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## ASSESSMENT OF UTILIZATION OF COUNSELLING SERVICES AMONG STUDENTS IN KENYAN UNIVERSITIES

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### ABSTRACT

In Kenya, guidance and counselling has been appreciated as an integral part of education and it seeks to address and resolve problems so that one can live at peace with oneself in the environment. Despite the existence of guidance and counselling services in Kenyan universities, needs continue to be reported among students. This study assessed the level of utilization of counselling services among students in Kenyan universities. Descriptive survey research design was used. Student needs assessment questionnaire, peer counselors questionnaire and an interview schedule were used to collect data from 486 respondents. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The majority of the students did not utilize the counselling services offered in the universities. Thus universities should sensitize students on importance of seeking counselling services available.

**Keywords:** *Counselling Services, Utilization, Students, Kenyan Universities*

### INTRODUCTION

Guidance and counselling is of importance in institutions of learning; counsellors make learning a positive experience for every student, they facilitate communication among teachers, parents, administration and students and help them adopt the schools environment in the best interest of each individual student (Krumboltz and Thierry, 2002). Guidance and counselling helps students in decision making, problem solving, developing positive attitudes towards self and others, establishing personal goals, developing educational plans as well as selecting the related courses based on individual interests and talents and being responsible for one's actions and choices (Charturvedi, 2007; Ombuya, 2005). Further Rgniyd (2008) add that guidance and counselling aims at stopping wastage of human power and physical resources by helping the individuals to find their place in the society. Mutie and Ndambuki (1999) supports this argument by adding that guidance and counselling minimizes the mismatch between education and employment and this helps in the efficient use of labour force.

University students may be faced by difficult situations; academic adjustment, developmental issues, violence, family and domestic issues, community or college conflicts, addiction, poor decision making, wrong career choices, disciplinary problems, sicknesses including HIV/AIDS (Nayak 2007; Egbochuku 2006; Charturvedi, 2004; Sindabi, 1989). These difficulties can be resolved through counselling. Effective guidance and counselling services in universities are very essential to ensure optimal and holistic growth and development of the students. The government of Kenya recognizes guidance and counselling as an

important service that should be given to every learner (GoK, 2002). Despite this recognition by Kenya and other African countries, these services still remain under-developed in most parts of Africa and thus not able to meet the ever changing needs of students in the universities (Aluende et al., 2005). This is corroborated by the Public chartered universities Inspection Board of 2006 which observed that public chartered Kenyan universities do not have strong counselling services to meet the various students' needs, especially, those engaged in alcohol and drug abuse and therefore recommends that public chartered universities to set effective counselling units for prevention, education and rehabilitation (Public chartered universities Inspection Board, 2006).

Counselling services may be well set, but the users may not seek help, others may be non-functional while they may also be missing in some universities and colleges. Nyaga (2011); Omatunde and Henrietta (2010); and Johanson (n.d.) states that lack of awareness, issues of confidentiality, and ignorance are some of the reasons that lead students not to utilize the counselling services offered in the universities. Despite the availability of counselling services in Kenyan universities, a myriad of problems and needs among the students continue to be reported: alcohol and substance abuse, suicide, prostitution, murder, kidnappings, theft and other psychological problems/needs (Aluende, 2001; Mutie and Ndambuki, 1999). This raises questions about the level of utilization of counselling services by the students in the Kenyan universities. It is against this background that the researcher sought to assess the level of utilization of counselling services among the students in Kenyan universities.

### **Statement of the Problem**

University education is essential for both personal and societal development; it equips individuals with necessary high level skills for every labour market. To achieve this, the government of Kenya acknowledges guidance and counseling as an important service for all learners that help them to resolve various needs that face them. Despite the existence of counselling services in Kenyan universities counseling needs continue to be reported among the students. This study therefore sought to assess the level of utilization of counseling services among students in Kenyan universities.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design to assess the level students in Kenyan universities utilized the counselling services offered in the universities. Descriptive survey design often results in the formulation of important principles of knowledge and solutions to significant problems since it produces statistical information about aspects of education that is used by policy makers, educators and other interested parties in different capacities (Kombo and Trompo, 2006; Borg and Gall, 1989). This design was therefore suitable since it enabled the researcher to determine the level of utilization of the counselling services offered in the universities.

The target population for this study was 132,373 students from the seven public and the twelve private chartered universities in Kenya (Ministry of Education, 2009). The accessible population was 54,974 students from six randomly selected universities. Stratified random sampling was used to draw the sample. Stratified random sampling is used in situations where the researcher knows some of the variables in the population that are critical to achieving representativeness (Burns and Groove, 1995). Type of university and gender were used as variables for stratification. Additionally, purposive sampling was used to select twelve student counselors and ninety peer counselors for the study

The 19 universities formed two strata comprising of seven public chartered universities and twelve private chartered universities respectively. The accessible population comprised of students, peer counselors and student counselors in six randomly selected universities; three public and three private chartered universities. Using Kathuri and Pals (1993) table, a population of over 100,000 subjects has a minimum sample size of 384 subjects. The student sample size was therefore 384 since the target population for the students was 132,373. The total sample size for the study was 486 respondents that comprised of; 384

students, twelve student counselors (two from each university under study) and ninety peer counselors (fifteen from each university under study). The peer counselors and the student counselors were purposively selected for the study. For representativeness, proportionate sampling was used to distribute the 384 students by gender to the six randomly selected universities.

Data from the sampled subjects was collected using two types of tools; student needs' assessment questionnaire, peer counselors questionnaire and an interview schedule for the student counselors. The rationale of using questionnaires was due to the large number of the students who were also widely dispersed. Wood and Ross- Kerr (2006) states that questionnaires can be given to a large number of people simultaneously, they can also be sent by mail. The student counselors' interview schedule was used for the purposes of validating the data. Mugenda (2008) states that data should be validated through the use of triangulation or the use of multiple data collection techniques.

Quantitative data that was collected using the questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistics. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyze data. The data was analyzed by use of a computer programme Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 17. The results of the data were presented in summary using frequency tables, bar graphs and pie charts.

Qualitative data generated from open ended items and interview schedule were organized into themes and summaries and the researchers evaluated the usefulness of the information given by the respondents to the study. Qualitative data was useful; it was a source of in-depth information on the utilization of the counselling services among the students in Kenyan Universities.

## FINDINGS

**Table 1:** Level of utilization of counselling services

| Ut utilization       | Frequency | Percentage |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|
| Very poorly          | 80        | 22.3       |
| Less than adequately | 124       | 34.7       |
| Adequately           | 137       | 38.4       |
| More than adequately | 12        | 3.1        |
| exceptionally well   | 6         | 1.4        |
| Tota Total           | 359       | 100        |

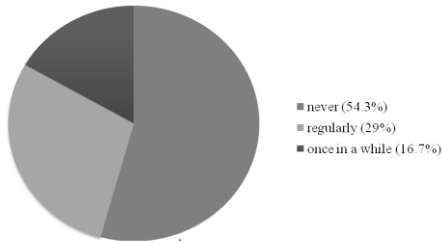
Key

**Students-----level of utilization**

- 0-142-----poorly utilized
- 143-215-----less that adequately utilized
- 216-287-----adequately utilized
- 288-358-----more than adequately utilized
- 359 and above----exceptionally well

**Table 2:** Students who have and have never utilized the counselling services

| Ever utilized | Frequency | percentage |
|---------------|-----------|------------|
| No            | 195       | 54.3       |
| Yes           | 164       | 45.7       |
| Total         | 359       | 100        |



**Figure 1:** Frequency of Seeking the Services

## DISCUSSION

### To Assess the Level of Utilization of Counselling Services among Students in Kenyan Universities

Counselling services are crucial for optimal growth and development of university students. From the findings on Table 1, 80 (22.3%) and 124 (34.7%) of the students stated that the counselling services were very poorly and less than adequately utilized respectively. Students who indicated that the counselling services were adequately utilized were 137 (38.4%), while 12 (3.1%) indicated that the counselling services were more than adequately utilized and only 6 (1.4%) indicated that the counselling services were exceptionally well utilized. The information in Table 2 shows that 195 (54.3%) of the students have never sought counselling services while 164 (45.7%) have ever sought the counselling services offered in the universities. These findings concur with a study on cultural differences and similarities in seeking social support as a response to academic failure by Mortenson (2006) who found out that despite their high need for support, international students are reluctant to seek help through counselling services as compared to domestic students. International students are less inclined than American students to engage in healthiest form of emotional coping and more engaged in most unhealthy form of coping which is avoidance (Mortenson, 2006). Contrary to the findings of this study, Nyaga (2011) found out that all the students (100%) in Private chartered universities and 64.6% of students in public chartered universities utilized the counselling services offered in their universities. It is clear from Table 2 that 164 (45.7%) of the students in Kenyan universities have ever utilized the counselling services and therefore the researchers sought to find out how often these students sought the counselling services offered in the universities. According to the results in Figure 1, 195(54.3%) of the students never sought counselling services while 104 (29%) sought the counselling services regularly and 60 (16.7%) sought the counselling services once in a while. The results therefore indicate that the students in Kenyan universities utilized the counselling services offered in their universities poorly as can be deduced from the key whereby all the frequencies for all the levels of utilization are lying below 142 students.

Students gave various reasons of why the services were not well utilized in their universities. Confidentiality was a major concern among the students. This concurs with Nyaga (2011) who states that some of the students in public chartered universities who did not utilize the counselling services were concerned about confidentiality of their information. Students had a feeling that many of the student counselors expose their problems once they seek the services since some of the student counselors are also their lecturers in some units. This is dual relationship where by Sheppard et al., (1999) states that dual relationship refers to a situation where a counselor has other relationships with the counselee. Considering the nature of counselling where confidentiality and trust between the counselee forms the basis for helping, this dual relationship may lead to fear of the client opening up to the counselor or the counselee may worry about the confidentiality of his/her information. The helper may as well be influenced by the prior knowledge about the client. Lack of confidentiality leads to the clients losing trust on the counselor, the client can fail to open up in cases of referral, may also lead to stress on the part of the client. Nyaga (2011) states that when there is guaranteed confidentiality, clients are able to develop trust in the counselling relationship and to disclose and explore painful feelings and experiences during the healing process. According to Frank and Karyn (2005) confidentiality is of importance because; It reinforces the safety that the counselee needs to experience so as to share their problem situation, it also helps the counselee to trust

the privacy of their revelations to the counselor, enhances the counselling relationships as well as helping in dealing with stigma that is associated with counselling due to social prejudice against people with problems. It is of paramount importance that the student counselors maintain confidentiality in order to motivate more students to seek help in the counselling centers.

Some students pointed out that they were not aware of the existence of the services. Others noted that they did not know where the counselling offices were; still others said that they were aware of the services but have never sought counselling because they were not aware of the kind of services offered. These findings are in congruence to the findings by Johanson (n.d) who found out in her study on Attitudes and Utilization of counselling services among international students that 63.4% of the respondents did not know where the counselling centre was located while others noted that they were not aware of the kind of services offered, 90% noted being aware of the counselling services but never sought them. This further concurs with Omatunde and Henrietta (2010) who states that many people are unaware of what guidance and counselling entails, moreover there are very many individuals with real problems and thus if they are aware of the main aims of guidance and counselling programs which include to help individual; set goals, overcome fears, solve various problems and define their values, the individual will desire to be guided if they know who to guide them, what to be guided on and location of the assistance.

Other reasons that the students gave include; some students feel that they have very tight time schedule that does not allow them to seek counselling. This is because students are free when probably the student counselor has already left the office after work. Others noted that seeking counselling is a waste of time since some of their friends have gone for counselling and their behaviors never change and thus they prefer talking out their problems to other people such as friends and peers who seem to be more understanding than the student counselor. The counselors also hold dual responsibilities, where the counselor is teaching as well as offering the services. This makes it difficult for the students who might have a need to feel shy of exposing her/his problems to his/her lecturer. Excerpts from student counselors also indicated similar reasons of poor utilization of counselling services. However three student counselors identified physical office as a limiting factor to the level of utilization of counseling services among students in Kenyan universities. One student counselor had the following to say:

**Researcher:** what reasons do you think may hinder students from utilizing the counseling services offered in your universities? How do you counter them?

**Alice\*:** Our biggest problem is lack of privacy, you can also see where we are right now, this office is just a partition so whatever we are talking may be heard by other people. Students do not like being seen coming from this office because many of them do not appreciate the importance of counselling. Some students are so emotionally weak; they will need time to cry out, this office is a real limitation. The students are also too busy, with eight units to attend to; they have not time spared for counselling unless one is at a point of breaking down. Due to burnout, some students counsellors may fail to attend some sessions with students and therefore the student may feel like the student counsellor is not helping him/her so the student just disappear and because of the high number of clients, the counsellor may not remember to follow up . As far as the office is concerned, i cannot do much, i only keep on talking to the administration to provide a better place for these services. My students have realised that i can help them even out of office hours, so i spend extra one and half hour to help the very needy cases. For burnout, seeing a personal therapist helps and taking off from work to prevent emotional overload helps us (*student counsellor from a public university*).

## CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to determine the level of utilization of counselling services among the students in Kenyan universities. It was found that counselling services in Kenyan universities are poorly utilized due to various reasons which include confidentiality issues, dual relationships, lack of awareness about the counseling services, physical office among others reasons.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The counselling services offered in the Kenyan Universities were poorly utilized by students due to various reasons. Therefore:

- (i) The student counselors have a responsibility to make sure the students are aware of the services offered in the counselling centers, the location of the offices, and the time the offices are open.
- (ii) The university administration should also organize seminars and conferences for the student counselors to emphasize on the importance of the code of ethics in counselling. The student counselors should follow the code of ethics to promote confidentiality in student issues.
- (iii) University administrators should set the time tables in such a way that all the students will have free time that they can use to seek the counselling services.
- (iv) The number of student counselors should match the student population to prevent student counselors from experiencing burnout.

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