which the younger generation of professionals are more comfortable using as tools of their trade as opposed to the older generation who have been historically trained to use direct face to face human interaction in their trade.

4.2.2 Types of issues handled via online text mediums

Participants' highlighted different issues as being presented by clients requesting help via text mediums. The issues were mainly mental health related and often includes depression. One of the participants made this point about typical issues handled via their text mediums;

> "*Most of the time we get suicidal people, somebody would tell you I am feeling so depressed I want to commit suicide" (Jane, 35).*

This indicates that suicidal threats are amongst the most recurrent issues presented by clients through online text-based mediums at SADAG. A study presented by SADAG on the impact of depression in the workplace, in South Africa, indicates depression as one of the main contributors to employee absenteeism (A South African IDeA Report, 2015). One of the findings in the study indicate that 80% of those who had taken time off work because of depression, 32% did not disclose to the employer of the actual reason. (A South African IDeA Report, 2015). An article written for the Daily Maverick on teen suicide in South Africa,

reported that a suicide occurs every 40 seconds and an attempt is made every three seconds (van der Merwe, 2015). In South Africa suicide is reported to be one of the highest causes of death. In an article released by SADAG reporting their partnership with a popular social media platform, Facebook, corroborated this finding from their own analysis on posts by social media users; Facebook says a third of the posts shared on their platform include some form of negative feelings (SADAG, 2016). The report by van Merwe (2015) seems to suggest that most Facebook users are displaying symptoms of depression. Hence the Facebook partnership with SADAG to facilitate suicide prevention on Facebook's social media platform was created (SADAG, 2016).

Furthermore, participants indicated that some clients request the counsellors for information that is beyond the spectrum of their professional services such as medication for psychological disorders like bi-polar. This is an ethical issue for counsellors who were participants in this study because they are not professionally allowed to make such diagnosis nor offer advice of medication. The first issue presented by one participant which states that suicidal threats are amongst the most recurrent issues presented by clients through online text mediums, elicits that these mediums make the containment of such issues a challenge. So such clients are thus followed up through telephonic mediums and also referred for further face to face interventions. This suggests that an online medium has limitations in terms of the depth of counselling that can take place through text mediated mediums. Text based counselling seems to be only a first line measure that is followed by telephonic counselling as is borne out by the following remark by a participant.

> *"Thank you for getting in touch with us can I get your numbers and will get a counsellor to call you?'[This is the routine response provided] It's never really a thing of 'Oh my gosh, what do I say to this person, I don't know what to say'. If I do encounter such problem where I feel like this person needs help, I go to our operations director and she would usually say okay I will take it from here" (Amanda, 29).*

This illustrates the division of labour and tensions of using online text mediums as illustrated in the CHAT. The counsellor in this regard needs to solicit guidance from their supervisor to handle complex tasks. The counsellor has no full ownership of the work and needs to consult with authority to be able to complete the work. The advantage of this is that a more trained and experienced counsellor is available to support the less experienced ones. However coaching support is often delayed and not always available when required.

4.2.3 Age group of clients accessing counselling using online text based mediums

The relevance of age in this study was important so as to determine appropriate mediums for workplace interventions when providing employee wellness programmes. Evidence in studies done in the United Kingdom (UK) indicate that more young males prefer accessing mental health services online as compared to women (Wright, 2002). In this study the evidence points to different age categories that make use of online text mediums to access mental health information and counselling services.

Seven of the participants in the study agreed that most people using text based counselling services were young people. The age groups range from teens to 35 year olds. Of the older generation that access the service it is mainly for requesting help for their teen children. Younger people between the ages of 16-25 years seem to be the ones that most commonly access mental health services using text mediums which are often on Facebook and Twitter platforms. As summarised by one of the participants:

> *"…it's usually young people and I would say between the ages of 16-25, those are the people we deal with most commonly, youngsters. Depending on the platform obviously on Facebook you will find young people and on twitter, with calls it's usually more matured people. I believe that young people want to chat most and older people just want to talk" (Sam, 24yrs).*

4.2.4 Level of counsellor comfort and discomfort with handling issues using text based medium

Participants reported different levels of comfort and discomfort in using online mediums for counselling. It was interesting to note that the participants who had media qualification background felt more comfortable using text based mediums for information and campaign purposes. On the other hand participants with a counselling background expressed more discomfort with using text mediated platforms and preferred telephonic mediums.

One participant had this to say regarding the discomfort and skills needed by professional counsellors who are booked to engage with clients on Facebook Friday sessions:

> *"At times we have a more matured psychologist or psychiatrist they don't know how to use Facebook, you need to train them step by step. There are times when we don't have time to train them so we call them with the questions they'll have to answer and we type on their behalf. We are however trying to include them, get them to use Facebook more because we realise that there's actually a lot request on social media other than other*

platforms that's what we are working on now. So mostly with our Facebook Friday we try involve more matured experts on the chats" (Sam, 23 yrs.).

A further quote that corroborates the view that text counselling is used to a limited extent due to limited expertise on part of the counsellor and the method of text based counselling.

> "Well *my experience is pretty much basic I would not say I can get into it that much. What I do is I would take people's details so a person would come to us with a query like I am suffering from this and that, then we would say 'hi so and so' we would like to help you please give us your number and we take that person's number plus we also give them an alternative that you can give us a call. Here's our number but can you also give us your number, then we give your number to SADAG counsellor to give you a call, so that's pretty much how it goes" (Dorcas, 29years).*

The above quote shows that the participant prefers to plays an intake and referral role when confronted with client issues that may be complex to handle via online mediums. Another participants adds to the limitations of the text-based counselling medium by saying,

> *"…There is only so much that can be done through a text message so I am not a fan of it personally. It's a very difficult medium to use" (Lorena, 50years).*

The above quotations are a clear indication of how participants who are less confident with using text based online mediums. The counsellors would rather refer a client for telephonic or for face to face services for further help. As mentioned above by 50 year old participant, Lorena, the text online based mediums are difficult to use for most counsellors with more experience using telephone and face to face counselling methods. All the participants agreed that they found it difficult to sustain interaction that demonstrates active listening which is a core component in determining effectiveness of counselling. Active listening is a critical skill that professional counsellors are trained to master to be able to reflect back feeling, paraphrasing what client said and summarising key issues (Hutchby, 2001). These are skills that are taught for face to face counselling, the difficulty for counsellors emerges when active listening skills need to be demonstrated using text based online mediums. The application of active listening skills on text based online mediums need to be further researched.

4.3 Investigate the constraining factors regarding the use of online text-based workplace interventions

4.3.1. Texting and interpretation

One of the participants, indicated that these online text based intervention approaches can be very impersonal at times even though they do serve a therapeutic purpose that they are meant to serve. The participant stated that it is easier for them to not want to thoroughly engage in the therapeutic process in a sense that they sometimes do not want to get very personal or send a sentimental message to the clients on Facebook but instead they send an automatic message that refers the clients to the counsellors in the call centre. The participant expressed the following:

> *"I think the people miss that personal thing because maybe at some point they feel that they are speaking to a machine or they don't know if their voices have been heard"(Amanda, 29).*

The participant proceeded to indicate that it is better when a client receives counselling via telephone as a client can rest assured that their problem was heard by someone else who will give verbal cues to indicate to the client that he/she is listening. This reaffirms the importance for a counsellor to be able to demonstrate active listening skills when interacting with clients as discussed earlier in this report.

In terms of the interpretation of messages the participant denoted that something as simple as a punctuation mistake can distort the whole meaning of a sentence or message. One participant mentioned that some clients use jargon(s) that is difficult to interpret or understand. Other studies are of the view that there is a need to better understand the youth culture (Kirkland, 2008). A different type of language is used which requires information from multiple sources to make sense of the language used in text based counselling. The participant further mentioned how some people are good at speaking English compared to writing it; hence people find it very difficult to fully express what they need to say.

Other participants also expressed a similar concern in terms of texting and interpretation. She indicated that;

> "For *online text based mediums it is difficult to ask a client to clarify something to you because their clarification could lead to further distortion of the message. Therefore this makes miscommunication between the helper and the client inevitable"* (Jane, 31years).

Two other participants echoed similar concerns regarding texting and interpretation which could lead to miscommunication. They reported that the remoteness of the client-helper relationship in relation to the online text based intervention approaches makes it difficult for the individuals involved in the relationship to establish rapport and thus is not reflective of accurate communication between the helper and the client.

On the other hand, another participant expressed a different experience, she reported that she had not experienced any miscommunication problems. This she explained as follows;

> *"People usually used online text-based mediums say things directly like they are and they never beat around the bush hence this makes it easier to understand" (Tshego, 23).*

According to other research, cues such as emoticons improves written communication in the same way visual or non-verbal communication supports verbal communication (Rezabek & Cochenour, 1998). It is argued that insertion of emoticons helps a reader to better comprehend the level and direction of the emotional context surrounding the message communicated over online text mediums. This could be the reason for some counsellors who expressed feeling confident with interpretation of text from their clients. However this is also to be understood within a context of the counsellor's adeptness with a youth culture and lingo that is used in a digital dispensation. Furthermore, counsellors do not receive any formal training on the use cues such as emoticons hence the lack of confidence and difficulty for some counsellors on using text mediums.

4.3.2. The experience of the tool utilising Facebook, Twitter and Chat applications

Not all online text based mediums are suitable for therapeutic interventions because of their design. The first participant indicated that some of the text mediums like twitter pose a challenge in terms of giving feedback to the clients requesting help via the medium as it imposes limitations such as having to condense whatever advice that helper has to offer to the client. The participant stated that a text medium such as twitter does not permit much needed flexibility for the helper to give adequate advice to the client because it has set a strict limitation on how much one can actually write to other users on that medium. Hence this makes a comprehensive dialogue between the client and the helper impossible via online text medium. The first participant also elicited that other text based mediums such as Facebook do permit much needed flexibility for the helper to render adequate information and/or advice to clients because there are no limitations as to how much one can write to another user of that medium.

The participant also contrasted the user friendliness of both Facebook and twitter and she so revealed that it is easier to use Facebook compared to twitter.

The third participant highlighted that the time frame by which the helpers render help or feedback to the clients through online text mediums poses a significant problem especially on Facebook. The participant states that the only time when they can reply to the messages of clients on Facebook is on Friday, hence this particular issue defeats the urgency of help required by the clients. The participants used related example where a client expressed to the helper via Facebook that he/she is feeling depressed and hence he/she wants to commit suicide, such an urgent matter would require immediate attention and assistance but then due to the time frame that online text based helpers are required to provide feedback to the clients, the much needed help is not provided at that essential time. This means the online counselling service may not provide the immediacy of attention as may be required by the client.

Other participants indicated that they face issues of expression in terms of language via online text mediums. The participants indicate that the medium of expression in these online text mediums is usually English. Though most of the time counsellors know what to say, it becomes a challenge sometimes to succinctly articulate the response to the client because they find it difficult to structure it. So hypothetically speaking, it is safe to assume that if helpers are experiencing difficulties concerning the medium of expression then there is a great possibility that clients might be experiencing the same problem as well.

4.3.3. Supervision offered for counsellors

The participants in this study stated that all texts, tweets and postings are quality assured and evaluated by supervisors before being approved to be posted. One participant counsellor further stated that:

> "*I can say to you 'argh get over your feeling because you are not depressed' I can't say that to a depressed person" (Jane, 31).*

The participant indicated that when posting a text, they have to be cognisant and mindful of clients who may have serious mental disorder or is scared, anxious, depressed etc.; hence the need to be cautious with feedback to ensure client benevolence and thus deviate from client malevolence. One of the participants who also had a supervisory role made emphasis on the importance of quality assuring all postings on social media platforms.

Another participant, added that all interactions were quality checked and analysed through weekly reports, the Facebook interactions generate a weekly data analysis report which is an

online freely accessible report generated through google website and is called google analytics. The report illustrates how quickly their response rate was, and how better some posts have improved per day, which means the number of people who engagement with what was posted either through liking the post and or commenting on the post. The Facebook google analytics report also assist the organisation to evaluate client ratings of the service received from SADAG counsellors.

The researcher however noted that the quality assurance mechanisms are completed only for planned preventative and health promoted messages and campaigns on SADAGs social media and print media platforms. There needs to be clear policies and procedures that provide guidance on quality assurance for all platforms used by SADAG.

It is the researchers view that there needs to be checks and balances built into the system. The google analytics report has some limitations because it provides a statistical analysis and does not provide qualitative feedback. Furthermore, synchronous text mediated counselling is difficult to monitor and develop quality assurance mechanisms. The participants agreed that they don't have processes in place to save historical interactive text exchange on social media for supervision purposes. Such a process guideline would be useful for evaluating service improvement and recovery dynamics.

4.3.4. Monitoring of the mediums used

Monitoring of interventions used in counselling is an important aspect of ensuring quality. This includes having effective processes in place to monitor and guide counsellor performance and to evaluate the efficiency of the tools used. In this research, all participants understood the importance of robust monitoring processes. It would seem there are different platforms used as mediums for intervention but a specific application is used for monitoring and reporting. As reported by one of the participants:

> *"I forgot the application name but on the page you can evaluate and we get a weekly report that tells us this post has been seen by so many people, it reached so many people, so many people shared it, so many people commented. From last week there have been so many page visits and this week is down or up to how many" (Zoleka, 27).*

Another participant also provided more insight to the importance of monitoring and supervision of counsellors and their interventions;

> "*Intervention and supervision is vastly important. Every single either message that comes through, an email or whatever it is that comes through does get supervised. The*

person who is handling this query will just get an understanding by a senior what the action is going to be. Should a counsellor undergo any kind of trauma by dealing with that specific message that affects them, they will get debriefed as well. So they are not going to be opened for let's say hurtful situations at all" (Jane, 31).

The SADAG counsellors refer most of their clients to professionals in private practice which is not a free service, clients are liable for payment of counselling. It is clear SADAG online counsellors ensure that their referral to private practitioners is a vetted process that ensures that clients are referred to an appropriate intervention. One participant articulated in the following way:

"*There are forums like Psych central, cognitive like specialized psychologists that we know for a fact that this is a psychologist that has online resources; those are the only resources that we give to people, not some dodgy support group that you find and throw it to people. Like I said these are resources that can cause more harm than good and for those of course that I have just mentioned Psych central, Dr Colinda Linde on live forum or Skype session or whatever we know because that is a specialist, someone who is an academic who has written books, who has a practice. She is doing exactly what she would have done face to face except she is using internet as a medium, then I am sure she is comfortable with that because she is a professional (Jane, 31yrs).*

The above participant reiterates the importance of ensuring that their referral system is quality assured given the high risk associated with sites that are fake and could pose a threat to SADAG credibility as experts in mental health counselling.

4.3.5. Unpleasant experiences encountered when using these mediums

To further understand the constraining factors the researcher probed to check if counsellors had ever encountered unpleasant experiences on online text mediums. Studies indicate that helplines deal with prank and abusive calls and this is often one of the demotivating dynamics as counsellors have no control of the kind of calls they receive (UNAIDS Best Practise, 2002). Abusive and prank calls are quite exhausting and can lead to stress for counsellors if there are no well-structured processes in place to help counsellors in dealing with them. As such the researcher wanted to find out if text based mediums expose counsellors to similar experiences and how it is dealt with.

In this research it was clear that counsellors have encounters with irate and unpleasant text requests. All participants in this research seemed to agree that the organisation, SADAG, does

not allow them to respond negatively or in a rude manner to clients on any of their mediums. Participants seemed to understand that most clients come through already feeling vulnerable and overwhelmed by their personal circumstances, as such they are likely to present with anger that masks deep seated fears. One of the participants summed it as follows:

> *"…They may come across as rude but then they may be going through something still, so whatever you think is unpleasant you have to put it away and focus on helping this person. ..For me I have this motto that whatever happens at work is not personal but Facebook I have to take home with me and keep on checking, but empathy more than anything else and understand the patrons that use our social networks. For example this morning had someone who wrote and asked what is the problem, she said that's none of your business, I want to help you so why are you calling, because I want to speak to you. You sit there and listen because they do get better and recall, "I did call SADAG and I swore at them… They call back and say I am sorry I was going through ABC"* (Ntokozo, 29).

The participant above understands the principles and ethics that underpin the counselling profession on the ability to as a counsellor to separate the self from the personal. The participant demonstrated good understanding of typical behaviour associated with people with mental health problems and her role as a counsellor. Firstly it is important to understand that as a counsellor you are there to serve the clients' needs. The counsellor helps clients find satisfaction in their lives as stated by Corey (2009). Other participants also expressed that they found it easier to deal and move on with an unpleasant text interaction with client as compared to telephone abusive callers. It would seem counsellors feel telephone interaction as more direct and immediate. The text mediums provide some form of distance that enables the counsellor to find it easier to separate the self from the professional.

4.3.6 Suitability for workplace interventions

All participants agreed that online text mediums can be suitable for workplace environments if counsellors are well trained with skills to provide support through text mediums. Participants said most people who used online text mediums are usually those who are comfortable using social media platforms. Some studies have also indicated that 60% of the internet users preferred to seek help online for mental health problems (Hanley & Reynolds, 2009). One participant summarised it as follows;

"..If someone is just feeling stressed and overwhelmed at work I think it would be a great medium. If someone is having some serious issues and is not coping, not just at work but through life in general then again it is very inappropriate to counsel someone via text message. The discrimination of mental illnesses within the workplaces, a lot of people will be scared to ask for help so what better way to do it online and anonymously. They do not have to let their employers know they are suffering from a mental illness. It is literally a one on one and it is completely confidential, but they do need to kind of broaden that area of wellness program (Lorena, 50)."

Though most participants agreed that online text based counselling is suitable for workplace, it was noted it has limitations. Counsellors are of the view that online text mediums need to be used as assessment and refer client for further telephonic or face to face counselling. Some authors argue that "when the auditory information is not available to both parties, as is the case in online web counselling, then the interactive work that comprises the counselling session needs to take into account the affordances, both enabling and constraining, offered by the technology"(Hutchby,2001).

SADAG facilitates mental health related workshops for various workplaces to promote its varied services which include group work, employee referral and linking for mental health related issues at a micro level. SADAG's focus is on work role issues and challenges that emanate from the working conditions and how they impact on the person as employee. The workplace workshops involve employees being taken through ways to deal with stress, anxiety and depression. As such interventions in the workplace are mainly at a meso level using the promotive approach. These are interventions aimed at capacitating employees for further growth and development, Kruger and Van Breda's OSW Practice Model (cited in du Plessis, 2009). Workplace group interventions are often short term, focused on teaching participants problem solving strategies and interpersonal skills that accelerate change (Corey & Corey, 2012).

4.4 Skills used by counsellors when conducting text based counselling for workplace interventions

This section explores the skills and experiences used by counsellors for online text counselling for workplace interventions. The section further looks at the type of training induction offered by SADAG for online counsellors.

4.4.1 Skills needed by counsellors

A study conducted by Dean (2005) suggests that employee job fit is more important for call centre as compared to any other environments. Employees need to be able to cope with the unique stressors, "be self-assured, confident people who don't take anything personally" (Dean 2005, p. 42-43). SADAG counsellors are employees placed within a call centre environment to provide a counselling service using telephonic and online text mediums. It is reported that if the fit is poor, it impacts on employee performance significantly (Dean, 2005). As such it important that counsellors receive technical training in telephone and computer skills (UNAIDS Best Practice Studies, 2002).

Participants agreed that there are specific skills that one needs to be a counsellor using online mediated platforms. All acknowledged that you need to have educational qualifications as a counsellor which teaches you counselling skills. Empathy was highlighted as an important skill but it was emphasised that any training that enables and equips the counsellor with tools to better understand written text by clients is important. It was interesting that counsellors highlighted the need for training for using online mediums as this is not offered in their academic preparations and qualifications.

Other important skills noted from some authors include; the counsellor and client being practically good at expressing themselves in written text and also ability to type at a reasonable conversational level. It is argued that online counselling is best suited to those who are capable of self-introspection, appreciative of written self-expression, and are creative enough to keep sustained text conversation. (Speyer & Zack, 2004).

The additional skills identified by the participants include somebody with compassion, kindness, empathy and passion for helping in the mental health. Customer relations was also identified as an important skill which exposes one to being sensitive to the things that people talk about. Another participants added that a counsellor needs to understand the sort of responsibility they have towards the people they serve specifically when dealing with mental health issues. An example on suicide was made where it is the counsellors' responsibility to point clients towards the right direction.

4.4.2. The kind of training included at induction or training of online counsellors offered by SADAG

The researcher needed to ascertain if participants received any additional specialised training to complement their skills. It seems there are different kinds of training workshops that counsellors at SADAG receive. There is induction training for all new counsellors which

includes operational processes and protocols. This is the training that includes being familiarised with working with online social media platforms which involves appropriateness of language used and common courtesy on social media. It would seem counsellors are encouraged to assess and refer online requests for telephonic counselling. This is how one of the participants responded;

> *"Training at SADAG actually never stops you have it always, it is constant. You have the major training which is actually the whole weekend when you start. We have monthly meeting and at every meeting there is a professional who comes in and teaches us something new be it on substances, bi-polar, HIV. Every so often there will be training for people who are interested for a day and the professional goes slightly in depth on the topics. So training at SADAG is constant it does not stop" (Amanda, 24).*

This illustrates that the ongoing training offered in-house by SADAG for its counsellors focuses mainly on knowledge content specific to mental health issues. The ongoing training is not on the use of online text based mediums. Though online is a tool used for the delivery of the counselling service, it would seem it is taken for granted that counsellors have the confidence and expertise to effectively interact with clients over such mediums.

A key informant also mentioned that when they recruit potential counselling staff, they do look at employee compatibility for using online mediums, but focusing mostly on telephone counselling. The online text abilities are a on the job skill acquisition as the counsellors gain more work experience.

4.5 Ethical Considerations

This section describes ethical issues that guide the profession of counselling and when dealing with issues of mental health. The section looks at how SADAG has made considerations and how online counsellors integrate such issues in online text mediated interventions.

4.5.1 How are issues of confidentiality ensured and handled for text based interventions?

There are also universal principles and ethical frameworks that govern the practice of professional counselling and are applicable in all settings. Firstly it is important to understand that as a therapist you are there to serve the clients' needs. Secondly the counsellor needs to be aware of their professional ethics and code that regulate decision making. These will also be influenced by the policies and standard operating procedures of the employer organisation. The

next ethical issue pertains to right of the client to informed consent. "By educating your clients about their rights and responsibilities, you are both empowering them and building a trusting relationship with them" (Corey, 2009. p. 61). This creates a permissive environment for effective helping process. Confidentiality need to clearly communicate as the cornerstone of therapy and it helps in building trust and rapport. The researcher could not determine if SADAG had written policies on confidentiality but was assured that such ethical issues are covered comprehensively in induction trainings and through other trainings on mental health issues.

The researcher needed to find out how these principles are upheld by counsellors using text mediated online mediums. From this research it would seem that participants understood the importance of maintaining confidentiality. The online text based platforms have options that clients have the option for either remaining anonymous or not to the counsellor. For the social media platforms, it would seem there is a process in place that the media consultants use to assist in ensuring client anonymity and confidentiality. Counsellors did seem to have concerns in this area and felt comfortable with how issues of confidentiality are handled.

> "*Everything is really confidential…We won't put it on our Facebook page so it's pretty confidential. It's just that we can't protect you to a certain point if you say 'Hi I am going through this on a public platform, we can't hide it from there, and maybe we can say that we will reply you via inbox. The biggest is remaining anonymous and also we have to respect that sometimes when people call the husband or wife doesn't know. So when you call someone you have to ask them is this the right time to speak. If they say to you I am only available after 17h00 then you call them from 17h00 never before that. What the patient want, wishes first on the list rather than anyone else" (Lorena, 50).*

The counsellors take this more seriously as they seem to have a grounded understanding on the importance of confidentiality. As mentioned earlier, the counsellors' role is underpinned by ethics of counselling which include understanding maintaining confidentiality. The participant in the above quote raises an important dynamic that compromises maintenance of privacy when using Facebook. The control of privacy is also determined by the client, who may choose to text publicly or to use the inbox facility which can only be seen by the counsellor. This is another area of development for Facebook to continuously create awareness for its users.

4.5.2 Record keeping processes

Record keeping is a requirement for all interventions offered by professional counsellors. In this regard, the counsellor or the employer needs to create, maintain, and store records related

to their professional work in order to facilitate care by them or other treating professionals and to ensure compliance with legal requirements (National Association of Social Workers, 2008).

Record keeping is of particular interest and relevance for client organisations with employee wellness programmes especially if offered as an external service. The service has cost implications for the client organisation and as such utilization reports are required from the service provider. In this instance, SADAG does not include costs for their online services to client organisations. The online text based services is integrated as part of a package and follow up support for employees. One participant mentioned that:

> *"Records are kept for our research, for stats, our margins so that we know that everything balances, just for those things and I am not sure how long they are kept. They are kept in a safe place which is locked where no one can access them unless it's at management level. Hard copy records are kept in a file in a store room which is locked for 3 to 5 years, the online ones indefinitely. I have no idea how long they are kept for" (Zoe, 26).*

Another participant who is a supervisor also agreed that SADAG does have a system for record keeping purposes specifically for telephone counselling calls. The supervisor however disputed the other participants claim and made it clear that SADAG did not have a record system in place for their online text mediums.

> "*We using Dazix for case studies as well or just to keep a track records, e.g. If somebody calls and says I've called and was never helped', you have to go back. We have requests from 2001 and we never delete that, for online we don't have any records" (Justine, 31).*

In South Africa, the legal requirements for keeping personal information of people is guided through POPI Act of 2009. The Act seeks to regulate processing of personal information and also has implications for the counselling profession (retrieved, http://www.popi-compliance.co.za/). The POPI Act is not very explicit for mental health therapy, however it is clear that any personal information of people need to be protected.

4.6 Key informants: Affordances of using text based technologies as a medium of work place interventions.

Using other sources in analysing the data ensures validity of the study (Newton, 2012). As a result the researcher used triangulation and conducted interviews with management representatives as key informants to increase trustworthiness of the study. This section of the study focused on data gathered from the two key informants in the study.

SADAG uses a number of online mediums for their intervention on mental health. These include Social media platforms, online recorded videos and helplines for various mental health emergencies. The key informants in this study reported using methods that involve assessment and referral as this helps to link client requests with appropriate intervention. The assessment is applied on all the mediums as it involves predefined questions.

The online mediated mediums also offer a high degree of anonymity for users especially within workplace environments. Employees seeking assistance can access counselling and support in the privacy of their workstations or at home at their own convenient time.

One of the key informants said some of the reasons for introducing online text mediums for support and counselling were motivated by the rapid growth of mobile phones. They expanded the mediums through which the wellness services were provided.

4.6.1 How do you know that it is an effective medium of intervention?

The rapid growth of social media has influenced organisations to expand their forms of communication to online platforms. SADAG was also seeing the necessity of introducing online text based platforms to be able to increase their reach and convenience for their clients. All participants also agreed that the online mediums offer more benefits for the clients because of its convenience of time and place. Clients are able to access counselling remotely saving travelling costs and time. The key informant who manages the operations of the counselling service summarised the effectiveness as follows;

> *"I can say that it is an effective medium of intervention, due to research which has shown that there are other like-minded organisations using similar platforms and have shown good uptake of the platforms. Research showed that texting was increasing rapidly with people being communicating more on social media and we needed to remain relevant and thus Facebook Fridays and our twitter page. The uptake on these platforms has been good and we continue to see a steady uptake month on month. It is*

also more cost effective for the organisation as compared to telephone counselling" (Kesi, 40).

This implies that SADAG saw online mediums such as Facebook and Twitter as other means to connect and reach out to their clients. Further on SADAG seems to have established some protocols to standardise and ensure quality of service. There is a standard introductory line uses and an assessment criteria for pre-screening the clients and determining appropriateness of service. This means pre-screening can be seen as an "affordance" (Hutchby, 2001) of the technology supporting the interaction. Central to the concept of technological affordances is that they do not impose themselves upon human actors when these actors interact with a particular artifact (DAZIX software), but that they frame what is possibly done with it (Stommel & Molder, 2015).

4.6.2 What are the cost implications for the organisations for using online text based mediums?

According to other research conducted on effects of social media in the workplace, employers use social media not only for helping employees become more productive; it allows employers or organisations such as SADAG to keep abreast with market trends (Dierckson, DiPlacibo, Harvey & Bosco, 2013). The research further states employees; in this case counsellors; are also better prepared to troubleshoot potential setbacks and are more likely to create good public relations through the work they are doing. The key benefit to social media is that it is free. There is no cost to using these sites, other than the cost of the employee's time to update the company's site (Dierckson et. al, 2013). The key informant participant also confirmed that cost implications were minimal for the organisation because they only need good internet connectivity to be able for activating social media platforms.

4.6.3 Cost implications for the clients

According to Tarrific; a South African company that helps companies and individuals save on their cellphone bills, South Africa has been reported to be one of the highest priced when it comes to data on contract (FIN24, 2016). It is further reported that users, especially those in the lower income category are spending significant portions of their income (around 20%) on relatively small amounts of data (FIN24, 2016). This implies that employees who may need to use texting technologies to access counselling service are impacted because they need to carry the cost of the request. However one of the key informants who is a supervisor at SADAG said the following:

"It works for the organisations mission to provide the service at a very minimal cost as possible to clients. Currently the helpline is toll free and using facebook and other texting mediums is free. There are mainly data costs for the client, however should they be in a WiFi Hotspot, then there are no costs to the client. And we have not received any concerns regarding costs using email or Facebook. Actually we see a steady increase of client using texts to ask for help" (Kesi, 40).

This means the organisation relies on the free service offered mainly through the social media platforms which only requires the organisation to have access to internet to be able to use the platforms. This becomes a minimal cost for the organisation. However, for an individual who relies on their own income to be able to access internet may be a costly exercise given the high costs of data as reported earlier. So SADAG supports this with a free telephonic counselling service.

4.6.4 Ethical considerations for introducing intervention through text based counselling

The helping profession is bound by specific ethical considerations to protect clients and to facilitate trust in the helping process. However these principles and ethics it would seem, are mainly based on face to face interventions and not specific for online counselling technologies. Findings from a study conducted by Finn and Barak (2010) indicate that there are no agreed standards of practice on ethical obligations in e-counselling, as such practitioners use ethics inconsistently.

One of the principles and ethics in counselling is the assurance of confidentiality for clients. According to Speyer and Zack (2004), the counsellors physical absence minimises the clients' initial "shame" while presenting their problem, as such online counselling provides a sense of perceived privacy (Speyer & Zack, 2004). Online counsellors have found that text based self-disclosure can have the effect of inducing a high degree of intimacy and honesty from the first exchange of e-mails (Speyer & Zack, 2004). For SADAG, one of the important aspects considered as mentioned by the operations manager, was being able to assure confidentiality and that client information was being kept safe. This aspect is of interest for workplace wellness programmes as employees may not always have the awareness of the associated risks and implications of exposing personal mental health issues on a social media platform (Pilcer, 2012).

With this understanding one of the key informant stated that they take measures in ensuring that their systems are protected from being accessed by any unauthorised third parties.

Furthermore SADAG allows for clients using online mediums to remain anonymous and only requesting general demographic information for organisational reporting purposes.

Another aspect that was considered related to ensuring that the online client would be able to be counselled by one counsellor for continuity purposes. This the key informant says is sometimes a challenge because the online text requests are not always asynchronous. Sometimes a client responds after (i.e. synchronously) a counsellor has completed a work shift. In such instances the next counsellor on shift would have to continue with the online counselling having read the counselling thread of the session. She mentioned in such instances the counsellors refer clients for face to face interventions. So this requires that the counsellors themselves being comfortable with using online mediums and being able to assess appropriately to determine if further referral is necessary.

4.6.5 Criteria for recruiting SADAG online counsellors

In keeping abreast with technological advancements within the call centre industry, SADAG also saw it as important to scale up on its services extending accessibility of their information and counselling services through text based online mediums which included email, Facebook and twitter. This approach also meant a review of their recruitment and staff training approach to include employees with skills and knowledge using online text based mobile technologies to interact with clients. A study conducted by Dean (2005) suggests that employee job fit is more important for call centre as compared to other environments. Employees need to be able to cope with the unique stressors, "be self-assured, confident people who don't take anything personally" (Dean 2005, p42-43). It is reported that if the fit is poor, it impacts on employee performance significantly (Dean, 2005). The sample used in this study illustrates SADAG's attempt to achieve job fit which includes participants with media studies and participants with counselling skills background.

As mentioned earlier in the report, all participants concurred that for one to be an effective online counsellor, you need to firstly be a qualified counsellor with a degree in social work or psychology and registered with a professional body. Participants added that one needs to also be comfortable using online technologies for counselling clients. This fact was further reiterated by one of the key informants who is a supervisor at SADAG. She said prospective SADAG counsellors need to have the relevant qualifications in counselling, and should have experience with telephone counselling because their services are still mainly accessed through the helpline. She further mentioned that the induction of new employee counsellors focuses on

processes and protocols relevant to telephone counselling and text mediums including social media and emails.

Furthermore counsellors are recruited based on their interpersonal skills, and on their problem-solving and decision-making abilities. A positive attitude towards mental health issues and an ability to be non-judgemental, respectful of others and compassionate are also important criteria that are sought after when recruiting a counsellor to conduct text-based counselling (UNAIDS Best Practice Studies, 2002). Counsellors also need to be able to deal with stress. The training provided to counsellors builds on these basic skills and on any previous counselling experience. According to other studies conducted on skills needed for an effective online counsellor; induction needs to include technical training in telephone and computer skills (UNAIDS Best Practice Studies, 2002). The highly technical environment is managed through clearly set out processes and protocols with no flexibility. As such counsellors need to be competent in computer skills to be able to capture information onto the system while interacting with the client.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This chapter starts with a brief account on how the objectives of the study were met. Thereafter, it summarises the main findings of this study, it makes recommendations based on the findings and also suggests areas for future research that will be useful to the body of knowledge concerning the preparedness and perceptions of counsellors on the use of online text based technologies in the workplace.

5.2 Objectives of the study

All the objectives of the study were met, participants felt free to share their insights and contribute to more knowledge in this ear.

- ***To explore experiences of online counsellors regarding the use of online text mediated workplace interventions***

  The first objective intended to set the scene for the researcher and gain insight from participants about how they experienced text based mediums. Guiding questions were prepared to ensure the correct data is collected related to the types of issues that participants dealt with and the age groups that were likely to access the service using online text mediums. The researcher used open ended questions to probe on specific timeframes that participants had been using online text mediums and requested participants to describe their experience. Other questions for this objective inquired about the educational background of participants.

  This objective was met, participants had different levels of qualifications with some not necessarily related to counselling but media studies. All participants agreed that most of the requests were related to depression.

- ***To investigate tensions and constraining factors regarding the use of online technology mediated platforms***

This objective was met through probing about the challenges that participants encountered. Rich insights were gained because participants referred to interpretation of texting for counselling purposes being a difficulty. Participants also shared insights on the limitations

of the tools being used i.e. twitter for counselling; the platform has limitations on characters of words that can be used which then makes it inappropriate as a counselling medium. Further observations in this study related to supervision of online counsellors and monitoring; these aspects were found to be a concern because they are not adequately defined and structured. As a result participant did not feel confident to fully conduct text counselling but would rather use such mediums for information and referral purposes.

- ***To explore the skills used by online counsellors when conducting counselling for workplace interventions***

This objective was achieved. Participants described their skills and some of their limitations in offering online counselling because some were not qualified as counsellors. All participants agreed that it was important for online counsellors to acquire professional counselling skills and technical skills of writing on social media platforms. To investigate affordances of using text based technologies as a medium of work place intervention.

The objective was achieved using further probing questions to understand the rationale for SADAG to introduce text based information and counselling platforms. The data was mainly gathered from key informants who represented management of the organisation. The researcher also found that the organisation had minimal costs associated with offering online text mediated services. It was also interesting that the recruitment criteria is not only limited to professional counsellors but includes media studies; for operations of their social media platforms.

- ***To discover ethical considerations in conducting online text based mediums for workplace interventions***.

Of interest with this objective were the ethical considerations that were highlighted to ensure compliance with counselling ethics. The issue of assuring confidentiality and anonymity were emphasised by participants.

5.2. Experiences of online counsellors regarding the use of online text mediated workplace interventions

Findings in this study indicate that SADAG employs counsellors from different disciplines for their online based platforms. The employees consists of media studies graduates who are primarily responsible for providing information and facilitating engagements on social media

platforms. The other categories of staff are counsellors with social sciences degrees and specialising in counselling. The counsellors are primarily responsible for telephone counselling, referral and linking clients for further face to face interventions. There is also another set of professional counsellors who are affiliated to SADAG and form part of their referral database for face to face interventions and also offer their service via online mediums facilitated by SADAG.

The participants with academic background in the social sciences are more experienced and confident in counselling over the phone as compared to online texting. This was evident in participants 'assertions of their preference for telephone counselling as it has auditory senses that can be leveraged on for active listening. Through ongoing training and practise, the professional counsellors gain more confidence using all online mediums for providing a counselling service. Participants with media studies background operated more as intake and assessment for client requests that come through social media platforms. These participants seemed more comfortable providing information and referring for face-to-face and telephone counselling where most of the experienced counsellors are based.

5.3 Tensions and constraining factors regarding the use of online technology mediated platforms

Findings from the study indicated that the experience of participants as counsellors using online mediums were not the same. There were varying levels of tensions and constraints influenced by participants' educational background, competency with counselling skills and their level of experience using online text mediated platforms. The following themes are presented with notable findings relating to constraints and tensions on using text online mediated platforms.

Texting and interpretation

All participants agreed that texting is a different medium that can easily be misinterpreted which can lead to communication breakdown. Participants pointed out that texting language was different from spoken language, where the counsellor is able to read the tone of voice and clarify immediately to check for meaning. Text mediums include the use of emoticons and punctuation marks that can change the meaning and tone of what is being said by both the counsellor and the client. Furthermore, most of text exchanges are asynchronous which provides limited time for the counsellor to process the text and respond. A further analysis of this finding may be due to the fact that SADAG has not yet set predefined protocols and standardised responses that counsellors need to use for asynchronous online text mediums.

Another finding which has been found to be a constraining factor for participants was the remoteness of the client-helper relationship in relation to the online text based intervention approaches. Participants found it difficult to establish rapport with clients using text mediated platforms and thus felt that the process as not reflective of accurate communication between the helper and the client.

Experience using online mediated tools

For this objective, all participants indicated a preference for telephonic counselling as compared to using text mediated platforms. Of the total sample of 10 participants, three felt better equipped to work on SADAG's mobile communication platforms because they had formal qualifications in media studies. Though the three participants felt confident with the text based online platforms, they expressed discomfort with counselling on mental health issues. The role of a text based counsellor is evidently limited to disseminating information and facilitating referrals for telephonic and face to face services. The identified main online text mediums used by SADAG counsellors include email, Facebook and Twitter. The main online medium for counselling service offering to employees and wider client base is telephonic counselling and not text-based counselling.

The participants with counselling qualifications had no prior experience with text based online mediums, however they came with experiential and formal qualifications on counselling skills. Evidently, SADAG provides basic orientation which is an on the job practical experience on how to interact with clients seeking information over text mediated platforms. The key limitations experienced by counsellors on using Twitter as an online text platforms is that it has restricted space for writing and is as such not a suitable medium for counselling.

Facebook on the other hand was found to be much user friendly and affords flexibility for the helper to render adequate information and/or advice to clients because there are no limitations on the number of words that one can write to another user of that medium. One of the highlighted finding that was found to be a challenge regarding Facebook as a text medium for employee counselling was the scheduling for counselling through #Facebook Fridays. The once a week scheduling of specialist psychotherapist in mental health issues hinders continuity of the helping process. The study also revealed the difficulties experienced by the affiliated psycho therapists when tasked with online text counselling for Facebook Fridays.

Supervision of interventions

SADAG mental health services are primary rendered through telephone mediums within a call centre environment. Call Centres offering employee wellbeing and mental health services use state of the art technological systems that are enabled to monitor and track the quality of counselling services rendered (UNAIDS Best Practise Studies, 2002). As a result, the findings in this study points to supervision being mainly structured for interventions rendered through telephone platforms. Therefore, SADAG counsellors' voice interactions with clients are recorded and kept safe through a voice recording software system for purposes of supervision and quality assurance.

However it would seem that the text mediated platforms have no structured supervision processes integrated. Online text based technologies within the mental health counselling field are still relatively new with limited research that can be used as reference for best practise. The tension as illustrated in the CHAT where the tool (i.e. online text mediums), is relatively new and creates tension in execution of tasks, (i.e. supervision, guidelines) resulting in division of labour. Different tasks are undertaken by counsellors in the development, management and rendering of the activity being online text counselling. Organisations such as SADAG need to define their own supervision processes using the counselling best practise models to ensure that their employee counsellors utilising text based mediums are supported through appropriate supervision.

Monitoring of the tool utilised

Monitoring of the tools used for interventions is taken seriously and as such there are specific software systems that SADAG uses for reporting and quality assurance purposes. However it would seem that it is not always to monitor what counsellors are on synchronous text messages which is the case for social media platforms such as Facebook and twitter. Where the messages are asynchronous there is an opportunity for the supervisor to guide the type of intervention and follow up with the assigned counsellor. The social media Facebook page seems to be the main text based tool used for engagement and counselling of clients. There is a structured process initiated by SADAG which involves planned monthly online chats with experts which they have termed Facebook Fridays. The organisation reports that the Facebook chats have become popular because there is a steady increase on number of clients engaging on the platform as analysed in monthly utilisation reports.

Handling unpleasant experiences

Participants demonstrated more understanding that as counsellors working with mental health issues; they know that often clients seek help when they are already feeling vulnerable and overwhelmed by their circumstances, as such clients are likely to present with anger that masks deep seated fears. Counsellors further reported being more comfortable dealing with unpleasant texts as compared to same encounter via the telephone. It would seem text mediums provide some form distance that makes it easier for the counsellor to not personalise the unpleasantness of the encounter.

Suitability for workplace interventions

Findings from this study indicate that though text based platforms such as social media are popularly used for communication, they are not adequate mediums for workplace counselling interventions. Training of professional counsellors is still primarily focused on traditional methods of counselling.

5.4 The skills used by online counsellors when conducting counselling for workplace interventions

In this section the researcher summarises findings regarding the knowledge and skills required for online text counsellors and criteria used by SADAG's for recruitment.

5.4.1 Skills needed by counsellors

Findings from this study indicate a need for specific skills required to be an effective online counsellor. Academic qualifications in counselling need to be a prerequisite for understanding the helping process. It was highlighted that there needs to be training on using online tools and understanding texting language as it can have different connotations in meaning as compared to spoken language. In this particular field of mental health, it was emphasised that a counsellor needs to have passion to work with mental health issues as these can be emotionally taxing.

5.4.2 Induction training offered to counsellors at SADAG

SADAG offers internal induction to all new employees' on operational processes and protocols. There is also ongoing training offered by various experts related to mental health issues. The findings from this study indicate that training offered by SADAG mainly focuses on issue specific content related to mental health. The ongoing trainings do not include use of online text mediums. The induction for a new employee counsellor tends to focus on telephone

counselling because it is SADAG's main medium of service. The use of other online mediums such as Facebook and emails are integrated as experiential learning on the job. For instance the Facebook Friday sessions are facilitated by employees with a speciality in media studies and they refer serious cases to professional counsellors for further intervention. The professional counsellors seem to also not be confident with the use of the medium and are thus assisted by the media facilitators. This indicates that there is a need for a more structured training for professional counsellors on the use of online mediated mediums.

5.4.3 Affordances of using text based technologies as a medium of work place intervention.

Findings indicate that online mediated mediums offer a high degree of anonymity for users especially within workplace environments. Employees seeking assistance can access counselling and support in the privacy of their workstations or at home at their own convenient time. Albeit that, counselling process mediated over text communicated mediums afford the client greater control of the counselling process there are several practical limitations. Findings in the study illustrate the importance of well-defined processes and protocols that would guide the interaction between the counsellor and client. In this study it is clear that processes at SADAG were not as yet well developed to support and capacitate counsellors to enhance their confidence and sense of comfort in using text mediated platforms.

5.4.4 Cost Implications

The main finding regarding costs impact rests more on the end the users of the service because one needs data connectivity to access SADAG's text mobile services. For an individual who relies on their own income to be able to access internet may be a costly exercise given the high costs of data as indicated by the study.

5.4.5 Ethical considerations in conducting online text based mediums for workplace interventions.

Issues of assuring confidentiality and privacy emerged as important aspects considered when introducing online text mediums especially for workplace environments. Online counsellors have found that text based self-disclosure can have the effect of inducing a high degree of intimacy and honesty from the first exchange of e-mails (Speyer& Zack, 2004). The authors assert that the counsellors' physical absence minimises the clients' initial "shame" while presenting their problem, as such online counselling provides a sense of perceived privacy

(Speyer & Zack, 2004). This raises ethical concerns and to a great extent requires that the counsellor should be trained and skilled to work with clients who are prepared to disclose considerably about themselves. To this end, SADAG allows for clients using online mediums to remain anonymous and only requesting general demographic information for organisational reporting purposes.

5.4.6 Recruitment criteria and training for online counsellors

A key finding in this study was that when SADAG reviewed the counsellor criterion with the introduction of online mobile communication mediums to include staff with media studies background various ethical challenges become evident. Employees with qualifications in media studies are unable to provide a counselling function but simply an information giving and referral function. An employee with a media studies background does not have the requisite skills and training to conduct therapeutic counselling, although these employees do play a pivotal part in coaching the professional counsellors on using online text mediums such as Facebook. This study highlighted the need for training and structured guidelines for professional counsellors on using online mediums as this is not offered in their academic preparations and qualifications. According to other studies conducted on skills needed for an effective online counsellor; induction needs to include technical training in telephone and computer skills (UNAIDS Best Practice Studies, 2002). The highly technical environment is managed through clearly set out processes and protocols with no flexibility. As such counsellors need to be competent in computer skills to be able to capture information onto the system while interacting with the client.

5.5 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

To conclude this report study, the researcher provides a brief summary of what the report covered, and recommendations for different stakeholders are made.

5.5.2 Summary of main findings

CHAT provided a socio-cultural perspective on developmental trajectories. The strength of the theoretical approach used helped to locate how the use of text based counselling that is mediated online can be located in a specific time and place (Hardman, 2008). It was useful in an analysis of the activity system that surrounds text-based counselling of employees at the SADAG. Findings of the study did provide insights from practising counsellors and their impression of the suitability of text mediums for workplace environments. Clearly there are further considerations that need to be made for these mediums to meet the requirements that enable an effective counselling interaction between the counsellor and client. Such considerations include the convenience of client being in control of time and space when using text based online counselling, further training of counsellors, to explore further the dynamics experienced with synchronous and asynchronous interactions and limitations experienced by counsellors to feel confident in using counselling skills on text mediated online platforms.

In light of this, the scope and occupational hazards of online counselling are still being discovered and explored by its practitioners, a comprehensive evaluation of its effectiveness is not yet possible. Ultimately, both parties must have trust and confidence in the medium for it to work well.

5.6 Recommendations

The study has provided insights on the experiences of counsellors working for SADAG using online text based technologies. The findings point to key areas that serve as enablers for successful integration of such mediums into mental health wellness programmes designed for workplace environments. The study further provided insights on tensions and barriers experienced by online counsellors as this is a fairly new area of study. It will be interesting to see further developments unfolding within the mental health counselling arena as online text technologies continue to develop. The following recommendations are made as informed by findings from this study report:

-SADAG

The organisation needs to consider a structured training plan to capacitate professional counsellors on technical aspects of using online tools.

Considerations for well-defined monitoring and supervision processes for text based interactions.

Until these recommendations are put in place and qualified counsellors are appointed the text based service should only be used for information giving and referral

-Social Work Profession

Of importance to note from this study are recommendations for development of online text use training content that is mainstreamed into formal academic curriculum. This would form a good foundation and boost counsellor confidence level when engaging with client through online mediums.

Considerations need to be made in integrating innovation and use of technology mediums in the academic curriculum of social work to prepare prospective students for realities of work.

Development of well researched ethical guidelines for those already in practise to guide their intervention and align to what constitutes good practise

Ethical guidelines for the use of technology should be developed for social workers by the SACSSP

-The legal fraternity

It is important to develop legislation that would provide governance for contact centres offering psychological counselling services and mental health. Legislation will provide policies that guide on requirements for practitioners wishing to offer online counselling

-Social Media (Facebook and Twitter)

Review the design and development of the platform integrating key requirements that enable effective counselling to take place. These include features that assure privacy, removing number of word limitations as is on twitter and flexibility for organisations to design platform to match their operational needs which includes generation of detailed analytical reports.

Further recommendations include; online professionals need to always understand and appreciate the limited nature of the medium. They need to:

• assess the suitability of clients and work within ethical parameters

• educate clients and provide informed consent

• advise clients regarding limitations

• have back-up resources in place to address urgent issues

5.7 Limitations of the study

The researcher made use of two semi structured interview schedules as data collection instruments. This minimised bias in the collection and analysis of data. The researcher kept reflective notes to minimise reflexivity however bias in qualitative research will occur to a certain degree given the researchers closeness to the data and current work in the area of study Sarantakos (1998).

The sample raises issues of representativeness of findings. Initially the researcher had planned to have a sample comprising of 10 participants with professional qualification in counselling. However, challenges were experienced in finding the planned sample because of the following dynamics; participation was voluntary which resulted fewer counsellors availing themselves as participants, the area under investigated was an under-researched area which made it difficult to find participants with the necessary knowledge and experience on the topic. As such, the sample comprised of eight participants and two key informant participants. . The size of the sample was determined by the quality of information gathered from the participants. In addition, data gathering and analysis was time consuming due to availability of participants, the process took longer than planned.

5.8 Suggestions for future research

The study focused on perceptions of counsellors using online text mediated technologies for counselling in the workplace. The study has provided insight on some of areas that could be further to guide best practise in this regard. Further research could focus on emerging interpretation of text mediums and use of emoticons by counsellors, further affordances of using text based technologies and associated assessment criterion that needs to be used for types of issues that can be handled through such mediums.

5.9 Final note

The use of text-based counselling does offer the potential of success if conducted by qualified trained personnel within the counselling profession. Finding spaces to reach people in workplace to improve wellness is a noble goal but needs to comply with strict ethical and legal practices.

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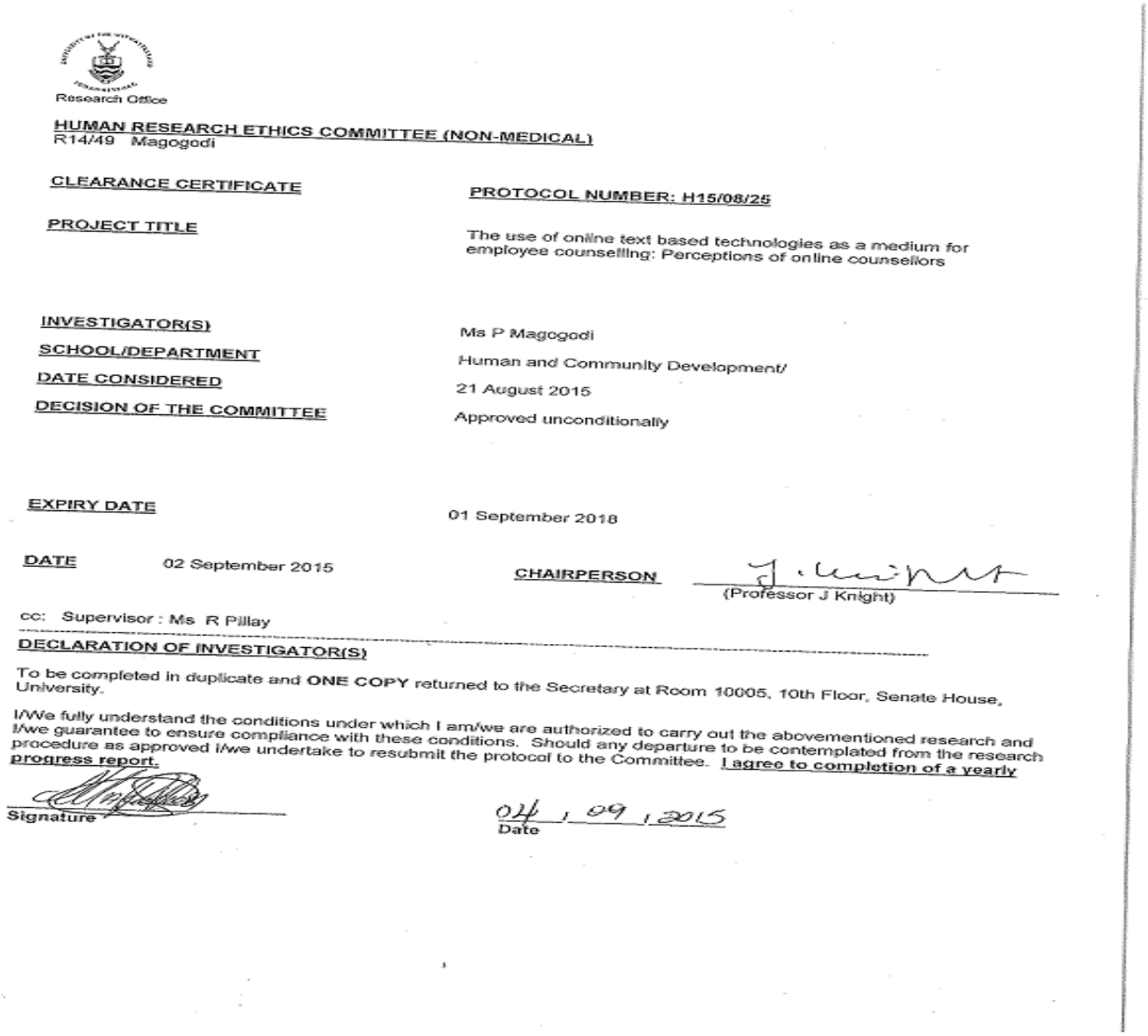
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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics Clearance Certificate



Research Office

HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (NON-MEDICAL)
R14/49 Magogodi

CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE **PROTOCOL NUMBER: H15/08/25**

PROJECT TITLE The use of online text based technologies as a medium for employee counselling: Perceptions of online counsellors

INVESTIGATOR(S) Ms P Magogodi

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT Human and Community Development/

DATE CONSIDERED 21 August 2015

DECISION OF THE COMMITTEE Approved unconditionally

EXPIRY DATE 01 September 2018

DATE 02 September 2015 **CHAIRPERSON** (Professor J Knight)

cc: Supervisor : Ms R Pillay

DECLARATION OF INVESTIGATOR(S)

To be completed in duplicate and **ONE COPY** returned to the Secretary at Room 10005, 10th Floor, Senate House, University.

I/We fully understand the conditions under which I am/we are authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I/we guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I/we undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee. **I agree to completion of a yearly progress report.**

Signature Date 04 / 09 / 2015

Appendix B: Approval Letter from SADAG

THE SOUTH AFRICAN DEPRESSION AND ANXIETY GROUP

NPO 013-085 Reg. No. 2000/025903/08

P O Box 652548 Benmore 2010

Tel: +27 11 234 4870

Fax: +27 11 262 6350

May 2015

To Whom It May Concern,

The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) hereby grants permission to Precious Magogodi to conduct interviews with some of SADAG Counsellors and Staff members pertaining to her research project as part of her Masters programme.

We ask that we please be informed of the research results and a final copy of the research report be submitted to us to share with our Volunteer Counsellors and Board Members.

If you have any further questions, please don't hesitate to contact me directly.

Regards,

Cassey Chambers
Operations Director
The South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG)
Tel: 011 234 4837
Email: office@anxiety.org.za
Website: www.sadag.org

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet

University of the Witwatersrand, 1 Jan Smuts Avenue & Jorissen Street, Braamfontein,
Johannesburg, 2000
011 717 1000

Good Day,

My name is Precious Magogodi, and I am a post graduate student registered for the degree MA in Occupational Social Work at the University of the Witwatersrand. As part of the requirements for the degree, I am conducting research on the use of text based online technologies as a medium for counselling within the workplace. It is a qualitative study that intends to look at perceptions and experiences of counsellors who are already using online mediums for counselling.

I therefore invite you to participate in my study. Your participation is entirely voluntary and refusal to participate will not be held against you in any way. If you agree to take part I shall arrange to interview you at a time and place that is suitable for you. The interview will last approximately one hour. You may withdraw from the study at any time and may also refuse to answer any questions that you may feel uncomfortable with answering.

With your permission, the interview will be tape-recorded. No one other than my supervisor will have access to the tapes. The tapes and interview schedules will be kept in a locked cabinet for two years following any publications or for six years if no publications emanate from the study. Please be assured that your name and personal details will be kept confidential and no identifying information will be included in the final research report.

Please contact me on 0825557995 email pmagogodi@lovelife.org.za or contact my supervisor, Roshini Pillay on 011 717 4472 email Roshini.Pillay@wits.ac.za for any further clarity. Should you wish to receive a summary of the study; an abstract will be made available on request.

Thank you for taking time to consider participating in the study.

Yours sincerely

Precious Magogodi

Post Graduate Student: MA in Occupational Social Work

University of the Witwatersrand

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form



CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE STUDY

I hereby consent to participate in the research project. I consent to be interviewed on my experience as a counsellor on the use of text based online technologies as a medium for counselling within the workplace. The purpose and procedures of the study have been explained to me. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may refuse to answer any particular items or withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences. I understand that my responses will be kept confidential.

Name of participant:

Date:

Signature:

CONSENT FORM FOR AUDIO-TAPING OF THE INTERVIEW

I hereby consent to tape-recording of the interview. I understand that my confidentiality will be maintained at all times and that the tapes will be destroyed two years after any publication arising from the study or six years after completion of the study if there are no publications.

Name of participant:

Date:

Signature:

Appendix E: Interview Schedule



INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR COUNSELLORS

Age: Gender:
Professional Qualification:
Duration of employment:
Date of interview:

Objective 1: To explore experiences of online counsellors regarding the use of online text mediated workplace interventions.

1. How long have you been using text based mediums for counselling?
2. Describe your experience with online text based mediums
   Please respond in relation to the following areas:
   - Academic or any form of training received in prior to practising
   - Types of problems handled
   - Age group of clients accessing counselling using online text based mediums
   - Level of counsellor comfort and discomfort with handling issues using text based medium

Objective 2: To investigate the constraining factors regarding the use of online text based workplace interventions.

1. What are the constraining factors in rendering this service? Please respond in relation to the following areas:
   - Texting and interpretation
   - The experience of the tool utilised e.g. facebook/email/chat applications
   - Supervision of interventions
   - Monitoring of the tool utilised
2. Describe some of the unpleasant experiences you encounter when using this medium
3. Explain the factors that make this type of intervention suitable for workplace interventions. Please give as much detail as possible.

Objective 3: To explore the skills used by the online counsellors when conducting text based counselling for workplace interventions.

1. Describe the skills needed to be an online counsellor
2. Explain what is included in induction or training of online counsellors as offered by SADAG?

Objective 4: To discover ethical considerations in conducting online text based mediums for workplace interventions

1. Explain how issues of confidentiality ensured and handled for text based interventions?
2. How are records kept and for how long?
3. Describe other ethical challenges you have experienced when conducting online counselling.

Appendix F: Interview Schedule for Key Informant



INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE KEY INFORMANT

Gender:

Position in organisation:

Duration of employment:

Date of interview:

Objective: To investigate affordances of using text based technologies as a medium of work place interventions.

1. Please explain what your role in the organisation entails.

2. Please explain the reasons for introducing online text based counselling application.

3. How do you know that it is an effective medium of intervention?

4. What other methods of intervention do you use and how different is online text based medium from them?

5. What are the cost implications for the organisations for using online text based mediums?

6. What are the cost implications for the client?

7. What ethical considerations did you have to make when introducing intervention through text based counselling?

8. What is your criteria for recruiting online counsellors?

9. What challenges have you experienced with counsellors having to use online text based mediums for workplace interventions?