
HINDRANCES TO EFFECTIVE DELIVERY OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES IN MITIGATING PSYCHOSOCIAL DISTRESS IN TANZANIAN UNIVERSITIES.

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the hindrances to effective delivery of guidance and counselling services in mitigating psychosocial distress in Tanzanian Universities. An exploratory design was employed. Two universities and two Deans of students and two counsellors were purposively sampled. Data was collected using interview schedule. For content validity, inter-raters checked and established the viability of the instruments in view of the research questions. Data was analyzed thematically. The results revealed non-existent of budget for guidance and counselling department, poor counselling facilities, tight academic schedules and inadequate professionals as the major factors militating against the administration of guidance and counselling services in universities. Based on the findings, the study recommended that the guidance and counselling departments should be well funded for effective delivery of services. Besides, professionalism should be considered when employing university counsellors. The university counsellors should practice group counselling to mitigate the low ratio of counsellors and students in the universities.

KEYWORDS: Counselling, Guidance, Mitigate, Psychosocial distress

INTRODUCTION

According to Mirowsky and Ross (2003), distress refers to an unpleasant subjective state. It takes two major forms, that is; depression and anxiety. Depression is characterized by feeling sad, demoralized, lonely, hopeless, or worthless, wishing you were dead, having trouble sleeping, crying, and being unable to get going. Students in secondary and tertiary education settings face a wide range of ongoing normative stressors, which can be defined as normal day to day hassles such as ongoing academic demands (Pascoe et al., 2020). Research in the United Kingdom indicated that mental health illness or psychological problems within student populations were high with most students suffering from depression or anxiety, or both (Sherina et al., 2004). This is consistent with Gallagher (2005) (as cited in Nsereko et al., 2014) indicting that 86% of university students reported severe psychosocial problems including depression, anxiety and serious substance abuse at counselling centers. Similarly, in Nigeria, one in every three of the trainee teachers were psychosocially distressed (Ani et al., 2011).

A study by Flatt (2013) in North America identified six factors that contribute to the mental health crisis: academic pressure, financial burden, increased accessibility of higher education, increased female to male student ratio, increased use of technology, and dramatic change in the lifestyle of university and college students. This is corroborated by Seif (2011) (as cited in Onditi et al., 2014) who also identified common psychosocial stressors as: academic, financial hardships, relationship, infrastructural issues, health concerns, parental expectations, lifestyle issues, social problems, future career plans, and personal problems.

A university-based study conducted in Tanzania by Onditi et al. (2014) on Psychosocial Stressors and Help-Seeking Behavior among Undergraduate Student Teachers in Tanzania at Dar es Salaam University College of Education indicated that despite the existence of college formal help or support resources, their utilization by students was low. This is also consistent with another university-based study by Kalonge (2007) which reported that students from the University of Dar es Salaam – Mwalimu Nyerere campus in Tanzania were overwhelmed by many stressors but seemed not willing to seek professional help from guidance and counselling department despite the availability of the services in the universities. Guidance and counselling services therefore come in handy in such situations in order to help students facing these new challenges. Effective guidance and counselling services assist, particularly university undergraduate students individually or in groups to develop competencies that help them adjust to different situations and make appropriate decisions in life (Lasode et al., 2017). However, studies have shown that guidance and counselling services in universities face a lot of challenges.

Regarding challenges of the provision of guidance and counselling services, HERQA, (2008) as cited in Yilfashewa (2011) indicated lack of appropriate number of counsellors, lack of recognition of G&C services by the university, inadequate professional counsellors, no well -organized student counselling system, lack of a comprehensive plan for giving direction to student services across its campuses, counselor-students ratio, and unavailability of a counsellor in the office because of other additional duties in the university. In addition, other challenges faced in the provision of the service were lack of commitment and creativity by professionals to promote the profession in the school and lack of proper facility like office, inadequate funding of guidance and counselling services and inadequate counselling staff. (Abdul, 2012; Bogba, 2016; Mahlangu, 2011; Wako, 2015). A Study by Nkuba (2010; 2013) on the status of career counselling services in Tanzania schools also indicate serious inadequacy of counselling skills among school counsellors. Lack of enough professional counsellors was also found to be one of the fundamental problems affecting the provision of career guidance for students (Amani & Sima, 2015). Amani and Sima further opined that most universities in Tanzania have not yet officially institutionalized career guidance as an independent service. It was rather done under the patronage of the Dean of Students who is not professionally trained for such a post. Lack of enough professional counsellors and lack of a clear policy for implementing career guidance and counselling services at both national and university level are the most fundamental barriers to effective provision of career guidance and counselling in Tanzania. This study therefore

widens the scope by investigating hindrances to effective delivery of all guidance and counselling services in Tanzanian universities unlike Amani and Sima (2015) who only investigated barriers to career guidance and counselling services in Universities.

The Ministry of education and culture (MOEC) in Tanzania made efforts to institutionalize guidance and counselling services in the education system. MOEC established guidance and counselling services in secondary schools and colleges through Education Circular Number 11 of 2002 (URT, 2002). Despite the government's effort to institutionalize guidance and counselling in Tanzania, there are many factors that hinder effective delivery of guidance and counselling services. Many researches have been done internationally too in secondary schools than in universities. There appears to be a gap in this service between secondary school and tertiary education. It is against this background that this study sought to establish the hindrances to effective guidance and counselling services in Tanzanian universities.

Objective of the study

The objective of this study was to investigate the hindrances to effective delivery of guidance and counselling services in in mitigating psychosocial distress in universities in Tanzania.

Methodology

This was an exploratory study, which sought to establish the challenges faced in the provision of guidance and counselling services in universities. The qualitative paradigm was employed. Universities in Tanzania were stratified into two categories: Private and Public chartered universities then one was purposively sampled from each stratum based on reported cases related to psychosocial distress in those universities and the personal experience of the researcher when undertaking practicum in one of the universities. One student counsellor and Dean of students from each university were purposively sampled. Hence a total of four participants took part in this study. Structured interview schedule was used to collect data. Face to face interview was conducted with the Deans of Students and counsellors. This type of interview gives the researcher opportunities to probe for views and opinions of the interviewee (Gray, 2004 as cited in Koskei & Simiyu, 2015). The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to facilitate subsequent analysis. Thematic analysis was applied to the data. Respondents' data was also treated with ultimate confidentiality during, and after collection. Research participants, and the institutions sampled for this study therefore remained anonymous.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

To establish the hindrances to effective delivery of guidance and counselling services in Tanzanian universities, Interview schedule qualitative data were used. Based on the analysis of the study done, the following result obtained was categorized into the following themes:

Non-existence budget for this department

Firstly, there was no specific budget allocation for guidance and counselling. This is what one of the respondents had to say about hindrance to effective delivery of guidance and counselling services;

“The department does not have a budget and i use my money when visiting students in rehabilitation centres. There should be specific budget allocation for the guidance and counselling department, this will help facilitate our operations.” (Male counsellor, Public University)

This means that lack of financial support was experienced in the public university’s G&C department. This finding is unexpected because the public universities are funded by the government hence should have enough money to support all departments as opposed to private universities that depend on fees paid by students only. Lack of financial support may lead to poor quality of G&C services.

The outcome of this study showed that guidance and counselling departments in the sampled public university was inadequately funded. Much as the university administration recognized the importance of guidance and counselling, it did not provide enough financial support necessary for effective guidance and counselling services. Effective counselling demands adequate funding to help put up infrastructure and to organize activities such as orientation, excursions, career clubs and Career Day/week. Scholars and educators have underscored the importance of adequate funding for guidance and counselling programmes (Aidoo, 2011; Bobga, 2016; Songok, Yungugnu, & Mulinge, 2013; Willys, 2013). A counsellor who has adequate and relevant materials and facilities tend to be more confident, effective and productive Kafwa (2005). This implies that adequate funding of the guidance and counselling services will enhance effectiveness of the guidance and counselling services through provision of adequate counselling resources hence students’ psychosocial distress will be mitigated in universities in Tanzania.

Poor facilities

Secondly, data analyzed from the interviews with the counsellors and Deans of Students indicated that both private and public universities lacked well-equipped counselling offices with necessary materials for counselling services that would enable counsellors to provide effective services to students. On whether there were counselling rooms in the universities, one of the counsellors had this to say; “*We use the office as a counselling room. It is a serious matter, sometimes I move to the garden to talk to the client. Sometimes you may find many students in the office and the client has to be helped.*” (Counsellor, Public University). This sentiment points to the inference that the privacy of the students during counselling is threatened, they cannot feel comfortable in the full glare of everybody. This would discourage students from seeking counselling services in fear of being labelled by their fellow students.

Privacy and comfort during counselling helps the client to open up to the counsellor. This was not the case in Tanzanian universities sampled. The study established that there were no rooms allocated for counselling hence lack of privacy and comfort during counselling. Sometimes the counsellors had to

move to the field to counsel students. A safe and productive counselling relationship can only be achieved when the counselling space is suitable, comfortable and private. The finding of this study is consistent with the findings of Ayieko (2013) who established that most counselling in Moi University took place in the field or in vacant classrooms. Similarly, K'okul (2010) reported that Kenyatta University and Nairobi University did not have counselling centres and counselling was done in the Dean of Students' offices. Moreover, Amina (2015) also revealed that guidance and counselling services are not institutionalized in Tanzania universities and there is lack of well-equipped counselling rooms in both private and public universities. Lack of designated well equipped room for guidance and counselling services would expose students who seek help from their fellow students this could contribute to the students' apathy towards guidance and counselling services hence prevalence of psychosocial distress.

Professionalism not taken to consideration when hiring university counsellors

The outcome of the interviews with counsellors from public and private universities showed that they are not professionally qualified to hold counselling posts. This is what they had to say regarding their qualifications; *"I have a bachelor of education science degree and a master of education science."* (A male counsellor, public university) and *"I hold a diploma in nursing and a certificate in drug and substance abuse counselling."* (A counsellor, private university). This lack of professionalism has a negative implication on the quality of G&C services offered.

Regarding professionalism, adequate professional training is lacking. Professionalism in counselling is a mandatory requirement for counsellors, it helps in building the trust and enables the students to believe the counsellors. The counsellors used their general knowledge about counselling which was not enough for competent delivery of quality guidance and counselling services. The finding of this research corroborates the findings of Mapfumo and Nkoma (2013) which postulated that there is an acute shortage of trained counsellors in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa and Tanzanian seems like it is not an exception. The finding of this study is also consistent with Amani and Sima (2015) and K'okul (2010) who found lack of enough professional counsellors to be one of the fundamental problems affecting the provision of guidance and counselling services for students. The finding of this research however doesn't conform to The American School of Counselling Association (ASCA) (2003) and The International Association of Counselling Services (2000) recommendation that student counsellors have a minimum qualification of a Master's degree from the disciplines such as counselling psychology, clinical psychology, counsellor education, psychiatry, social work or school counselling making them uniquely qualified to address all students' academics, personal, social, and career needs. The result implies that availability of qualified professional counsellors would ensure quality guidance and counselling services thus enhance students' positive perception towards the services.

SCHEDULES

Besides, inadequate time for students to honour appointments with the counsellor was highlighted. When a question was posed regarding hindrances to provision of effective guidance and counselling services in the universities, a counsellor in the private university had this to say; *“The university has a tight academic schedule during the week days so much that students are occupied the whole day hence many appointments bounce” (A female counsellor, Private university).*

This means that there is no allocated time for counselling in the universities hence students have to create their own time out of the title timetable.

Moreover, the current study also established that students had very busy academic timetables for lectures and universities had not timetabled guidance and counselling. Inconsistency in the visits by the client due to inadequate time can thus affect the quality of counselling. The result of this research is consistent with findings by Hayes and Morgan (2011) that pointed out that counsellors had to look for time to counsel students. There was no scheduled time upon which counsellors could render help to students. Bogba (2016) also observed that in most universities in Cameroon guidance and counselling is not timetabled. This implies that students have to miss academic activities to attend counselling sessions and the counsellors may also have to stretch their normal working time so as to meet students after classes. This may affect the quality of the sessions because of fatigue in both counsellors and students.

The workload for Counsellors

Another obstacle to effective delivery of guidance and counselling services established in the current study was the inadequate manpower in the universities, four counsellors against a student population of 7237 in private university and three counsellors against student population of 6,316 in public university hence leads to burn out therefore some students may not be attended to when they seek help. This can subsequently make students develop negative perception of guidance and counselling services. This result replicates other researches showing that the counsellors are few in both private and public universities in Tanzanian and Turkish universities hence work overload (Güneri, 2006; Mmidi, 2015). Lasode, Lawal, and Ofodile (2017) also reported that students perceived that they need more counsellors at their various colleges for effective guidance and counselling services that will take care of their interests. Having adequate counsellors would lead to improved service delivery by counsellors. Most accrediting agencies require a counsellor-student ratio of one full-time counsellor for 250 to 300 students (Lunenburg, 2010).

LANGUAGE BARRIER

Besides, language barrier was also highlighted by the counsellor in the private university as a hindrance to effective guidance and counselling. English and Kiswahili are both national languages in Tanzania. However, students are more comfortable expressing themselves in Kiswahili than in English. Therefore, they were more comfortable approaching a counsellor who speaks Kiswahili for easy

communication. "I am Irish and I don't know Kiswahili, many students here can't speak English therefore counselling them is a problem, I am trying to learn Kiswahili but I can't speak it fluently." (Female counsellor, private university). The inability of the counsellor in the private university to speak Kiswahili was a barrier to effective counselling because students who could not express themselves well in English could not seek help. Excellent communication between the counsellor and the client is key for effective counselling (O'Connor, 2017). The excellent communication can only be realized if the counselee and counsellor are competent in the language used.

CONCLUSION

The study established that there were constraints that hindered effective delivery of guidance and counselling services in a bid to mitigate psychosocial distress among university students in Tanzania. The Tanzanian universities don't take guidance and counselling services seriously as evidenced by lack of enough counselling facilities, failure to employ professional counsellors and non-existing budget for guidance and counselling services. Guidance and counselling departments in the universities have not formalized peer counselling. Besides, heavy workloads for counsellors, language barrier between the counsellor and tight academic schedule are also hindrances to effective delivery of guidance and counselling services. These challenges compromised the quality of G&C services provided thus psychosocial distress is prevalent in Tanzanian universities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

University administrations should employ adequate professional counsellors commensurate to the number of students for effective delivery of guidance and counselling services. Besides, universities counsellors should employ group counselling so as to help many students with problems given that there is shortage of counsellors to effect individual counselling. Moreover, guidance and counselling departments should formalize peer counselling so as to reach out to many students who cannot access the counsellors. There should also be conducive counselling rooms where students feel comfortable and privacy is guaranteed to attract students to seek help.

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