

Relationship between Counselor's Services Provision and Help-seeking Behavior among Secondary School Students in Laikipia County, Kenya

Caroline Maina¹, Dr. Doyne Mugambi², Dr. Chrispus Wawire³

¹Masters student Kenyatta University

^{2,3}Lecturer Kenyatta University

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2024.802111>

Received: 14 December 2023; Revised: 13 January 2024; Accepted: 19 January 2024; Published: 16 March 2024

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between counselor's services provision and help-seeking behavior among secondary school students in Laikipia County, Kenya. Fishbein and Ajzen's theory of Reasoned Action anchored this research. The researcher utilized correlational research design. The target population of this study consisted of form three students only from three categories of schools (boys boarding, girls boarding and mixed day schools) which make a total of 28 public secondary schools. The sample size of the study was 310 form three students from 10 schools. The researcher used two instruments to collect data from form three students. A pilot study was carried out to ascertain the validity of the instrument. Quantitative data gathered through a questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The results indicated that there was a moderate positive correlation between counselor's services provision and help-seeking behavior among the students, $r(290) = .29, p < .05$. The study recommends that teachers should sensitize students on the importance of counsellors to build a positive perception of school counselors to enhance help-seeking behavior among the students. There is a need for the students to be encouraged to seek help whenever they are faced with challenges to reduce cases of problem behavior in schools.

Keywords: Counselor's Services Provision; Help-seeking Behavior; Secondary School Students

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Historically, some Kenyan secondary schools have been experiencing indiscipline cases such as arson, bullying and student unrests. Despite the existence of guidance and counselling departments and government policies guiding learners' behavior management in secondary schools, some schools resort to punitive forms of punishment, including corporal punishment (Wamugunda, 2018). According to the policies in place, teachers are required to embrace guidance and counselling in dealing with problem behaviors in schools. The government developed a policy framework and legislation to create learner friendly environment in schools and each school is supposed to have a functioning guidance and counselling department. The department comprises trained teachers and counselors to handle students' behavioral issues (Awour, 2018).

Many Kenyan secondary schools have experienced cases of indiscipline among students. Warui (2018) sought to establish the difficulties that guidance and counselling teachers have encountered in their schools.

According to the findings, most schools have experienced lack of cooperation from both students and their parents in help-seeking behavior. The researchers noted that some religious beliefs act as a barrier to access to guidance and counselling services. The challenges experienced in the provision of guidance and counselling services in schools have been attributed to reluctance in help-seeking behavior among students (Warui, 2018). As result, some of the students suffer in silence and some of these challenges are manifested through disruptive behavior experienced in some secondary schools.

In Laikipia county and Laikipia West sub county in particular, similar challenges are experienced. Help-seeking behavior in secondary schools seem to be low due to the high cases of student unrests experienced every year in the county. According to Mwirigi (2020), there has been widespread indiscipline among students resulting in school strikes and destruction of school property. Guidance and counselling service is considered to provide support and solutions to the challenges that students face but there are difficulties in implementing guidance and counselling programmes. The study highlighted a lack of resources and trained counsellors to provide services to students. The current study aimed to find out the relationship between perception of the counsellor and help-seeking among secondary school students in Laikipia county.

Student's perception of counselor's provision of services in the school context refers to the way students view the counsellor in terms of professionalism and effectiveness in service delivery (Laurence, 2021). Students tend to seek help from counsellors who are perceived to be more professional in their work. On the other hand, students become reluctant to seek help if they have the perception that the information they will provide will not be handled with confidentiality.

Saunders and Saunders (2001) revealed that learners have different thoughts of their interactions and experiences with the school counsellors. Additionally, the researchers found that the learners rated their school counsellor based on their perception and experiences. Equally learners refused to consider their predecessor school psychologist as being very flexible and assertive in assisting learners to handle their household members and own problems. On the contrary, Davila (2003) noted that learners from Puerto Rico had rebellious views with their secondary school psychologist in learning support issues. Learners in Latino College portrayed; dissenting knowledge with their school psychologist and indicated lack of learning, forecasting and guidance. The results indicate that the findings on the relationship between perception of the counsellor and help-seeking behavior are mixed, a gap that prompted the need for this study.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aimed to address low help-seeking behavior among secondary school students in Laikipia West Sub County. When students do not seek help they will be psychologically unstable because the pressure is more than what they can handle thus they become overwhelmed. This can lead to student strikes, school arson, bullying and adolescent pregnancies which have been on the rise in Laikipia County and Laikipia West Sub County in particular. According to the statistics obtained from the Ministry of Education, there were 18 attempted arson cases in secondary schools in the county in the year 2021. There were three cases of arson reported in secondary schools and in one school, a Form two student lost his life. Cases of teenage pregnancies among secondary school girls in the county have also been reported. During KCSE 2021, a significant number of girls sat for the examination while pregnant while others gave birth while doing the examination. Most of these challenges have been associated with student's unwillingness to seek help from the counsellors.

Problem behavior among secondary school students has been linked to a number of factors. Studies have revealed that strikes in schools are associated with discontent, bullying, disobedience and unresolved issues among the students. Other studies have also stated that burning of dormitories in schools was associated with disobedient students and poor parenting. This challenge has also been associated with drug abuse, unwillingness to seek help, rape, moral decay, negative peer pressure, and technology are among the causes

of teenage pregnancies among high school students. Evidence has shown that if students get support through guidance and counselling, such cases will reduce. However, there is a scarcity of literature on the factors associated with help-seeking behavior among secondary school students, a gap this study sought to fill.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The results of the study showed that there is a significant relationship between counselor's services provision and help-seeking behavior. The findings of this study may benefit the school heads and teachers as it highlights on the predictors of help-seeking behavior among the learners. The results may be used by the teachers to enhance help-seeking behavior among secondary school students in order to reduce cases of problem behavior in schools. The Ministry of Education may be able to get insights on the areas that need more attention in terms of policy improvement for the betterment of student wellness while in school. The parents may benefit from the results to guide their children on help-seeking behavior to reduce cases of problem behavior. The students may use the results of this study to gain insights on the factors associated with help-seeking behavior when faced with challenges. This will help to promote well-being among the students. The research contributes to the body of knowledge on the predictors of help-seeking behavior among students therefore may benefit researchers and academicians in guidance and counselling.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have been done globally, in Africa, East Africa, and Kenya in an attempt to unmask the relationship between the counselor's services provision and help-seeking behavior among students. These studies have found mixed results, some establishing the existence of a significant relationship between counselor's services provision and help-seeking behavior, while others did not. In the USA, Pfohl et al. (2010) investigated the factors that contribute to the difficulties experienced by counseling trainees in seeking help. The sample size for this study was a thousand students. The research design adopted was a descriptive survey. From the one thousand questionnaires issued to the students, three hundred and ten were returned for analysis. The data were subjected to multivariate analysis and a t-test for independent samples. It was found that the students who had sought help developed a negative attitude towards the same, hence did not prefer seeking the same help in the future. This category of students reported stigmatization that comes with help-seeking. It was also established that stigma, counseling experience encountered before, and gender contributed thirty-two percent of the variance towards seeking help from qualified and trained individuals. The shortcoming of this study is the return rate of 31% of the questionnaires issued which was below the recommended 65% for a survey study. The current study addressed this gap by ensuring the questionnaires are administered in person by the researcher, and the respondents are helped on questions that seemed difficult to them.

In Ireland, Kearns et al. (2015) carried out a study to determine whether help-seeking can influence the suicide ideation prevalence rate among the learners in the university. The study involved four hundred ninety-three students at Irish University who were interviewed in an online survey. The questionnaires were administered online by the researchers to all the respondents involved. The researchers found that group identification could be used to determine whether students would seek help or not when faced with challenges in the university. It was also established that those students who were deeply attached to the institution struggled the most in seeking help from the university's mental health department. However, this study did not investigate the reasons why the students who were deeply attached to the institution struggled to seek help from the counselors in the health department. The current study filled this gap by investigating the counselor's services provision and help-seeking among the students.

In Nigeria, Seyi-Oderinde (2020) carried out a study to determine the extent to which socio-demographic

factors affect male university students in seeking help. The sample size for this study was 323 male university students chosen from a population of ten thousand students using cluster sampling. Questionnaires were used to collect data from the selected male students. The reliability of the research was achieved by conducting a field test involving 30 male students. The data were analyzed using SPSS where t-tests for independent samples, multivariate analysis, and ANOVA tests were conducted. The results indicated no relationship between attitudes and beliefs on seeking help amongst the students. However, a significant relationship was established among the male students on seeking help beliefs and attitudes. The attitudes of those who had sought help were determined to be different from those who had no prior experience. The study focused only on male students while female students were not considered. The current study involved both male and female respondents.

In Ethiopia, Bizuneh (2022) carried out a study to establish the link between help-seeking and student counseling services. The correlational research design was adopted. The sample size for this study was one hundred eighty-two college students. Questionnaires were administered to all the students sampled for this study by the researcher to ensure that clarifications are provided to ensure quality data that can be relied on for decision-making. The hypothesis was tested using t-test analysis. It was established that the male students obtained higher scores than female students on academic self-concept and help-seeking behavior. The students had a positive attitude towards counseling services and noted that they were indeed effective. The study also found out that the difference noted in help-seeking behavior among students in academics was contributed by their positive attitude towards counseling services and academic self-concept. This study was done at the peak of the covid-19 pandemic and the civil war that is ongoing in Ethiopia, which may have had an impact on the outcome. The current study was conducted in Laikipia County where there is peaceful coexistence and covid-19 positivity rate was less than 1%, hence addressing the gap in the study done in Ethiopia.

In Kenya, Kiptala and Kipruto (2021) carried out a similar study in Baringo County. The researchers investigated whether guidance and counseling had an impact on academic performance with regard to learners' perceptions. Data were collected qualitatively using a phenomenology research design. The study involved twelve secondary schools, a hundred and thirty students and twelve teachers. The respondents of this study were involved through interviews and focused group discussions using predetermined guides. The data were then analyzed qualitatively using NVIVO. It was established that the students welcomed the idea of guidance and counseling and that it had a positive influence on academic performance. The major shortcoming of this study is the fact that the qualitative data was only collected in groups, which limited the participants in providing key personal information that may not be shared in a group and may have an influence on the overall interpretation of data. The current study addressed this gap by using quantitative data.

In Mount Kenya East, where the current study was carried out, William (2017) carried out a similar study to identify the factors that can impact learners' perception of counseling services in Kenyan Universities and Middle-level colleges. The descriptive research design was adopted in this study, where 120 students were sampled from the target population of 5658. The quantitative data collected were analyzed using SPSS while the qualitative data was analyzed using content analysis. It was determined that most of the students supported guidance and counseling services because of the benefits associated with it and that they preferred older counselors due to their life experiences encountered and maturity. The gender of the counselor had an impact on students' perception of counseling services.

Hypothesis Testing

The objective of this research was to find out the relationship between counselor's services provision and help-seeking among secondary school students. To achieve this objective, the researcher advanced the following hypothesis.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between the counselor's services provision and help-seeking.

METHODOLOGY

The study used a correlational research design. This research design was appropriate because the study aimed to establish the relationship among the study variables without manipulating them as opined by (Creswell, 2006). Only quantitative data were collected from the respondents on counselor's services provision and help-seeking behavior. The need to quantitatively establish the relationship between the counselor's services provision and help-seeking behavior made the correlational research design the most suitable for this study.

Sampling Techniques and Sample size

A stratified sampling technique was used to select the schools from the different categories namely boys boarding, girls boarding and mixed day. The selected schools were appropriate for this study because the students in those institutions come from diverse cultural backgrounds which was appropriate for generalization of the findings (Kimani, 2018). The students from boys and girls schools were selected using simple random sampling techniques. Proportionate sampling procedure was used to select boys and girls from mixed day schools because the population of the students in each school varied. The guidance and counselling services received from the different categories of schools were different prompting the need to involve students from the different categories of schools (girls boarding, boys boarding, mixed day). The choice of involving Form three students was informed by the fact that they have been in school for more than two years, and thus were considered to understand guidance and counselling services better. A good number of these students may have in one way or the other been involved in help-seeking, thus better placed to reliably respond to the questionnaire.

Research Instruments

The following research instruments were used.

i. The Students' Counselor's services provision Scale

The study adapted students' perception of counselor scale to measure perception of the counsellor. The reliability of the scale was 0.76. The scale comprised of 7 items which measured perception of the counselor on a 5-point Likert scale with Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Neutral (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The expected maximum score was 35 while the minimum score was 7. This scale was scored by calculating the sum of the scores. Negatively worded items were reverse scored.

ii. Student's Help-Seeking Behavior Scale

The outcome variable for this study was help-seeking which was measured using the adapted help-seeking scale developed by Wade et al. (2006). The reliability coefficient of this scale was 0.78. The respondents were presented with a 10-item questionnaire which measured help-seeking behavior on a 5-point Likert scale with Strongly Agree (5), Agree (4), Agree & Disagree Equally (3), Disagree (2), and Strongly Disagree (1). The scale was scored by adding the scores from each item. The expected maximum score was 50 while the minimum score was 10.

a. Data Collection

Data were collected explicitly using questionnaires because the study focused on collecting quantitative

data. The choice to use questionnaires was informed by the merits associated with them including; the interviewer will not influence the responses, the respondents providing feedback in their own words and understanding, and the respondents having enough time to give a useful response (Mugenda & Mugenda, 2008) and Kothari (2004). The researcher administered the questionnaires by herself to the selected students from the study sample. The use of questionnaires was the most appropriate as it gave the researcher a chance to collect sufficient information.

b. Data Analysis

Data analysis process began with data vetting, where the questionnaires that were completed as per the instructions were identified and separated from those which did not meet the set criteria. The data were then coded per the variables studied. Data was entered into the codebook prepared in SPSS. The researcher used SPSS version 18 in this research and analysis. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented in form of percentages, frequencies, mean, and standard deviation. The relationship between counselor’s services provision and help-seeking behavior were determined by carrying out inferential statistics. The processed data were presented using tables.

FINDINGS

Demographic Information of the Respondents

The researcher computed age and gender cross tabulation of the respondents and the results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Age and Gender Cross Tabulation

Age Category	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
14-18	129(51%)	127(49%)	256(100%)
19-25	21(70%)	9(30%)	30(100%)
25 and Above	2(50%)	2(50%)	4(100%)
Total	152(52%)	138(48%)	290(100%)

The results in Table 4.4 show that male students aged 14-18 years represented 51% while female students represented 49%. The male students aged 19-25 years represented 70% while the female students represented 30%. The number of female and male students aged 25 years and above represented 50% in each case.

Correlation between Counselor’s services provision and Help-Seeking

The descriptive statistics for counselor’s services provision by gender was also conducted and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 4.8: Descriptive Statistics for Counselor’s services provision by Gender

Gender	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Male	152	17.00	14.00	31.00	22.38	2.81
Female	138	14.00	14.00	28.00	22.78	2.33
Total	290	17.00	14.00	31.00	22.57	2.59

The results in Table 2 show that the range of the scores for male and female students was 17 and 14 respectively. The minimum score for both genders was 14 while the maximum score for male and female students was 31 and 28 respectively. Female students had a mean score of 22.78 ($SD = 2.33$) while male students had a mean score of 22.38 ($SD = 2.81$). Female students had a slightly better perception of the counsellor than male students.

The researcher also examined the descriptive statistics of help-seeking by gender and the results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Help-seeking Scores by Gender

Gender	N	Range	Min	Max	Mean	SD
Male	152	35.00	10.00	45.00	25.82	5.99
Female	138	31.00	12.00	43.00	29.75	5.72
Total	290	35.00	10.00	45.00	27.69	6.18

Table 3 shows that the range of the scores for male students was 35 with 10 and 45 being the minimum and maximum scores respectively. The mean score for male students was 25.82 ($SD = 5.99$) while that for the female students was 29.75 ($SD = 5.72$). The results indicate that the female students scored slightly better than male students in help-seeking.

Hypothesis Testing

The objective of this research was to find out the relationship between counselor’s services provision and help-seeking. To achieve this objective, the researcher advanced the following hypothesis.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between the counselor’s services provision and help-seeking.

The hypothesis was tested using Pearson correlation and the results were as presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Correlation between Perception of Counselor and Help-Seeking

		Help-Seeking
Perception of Counselor	Pearson Correlation	.29**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00
	N	290

The results indicate that there was a moderate positive correlation between counselor’s services provision and help-seeking among the students, $r(290) = .29, p < .05$. The correlation was statistically significant and therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. The results imply that the way students perceive their school counselor is directly related to their help-seeking tendency.

Discussion of the Results

The aim of this study was to find out the correlation between the counselor’s services provision and help-seeking among learners in secondary schools. It was established that female students scored better than the male students in help-seeking. This difference between male and female students was statistically significant, in favor of female students. It was established that there was a moderate significant and positive

correlation between the counselor's services provision by the students and help-seeking. These findings are consistent with the findings from previous studies conducted, though some are inconsistent. In USA, Pfohl et al. (2010) investigated the factors that contributed to the difficulties experienced by counseling trainees in help seeking behavior. The researchers found out that the students who had sought help developed a negative attitude towards the same, hence did not prefer seeking the same help in the future. This category of students reported stigmatization that comes with help-seeking. It was also found that stigma, counseling experience encountered before, and gender accounted for thirty-two percent of the variance towards seeking help from qualified and trained counsellors. The implication of these findings is that there is a need to counter the post-help-seeking effects to ensure that those seeking help do not suffer from stigmatization.

Similar results were reported in Ireland in a research by Kearns et al. (2015) which examined whether help-seeking can influence suicide ideation prevalence rate among the learners in the university. The researchers found that group identification could be used to determine whether students would seek help or not when faced with challenges in the university. It was also established that those students who were deeply attached to the institution struggled the most in seeking help from the university's mental health department. The implication of this study is that there is a need for stakeholders in learning institutions to work together in ensuring that all students going through challenges that require a counselor's attention or support from informal sources, as may be preferred, get access to such services, without fear of stigmatization.

In Ethiopia, Bizuneh (2022) carried out a study to establish the link between help-seeking and student counseling services. It was established that male students obtained higher scores than female students on academic self-concept and help-seeking behavior. The students had a positive attitude towards counseling services and noted that they were indeed effective. The results demonstrated that the difference noted in help-seeking behavior among students in academics was contributed by their positive attitude towards counseling services and academic self-concept. The implication of this study is that there is a need to establish and support counseling departments in all learning institutions for the benefit of the students, both in academics and social life.

Relatedly in Nigeria, Seyi-Oderinde (2020) carried out a study to determine the extent to which socio-demographic factors affect male university students in seeking help and reported contrary results to the current study. The attitudes of those who had sought help were found to be different from those who had no prior experience. It was also determined that there is no significant relationship between attitudes and beliefs and help-seeking among the students. The implication of this study is that there is need to counter the effects that come after help-seeking among students to ensure that such students are not discouraged from seeking similar services in the future.

In Kenya, Kiptala and Kipruto (2021) carried out a similar study in Baringo County and reported similar results. The researchers investigated whether guidance and counseling had an impact on academic performance with regard to learners' perceptions. It was established that the students welcomed the idea of guidance and counseling and that it had a positive influence on academic performance. The implication of this study is that there is a need for the school stakeholders to join hands in strengthening and supporting guidance and counseling departments to ensure that the students reap maximum benefits from such departments for their academic and social prosperity.

In Mount Kenya East, where the current study was carried out, William (2017) carried out a similar study to identify the factors that can impact learners' perception of counseling services in Kenyan Universities and middle-level colleges. It was established that most of the students supported guidance and counseling services because of the benefits associated with it and that they preferred older counselors due to their life experiences and maturity. Gender of the counselor had an impact on students' perception of counseling services. The implication of these findings is that there is a need for the learning institutions to consider the age of the counselors before engaging them because the students prefer working with older counselors. The

results suggested that guidance and counseling departments need to be strengthened to ensure that they effectively serve the students without any limitation whatsoever. Learning institutions also have a responsibility to ensure that the counselling needs of either gender of the students are taken care of.

CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to find out the correlation between the counselor's services provision and help-seeking among learners. The study established that counselor's services provision by the students is significantly related to help-seeking. The study concludes that the students' perception of counselor is associated with their help-seeking tendency. Therefore, need to be sensitized to enhance their perception of the counsellor to improve helping seeking when they are faced with challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results, the study recommends that teachers should sensitize students on the importance of counsellors to build a positive perception of school counselors to enhance help-seeking behavior among the students. This will help them seek counsel when faced with life and academic challenges to reduce cases of problem behavior.

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