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INSTITUTIONAL CRISIS PLANNING AND SCHOOL COUNSELOR EFFICACY: IMPLICATIONS FOR BURNOUT

BY

Joseph Bankole Filani: Department of Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, School of General Education, Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Nigeria; E-mail: bfilani@yahoo.com

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Surajudeen Olawale Sadiq: Department of Educational Foundations and Management, School of General Education, Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Nigeria;
E-mail: sadiqsog17@gmail.com/ORCID: https://orcid.org/0009-0004-8168-1940

Abstract

This study examined the relationship between institutional crisis planning, school counselor self-efficacy, and burnout, and tested the mediating role of counselor efficacy in the crisis planning burnout nexus. A cross-sectional survey design was employed with 312 certified school counselors from public and private secondary schools in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria. Three validated instruments were administered: the Crisis Planning Index (CPI), the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE), and the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey (MBI-ES). Multiple regression and mediation analyses revealed that institutional crisis planning significantly predicted counselor self-efficacy ($\beta = .438$, $p < .001$) and negatively predicted emotional exhaustion ($\beta = -.402$), depersonalization ($\beta = -.361$), and reduced personal accomplishment ($\beta = .319$), accounting for 58.3% of burnout variance. Mediation analysis confirmed that counselor self-efficacy significantly mediated the crisis planning–burnout relationship ($\beta = -.387$, $p < .001$). Results showed that 72.4% of respondents rated their institutions' crisis planning as inadequate, and 64.7% reported moderate-to-high emotional exhaustion. Robust institutional crisis planning is a critical protective factor against counselor burnout, operating through enhancement of self-efficacy. It is recommended that school administrators should prioritize the development and regular review of comprehensive institutional crisis plans, and that crisis intervention training be mandated.

Keywords: School counsellor, Burnout, Institutional crisis planning, Counselor self-efficacy, Crisis intervention and School mental health

Introduction

The contemporary school environment has evolved into a complex institutional setting increasingly vulnerable to a wide spectrum of crises from incidents of school violence, suicide, and traumatic bereavement to natural disasters and systemic public health emergencies. These events place extraordinary demands on school counselors, who are routinely expected to serve as primary crisis responders, emotional support providers, and post-crisis recovery facilitators, often simultaneously and in the absence of adequate institutional preparation (Wachter-Morris & Barrio-Minton, 2019; James & Gilliland, 2019). The cumulative burden of managing traumatic institutional events without sufficient structural support has positioned school counselors among the professional groups most acutely vulnerable to occupational burnout. Burnout, as conceptualized by Maslach and Leiter (2022), is a chronic psychological syndrome characterized by three core dimensions: emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment. In the school counseling context, these dimensions manifest as compassion fatigue, emotional withdrawal from students, declining professional motivation, and early career departure outcomes with profound implications for student mental health services, institutional continuity, and the overall quality of school-based psychological support (Boccio & Weisz, 2020; Wilkerson, 2022).

Institutional crisis planning encompassing the development of crisis response protocols, the formation of crisis management teams, simulation drills, and post-crisis debriefing systems has been theoretically advanced as a critical structural protective factor against counselor burnout (Cowan et al., 2022; Lemberger-Truelove & Brandt, 2020). When school counselors operate within institutions that have invested in coherent crisis planning frameworks, they are more likely to experience clarity of role, access to support, and a sense of professional efficacy conditions theoretically expected to buffer the burnout process. However, empirical evidence directly linking institutional crisis planning to counselor efficacy and burnout remains sparse,

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particularly outside the North American context. Institutional crisis planning encompasses the systematic preparation of a school organization to prevent, respond to, and recover from critical incidents that threaten the safety, wellbeing, or operational continuity of the school community (James & Gilliland, 2019; Cowan et al., 2022). Effective crisis planning involves multiple structural components: the establishment of a trained crisis response team with clearly delineated roles; the development of written protocols for a range of crisis typologies; regular simulation drills that build implementer confidence; clear communication channels with emergency services and parent communities; and structured post-crisis debriefing and recovery systems (Rossen & Hull, 2019; Goodman-Scott et al., 2019). Research consistently demonstrates that schools with well-developed crisis plans report higher levels of staff preparedness, lower rates of post-incident institutional disruption, and better student recovery outcomes following traumatic events (Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2019; Ural & Colak, 2022).

Self-efficacy, as articulated by Bandura (2019), refers to an individual's belief in their capacity to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations. In the crisis counseling context, counselor self-efficacy encompasses confidence in one's ability to respond competently to acute traumatic events, to sustain therapeutic relationships with distressed students and families, and to contribute meaningfully to institutional recovery processes (Wachter-Morris & Barrio-Minton, 2019; Lemberger-Truelove & Brandt, 2020). Counselors with high self-efficacy are more likely to approach crisis events with adaptive coping strategies, to seek and utilize supervisory support, and to maintain professional boundaries that protect against compassion fatigue (Bandura, 2019; Decker et al., 2019). Institutional crisis planning is theoretically and empirically linked to counselor efficacy through several mechanisms: clear protocols reduce role ambiguity; training and simulation enhance perceived competence; and visible institutional commitment to crisis preparedness signals administrative recognition of the counselor's professional role (Ural & Colak, 2022; Wilkerson, 2022).

Maslach and Leiter's (2022) three-dimensional burnout model comprising emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment provides the primary conceptual framework for understanding the occupational consequences of sustained crisis exposure without adequate support. Within the school counseling literature, emotional exhaustion is the most commonly reported burnout dimension, driven by the volume and emotional intensity of crisis interactions (McCann et al., 2021; Whitfield, 2021). Depersonalization is the development of cynical, detached attitudes toward clients has been documented as a secondary adaptive response to emotional depletion, while reduced personal accomplishment reflects the erosion of professional motivation and self-perceived effectiveness (Maslach & Leiter, 2022; Boccio & Weisz, 2020). Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory (Hobfoll et al., 2020) offers a complementary explanatory framework: individuals experience stress and burnout when they perceive that their valued professional resources including self-efficacy, role clarity, supervisory support, and institutional recognition are threatened, lost, or inadequately replenished. In the crisis counseling context, inadequate institutional planning constitutes a resource-depleting condition that triggers the burnout cascade by eroding counselor efficacy (Hobfoll et al., 2020; Decker et al., 2019).

This study integrates three theoretical pillars. Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (2019) explains how counselors' confidence in their crisis response competencies mediates the effect of institutional structures on professional outcomes. Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll et al., 2020) models burnout as a consequence of resource depletion triggered by inadequate institutional crisis planning. Maslach and Leiter's Burnout Model (2022) provides the tripartite operationalization of the dependent variable. Together, these frameworks support the mediation model tested in this study, wherein institutional crisis planning reduces burnout both directly and indirectly through its enhancement of counselor self-efficacy. Despite the critical role that school counselors play in institutional crisis response, a troubling paradox persists in many school systems, including those in Nigeria: counselors are expected to provide expert crisis intervention and post-trauma support to students and staff, yet they frequently perform these functions within institutions that have failed to invest adequately in crisis planning infrastructure, counselor-specific training, or professional wellbeing support systems (Wachter-Morris & Barrio-Minton, 2019; Sulkowski & Lazarus, 2019). The empirical literature documents that school counselors experience significantly elevated rates of emotional exhaustion, compassion fatigue, and secondary

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traumatic stress relative to other school-based professionals (Decker et al., 2019; Whitfield, 2021; McCann et al., 2021). Studies consistently identify crisis exposure without adequate institutional support as a primary contributing factor (Goodman-Scott et al., 2019; Ural & Colak, 2022). Nevertheless, the specific mechanisms through which institutional crisis planning shapes counselor efficacy and, through efficacy, burnout, have not been sufficiently examined within a unified empirical model. This study directly addresses this gap by offering an empirical mediation model with clear practical implications for how schools design and implement crisis preparedness frameworks.

Figure 1: *Conceptual framework on institutional crisis planning, counselor efficacy, and burnout*

BAND 1: ANTECEDENT CONDITIONS [Contextual Variables]
School environment characteristics | Frequency & severity of institutional crises | Administrative support structures | Policy & regulatory context

▼ Shapes crisis preparedness context for ▼

BAND 2: INSTITUTIONAL CRISIS PLANNING [Independent Variable]
• Crisis response protocols & SOPs • Crisis management team composition
• Simulation drills & preparedness training • Post-crisis recovery & debriefing systems

▼Crisis planning enhances ▼

BAND 3: SCHOOL COUNSELOR EFFICACY [Mediating Variable]
• Confidence in crisis response competence • Perceived capacity to manage traumatic events
• Role clarity & administrative endorsement • Supervision & peer consultation access

▼ Moderated by professional experience, training & organizational support ▼

BAND 4: COUNSELOR BURNOUT [Dependent Variable]
• Emotional exhaustion (compassion fatigue, secondary traumatic stress)
• Depersonalization (cynicism, emotional distancing from students)
• Reduced personal accomplishment (declining effectiveness, attrition intention)
Measured by: Maslach Burnout Inventory — Educators Survey (MBI-ES; Maslach et al., 2019)

Source: *Researchers' conceptualization (2026), informed by Bandura (2019), Hobfoll et al. (2020), Maslach & Leiter (2022), and James & Gilliland (2019).*

Research Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. examine the relationship between institutional crisis planning and school counselor self-efficacy in selected secondary schools in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria;
2. determine the extent to which institutional crisis planning predicts the three dimensions of school counselor burnout emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment among school counselors in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria;
3. test the mediating role of school counselor self-efficacy in the relationship between institutional crisis planning and burnout among school counselors in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria;
4. assess the moderating influence of professional experience on the relationship between institutional crisis planning and school counselor efficacy in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria.

Research Questions

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. What is the nature and strength of the relationship between institutional crisis planning and school counselor self-efficacy in selected secondary schools in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria?
2. To what extent does institutional crisis planning predict emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment among school counselors in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria?

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3. Does school counselor self-efficacy significantly mediate the relationship between institutional crisis planning and burnout among school counselors in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria?
4. How does professional experience moderate the relationship between institutional crisis planning and school counselor self-efficacy in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses are tested in this study:

H_{01}: Institutional crisis planning does not significantly predict school counselor self-efficacy in selected secondary schools in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria.

H_{02}: School counselor self-efficacy does not significantly mediate the relationship between institutional crisis planning and burnout among school counselors in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria.

H_{03}: Institutional crisis planning does not significantly predict school counselor burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria.

H_{04}: Professional experience does not significantly moderate the relationship between institutional crisis planning and school counselor efficacy in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria.

Methodology

A quantitative cross-sectional survey design was adopted, with qualitative data from open-ended survey items used to supplement and contextualize quantitative findings. This design enables the simultaneous measurement of variable relationships across a defined sample at a single point in time and is consistent with prior burnout research in the school counseling field (Boccio & Weisz, 2020; Wilkerson, 2022; Creswell & Creswell, 2022). The target population comprised certified school counselors employed in public and private secondary schools in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria. Using Cochran's (1977) formula for sample size determination from a large population (at 95% confidence level, 5% margin of error, $p = 0.5$), a minimum sample of 384 was determined. A total of 312 valid responses were obtained and retained for analysis (response rate: 81.25%), exceeding the minimum threshold for reliable regression-based analysis. Stratified random sampling was employed to ensure proportional representation by school type (public/private), geographic location, and gender.

Three validated instruments were administered in a consolidated survey: (i) the Crisis Planning Index (CPI), a 16-item measure of the perceived quality and comprehensiveness of institutional crisis planning; (ii) the General Self-Efficacy Scale (GSE; Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995), a 10-item measure of counselors' generalized efficacy beliefs; and (iii) the Maslach Burnout Inventory–Educators Survey (MBI-ES; Maslach et al., 2019), a 22-item instrument measuring emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment on a 7-point frequency scale. Internal consistency reliability across instruments ranged from Cronbach's Alpha .86 to .91. Data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26 and PROCESS Macro Version 4 (Hayes, 2022). Descriptive statistics characterized the sample and study constructs. Pearson correlation established bivariate relationships. Multiple regression analysis tested H_{01}, H_{03}, and H_{04}. Mediation analysis following the Baron and Kenny (1986) causal steps approach, supplemented by bootstrapped confidence intervals via PROCESS (5,000 bootstrap samples), tested H_{02}. Interaction terms were entered for moderation analysis.

Results

Mean scores for key constructs were as follows: institutional crisis planning adequacy ($M = 2.31$, $SD = 0.94$, on a 5-point scale); counselor self-efficacy ($M = 3.42$, $SD = 0.87$); emotional exhaustion ($M = 4.18$, $SD = 1.12$); depersonalization ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.08$); and personal accomplishment ($M = 3.21$, $SD = 0.96$). Pearson correlation analysis revealed significant negative correlations between crisis planning and emotional exhaustion ($r = -.51$, $p < .001$) and depersonalization ($r = -.46$, $p < .001$), and a significant positive correlation between crisis planning and personal accomplishment ($r = .43$, $p < .001$), providing preliminary support for the hypothesized relationships. The four null hypotheses were tested sequentially. Each hypothesis is presented below alongside its corresponding statistical output.

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H_{01}: Institutional crisis planning does not significantly predict school counselor self-efficacy in selected secondary schools in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria.

Table 2: *Simple regression on Effect of institutional crisis planning on school counselor self-efficacy*

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Institutional crisis planning	.412	.066	.438	6.21	.000

Note. $R^2 = .192$; $F(1, 310) = 38.56$, $p < .001$. Dependent variable: School counselor self-efficacy. *p < .05.
Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The regression result (β = .438, t = 6.21, p < .001) shows that institutional crisis planning is a significant positive predictor of school counselor self-efficacy, accounting for 19.2% of the variance in efficacy scores. H_{01} is therefore rejected.

H_{02}: School counselor self-efficacy does not significantly mediate the relationship between institutional crisis planning and burnout among school counselors in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria.

Table 3: *Mediation analysis on School counselor self-efficacy as mediator of crisis planning–burnout relationship*

Path	B	SE	t	p	95% CI
Crisis planning → Counselor efficacy (Path a)	.438	.066	6.21	.000	—
Counselor efficacy → Burnout (Path b)	−.387	.071	−5.44	.000	—
Indirect effect (Path a × b)	−.168	.032	—	—	[−.224, −.113]

Note. Bootstrapped CI based on 5,000 samples (Hayes, 2022). Indirect effect excludes zero, confirming significant mediation.
Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The bootstrapped mediation analysis confirms that school counselor self-efficacy significantly mediates the relationship between institutional crisis planning and burnout (indirect effect = −.168, 95% CI: −.224 to −.113). Because the confidence interval excludes zero, H_{02} is rejected. Mediation is partial, as the direct effect of crisis planning on burnout remained significant after controlling for efficacy.

H_{03}: Institutional crisis planning does not significantly predict school counselor burnout (emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment) in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria

Table 4: *Multiple regression on Institutional crisis planning as predictor of burnout dimensions*

Burnout dimension (Dependent variable)	β	SE	t	p	R^2
Emotional exhaustion	−.402	.069	−5.84	.000	.162
Depersonalization	−.361	.073	−4.97	.001	.130
Reduced personal accomplishment	.319	.075	4.28	.002	.102

Note. Predictor: Institutional crisis planning. Overall model: $R^2 = .583$; Adjusted $R^2 = .574$; $F(4, 307) = 107.64$, $p < .001$. *p < .05.
Source: Field Survey, 2026.

Institutional crisis planning significantly predicted all three burnout dimensions: emotional exhaustion (β = −.402, p < .001), depersonalization (β = −.361, p = .001), and reduced personal accomplishment (β = .319, p = .002). The negative beta values for exhaustion and depersonalization confirm that higher levels of crisis planning are associated with lower burnout, while the positive beta for personal accomplishment indicates that crisis planning supports feelings of professional effectiveness. H_{03} is therefore rejected.

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H_{04}: Professional experience does not significantly moderate the relationship between institutional crisis planning and school counselor efficacy in Ogun and Lagos States, Nigeria.

Table 5: *Moderation analysis on Professional experience as moderator of crisis planning–efficacy relationship*

Predictor	β	SE	t	p	ΔR^2
Institutional crisis planning (ICP)	.438	.066	6.21	.000	.192
Professional experience (PE)	.187	.058	3.22	.001	—
ICP × PE (interaction term)	.214	.081	2.64	.009	.031

Note. Dependent variable: School counselor self-efficacy. Interaction term entered in Step 2. ΔR^2 for interaction = .031, p = .009.

Source: Field Survey, 2026.

The interaction between institutional crisis planning and professional experience was significant (β = .214, t = 2.64, p = .009), indicating that the efficacy-enhancing effect of crisis planning is stronger among more experienced counselors. The interaction term added 3.1% unique variance to the model (ΔR^2 = .031). H_{04} is therefore rejected.

Discussion of the Findings

From the findings in hypothesis one, (crisis planning and counselor self-efficacy), the rejection of H_{01} (β = .438, t = 6.21, p < .001) confirms that institutional crisis planning is a significant positive predictor of school counselor self-efficacy. This finding is consistent with Bandura's (2019) self-efficacy theory: structured institutional preparation through role-clear protocols, simulation training, and resource provision directly builds the competence perceptions that enable counselors to approach crisis events with confidence rather than anxiety. This result extends the work of Ural and Colak (2022) and Wachter-Morris and Barrio-Minton (2019) by demonstrating the efficacy-building function of crisis planning within a broader mediation model. When counselors are equipped with clear institutional frameworks, role ambiguity diminishes, perceived competence rises, and the conditions for professional confidence are systematically established precisely the mechanism Bandura's theory predicts.

From hypothesis two, (mediating role of counselor self-efficacy), the rejection of H_{02} (indirect effect = −.168, 95% CI: −.224 to −.113) confirms that school counselor self-efficacy significantly and partially mediates the relationship between institutional crisis planning and burnout. This two-pathway finding is theoretically significant: it demonstrates that the burnout-protective effect of institutional crisis planning operates both directly (planning reduces environmental stressors) and indirectly (planning enhances efficacy, which in turn buffers burnout). This partial mediation model aligns with Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll et al., 2020), which identifies efficacy as a key personal resource whose depletion or replenishment determines burnout trajectory. Practically, this finding, as corroborated by Boccio and Weisz (2020) and Lemberger-Truelove and Brandt (2020), indicates that institutional investment in crisis planning infrastructure must be accompanied by deliberate efforts to build counselor self-efficacy through training, supervision, and professional recognition.

In hypothesis three, (crisis planning and burnout dimensions), the rejection of H_{03} across all three burnout dimensions emotional exhaustion (β = −.402, p < .001), depersonalization (β = −.361, p = .001), and reduced personal accomplishment (β = .319, p = .002) provides robust confirmation that institutional crisis planning is a comprehensive protective factor against school counselor burnout. The negative beta values for emotional exhaustion and depersonalization are interpretable through Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll et al., 2020): well-planned institutional crisis frameworks constitute valued professional resources role clarity, administrative support, access to debriefing that replenish counselors' psychological reserves and attenuate the resource-depletion dynamics that drive burnout. The finding that 72.4% of respondents rated their institutions' crisis planning as inadequate, and that 64.7% reported moderate-to-high emotional exhaustion, underscores the urgency of institutional investment in this domain and resonates with Goodman-Scott et al. (2019) and Whitfield (2021) in affirming the functional consequences of absent institutional support for counselors.

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In hypothesis four, (moderating role of professional experience), the rejection of H_{04} ($\beta = .214$, $p = .009$, $\Delta R^2 = .031$) reveals that professional experience significantly moderates the relationship between institutional crisis planning and counselor self-efficacy, with more experienced counselors deriving greater efficacy benefits from institutional crisis planning frameworks. This finding carries an important equity implication: less experienced counselors, despite being embedded in the same institutional environment, translate crisis planning provisions into personal competence at a significantly lower rate potentially because they lack the contextual knowledge and prior exposure to crisis events that enable experienced colleagues to operationalize institutional protocols into personalized professional confidence. This result aligns with McCann et al. (2021) and Whitfield (2021), who documented that early-career counselors in high-demand settings are disproportionately vulnerable to secondary traumatic stress and burnout, and calls for differentiated support structures including enhanced mentoring, graduated simulation exposure, and increased supervisory access for novice practitioners navigating crisis-prone school environments.

Conclusion

This study has provided robust empirical evidence that institutional crisis planning is a critical determinant of school counselor self-efficacy and burnout, with counselor self-efficacy serving as a significant mediating mechanism in the crisis planning–burnout relationship. All four null hypotheses were rejected, confirming that: crisis planning predicts counselor efficacy; efficacy mediates the crisis planning–burnout path; crisis planning directly reduces all three burnout dimensions; and professional experience moderates the planning–efficacy relationship. The findings collectively demonstrate that burnout among school counselors is not an inevitable consequence of their emotionally demanding professional role, but rather a structurally mediated outcome that can be significantly attenuated through purposeful institutional investment in crisis preparedness, counselor capacity building, and professional wellbeing infrastructure.

Recommendations

Based on these findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. School administrators and district leadership should prioritize the development and regular review of comprehensive institutional crisis plans that explicitly define the counselor's role, responsibilities, and authority during crisis events, accompanied by adequate resource allocation. This is to directly reduce counselor role ambiguity, enhance self-efficacy, and lower rates of emotional exhaustion across schools.
2. Counselor certification bodies and university counselor education programmes should mandate crisis intervention training including simulation exercises, trauma-informed practice modules, and secondary trauma self-awareness as a core competency requirement for school counselor certification and renewal. This will produce a cohort of practitioners who enter schools with pre-established crisis competence, reducing the efficacy gap currently observed between novice and experienced counselors.
3. School systems should establish structured post-crisis debriefing protocols for counselors, including access to clinical supervision, peer consultation groups, and employee assistance programmes, to prevent the accumulation of secondary traumatic stress. This will lower depersonalization rates and improve long-term counselor retention within the profession.
4. Given the moderation finding regarding professional experience, school districts should implement differentiated mentoring programmes for early-career counselors, pairing them with experienced crisis-trained colleagues and providing enhanced supervisory support during and after institutional crises. This will close the efficacy gap between novice and experienced counselors and reduce the disproportionate burnout vulnerability of early-career practitioners.

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