Factors Influencing Students Access To Guidance And Counseling Services In Secondary Schools In Central division, Machakos District Kenya.

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ABSTRACT

The main focus of this study was to examine the factors influencing students' access to guidance and counseling services provided in secondary schools, private and public in Central Division Machakos District. The youth in secondary schools face a lot of problems and challenges as this is the developmental stage which coincides with tremendous changes in the process of growth.

The ministry of education has issued guidelines for secondary schools to set up departments to provide guidance and counseling services to students. Within the schools the services are provided by an appointed teacher. However it is not clear to what extent students make use of the available services, hence this study sought to find out what motivated the students to seek the services and their perception of factors influencing their access to these services.

The descriptive survey method of research was used. Stratified sampling method was used to randomly select 7 public and 4 private schools from which 20 form three students were randomly selected from each school. The teacher in charge of the guidance and counseling were purposively selected from every school. Questionnaire and interview schedules were employed as data collection instruments. Data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS)

It was found out that 61 % of the students accessed counseling services in their respective schools. Access was found to be determined by gender of the student and type of school. Subject teachers and parents influenced students to seek counseling services. One of the recommendations was that of lighter curriculum workload be adopted for guidance and counseling services providers in the schools.

Keywords; Guidance, counseling, secondary schools, students, Teacher counselor, access.

1.INTRODUCTION

Guidance and Counseling is recognized as an important component all over the world among secondary school students. This is due to the fact that this level of schooling coincides with the period when the individual goes through volatile periods of many perplexities, changes and pressures. Scholars assert that the professional school counselors must therefore provide and carry out a comprehensive developmental Guidance and Counseling program which focuses on the uniqueness of all students in these areas of development, academic, career and personal / social issues. The establishment of Guidance and Counseling program in schools is meant to address issues such as strikes, indiscipline, drug abuse, school drop-out and teenage pregnancies (Macharia 2006).

Whilst studies have been carried out on the impact of Guidance and Counseling in secondary schools, no meaningful research has been carried out on students' access to Guidance and Counseling services in the schools. Kilonzo (1980) found out that the Guidance and Counseling program in secondary schools limits itself to career Guidance and is provided to form fours only. It provides students with information about the opportunities for further education, training and employment. Kombo (1998) investigated the correlates of students' deviant behavior and their provision of Guidance and Counseling in schools. He found out that there was a missing link in the understanding of the real value that students attach to Guidance and Counseling services. Other studies focused on the students attitudes to Guidance and Counseling (Gitonga 1999) observed that the students had a negative attitude to Guidance and Counseling and are afraid of being seen with a teacher counselor, and fear that their confidential concerns would not be respected in the school.

Ndungu (2002) found out that the effective implementation of the Guidance and Counseling program could not be attained, because the students who require this service were few, and effective counseling

needs considerable time. Therefore the Guidance and Counseling teacher needs to reschedule extra time to meet the counselees outside the school daily schedules.

The secondary schools in Central Division Machakos District, like all others in the country, have a long standing interest in meeting the educational needs of all students and improving the quality of education offered thus there is a need to provide a favorable learning environment to attend to this goal. Assisting students in reaching their full potential requires the cooperative efforts of school administrators: teachers, community representatives, government officials, parents and the students themselves, as well as trained school counselors, who are able to facilitate students' psychological development and ability.

The Ministry of Education (1999) recommended the function of Guidance and Counseling as holding regular meeting with students to sensitize them on the dangers of taking drugs, premarital sex, misconduct and undesirable behaviors. The use of guidance and counseling makes students feel close to the teacher thereby establishing a friendly relationship. This enables the teacher to get the root cause of the problem and therefore has a long lasting effect and the student has the freedom to talk and realize the consequences of his /her action.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology has placed great emphasis on a sustainable Guidance and Counseling program in schools. This is because mere academic achievement is not enough for the all round growth and development of the total person.

The Gachathi Report (1976) on education objectives and policies clearly observed that students have many psychological problems which are largely ignored. Student's access to Guidance and Counseling to such services is however to a large extent voluntary, implying that only those that seek the services would have it. This can turn out to be a limitation because not all students that need the service would go out and get it. Indeed some students may not be aware that such a service would be helpful in the circumstances.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Various commissions on education and their subsequent reports and the ministerial policies on education recommended the introduction of Guidance and Counseling programs in secondary schools. Despite the government's effort to facilitate the provisions of Guidance and Counseling services in secondary schools, numerous challenges continue to be experienced by the students. Some of the common issues that the counselor would address are: indiscipline, strikes and boycotts, use of drugs, teen pregnancies, truancy, dropouts, stress and burnout, poor study habits, drug abuse, relational problems, poverty and poor academic achievements as well as limited career information.

A good example of the above scenario is a study published by the Daily Nation (21st June 2008) on how students are drowning in alcohol and drugs. When asked why they were taking drugs students said they did so to get high relieve, emotional problems, peer pressure and curiosity. The persistence of these challenges raises the question regarding access to Guidance and Counseling services country wide.

Whereas many studies the scholars dwelled on effectiveness and capacity of the Guidance and Counseling programs, the aspect of students' access has not been properly investigated. Students may have the wrong notion about Guidance and Counseling which could impair seeking of counseling services.

This study therefore seeks to investigate the factors influencing students' access to Guidance and Counseling services in secondary schools in Central division in Machakos district.

1.3 Purpose of the study

The purpose of study is to investigate secondary school students' access to Guidance and Counseling services provided in Machakos district.

1.4 Study objectives

This study is governed by the following objectives:
  i)   To determine the students perception of counseling services in their schools
  ii) To find out levels of access to Guidance and Counseling services
  iii) To establish factors that influence students access to Guidance and Counseling services
  iv) To suggest way to enhancing students access to Guidance and Counseling services in the students

2. Theoretical framework

The study was guided by Durkheim theory which recognizes the importance of moral guidance of the children and suggests that good discipline should be a concerted effort right from the family, the learning institutions and the wider community if the right behavior is to be achieved among the children. In the school situation, the theory is important because it argues that persistence deviance is

an indicator of problems being experienced within the school. Thus the school can try to make accessibility to the Guidance and Counseling as open as possible so that the students with various problems can be assisted early enough. Some of the conditions that lead to deviance include rapid social change and sudden economic crisis that disrupts the normal running of the society without any means of regulating it.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research design

(Kerlinger 1964: 275) looks at research design "as the plan, structure and strategy of investigation concerned so as to obtain answer to research questions and to control variance." The researcher adopted a descriptive survey technique in this study. According to Gay (1973), the descriptive method of research is a process of collecting data in order to test hypothesis or answer questions concerning the current status of the subject in the study. Such a method of study determines and reports the way things are. Orodho (2004) asserted that the survey approach in research dealt with the incidence distribution and interrelations of educational variables. Its purpose being to describe the nature of existing conditions, to identify the standards against which conditions can be compared and also to determine the relationship that exists between specific events.

The descriptive survey method was deemed relevant in the study since the researcher intended to find out the state of students access to Guidance and Counseling services in secondary schools.

3.2 Study location

The location of the study was Central division of Machakos district, Eastern province. This area was chosen for the study because of the concentration of public secondary schools and the fact that no research on access to Guidance and Counseling had been done in the division. The choice was also motivated by their proximity to the researcher work area.

3.3 Target population

Target population is all the members of a real or hypothetical set of people, events or objects to which we wish to generalize the results of research (Borg and Gall 1983 : 241).

There were a total of 29 public and private secondary schools in Central division of Machakos district in the following categories:

- Day mixed secondary schools
- Day and boarding mixed secondary schools
- Boarding boys secondary schools
- Boarding girls secondary schools

Table 1.1

Type of school	Number
Day mixed secondary schools	10
Day and boarding mixed secondary schools	9
Boarding boys secondary schools	3
Boarding girls secondary schools	7
T o t a l	**29**

The population of the study was all the form three students and teacher counselors from 11 sampled schools. Forms threes were selected because they had been in the schools for long to be well informed about Guidance and Counseling services. This population was considered large enough and most appropriate for producing a representative sample which was used to obtain the required information.

3.4 Sampling procedures

In order to get a representative sample, 7 public and 4 private schools were randomly selected for the study from a total of 29 schools.

The researcher randomly selected a form three stream from which a random of 20 students was drawn. To ensure the choice of the respondents was random the researcher used balloting method in which the available students were given serial numbers from which 20 were randomly picked. The 11 teachers in charge of Guidance and Counseling in the schools were purposefully selected for the study because they were in charge of day to day implementation of counseling in their schools.

3.5 Research instruments

In order to undertake this study structured and unstructured questionnaires were used, According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999) questionnaires were suitable in obtaining important information about the population. Structured questions were used in order to get specific information by providing a list of possible alternatives from which the respondents would select answers that best describe their

opinions while unstructured questionnaires were used in order to allow respondents to express their feelings and opinions.

The questionnaire was divided into four sections. Section one contains the general and demographic information of the sampled school. Section two onwards contained information on problems experienced by students and their perceptions towards guidance and counseling and their recommendations.

3.6 Data analysis

The data collected was edited and condensed into categories and tables in order to create meaning. Data analysis was carried out using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The output was presented in frequency tables, bar charts and pie charts. Means were used to give descriptions of the results while a Chi square test was used to show the nature of the relationship between selected variables.

4.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following are the summary of the results presented in the preceding chapter. Teacher counselors indicated that the average counselor student ratio was 1 : 218. One of the schools with nine hundred students had only one trained guidance and counseling teacher. This implies trained counseling teachers and volunteers were therefore a serious factor which definitely affected service delivery and effectiveness.

4.1 Awareness of guidance counseling services

A large majority (91 %) of the respondents were aware of the existence of guidance and counseling services, this shows most students knew that guidance and counseling services were offered in their schools. This implies that access levels could not be greatly influenced by awareness levels.

Another large majority (97.1 %) of the males compared to(86.2%) of the female students were aware of the existence of the guidance and counseling services in their respective schools. The implication here is that boys' schools were more informed of the existence of the guidance and counseling services in their respective schools.

Further the awareness levels were higher in public schools (97.2 %) than in private schools (80.8 %). This implies that the government support and initiative in public schools were bearing fruit. As earlier stated unless students were made aware of the purpose of guidance and counseling they are not likely to utilize the service (Moser, 1963).

Figure 1.0 Problems students experience while in school
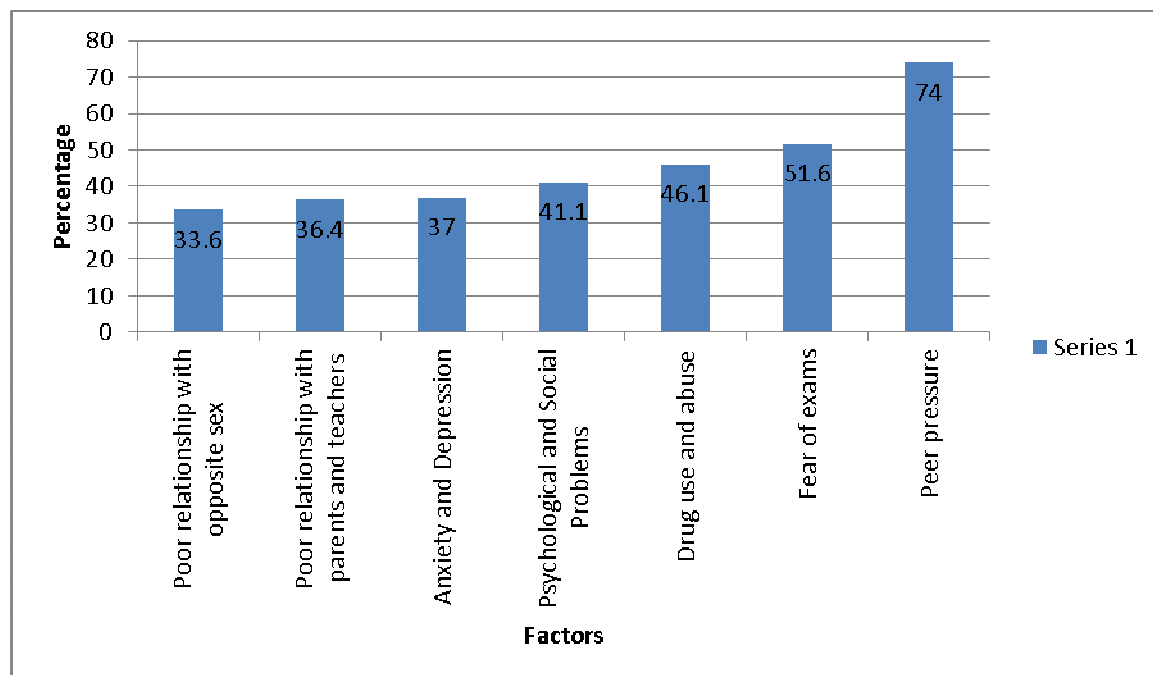
Source; Field data

Students identified peer pressure (74 %) as the most common problem they experienced while in school. Other major problems pointed out were fear of examinations (51.6 %) drug abuse (46.1 %). Psychological and social trauma (41. %) as well as anxiety and depression (37 %) and poor relationships with the opposite sex at (33.6%)

The teacher counselors reported that the above problems mentioned by the students were real. It is therefore needful for the counselors to be fully trained to be able to address these problems such that the students can confidently access guidance knowing they will be assisted to deal with problems and issues affecting them

The study also found out that more that 60 % of the students had sought counseling from the respective departments in their schools, thus implying moderate levels of access to guidance and counseling services in secondary schools, though further this seeking behavior was only limited to academic issues and not social issues which are the major ones affecting students at this stage of development

Table1:2 Proportion of students seeking advice by gender and school type

Ever sought advice	Yes (n = 134)	No (n = 85)	P – Value
Sex Male Female	61 (59.2) 73 (62.9)	42 (40.8) 43 (37.1)	0.574
Type of school public private	88 (62.4) 46 (59.0)	53 (37.6) 32 (41.0)	0.617

Source: Field data

Table 1:2 shows that 59.2 % of the males compared to 62.9 % of the females had sought advice from guidance and counseling teachers in their schools. The difference were however insignificant as at $P \leq 0.05$ of c.i.

Table 1:2 also shows that 62.4 % students in public schools compare to 59 % of those in private schools had accessed the counseling services. The P-value ($P \leq 0.05$) however indicates that the difference between the two types of schools were not significant.

4.1 Students' attitude towards guidance and counseling

The study sought to unravel the attitudes students had formed towards counseling department. It is believed that the students' attitudes highly correlate with the access levels to the services.

Table 1:3 Students' attitudes towards guidance and counseling mean ranking

	N	Mean	Std Deviation
There are certain problems that I can share with my peers only	215	4.15	1.044
There are experiences in my life that I can only describe to my peers	215	4.03	1.211
If I were experiencing a crisis in my life I would confide in a teacher counselor	214	3.60	1.217
I fear talking about my problems to the teacher counselor because I think my case will be discussed in the staffroom	216	3.54	1.497
If a good friend asked my advice about a problem I would refer to a teacher counselor	217	3.23	1.331
I would willingly present my problems to a teacher counselor	216	3.17	1.26
I find uneasy going to a teacher counselor because of what people might think	216	2.98	1.474
I dislike a teacher counselor who wants to know about my personal problems	214	2.46	1.410
To seek guidance and counseling is a bad mark on ones records	217	2.16	1.369

Scale: 1 = strongly disagree   5 = strongly agree

Table 1:3 shows that the students most agreed that there were certain problems that they could share with their peers only (Mean = 4.15) and that certain experiences would only be shared with peers (Mean = 4.03). These findings reveal that students created a barrier on the kind of problems they could present to guidance and counseling teachers.

Results have also shown that students gave a mean rating of 3.6 on the statement that they would confide in a teacher counselor if experiencing crisis in life perhaps to explain the lukewarm response to guidance and counseling services, students said they feared confiding in the teacher counselor for fear that they would be discussed in the staffroom.

The implication of these findings is that students regarded confidentiality in a counseling situation very highly thus it come out clearly that student's perceptions of confidentiality affected their access to counseling services in the schools.

Table 1:4 Factors affecting students access to counseling

	Had sought counseling	
	Yes (n = 133)	No (n = 83)
School has a teacher in charge of guidance and counseling	63,1**	36.9**
School has peer counseling	64.3	35.7
Guidance and counseling is active	58.5	41.5
Guidance and counseling offered in a confidential environment	68.5**	31.5**
New students informed about guidance and counseling	65.0	35.0
Subject teachers advised to seek guidance and counseling	68.9+	31.1+
Parents encouraged to seek guidance and counseling	71.8+	28.2*

Source; Field data

*Differences between independent variables statistically significant at $P < 0.5$

**Differences between independent variables statistically significant at $P < 1$

Results in Table 1.4 show that 68.9 % of students that had been advised by subject teachers to seek guidance and counseling did so this compares to 31.1 % that had sought the service even without the subject teachers prompting. It is further shown that 71.8 % of those encouraged by parents sought counseling while 28.2 % had accessed the counseling even without the parents influence. There were significant differences between the two groups as indicated by $P < 0.05$.The finding clearly shows that subject teachers and parents could influence students to seek counseling services. The guidance and counseling teachers should therefore involve subject teachers and indeed parents to enhance students' access to guidance and counseling. This shows that the counseling environment had a mild effect on students' accessing guidance and counseling services in secondary schools.

4.2 Summary.

On the aspect of resources within the schools, it was found that these had a significant influence on students' guidance and counseling seeking behavior as the availability of an office or room confidentiality situated led to a higher number of students accessing the services. This implies that with more provisions of resources the students would be motivated to make use of the guidance and counseling services in the schools.

With regard to student attitude and perceptions towards guidance and counseling, the results indicated that the majority of the student's respondents had a positive attitude towards the guidance and counseling initiative

The study also found out that, the teacher counselors agreed that peer counselors in the schools would strengthen and motivate the students to access counseling and also ease the workload of the teacher counselors. This highlights the need for establishing peer counseling groups in the schools since the students feel free getting information from them. The peers should be trained so as to be able to give the right information.

On the strength of the findings it was concluded that Students' access to counseling was found to be affected by gender, type of school and attitudes / perceptions.

The study reveals that the majority of students already appreciate the role of guidance and counseling services in their schools. From the findings, the awareness level was high for the males than for the females. Public schools had also a higher awareness level than the private ones. This suggests that guidance and counseling programs were more established in the public schools.

5.0 Recommendations

On the basis of the findings revealed by this study, the following recommendations are made to the schools, teachers, counselors and the government in relation to the students' access to guidance services in secondary schools:

a) **Government / Ministry of Education**
b) The government needs to encourage or support schools especially the less developed ones to strengthen their guidance and counseling departments so as to be able to offer the required services effectively.

- There should be regular seminars and workshops for teacher counselors so as to be updated on current and emerging issues so as to be able to deal effectively with the complex, social and psychological issues affecting the students.
- The government should also reach out and strengthen guidance and counseling programs in private schools.

c) **The school**

- The guidance and counseling teachers should be given a lighter curriculum workload that can allow them time to prepare for and attend to the students' counseling needs.

- They should also be given lighter class load so that they may get time to conduct more counseling sessions, make follow up and also update the students' appraisal records.
- The school should also provide resource materials and counseling / meeting room so as to make it a conducive and comfortable place to work from.
- Counselor timetables for each school should be developed
- There should be orientation program for new students.
- Schools need to train peer counselors who will eventually help in reaching out to the other students.
- The school should also try to delink discipline issues from guidance and counseling since the link between the two creates fear and negative attitude towards guidance and counseling.

c)The teacher counselors

Teacher counselors should have some form of training to be equipped with   competence in dealing with complex student issues.

The teacher counselors must work closely with other teachers to facilitate identification of students with counseling needs and encourage them to seek the services.

5.1 Suggestions for further research

a) On the basis of current research findings, I recommend that further research can be carried out to investigate the following:

- Poor attitudes / negative perceptions towards guidance and counseling.
- The current counselor / student ratio in the rest of the country.
- Whether non-teacher counselors in schools would enhance access to guidance and counseling.

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