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**Proceedings of the Second Academic Conference in  
Commemoration of the Late Mwalimu Julius Kambarage  
Nyerere, the First President of the United Republic of Tanzania  
and Father of the Nation, held at The Mwalimu Nyerere  
Memorial Academy, Kivukoni Campus, Dar es Salaam on 13<sup>th</sup>  
October 2023**

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# **Assessment of Workplace Counselling Satisfaction to Employees in Public Institutions: A Case Study of Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology**

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## **Abstract:**

The study aimed to assess workplace counselling satisfaction to employees in public institutions by using the Tanzania Commission for Science and Technology as a case study. A case study design was adopted. The study applied a mixed-method research approach by using both qualitative and quantitative techniques of research. Simple random sampling and purposive sampling were used to obtain the sample units for the study. In-depth interviews and questionnaires were instruments used to collect data from respondents. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive statistics. Findings revealed that a relatively higher number of respondents (58.3%) acknowledged counselling services were provided at their organization leaving a relatively lower number of respondents who were not aware of the availability of formal or informal counselling available at COSTECH. Awareness should be made among employees to gain knowledge of the availability of workplace counselling at COSTECH and the public institutions at large.

**Keywords:** Workplace counselling, counselling process, Counselling outcomes, and Job satisfaction

## **1. Introduction**

Employee counselling has become the latest tool to determine the best employees and improve workforce quality (Persell *et al.*, 2018). Counselling is one of the popular components of workplace wellness programmes (Maletzky, 2017). Counselling is related to a way of responding to employees or peers so that they can explore their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours to attain a clear self-understanding. Studies for instance Urbonas and Kubiliene (2016) documented the effects of counselling on job satisfaction. Statistically, workers spend almost one-third of a day at the workplace, and therefore to be productive job satisfaction is essential since happy employees tend to respond to work

dynamics more positively relative to unhappy employees (McCarthy and Ford, 2020; Thai *et al.*, 2023).

The majority of employers have understood the costs of stress, overload, declining productivity, interpersonal conflict and increased sick leaves at the workplace (Tsuma *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, currently, organizations have been paying attention to employees' stress and related psychological health problems that lead to financial costs to organizations (Bophela and Govender, 2015; Ajayi, 2018). Therefore employers choose to encourage employees to participate in workplace wellness programmes to help them with mental health to improve their productivity and performance (Maletzky, 2017). These kinds of interventions can also be referred to as Employee assistance programs (EAPs) and are mostly sponsored by employers (Bophela and Govender, 2015).

Workplace counselling is a vital function of human resource management to improve organization productivity and employee well-being (Nielsen *et al.*, 2017; Kowalski and Loretto, 2017). The definition of workplace counselling in literature is defined differently according to the themes a researcher intends to investigate. Although there are several definitions of workplace counselling, a few keywords stand out which is a process of accounting for the growth, development, acquisition, and change of people's behaviour (Mbwete, Bagandanshwa and Mnyani, 2012). In this study, workplace counselling is defined as an intervention that is: (a) voluntarily chosen by the employee; (b) responsive to the needs of the employer or employees; and (c) primarily intended to bring about change in an area of psychological/behavioural functioning (McLeod, 2010).

The benefits of workplace counselling are widely documented in scholarly works of Psychologists, Psychiatric, and Human Resource professionals (Neupane *et al.*, 2022; Bajorek and Bevan, 2021; Hennekam, Follmer and Beatty, 2021). Workplace counselling has been associated with reduced sickness absence, enhanced job retention, improved employee productivity and made employees much happier at work, opening up communication between employers and employees, improved staff morale and self-esteem, helping to reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, resolving a lot of personal issues that affect employees work (Bjorek and Bevan, 2020).

Implementation of workplace counselling in developing countries is at a nascent stage compared to developed countries despite established evidence on the effectiveness of workplace counselling (Bajorek and Bevan, 2021; Ahimie and Agbogidi, 2017). Workplace counselling being at its elementary stage in

developing countries has been well documented by Ahimie and Agbogidi (2017) and Dookran (2014) in Nigeria and South Africa respectively. This is mostly due to a vacuum of professional counsellors at workplaces in most developing countries (Mbwete, Bagandanshwa and Mnyani, 2012). However, employers including the Government have been encouraged to take measures to promote the well-being of their employees (Hennekan, Follmer and Beatty, 2021). Participating in workplace wellness programs improves the quality of work which increases job satisfaction and thus boosts employees' productivity and efficiency (Maletzky, 2017; Bophela and Govender, 2017). Counselling service in workplaces is either provided within the organization or outside the organization. However, the extent to which employees are satisfied with workplace counselling is not clearly understood particularly in developing country's institutions.

Research on workplace counselling is growing rapidly, particularly in developed countries (Bajorek and Bevan, 2021). It has moved from implementation factors toward linkage between process and outcomes and the effectiveness of different workplace counselling models to different demographic or socio-economic groups of employees (Tryon, Birch and Verkuilen, 2018; Elliot and Williams, 2002). For instance, Studies such as Leibert (2011); Pascual-leone and Yeryomenko (2017); Vybiral *et al.* (2023); Keum and Wang (2017) documented the relationship between the counselling process and outcomes from a counsellor-client perspective in the developed countries. In developing countries research on workplace counselling is still focused on factors that influence implementation and delivery (Akoth, 2010; Owino, 2015; Wekesa, 2018).

However, fewer studies have gone deeper to study the counselling process by focusing on counselling skills and knowledge when approaching serious conditions such as trauma (Ahimie and Agbogidi, 2017). Other studies such as Dookran (2014) focused on socioeconomic groups that affect the counselling process satisfaction due to cases of mistrust when black employees who are used to ethnicity healing are compelled by employers to go for Western counselling therapy that they are not used to. That being the case this study took the trajectory of examining employee satisfaction by linking the counselling process and outcomes in the public service.

Furthermore, it is not clear whether employees are aware of workplace counselling or the skills and competence required of a workplace counsellor (Bajorek and Bevan, 2020; Ahimie and Agbogidi, 2017). According to Maletzky (2017), employees may choose not to participate in counselling services because they are unaware of the academic qualifications and experiences of counsellors.

Although well-researched, practised and documented in developed countries, the workplace counselling profession seems to be in its initial stages in developing countries (Ahimie and Agbogidi, 2017; Dookran, 2014) and much less practiced in the public service of developing countries (Tsuma *et al.*, 2018). Therefore, this study was conducted to assess employee satisfaction with the workplace counselling process and outcomes in the public service, together with examining knowledge and awareness of employees regarding the availability of workplace counselling and the laid down policies that underpin the practice of counselling at a public organization with COSTECH as a case study.

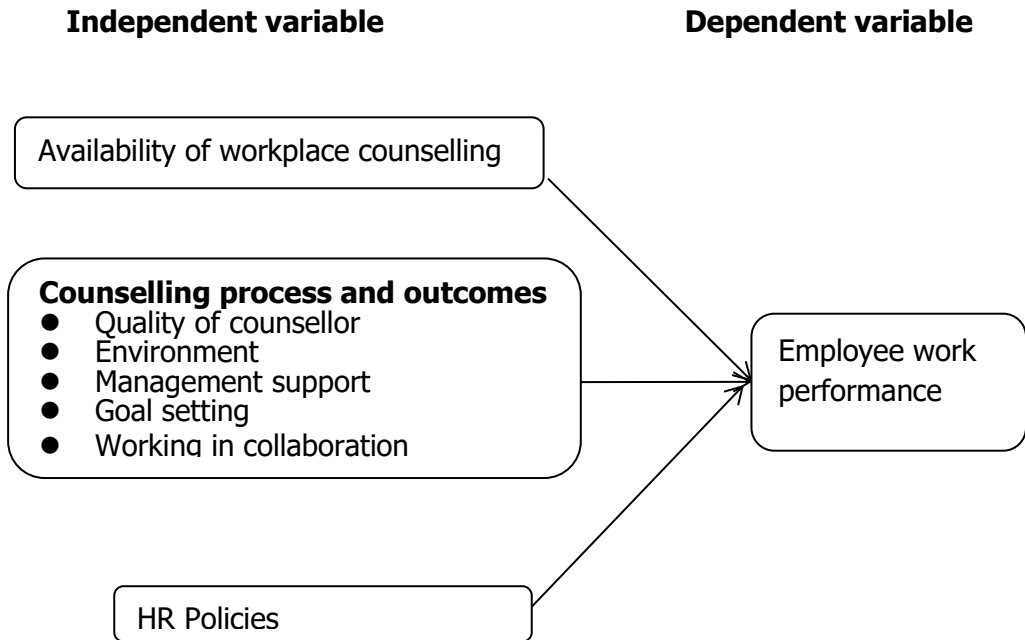
### **1.2. Problem Statement**

Recognition of workplace counselling on the well-being and performance of employees is more widely researched and documented in developed countries than in developing countries, this is so because in the developing countries it is an emerging profession while it is well established and structured in developed countries (Bajorek and Bevan, 2021; Mbwete, Bagandanshwa and Mnyani, 2012). In developing countries, employee satisfaction from workplace counselling varies widely because implementation factors at institutional and individual levels are scattered and not well-organized (Jacksons et al., 2006). Most organizations in developing countries, public and private, national and international do not have workplace counsellors (Ahime and Abgbogidi, 2017), thus leaving the role of workplace counselling to Human Resource Management personnel who are unprepared and thus practice it poorly (Hennekam et al., 2021). Even though, most studies have highlighted factors for implementation and improving workplace counselling (Mbwete, Bagandanshwa and Mnyani, 2012; Wekesa, 2018), little is documented in the literature on the competence of personnel who should conduct workplace counselling. Furthermore, less has been stated on the policies to underpin and formalize workplace well-being programs in public institutions, something that causes workplace counselling procedure to rather be an event than a process. This study sought to bridge this knowledge gap by examining the knowledge and awareness of employees regarding the availability of workplace counselling and policies supporting the counselling practices.

### **1.3. Objectives**

This study was conducted with the main goal of assessing employee satisfaction with the workplace counselling process and outcomes in the public service. Specifically, the study examined knowledge and awareness of employees regarding the availability of workplace counselling and the laid down policies that underpin the practice of counselling at a public organization with COSTECH as a case study.

## 1.4 Conceptual Framework



**Source:** Authors

## 2. Methods

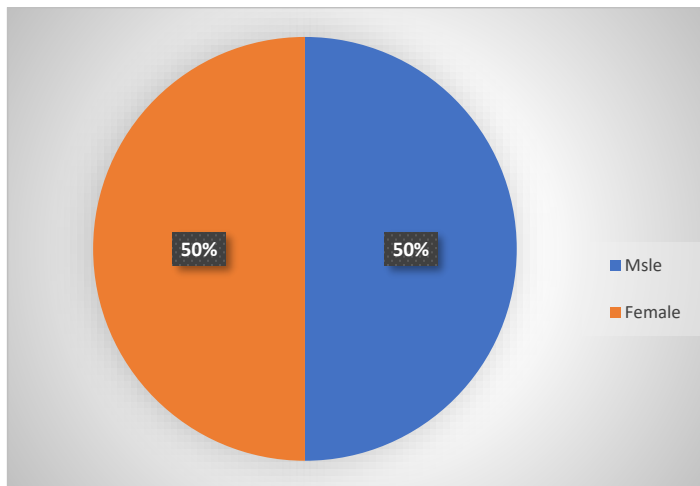
This cross-sectional study was conducted at COSTECH located in Kinondoni municipality and included employees living in Dar es Salaam region, Tanzania. The study applied mixed -methods research approach. Study data were collected for two months that is in June and July 2023. The study participants were employees currently working at COSTECH offices in Dar es Salaam Tanzania. The study applied a single case - study design. A sample size of 114 was used, whereby 90 sample units were selected by simple random sampling; The Sample size for the study was determined by using Yamane's (1967) formula which is given by  $n = N/1 + N(e^2)$ , whereas  $n$ = sample size,  $N$ = Total population and  $e$ = Margin of error of which 5% was used for this study. Furthermore, 14 sample units were selected by using purposive sampling. Structured questionnaires with closed-ended questions were used to collect data from respondents who were sampled through simple random sampling. In-depth interviews were also conducted with the key informants to gather quality information regarding workplace counselling. The data collected from questionnaires were analysed quantitatively using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data collected from interviews.

## 1. Results

### 1.1 Demographic information of respondents

### 3.1.1 Distribution of respondents by gender

In this study, findings revealed that half the respondents interviewed were females and the other half were males implying that there was equal representation in terms of gender of employees who seek counselling at the workplace. This is contrary to Rahmawati and Dewi (2020) who observed that the majority of clients who visited for counselling were females. The implication here is that there is an increasing number of males who seek counselling at the workplace. The study took an interest in analysing the gender distribution of respondents since studies such as Keun and Wang (2017) and Dookran (2014) observed that among other demographic factors, gender had a profound effect related to the therapeutic counselling relationship. Also, Bophela and Govender (2015) indicated how gender influences quality of work life and further observed a significant difference in perception of employee assistance programs based on gender differences.



**Figure 3.1.1 Distribution of respondents by gender**

**Source:** Field data

### 3.1.2. Distribution of respondents by age

The age of respondents was structured into four groups, starting with the age of eighteen (18) years old which is the minimum age for a person to be officially employed in Tanzania as per the Public Service Laws and Regulations together with the Employment and Labour Relations Act. More than 70% of the respondents belonged to the Middle Ages which is the 36-45 years group and the 46-55 years group implying that the majority of employees who seek counselling are those in the middle age (Table 3.1.2). The findings comply with Agi, and Fiddo (2018) who found out that Career counselling is extremely important for all and sundry, but especially for people at middle age. The study

took an interest in analyzing the age of respondents as it is likely to influence counselling practices. The study resonates with Urbonas and Kubiliene (2016) who noted that age of pharmacists influenced the counter counselling satisfaction of respondents. This is also in line with Bophela and Govender (2015) who noted that age was one among many other demographic factors that cause significant differences in perception regarding employee assistance programme. Attridge (2019) also noted that one special feature of mental disorders is that they mostly commence early in life mainly in the teenage years. Such disorders include anxiety, substance abuse, and mostly mood disorders.

**Table 3.1.2: Age groups of respondents in frequency with percentages**

<b>Age groups</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>
18 – 35	18	21.4
36 – 45	30	35.7
46 – 55	30	35.7
56 – 60	6	7.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Author

### **3.1.3 Distribution of respondents by education**

The study took an interest in analyzing the education level of respondents. Findings revealed that, all employees interviewed (100%) had post-secondary education (Table 3.1.3). However, the majority of respondents (71.4%) were graduates. The remaining (28.6%) had non-degree qualifications. This implies that most of the employees seeking counselling at the workplace were educated. This approach resonates with Altman et al. (2023) whose study documented that among other demographic factors, the level of education influences employee health status and participation in wellness programme sponsored by employers. Also, Hamlet and Burnes (2013) documented the counsellor brassiness in counselling due to the participant's education background and experience.

**Table 3.1.3: Respondents' Education frequency with percentages.**

<b>Education</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Certificate	5	6
Diploma	19	22.6
Graduate	33	39.3
Masters	10	11.9
PhD	6	7.1
Postgraduate	11	13.1



<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>100</b>
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**Source:** Author

### 3.1.4 Distribution of respondents by designation

Findings revealed that, 19% of the respondents were from other ranks while 81% were at the officer level and above (Table 3.1.4). This structure reflects the education level structure presented in Table which implies that, at COSTECH the majority of employees are at the officer level and above as per the Government Public Service Scheme which require a Bachelor degree to be hired at an Officer level rank.

**Table 3.1.4: Respondent's job designation**

<b>Designation</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Per cent</b>
Managerial Level	10	11.9
Officer Level 1	42	50
Others	16	19
Senior or Principal Officer level 2	16	19
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Author

### 3.1.5. Distribution of respondents by experience

Findings revealed that, majority of respondents (66.7%) constituted a group of employees who had 6 to 15 years of experience at work implying that, most of the interviewed employees had adequate experience at work and that their experience had impacts on workplace counselling (Table 3.1.5). This complies with Elliot and Williams (2002) who noted that work experience may affect workplace counselling both positively and negatively.

**Table 3.1.5: Distribution of respondents by experience**

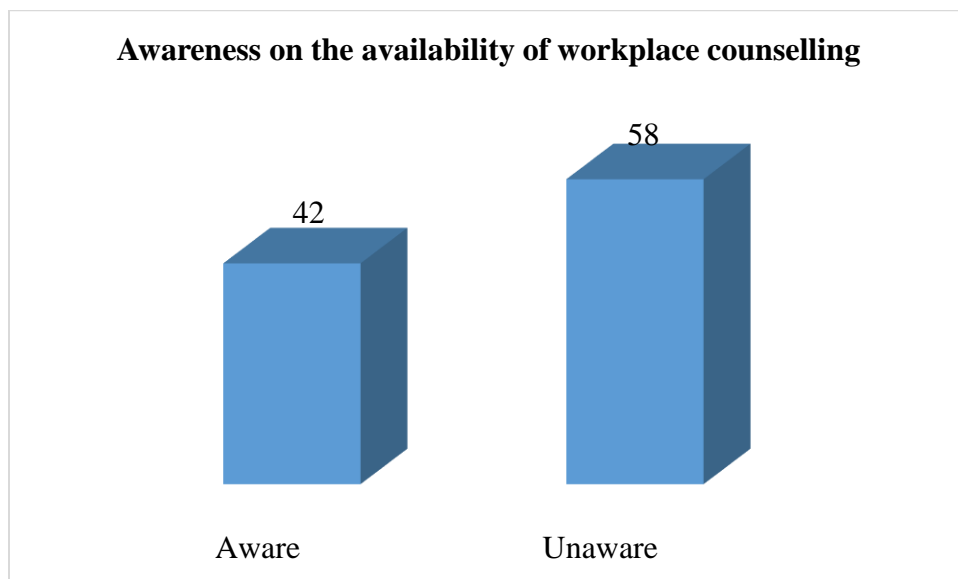
<b>Experience at work</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percent</b>
11-15 years	22	26.2
16- 20 years	18	21.4
21 years and above	4	4.8
6-10 years	34	40.5
Bellow 5 Years	6	7.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>84</b>	<b>100</b>

**Source:** Author

In terms of career development employees with long working experience may need counselling to go through career progression, to help them set career goals and solve challenges that are connected to career development, however the experience can impact counselling negatively in such a way that where there are employees facing career stagnation may seek counselling to find a way through career development. Furthermore in terms of work stress and burnout experienced workers mostly have developed mechanisms to cope with work stress and burnout therefore counselling is likely to improve their coping skills and knowledge on how to handle workplace stress and burnout.

### 3.2 Awareness of the availability of Workplace Counselling

The study results showed that 58.3% of respondents had the knowledge and were aware of the availability of counselling services that are provided at their organization leaving only 41.7% with no knowledge of the availability of formal or informal counselling available at COSTECH (Figure 3.2). These findings imply that COSTECH is improving towards creating awareness among employees even though the awareness level is still not satisfactory. These findings relate to Ayub et al. (2014) who found that 50.3% of employees were aware of workplace counselling services. Also, these findings fall in line with Tsuma and Byaruhanga (2018) whose study found that almost more than two-thirds of employees working at Mumias Sugar Company Ltd were aware of workplace counselling services available in Kenya commercial banks.



**Figure: 3.2. Percentage of employee's awareness of availability of Workplace Counselling**

**Source:** Author

Conversely, these findings contradict Elliot and Williams (2002); Altman et al. (2023); Rahmawati and Dewi (2020) who found low levels of awareness despite workplace counselling being provided at the workplace. Therefore, studies by McCarthy and Ford (2020); Bajorek and Bevan (2020); Akoth (2014); Hennekam et al. (2021); Bophela and Govender (2015); Maletzky (2017) emphasized the importance of finding the best avenues such as training employees to raise awareness and create knowledge on the availability of counselling services at workplace to get timely intervention to avoid sickness absence resulting from work-life stresses.

## **2. Conclusion and Recommendations**

The study generally established that employees were indifferent in their views regarding their awareness of the availability of workplace counselling as it was found out that, a slightly higher number of employees had the knowledge and were aware of the availability of counselling services that are provided at their organization whereas fewer employees did not know about the availability of formal or informal counselling available at COSTECH. COSTECH is improving towards creating awareness among employees of counselling practices. Due to fear of confidentiality, the organization can opt to make further arrangements for external counselling services. Public institutions should develop and adopt workplace counselling policies which guide issues such as management responsibilities in enforcing the practising of workplace counselling, the policy should further indicate a clear implementation plan and the professional qualifications of the counsellors.

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