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## The Role of Training on the Effectiveness of Peer Counseling Among Public Secondary School Students in Hamisi Sub County, Kenya

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### **Abstract:**

*The study sought to establish the role of training on the effectiveness of peer counseling (PC) among public secondary school students. Erik Erikson's Psycho-social theory (1963) which lays emphasis on peer influence during the Identity vs Confusion stage laid the foundation for the study. Descriptive survey research design was adopted. The 35 teacher counselors and 338 peer counselors (PCs) were targeted. Stratified and simple random sampling techniques were used to sample 14 teacher counselors and 142 peer counselors for the study. Data was collected using a questionnaire for PCs and Interview schedule for teacher counselors. Reliability of the study was through test retest while validity was established by analysis of data collection instruments by experts in Educational psychology. The collected data was analyzed using descriptive statistics. The study established that training of both teacher counselors and PCs played a vital role in ensuring effective PC among secondary school students. It was thus recommended that the ministry of Education in collaboration with public secondary school's administration should come up with policies to see to it that both teacher counselors and PCs undergo basic training in guidance and counseling and PC respectively. This will ensure effective handling of students' problems resulting to their mental, psychological and social stability. Consequently, retention, completion and academic achievement will be attained in public secondary schools while minimizing on students' unrest, exam malpractice and other antisocial behaviors which makes schools insecure.*

**Keywords:** Peer Counseling (PC), Peer Counselors (PCs), teacher counselors and training

### **1. Introduction**

Peer counseling is the helping relationship among group members sharing common interests without depending on the professionals or those in authority within an organization or an institution. Among students in secondary school, PC is carried out by PCs who are selected from among the students based on the qualities of a good counselor such as empathy and ability to accept others (Nasibi, 2003; Arudo, 2008). The selected students should then be trained in helping skills to offer such services under supervision of a qualified adult, and to influence their peers by modifying their beliefs, knowledge, attitudes or behaviors (Deutsch and Swartz, 2002).

Numerous studies on counseling shows that students in secondary schools prefer to seek help from PCs than teachers (Tinsely, 1985, Le-surf & Lynch, 1999, Wango & Mungai, 2007; Arudo, 2008). Various reasons are attributed for this finding. According to Oidi (2001), many youth view teachers, parents and religious leaders as old fashioned whose opinions and advice is outdated. Thus, the opinions of their peers are more important than those of their teachers. Secondly, most adolescents are influenced by their peers because they respect and view them as role models (Steinberg & Morris, 2001). Besides, students are more likely to seek help from PCs especially on matters they consider embarrassing like sex and rape (Wango and Mungai, 2007). Nasibi (2003) is of the view that the social barrier is less among peers since PCs are not seen as contaminated by position, authority or age. Instead, the helping relationship is spontaneous, immediate and experiential since PCs are viewed as friends and as being at the same level. According to the Ministry of Education (2009), there was need for other strategies to employ in dealing with student's challenges given the increased student population in secondary schools. PC thus becomes one of the most appropriate strategies.

There are several issues or problems that lead students to seek PC. Ndichu (2005) asserts that when empowered through training, PCs help deal with drug abuse before it becomes an indiscipline problem. Studies by Rubin, Bokowski & Parker (1998) showed that PC empowers adolescents to deal with suicide, substance abuse, low self-esteem, decision making and loneliness. Farsik (2004) pointed out that peers are more influential than teachers in shaping sexual attitudes and behaviors. Negative attitude towards school and absenteeism leading to poor academic performance is well handled through PC (Arudo, 2008). Dondo (1996) notes that secondary school students in Kenya require constant counseling in areas especially love relations, teenage pregnancies, STI's and HIV and AIDS. A study by Egbochuku and Obiunu (2006) on the effect of PC on adolescent development of self-concept in secondary schools in Nigeria showed that the participants had high self-concept than members of the control group.

Training is pivotal in ensuring effective PC among secondary school students. According to Boyer (1984) PCs require a formal training of at least 48 hours for them to be effective. He further pointed out aspects to be included in the training as; basic skills, qualities of a good counselor, signs of referral, procedures of referral, sources of support, the role of the PCs and organization of PC program. Wango and Mungai (2007) concur with Boyer's (1984) observation that after selection, the PCs should be trained so as to equip them with necessary skills and knowledge in PC. Lutomia and Sikolia (2002) and Nasibi (2003) seem to share this view when they further noted that the teacher in-charge of Guidance and Counseling department should organize for the training of the PCs. A study by Onyango (2004) on head teachers and teacher counselors' perception of Guidance and Counseling reported that teachers were of the view that PCs would be more effective if they were trained.

The presidential task force on students' unrest and indiscipline in Kenya strongly recommended PC to curb moral decay such as drug abuse, pregnancies, HIV and AIDS and truancy among secondary school students. The Task Force further recommended that PC groups be set up in every school and the PCs be trained to be equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge (GOK, 2001). Since then, various policies by Education stakeholders for strengthening of Guidance and Counseling in schools have continued to be put in place. Despite the implementation of PC, secondary schools have continued to witness increased cases of students' unrests and indiscipline (Mathenge, 2008, Opondo, 2008). For instance, between June and July 2008, more than 300 secondary schools were closed following students' unrests' (Kigotho, 2009, Opondo, 2008).

## 2. Statement of the Problem

Hamisi sub county Education office indicated that indiscipline cases such as love relations among students leading to early pregnancies, absenteeism, school drop outs and substance and drug abuse were on the rise in public secondary schools and had greatly contributed to poor academic performance (District Education Office, 2009: Vihiga County Director of Education (VCDE), 2015). Though these challenges were observed to cut across the entire County, Hamisi Sub County bore the brunt and thus consistently trailed behind the rest of the counties in academic achievement. For instance, in 2016 one of the school properties was set on fire by suspected indiscipline student. This is happening despite PC having been introduced in schools to curb student's indiscipline and other anti-social behaviors (GOK, 2001: Sunguti, 2002). Could it be training since it is a key pillar of PC? There was therefore need to establish the role of training in the current status given that to the best of my knowledge and records from Vihiga County Education Office (VCDE, 2015), no study had been conducted on the same to fill the gap.

## 3. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- Establish the level of training in Guidance and Counseling for teacher counselors.
- Find out the extent to which PCs were conversant with the various aspects in PC,
- Assess the extent to which students' problems were handled through PC.

## 4. Theoretical Framework

The study was founded on Erik Erikson's Psycho-social theory 1963. The theory states that human development occurs in 8 pre-determined stages and that at every stage an individual is faced with the task of establishing equilibrium between oneself and the social world (Kouyoumdjian, 2014). According to Fernald and Fernald, (2005) the fifth stage which according to Erikson (1963) is the Identity vs Confusion formed the basis for the current study. The stage occurs between ages 12-19 years where a majority of the secondary school students under study fall. At this stage, the major task for an individual is to accurately define the self. This is a crucial stage since the charges that occur within an individual have great implications on one's sexual, emotional, social and vocational life.

The Identity vs Confusion is best suited for the study in two main ways. Firstly, this stage commonly known as adolescence is seen to be representing a crossroads where one has to select from many possibilities resulting to trial and error. This may make one to engage in antisocial activities such as drug abuse (Boore, 2006). Besides, during this period, peer influence tends to play a vital role since adolescents listen more to their peers than adults (Jacobs, Masson & Riley, 2009). Through peer influence, adolescents may be able to control aggressive impulses, obtain emotional and social support, improve social skills and self-esteem and strengthen moral judgment and values (Dacey & Travers, 2004). Thus, the need for use of peers counseling of secondary school students just as recommended by the Presidential Committee on Students' Unrest and Indiscipline in Kenyan public secondary schools (GOK, 2001).

Secondly, Erikson (1963) emphasizes that the Identity vs Confusion crisis is a crucial stage as it is a link between childhood and adulthood and that part of the major factors that contributes to whether an individual will establish identity or not are the opportunities and resources in one's social environment. The resources might therefore include PC. However, effective PC as indicated by many studies require training (Kamore & Mitto, 2015: Chireshe, 2013: Murangu et.al, 2012: Onyango, 2004: Nasibi (2003). On this basis therefore, there was need to establish the role of training on effectiveness of PC.

## 5. Research Methodology

Research methodology was as follows;

### 5.1. Research Area

The study was conducted in Hamisi sub county, Vihiga County. The Sub County has two divisions namely Tiriki East and Tiriki West. Hamisi has the largest land coverage of 156.4km and highest population density of 165,399 as compared to the other four sub counties; Emuhaya, Vihiga, Sabatia and Luanda (Vihiga County Integrated Development Plan 2015). According to records, it had 338 teachers against the required 558 translating to a shortage of 200 teachers an indicator that the teacher counselors could be overloaded with the teaching responsibilities making it difficult to offer counseling to many students. Besides, it had highest number (24) of mixed day secondary schools against 11 boarding schools making the students to battle with challenges emanating from both home and school environment. Perhaps the foregoing factors largely contributed to the rising cases of anti-social behaviors, hence the need for effective PC.

### 5.2. Research Design

A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The design allows collection of data aimed at describing as accurately as possible a subject's behavior by reporting what presently exists with regard to the subject under study (Walingo & Ngaira, 2008). The design enabled the researcher to collect data from the teacher counselors and PCson training and the extent to which students' problems are handled by PCs so as to establish the role of training on the effectiveness of PC among secondary school students.

### 5.3. Study Population

The target population was the 35 teacher counselors and 338 PCs in the 35 public secondary schools in Hamisi Sub County.

### 5.4. Sampling Techniques

Using Stratified sampling technique, the 35 public secondary schools were divided into strata based on type of school namely; boys boarding, girls boarding; mixed day and boarding and finally mixed day. This ensured representation of each category of school. Thereafter, simple random technique was used to select 14 schools proportionate to the type of school. On this basis, 14 schools comprising of 2 Girls boarding, 2 Boys boarding, 2 mixed boarding and day schools and 8 mixed day schools were sampled. From the 14 sampled schools, simple random technique was used to select 142 PCs proportionate to the type of school while all the 14 teacher counselors in the 14 sampled schools participated in the study. Simple random technique allowed each school and each peer counselor an equal chance of participation in the study. Thus, a sample size of 142 PCs and 14 teacher counselors which accounted for 42% of the target population participated in the study. Best and Kahn (2003) contend that 40% of the target population is acceptable as a fair representation from which generalization can be made.

### 5.5. Data Collection Instruments

Data collection was done through a questionnaire and an interview schedule. PCs questionnaire consisted of both open ended and closed ended questions on a 4-point rating scale was used to collect data from the PCs and items scored as follows; Very much (4 points), Very (3 points), Not very (2 points) and Not at all (1 point). The open-ended questions were used where personal data was required. According to Fraenkel & Warren 2009, the use of questionnaires allows respondents to give their views freely unlike face to face interview. An interview schedule consisting of structured statements was administered to teacher counselors. This enabled the collection of specific and personal data on their level of training. Walingo and Ngaira (2008) observe that interviews allow the investigator to gather information by getting in contact with the respondents. This provides an opportunity to observe and ascertain the sincerity of the respondent.

### 5.6. Piloting of the Research Instruments

Piloting was conducted in four mixed schools in Hamisi County; two from Tiriki East and the other in Tiriki West. The 4 teacher counselors and 35PCs from the four schools did not participate in the final sample for the study. The piloting sample was 11.42 % for the teacher counselors and 10.35% for PCs. The pilot sample was considered appropriate since Mugenda and Mugenda (2013) recommends 10% as being sufficient. Through the piloting exercise, the researcher was able to refine the data collection tools by re phrasing the vague items and deleting the unnecessary ones. This ensured both reliability and validity of the data collection instruments.

### 5.7. Validity of the Research Instruments

Validity is the ability of the research instruments to measure what it purports to measure (Walingo & Ngaira, 2008). Face and construct validity were ascertained by experts in the department of psychology who assessed the instruments to ensure it measured the subject under study. Validity is established by several experts analyzing the items to establish whether it's a true reflection of the subject under study (Mutai, 2000)

### 5.8. Reliability of the Research Instruments

According to McMahon, McMahon & Romano (1995) and Kothari (2004), reliability is the extent to which a measure consistently yields similar results on the concept under study at different times. Test re-test technique was used to establish reliability for the current study. This was done by administering the questionnaires on the respondents from the four piloting schools in Hamisi twice with an intervening period of two weeks. The two tests were scored so that each respondent had two scores. Thereafter, a correlation coefficient of the two scores was calculated using Spearman's rank

order ( $\rho$ ) and a score of 0.789 was obtained. Given that the  $\rho$  was closer to 0.8 and therefore closer to 1, it was considered significant. Smith (2003) asserts that a  $\rho$  of 0.8 is deemed reliable.

### 5.9. Data Collection Procedures

The researcher sought permission from National Council of Science. A notification letter was then sent to Vihiga County Director of Education for ministry of Education and for Teachers Service Commission (TSC). The researcher then visited the sampled schools to meet with the principals and the respective respondents to agree on the appropriate time for data collection. Thereafter, the researcher visited the schools based on the agreed schedule to administer the questionnaire for PCs and interview the teacher counselors.

### 5.10. Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations are key in any research (Mugenda & Mugenda, 1999). Data collection was done on voluntary and informed consent basis in that no respondent was tricked, coerced or bribed to participate. The investigator ensured the confidentiality of the information by assigning numbers to the respondents and codes to schools instead of their names. Furthermore, the information collected was solely for the study and not any other use or purpose. All these were done to avoid any psychological or social harm to the respondents or participating schools.

## 6. Results and Discussion

The first objective of the study was to find out whether the teacher counselors had any formal training in guidance and counseling and if so to what level. The information was crucial since PC is supervised by the teacher counselors who recruit, oversee their activities and even train them where necessary. The effectiveness of this crucial oversight role would depend on how conversant these teachers are in the line of guidance and counseling. The responses of the 14 sampled teacher counselors were as tabulated in Table 1:

Training	Frequency	Percent	To What Level
Trained	2	14.3%	certificate
Partially trained / sensitization	7	50%	Seminars or/ and workshops
Not trained	5	35.7%	N/A
Total	14	100	

Table 1: Teacher Counselors Responses on Training

Data in Table 1 indicates that a majority of the teacher counselors (85.7%; 50% and 35.7%) are either partially trained or are totally not trained. This means that these teachers may not understand what is required in PC and may also lack or have inadequate skills to deal with challenges being encountered by PCs. The finding is unfortunate considering that it is the teacher counselors to organize for the training and even in some cases they themselves should train the PCs especially where the school administration is unable facilitate the training due to one reason or the other. Besides, the said teacher counselors are to offer encouragement and support whenever the PCs are low and also handle referral cases. Consequently, the PCs may not adequately deliver on their mandate of mentoring, modeling and helping their peers to solve the many challenges that afflict them. The finding is detrimental due to shortage of teachers (338 against 558 as indicated in sub county records) an implication that teacher counselors may be overloaded and therefore the need to rely on PCs for most of the guidance and counseling of their peers. The foregoing observation is in line with Disiye and Munyua (2012) that guidance and counseling programs in many secondary schools are led by untrained teacher counselors who are thus unable to effectively supervise PC programs.

The second objective of the study was to investigate the extent to which PCs were conversant with the basic aspects which form part of the content area in PC training. This information was an indicator of how well equipped the PCs were in terms of the required vital skills and knowledge in PC. All the 142 PCs who participated in the study were asked to respond appropriately concerning the items on a 4-point scale and their responses were computed as shown in Table 2.

Aspect of PC	Very Much F %	Very F %	Not Very F %	Not At All F %
Qualities of a good counselor	(56) 39.4	(50) 35.2	(36) 25.4	(0) 0.0
Basic skills of counseling	(4) 2.8	(8) 5.6	(30) 21.1	(100) 70.4
Peer counselor's role	(74) 52.1	(43) 30.3	(25) 17.6	(0) 0.0
Sources of support	(49) 34.5	(66) 46.5	(27) 19.0	(0) 0.0
Signs of referral	(13) 9.2	(12) 8.5	(32) 22.2	(85) 60.2
Procedures of referral	(15) 10.6	(10) 7.0	(21) 14.8	(96) 67.6
Organization of PC program	(0) 0.0	(0) 0.0	(18) 12.7	(124) 87.3
Methods of PC	(42) 29.7	(20) 14	(22) 15.5	(58) 40.8

Table 2: PCs Understanding of Various Aspects of PC

Data in table 2 reveal that most PCs had substantial knowledge on their role, sources of support and qualities of a good counselor while none (0) of the respondents consented while none consented to not having any understanding on

these aspects by giving a 'not at all' response. Specifically, A total of 106 PCs; 56 (39.4%) and 50(35.2%) were conversant with the role of the PC's, 115 PCs; 49 (34.5%) and 66 (46.5%) on sources of support while 106 PCs; 56 (39.4%) and 50 (35.2%) on qualities of a good counselor. These respondents therefore consented to 'Very much' and 'Very' respectively (see table 2).On the other hand, a majority of the PCs had no knowledge at all on basic skills of counseling (100 PCs; 70.4%), signs of referral ((85 PCs; 60.2%),procedures of referral (96; 67.6 %) and organization of PC program (124; 87.3%). These aspects saw over 60.2% (85 PCs) affirm to not having any understanding at all and therefore asserting to 'Not at all'.

The above Reponses indicate that either majority of the PCs had undergone inadequate training or had no formal basic training in guidance and counseling. Instead they may have undergone sensitization sessions of a few hours. As such, the PCs may not be in a position to effectively guide and direct other students in matters related to personal, social and academic problems and hence lack of suggestive solutions to problems faced by secondary school students in Hamisi Sub County leading to an increase in anti-social behaviors. The above scenario makes the PCs to fail in their role as outlined by Deutsch and Swartz (2002); the role of formal educator, informal role model, identifier and referrer of problem behavior. Yet this is happening despite several studies(Boyer, 1984: Onyango,2004: Wango &Mungai, 2007) having revealed the critical role of training in effective PC and even the government of Kenya having recommended that PCs in all secondary schools should be trained (GOK, 2001).

Worse still is the discovery that a majority of the PCs were not well versed with the various methods used in PC such as use of videos, plays, sports and talent show and role modeling. In table 2, only 29.7 % (42 out of the 142 PCs) had adequate knowledge on the methods to be used in PC and thus responded by 'very much' while 40.8 % (58) had no knowledge at all and therefore responded 'not at all'. Perhaps this could be due to inadequate training by the teacher counselors who are unable to offer adequate or no training to the PCs on the methods to be used. Consequently, most of the PCs may just be using the traditional method of talk therapy which in most cases may not appeal to students who given their developmental stage prefer captivating sessions. The observation contradicts Arudo (2008) assertion that there is need to diversify and adopt new strategies to PC due to the changing times and advancement in technology. Such strategies include video show, role modeling, talk show and sports.

The third and final objective of the study sought to find out the extent to which students' problems are handled through PC. This aimed at providing information on which problems are effectively handled by PCs and thus reveal the extent of their effectiveness. This is because the frequency with which the problems are handled may be an indicator of trust that when shared with the PCs, they will receive help. The responses were computed as shown in Table 3 and Table 4 depending on the frequency at which they were handled.

Problem	Very Much		Very		Not Very		Not At All	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Peer pressure	84	59.2	51	35.9	7	4.9	0	0
Poor study habits and time management	82	57.7	36	25.4	22	15.5	2	1.4
Interpersonal Relationships e.g.quarrels.	76	53.6	59	41.5	7	4.9	0	0
Absenteeism	76	53.5	41	28.9	23	16.2	2	1.4
Low self-esteem/ feelings of inferiority	77	54.2	34	23.9	27	19.1	4	2.8

Table 3: Students' Problems Frequently Handled by PCs

Data in Table 3 clearly indicates that through PC, most students are assisted in dealing with problems such as peer pressure, poor study habits and time management, interpersonal relationships, absenteeism and low self-esteem. These problems had over 53.5% (76) of the PCs asserting that they handle such problems 'very much'. The above observation implies that students are either willing to seek the help of PCs on these issues or its easier for PCs to identify the clients with such problems and offer help. This is easier considering that they are constantly in touch unlike the teacher counselors who may require a formal session to provide help. Besides, students consider PCsas one of their own, they understand their language and their help is spontaneous. The above observation is a confirmation of Presidential Task Force (GOK, 2001) recommendation that PC be set up in every school to deal with students' problems. Various studies on the role of PC are in agreement with the foregoing finding. The studies showed that PC play a crucial role in curbing indiscipline such as peer pressure, adolescent pregnancies and absenteeism among others (Gitonga, 1999: Sunguti, 2002: Odongo, 2005: Arudo, 2006).

Problem	Very Much		Very		Not Very		Not At All	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Careers and Subject choices	5	3.3	28	19.8	52	36.4	58	40.5
Drugs and Substance Abuse	4	2.6	14	9.7	53	37.3	72	50.4
Sexually transmitted diseases e.g. HIV and AIDS	0	0	8	5.6	21	15.1	114	80.2

Table 4: Students Problems Least Handled by PCs

According to data in Table 4, the least handled problems were careers and subject choices, drugs and substance abuse and HIV and AIDS. The above areas had less than 3.3 % (5 PCs) of the PCs and in some case none (0) contenting to handle these problems 'Very Much' while over 40.5% (58) of the PCs affirmed to 'Not at All'.

Therefore, going revelation may make one to think that these problems are rare or students don't experience them. On the contrary, such issues are rampant considering that most of the students are in adolescent stage and may be undergoing identity crises stage and therefore experimenting on many issues such as sex and drug abuse. Peer influence plays a vital role at this stage. Arudo (2008) observed that students with problems related to HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases are suffering in silence, something that needs to be urgently addressed. Furthermore, it is at the secondary school level that the students are required to choose subjects leading to the careers they hope to pursue. Perhaps inadequate counseling on this issue is what makes most of the students in secondary schools to wait until the KCSE results are out so as to finally select the course their grades qualify them to take or resort to fate by pursuing whatever course the government has admitted them for. This clearly shows that though students prefer to seek assistance from PCs, some areas like HIV and drug abuse are sensitive and thus require counseling skills and diversified methods of counseling to handle. Students will only share such issues if he/she is assured of trust, confidentiality and unconditional positive regard. Unfortunately, most PCs seem not to have the capacity of handling such sensitive issues, a scenario to be blamed on either inadequate or lack of training. According to Murangu, Bururia & Njoge (2012) one of the major challenges faced by PCs is adequate training. The above finding contradicts various observations which have shown PC as one of the most effective way of dealing with such problems (Whiston, Sexton & Lasoff, 1998, GOK, 2001, Farsik, 2004, Wango & Mungai, 2007, Arudo, 2008).

## 7. Conclusion

The study concludes that training of both the teacher counselors and PCs is mandatory to ensuring effective PC among students in public secondary schools. Trained teacher counselors are able to effectively supervise PC programs in their respective schools. Where the school administration is unable to facilitate external trainers to train the PCs, the teacher counselors if trained are in the position to do so. Through training, PCs are equipped with the basic skills of counseling which enable them to help their peers in dealing with many problems that affect them such as, interpersonal relationships, absenteeism, low self-esteem and drug and substance abuse. Furthermore, training equips PCs with knowledge on when to refer the difficult cases and whom to refer to such cases. Hence, students are assisted in the best way possible. It is also through training that the PCs are able to plan their PC activities in the school and be able to use modern methods in conducting their sessions. This orderly, organized and diversified system of PC appeals to their peers making them to respect, trust, and listen to their opinions. It therefore becomes easier for their fellow students to approach PCs for help on issues they consider sensitive and even embarrassing.

The study therefore recommends that the ministry of Education through the standards and quality assurance should enact policies that ensure teacher counselors have basic training in guidance and counseling to enable them supervise PC programs in an informed manner. Furthermore, the school administration in collaboration with the teacher counselors should come up with policies that see to it that PC is not only established and practiced in their respective schools but that that PCs receive basic training in guidance and counseling and PC in particular. This will enable the PCs to have the required basic skills in counseling, organization of PC activities and methods of PC in order to meet the diverse needs among students. Thus, through PC most students will be psychological stable and be equipped with skills to deal with their social issues accordingly. As such, public secondary schools will become peaceful and secure institutions for retention, completion, and academic achievement, social and moral development for the students.

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