

COUNSELLING SERVICES NEEDED BY SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN MOUNT ELGON DISTRICT, BUNGOMA COUNTY, KENYA

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The youth are facing many social, economic and educational problems. These problems are turning the youth into delinquents and misfits in society. This study is aimed at identifying the counselling services needed by secondary school students in Mt. Elgon District. The researchers employed closed ended questionnaire to collect data. The sample population was 58 teachers and 180 students proportionately drawn from six public secondary schools categorized as boy schools, girl schools and mixed schools. The study revealed that students needed the following counselling services: academic counselling, social, peer and spiritual counselling. However, it was noted that the students are at a variance with the teachers regarding the most important counselling service to be offered in secondary schools.

KEYWORDS: Counselling Services, Secondary Schools

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

According to Melgosa (2000), counsellors have a duty to perform in solving the problems of adolescents in school. Some of the problems arise due to adolescents' stage of development, for example, the focus on other interests like the opposite sex, clubs, dressing, music and even drugs. This results into the following reactions among adolescents:

1. Loss of interest in studying. This has to do with the assumption that they are sure of themselves and their independence. They want an opportunity to experience sensations more interesting than studying.

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2. Adolescents intentionally fail academically in an attempt to gain their parents' attention. Adolescents are aware that when they bring home poor results, their parents get concerned. Parents would therefore want to support them, talk to them and as a result, these adolescents feel they have succeeded to attract the attention of parents.
3. The loss of self-esteem is another common problem among adolescents. Self-concept is very important in this stage. Comments from teachers about their dressing can cause adverse effects on the adolescent's self-esteem.

Melgosa (2000) points out that one of the major threats to the health of adolescents is substance abuse among which are a wide range of legal drugs like cigarettes, khart and alcohol. Appropriate counselling by teachers and professional counsellors is inevitable to help students to avoid these substances. Similarly, Fine (2000) asserts that the most disturbing trend in schools is the violence demonstrated by students against each other and against teachers in the classroom. The United States department of education has provided an effective counselling measure which promotes family involvements in schools. They have set up a department of education to provide counselling after-school and summer learning centres.

According to Davidoff (1987) the students who abuse drugs and alcohol are unrepentant when caught and punished by teachers and are more likely to continue engaging in the same unless they are consistently counselled to desist from the behaviour for which the consequence is depression. Carlson (1993) points out that effective counsellor guides and supports the students in handling of students' ability to deal with external circumstances that confront him/her. These circumstances include stress and depression and if not handled well, the situation makes students perform poorly in class and thus are unable to deal with life positively in the future.

Melgosa (2000) points out that at puberty, boys and girls are attracted to one another so easily. This is an indication that they are about to mature. The experience of falling in love can affect student's learning. Students involved in romantic relationships experience some crisis of parting due to varied preferences and ideologies. After breakup, the two involved experience a period of psychological disturbance. In this case the youth requires:

1. To look after self-esteem after disappointment in love.
2. To be kept busy with activities like playing so that the energies are channelled there.
3. Social support, by talking about the problem with friends, parents and even teachers and this will become a cure for the same problem.
4. Patience will heal the problem gradually.

Melgosa (2000) further argues that there is insufficient information about

sex, acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), sexually transmitted infections (STI's) and their effects, therefore students may gather conflicting information from parents, friends and Internet causing confusion among the adolescents. Teachers and counsellors need to help the adolescent to sort out these mixed messages and develop a sense of their own physical and psychological sexuality.

Davidoff (1987) observes that boy/girl relationship and dating serve two recreational functions. Through this teenagers learn about their own sexuality and the intimate give and take relationship. By allowing comparisons to be drawn, adolescents find that dating also yields insights into their personalities, inter-personal needs and values and into members of the opposite sex. He argues that the influence of peers on adolescent development is evident because teenagers spent most of their time together. They form cliques or groupings, share their interests and discuss how to find new friends.

Roediger (1996) points out that during adolescence the youth rely heavily on one another for support, direction, self-esteem and identity. The adolescents tend to value one another's opinion and spend a lot of time with one another. The youth heavily conform to group standards. The superiors who include teachers and counsellors are supposed to utilize these groups to impart the right moral skills. Friendships and groupings consist of both boys and girls. They make rules and anybody who violates the group standards is likely to be excluded by group members. If the standards of the group are noble, they perform well in class and those who perform poorly may be rejected and only be accepted after some improvement noted. Therefore, teachers should meaningfully exploit such groupings.

Collins (1988) observes that counselling attempts to provide encouragement to students who are facing losses, indecisiveness or disappointment in academics. Spiritual counselling by teachers or counsellors can help students grow spiritually and cope with school challenges. Counselling those living with inner conflicts, crippling emotions and poor performance in class due to the effects of drugs helps them to improve and quit these habits. He asserts that spiritual counselling assists the students to have good relationships with God. This will further help them to approach issues in academics positively. Spiritual counselling is unique by nature because it sets goals in seeking to help students change behaviour, attitudes, values and perceptions, especially those who were negatively oriented.

Lutomia and Sikolia (2002) add that peer counselling is advantageous in the sense that the peer counsellors are of the same age with the fellow students, and therefore they relate to each other without the age-gap that at times is a problem between teachers and students. This method of counselling can make information reach as many students as possible with the right selection of

followers. It is easier for information such as responsible relationship between boys and girls.

METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study was to assess the effectiveness of counselling services in secondary schools in Mt. Elgon district. Descriptive research design was used to depict the current situation of counselling services offered in secondary schools. The evaluation research design was employed to make judgments about the quality of counselling programmes. The effectiveness of counselling services was assessed by looking into the concurrence between the counselling services offered and the need for the utilization and helpfulness of these services and the training of teacher counsellors on counselling in the different problem areas. Two sets of questionnaires, which had both closed and open-ended question items, were used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire was designed to solicit for information on the effectiveness of counselling services in schools. It was hoped that the information collected would effectively address the issue of counselling services needed by students.

DATA ANALYSIS

What are the counselling services that students need in secondary schools?

Table 1

Students' Need for Counselling Services as Identified by Teachers.

Areas	Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Alcohol and drug abuse	Agree	58	100	1
	Disagree	0	0	
Management of stress and depression or grief	Agree	55	94.8	7
	Disagree	3	5.2	
Answers on spiritual problems	Agree	51	87.9	10
	Disagree	7	12.1	
Study and testing skills	Agree	56	96.6	4
	Disagree	2	3.4	
Time management	Agree	57	98.3	2
	Disagree	1	1.7	
Social relationships with others	Agree	56	96.6	4
	Disagree	2	3.4	
Boy-girl relationships	Agree	55	94.8	7
	Disagree	3	5.2	
Training of students to be counsellors to peers	Agree	53	91.4	9
	Disagree	5	8.6	
Choice of life careers	Agree	57	98.3	2
	Disagree	1	1.7	
Information on careers	Agree	56	96.6	4
	Disagree	2	3.4	

Table 1 shows the responses of the teachers on the students' need for counselling services in their schools. In all areas, the percentages of agreement are above 90% meaning that teachers recognize the need for counselling services among students. Counselling on alcohol and drug abuse was ranked first. This indicates that alcohol and drug abuse is the most important area of concern among secondary school students that should attract utmost attention. These findings agree with the position held by Vanderpool (1997) who stressed that teachers should counsel students to avoid substance abuse.

Analysis of the Questions by School Type

In boys' schools, teachers perceived a very high need for the counselling services. A great majority of the teachers (92.9%) indicated the need for counselling services in all areas in boys' schools. More than 90% of the teachers in girls' schools also indicated that students need counselling services in all aspects indicated in the study. Teachers in boys' schools perceived that students highly need counselling services, as there are six counselling services with an agreement of 100%. These are on management of stress and depression or grief, answers to spiritual problems, study and testing skills, time management, choice of life careers and information on careers. All the teachers in boys' schools pointed out the need for academic-oriented services.

In the girls' schools, teachers equally acknowledged that their students need counselling services in these different areas. The highest needed counselling service among the girls is on alcohol and drug abuse and social relationships, especially among themselves. This may be attributed to the perception that the girls are vulnerable to alcohol and drugs abuse, hence the need for such information. There may also be a problem with regard to the relationships between students that the teachers see the importance of this service in school.

In the mixed schools, which are basically day schools, the counselling services most needed are on the areas of alcohol and drug abuse, time management, boy-girl relationship and choice of life careers as pointed out by all the teachers who participated in the study. It is possible that at home, time management on academics may be a concern of many students. Students involved in domestic work find it difficult to find time for academics. To help them manage this problem, teachers feel that the students need some counselling services.

There also exist some problems of boy-girl relationship that could have led to sexual relations and thus teachers felt a great need for the service in school. Melgosa (2000) urges the teachers to give students the right direction on boy-girl relationship.

Table 2**Students' Perceptions of the Need for Specific Counselling Services in their Schools.**

Areas	Scale	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Alcohol and drug abuse	Yes	131	72.68	10
	No	49	27.2	
Management of stress and depression or grief	Yes	152	84.4	7
	No	28	15.6	
Answers on spiritual problems	Yes	154	85.6	6
	No	26	14.4	
Study and testing skills	Yes	163	90.6	1
	No	17	9.4	
Time management	Yes	156	86.1	5
	No	24	3.3	
Social relationships with others	Yes	160	88.0	3
	No	20	11.1	
Boy-girl relationships	Yes	146	81.1	9
	No	34	18.9	
Training of students to be counsellors to peers	Yes	150	83.3	8
	No	30	16.7	
Choice of life careers	Yes	155	86.1	4
	No	25	13.9	
Information on careers	Yes	159	88.3	2
	No	18	10.0	

As given in Table 2, in almost all areas students perceive the need for counselling service as demonstrated by a high percentage of agreement (above, 80%), except for the need for counselling on alcohol and drug abuse, which is 72%. This shows that students indeed have seen the need of counselling services particularly in the areas of study and testing skills, which is ranked the highest with 90% by the respondents expressing their need for this service. The findings of this study give credence to Melgosa (2000) who observed that students need counselling services in these areas. This indeed is important because it may solve many problems of students and their friends and even the neighbourhood.

Analysis of the Problem by School Type

In Boys school, counselling services in all areas are needed as shown by 74% and above in the agreement. This may imply that most boys among the respondents realize the need of counselling services. Study and testing service is rated the most needed counselling service in boys' schools. This may mean that boys are aware of the importance of academic achievement.

In the girls' schools, all the counselling services are also needed but the most needed are with regards to answers to spiritual problems and social relationship with others. This implies that the girls have different interests in comparison with boys. Girls see less need for counselling services in academic

matters and social relationship with others. 87% of the teachers in girls' schools agree that the students need the counselling service on study and testing skills but 92% of the teachers in boy's schools agree on this issue.

In the mixed schools there are three needs that have the highest percentage and these are study and testing skills, information on careers, and choice of life careers. In the mixed schools, students are also well focused on academic matters as well as career choices. This indicates that students here are concerned about what they will pursue in future as well as excelling in exams. Mutie and Ndambuki (1999) recommend the need for teachers to give knowledge on career choice.

Comparing the results of teachers and students on the needs of the learners with regard to counselling services, it is manifestly apparent that teachers, in all the school types, value counselling services in all areas considered in the study as clearly indicated by the percentages that are all above 70%, except one need in the mixed school, on spiritual problems, which has 66%.

However, it is observed that the counselling services which teachers perceive to be the most important for the students are not what students actually believe they need, for example, substance abuse is ranked 10th by students where as 72% teachers ranked 1st with 100% of the teachers indicating it as the most important. A similar discrepancy was observed in the provision of this service.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers and students agreed that counselling services in the following areas are needed in secondary schools: substance abuse, management of stress, depression or grief, study and testing skills, time management, training of students as peer counsellors, boy-girl relationship, choice of life careers and information on careers. In the light of these findings the following recommendations are made:

1. The guidance and counselling department should be made effective by employing professional or trained counsellors. Each school should have at least one trained counsellor whose main job is counselling or at least one trained counsellor in the District to teach other teachers on how to counsel.
2. If the ministry of Education cannot provide counselling services for each school, then the school should organize workshops, seminars, and courses of training on guidance and counselling for all teachers, to enable them to offer quality counselling services.

3. The schools should strengthen counselling services by providing counselling rooms, time for teachers to counsel students, assisting teachers to get trained and providing useful programs on HIV/AIDS, drug abuse and premarital sex in schools so that students would improve their behaviour in such areas.

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