

Status of Counselling Services in Universities in Kenya: Implications for Counselling

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Abstract

The study set out to investigate the status of counselling services in universities in Kenya. The study was conducted in 2 public universities in Kenya. The population included first year undergraduate students studying medicine and surgery. The sample size was 104 students and 6 counsellors. The study found that the status of counselling services in the two selected universities was adequately favourable with available counselling rooms, adequate basic facilities, appropriate location and accessibility to counselling services. Implications of this finding are discussed.

Keywords: Status of counselling services, universities, medicine and surgery

1. INTRODUCTION

Most counselling sessions in universities are pegged on various variables, such as the theoretical orientation of the counsellor and the processes of counselling. However, little regard is given to the counselling context, where the counselling takes place, which is a core element in the healing process. In a study carried out in the USA on the effectiveness of physical environment on counselling, Pressly and Heesacker (2001) identified that common architectural characteristic of space including accessories, color, furniture, and room design, lighting, smell, sound, texture, and thermal conditions affect counselling outcomes in the healing process during counselling.

A study carried out in Australia by Sanders and Lehmann (2018) stressed the importance of modelling counselling rooms to enhance an interplay between physical and spatial features such as paint colors, natural lighting, seat positioning, temperature, and clients' thoughts and feelings. These physical-spatial features have contributed to the healing process during counselling.

Carpman and Grant (2016) affirm that clients' design-related needs are essential in enhancing the psycho-social, emotional and physical needs of clients. They suggest that accessories in a counselling room such as plants and objects like sculptures provide mental stimulation to clients, making the counselling room comfortable and appealing to counsellors, thereby revealing a counsellor's character and personality. A room facility where clients visit

In a study done in China, Liu, Ji, Chen, and Ye (2014) found that colors in a counselling room have spectrum effectiveness that triggers physiological processes in both the counsellor and the client to particular colors. For instance, light has been known to determine a client's perception of color, texture, and form (Ching, 2015). Furniture and room design, especially positioning of furniture in a counselling room and the distance between furniture, create mutual understanding between the counsellor and the clients, bearing in mind their gender (Pressly and Heesacker, 2001). Therefore, although not directly influencing the counselling outcome, they are crucial for creating a conducive environment for counselling. As highlighted in the opening paragraph, these are aspects of counselling that are least reflected upon. This study sought to establish the status of facilities from which counseling services was undertaken.

Lighting in a counselling room affects a client's perception of his awareness of aspects of space, such as physical and emotional (Mirjam et al., 2017). Lighting also affects a counsellor's productivity in that a counsellor will have a positive perception during counselling and will have less boredom when lighting is adequate in a room (Liu et al., 2014). Therefore, counselling is likely to be more successful if a counselling room has soft lighting or natural lighting. For example, Erlichman and Carpman and Grant (2016) found that unpleasant smell and sounds trigger unhappy memories among clients while pleasant smells and sounds in a counselling room enhance healing.

Additionally, Pressley and Heesacker (2001) found that unpleasant odours such as bad breath and an intense perfume make clients and counsellors negatively evaluate each other unconsciously during the counseling process. Therefore, smells in a counselling room determine automatically how the counsellor and client assess each other. These are overshadowed factors, yet they contribute to the outcome of counselling. This study sought to establish the status of facilities from which counseling services was undertaken.

Designing a counselling room, calls for considerations on the quality and dimensions of sound because they affect counselling. Sanders and Lehmann (2018) found that slow and quiet music, such as water sounds, can actively calm emotional clients. Additionally, effectiveness counselling can thus be influenced by the type of sound in the counselling room as these sounds may keep external noises from interfering with the counselling process. Textures like walls, ceilings, floors, furniture, soft or hard surfaces create illusionary or real emotions that evoke past memories through associations (Ching, 2015). Soft texture in counselling room absorbs sound and boosts feelings of privacy in clients (Pressely, & Heesacker, 2001). However, there is limited

empirical data to explain whether these aspects are considered crucial in university counseling. The above mentioned was a gap that this study sought to address.

Arguably, all these factors are essential in facilitating counselling. The Common Factors Theory underscores the importance of context in effecting desired counselling outcomes. Thus, the context is a moderating factor that communicates to both counsellors and clients the importance of counselling services in restoring psychological well-being, which plays a crucial role in academic performance and retention rate.

The literature reviewed herein has demonstrated scarcity in counselling services researches in Kenyan universities and how it affects students' academic performance and retention. This study, therefore, endeavoured to investigate the status of counselling services in enhancing academic performance and retention rates in universities.

2. METHODS AND PROCEDURES

Quantitative and qualitative data was collected from the participants. For collection of general information and accurate comparison, quasi-experimental design was employed for quantitative data. The study was a survey research design that used an *ex-post facto* design. Qualitative data was collected with the help of a phenomenological design. This study was carried out in two public universities in Kenya.

3. RESULTS

The objective of the study was to ascertain the status of counselling services in universities in Kenya. The common factor theory that informed this study asserts that context is crucial in effective counselling. It was essential to establish the status so as to authenticate conditions under which counselling services are offered. Participants in the experiment group provided information on the status of counselling in universities. Table 1 presents the respondents' responses to the status of counselling services in the university.

Table 1 shows that 37.3% of participants in the experiment group strongly agreed that counselling rooms are adequately furnished and comfortable. Participants who agreed were 37.3%. Participants who were not sure were 21.6%. Those who disagreed were 2.0% and strongly disagreed were 2.0%. As to whether counselling rooms are located in private places ensuring students confidentiality, 41.2% strongly agreed, 35.3% agreed, 7.8% were not sure, 13.7% disagreed and 2.0% strongly disagreed. In line with space, 21.6% strongly agreed, 47.1% agreed, 19.6% were not sure, 9.8% disagreed and 2.0% strongly disagreed.

Table 1: Experiment Group Participants' Response to Counselling Status

Statement	Strongly agree		Agree		Not sure		Disagree		Strongly disagree		Total	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	n	%
I find counselling rooms to be adequately furnished and comfortable	19	37.3	19	37.3	11	21.6	1	2.0	1	2.0	51	100
Counselling rooms are located in private places ensuring me confidentiality	21	41.2	18	35.1	4	7.8	7	13.7	1	2.0	51	100
Counselling rooms have adequate space so that there is no sense of intrusion on my personal space.	11	21.6	24	47.1	10	19.6	5	9.8	1	2.0	51	100
Average	17	33.4	20.3	39.8	8.3	16.3	4.3	8.5	1	2	51	100

In summary, 73.2% participants were in agreement that the status of counselling services is adequately favourable. Those who were not sure were 16.3% while 10.5% were in agreement that the status of counselling services is less favourable. This summary of finding is presented in Figure 1

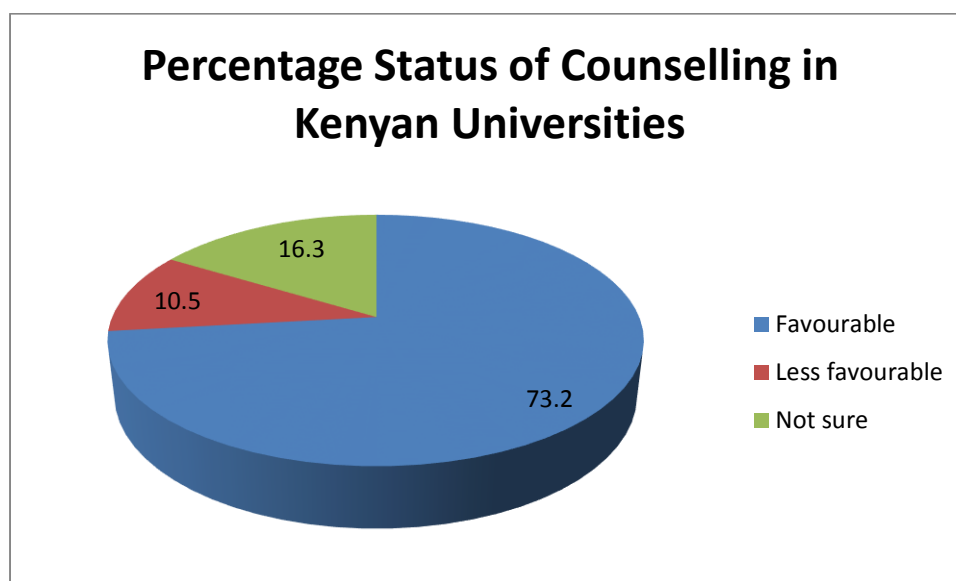
**Figure 1:** Status of Counselling in Kenyan Universities

Figure 1 indicates that majority of students' participants (73.2%) are in favour that counselling rooms have adequate infrastructure that make them feel comfortable during counselling, 10.5% are less in favour while 16.3 are not sure. Sanders and Lehmann (2018) stressed the importance of modelling counselling rooms to enhance an interplay between physical-spatial features such as comfortable seats and seats positioning in promoting clients' thoughts and feelings. This is an indication that universities have observed the prerequisites that can facilitate effectiveness counselling. Pressly and Heesacker (2001) observe that presence of furnishings such as furniture; plants and sculptures contribute positively towards the healing process as they help diffuse anxiety in clients. These findings were collaborated by qualitative data as indicated as follows:

“...during the counselling session...I felt at home ...the seat was good compared to what I have in class...we talked a lot.... coz I was feeling comfortable throughout...” [Female student, 19 years]

The disclosure is in line with Saari (2002) who found that counsellors' offices that are comfortable trigger clients to freely communicate sensitive information and help in positive counselling outcomes.

Majority of the participants were satisfied with the location of counselling rooms and thus they felt that their privacy and confidentiality was secure during the counselling process. As noted by a participant:

“...I find counselling room more private ... located in good place with little activities around it...like you don't find students around that place.... I am comfortable knowing nobody knows what I am up to...” [Female student, 21 years]

The location of a counselling room is important because it directly influences clients' attitudes towards seeking assistance and affects the depth of disclosure during counselling. Lack of privacy has been attributed to lower levels of disclosure during counselling session's thereby limiting client communication (Pearson, & Wilson, 2012). This is also supported by Omonyi (2016) who found that counselling rooms that are too open and those located next to administration offices negatively influence students' attitude towards going for help. Effective counselling may not be attained if the privacy of students is compromised by the location of the counselling service within the university. These findings show that the status of counselling services in Kenyan universities is favourable, meaning that the university administration find counselling an important aspect in the student support services and will therefore provide what is needed for the service to function to help enhance students' academic performance and retention rate. Participants were asked whether counselling rooms have adequate space so that there is no sense of intrusion on their personal space. A student participant commented about space in the counselling room as:

“.... the space is ok with me...am comfortable ...” [Male Student, 19 years].

The size of the counselling rooms and their requisite facilities provide a counselling context for a collaborative interpersonal relationship between the counsellor and client. This context according to the common factors theory provides a treatment setting where new learning experiences occur and lead to client changes during sessions. Kastrani, Deliyanni-Kouimtzi and Athanasiades (2017) classify “space” as a counselling tool that builds client-counsellor relationship during the counselling process. The implication is that the physical elements of space can influence clients’ first impressions and might enhance their ability to build a positive and healthy working collaboration for more client growth because space provides an initial feeling of safety.

In summary the study shows that the status of university counselling services are favorable because: counselling rooms are adequately furnished, comfortable and are located in places that ensure privacy and security. According to Pressly and Heesacker (2001) favorable conditions will affect counselling outcome in clients during counselling. Furthermore, Pearson and Wilson (2012) add that physical comfort of the counselling room enables clients to feel at ease and therefore interact in-depth during the counselling process. In depth sharing will enable the counsellor to pick the crucial issues affecting the client thereby helping them become more aware of the feelings, thoughts, and anxiety, which might affect their academic performance and retention rate.

The findings show that counselling services at universities are provided in favourable physical conditions thus meeting the requirements of a counselling status by the World Health Organisation (2013) which stresses that the status of counselling should have a conducive physical environment. This in turn nurtures a good emotional climate in a counselling relationship. These favourable conditions are perceived to facilitate effectiveness counselling to achieve positive outcomes in line with academic performance as well as retention rates. However, it will be recalled that the common factor theory that informed this study suggest that many factors influence counselling outcome among them counsellors and clients’ characteristics as well as the process of change. Therefore, it was important to establish whether the services offered could influence change that would facilitate retention and academic performance of students. These are examined in the next section.

4. IMPLICATIONS

University senates should put in place effectiveness counselling programmes and allocate adequate resources in terms of funding and staffing. University administrators need to emphasize career counselling aspects within the few weeks of students’ enrolment. The universities need to employ more counsellors to work in the counselling centres, thereby lessening the workload of existing counsellors to enable them to become more productive.

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