



# The Silent Screaming for Professional School Counselors in Dodoma City Public Secondary Schools in Tanzania

Pilly M. Mweta & Milka V. Otieno

Department of Education

St. John's University of Tanzania

Email: [mwetapilly61@gmail.com](mailto:mwetapilly61@gmail.com)/[omilka@sjut.ac.tz](mailto:omilka@sjut.ac.tz)

**Abstract:** *Despite the government's efforts to introduce a conducive learning environment by providing enough teaching and learning resources, the psychological needs of learners are crucial. In creating a healthy environment for learners to achieve their academic goals professional counselors in secondary schools must be brought to the foreground. A qualitative approach with a narrative study design was employed. The selected population were sexually abused learners, school counselors, academic teachers, a ward education officer, Statistical and logistical officers, police officers, and social workers. The professional participants were purposely selected and sexually abused learners were voluntarily selected. Semi-structured interviews, observation, and documentation were used as an instrument for data collection and data were analyzed thematically. From the findings, it has been known that professional participants understood the importance of having a professional counselor. While learners themselves do not know the existence of school counselors, as a result, they fail to get assistance and endure a painful experience that affects their academic performance. It is recommended that the school should capacitate learners' awareness of the availability of counseling services around the school. The government should increase the number of professional counselors in secondary schools by considering the number of learners in those schools and provide a sound environment by supplying educational resources and infrastructure for counseling to take place.*

**Keywords:** *Counselling, School counselor, Public secondary school, Academic achievement*

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## 1. Introduction

Counseling is currently becoming a necessary service for school learners in developing countries, this is because of challenges that face learners in their learning process resulting from family problems and globalization affects students learning in their academic performance and social life. School counseling is a profession that focuses on the relations and interactions between students and their school environment with the expressed purpose of reducing the

effect of environmental and institutional barriers that impede students' academic success (Spiegler, 2015). According to Goodrich, Kingsley and Sands, (2020) trained school counselors must be confident and use as many counseling skills as possible to help students gain opportunities to comprehend their dreams. They assist students in their academic, social, emotional and personal development; and help them to define the best pathways to successfully achieve their plans.

The researcher decided to write a paper on counseling because during data collection, the researcher found out that counselling was not considered important to learners in public secondary schools. In the school where data were collected, learners who accessed counseling service did so by coincidence either by the teacher who realized that the learner had a problem or by being identified by the school counselor. According to (Musa and Martha, 2020), without sound counseling, many students lose direction and engage in bad behaviors such as drug abuse and dropout, students need counseling and direction to study and face their social problems (Blake, 2020). The findings from the study observed that learners are not aware of the counseling service available at the school. It also seemed that the counselor/student ratio is a problem where the number of learners is too high for a single counselor to handle together with the teaching load of the school counselor. This is with a consideration of little valuable accounted. Nevertheless, facilities like offices were absent so counseling was taking place in a tough environment.

According to Mabula and Edna (2015), much effort has been put into counseling secondary learners and school counselors' perception of counseling service is positive. However, little effort has been put into counseling these learners on matters of their studies and social problems (Eliamani, Richard and Peter, 2014). Counselors are being produced in colleges and universities, but they are not enough to fit the demands due to many students in secondary schools. Therefore, there is an urgent need to have proper counseling in public secondary schools to meet the various needs of learners. Unfortunately, the importance of counseling is still adequately recognized. As a result, counseling is ineffective in public secondary schools and this is the gap the study intends to fill.

## 1.1 Problem statement

It was expected that counselling would help students to resolve their problems easily and work towards better achievement. Studies in Tanzania show that public secondary school students meet social, academic and psychological problems (Nweze and Okolie, 2014). Among the increased number of secondary schools as directed by the ministry of education in Education and Training Policy of 1995, a growing number of students' problems has been reported, calling for effective counselling services (Mashala 2019). Such problems are related to the child sexual abuse; street children; child labor and family problems that affect students directly and indirectly they are academic, particularly related to poverty. Other problems include discipline matters such as truancy, sexual harassment bullying and relationships.

## Objectives

The following objectives guided this study:

- i. To identify learners' awareness of counselling services in school environment.
- ii. To explore counselor's/student ratio in public secondary school
- iii. To find out the availability of counselling room in public secondary schools.

## 1.2 Research questions

- i. What is learners' awareness of counselling services in a school environment?
- ii. What is counselor's/student ratio in public secondary schools in Tanzania?
- iii. What is the availability of a counselling room in public secondary schools?

## 2. Literature Review

This section begins with the empirical and theoretical reviews for the study.

### 2.1 Empirical review

According to Shohel (2022), in recent times, there has been an emergence of many social and academic problems in schooling at both national and international levels that expresses the need for counseling to students and teachers. Such problems are inspired by globalization, social stress, culture, human rights and policy and laws. In such a situation each member state of the United Nations should make sure the varied developmental needs of the students are met (Moore and Pubantz, 2022).

Globally, counselling has started some eras back between the 1920s and 1930s. Public secondary schools began to see the need for it beyond the secondary realm. Students needed personal, social and academic counseling (Nurshat, Almazhai, Laura, Begakhmet, Zhorabekova, Bagdat and Elmira, 2021). Due to growing and increased science and technology counseling becomes the most important tool required to face global problems and this is where individual counseling needs arises.

The global concern related to globalization and the rise of social problems in the world especially among young children and in educational institutions have led to interest in having counseling services in most schools and universities. Studies from the past decades confirm the availability of counseling all over the world including Europe, North and South America, Asia and Africa and how this has a positive impact on managing discipline

issues in schools and universities (Zamroni, Hanurawan, Muslihata and Hidayah, 2022)

A study conducted at a large suburban high school in Western New York, shows that students from more privileged high school sectors can maximize attendance at better academically matched colleges due to counselling services they obtained at school (Maru 2017). But again, Sculli (2011) adds that students were asked to identify their counseling needs in three categories of the career, academic, and personal/social domains, they observed that professional school counseling is transforming the development and implementation of comprehensive school counseling programs.

In Africa, counseling service was introduced in the 20<sup>th</sup> century when the education curriculum directed School, Colleges and Universities to establish a counseling unit to address student needs and challenges (Wambu and Fisher, 2015). This was expected to help the learners at schools, vocational training and higher learning institutions to identify their problems and find better ways to solve their problems through professional counseling services available in their academic institutions (Getachew, 2020).

A study in Nigeria by Omoniyi (2016), realized the importance of counseling services provided at all educational levels. Unfortunately, counseling, which is an aspect of the school guidance program is yet to be effectively implemented. The concentration is on employing professional counselors in secondary schools and higher /tertiary institutions. In Nigeria's education system teachers play the role of counselors because no qualified counselors in almost all the schools and these teachers are working as Counselors (Oluede and Adubale, 2020).

A study in Mumbwa District in Zambia found that rural teachers provided counseling services and the majority of pupils did not report their problems to counseling teachers but to their class teachers because they believed that the counseling teachers did not keep confidentiality (Makumba, 2014). The study recommended that the Ministry of Education, Science, Vocational Training and Early Education should employ trained full-time counseling teachers in schools. But also provide appropriate and adequate materials for counseling purposes and put in place a deliberate policy that would allow the provision of counseling to lower grades in primary schools, these provisions are lacking at the moment (Chivuna, 2013).

After Gachathi report of 1976 In Kenya, guidance and counseling was introduced in secondary schools. The purpose was to help students understand themselves and to discover their abilities and limitations from their environment (Ndegwa, 2013). In introducing guidance and

counseling several other studies have reported different accomplishments following in schools. The review conducted in Kenya in 2020's reveals that, most of the guidance teachers have an ambiguous understanding of what counselling demands and the students also do not fully utilize the services and do not understand its role (Ndegwa, 2013). The study further, reveals that despite all those efforts, there has not been a change in behavior of students.

Another study carried by Chireshe (2006) to examine the status of School Guidance and Counselling (SGC) services needs assessment in Zimbabwe secondary schools as perceived by school counsellors and students. The study was part of a larger study on assessing the effectiveness of school GCS in Zimbabwean secondary schools. A survey design based on two questionnaires (one for school counsellors and the other one for students) was undertaken with a sample of 950 participants (314 school counsellors and 636 students). The main findings of the study revealed that there were significant differences in the rating of the frequency of assessing the needs of students, teachers and parents among school counsellors and students (Chireshe, 2006). In addition, the findings showed that both school counsellors and students viewed the involvement of parents substantially negatively.

In Tanzania, a legalized establishment of counseling service for education institutions were introduced in the 1980s. In Tanzania, professional counseling began in 1984 after the Arusha conference held in October 1984. The Ministry of Education adopted counseling in 1992 with the view of improving the academic performance of learners and helping them with health services, especially for HIV/AIDS (Eliamani *et al.*, 2014).

The rapid increasing number of public secondary schools in Tanzania, tied with social problems like marriage and family breakdown, street children, child labor and child sexual abuse with the rise of globalization, cannot be underestimated hence the need for psychological help through counselling. Therefore, the Government of Tanzania issued a Circular No. 11 of 2002 which demands the establishment of counseling services in schools and teachers' colleges to ensure that counseling services are offered in secondary schools (Assey, 2020). However, the problem is the increased number of learners that do not match the number of counseling teachers. Most public secondary schools use mere teachers as school counselors (Blake, 2020). For example, during data collection in one of the public secondary schools, there was one counseling teacher who did not attend any training after completing her university training and who was supposed to handle thousand two hundred and fifty-four students. Therefore, counseling efficiency in this school hasn't made any significant changes regarding students' well-being.

The counseling service at schools has a great possibility to help learners attain their academic performance and personal or social issues in their lives. Professional counseling in schools was still unknown to learners despite the rapid growth of counseling needs. Psychological problems have an impact on the performance of students (Mboya, John, Kibopile, Mhando, George, and Ngocho, 2020). The Ministry of Education realizes that there is importance in establishing counseling services for students in secondary school. The Ministry of Education directed each school to have school counselors work with students to solve their problems and issued circular No. 11 to guide that directive (Edward, Hoffmann, Manase, Matsushita, Pariyo, Brady, and Appel, 2020). However, despite the instruction from the ministry to secondary schools, the number of school counselors was not enough and their value was not recognized.

## 2.2. Theoretical Review

The study was guided by social learning theory postulated by Albert Bandura in 1977, who emphasized both environmental and cognitive factors interacting to influence human learning and behavior (Bandura, 1977). Therefore, learners are supposed to be in a healthy state of mind so that they can achieve their academic goals and this is only possible through the help of a professional school counselor.

## 3. Methodology

This section presents the methodology that guided the study.

### 3.1 Source of Data and Data Collection Method

The narrative research design was employed to investigate the everyday experiences of human beings. The design interprets the participants' feelings, perceptions and beliefs to clarify the essence of the phenomena under investigation (Niazi, 2022). Purposive sampling was used for professional participants and sexual abuse learners were voluntarily selected. Data were collected through semi structured interview, observation and document review and analysis.

### 3.2 Data analysis method

The narrative approach was applied for data collection. The narrative approach is the study of how human beings experience the world through storytelling (Moen, 2006). Learners who voluntarily accepted to participate in this study, tell their stories in semi structured interview and the researcher was recording the story. Data were thematically

analyzed in line with Braun and Clarke 2021 that thematic analysis is an accessible, flexible and increasingly popular method in qualitative data analysis.

## 3.3 Ethical consideration

Ethical consideration is a set of principles that guide research practices (Masanja, 2020). The researcher collected ethical approval from the university committee and a letter from Faculty of humanities and education (FAHE) of St John's university. This letter officially introduced the researcher to DEO's office, WEO's office and social worker's office and respective schools involved in the study.

## 4. Results and Discussion

From the data analysis, three major views were obtained based on the researcher's findings from this study. These findings include learners' awareness of counseling services around the school environment, school counselor/learner ratio and availability of educational resources and facilities for school counselors to provide the counseling service to these learners.

### 4.1 Learners' awareness of counseling services in a school environment

Learners are not well informed on services available at school (Maree and Magere, 2023). For instance, in most public secondary schools in Dodoma, learners are being oriented about the service and environment around the school by many students have not reported to the school yet, this is the main cause why most learners do not have consent about the availability of counselling service. The findings indicated that most learners are not aware of the availability of counseling services in the school environment.

*I wasn't aware of the counseling service provided at school until Madam X took me to her for counseling (Interview with a learner on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023).*

During the interview, the learners mentioned that they just chose the teacher who looked familiar and friendly to them or the 'Malezi' teacher and presented their problems to them. (According to Otieno 2016, malezi is a Swahili word literally meaning upbringing).

*When I was sexually abused, I had nobody to tell the story I suffered for quite a long time until I met Madam X who was concerned with the drop in my academic results and I decided to tell her about*

*the issue of sexual abuse which was tormenting my heart and she assisted me am so grateful that am doing great by now (interview with a learner on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2023).*

The above quote showed the failure of the organization by not making it aware to learners that there was counseling service. Kim, Geesa and McDonald (2020), argue that the primary role of the counselor is expected to be able to formulate individual counseling services that are to the needs of students today.

On the other hand, all the professional participants involved in this study are aware of the counseling services available at secondary schools. The academic teacher admitted the presence of the service and mentioned some students who got the counseling service and are doing well after counseling:

*We have a professional school counselor who deals with learners facing problems at home and school. She is trying her level best to deal with them though the environment is not favoring them” (Interview with an academic teacher on 19<sup>th</sup> April 2023).*

Those professionals who are outside the school like ward education officers, statistical logistical officers, and social workers also are aware of the service availability though they were not sure if they were professionals or just mere teachers.

*The school counselors are available though not all of them are professionals in most cases the head of the school chooses any teacher to deal with students and these are referred to as Malezi (Interview with ward education officer on 20 April, 2023).*

Considering these findings, it is clear that awareness of counseling services is underestimated in secondary school, while there are a lot of burning issues for learners that require counselors’ attention (Otieno, 2016). The researcher found out that learners who met with the school counselor did not do it intentionally. It occurred coincidentally after having a problem and teachers noticed it and took them to counselors.

## **4.2 Counselor’s/student ratios**

The number of professional counselors in public secondary schools does not match the number of learners in these schools. Professional counselors are less valued and their importance is not well recognized by learners, professionals, and the community at large. Due to a rapidly

growing number of public secondary schools in Tanzania the number of learners in these schools are large compared to available human resource (Mkunja, 2016).

For instance, in the school where data was collected, there was only one professional school counselor who was supposed to deal with more than one thousand students. One of the school counselors is quoted saying;

*Handling all students with social problems that affect their academic issues became very difficult as I met with painful and heart-touching stories that disturbed my mind. Sometimes I have to deal with a case partially and leave some matters pending so I can get a chance to solve the other cases (Interview with school counselor on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2023).*

In line with that counseling, work is not considered important as they had a lot of classroom periods like other teachers and this limits their performance as counselors (Otieno, 2016; Charles and Mkulu, 2020). The counselors might wish to do all their counseling work properly, but the problem is that these counselors are being assigned to other school work as teaching, being in the school management team as a result they fail to accomplish and hold on to both duties (Heled and Davidovitch, 2021). The academic office should consider the school counselor to have enough time to meet with the learners by reducing the number of normal class periods. For instance, a school counselor in secondary X was teaching Literature for form three where she spent more time in the class and used her extra time on counseling. Together with that, the school timetable in most schools has no space for guidance and counseling (Chilewa and Osaki, 2022).

## **4.3 Availability of a counseling room**

The findings revealed that counselors were mainly challenged by the unavailability of counseling resources, including confidential rooms for conducting counseling with learners. Sukurieth and Kitula (2021), conquered with Otieno, 2016; Sephania and Kipng’etich (2017), that the availability of a good learning environment cannot be ignored. These public secondary schools have no office where counseling can take place. For instance, in the school where the research was conducted, the counselor used the class as the laboratory where there are a lot of chemicals and interaction with other teachers. Whereby a counseling teacher should wait for other teachers to finish their activities. These become difficult for both the counselor and her client that requires the service.

*It becomes difficult when I need to counsel a learner, especially those with traumatic issues as I have no office where we can sit quietly and talk,*

*the situation is tough. I have to look for an available office and talk with a client sometimes the rooms have no sealing board so it becomes difficult for the client to open up (Interview with school counselor on 18<sup>th</sup> April 2023).*

From the findings above, the researcher strongly sees the problem the school counselors face and makes their work difficult to handle. As stated above, counseling is a confidential service that requires high privacy as other learners have been sexually abused by the teachers that are available at the school, so seeing that learner talking to a school counselor might make the perpetrator suspect things and do something fishy to make the sexually abused learner shut their mouth by using their power. Therefore, the office of a school counselor is very crucial for counseling to be successful.

## 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

The study successfully identified that the availability of counseling services has a positive impact on learners' academic performance and their social issues. This was observed in those learners who got counseling after being sexually abused. There was an exciting improvement in their academic performance. Moreover, the study revealed that counseling has a positive outcome to learners, therefore, counselor/student ratio should be considered to improve the provision of service to all learners who are in need. But again, providing a supportive and safe environment for counseling to take place may increase the number of learners who get counseling as they are assured their privacy during counseling. In conclusion, the study highlights the importance of counseling services in improving learners' academic performance. It emphasizes learners' awareness, counselor/learner ratio, and availability of a special room for counseling in order to help learners in the healing process and improve their academic performance.

### 5.2 Recommendations

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Based on the conclusion different recommendations from a wide range of education stakeholders were made

1. The school should inform the learners of the availability of counseling services around the school, and concentrate on capacity building for learners and teachers on counseling. The community also should be aware of counseling services provided at school, together with teachers they can help learners in the healing process from sexual abuse and other problems and improve their academic performance.
2. The government should increase the number of professional counselors in public secondary schools, to cover the demands of learners that require counseling services.
3. The government should make sure that special rooms for counseling are available so that learners can be assured of their privacy.

By implementing the above recommendations, public secondary schools can create a safer and more supportive learning environment for learners, promote their well-being, and improve their academic performance.

### 5.3 Areas for further studies

Based on the findings of the current study, there are several areas that could be explored in future research on counseling in public secondary schools. Some potential areas for further studies include:

1. Evaluation for effectiveness and intervention programs and support services in secondary schools aimed at addressing the importance of professional counselors in secondary schools in promoting recovery to learners with different problems.
2. The study was conducted only in a single school in Dodoma city. There is a need to conduct more studies in many other schools and other areas in Dodoma and Tanzania at large.

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