



Attitudes of High School Students towards Mental Health among Some Selected High Schools in Kajaiido North Sub County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

Teacher-counselors in high schools are seen as agents of psychotherapy in view of the assumption that they help in tackling students' psychological needs and fostering positive outcome among students in need of mental healthcare. The objective of this research is to investigate the following inquiry. What is the perception of students about mental healthcare in selected high schools in Kajaiido North Sub County, Kenya? This study used convenience sampling and employed the embedded method research design, selecting 10 high schools in the aforementioned County. The population size of interest is 3720. The sample size is 361. The study used the Yamane formula (1967) formula in determining the sample size. The stratified technique was used to select 338 students and 23 teacher-counselors. Data collection included the use of the Fisher and Farina (1995) Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help tool. First, the data was entered into SPSS. Then, the Pearson correlation method was used to evaluate the data. The results were then organized into tables to evaluate the mental health attitudes of high school pupils. The researcher designed a qualitative instrument called the Teacher-Counselors Professionalism and Interview Guide Questions. 70% (n = 236) of the respondents had negative attitude towards mental health services from teacher-counselors, while 30% (n = 102) of the respondents had positive attitude towards mental health services from teacher-counselors in some selected high schools in Kajaiido North Sub County, Kenya. It will be encouraged that the ministry of education may provide psycho-education to reinforce positive attitudes and reduce negative attitudes among high school students.

Keywords: Mental Health, Attitudes and High School Students

1. Introduction

This research examined the views of a sample of high school students regarding mental healthcare in Kajaiido North Sub County, Kenya. The study provides an introduction to the research, a clear definition of the issue being addressed, the research purpose, the methodology used, the results and subsequent comments, and finally, a conclusion.

1.1 Background

Secondary school students have a significant role in the society, hence their approach to mental healthcare should be regarded with utmost seriousness. Bhugra et al (2013) argue that mental health is not an isolated phenomenon. It is a fundamental and essential component of total well-being. According to the World Health Organization (2022), health is a state of mental well-being that enables people to recognize their own abilities, effectively manage life's stresses, acquire knowledge, perform well at work, and positively impact their community.

Puspitasari et al (2020) define mental health as an individual's disposition to respond to certain circumstances in distinct ways and perceive and interpret events based on various inclinations or viewpoints. Egunjobi (2022) defined attitude as an individual's emotional disposition towards a certain conduct, which might range from positive, negative, to neutral. Therefore, these types of attitudes can be observed among high school students. According to Jacob and Lehner (2011), high school students are considered an ideal environment for preparing young individuals, particularly adolescents, for successful and fulfilling adult lives. This preparation includes involvement in social, mental health, political, and economic aspects. This technique facilitates the integration of pupils in a more logical and innovative manner, particularly those who are dealing with mental health difficulties.

The mental health attitudes of high school students could be challenging depending on their past and present experience of mental health services received from a teacher-counselor. However some of these challenging attitudes have been cited in global level. In a study focused on five strategies to reduce the stigma among High School students towards mental healthcare in three cities of Spain, Escudero, et al.(2021), found that students have many dimensions associated with mental health attitudes, including negative attitudes, self-stigmatizing, dislike mental health services, beliefs, intentions and behaviors toward teacher-counselors in schools. In Canada, Doan et al. (2020) conducted a study on the reluctance of secondary school students to seek help for

mental healthcare concerns. The study, part of a larger compass study, revealed that a significant majority of these students exhibited strong resistance and reluctance towards utilizing mental health services.

Four focus groups were carried out at two schools located in Dublin. The study involved 18 participants and revealed that these students had unfavorable attitudes towards mental health services. They lacked knowledge about appropriate contacts for depression and were highly concerned about the social stigma associated with seeking help from a "professional" (Burke et al., 2014).

A research done by Yuksel and Yilmaz (2020) at medical vocational high schools in Turkey revealed that students enrolled in these institutions mostly seek solace in conversations with their friends and moms while experiencing sorrow. Merely 4 out of 364 pupils indicated their inclination to seek psychiatric assistance from a professional expert. According to a research conducted in Turkey, teenagers grappling with alcohol and drug misuse issues were found to mostly turn to their friends for psychological assistance, with just a small number of adolescents seeking professional care for mental health concerns. This might be attributed to the students' ideas and attitudes about psychological assistance or their limited understanding of the subject.

Biolcati et al. (2018) conducted a study that indicates several research efforts have been made to elucidate the characteristics of teenagers who actively seek professional assistance. Teens often decide to turn to friends and family for support rather than institutional resources like teachers, psychologists, and teacher-counselors. This inclination is particularly noticeable among younger teenagers.

For adolescents to develop trust According to Luca et al. (2019), establishing a strong connection to school, particularly through supportive relationships with teachers and trusted adults, can be beneficial for adolescents and help reduce negative mental health outcomes. As mental health issues become more prevalent during adolescence and young adulthood, it is important to focus on promoting positive coping strategies during early adolescence to prevent more severe problems in high school and beyond.

A significant proportion of pupils in Secondary Schools in Asmara, Eritrea had unfavorable views about mental illness (Tesfamariam et al., 2020). However, advancements in educational attainment might foster a favorable mindset and understanding of mental illness. Furthermore, having a family member with a mental disease fosters a favorable outlook on mental illness. Mental health practitioners should create programs aimed at improving attitudes and give pertinent information to pupils in Secondary School. The media should fulfill its responsibility in diminishing the stigmatizing views of the general public, particularly among students, by implementing targeted programs focused on mental diseases (Tesfamariam et al., 2020).

The user's text is empty. Ibrahim et al. (2019) found that prior research has shown that students with psychological issues tend to conceal their difficulties and refrain from seeking therapy in order to minimize the potential negative outcomes associated with teacher-counselor interventions. An adverse consequence is the undermining of their self-esteem, as students see obtaining professional psychological assistance as a danger to their self-worth and an indication of weakness and admission of defeat. In the aforementioned study conducted by Ibrahim et al. (2019), it was found that a significant proportion of primary and secondary school students in Scotland expressed their inclination to withhold or postpone the disclosure of their mental health issues. This reluctance stemmed from their personal perception of the symptoms as being unconventional or uncommon, as well as their apprehension of facing social stigma from their peers, teacher-counselors, and parents upon revealing their struggles.

Tesfaye et al. (2020) proposed that in Ethiopia, a significant number of high school pupils who tend to conceal information about their difficulties have a pessimistic outlook on obtaining assistance from experts and possess a limited social support system.

Egunjobi's (2022) research posits that the attitude towards obtaining professional psychological assistance is intricate, as preferences for getting help are impacted by a range of attitudinal and socio-demographic characteristics. This may often lead to unfulfilled demands, gaps in treatment, and delays in seeking help. The same survey suggested that there is a growing desire among students in obtaining psychological aid. The study observed that although there has been a rise in the number of individuals seeking psychological assistance, a considerable proportion of students opt not to disclose their issues due to their hesitant attitudes. This reluctance is influenced by various factors related to attitudes and socio-demographics, which deter students from addressing their needs. Numerous research findings indicate that these students tend to believe that their problems will resolve on their own. Tesfaye et al.'s (2020) research revealed that the prevalence of behavioral and emotional difficulties, which emerge in late childhood, intensify with the transition from puberty to early adulthood. However, students do not seek assistance for these obstacles owing to a multitude of factors. The reasons for individuals not seeking help can be attributed to various factors, including their aversion to being labeled, tendencies to conceal their struggles, gender disparities, educational attainment, personal beliefs, specific targets of their distress, stress levels, beliefs about personal control, perception of loneliness, manifestation of psychological symptoms, perceived self-reliance, reliance on denial as a coping mechanism, reluctance to discuss personal issues, limited awareness of counseling services, and misconceptions surrounding seeking assistance. In a research conducted by Mutai (2008), the perspective of Ghanaian students toward mental health services was examined. The findings revealed that the students expressed a need for a designated individual whom they could approach for assistance with any issues they may be facing. This is particularly true when children are living away from their homes or attending boarding schools.

A research done by Mutai (2008) in Ainabkoi Division, Uasin Gishu District, Rift Valley Province, Kenya, found that pupils had varying attitudes about help-givers, which may influence their inclination to seek assistance from teacher-counselors.

In Mutai's (2008) research conducted in Kenya, it was shown that the likelihood of students seeking mental health assistance significantly rises when counselor-teachers engage in conversations with students about their responsibilities, either on an individual basis or in a group setting. This also enhances the likelihood of pupils placing faith in them and seeking assistance promptly. The extent to which students understand the role of the teacher-counselor may significantly impact the effectiveness of counseling services and the overall outcome of the counseling program. The attitudes that students have on obtaining mental health treatment are crucial as they serve as reliable markers of whether an individual would actively seek assistance when the need

arises. Momanyi (2013) conducted study in Kenya on the views of educators and learners on counseling and guidance programs in public high schools located in the Kajiado North District's Ongata Rongai and Ngong Zones. Momanyi (2013) carried out a study that demonstrates how programs for counseling may help students develop positive attitudes about work all through their time in school and subsequently in the workforce. Attaining this goal is possible if students possess accurate impressions of the counseling services that are available. Nevertheless, despite the government's efforts in the advancement of counseling programs, students and the young at large seem to be neglecting the available services. This might be attributed to their attitudes or beliefs on mental health treatments.

Similarly, Momanyi (2013) discovered that counseling programs in schools and colleges placed great importance on the need for Kenyan secondary school teacher-counselors to possess enough preparation. Prior to engaging in counseling, it is crucial to get a comprehensive understanding of personality theories, psychotherapy approaches, diagnostic methods, behavioral intervention strategies, and the intricacies of human behavior. Multiple academics have verified the absence of teacher-counselors who possess professional training or the insufficiency of counseling teacher training programs in Kenya. The research conducted in Miriga Mieru West Division in Meru District focused on the difficulties encountered by counseling services in secondary schools. Data was collected via the use of survey design, questionnaires, and interview guides. It was determined that several goals of advice and counselling were not achieved. Furthermore, it was observed that teacher-counselors lack regular training in guidance and counseling services, resulting in limited knowledge of the latest developments in the field. Consequently, they have deficiencies in their ability to manage advice and counseling, including the practice of maintaining confidentiality. Furthermore, it was observed that there is a lack of information about the implementation of guidance and counseling techniques in secondary schools, and a significant number of teacher-counselors are uninformed about these approaches.

Attitudes of high school students in mental health seeking, has been examined, assessed and explored by various studies on the issue of students health seeking. Related findings came up with same factor like stigma and other different factors associated with student attitudes. Despite the fact that these factors are found, yet none of these reviewed studies indicated the factors of teacher-counselors or school-counselors as an influence factors to students attitudes in seeking mental healthcare. Probably, the thought of not being adequately skilled with counseling skills or counseling services could intend factors of student's behavior in finding other social agent to rely on talking about their social, physical and psychological needs which in turn hinder the self-esteem of students to seek teacher-counselor services in school. It is on this light, this study sees the need to assess the attitudes of some high school student's towards mental healthcare in Kajiado North Sub County.

Statement of the Problem

The awareness of teacher-counselor services has been with us for many decades in schools. Since 1999, counseling was established in schools, teacher-counselors were appointed without training in counseling (Ajwoi and Simatwa, 2010). It is therefore possible that teacher-counselors' incompetence has had influence on student's mental healthcare-seeking attitudes. The user's text is empty. Since 2000, a significant number of divisions in Kajiado District have had a recurring occurrence of schools' discontent. The frequency of unrests has been progressively rising over the years, with the KDSDCR (2008) report from the Kajiado District Students Discipline Committee attributing the absence of efficient mental healthcare as the underlying reason, as mentioned in Momanyi's (2013) study. Hence, it is plausible to ask; how then do high-school students in Kajiado North Sub County behave towards mental healthcare services in some schools? The lack of professional skills among teacher-counselors may hinder students from receiving adequate mental healthcare. It is on these notes that this study is poised to assess the attitudes of some high school students towards mental healthcare in Kajiado North Sub County.

Objective of the Study

1. To assess the attitudes of some high school students towards mental healthcare in Kajiado North Sub County.

2. Methodology

This study used an embedded method research design. The research was conducted in 10 specifically chosen high schools in Kajiado North Sub County, Kenya, using the convenience sample approach. The sample size consisted of 3720 individuals. The sample size of 361 was calculated using the Yamane (1967) formula. A stratified algorithm was used to determine the number of students and teacher-counselors, resulting in a total of 338 pupils and 23 teacher-counselors. The Fisher and Farina (1995) study used the Attitudes towards Seeking Professional Psychological Help scale to assess students' attitudes in a quantitative fashion. The scoring of this instrument included assigning reverse scores to items 2, 4, 8, 9, and 10, and then summing up the ratings. The ATSPPH scale is designed to measure attitudes towards seeking professional assistance. Higher scores on this instrument imply more positive attitudes. The total scores that may be obtained from the scale vary from 77 to 98, with specific values of 84 and 90 reported by Wei et al. (2015). The researcher designed a qualitative instrument called the Teacher-Counselors Professionalism and Interview Guide Questions. The ethical considerations and data gathering procedures were adhered to.

3. FINDINGS

This section shows the response rate of the questionnaires distributed to the research participants, findings of the study and the outcomes are presented.

Table 1*Response Rate*

Class	Distributed	Returned	Valid	Percent
Form 1	91	91	91	26.8
Form 2	96	96	96	28.4
Form 3	81	81	81	24.1
Form 4	70	70	70	20.7
Total	338	338	338	100.00

As seen in Table 1, 338 questionnaires were distributed to the participants in their various classes, from Form 1 to Form 4, and the students duly filled and returned the questionnaires to the researcher. All the questionnaires were valid. Therefore, this research realized a 100% (n= 338) response rate per the sample size.

This study assessed the students' mental healthcare-seeking attitudes of in some selected high schools in Kajiado North Sub County, Kenya. Findings from the attitudes was analyzed and presented in table 2.

Table 2*What are the Mental Health Attitudes among Some Selected High School Students in Kajiado North Sub County Kenya?*

Attitudes	Frequency	Percentage
Positive	102	30%
Negative	236	70%
Total	338	100%

According to Table 2, the findings from the analysis demonstrated that 70% (n = 236) of the participants had negative attitude towards mental healthcare services from teacher-counselors, while 30% (n = 102) of the participants had positive attitude towards mental health services from teacher-counselors.

4. Discussions

This section discusses the findings of the study in relation to the objective which is; Attitudes of high school student towards mental healthcare.

These showed that certain students were influenced with negative attitudes; also few students portrayed benefit of positive attitudes in terms of their self-beliefs and help-seeking attitudes towards mental healthcare services from teacher-counselors. This was expressed by some teacher-counselors as Teacher-counselor **F** opined that majority of students have reluctant and resistant attitudes; students postpone counseling sessions using excuses like such as, "counseling is not medicine, it is just gossip, and counseling is for drug abusers and bereaved persons only. "Reluctant and resistant students are never free to disclose the issues affecting them; sometimes when students are called for counseling session, some feels not to talk, while some feel not to come."(Interview, June 1, 2023).

To buttress what Teacher-counselors **F** said concerning student's negative attitude towards mental healthcare, Teacher-counselor **B** expressed that: Most students with reluctant attitude don't seek for voluntary counseling; it is the teacher-counselor who goes for the student. (Interview June 6, 2023).

Narrating other responses from teacher-counselor on student's negative attitude towards mental healthcare the following response emerged:

- Voluntary and reluctant: students come for counseling services willingly; some of them have to be followed so as to attend the counseling.
- Resistant: because some of these students don't belief in teacher-counselor services due to some unsafe experience.

The study conducted by Doan et al. (2020) in Canada examined the reluctance of secondary school students to seek help for mental health issues. Their findings align with the present study, as they discovered that a significant number of students exhibited strong resistance and reluctance towards utilizing mental health services.

Additionally, this study's findings support those of Cruz et al.'s (2021) Chinese study, which looked at the views, mindsets, and expertise of teachers serving as lay counselors for mental health in low- and middle-income nations. The research revealed that students' resistive and hesitant attitudes may stem from the teacher-counselors' failure to see student mental health as their own obligation.

Asmara is the name of a place. In line with the research conducted by Tesfamariam et al. (2020), a study conducted in Eritrea revealed that a significant proportion of high school pupils had unfavorable views towards mental health services. This further substantiated Egunjobi's (2022) assertion that a considerable proportion of students choose not to disclose their issues owing to their unwillingness, since there exist several attitudinal and socio-demographic variables that might deter students from addressing their requirements.

In a 2013 research, Momanyi investigated how instructors and students who attended public high schools in the Ongata Rongai and Ngong Zones of Kajiado North District felt about guidance and counseling services. The study revealed that when teacher-counselors fail to maintain confidentiality regarding students' concerns, it leads to negative attitudes among students towards mental health. Ngure (2016) observed that children who have had poor encounters with mental health services may exhibit hesitancy in seeking assistance from teacher-counselors.

The survey clearly indicates that a significant minority of students had a favorable disposition towards mental healthcare. This might be attributed to the fact that some students possess a strong inclination towards voluntarily discussing their mental health struggles with teacher-counselors. As Teacher-counselor H has seen, there are instances when students proactively approach them to seek assistance. When a student willingly seeks treatment, some of them see the mental health services offered as beneficial by providing feedback. Interview conducted on June 13, 2023).

This finding demonstrated that seeking mental healthcare on voluntary bases could result to positive attitude among students. It is in line with Yuksel and Yilmaz (2020), claim that very few students showed voluntary positive attitudes towards mental health as this may relate to their beliefs toward help-seeking: According to Mutai (2008), students have varying perspectives on mental health, which may influence their inclination to seek assistance from teacher-counselors.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to diminish the prevalence of students' adverse dispositions towards mental healthcare by providing psycho-education to these kids within their respective schools about the consequences of being hesitant and resistive towards mental health.

Students' Attitudes towards Mental Healthcare in some Selected High School in Kajiado North Sub County

This study clearly revealed that most of the high school students demonstrated negative attitudes towards mental healthcare counselling, as some of the fundamental influence noted by some teacher-counselors was resistance, reluctance, and other demographic factors found in the reviewed studies could influence high school students' attitude towards mental healthcare. Therefore, it is evident that there is a lack of professional training and certification of most teacher-counselors. And this negatively influenced students' negative attitudes toward mental healthcare. This invariably suggests that if teacher-counselors are well-trained, there could be positive attitudes towards mental healthcare among students.

5. Conclusion.

Mental health is a germane concern of human living; a good mental healthcare service fosters students' dispositions towards seeking mental healthcare. An inappropriate mental healthcare service has an effect not only on students' mental health but also on students' social and academic well-being. The research uncovered the existence of negative attitudes among high school students in certain high schools in Kajiado North Sub County, Kenya. This indicates a significant level of unprofessionalism among teacher-counselors. Therefore, this study admonished that the ministry of education through the provisions of Teachers Services Commission should begin to engage teacher-counselors on proper online and onsite training through the intervention of psycho-education on counseling services. Furthermore, there should be an awareness policy through the ministry of education for schools by providing psycho-education among students and preparing them as peer ambassadors in order to become a reinforcing agent of helping their fellow students. This recommendation is based on the fact that majority of the students showed negative attitudes towards mental healthcare services from teacher-counselors rather than from their peer due to trust and confidentiality among teacher-counselors. This could help to lessen negative attitudes of mental healthcare among students. A comparative study can be carried out: Between private schools and public schools on teacher-counselors professionalism and mental healthcare-seeking attitudes among some selected high school students. Finally other stakeholders who are interested could also pick useful information from this study to broaden the scope of their studies on other part of the counties on the general knowledge on attitudes of high school students towards mental health among selected schools in Kajiado North, Sub County Kenya.

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