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## Kenyan Professional Counsellors' Role Perceptions and Responsibilities

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# Kenyan Professional Counsellors' Role Perceptions and Responsibilities

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## Abstract

This article presents the results of survey research on Kenyan professional school-based counsellor's perceptions of roles and appropriate activities. Data were collected from 47 Kenyan counsellors using the International Survey of School-Based Counselling Activities. Mean subscale scores and standard deviations were employed to analyse data across five dimensions of the school-based counsellor role practice: Counselling Services; Advocacy and Systemic Improvement; Prevention Programs; Administrator Role; and Educational Career Planning. Results indicated that Kenyan counsellors' highest scale of preference for role/responsibility they perform was Counselling Services (one-to-one counselling service and group counselling aimed at improving children and adolescences' mental health and academic performance). Results also indicated that Kenyan counsellors perceived Administrator Role activities as the least cogent of their responsibilities. It is suggested that these findings will facilitate future comparative research on school-based counsellors' roles and responsibilities and promote the building up of a body of literature that will inform policy development.

*Keywords:* self-awareness, school-based counselling practice, International Survey of School-based Counselling Activities, cross national research, context-bound acuity

Global variations abound in the way counsellors perceive their roles and responsibilities, particularly within the context of school-based counselling wherein the primary focus is on facilitating clients' (students) growth process towards becoming fully functional members of the society (Okech & Kimemia, 2012; Wango, 2006). As such, being a school-based counsellor requires that the counsellor fit into a multifaceted role in order to be effective and relevant (Okech & Kimemia, 2012, 2013; Otieno, 2015; Owion, 2013; Owion & Odera, 2014; Oyieyo, 2012), particularly in the face of the multifaceted needs that school-going children (clients) may present. Much of the variation that exists in the counsellor's role perception emerge from a number of factors including cultural factors, national needs, societal

movements, models of school counselling, laws and educational policy and characteristics of the public education system (Harris, 2013; Martin, Lauterbach & Carey, 2015). Consequently, there is a wide range of activities that school-based counsellors might engage with in their day-to-day interaction with students. Therefore, it becomes important that the counsellors' perceptions of *who they are* and appropriate role characteristics in terms of *what they do* including *what they would most likely prefer to do* are explored. In this sense, the counsellors' views on which activities are appropriate for them to enact are vital in understanding the services they render.

Apart from the vital importance of exploring how school counsellors view themselves, the larger study in which the Kenya data was included (Carey, Fan, He, & Jin, 2020) aimed at identifying similarities and differences among counsellors from 10 countries (China, Costa Rica, India, Kenya, Malta, Nigeria, South Korea, Turkey, USA, Venezuela). These findings facilitate a comparative understanding of how counsellors across nations view themselves, which ought to promote a wider composition of a body of literature that to inform further research and policy formulation. The present study explored five dimensions of Kenyan school-based counsellors' role and responsibilities: Counselling services; Advocacy and Systemic Improvement; Prevention Programs; Administrative Role and Educational Career Planning. The counselling activities explored in this study covered a very wide range including direct services, indirect services, program management, advocacy and participation in system change. The main focus of the study is to determine which services the Kenyan counsellors identify as being most important for their role as counsellors in schools. In this regard, the counsellors' preference(s) to a large extent represent the counsellors' mode of practice with reference to their roles and responsibilities.

Although, counselling has been an important service provided for Kenyan school-going children since early 1970s (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2010), there has been notable disagreements regarding the counsellors' roles and responsibilities as reflected in varying descriptions of the counsellors' daily activities (Republic of Kenya, 1964;

Wambu & Fisher, 2015; Wango, 2006). As far back as 1976, the Kenyan National Committee on Education recommended that counselling with the clause *guidance* be taught as a school subject in public schools (like Religious Education, Social Education and Ethics) to enable the school to promote the growth of self-discipline among students (Republic of Kenya, 1976). No doubt, such a move is positive in the sense that it enables counsellors to go beyond delivering remedial counselling services in order to facilitate students' development through preventative activities.

A number of empirical research studies in Kenya have examined the importance of the different elements of the school counsellors' roles from different perspectives including: the Ministry of Education, school administrators, other school staff, students and counsellors themselves and the general public. For example, Wango (2006) researched the policy and practice of guidance and counselling in secondary schools in Kenya and reported that there is a very wide range of roles and responsibilities expected for the school counsellor. This study, therefore, recommend that government policy be developed to monitor the practice of school counselling and the provision of counselling services in schools.

Similarly, Oyieyo (2012) in exploring the influence of guidance and counselling on students' discipline in public secondary schools in Kabodon Division, Kenya reported the need for policy guidelines for service delivery in schools. In the same vein, Owion (2013) carried out a study focusing on the nature of guidance and counselling services in selected secondary schools in Eldoret municipality, Kenya and reported that there are diverse viewpoints among stakeholders regarding the understanding of appropriate services that school counsellors ought to provide. Accordingly, Owion (2013) recommended that further studies be conducted with regards to nature of the school counsellors' roles and responsibilities.

In this regard, the present study is important based on the fact that its findings would add to the accumulation of a robust body of knowledge inspiring policy makers and informing the public about the counsellors' roles and responsibilities in Kenya. This research study forms part of a 10 country International Survey of School-Based Counselling Activities (ISSCA). The findings permit the comparison between practice in Kenya and practice in other developed and developing countries, hopefully facilitating future fruitful comparative research on modes of school counselling practice between Kenya and other national contexts.

## Method

### Research Design

The study adopted an explorative descriptive research design that used survey sampling to collect data. The design was informed by the nature of research requiring sampling

across nations, with the anticipation that the findings would portray different counselling roles and responsibilities across the globe with particular reference to cultural factors, national needs, societal movements, models of school counselling, laws and educational policy (Martin, Lauterbach & Carey, 2015). Hence, a quantitative survey design that provides space for understanding the characteristics of a large sample was deemed most appropriate for this study (Mathiyazhagan & Nandan, 2010).

### Data Collection

As already mentioned, a total of 2,913 practicing school-based counsellors in 10 countries contributed data to the overall study (Carey et al., 2020). A total of 47 Kenyan counsellors participated in this study. Convenient purposive sampling was employed, as the research was restricted to practicing school-based counsellors (Creswell, 2011; Silverman, 2005). The sample from Kenya is low compared to larger samples across six nations though slightly higher in comparison to samples from India ( $n = 45$ ), Malta ( $n = 37$ ) and Venezuela ( $n = 30$ ). This smallness of number does not mean that Kenya has the smallest number of practicing school-based counsellors rather it was due to proximity within and around Nairobi County where data was collected. At the point of data collection, the researchers could not travel to the other 46 counties to access school-based counsellors, due to time constraints and resources. Other means of data collection method such as electronic devices via email proved abortive.

The researchers personally collected the data. As suggested for studies of this type (Creswell, 2011; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), initial contact with school administrators was made in order to obtain gatekeeper permission before inviting the school counsellors to participate. Informed consent was obtained from each of the participants, as each participant was oriented towards understanding the purpose of the research before accepting to participate. The questionnaire was administered on a one-to-one basis at the participants' convenient space/time and some participants indicated when/where the researcher could come back to collect the filled in questionnaire. Besides, some of the participants just filled in the questionnaire immediately whilst the researcher waited. The questionnaire return rate was 95% as 47 questionnaires out of 50 administered were returned and formed part of the data used for analysis.

### Participants

The study participants consisted of 41(87%) females and 6 (13%) males (total 47) school-based practicing counsellors in Nairobi, Kenya. Among them, 3 (6%) held a PhD in Counselling Psychology, 16 (34%) had Master's degrees; 16 (34%) had Bachelors' degrees; 10 (21%) held diplomas; and, two (4%) had certificate degrees. Out of these participants, six (13%) were practicing in primary school,

33 (70%) rendered services at the secondary school level and eight (17%) offered services at tertiary institutions (university). At the time of data collection, four (9%) participants had served for 1 year, three (6%) had served for 2 years, five (10%) had served for 3 years, seven (15%) had served for 4 years, 18 (38%) had served for 5 years, four (9%) had served for 6, 7, 8 and 9 years respectively, three (6%) had served for 10 years, whilst four (9%) had served for 13, 16, 20 and 21 years respectively.

### Measure

We employed the International Survey of School-Based Counseling Activities (ISSCA; Fan, Carey, Thomas, Griffith, Wells, He, & Niu, 2019). The development, subscales and psychometric properties of the ISSCA are described in the lead article of this special issue (Carey et al 2020). An English language survey was used to collect data in Kenya with slight modifications made after consulting with the developers in order to ensure that its conceptual equivalence was maintained.

### Data Analysis

Consistent with the international school-based research teams' proposal, the data analysis was conducted across five dimensions as follows: Counselling Services; Advocacy and Systemic Improvement; Prevention Programs; Administrator's Role; and Educational Career Planning. In this regard the counsellors' responses were calculated using means and standard deviations with the aid of SPSS (Version 25). These results reflected the counsellors' preferred roles and responsibilities in view of the daily delivery of services to the school client. The Kenyan results were also contrasted with results from the other 9 countries reported by Carey et al. (2020).

## Results and Discussion

We present the findings based on the five dimensions of practice as measured by the ISSCA subscales as follows: Counselling Services; Advocacy and Systemic Improvement; Prevention Programs; Administrator's Role; and Educational Career Planning based on mean scores, standard deviation and simple percentage (see Table 1). The Kenyan counsellors' rating of perceived roles and responsibilities across the five variables anchored on appropriate valued at 3 points and very appropriate at 4. As such the results document that there is a multiplicity of roles and responsibilities that Kenyan counsellors fulfil as they assist school-going children/adolescence to resolve their everyday educational, career and personal-social issues. However, the findings for the fourth variable (Administrative Role) anchored on inappropriate with the numerical value of 2. The table below presents the subscale mean scores, and standard deviations.

### Counselling Services

The participants' role perception in terms of Counselling Services anchored between appropriate and very appropriate reflecting the mean score of 3.6 ( $SD = .43$ ), which is in congruence with results across other nations, particularly South Korea's mean of 3.7 ( $SD = .32$ ) and Nigeria 3.5 ( $SD = .34$ ) (from Carey et al., 2020). The implication is that counselling services is one of the major roles that counsellors across the 10 nations perceive as suitable. Items assigned to counselling services were as follows: individual counselling with students; group counselling with students; crisis counselling with students; consultation and coordination with parents; consultation and counselling with teachers; referral processes; and monitoring effectiveness, which were tested across 18 items out of 40 of the ISSCA items. Compared to the findings from other nations, Kenyan counsellors share the commonality of perceiving themselves as primarily devoting their services to providing counselling services to school-going aged children. This finding is consistent with previous research findings carried out in Kenya, indicating that school counsellors' main focus is to enable students to resolve educational, career and personal-social issues through personal counselling in order to be fully functional persons in the society (Okech & Kimemia, 2012; Otieno, 2015; Owion, 2013; Owion & Odera, 2014; Oyieyo, 2012, Wango, 2006).

### Advocacy and Systemic Improvement

The participant's responses for Advocacy and Systemic Improvement reflect a mean score of 3.4 ( $SD = .42$ ). A total of eight items were assigned to test the advocacy and systemic improvement variable. The items reflected activities related to advocacy for students, advocacy for effective school policies and practices and program evaluation and improvement. These results indicate that Kenyan counsellors showed the second highest ratings for advocacy and systemic improvement—second only to the US counsellors' ( $M = 3.5$ ;  $SD = .42$ ) (from Carey et al., 2020). What this means is that Kenyan counsellors in comparison, like US counsellors, placed much emphasis on the importance of activities associated with advocacy and system improvement. Hence, part of their role and responsibility entail going beyond counselling school children on one-to-one basis for educational and personal-social issues but also addressing clients' general welfare concerns (Wambu & Fisher, 2015) and working to improve the schools in which they work so that they better serve students.

### Prevention Programs

The mean score for Prevention Programs is 3.2 ( $SD = .46$ ). Compared to other nations, this finding reveals a commonality that is shared with India ( $M = 3.4$ ;  $SD = .72$ )

Nigeria ( $M = 3.4$ ;  $SD = .54$ ), Turkey ( $M = 3.4$ ;  $SD = .42$ ) and USA ( $M = 3.4$ ;  $SD = .45$ ) (from Carey et al., 2020). Therefore, it can be argued that Kenyan counsellors consider prevention programs to be an important part of the vital services they deliver to the children and adolescents. Prevention Programs items reflected activities related to classroom guidance lessons, parent training and education, teacher training and consultation with administrators to improve educational policies and practices. This finding is in consonant with Wango's (2006) research findings conducted among Kenyan schools stating that counselling is preventive in nature geared towards helping clients to live life to the full.

### **Administrator Role**

The participants' responses to Administrator's Role present a mean score of 2.1 ( $SD = .35$ ). Aptly, this finding indicates that Kenyan counsellors consider the administrator role as less cogent services that they render to school students, particularly when compared to Nigerian counsellors' mean score of 3.2 ( $SD = .50$ ) (from Carey et al., 2020). Basically, the Kenyan counsellors rated Administrator's Role activities as inappropriate and to this effect some of the additional notes from the participants' surveys indicated that they would prefer to opt out of any form of students' discipline unless on the grounds of mentoring. This finding points to the fact that the participants' perceived administrative role as not part of the essential counselling services that they render. In this context, such services as student's discipline including classroom management, leadership in database school improvement initiatives are not part of the essential services the Kenyan counsellors consider important. To the researchers' knowledge there is no previous research in Kenya related to this finding, but hopefully this finding would inspire further research.

### **Educational and Career Planning**

The results for Educational and Career Planning present a mean score of 3.7 ( $SD = .44$ ). Kenyan counsellors' ratings were similar to counsellors from other nations, particularly Nigeria whose mean score is equally 3.7 ( $SD = .50$ ), (from Carey et al., 2020) indicating that Educational and Career Planning is one of the appropriate services they render to their school clients. This result aligns itself with the Kenyan Ministry of Education expectations of the school-based counsellor, which ought to primarily aid the facilitation of educational development and achievement of pupils/students (Republic of Kenya, 1976). It also reflects the widespread view that career development/planning is a core service rendered by the school counsellor (Gysbers & Henderson, 2012) in order to enable clients make informed decisions regarding the world of work. Accordingly, educational and career planning is presented as one of the core services rendered to school children and adolescents. Educational and Career Planning items reflected activities

related to helping students choose courses and a course of study and engagement in groups-based career development.

### **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

The major limitations in this study result from the small sample and the lack of assurance of the representativeness of the sample. While the results are consistent with previous research in Kenya, this study should be considered as exploratory and should be replicated with a large representative sample to assure reliable data and valid conclusions. The results do suggest that the five dimensional framework based on the international factor analytic study of the ISSCA described in the lead article of this special issue (Carey et al., 2020) provides a useful way to describe a country's mode of school-based counselling practice and to compare and contrast modes of practice across countries. Future single country case studies of school-based counselling practice should use this framework in order to facilitate cross-national comparisons of modes of practice. Relatedly, cross-national comparative studies should use this framework to ensure that the modes of practice between countries are compared on meaningful dimensions related to the work of school-based counsellors.

### **Conclusion**

The findings of this research indicate that Kenyan counsellors share similarity with counsellors from the nine other nations on four of the dimensions such as Counselling Services, Educational Career Planning, Advocacy Systemic Improvement; Prevention Programs. Kenyan counsellors' perception of the Administrative Role indicates that they perceive administrative activities not being part of the role of a school-based counsellor.

These findings have contributed to a comparative analysis regarding how counsellors across 10 nations view their roles and responsibilities. In summary, these findings have helped establish a body of literature, which will enable the comparative analysis of how school-based counsellors in different national contexts perceive their roles and responsibilities. Hopefully, this line of research will inform policy makers about the ways that the school-based counselling modes of practice differ across countries and the potential strengths and limitations inherent in these different modes of practice in order to guide the improvement of counselling services in Kenya and across the globe.

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Table 1.

*Means and standard deviations of ISSCA subscales for Kenyan counsellors*

<b>Variables</b>	<b><i>M</i></b>	<b><i>SD</i></b>
Counselling services	3.6	.43
Advocacy & systematic improvement	3.4	.42
Prevention programs	3.2	.46
Administrative role	2.1	.35
Educational & career planning	3.7	.42

*Note. N = 47*