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Effectiveness of Programmes and Strategies Put in Place to Enhance Guidance and Counseling Services among Early Motherhood Students in Selected Universities in Western Kenya

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Abstract:

Early child bearing or pregnancy and delivery during adolescence and early adulthood can have far reaching effects on Psycho-social well-being of young student's mothers. In Kenya, there are several students who join motherhood while still pursuing their academic journey at the Universities. Universities offer guidance and counseling services as an essential pillar in student support services. Young students' mothers require counseling to support their psycho-social wellbeing. There is a shortage of empirical data on guidance and counseling interventions on anxiety and self-esteem of early mother's university students. The overall objective of this study is to determine Effectiveness of programmes and strategies put in place to enhance guidance and counseling services among early motherhood students in selected universities in western Kenya. The study was guided by the Common Factors Theory by Grencaavage and Norcross (1990), and the Self- Determination Theory by Ryan and Deci (2000). Data was collected from Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST) and Kibabii University (KIBU). The Study used qualitative descriptive research design. The researcher used census to sample 30 young mothers and all the 6 university counselors in the two universities. Test-retest method was used to determine the reliability of the research instruments. Methods of data collection were questionnaires as well as Beck anxiety inventory and Rosenberg self-esteem inventory which were used to assess anxiety and self-esteem levels of the respondents. Data was analyzed using SPSS version 25. Findings revealed that the counseling programs put in place are not adequate to curb the challenges faced by early motherhood students in the universities. The results provided significant insight on psycho-social well-being of early motherhood students in the selected universities.

Keywords: Early motherhood, guidance & counseling and selected universities

1. Introduction

Premature pregnancy and early motherhood is a global phenomenon affecting both developed and developing countries and constrains young mothers from participating in university studies effectively and efficiently. According to UNDP (2010), young female students in tertiary institutions may have sex at earlier ages and without use of contraceptives. Studies reveal that majority of young female students have their first intercourse before their 18th birthday. UNDP (2010) asserted that early dating of young men and young girls is a contributing factor to premature pregnancy since they indulge in sexual activities without proper knowledge of the possible outcome. Early motherhood occurs at critical development of adolescents and early adults students' mothers. Motherhood increases responsibilities and challenges that may affect their lives negatively. Most of these challenges include coping with responsibilities following the birth of a baby, managing and completing the demands of schooling work. The social and economic consequences of early student mothers are largely studied, yet psychological ramifications on anxiety and self-esteem have limited literature. Counselors can play a pivotal role in facilitating the improvement of the mental health of early students' mothers.

2. Literature Review

The counseling program in universities is aimed at improving psychological well-being of students; it is also intended to help students complete their studies on time. University students are relatively free from parental and university supervision and are therefore expected to manage their study time well to increase their completion rate. In USA, National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES, 2011) found that 72% of university students, who begin seeking a bachelor's degree at a four-year institution, complete their degree four years later (NCES, 2011). Transfer rates in

American universities are very high, with 60% of all bachelor's degrees being awarded to students who begin their studies in different institutions.

Counseling focuses on helping the students adapt to different situations, hence helping to reduce transfers or delayed completion. Odes, Michelson, Locke, Oslon, and Lee (2009) in a study carried out in the USA, among 10,009 first-year university students, and which examined the relationship between counseling experience, student retention, academic performance and transfer during 2004 found out that counseling experience was significantly associated with student retention. The counselee students' retention rate was higher compared to the non-counselled students. Counseling, therefore, might help university students to complete their degree on time.

Unfortunately, as noted by Nyutu (2008), most of the pregnant students at the university do not go to seek counseling. In most cases, these students experience considerable stress in their lives, but they do not consider counseling. They strain with their problems, waiting for more problems to continue adding after they deliver. In addition, most universities do not offer a platform to encourage premature mothers to seek counseling (Anyanwu, Goon & Tugli, 2013). Rather, the institutions of higher learning only provide an open room for learners to come when they wish to do so. In this case, most pregnant students lack the necessary psycho-social support from the university during and after the pregnancy. This current study seeks to assess the effectiveness of counseling, and how it affects the psycho-social wellbeing of early student's mothers.

2.1. Challenges Experienced in Offering Counseling Services in Universities

Counseling centers in universities are facing challenges as they encounter changing and unstable social and financial environment. Vogel, Wester and Larson (2007) carried out a study investigating psychological factors that inhibit seeking help among university students and found that despite the availability of opportunity of seeking counseling help in university counseling centres, a small percentage of students utilize these services due to fear of being discovered by other students as well as stigma. However, the study does not explain the main factors that limit students from seeking these services.

Globally, students have individual characteristics that are likely to contribute to psycho-social malfunctioning which has been cited as one of the critical factors determining effective counseling in universities as found out in a study that investigated 186 Non-English-speaking students' attitudes and perceptions of plagiarism in New Zealand (Marshall, & Garry, 2006). The study also found that students' characteristics are a significant factor in determining their academic performance and retention rates. Findings from this study have highlighted university counselors' uncertainties over role definition. Sears (2002) argues that role definition is the most significant challenge facing counselors in higher learning institutions.

In a related study in the USA, Watson (2006) found that clients' characteristics can hinder counseling outcomes despite the counselors' interventions and effort. For instance, clients, whose personal traits like long pauses and silences during sessions, create a barrier in communication in determining how the counseling proceeds.

In a study in Portugal on factors influencing the implementation of screening and brief interventions for alcohol use in universities, Frederico, Inês, Kathryn, Leo, and Niamh (2018) found that lack of adequate counseling materials was the most cited barrier to provision during counseling sessions. This study indicates that counseling facilities are necessary in effective counseling. The current study sought to determine if challenges exist that may influence the effectiveness of counseling on students' academic performance and retention.

In Canada, a study investigating why university students seek counseling found that most students present reasons such as relationship concerns, anxiety, distress, grief, depression, academic and career issues (Cairns, Massfeller, & Deeth, 2010). The above study does not address the aspect of psycho-education counseling, which equips students with skills and abilities such as positive attitude and problem-solving skills to help them gain knowledge and learn how to cope with issues affecting them. Such skills and abilities will enhance academic performance and retention rates.

Studies carried out in Africa on challenges facing counseling in universities emphasize psychological and cultural issues (a typical modern phenomenon caused by rapid urbanization and modernity). The result is a loss of identity, increased use of drugs, and a casual approach to sex and sexuality. In a related study, Whyte (2014) found that adequate counselors who worked as teams experienced fewer episodes of burnout than those who were few and worked as individuals (Soda and Bondai, 2015).

In a study investigating coping strategies employed by students to address stress emanating from social, economic, and academic challenges in Zimbabwe, Soda and Bondai (2015) found out that counseling in university is severely compounded by students' challenges such as lack of school fees, inadequate stationery, and sexual harassment. Counselors have consequently faced challenges in handling students' psychological problems due to students' issues taking a complex dimension. This study shows that some personal student issues are beyond counselors' intervention and pose a challenge to the delivery of counseling services. In a related study in Zimbabwe, Musika and Bukaliya (2015) conducted a study, which involved 100 university students on the effectiveness of counseling on students. They concluded that inadequate counseling services compounded by inadequate counseling skills and poor counsellor characteristics curtail students' motivation to seek counseling services.

In Kenya, Meru County, Kirimi (2011) identified that negative student attitude towards seeking counseling help has led to decreased usage of counseling services. In a study investigating the determinants of effective guidance and counseling programmes in Kericho County, Ruto, Manduku and Kosgey (2017) found that a lack of facilities and materials affects counseling services delivery. The finding concluded that the counseling process is not effective in changing the behaviour of students who seek the services. The mentioned studies identify low self-esteem, anxiety and negative attitude

and cultural affiliation as restraining factors in the delivery of effective counseling in universities, whereas other factors were not considered. A negative attitude may be attributed as a factor of not seeking counseling help. Therefore, students continue to register unstable social relations and poor academic grades and fail to graduate within the stipulated period.

Students, who become pregnant at an early age, face a lot of stress and psychological issues. It is unfortunate that the institutions of higher learning have not effectively captured the psychosocial wellbeing of such learners through proper counseling strategies. The psychological aspect of an individual is the backbone to his social, academic, and even financial life. In this case, therefore, there is a need to investigate how effective the counseling process has been to students with early pregnancies, so as to come up with better strategies that can help them improve their psychosocial wellbeing.

3. Methodology

3.1. Target Population

The target population in this study was all the early motherhood students who are not married and the counselors in Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST) main campus located in Kakamega County and Kibabii (KIBU) University main campus, which is situated in Bungoma County. Currently, the population for MMUST is estimated to be about 80,000 while that of Kibabii University (KIBU) is said to be about 5,000 (preliminary studies).

3.2. Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

The western region has four universities. Mugenda and Mugenda (2008) suggest that 50% of the population is a justifiable sample size. Thus, two out of four universities made the 50%. MMUST and KIBU universities were purposely selected because they are the largest universities in the region. Therefore, they have the largest number of students, and will give an adequate representation of the universities in the region. The study adopted quantitative and snowballing research design to obtain the necessary data from respondents. The population of early students' mothers in both institutions is 102, 68 from MMUST and 34 from KIBU. The determination of the sample size was informed by Mugenda and Mugenda (2008), who opined that a sample size of 10% is suitable for a population exceeding 1000; whereas a sample size of 30% is suitable for a population of less than 1,000. For this study, 30% was considered in determining the sample size of early motherhood students, which translated to 30. The 30 early motherhood students were sampled using snowballing in order to get 20 and 10 early motherhood students from Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology (MMUST) and Kibabii University respectively (KIBU). In addition, census method was used to get 6 respondents counselors. MMUST has 4 counselors, while KIBU has 2 counselors.

3.3. Data Collection Instruments

The following tools were used for data collection:-

- Students Questionnaire
- Counselors questionnaire
- Beck anxiety inventory
- Rosenberg self-esteem inventory

3.4. Students' Questionnaire

The researcher developed social-demographic questionnaire to capture the background information of the early motherhood students. In developing the instrument, the researcher ascertained that they were enough items to measure the social-demographic indicators of study in section A. Section B was on the nature of counseling services in the university. Section C captured the effects of counseling services on anxiety and self-esteem of the respondents. The last section (D) was on strategies and programmes that can put in place to enhance psycho-social well-being of early motherhood students.

3.5. Counselor's Questionnaire

The researcher also designed questionnaire for counselors. Counselors from the two selected institutions gave information on resources, programmes and strategies that they have adopted to enhance their work. In addition, they also provided information on their training qualification.

Prior to data collection, the researcher first obtained approval from graduate school at Kisii University. Thereafter, an application for a research permit was made to the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) and the research permit was granted from NACOSTI. The researcher then made application through the dean of students of the sampled institutions to be allowed to collect the data. During the actual data collection exercise, the researcher personally administered the questionnaires which were collected the same day.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Response Rate

The study involved six counselors and thirty early motherhood students who are not married in the selected institution. The entire sample for the study was a total of 36 respondents.

The response rate is presented in Table 1.

Category	Sample Size	Frequency	Percentage
Early Student Mothers	30	30	100
Counselors	6	6	100

Table 1: Response Rate
Early Student Mothers N=30, Counselors=6

The researcher administered 30 questionnaires and tools to all the early motherhood students who are not married in the selected two universities. A total of 30 questionnaires and tools were obtained from the early motherhood students which gave a return rate of 100%. Other different questionnaires were also administered to the counselors of the respective universities and the return rate was 100% for all the categories. All the returned questionnaires and tools were checked for completeness to ascertain whether all the questions and tools item were answered. The response rate was considered suitable for the study.

4.2. Social-Demographic Characteristics of Early Motherhood Students

4.2.1. Age Group of Respondents

Figure 1 shows that 75% of the respondents are within the age bracket of 23 – 26 years, while 15% of the respondents are within the age bracket of 19 – 22 years. 4% of the respondents are below 18 years, while those, who were 26 and above, were 6%. This, therefore, indicates majority of the young mothers are adolescents and young adults. This concurs with studies conducted in Sub-Saharan Africa and Japan. In sub-Saharan Africa, it is estimated that 14 million unwanted pregnancies occur every year, with almost half occurring among women aged 15–24 years. In Japan, only 36% of child births are intended, while in Turkey, the Population and Health Research unit estimates that 20% of all birth between 1998 and 2003 were unwanted and 14% were unplanned.

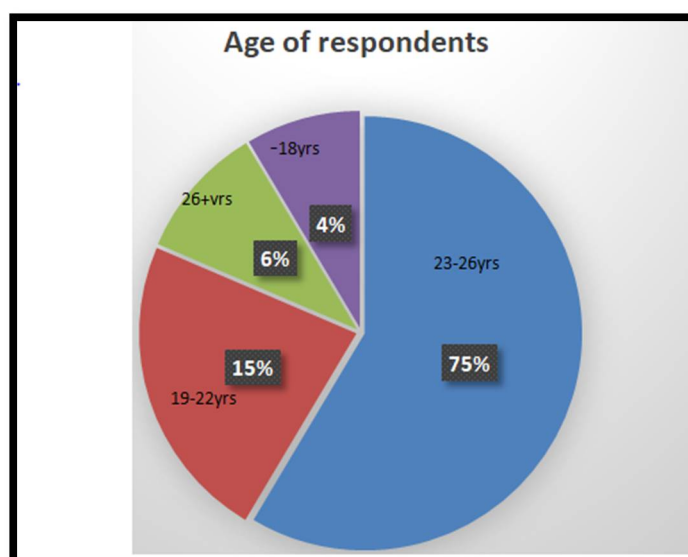


Figure 1: Age of Respondents against %

The students (30) were asked to highlight challenges faced by counselors and the results are shown in Figure 1.

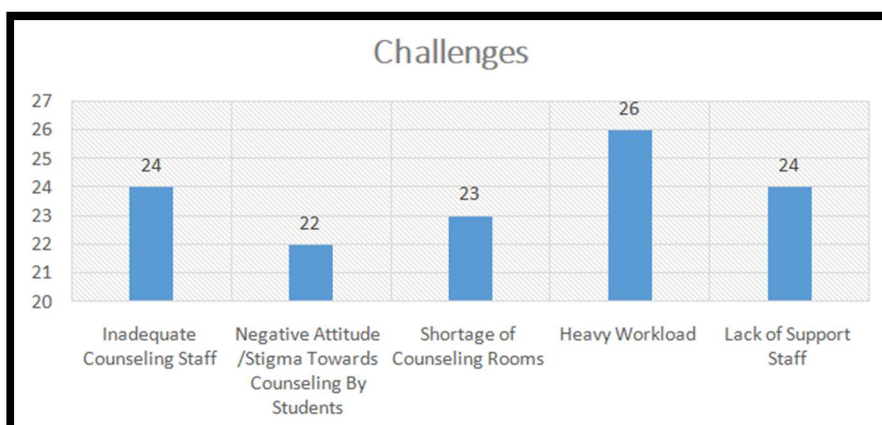


Figure 2

Figure 1 indicates that the students (87%; 26) noted heavy workload, lack of support from staff (80%; 24), inadequate counseling staff (80%; 24), shortage of counseling rooms (77%; 23), and negative attitude (74%; 22).

When asked their view on the effectiveness of guidance and counseling programmes, the counselors (50%; 3) noted that the programmes were effective. However, equal number of counselors (50%; 3) cited that the programmes were ineffective.

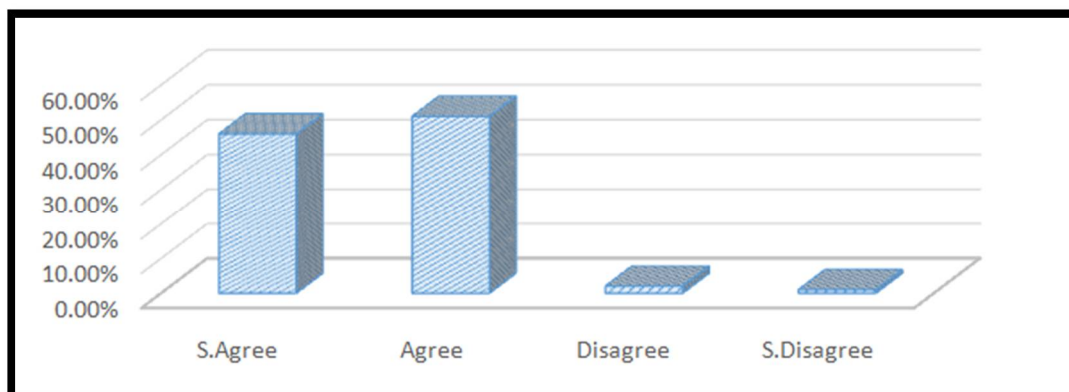


Figure 3: Counseling Rooms Are Adequate and Located in Private Places Ensuring Confidentiality

From the above figure, 86% (25) of respondents agreed that there are adequate and comfortable and private rooms suitable for counseling services that facilitate no sense of intrusion on personal space, while 14% (4) disagree. However, lack of resources and support creates significant difficulties for college's counselors in Kenya (Okech & Kimemia, 2012). University counselors have apparently reported a lack of support from university administration, lecturers and the university community. University counselors cannot succeed in their roles if they work in isolation (Palsey & Ben-sholf, 2002). To be effective, counselors will need support from all the stakeholders. Additionally, lack or limited resources in the form of counseling materials such as DVDs, books, office supplies, and sometimes a counseling office hinders effective service delivery. Universities need to set aside funds to help in the running of the counseling department. For counseling to be effective, the setting and the location of the counseling office must be taken into account (Romana, Goh & Walh, 2005). Unfortunately, to date, some universities in Kenya do not have a counseling office, and even where present; it is either ill equipped with the necessary supplies or poorly located.

In some universities, counselors share the office with other lecturers, consequently confidentiality of student's records can be easily compromised (Gyshers & Henderson, 2012). The lack of university community-based support poses another challenge to universities counseling in Kenya. Counselors need access to community based resources where they can refer students who may be in need of prolonged therapy. Without such support, the scope of services counselors can provide will be limited (Lapan, 2001). Lack of consultation and referral sources can also limit the help students can receive. Additionally, a general lack of support from the university system and the community can discourage counselors from effectively performing their roles (Gyshers & Henderson, 2012).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Conclusion

This study investigated guidance and counseling interventions on the psycho-social well-being of early motherhood students in selected universities in western Kenya.

This study established that early motherhood students lead to psycho-social challenges among the early motherhood students in the universities. This calls for an urgent need to provide adequate guidance and counseling interventions. In view of these findings, the study concluded that there is need to develop clear strategies to enhance interventions among the early motherhood students in the universities.

5.2. Recommendation

- The universities should provide adequate counseling space in the students' counseling activities
- The universities should provide adequate budget for counseling activities and intervention
- The universities should come up with a support system for early motherhood students in the universities
- There is need for broad community involvement and support to provide support and care for early motherhood in the universities
- Strategies should be put in place for psycho-social interventions targeting early motherhood students in the universities.

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