The most common cases and counseling approaches in school counseling

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to find out numerous situations and counseling approaches that school counselors are likely to encounter during their training and the first five years of practice. We believe that attention to the various theoretical approaches that can be applied to resolve different cases will better prepare school counselors to deal with each dilemma using an efficient approach to school counseling. Thus it is important to know the most common cases seen and counseling approaches used in school counseling to prepare school counseling students to the profession. In order to achieve data about school counseling cases and approaches, fourteen high school counselors from public and private schools are interviewed with semi structured questionnaire prepared by researchers. School counselors are asked about the cases that they see the most, the approaches that they use with these cases, support systems that they seek for and therapy trainings that they take after their graduation from college. Study group is settled with random sampling from schools in different districts of Istanbul that have school counselor with at least one year experience. The results are analyzed with thematic analysis.

Keywords: school counseling, counseling cases, counseling approaches, school counselor education

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1. Introduction

Although it is believed that school counselors' prior focus is on academic achievement, their objective also includes assisting students in their development from social, emotional, and personal dimension. Further to that, school counselor's role includes helping to bring about educational equalization, eliminate the barriers to academic success, and closing the achievement gap between poor and minority youth and their more privileged peers. In order to success in all these areas, it is expected from school counselors to expertise in five scopes: leadership, advocacy, teaming and collaboration, counseling and coordination, and assessment and use of data (Sears, 1999). It has been identified with specific examples of what school counselors should do to implement these five scopes into the school counseling programs.

School counselors are anticipated to approach toward the new vision which focuses on more academic/student achievement; from mental health providers toward an academic/student achievement focus; from individual students' concerns to whole school and system concerns; from record keepers to the use of data to effect change; from guardians of the status quo to agents for change, especially for educational equity for all students (House & Martin, 1998). But this change in focus of school counseling away from mental health towards academic achievement has not been accepted by all school counseling professionals (Guerra, 1998). Dahir (2001) mentioned that school counsellors both can work in mental health field and academic scope at schools. Studies showed that it is believed that the main tasks for school counselors include tasks like registration and scheduling of all new students; administering cognitive, aptitude, and achievement tests; and maintaining student records. Coy (1999) mentioned that school counselors need to clarify what is appropriate for them to do as their professional task at schools. School counselors are the ones who define their roles at school, not third parties like school administration (House & Martin, 1998).

Since 1950s, main focus of school counseling is summarized in career, academic and personal/social domains. In time these domains have evolved and became ASCA National Model's (2006) description of school counselor's role and responsibilities. These three domains are fulfilled by school counselors by supporting students in all career, academic and personal/social domains. Providing students with career and college information, providing individual and group counseling, and delivering classroom curriculum are the ways that school counselors use in order to fulfill these domains. Individual and group counseling are also effective ways to support students when provided by school counselors in the school setting.

In his study Flitton (2005) examined the impact of individual counseling on students with complex needs by working with students who had learning disabilities and/or diagnoses including Down's syndrome and Autism. His study showed that humanistic counseling helped these students to grow significantly in terms of communication, self-awareness, and self-confidence. Therefore, even though this study provides only one case study of a student involved in individual counseling within a school, the results suggest that individual counseling can be a meaningful and beneficial experience for students within schools. Also school counselors are account for group counseling at schools. (2007), examined the effectiveness of group counseling at schools in their meta-analysis study. In their study Gerrity and DeLucia-Waack examined cognitive behavioral group counseling in different cases like eating disorders, child sexual abuse prevention, and early age pregnancy prevention, bullying and anger management and found that one problem focused group counseling at schools has positive outcomes. Hence Gerrity and Delucia-Waack's work provides support for group work in the school setting that can help inform school counselors of the best group practices researched so far in the field.

The role of school counselor was not defined clearly until 1970s and school counseling represented as "a set of services delivered by an individual in the position of school counselor" (Gysbers, 2001). Thus, it created different oriented school counseling perspectives. When some counselors were more academically-oriented, some others were career-oriented, and still others were mental health-

oriented. The inconsistency in the orientation of school counselors caused confusion among counselors, administrators, teachers, and parent/guardians (ASCA, 2003; ASCA, 2006). Since school counselors are really valuable sources who can both reach parents, students and school administration, arrangements to reach every student by interventions, how much time school counselor should spare for different areas and problems at school, what areas they should specialize in. With this clarification, school counselors can manage to act as facilitators in creating and fostering working relationships among students, teachers, parents, administrators, and support staff.

2. Method

The aim of this study is to uncover the most common cases that faced by school counselors and the methods and techniques used by them in these cases. Thus this study is designed as a qualitative research design with phenomenology pattern. The aim of phenomenology pattern in qualitative research is to uncover the perceptions, understandings and meanings that people assign to a phenomenon (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011).

3. Study Group

The study is done with school counselors working in high schools in 14 different districts of Istanbul which are; Atasehir, Besiktas, Beykoz, Cekmekoy, Esenler, Bahcelievler, Kadıkoy, Eyup, Pendik, Sancaktepe, Sultanbeyli, Uskudar and Tuzla. 4 of the participants were male and 10 of participants were female. The distribution of universities that participants graduated ranged as below: 8 of participants from Marmara University, 1 participant from Samsun 19 Mayıs University, 1 participant from Cukurova University, 1 participant from Canakkale 18 Mart University, 1 participant from Istanbul University, 1 participant from Ege University and 1 participant from Bogazici University. Professional experience of the participants ranged from 2 years to 15 years. School counselors worked in Vocational and technical high schools, Anatolian high schools, multi-programmed high schools and religious vocational high schools.

4. Data Collection and Data Collection Tools

The data is collected with Semi-structured interview form consisting of four open-ended questions conducted by researchers. Interview from includes primarily demographic and professional information, and then discussed with the four questions, which is mentioned in the purpose of the research participants. Questions are prepared by specialist counselors based on the relevant literature review and implemented after expert opinion is taken. Questions are implemented after expert opinion is taken. 30 minute face to face interviews are done and recorded by researchers. Transcription of the records are done and analyzed with MaxQuda qualitative analysis software program. During the interviews, anything that would lead the answers of the participants were avoided.

5. Data Analysis

The data, collected in this study is analyzed with content analysis. Content analysis is a scientific approach that allows an objective and systematic way to examine of verbal, written and other materials (Tavsancil & Aslan, 2001). Content analysis is a data analysis technique that makes it possible to derive meaning in a repeated (Replicable) and valid contend from the text (Krippendorff, 2004). The main purpose of qualitative research analyzed with contend analysis is, to focus on language as a communication tool and contend and context as meaning (Budd, Thorpe & Donohew, 1967; Lindkvist, 1981; McTavish & Pirrone, 1990; Tesch, 1990). Contend analysis provides the possibility to achieve and

explain the concept and the relationship of the data collected. In this study we aimed to gain information about school counseling cases and techniques used in these cases hence this study is examined by contend analysis.

In order to ensure the reliability of the coding, primarily semantic analysis of the text is done by the two researchers. Then, according to the stage of content analysis, qualitative data carefully processed, encoded, themes have been identified, codes and themes organized and findings had been tried to be identified and interpreted. In addition, verbal findings can be transformed to numeric data and in this way reliability of the research can be enhanced, bias in the interpretation of the data can be reduced and it became possible to make comparisons between emerging themes and codes (Yildirim & Simsek, 2011). Apart from demographic and professional questions, each question posed to psychologists and counselors in the study was assessed as a theme for content analysis. Codes are generated based on the themes and numerical values given each of them.

6. Findings

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage table for the most common cases that have been faced by school counselors

	f	%
Technology addiction	2	2,17
School System	1	1,09
Choice of profession	3	3,26
Sexual Preference	2	2,17
Trauma	3	3,26
Clinical Cases	10	10,87
Legal cases	1	1,09
Violence	10	10,87
Peer bullying	7	7,61
Substance abuse	5	5,43
Physical and Sexual Abuse	7	7,61
Family issues	11	11,95
Smoking	5	5,43
Cases about Developmental Period	7	7,61
Academic problems	10	10,87
Inclusive student	8	8,70
	92	100

Even though there are some studies mentioning that school counselor work with more vocational choices in schools, in this research it has seen that there is a big number of clinical cases, family issues, addiction, physical and sexual abuse that are seen by school counselors. As seen in the table there is a range of cases including sexual preference cases, clinical cases, abuse and trauma. "There was a female student who has strong will not to use girls' restroom at school. She applied to the administration to use unused men's restroom in upstairs, mentioned that she feels more comfortable at that restroom. Her biggest wish was to have a penis." Said one of the participants about a case that she was working on about sexual preferences. Also school counselors mentioned about school system. Some of our participants were working in religious vocational high schools and they had cases from school system. "For example, one of our male students have plucked his eyebrows, and the school administration thought of it as perversion and said that we could have handled it if we were male counselors but since we are female counselors they believe that student didn't want to come an speak with us." In this example school system can create a case and blame school counselor not capable of solving the problem because of her gender. One of the most common cases were clinical cases. School counselors take a big role in the noticing students with clinical issues and directing them to diagnosis process. They also go on working with these students in school setting, not about the diagnosis but

secondary results of the diagnosis, like side effects of medication or characteristics of the disorder. One of the participants mentioned about their work with one of their students who was diagnosed with schizophrenia. "… he is in guidance office every day, we ask him to stay there with us because whenever he is alone he hears voices and claims that he has a friend there next to him. It was really hard and he struggled a lot thus we directed him back to the hospital again.", "…guidance office was a safe port for him. Whenever he came to the office, the problem stayed out of the door for him and he received help from us to distinguish what is real and what is not." There was also another participant who mentioned about the side effects of the medication. "…besides I had a severe depression case. The mother left the house for another man. After this incident student and his girlfriend committed suicide and we directed him to professional help. He is being treated now but meds are making him sleepy and weak." It was proven that since school counselors are the first and longtime contacts that see these cases, they have a big role in the diagnosis and treatment process. "When I am working with a student with schizophrenia I work with problems that he face at school because of his schizophrenia like being alienated by other students etc. but I didn't work directly with his diagnosis."

 "…I have a student who claims that she is sexually abused by her uncle in law. We started a process with her. She also has friendship issues and had been bullied by her peers. She is depressed and suicidal, she is also neglected by her family.", "…. she mentioned that she had sexual experiences with her brother and that still affects her badly."

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage table for the most common approaches and techniques that have been used by school counselors

	f	%
Group therapy	4	6,15
Seminars	9	13,85
Psychodynamic Techniques	1	1,54
Narrative Therapy Techniques	1	1,54
EMDR Techniques	2	3,08
Existential Therapy Techniques	2	3,08
Transactional Analysis Techniques	1	1,54
Psychodrama Techniques	2	3,08
Eclectic Approach	2	3,08
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Techniques	10	15,38
Solution Focused Therapy Techniques	9	13,85
Play Therapy Techniques	1	1,54
Individual Counseling	11	16,92
Inventory	10	15,38
	65	100

   In the interviews, school counselors mentioned that they used seminars to introduce counseling office and giving brief information (ex. Drug abuse), but they use inventories to assess school wide problems, be up to date about emergency situations. Model based techniques like narrative therapy, existential, solution focused therapy techniques are preferred because they work better in short time since school counselors have limited time for individual therapy at school "Since teachers and administrators don't let me to take so many students from classes, I have to use brief therapy techniques like solution focused therapy.".

Table 3. Frequency and percentage table of collaborators for cases that school counselors needed assistance

	f	%
Psychologists	2	4,08
Institutions that fight against addiction	1	2,04
Other school counselors	2	4,08
Family	4	8,16
RAM	7	14,28
Ministry Of Family and Social Policies	1	2,04
School administration	7	14,28
Family therapists	1	2,04
Psychiatrists	14	28,57
Police	9	18,36
Academic Members	1	2,04
	49	100

In the interviews it was seen that most of the participants work in cooperation with child psychiatrists and police. When faced with abuse and violence at schools, it is really important for school counselors to work with the police. There were some cases that school counselor was not supported by school administration and needed to seek help from other parties. One of the participant mentioned getting help from ministry of family and social policies: "Even when the school administration asked me not to report anything, I individually called the ministry of family and social policies and asked for their help." Families are the most important collaborators for school counselors. "We certainly discuss the issues with the family and when we see family we realize there is a problem within the family too. When you see mother and father, they look at you even more anxious than children, perhaps sometimes parents need to get more attention than the child. Therefore, you work with the parents too. We always say that the problem that we see in the child is rooted in a problem in the family. The main source of the problem is the presence of something going wrong in the family. When we direct our students to help we also tell them not just child but also family should be observed too."

Table 4. Frequency table of school counselors' additional therapy, assessment tool trainings

	f	%
Undergraduate Education	2	8,33
Scientific Activities	1	4,16
EMDR	1	4,16
Family Constellation	1	4,16
Creative Drama and Psychodrama	3	12,5
Coaching	1	4,16
Cognitive Behavioral Therapy	4	16,6
Solution Focused Therapy	3	12,5
Test Training	1	4,16
Graduate Education (masters, PhD)	7	29,16
	24	100

All participants mentioned about the need of the supervision and additional training. They all planned or had taken additional therapy trainings after graduation because they wanted to learn at least one therapy approach with supervision in practice. Two participants mentioned about sufficient undergraduate education. One of the suggestions about undergraduate education was about inclusive students. Participants mentioned about a need of an inclusive education lecture in all faculties of education: "When examining courses at undergraduate education, special education courses are really insufficient. If I did not searched my own or had not gained experience through internship, I would not be able to neither help inclusive students nor manage the process. Teachers sometimes see inclusive

students as excess baggage thus they don't prepare students' IEP documents properly. I think this is why all students at faculties of education should be given information about inclusive students because every school has inclusive students."

7. Discussion

School counseling has always been seen as a profession that focuses on academic achievement and career planning. On the other hand school counselors work with a wide range of problems not just faced by students but also by families and school administrators (House & Martin, 1998) School counselor is the one who creates the balance between families, school and students and create the best school environment for students. Although school counselors do not diagnose any clinical case, they are the ones who will follow up the student at school and help student to deal with the problems that they face because of their diagnosis. Thus squeezing in school counselors juts to academic success would cause big gap at schools. Students from low social economic status don't have the chance to see a therapist in a regular basis. But they still have some developmental or social problems that they need help to deal with these problems. School counselors can provide this therapy to these students at school (Springer, Lynch & Rubin, 2000). Although school counselors may not have the chance to see students on a regular basis, with a counseling office that offers therapy, students have the chance to see a professional at least once a month. Besides high school is a degree that students have problems with their peers and families because of their developmental level, a stressful time because of big decision s about universities and career and also questions about relationship with the opposite sex (Hopson & Kim, 2005). In this research it is seen that school counselors also have cases about drug abuse, trauma, abuse, clinical cases and inclusive students. For this reason school counselors need to use different approaches and techniques working with these different cases. Because they have limited time at schools, school counselors prefer to use solution focused approach and cognitive behavioral therapy techniques because it has steps to follow and easy to see the change. These results overlap with the study that proves that 20 minute therapy is very useful in school setting done in England (Biever, Moore, Clemons & Scamardo, 2001). In order to use these approaches school counselors need to take additional training and supervision. All participants mentioned that they needed supervision in the first years of their profession. Although they know a lot about all approaches, they all mentioned that they had hard time in the first years because they did not know how to use those approaches in real cases (Fallon & Lambert, 1998). Therefore participants agree on the need of supervision and extra training about some approaches to be a fulfilled school counselor. Their need for supervision also shows that they face cases different than academic achievement and career planning. In addition to this, even though psychiatrists are the main collaborator of school counselors, it was seen that a few of psychiatrists take collaborate with school counselors and inform school counselors about the process (LeFever, Dawson, Hannon & Morrow 1997). After student takes the diagnosis, school counselor is first authority who will observe and assess the outcomes of the diagnosis and medication and school counselor works with the student even more than the student's parents thus school counselor's opinions are really important and collaboration between school counselor and psychiatrist should systemized.

8. Recommendations

This study is done at some districts of Istanbul and a further study that brings a wider information could be conducted in order to gain more knowledge about the range of cases and approaches of school counselors. Also participants graduated different universities would make a further study richer to assess the effect of school counseling training at undergraduate degree.

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