WHY DO STUDENTS GO TO COUNSELLING?

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Abstract: *This research set out to identify the reasons why students attend the faculty/university counseling office and to identify students' preferred ways to promote the services of their faculty/university counseling office for the years 2019 and 2022. The research method used was a questionnaire survey (Alpha Chronbach coefficient is .790), applied to 207 students. The counselor's personality matters the most (5.2464- on average value) when students address the counseling office, followed by the promotion made to the counseling office (5.1304 average) and the students' interest (5.0242 average). The reasons for addressability to counseling is centered on: the need for individual counseling services (105 choices, N-207), the need for career counseling (47 choices) and the students' need for information (15 choices). Students acknowledge that they need individual counseling services (105 choices) and career counseling services (47 choices) but some are unaware of the existence of the counseling office (69 choices) and would need counseling, because they are not self-confident (51 choices). The ways students prefer to promote counseling services are flyers (26.06%) (mean - 3.69 with standard deviation - 13.41) and Facebook posts or on student groups (25.31%) (mean - 3.58 with standard deviation - 13.43).*

Keywords: *student counselling; counselling addressability reasons; promotion of counselling services.*

Introduction

Psychological counselling is defined by the British Association for Counselling (1989, 1992) as the professional, relationship based on principles, within the client is helped to gain a better understanding of self and to support their emotional growth and optimal development of their own personal resources. The main purpose of counselling is to support the developmental

process of young people, a process that does not necessarily results in brilliant academic achievements, but often it offers the chance to identify possible alternative paths, that might be compatible with their aspirations and inclinations (Adamo, et al., 2010). The person who supports this process of (self)knowledge, supports them to find meaning in their experience, so that they can manage their life in a less distressed way (Godelek, Kaya, 2012). There is a correlation between core knowledge, communication skills, cultural skills and counselling competence (Setiyowati, et al., 2019).

Background

In universities/colleges, The Counselor provides academic (educational), vocational, and psychological counseling (McCarthy, 2014). Students are seeking counseling services as the number is increasing and the severity of problems is increasing (Prince, 2015). There are students who turn to the counsellor out of a need for self-awareness or for support in overcoming academic difficulties (group counselling with problem-solving approach enhances educational self-efficacy - Sohrabi, Mohammadi, Aghdam, 2013), or those in managing emotional difficulties (Lindsay & Langevin, 2017), or for exploring the field of cross-cultural therapy, in the case of young people who are divided between family culture and culture in academia ((Ilhan, et al., 2012; Terranova-Cecchini & Toffle, 2014), for managing crisis situations (serious illness, divorce, death, pandemics (Ahmad, et al., 2021), or for managing (self)destructive behaviours by improving the development of knowledge, attitude, confidence and skills of students in addictive situations (alcohol, drugs, food, medication, etc.) (Xia, et al., 2021), for integrating students with disabilities (hearing, visual, motor) and raising peer awareness of special educational needs issues (Pisano, Miller, 2018) or for supporting gifted and/or gifted students (Ishak & Bakar, 2010). To the situations listed above, the issue of career counselling is added. Students face difficulties in making career decisions, know too little about the processes leading to career choice, about career options, about possible career-related barriers (Milot-Lapointe, Savard, Le Corff, 2018), about job opportunities and their expectations for the future. Aspirations are not always related to their own knowledge and skills, lacking a coherent career plan (Crişan, Pavelea, Ghimbuluţ, 2015). In Romania, one of the most important sources of anxiety for students is their professional future. In this respect, career counselling comes as a solution. Universities offer career counselling services for prospective students or focus on tracking the employability of graduates (Richiţeanu-Năstase, Stăiculescu, 2015). A 2010 survey stated that more than

50% of students preferred to deal with their own problems and seek career and academic help on their own (Ishak, Bakar, 2010). Hopefully things have now changed for the better.

A study conducted at Ankara University, Faculty of Education provides insights into students' counselling needs: Academic needs ("exam anxiety", "poor study skills", "fear of failure", "managing procrastination", "academic pressures"), relational needs ("relating to faculty" , "public speaking anxiety", "being assertive" and "relationship difficulties"), emotional needs ('finding meaning in life', 'emotional instability', 'shyness', 'controlling behaviour') and career issues ('career uncertainty', 'feeling anxious about finding a job') (Bishop, Bauer and Becker, 1998; Bostanci, et al. , 2005; Gizir, 2005 ; Güneri, 2006; Güneri et al, 2003). Research Researchers have also investigated the less common needs for which students turn to counselling: self-destructive behaviours ('drug use', 'suicidal tendencies', 'excessive alcohol or tobacco use' and 'conduct disorder'), sexual concerns ('anxiety about contracting a sexually transmitted disease, including AIDS', 'dealing with sexual harassment'), problem gambling and excessive credit card spending (Gallagher, 2009; Kitzrow, 2003). Differences in the level of the year of study have also been investigated. Thus, freshmen year 1, reported more concern about "exam anxiety", "adjusting to university life" and "relationship difficulties" while senior year students had more "job anxiety" and "career uncertainty" (Atik, Yalçın, 2010). In general, students accessing counselling services exhibit difficulties in the area of relationship, revealing an internalist emotional-adaptive profile (Collins & Mowbray, 2005; Cimino, et al., 2010; Biasi, et al., 2015). Salovey & D'Andrea (2010) are of the same opinion, adding academic educational difficulties as addressability issues. These difficulties refer to: exam anxiety, concentration problems, low self-esteem, depressive states, vague fears (Kreß, et al., 2015).

If we focus on the accessibility to counselling services and look at it from the perspective of gender and age differences, it is reported that: women address more than men, young female students seek psychological help more often than their older female colleagues. The problems they address come from the social area (high scores in problems related to an avoidant personality and difficulties in establishing interpersonal relationships) and the emotional area (high scores in depressive behaviors and anxiety) (Biasi, et al., 2015).

Another segment of students who come to the counselling office are students with disabilities. A research conducted by Margaritoiu, Eftimie, Enache (2011) states that for: 94% of mentaly disabled students, the choice of a profession is conditioned by the educational system – both, the educational

offer and the family, were neglecting their professional interest; 86% of youth want to practice a profession other than the one obtained after graduation; 67% do not know the techniques to search and apply for a job. The authors of the article above, draw attention to the fact that it is necessary to develop career counselling programs for this type of students, in order to maximize their chances of employment (Margaritoiu, Eftimie, Enache, 2011).

Let's not forget about foreign (international) students, who, are coming to a different country, with a different culture and customs, may have difficulties to adapt. They encountered problems related to language, food, habits (Ilhan, et al., 2012). For Asian international students coming to study in the US, there are issues related to: perceived influence of social networks on the decision to seek counseling, perceived stigma, expectations of a medical model of counseling, perceived cultural incompetence of counselors, positive counseling experience (Liu, et al., 2020; Liu, J. & Gao, L., 2021) emerged. Universities should implement a range of programs and activities aimed at increasing interaction between international and Euro-American students. Three factors have been identified as critical in this regard: self-esteem, educational barriers, and system problems (subjectively graded tests by the Professor, poverty, discrimination) (Cervantes, 1988). Rates of use of counseling services by international students, however, are low despite their increasing presence in American colleges and universities. One study examined international students' use of counseling services at a Midwestern university over a 5-year period. Their results indicated that international students underutilized counseling services; more women used services than men; the majority of international students who accessed counseling services were Asian; and the majority of students who accessed services had appointments set only after exam sessions were completed (Hwang, Bennett, Beauchemin, 2014).

Lipshits-Braziler, Gati & Tatar (2015) proposed a model of strategies for coping with career indecision (SCCI), comprising three main types of strategies: productive coping, assistance/support seeking and non-productive coping. It was found that a decrease in the use of non-productive coping strategies and an increase in the use of productive coping strategies predicted students' progress in making a career decision (Lipshits-Braziler, Gati, Tatar, 2015). A career counseling program conducted over six meetings significantly reduced career-related indecision, anxiety, uncertainty, and insecurity (Obi, 2015; Zarei, Shaikhi Fini, Fini, H.K., 2010).

It has been observed that the use of an approach with motivational interviewing, discussion, demonstration, role-playing, self-assessment and

interevaluation, are effective means to build the grid of necessary skills of students engaged in counseling (Ghasemzadeh, Saadat, 2011; Garza, et al., 2020).

Academic advising is considered as one of the most important factors of students' educational success, as it guides them in the right direction of academic success and helps them to cope with academic challenges, especially students with learning disabilities (Thawabieh & Atallah, 2011). Career counseling also has long-term impact observing higher qualitative levels of participants in implementing career projects, a decrease in indecision, longer-term career projects and a stabilization in terms of students' life satisfaction (Perdrix, Rossier, 2012). There are also weaknesses of counselling activities: students can wait quite a long time for and between appointments, stigmatisation of their poor mental health and their ability to seek help (Gasteiger, Fleming, Day, 2020). Based on the findings, awareness campaigns are recommended to be done by university counsellors for students so that they understand the importance of these activities (Yunusa, 2020). The increase in the number of applications requires an increase in the number of counselling centres where qualified staff are employed (Yuksel-Sahina, 2012; Kreß, et al., 2015). It can also train university's staff on counseling issues related to the problematic of academic counseling, since they are among the first people to notice the difficulties that their students face. (Dibia & Obi, 2013).

Research Methodology

The present research aimed to: 1). identify the reasons why students approach the faculty/university counselling office; 2). identify the preferred ways for students to promote the services of the faculty/university counselling office. The questionnaire survey was the method used in the research. The instrument developed for this research had 27 items, grouped into six dimensions: students' addressability to the counseling office, services offered by the counseling office, students' counseling needs, reasons for addressing the counseling office, and strategies for promoting the counseling office. The items used were: closed, dual or multiple choice or open items. The present questionnaire was developed and validated specifically for this research (Chronbach's Alpha = .902, high value coefficient).

Data were collected from May to June 2022. The questionnaire was self-administered. Participants were assured of data confidentiality. On average, completing the questionnaire took 10 minutes per participant. Completion of the instrument was done by about 90-95% of the students of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences - Transilvania University of Brasov -

specialization in Educational Sciences. Initially 215 questionnaire were collected, out of which the incomplete ones were eliminated. Consent was obtained prior to the application of the instruments, explaining to the subjects the purpose of the research, the research methodology and instrument, the related risks and the rights of each research participant.

The group of participants consisted of 207 subjects, 1st and 2nd year students of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences - Transilvania University of Brasov - Romania - specialization in Educational Sciences. Of these, most of them, 93.7% (194 subjects) were female, the remaining 6.3% (13 subjects) were male. According to background, there were 92 subjects (44.4%) from urban areas, with 115 (55.6%) subjects from rural areas. Looking at where they live, with most students coming from rural areas, it was found that 39.6% (82 subjects) live in a dormitory, then 31.4% (65 subjects) live in rented accommodation and 27.1% (56 subjects) live in Brasov with their family. Very small percentages, 1.5% (3 subjects) and 0.5% (1 subject) respectively, declare that they live in a privately owned apartment, alone, or live with their family but commute. If we look at the group of subjects in terms of age, the majority of subjects are aged between 18 - 20 years, namely 144 subjects (69.6%), followed by 57 subjects (27.5%) aged between 21 - 25 years; 1 subject (0.5%) aged between 26 - 30 years and 5 subjects (2.4%) aged over 31 years. All of them were undergraduate students in the daytime form of education. More specifically, 51.7% (107 subjects) were first year students, the remaining 48.3% (100 subjects) were second year students. Most of them aged 18 - 20 years, as marital status, are single (94.7% - 196 subjects), only 5.3% - 11 subjects, being married.

Results

The interpretation of the results began with the analysis of the first objective: to identify the reasons why students approach the faculty/university counselling office. We expected that if students knew about the existence of the counselling office and the services it provides, they would contact it. But, the highest addressability was recorded due to the personality of the counsellor. The advisors human side, mattered most (5.2464- on average value), followed by promotion made (5.1304 average) and student interest (5.0242) (see Table 1). The knowledge of the existence of the counselling office and the knowledge about the services offered by the counselling office, were placed as the last reasons.

Table 1. Addressability of the counseling office

	Average	Std. dev.
Addressability_ knowledge of the existence of the counseling office	4.7923	17.686
Addressability_ knowledge of the practice's services	4.9275	17.660
Addressability_ students' needs	4.9420	17.645
Addressability_ student interest	5.0242	17.629
Addressability_ promotion made	5.1304	17.607
Approachability personality of the counselor	5.2464	17.641

We aimed to investigate more closely the reasons for addressability. Therefore, the questionnaire presented two open-ended items. The first of these items was: "I think students turn to the counselling office for that............". The responses received were concentrated around 3 broad themes and 11 sub-themes. The broad themes were: the need for individual counselling services, the need for career counselling and the need for information. There were also students who did not respond to this item, so the first of the themes recorded 105 choices (N-207), the second 47 choices and the third 15 choices. This is basically the broad areas that counselling and guidance centres in universities and colleges deal with.
The sub-themes were identified as follows:
Theme 1. the need for individual counselling services
- the need for guidance/support in different personal problems/needs
- the need for guidance of qualified people
- are not sure of themselves / do not trust themselves (see, Bishop, Bauer and Becker, 1998; Bostanci, et al., 2005; Gizir, 2005 ; Güneri, 2006; Güneri et al., 2003)
- have specific educational, academic problems (see, Sohrabi, Mohammadi, Aghdam, 2013; Salovey & D'Andrea, 2010))
Theme 2. The need for career counselling
- concretely want career counselling
- they want to be informed about job placement and career development opportunities (see, Milot-Lapointe, Savard, Le Corff, 2018)
- they want support in drawing up career plans (see Crişan, Pavelea, Ghimbuluţ, 2015).
- they want support in choosing a career path
- they want to know their skills (see Crişan, Pavelea, Ghimbuluţ, 2015)
Theme 3. need for information
- need information / more information
- have doubts

The second item that wanted to deepen the addressability to the counselling office was: "I think students do NOT approach the counselling office because.....". It is the reverse meaning of the item analysed above and recorded 5 themes and 18 sub-themes as follows:

Theme 1. Lack of awareness of the existence of the counselling office - 69 choices
- did not know there was such a couseling office
- they do not know the benefits of the services of the practice

Theme 2. Lack of confidence in themselves as a person - 51 choices
- lack courage
- are shy (see, Cimino, et al., 2010; Biasi, et al., 2015)
- are introverts (see, Lindsay & Langevin, 2017)
- shame intervenes (see, Liu, et al., 2020).

Theme 3. Not for me - 43 choices
- do not need support from the cabinet
- do not need the services offered by the cabinet (see, Ishak, Bakar, 2010)
- are not interested
- do not have time

Theme 4. Lack of trust in the counsellor / his/her activities - 11 choices
- are skeptical about the activities of the counsellor
- do not trust the counsellor's activities
- don't know what the counsellor's reaction will be
- don't know exactly how it will be / what it will be

Theme 5. Stereotypes related to counselling activity - 11 choices
- are afraid of being seen differently
- are afraid of being judged by others and stigmatized (Gasteiger, Fleming, Day, 2020)
- fear of being marginalized

Students acknowledge that they need individual counselling (105 choices) and career counselling (47 choices) but are unaware of the existence of counselling offices (69 choices) and would need it because they are not confident (51 choices). It attracts attention the high number of choices (43 choices) of students who state that it is not the case of accessing counseling services, by them that they access counseling services (Ishak, Bakar, 2010). Could it be out of mistrust, lack of knowledge or self-sufficiency?

Because there were many students from rural backgrounds in the study group (55.6%) t-scores were calculated for their background. The significance threshold for all calculated values is less than 0.05, which means that there are statistically significant differences between urban and rural people. The means

obtained by urban students are higher than those from rural areas (see Table 2).

Table 2. T-test for Equality of Means - by innate environment background

		Mean	Std. d	t	df	Sig*
Adresabilitate_cunoaşterea existenţei cabinetului	Equal variances assumed	-2.245	205	.026	R - 2.3478	R - 9.10662
	Equal variances not assumed	-2.063	111.5,85	.041	U - 7.8478	U - 24.23372
Adresabilitate_cunoaşterea serviciilor cabinetului	Equal variances assumed	-2.236	205	.026	R - 2.4957	R - 9.09055
	Equal variances not assumed	-2.056	111.567	.042	U - 7.9674	U - 24.20174
Adresabilitate_nevoile studenţilor	Equal variances assumed	-2.203	205	.029	R - 2.5478	R - 9.08463
	Equal variances not assumed	-2.025	111.560	.045	U - 7.9348	U - 24.19009
Adresabilitate_interesul studenţilor	Equal variances assumed	-2.217	205	.028	R - 2.6174	R - 9.07627
	Equal variances not assumed	-2.038	111.567	.044	U - 8.0326	U - 24.16357
Adresabilitate_promovarea făcută	Equal variances assumed	-2.197	205	.029	R - 2.7478	R - 9.05911
	Equal variances not assumed	-2.019	111.525	.046	U - 8.1087	U - 24.14264
Adresabilitate_persoana şi personalitatea consilierului	Equal variances assumed	-2.130	205	.034	R - 2.9304	R - 9.23354
	Equal variances not assumed	-1.959	112.332	.053	U - 8.1413	U - 24.13359

*Sig. (2-tailed

Spearman correlations were performed and the following values were obtained: r- 437** with p-0.05 between information on employability and career development opportunities and support offered to students to make realistic career plans respectively, r - 421** with p-0.05 between counselling for employment in fields suitable for the specialization followed and information on employability and career development opportunities. These results confirm the need for career counselling for students.

The research continued with the investigation of the second objective: to identify students' preferred ways of promoting the services of the faculty/university counselling office. The majority of students (93.2% - 193 subjects) were of the opinion that for a better awareness of the services offered by the counselling office, it would be desirable to better promote them.

If it comes to the ways students prefer to promote themselves most prefer flyers (26.06%) (mean - 3.69 with standard deviation - 13.41) and Facebook posts or student groups (25.31%) (mean - 3.58 with standard deviation - 13.43) (Yunusa, 2020). At a relatively small difference, promotion is also desired through posters (24.69%) (mean - 3.49 with standard deviation - 13.44) and the least students prefer promotion done through year coordinators (23.94%) (mean - 3.39 with standard deviation - 13.46) (see Table 3).

Table 3. Mean values for students' preferences regarding the promotion of counselling services

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Promotion through year coordinators	207	3.3913	13.46252
Promotion through posters	207	3.4976	13.44708
Promotion through flyers	207	3.6908	13.41681
Promotion via Facebook posts or student groups	207	3.5845	13.43381

We analyzed how students prefer the counseling services to be promoted, and further we looked into the moment they prefer to be promoted. The criteria more often and quickly predominate, for most choices (92 subjects - 44.4%) preferring this to be done whenever necessary, then 74 subjects (35.7%) would like that services promotion to be done at the beginning of every semester (see Table 4). The option: every beginning of the academic year is chosen by only 35 students (16.9%).

Table 4. Mean values for students' preferences in promoting counselling services

	Frequency	Percent
at the beginning of each semester	74	35.7
at the beginning of each academic year	35	16.9
as often as necessary	92	44.4
Whatever	3	1.4
don't know / don't answer	3	1.4

Conclusions

In Romania, considering the context of the development of career services, there is the need for student counselling as real and growing (Cojocariu, Puiu, 2014; Cojocariu, Cojocariu-Ciotir, 2015). Universities are expected to further invest in career counselling in order to increase graduates' chances of integration (Richițeanu-Năstase, Stăiculescu, 2015). The expectation was that students' addressability to the counselling office would exist, if students knew that this office, existed within the faculty/university. But, the highest addressability was recorded due to the personality of the counsellor. The

human side of the counsellor mattered the most (5.2464- on average value), followed by promotion made (5.1304 average) and student interest (5.0242). (Prince, 2015). Awareness of the existence of the counseling office and knowledge of the services offered by the counseling office was ranked as last. There were many students in the study group who were inate from rural areas (55.6%), which is why t-scores were calculated related to their background. The significance threshold for all calculated values was less than 0.05, which means that there are statistically significant differences between people from urban and rural backgrounds. The means obtained by urban students are higher than those from rural areas. The reasons for addressability were centered on: the need for individual counseling services (105 choices, N-207), the need for career counseling (47 choices) (see, Milot-Lapointe, Savard, Le Corff, and see, Crişan, Pavelea, Ghimbuluţ, 2015) and the need for student information (15 choices). These are the broad areas that counselling and guidance centres in universities and faculties deal with. Students admit that they need individual counselling services (105 choices) and career counselling services (47 choices) but are unaware of the existence of counselling offices (69 choices) and would need counselling because they are not confident (51 choices) (see, Bishop, Bauer and Becker, 1998; Bostanci, et al, 2005; Gizir, 2005 ; Güneri, 2006; Güneri, et al., 2003). Attracting attention is the high number of choices (43 choices) of students stating that it is not the case for them to access counselling services (Ishak, Bakar, 2010). Could this be out of mistrust, ignorance or self-sufficiency? Spearman correlations were performed and the following values were obtained: r- 437** with p-0.05 between information on employability and career development opportunities and support offered to students to make realistic career plans respectively, r - 421** with p-0.05 between counselling for employment in fields suitable for the major followed and information on employability and career development opportunities. The results confirm the need for career counselling for students.

The need for counselling can be used to better promote the services of counselling offices. The ways students prefer to promote themselves are: flyers (26.06%) (mean - 3.69 with standard deviation - 13.41) and Facebook posts or student groups (25.31%) (mean - 3.58 with standard deviation - 13.43) (Yunusa, 2020). At relatively small difference, they also want to promote themselves through posters (24.69%) (mean - 3.49 with standard deviation - 13.44). The least students prefer promotion done through year coordinators (23.94%) (mean - 3.39 with standard deviation - 13.46). If we also look at the question: when do students prefer promotion to be done, it was observed that they want promotion that meets their needs. The criterion more often and quickly predominates, most (92 subjects - 44.4%) prefer it to be done as often as necessary, then 74 subjects (35.7%) would like promotion to be done at the beginning of every semester. Only 35 students (16.9%) would prefer to be

promoted at the beginning of each academic year. The issue of student counselling is important and remains open, with the desire for a true partnership between students and counsellors, the latter being in fact the link between the two main educational actors: teachers and students.

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