Challenging Existing Views of the Role of School Counsellors in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

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Background Overview of the Researcher

EDUCATION
- PhD in Education (School Counselling in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA))
  - The University of Nottingham
- M.Sc. Degree in Educational Counselling and Psychology (With Merit)
  - The University of Nottingham
- B.Sc. in Social Sciences (With Distinction and Honor)
  - The College of Teacher Preparation in Makkah

EMPLOYMENT
- Director of the Student Counselling (2009-2013)
  - Afif Education Department, KSA
- Supervisor for Student Counselling (2003-2007)
  - Afif Education Department, KSA
  - Intermediate Secondary Schools (Afif) (2 years)
  - Secondary School (Afif) (6 years)
  - Primary School (Afif) (2 years)
“Many people measure success by how much money they have, or how many cars or houses they own. But for me, I measure success by the number of people I have been able to help in my life. My name is Turki Al Otaibi. I am the Director of the Student Counselling Programme at the Education Department in 'Afif', a city geographically located in central Saudi Arabia in the Najd region. I am responsible for the appointment and supervision of all the student counsellors in Afif. I am the line manager for eight supervisors and for fifty school counsellors in the Afif region. For me, school counselling is not a job, it is my life, it is my passion. It touches my heart and I hope to bring some of that joy to the students that I have helped and worked with.”
What is School Counselling and what are its Aims?

- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP):
  "...a professional activity delivered by qualified practitioners in schools. Counsellors offer troubled and/or distressed children and young people an opportunity to talk about their difficulties, within a relationship of agreed confidentiality" (Cooper 2013, p.3)

- School counselling (or school-based counselling) services:
  - Delivered by a variety of professionals, paraprofessionals, and peers (Cooper, 2013);
  - Increasingly refer to the activities of ‘professionally trained counsellors’ (Cooper, 2013);
  - Highly prevalent form of psychological therapy (70,000-90,000 young people) (BACP, 2013a);
  - Generally offer one-to-one supportive therapy (BACP, 2013a);
  - Effective in reducing psychological distress in young people (McArthur et al., 2012);
  - Young people and school staff see them as accessible, helpful, non-stigmatising (Cooper, 2009);
  - Have a positive impact on students’ studying and learning (Rupani et al., 2012);
  - Can improve overall attendance, attainment, and behaviour of students (Pybis et al., 2012);
  - Can prove to be effective for pupils that have been bullied (McElearney et al., 2013).
What is the Role of the School Counsellor?

• **The role of the Counsellor:**
  - Listening in a patient and non-judgmental way;
  - Viewing problems from the perspective of those being counselled;
  - Helping those being counselled to see issues more clearly and from alternative viewpoints;
  - Minimising confusion;
  - Helping those counselled to make choices and changes (BACP, 2004).

• **The role of the Counsellor within Schools:**
  Professional practitioners provide young people with the opportunity to:
  - Discuss difficulties in a confidential and non-judgmental atmosphere;
  - Explore the nature of their difficulties;
  - Increase their self-awareness;
  - Develop a better understanding of their difficulties;
  - Develop the personal resources needed to manage their problems;
  - Develop strategies to cope with change (BACP, 2013b).
Background on School Counselling in the KSA

• **Counselling in KSA:**

  “Counselling is the reactive process set up between a counsellor and a student through which the counsellor gives help to the student to understand himself and recognise his capabilities and potentialities and to give him an enlightened approach to his problem and how to encounter him. He also helps him to enhance his responsive behaviour and to prove self-conformity with the community” (Ministry of Education, KSA, 1995).

• **Types of Counselling in Schools in KSA:**

  – Religious and moral counselling.
  – Educational counselling.
  – Vocational counselling.
  – Preventive counselling.

• **Tasks to be performed by the School Counsellor in KSA:**

  – To help the student to take full advantage of their abilities.
  – Improving the positivity in regards to the Islamic faith.
  – Identifying students that are talented and skilled.
  – Following up on both high achievers and low level students.
  – Creating and implementing plans for counselling.
  – Facilitating disabled students in appropriate and suitable ways.
  – Assisting students educationally, socially and psychologically.
  – Achieving and maintaining harmony among all members of the educational establishment.
  – To maintain harmony between parents and the school (General Administration of Counselling, 1991).
Point 1: Religious oversight of schools by the Ministry of Education (MoE).

Point 2: Islamic (Sharia’ah) law requires separate male and female schooling.

Point 3: Different educational ‘tiering’ of students (enter secondary school later).

Point 4: School counsellors may not be sufficiently qualified or trained.

Point 5: School counsellors may be subject to conflicts with own religion or beliefs.

Point 6: Lack of professional identity and status, of a clearly defined role, and of administrative support and adequate facilities (Al-Ghamdi, 1999).

Point 7: Differences among principals regarding the role of school counsellor, which suggests a potential for ambiguity and role conflict (Alghamdi and Riddick, 2011).
Cultural Values Affecting Schools and School Counselling in KSA

• **View 1: KSA is a Collectivist Society.**
The ‘closed nature’ of groupings may sometimes mean young students do not feel comfortable discussing personal or family matters, or student counsellors feel isolated.

• **View 2: High level of Uncertainty Avoidance.**
Highly conservative culture with many traditional and religious rules, laws, polices, and practices restricting freedoms which may sometimes inhibit change.

• **View 3: Large Power Distance.**
Citizens do not have a strong political voice; no changes unless agreed by school leaders.

• **View 4: Masculinity vs. Femininity.**
Dominant patriarchal society; separation of males and females; restrictions on females.

• **View 5: Long-Term over Short-Term Orientation.**
Emphasises social order; long-term goals; difficult to make quick changes (Finney, 2004).
Existing Views of the Role of School Counsellors in KSA

- **View 1**: the school counsellor’s role is not important.
- **View 2**: anyone can be a school counsellor.
- **View 3**: the school counsellor is there for punishments only.
- **View 4**: the school counsellor is not to be trusted.
- **View 5**: the school counsellor will not keep anything confidential.
- **View 6**: talk to your family not to a stranger.
- **View 7**: the school counsellor is never available or is never there.
- **View 8**: school counsellors do not do much so do not need money.
Research Aim and Objectives

• **Aim:**
  The main aim of the research study was to investigate and explore the challenges and problems that student counsellors might encounter in secondary schools in Afif.

• **Objectives:**
  – To understand the role of the school counsellor in a boys’ secondary school in KSA.
  – To understand the challenges and problems encountered by school counsellors from the point of view of the counsellors and of the head teachers (HTs).
  – To identify the problems that result from the counsellors’ relationships with the school administration (HTs, teachers, other staff), parents, students, and the Ministry of Education (MoE).
The research method used was ‘Mixed Methods’.

According to Creswell (2013, p.217) Mixed Methods:
- involves the collection of both qualitative (open-ended) and quantitative (closed-ended) data in response to research questions or hypotheses;
- it includes the analysis of both forms of data;
- the qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis procedures need to be conducted rigorously (i.e. sampling, information sources, data analysis steps);
- two forms of data are integrated in the research design (e.g. merging, connecting, embedding the data);
- mixed methods design emphasises the timing of data collection (concurrent or consequential) and the emphasis (equal or unequal) for each database;
- mixed methods procedures informed by a philosophical world-view or a theory.

In this research the quantitative data was used to support any findings made in the qualitative interviews.

The research used a total population of 44 (21 HTs and 23 school counsellors) based in Afif secondary schools for boys (the Participants).

Data collection and analysis took place from 2008 to 2009.

Qualitative Research Stage: semi-structured interviews five Participants located within various secondary schools located in Afif.
Research Method (cont)

• **Extracts from Interview Questions:**
  – To what extent do you think that all student counsellors in Afif schools are properly qualified and receive adequate training to do their task?
  – How does the head teacher perceive the student counsellor’s role?
  – What are the significant challenges and problems that the student counsellor faces in schools?
  – What support does the counsellor receive from all the people and officers he must deal with?

• **Quantitative Research Stage:**
  – Questionnaire distributed to a random sample of 12 HTs and 18 school counsellors.
  – The questionnaire covered a broad range of possible problems encountered by school counsellors from the point of view of the HTs and the school counsellors.
  – The questionnaire employed a five-point scale (always, often, sometimes, rarely, never) as responses to various issues which were represented as statements.
  – The statements were divided over four dimensions relating to problems encountered by school counsellors: (1) MoE; (2) School Administration and teachers; (3) counsellors themselves; and (4) students and parents.

• **Research Limitations:**
  – Study was not longitudinal and not enough time spent to obtain a larger sample.
  – Gender separation in KSA meant that interviews were only carried out with males.
  – The focus of the study was limited to school counsellors working in secondary schools in Afif.
**Findings: Major Themes**

- **Problems relating to the MoE.**
  - **FINANCIAL** - Insufficient financial and other support.
  - **UNDERSTAFFED** - Insufficient number of student counsellors in schools.
  - **UNDERQUALIFIED** - MoE does not require relevant qualifications for school counsellors.

- **Problems relating to the school administration (HTs).**
  - **REPUTATION** - HTs may not take school counsellors seriously.
  - **WORK** - HTs may believe that school counsellors does not work hard and does not achieve much.
  - **WORKLOADS** - Heavy workloads for school counsellors as lack of administrative support provided.

- **Problems relating to the school teachers.**
  - **LACK OF UNDERSTANDING** - teachers think that school counsellors have an easy job or do nothing.
  - **LACK OF RESPECT** - teachers do not refer students or deal with school counsellors in a professional way.

- **Problems relating to the school counsellors.**
  - **UNQUALIFIED** - many counsellors are not qualified and therefore do not know what to do or how to do it.
  - **LACK OF WORK PREPARATION** - many counsellors do not prepare enough for their duties.
  - **DEMORALISED** - many counsellors feel de-motivated and demoralised because of their work/reputation.

- **Problems relating to students and parents.**
  - **LACK OF UNDERSTANDING** - many students/parents do not trust/do not understand the counsellor’s role.
  - **LACK OF COMMUNICATION** - many students/parents do not communicate or co-operate with counsellors.
Findings: Key Themes

- **Understaffing (lower quality of counselling)**
  - “there is difficulty in the job because there are too many students to deal with in the school” [Interviewee C3]

- **De-motivated staff (lower quality of counselling)**
  - “There are those counsellors who are not motivated which can be detrimental to their performance as student counsellors” [Interviewee C3]

- **Lack of sufficient or adequate training (lower quality of counselling)**
  - “if we had more training then we would be more able to overcome the problems that we encounter” [Interviewee C1]
  - “Although there are counselling courses provided they do not last for a sufficient amount of time and the materials provided are not suitable for the actual problems and objectives that the counsellors must deal with” [Interviewee C1]

- **Limited budgets (lower quality of counselling)**
  - “the budget allocated for counselling is not sufficient” [Interviewee C4]
  - “my job would be much easier if I had more money so I can purchase tools and provide additional programs for the students” [Interviewee C4]
Findings: Key Themes (cont)

• **A misunderstanding of the counsellor’s role (lack of co-operation)**
  – “teachers think that the counsellor has an easy job with a comfortable office” [Interviewee C1]
  – “the teachers consider that the role of the counsellors is to simply give out punishments, if the student misbehaves or neglects their homework, they are referred to the counsellor by the teacher” [Interviewee C2]

• **Cultural traditions or behaviours (obstacles to effective counselling)**
  – Lack of trust between student and student counsellor.
  – Students discussing problems seen as a sign of weakness.
  – Closed society and tribal and familial bonds mean private matters stay private.
  – Parents disapprove of student counselling services – ‘keep it in the family’.
  – “because of the culture and society in Saudi Arabia it is common for parents to be uncomfortable with the involvement of the counsellor in their son’s life because they are considered private for the family” [Interviewee C4]
  – “we only see parents when their sons have a problem or are in trouble” [Interviewee C5]
Interpretation and Discussion of Research

• THE SAME:
  – Saudi children are just like other children around the world.
  – They are vulnerable.
  – They need to be understood and listened to.
  – Many may not be able to talk to friends or parents (e.g. religious reasons).

• OBSTACLES:
  – Lack of support by HTs, students, parents, MoE, and general public.
  – Lack of awareness by everybody – no one talks about it.
  – Financial restrictions – lack of financial budgets; no training; no facilities.

• CULTURE:
  – Saudi culture/tradition may make it difficult for school counsellors to be accepted.
  – Less open and hierarchical society – need more support by the MoE and HTs.

• FACILITATION:
  – School counsellors need more help, more training, more money.
  – They need help and advice from other experienced counsellors.
  – Increased co-operation from other education institutions.
Challenging Existing Views of the Role of School Counsellors

• In order to challenge existing views in Saudi society, school counsellors need many different types of support.
  
  – More training for student counsellors.
  – More qualified student counsellors.
  – More professional and academic research.
  – More administrative support.
  – Increased financial support.
  – Increased authority and autonomy.
  – Increased collaboration between counsellors.
Daring to Make an Impact: *Dynamic Changes Made*

**Dynamic Changes made as Director of Student Counselling in Afif:**

- **Change 1:**
  - All student counsellors in Afif have minimum educational qualifications, i.e. they have graduated in relevant counselling, psychology, or social work subjects.

- **Change 2:**
  - Established a trial Centre for Counselling Services in one school so students, teachers, or parents can attend to obtain confidential counselling or guidance.

- **Change 3:**
  - Established and distributed to schools a confidential email address for *(both male and female)* students, teachers, parents, or student counsellors to deal with any counselling issues in a private and confidential manner.

- **Change 4:**
  - Established regular 1 week training courses offered every school semester to inform student counsellors about counselling, to undertake workshops, or to inform them about new counselling news, or new journals or magazines relating to student counselling, or to talk about school counselling issues.

22nd March 2014

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Daring to Make an Impact: Personal Research Undertaken

- **3 Year PhD Research into School Counselling in the KSA, The University of Nottingham**
- First year of my PhD research – completing ‘Confirmation of Status’ Paper in May 2014.
- Literature Review has shown that there is a lack of relevant research in this area.
- Currently researching ways into understanding the existing problems surrounding school counsellors, the views of school counsellors, and potential solutions to school counselling problems in KSA.
- This would include using **interventions that might use specially designed school counsellor training and materials to improve counselling practices or in-depth interviews, or both.**

- **Supervisors:**
  
  **Dr Belinda Harris**
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  [http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/people/belinda.harris](http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/education/people/belinda.harris)

  Harris (2010)
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  **Dr Max Biddulph**
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  Biddulph (2008a)
  Biddulph (2008b)
  Biddulph (2010)
  Biddulph (2012)
Daring to Make an Impact: Future Research

• Areas for Future research into School Counselling in the KSA:

  – How counselling in schools should operate (official guidelines, use of case notes, confidentiality notices, feedback systems, parental interest and involvement).

  – Setting up a counselling service in schools.

  – Support by HTs and other Teachers.

  – Support by the Government of the KSA and by the MoE.

  – Procedures for employing a counsellor in a school (minimum qualifications, personal qualities, record checks, insurance issues).
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