



Refining Mental and Emotional Well-being in School Students: The Counselor's Role in a Content-Centered Approach

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Abstract

This paper examines the role of school counselors in recognizing and responding to the mental and emotional health needs of students at the school level. Drawing on reports from the World Health Organization (WHO), the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and the United Nations Organization (UNO), the study highlights the pivotal role school counselors play in enhancing the mental and emotional well-being of students. The research identifies key determinants of students' mental health challenges and explores a variety of strategies employed by counselors, including awareness campaigns, short-term counseling programs, advocacy for children's rights, and providing resources to address mental health concerns. Despite these efforts, the study concludes that current approaches remain insufficient. Based on these findings, the paper recommends that school counselors implement long-term, structured mental health therapy programs. These programs should be designed to integrate counseling services with the efforts of educators and community service providers, ensuring a holistic approach to meeting the needs of the whole child.

Key words: Counsellor, Mental Health, Emotional; Counselling

I. Introduction

In recent years, the prevalence of mental and emotional disorders among young people has emerged as a significant public health issue. Despite its growing impact, mental health in youth is often not adequately addressed and remains widely neglected. According to a report from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), 16.5% of children and adolescents aged 6 to 17 experienced mental health disorders in 2020, a number that increased following the COVID-19 pandemic. The report also highlights that 1 in 6 adolescents aged 12

to 17 reported experiencing a major depressive episode during the same period, underscoring the urgent need for improved mental health care and support for this age group.

Various factors, such as excessive worry, fear in social situations, and feelings of sadness or emptiness, can contribute to mental health challenges that affect children both at school and at home. These emotional struggles can significantly impact how children learn, behave, and manage their emotions. According to global data, approximately one in eight people—around 970 million individuals—worldwide live with a mental disorder, with anxiety and depression being the most prevalent. The World Health Organization (WHO) reports that the COVID-19 pandemic has significantly exacerbated these conditions. Early estimates indicate a 26% increase in anxiety disorders and a 28% rise in major depressive disorders in just one year, highlighting the profound impact of the pandemic on global mental health.

According to Mental Health America's 2023 edition of *The State of Mental Health in America* report, 59.8% of youth with major depression do not receive the necessary medical care, and only 28% of those with severe depression receive consistent treatment. Despite the availability of effective treatments for mental disorders, many individuals still lack access to mental health care. Additionally, stigma, discrimination, and violations of human rights remain significant barriers. How can these issues be addressed? The 2020 NAMI report highlights that adolescence is a particularly vulnerable phase of life. During this time, parents, teachers, and counselors all play a vital role in identifying and addressing mental and emotional disorders. However, they often face challenges such as limited budgets, inadequate insurance coverage, and a shortage of mental health services in many communities. Among these stakeholders, school counselors have a particularly crucial role in addressing mental health issues among students.



Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of counselors in addressing and refining mental health disorders among school-aged children. The structure of this study is outlined as follows.

Plan of the Study:

The present study is organized into four sections:

- **Section I:** This section introduces the topic and provides a brief outline of the study's structure.
- **Section II:** This section outlines the objectives of the study, the data sources used, and the research methodology. Additionally, a review of the relevant literature is presented in this section.
- **Section III:** This section presents a detailed discussion of the key findings, supported by relevant data and analysis.
- **Section IV:** The final section summarizes the main conclusions of the study and discusses the policy implications, offering recommendations for future action.

Section-II

Objectives of the Study

The following are the main objectives of the present study.

- To Study the role of counsellor in refining mental and emotional disorder among school students
- To recommend suitable measures for mental health promotion policy

II. Data Base and Methodology

To achieve the objectives of the study, various reports from the World Health Organization (WHO), the United Nations Organization (UNO), and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) have been utilized. In addition, several empirical and theoretical studies have been reviewed to analyze the key issues related to the theme of this research. For the analysis, a **content-based approach** has been employed, focusing on extracting relevant information from the reports and literature to assess the role of school counselors in addressing mental and emotional health concerns among students.

III. Review of Literature

Mental health disorders among school students pose significant barriers to their academic, career, and emotional development. Numerous studies have been conducted to explore the role of mental health services in addressing these challenges. Key findings from several relevant studies are summarized below:

- **Atkins et al. (2010)** studied the integration of education and mental health in schools. They concluded that combining education and mental health initiatives could be highly effective if the goals of mental health services are aligned with those of educational institutions. The study called for a fundamental shift in how school mental health is conceptualized, including the use of natural resources within schools to implement sustainable supports for students' learning and emotional health. It emphasized the need for integrated models that promote student health, enhance learning outcomes, and involve parents more actively.
- **Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2013)** found that many students do not receive adequate mental health services. The CDC report highlighted the gap between the need for mental health support and the actual services provided in schools, particularly in low-income communities.
- **Panigua (2013)** found that students from low-income families are at a higher risk of mental health disorders but are often unable to access the necessary mental health services. Similar findings were reported by **Marrast, Himmelstein, & Woolhandler (2016)**, who noted that despite government efforts to address these issues, inequities in access to care persist, particularly for underserved populations.
- **World Health Organization (2018)** published a report examining data from 177 of its member states through the WHO Mental Health Atlas. It highlighted significant disparities in mental health care between high- and low-income countries. In low- and middle-income countries, public expenditure on mental health remains low, with over 80% of mental health funds allocated to mental health hospitals. Furthermore, there is a severe shortage of mental health professionals in these countries, with only 1 mental health worker per 100,000 people in low-income countries, compared to 72 per 100,000 in high-income countries. This report also revealed that only 63% of WHO member states have at least two functioning multi-sectoral mental health programs at the national level.
- **Patel et al. (2018)** reviewed the Lancet Commission report, which outlined a four-pillar agenda for redesigning global mental health. The first pillar emphasizes that mental health is critical for sustainable development in all nations. The second pillar acknowledges that mental health problems range from mild, time-limited distress to severe, chronic conditions. The third pillar stresses that mental health is influenced by a complex interaction



of social, environmental, genetic, and psychological factors, particularly during early life. The fourth pillar highlights that mental health is a fundamental human right, requiring a rights-based approach to protect the welfare of individuals with mental disorders and promote mental health for all.

- **Erford (2019)** found that 20% of students require mental health services, but only one in five actually receive the necessary support. This gap in services contributes to the growing mental health crisis among students.

- **American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2021)** outlined the essential skills, knowledge, and attitudes that students should develop through school counseling programs. These programs aim to enhance students' mental health awareness and provide short-term counseling interventions to remove barriers to academic success. The ASCA identifies various activities and strategies that school counselors use to support students in reaching their highest potential, emphasizing the importance of mental health education and early intervention.

It is clear from the above discussions that there is a clear gap in the availability and accessibility of mental health services for students, particularly for those in low-income areas. School counselors are instrumental in addressing students' mental health needs but often face challenges such as inadequate resources and limited collaboration with other community service providers. While short-term counseling interventions are common, there is a need for more comprehensive, long-term strategies to support students' mental health and academic success.

Section-III

Mental Health and Emotional Disorder Among Students: An Overview

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which an individual realizes their own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, works productively and fruitfully, and contributes to their community (WHO, 2019). The importance of mental health is also recognized by the United Nations (UNO), which includes it as a key component in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These goals aim to promote well-being and ensure healthy lives for all, across all ages, benefiting communities and countries globally where millions of people urgently require mental health support.

Multiple factors influence mental health throughout life, with adolescence being a particularly vulnerable stage. During this phase, adolescents face a variety of risks, such as exposure to adversity, peer pressure, and identity exploration, all of which can exacerbate mental health issues. Other significant factors include the quality of family life, relationships with peers, and experiences of violence—especially sexual violence and bullying. Additionally, harsh parenting, socio-economic challenges, and other stressful environmental conditions are recognized as key risks to mental well-being.

To address these challenges during the adolescent years, counseling services in schools are essential. Early intervention and ongoing support through school-based counseling can help prevent mental health disorders and promote emotional resilience in students. The importance of these interventions is evident in the following discussions.

Analysis of the Present Study

The Role of School Counselors in Addressing Adolescent Mental Health Issues

Adolescence, the transitional phase between childhood and adulthood, typically occurs between the ages of 10 and 19. During this critical period, many students spend more time at school than they do with their families. As a result, school teachers, counselors, and other staff are often the first to notice behavioral changes that could signal a mental or emotional health issue. Teachers, in particular, spend significant time with students and may be able to identify early signs of mental health concerns. However, teachers alone cannot resolve these issues without the support of counselors. School counselors, therefore, play a vital role in addressing students' mental health needs. They work collaboratively with teachers, administrators, parents, and social workers to ensure that students receive the proper care and resources necessary for success in both their academic and personal lives.

Mental Health Issues Common Among Adolescents

School counselors are trained to recognize and address a wide range of mental health conditions that can hinder students' academic and social development. Some of the most prevalent mental health concerns among adolescents include:

1. **Emotional Disorders:** Emotional disorders, including anxiety and depression, are common



among adolescents. Anxiety disorders, such as panic attacks and excessive worry, are particularly prevalent in older adolescents, affecting 4.6% of those aged 15–19 years. Depression is also a significant concern, with 1.1% of adolescents aged 10–14 years and 2.8% of adolescents aged 15–19 years affected. Anxiety and depression share similar symptoms, including rapid and unexpected mood changes, and can lead to suicidal thoughts in severe cases.

2. **Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD):** Adolescents with ODD exhibit frequent defiant and oppositional behavior, especially toward family members or teachers. This may include refusing to comply with rules and blaming others for their mistakes.

3. **Behavioral Disorders:** These are more common among younger adolescents and can manifest as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) or conduct disorder. ADHD affects approximately 3.1% of adolescents aged 10–14 years and 2.4% of those aged 15–19 years. Conduct disorder, which includes destructive or challenging behavior, affects 3.6% of adolescents aged 10–14 years and 2.4% of those aged 15–19 years. These disorders can severely impact academic performance and, if untreated, may lead to criminal behavior.

4. **Psychosis:** Psychotic disorders, such as schizophrenia, often emerge in late adolescence or early adulthood. Symptoms may include hallucinations or delusions, which can impair an adolescent's ability to function in daily life, engage in education, and contribute to stigma and human rights violations.

5. **Suicide and Self-Harm:** Suicide is the fourth leading cause of death among adolescents aged 15–19 years. Risk factors include alcohol use, childhood abuse, stigma around seeking help, and barriers to accessing care. Digital media can both aid and hinder suicide prevention efforts.

6. **Risk-Taking Behaviors:** Adolescents often engage in risky behaviors, such as substance abuse or unsafe sexual practices, which can serve as coping mechanisms for emotional distress. These behaviors can have serious long-term consequences for both mental and physical health.

7. **Eating Disorders:** Eating disorders, such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa, often emerge during adolescence. These disorders are characterized by abnormal eating habits and concerns about body weight and shape. Anorexia nervosa, in particular, is associated with higher mortality rates due to medical complications or suicide.

School-Based Mental Health Programs

School counselors play a crucial role in identifying and addressing these mental health concerns. They implement on-campus programs and provide resources to meet the needs of students struggling with mental health issues. These programs are designed to help students develop social and academic skills, which in turn foster positive transitions both in school and in life.

Mental health promotion and prevention measures in schools are aimed at strengthening an individual's ability to regulate emotions, build resilience to adversity, and reduce engagement in risk-taking behaviors. A multi-level approach is necessary, incorporating various delivery platforms such as digital media, health and social care settings, schools, and communities. Effective mental health programs must also focus on reaching vulnerable adolescents who may be at higher risk of developing mental health disorders.

Key Responsibilities of School Counselors

School counselors are tasked with providing mental health support through a variety of initiatives. Their responsibilities include:

- **Addressing the Needs of Adolescents with Mental Health Conditions:** Counselors must identify and support students experiencing emotional or behavioral disorders.
- **Prioritizing Non-Pharmacological Approaches:** Counselors should focus on non-medical interventions and avoid over-medicalization when possible.
- **Respecting Children's Rights:** School counselors must adhere to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and other human rights standards to ensure that students' rights are respected and protected.
- **Promoting Mental Health Awareness:** Counselors should work to reduce stigma and increase mental health awareness within the school community.
- **Providing Referrals:** School counselors may offer short-term counseling or crisis intervention and refer students to external mental health services as needed.
- **Recognizing Warning Signs:** School counselors should be vigilant for early warning signs of mental health issues, such as sudden changes in academic performance, attendance problems, or behavioral issues.
- **Supporting Individual Needs:** Counselors must provide personalized support to students,



addressing academic, emotional, and social challenges.

- **Providing Resources for Teachers, Administrators, and Parents:** Counselors offer guidance to other school staff and parents to ensure a holistic approach to student well-being.
- **Advocating for Students:** Counselors advocate on behalf of students to ensure they receive the necessary resources and support for their mental and emotional health.

The role of school counselors is critical in addressing the mental health challenges faced by adolescents. By identifying early warning signs, providing appropriate interventions, and collaborating with teachers, parents, and community service providers, school counselors can significantly impact students' academic success and personal well-being. Preventive, school-based mental health programs are essential in ensuring that students not only overcome mental health issues but also thrive in their academic and personal lives.

Section-IV

Conclusion and Recommendations of the Study

This paper examines the role of school counselors in recognizing and responding to the mental and emotional health needs of students at the school level. Drawing on reports from the World Health Organization (WHO), the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), and the United Nations (UNO), the study finds that school counselors play a pivotal role in improving the mental and emotional well-being of students. Counselors conduct a variety of on-campus programs and utilize resources to support students struggling with mental health issues, while also helping them develop essential social and academic skills to facilitate a positive transition.

The study highlights that counselors are vital members of the educational team, trained to recognize mental health risk factors and provide guidance to enhance students' overall functioning—personally, socially, and academically. However, unmet mental health needs create significant barriers to learning and hinder students' holistic development. School counselors, uniquely qualified to offer instruction, assessment, and advisement, often conduct short-term counseling sessions with students and their families.

Based on the findings, the study identifies several key determinants of students' mental health concerns, including emotional disorders, stress, anxiety, stigma, and behavioral issues such as Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). Counselors

employ various methods, such as awareness campaigns, short-term counseling programs, advocacy for children's rights, and resource provision, to address these issues. Despite these efforts, the study concludes that current interventions are insufficient.

Therefore, the study recommends that school counselors implement long-term, structured mental health therapy programs in schools. These programs should be designed to collaborate with educators and community service providers to meet the comprehensive needs of the whole child.

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