

STRESS COUNSELLING AND EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR AND NATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN BOMET COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose of the Study: The study examined the influence of stress counselling on employee performance in the Ministry of interior and national administration in Bomet County, Kenya, focusing on accessibility, quality and stress-management support through counselling.

Problem Statement: Employees in public-sector institutions may experience work-related stress arising from demanding responsibilities and organisational pressures. Although counselling provides an important mechanism for managing stress, limited empirical evidence exists on whether accessibility, quality and stress-management support through counselling influence employee performance in Kenya's public sector.

Method/Methodology: The study adopted a positivist philosophy and explanatory research design. The target population comprised 210 employees, from which 138 respondents were selected. Primary quantitative data were collected using structured questionnaires and analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation and multiple regression analysis.

Results: The illustrative findings indicated that accessibility of stress counselling, quality of counselling and stress-management support had positive and statistically significant relationships with employee performance. Stress-management support had the strongest effect.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendation: The study concludes that effective stress counselling can contribute to improved employee performance. The Ministry should strengthen access to counselling, enhance the quality of professional counselling services and provide continuous stress-management support.

Keywords: *Stress Counselling, Counselling Accessibility, Counselling Quality, Stress Management, Employee Performance*

INTRODUCTION

Employee performance is an important determinant of organisational effectiveness because organisations depend on employees to translate institutional objectives, policies and strategies into measurable outputs. Performance is commonly reflected in the quality and quantity of work, timeliness, productivity, commitment and achievement of assigned objectives. In contemporary organisations, however, employee performance is increasingly influenced by psychosocial conditions in the workplace, including workload, interpersonal relationships, job insecurity, organisational support and work-related stress (Bakker et al., 2023; World Health Organization [WHO], 2022). Consequently, organisations are increasingly required to address not only employees' technical capacity but also their psychological and social wellbeing. At the global level, work-related stress has become an important occupational and organisational concern. The WHO (2022) observes that poor working environments, excessive workloads, limited control over work and inadequate organisational support can create risks to employees' mental health. The International Labour Organization (ILO, 2022) similarly identifies psychosocial risks as factors capable of affecting workers' psychological wellbeing, productivity and participation in the workplace. These concerns have increased interest in workplace interventions that can prevent or manage stress and enable employees to remain productive while dealing with demanding working conditions (WHO, 2022; ILO, 2022).

Workplace stress is particularly important because prolonged exposure to stressful demands can affect employees' psychological resources and work behaviour. Employees experiencing persistent stress may have difficulties with concentration, motivation, emotional regulation and interpersonal relationships, which can subsequently affect work performance (Hobfoll et al., 2018). From the Job Demands-Resources perspective, excessive job demands can contribute to an energy-depletion process, whereas adequate job resources can help employees manage demands and maintain motivation and performance (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Organisational interventions that provide employees with psychological and social resources are therefore increasingly viewed as important components of workplace stress management (WHO, 2022). One intervention used by organisations to address employee stress is workplace counselling. Counselling provides employees with an opportunity to discuss work-related or personal challenges with trained professionals and to obtain guidance for managing difficult situations.

Workplace counselling may help employees develop coping mechanisms, improve problem-solving abilities and obtain emotional support when dealing with stressful circumstances (Joyce et al., 2016; WHO, 2022).

Its potential value is particularly important where employees operate under demanding working conditions because counselling can provide an additional psychological resource that enables employees to manage workplace pressures. The effectiveness of workplace counselling, however, may depend on the extent to which employees can actually access and benefit from the service. The availability of counselling does not automatically mean that employees will utilise it. Employees may face barriers such as inconvenient locations, limited counsellor availability, complicated referral procedures, lack of awareness or concerns regarding confidentiality (ILO, 2022; WHO, 2022). Accessibility is therefore an important dimension of counselling because employees are more likely to obtain assistance when services are readily available, conveniently located and easy to access. The quality of counselling is also important. Employees need to perceive counselling services as professional, confidential, competent and responsive to their needs. Poor-quality services may discourage employees from seeking counselling and may limit the ability of counselling to address workplace stress effectively. Evidence on workplace mental-health interventions indicates that the design, implementation and appropriateness of interventions influence their effectiveness (Joyce et al., 2016; LaMontagne et al., 2014).

Counselling should therefore be evaluated not merely in terms of whether it exists but also in terms of the quality of support provided. Another important dimension is stress-management support through counselling. Effective counselling should enable employees to acquire practical skills for managing stressful situations rather than merely providing an opportunity to express concerns. Stress-management support may include coping strategies, emotional regulation, problem-solving, resilience development and guidance on managing workplace pressures. Such support can strengthen employees' psychological resources and enable them to deal more effectively with job demands (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). Within the Kenyan context, employee wellbeing has become increasingly important because public institutions are expected to provide efficient and responsive services to citizens. Kenya's public-sector workforce operates within an environment characterised by changing administrative requirements, increasing expectations for service delivery and the need to achieve institutional targets with available resources. These

conditions make employee wellbeing and psychosocial support relevant to organisational performance (Public Service Commission of Kenya [PSC], 2021; Government of Kenya, 2023). The Ministry of interior and national administration is particularly relevant because its employees perform responsibilities that are central to public administration, national security, coordination and service delivery. The nature of these responsibilities may expose employees to demanding working conditions, strict organisational requirements and pressure to deliver services effectively. In such an environment, appropriate mechanisms for identifying and managing stress are important for maintaining employee wellbeing and performance (Government of Kenya, 2023; WHO, 2022). Despite the potential contribution of counselling, the existence of a counselling programme does not necessarily establish that the programme is contributing to employee performance. Employees may have access to counselling but fail to utilise it because of limited accessibility, concerns about confidentiality or perceptions of poor service quality. Similarly, employees may receive counselling but obtain limited benefits where the service does not provide practical stress-management support (ILO, 2022; WHO, 2022). This creates a need to examine the specific dimensions through which counselling may influence employee performance.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Ideally, employees should work in an environment where organisational systems provide adequate mechanisms for preventing and managing work-related stress. Effective counselling services should be available to employees, easily accessible when required, professionally delivered and capable of providing practical stress-management support. Such interventions should enable employees to manage psychological pressures, maintain motivation and concentration, and consequently achieve expected performance outcomes (WHO, 2022; ILO, 2022). From an organisational perspective, effective stress-management systems should therefore form part of broader employee wellbeing and performance-management strategies (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). However, the reality in demanding public-sector work environments may differ from this ideal. Employees may experience substantial job demands without having equivalent psychological and organisational resources to manage them. Persistent work-related stress may affect employees' emotional wellbeing, concentration, motivation and ability to meet work expectations (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Employees of the Ministry of interior and national administration may be particularly affected by demanding responsibilities associated with public administration, security, coordination and service delivery (Government of Kenya, 2023). Although counselling provides a potential mechanism for addressing workplace stress, the mere availability of counselling does not guarantee its effectiveness. Employees may be unable to benefit from counselling where services are difficult to access, where counsellors are perceived as lacking competence or confidentiality, or where counselling does not provide practical and continuous stress-management support (WHO, 2022; ILO, 2022). Consequently, the organisational challenge concerns not merely whether counselling exists but whether its specific dimensions contribute to employee performance.

Existing empirical studies demonstrate the potential value of workplace interventions. Joyce et al. (2016) established that workplace interventions can improve mental-health outcomes, while LaMontagne et al. (2014) found that integrated workplace approaches can contribute to better employee mental health. Hobfoll et al. (2018) further explain that organisational resources can protect employees from the negative consequences of resource loss. Nevertheless, these studies do not specifically establish the influence of accessibility, quality and stress-management support through counselling on employee performance. The study therefore addresses a conceptual gap, a contextual gap and a geographical gap. Conceptually, limited studies have treated accessibility, quality and stress-management support as separate dimensions of counselling. Contextually, limited evidence concerns Ministry of interior and national administration employees, while geographically there is inadequate evidence specific to Bomet County. The study was therefore undertaken to establish whether these dimensions of stress counselling significantly influence employee performance.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

General Objective

To determine the influence of stress counselling on employee performance in the Ministry of interior and national administration in Bomet County, Kenya.

Specific Objectives

- i. To establish the influence of accessibility of stress counselling on employee performance in the Ministry of interior and national administration in Bomet County, Kenya.

- ii. To examine the influence of quality of stress counselling on employee performance in the Ministry of interior and national administration in Bomet County, Kenya.
- iii. To assess the influence of stress-management support through counselling on employee performance in the Ministry of interior and national administration in Bomet County, Kenya.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

H01: Accessibility of stress counselling has no statistically significant influence on employee performance in the Ministry of interior and national administration in Bomet County, Kenya.

H02: Quality of stress counselling has no statistically significant influence on employee performance in the Ministry of interior and national administration in Bomet County, Kenya.

H03: Stress-management support through counselling has no statistically significant influence on employee performance in the Ministry of interior and national administration in Bomet County, Kenya.

THEORETICAL REVIEW

Conservation of Resources Theory

Conservation of Resources (COR) Theory was developed by Hobfoll (1989) to explain stress from the perspective of individuals' efforts to obtain, retain, protect and develop resources. The theory emerged from the argument that psychological stress is strongly associated with the actual or anticipated loss of resources valued by individuals (Hobfoll, 1989). The central assumption of COR Theory is that individuals strive to acquire and conserve resources and become stressed when these resources are threatened, lost or fail to produce expected returns. Resources may include personal characteristics, social relationships, psychological capacities, material possessions and organisational resources (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018). The theory further assumes that resource loss is generally more psychologically significant than resource gain. Individuals experiencing resource loss may become increasingly vulnerable to further losses, creating a cycle of stress and reduced coping capacity. Conversely, access to appropriate resources can enable individuals to manage stressful situations more effectively (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

COR Theory is relevant to the present study because counselling represents an organisational resource that can help employees deal with psychological and emotional demands. Through counselling, employees can obtain emotional support, guidance, coping strategies and problem-

solving assistance. Accessibility determines whether employees can obtain this resource, while quality determines whether the resource is useful and credible (Hobfoll et al., 2018). Stress-management support is also consistent with COR Theory because it can help employees develop additional psychological resources. Employees who acquire effective coping strategies may be better equipped to manage stressful circumstances and preserve the resources necessary for effective work performance (Hobfoll, 1989). The theory therefore supports the study's expectation that effective stress counselling can improve employee performance by helping employees conserve and develop resources needed to cope with workplace demands (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Job Demands-Resources Theory

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) Theory was developed by Demerouti et al. (2001) to explain how job characteristics influence employee wellbeing and organisational outcomes. The theory distinguishes between job demands and job resources (Demerouti et al., 2001). Job demands are physical, psychological, social or organisational characteristics of work that require sustained effort and may consequently result in psychological or physiological costs. Job resources, on the other hand, are aspects of the job that assist employees in achieving work goals, reducing job demands and stimulating learning and development (Demerouti et al., 2001; Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). JD-R Theory assumes that excessive job demands can create an energy-depletion process that may result in exhaustion and reduced functioning. At the same time, job resources can stimulate motivation and employee engagement and can contribute to better performance (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007).

The theory is relevant because employees of the Ministry of interior and national administration may experience demanding working conditions that require considerable psychological and emotional effort. Counselling can function as a job resource by providing employees with emotional support, professional guidance and strategies for dealing with workplace demands (Demerouti et al., 2001). Accessibility of counselling ensures that the resource is available when employees need it. Quality determines whether the resource effectively addresses employees' needs, while stress-management support enables employees to develop coping mechanisms that reduce the negative effects of job demands (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). The theory consequently supports the argument that effective counselling can enhance employee performance by strengthening job resources and helping employees manage demanding working conditions.

EMPIRICAL REVIEW

Accessibility of Stress Counselling and Employee Performance

Accessibility of counselling refers to the extent to which employees can conveniently obtain counselling services when they experience stress. It encompasses availability of counsellors, ease of referral, convenient locations, flexible appointments, awareness of services and absence of unnecessary barriers (WHO, 2022). The WHO (2022) emphasises that workplace mental-health interventions should be accessible to employees and integrated into organisational systems. Accessibility is important because even well-designed interventions may have limited impact if employees cannot obtain them when they need support. The ILO (2022) similarly recommends organisational mechanisms that enable employees to address psychosocial risks. Easy access to counselling can enable employees to seek assistance before stress becomes severe and begins to interfere with their functioning. Joyce et al. (2016) reviewed workplace interventions for common mental disorders and found evidence that workplace interventions can contribute to improved mental-health outcomes. Although their study was broader than counselling accessibility, the findings demonstrate the importance of providing organisational mechanisms through which employees can receive support.

LaMontagne et al. (2014) found that integrated workplace mental-health approaches can contribute to improved employee mental health. Their findings support the importance of embedding mental-health support within organisational systems rather than treating it as an isolated service. Hobfoll et al. (2018) argue that organisational resources can protect employees from the consequences of resource loss. From this perspective, counselling can only function as a useful organisational resource if employees are able to access it when stressful circumstances arise. The literature therefore suggests that accessibility is an important condition for effective counselling. However, previous research has not sufficiently examined accessibility as an independent predictor of employee performance among Ministry of interior and national administration employees in Bomet County. The current study addresses this gap by statistically examining the relationship.

Quality of Stress Counselling and Employee Performance

Quality of stress counselling concerns the competence, professionalism, confidentiality, responsiveness and relevance of counselling services. High-quality counselling should provide employees with a safe environment in which they can discuss challenges and receive appropriate

guidance (WHO, 2022). The WHO (2022) recommends evidence-based workplace mental-health interventions that are appropriate to employees' needs. This implies that organisations should focus not merely on establishing counselling programmes but also on ensuring that such programmes provide effective and professional services. The ILO (2022) similarly emphasises the importance of appropriate responses to psychosocial risks. Employees are more likely to benefit from counselling where services are confidential, trustworthy and professionally delivered. Joyce et al. (2016) found that workplace interventions can produce beneficial mental-health outcomes, but their effectiveness depends partly on how interventions are designed and implemented. This finding is relevant because poorly designed counselling may not produce the expected outcomes. LaMontagne et al. (2014) similarly advocated an integrated approach to workplace mental health, suggesting that intervention quality and organisational implementation are important in achieving meaningful outcomes. Hobfoll et al. (2018) further suggest that resources are beneficial when they effectively help individuals cope with stress. Consequently, counselling quality can determine the extent to which counselling serves as a useful resource. Despite this evidence, previous studies have largely examined mental-health outcomes rather than directly establishing whether counselling quality influences employee performance. Furthermore, limited empirical evidence focuses specifically on public-sector employees in Kenya. The current study therefore addresses this gap.

Stress-Management Support Through Counselling and Employee Performance

Stress-management support through counselling refers to the extent to which counselling assists employees in identifying stressors, developing coping strategies, managing emotions, solving problems and maintaining psychological resilience. The WHO (2022) recommends organisational interventions that help workers manage psychosocial risks and strengthen their ability to cope with workplace challenges. Such interventions are particularly important where employees experience persistent or demanding job conditions. The ILO (2022) similarly emphasises the importance of workplace mechanisms for preventing and managing psychosocial risks. Counselling can provide employees with individualised assistance that enables them to understand stress and develop appropriate coping strategies. Hobfoll (1989) argues that individuals seek to acquire and conserve resources that protect them from stress. Counselling can enhance employees' personal resources by providing knowledge, emotional support and coping strategies.

Hobfoll et al. (2018) further demonstrate that organisational resources can reduce the consequences of resource loss. Continuous counselling support can therefore help employees maintain their psychological resources despite stressful working circumstances. Demerouti et al. (2001) explain that job resources can reduce the negative effects of job demands. Counselling-based stress-management support can function as such a resource by enabling employees to manage demanding situations more effectively. Although the literature provides theoretical support for stress-management interventions, limited empirical evidence directly tests their effect on employee performance within the Kenyan public-sector context. This study therefore examines whether stress-management support through counselling significantly predicts employee performance in the Ministry of interior and national administration in Bomet County.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Independent Variable

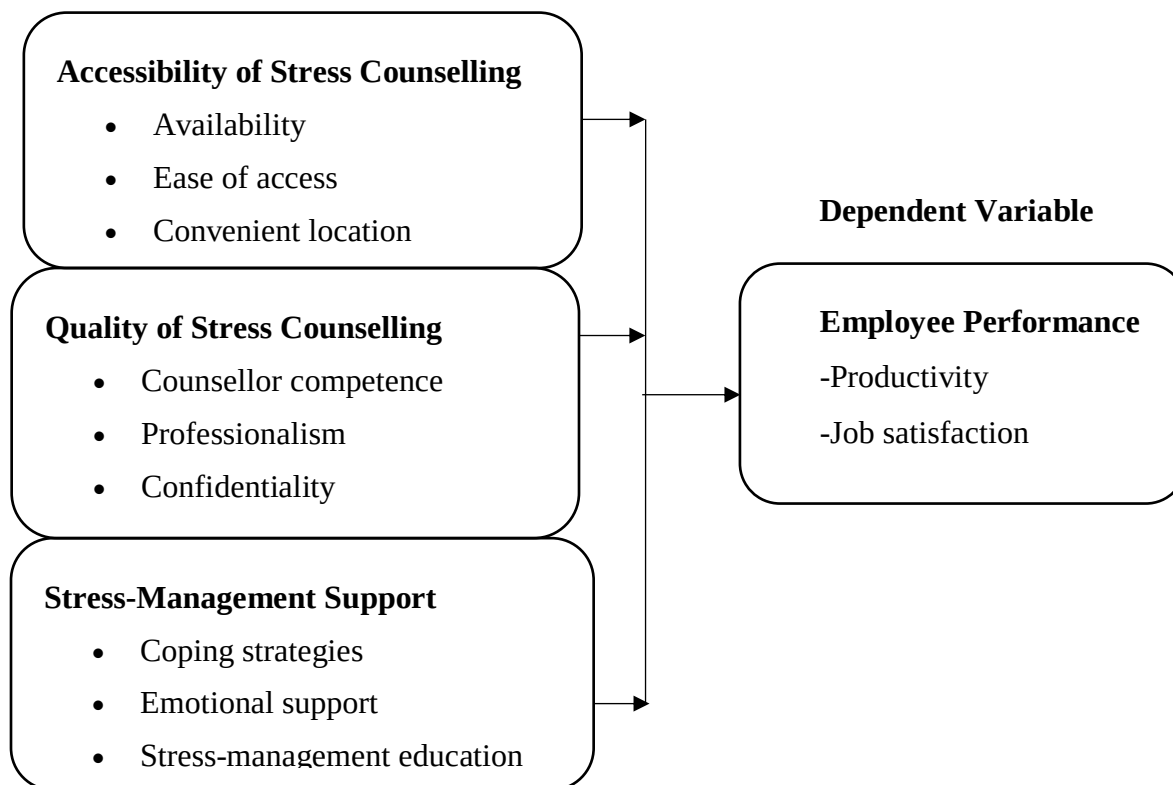


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a positivist philosophy and explanatory research design to examine the influence of stress counselling on employee performance (Saunders et al., 2019; Creswell &

Creswell, 2018). The target population comprised 210 employees of the Ministry of Interior and National Administration in Bomet County, from whom 138 respondents were sampled. Data were collected using a structured five-point Likert-scale questionnaire measuring counselling accessibility, quality, stress-management support, and employee performance. A pilot study involving 20 participants was conducted, content validity was established through expert review, and reliability was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with $\alpha \geq .70$ considered acceptable (Hair et al., 2019). Data were analysed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and multiple regression. The regression model was specified as $Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \varepsilon$, where Y represents employee performance, X_1 accessibility, X_2 counselling quality, and X_3 stress-management support. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality, anonymity, and ethical use of data were maintained throughout the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the study findings on stress counselling and employee performance. The analysis covers descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis to determine the nature and significance of the relationships among the study variables.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Descriptive statistics were used to summarise respondents' perceptions of accessibility of counselling, quality of counselling, stress-management support, and employee performance. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation
Accessibility of counselling	3.71	0.76
Quality of counselling	3.82	0.69
Stress-management support	3.77	0.73
Employee performance	3.86	0.67

The results show generally favourable perceptions across all study variables. Employee performance recorded the highest mean ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 0.67$), followed by quality of counselling

($M = 3.82$, $SD = 0.69$), stress-management support ($M = 3.77$, $SD = 0.73$), and accessibility of counselling ($M = 3.71$, $SD = 0.76$). The relatively high mean for counselling quality suggests that respondents generally perceived the services as professional and responsive, while the lower accessibility mean indicates that some barriers to obtaining counselling may remain (WHO, 2022). The positive stress-management support score further suggests that counselling provided employees with useful resources for managing workplace demands, consistent with COR and JD-R perspectives on the role of organisational resources in supporting employee functioning (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Pearson correlation analysis was conducted to determine the direction and strength of the relationships between the three dimensions of stress counselling and employee performance. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Correlation Between Counselling and Employee Performance

Variable	r with Employee Performance	p-value
Accessibility	0.574	<0.001
Quality	0.638	<0.001
Stress-management support	0.681	<0.001

The findings indicate positive and statistically significant relationships between all three dimensions of stress counselling and employee performance. Accessibility was positively associated with employee performance ($r = 0.574$, $p < 0.001$), while quality of counselling recorded a stronger positive relationship ($r = 0.638$, $p < 0.001$). Stress-management support had the strongest association with employee performance ($r = 0.681$, $p < 0.001$). These findings suggest that improved access, quality, and practical stress-management support are associated with better employee performance, particularly where counselling strengthens employees' psychological resources and capacity to manage workplace demands (Demerouti et al., 2001; Hobfoll et al., 2018).

REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the individual and combined influence of counselling accessibility, counselling quality, and stress-management support on employee performance. The model summary, ANOVA, and regression coefficients are presented in Tables 3, 4 and 5.

Table 3: Model Summary

R	R²	Adjusted R²	Std. Error
0.748	0.559	0.549	0.447

The model recorded an R value of 0.748 and an R² of 0.559, indicating that accessibility, quality, and stress-management support jointly explained 55.9% of the variation in employee performance. The adjusted R² of 0.549 shows that the model retained substantial explanatory power after adjustment for the number of predictors, while the remaining 44.1% of variation was attributable to factors outside the model. The findings therefore indicate that stress counselling constitutes an important organisational resource associated with employee performance, consistent with COR Theory (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Table 4: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	32.184	3	10.728	53.71	<0.001
Residual	25.382	134	0.189		
Total	57.566	137			

The ANOVA results show that the regression model was statistically significant, $F(3, 134) = 53.71$, $p < 0.001$. This indicates that counselling accessibility, counselling quality, and stress-management support jointly provided a statistically significant explanation of employee performance. The finding supports the JD-R perspective that organisational resources such as counselling can help employees manage demanding work conditions and sustain effective performance (Demerouti et al., 2001).

Table 5: Regression Coefficients

Variable	B	Beta	t	Sig.
Constant	0.921		3.721	<0.001
Accessibility	0.214	0.241	3.102	0.002
Quality	0.287	0.318	4.115	<0.001
Stress-management support	0.331	0.369	4.886	<0.001

The regression equation was Employee Performance = 0.921 + 0.214 Accessibility + 0.287 Quality + 0.331 Stress-management Support. Accessibility had a positive and statistically significant influence on employee performance ($\beta = 0.241$, $p = 0.002$), indicating that improved access to counselling was associated with better performance. Quality of counselling also had a significant positive influence ($\beta = 0.318$, $p < 0.001$), suggesting that professional, confidential, and responsive services contributed to improved performance. Stress-management support recorded the strongest influence ($\beta = 0.369$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that counselling that equips employees with coping strategies and practical stress-management skills makes the greatest contribution to employee performance. These results are consistent with workplace mental-health evidence and COR Theory, which emphasise the value of accessible, high-quality, and resource-enhancing organisational support (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018; Joyce et al., 2016; WHO, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that stress counselling is significantly associated with employee performance in the Ministry of interior and national administration in Bomet County. Accessibility, quality and stress-management support all demonstrated positive and statistically significant effects. Accessibility is important because employees must be able to obtain counselling when experiencing stressful circumstances. Quality is important because counselling must be professionally delivered, confidential and responsive to employee needs. Stress-management support is particularly important because it provides employees with practical resources for coping with workplace demands. The findings therefore support both COR Theory and JD-R Theory. Counselling provides psychological and organisational resources that help employees manage stress and maintain effective functioning.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ministry of interior and national administration should improve the accessibility of counselling services by ensuring that employees are aware of available services and can obtain counselling without unnecessary administrative barriers. Convenient appointment systems and appropriate referral mechanisms should be strengthened. The Ministry should also strengthen the quality of counselling by ensuring that counselling is provided by appropriately qualified personnel who observe professional and ethical standards. Confidentiality should be emphasised to increase employee confidence in counselling services. Counselling programmes should incorporate structured stress-management support, including coping strategies, emotional regulation, resilience development and problem-solving skills. Such interventions can strengthen employees' psychological resources and improve their capacity to deal with job demands. Management should further integrate counselling into broader employee wellbeing programmes rather than treating counselling as a reactive intervention provided only after employees experience serious stress. Preventive and continuous support is more consistent with the principles of workplace mental-health promotion.

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