MEASURES AMID THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC: VIRTUAL COUNSELING AMONG SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS IN FOCUS

Rosalie E. Caminero[1]

[1]*Student, Graduate School, The Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc.*

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the lived virtual school counseling experience amid COVID-19 for Senior High School students at The Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc. At this stage in the research, virtual school counseling will be generally defined as implementing a school counseling program through technology and distance counseling. The theory guiding this study is a phenomenological theoretical framework by Edmund Husserl. It helps to provide a rich description of the lived experiences of the Senior High School students virtually amid COVID-19. The target population for this study will be fifteen (15) participants from the Senior High School whose ages are 18 years old and above and currently enrolled during the first semester of the school year 2021-2022. Seven (7) participants will join for an in-depth interview (IDI) and eight (8) of them will join for the focus group discussion (FGD). The researcher considered the Senior High School Students who were still enrolled and experienced virtual guidance and counseling when the pandemic started. From this population, a sample of fifteen (15) SHS students was purposefully selected.

KEYWORDS: *Measures amid the covid 19, pandemic, virtual, counseling, focus, senior high school*

INTRODUCTION

In the United States of America, many mental health challenges are present in the nation's schools. Children ranging from ages 2 to 17 years have been diagnosed with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) at a rate of 9.4%, which is approximately 6.1 million (CDC, 2020). In addition, the CDC reported the following for children ranging from 3-20 years of age (a) approximately 4.5 million (7.4%) have been diagnosed with a behavior problem disorder, (b) approximately 4.4 million (7.1%) have been diagnosed with an anxiety disorder, and (c) approximately 1.9 million (3.2%) have been diagnosed with a depression disorder. Subsequently, the rate of prevalence tends to be high regarding mental health issues among school-aged children. A mixed-methods study conducted by Debose (2008) revealed that peer relationships, ADHD, anxiety, and low self-esteem are among the most prevalent mental health conditions identified in schools. School counselors are trained as mental health professionals in the school setting to assist students with these conditions.

In the early 1900s, vocational guidance was used for what we know today as school counseling (Gysbers, 2010; Wimberly & Brickman, 2014). Vocational guidance was performed by school administrators and teachers to provide a sense of direction for students in terms of careers and jobs. Originally, this was the primary role of school counseling to provide career guidance. Researchers in the field noticed a change in the need for counseling services. The shift occurred during the 1960s to focus more on mental health in the school setting (Gysbers & Henderson, 2001). This setting occurred at a brick-and-mortar structure.

As the growing need for mental health services in the school setting surfaced, the need for highly skilled individuals to address these needs increased. School counselors are perfectly positioned to tackle these critical student needs due to their extensive training, knowledge, and skillset in mental health. School counseling has evolved into a comprehensive counseling program rather than a guidance position (Gysbers & Stanley, 2014). A key component of any comprehensive counseling program regardless of the school level, such as elementary, middle, or high is the essential need to address all students' social and emotional needs appropriately.

According to Kaplan (2011), Filipino children deserve the absolute best that we have to offer them. In times of distress and uncertainty, school counselors have a charge to continue to provide adequate and effective services to students. Amid the sudden school closures caused by Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), school counselors are forced to work in unfamiliar territory. As they do so, little guidance or literature exists to help shape the new normal processes. This research will provide practical knowledge for them and enhance their skill sets.

Presently, school counselors, educators, and mental health professionals find themselves in a rather peculiar situation. Earlier this year, school counselors were involuntarily shifted from providing services in a traditional setting into a virtual setting. Although school counseling services have been rendered online for decades, this pales in comparison as this transition was due to an unforeseen pandemic (American School Counselor Association, 2020). Counselors and students accustomed to attending school in a traditional setting now have to manage in a virtual world. As they construct a new normal of what education and mental health services look like amid the Coronavirus 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, they are faced with a plethora of challenges and uncertainties. In a quest to navigate these turbulent times, these practitioners must regroup and redefine their chosen methods while holding to school counseling's core mission and vision. As a result of this shift, not only do school counselors suffer, but also the students and families.

This study's sample population consists of senior high school students at the Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc. in Davao City.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design
The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the measures amid the COVID-19 pandemic through virtual counseling and its effects on Senior High School students at the Rizal Memorial Colleges. There will be seven participants for in-depth interviews (IDI) and eight (8) participants for focused group discussion (FGD). A total of fifteen (15) senior high school students who are currently enrolled in the first semester of the school year 2020-2021 will be considered significant participants in this study.

This chapter also highlights the reasons for using a phenomenological design, as well as describes the setting, sample size, the instrument of data collection, methods of data analysis, protection of human participants, and ethical concerns.

It was assumed that all participants answered interview questions honestly and to the best of their abilities. It was further assumed that the sample used for this study was representative of in-depth and focus group interviews using Google Meet as a medium of communication.

Participants and Sampling
The target population for this study will be fifteen (15) participants from the Senior High School whose ages are 18 years old and above and currently enrolled during the first semester of the school year 2021-2022. Seven (7) participants will join for an in-depth interview (IDI) and eight (8) of them will join for the focus group discussion (FGD). The researcher considered the Senior High School Students who were still enrolled and experienced virtual guidance and counseling when the pandemic started. From this population, a sample of fifteen (15) SHS students was purposefully selected.

The researcher will use Purposive sampling (also known as judgment, selective, or subjective sampling) wherein is a sampling technique in which the researcher relies on their judgment when choosing members of the population to participate in the study. This survey sampling method requires researchers to have prior knowledge about the purpose of their studies so that they can properly choose and approach eligible participants to be conducted (Denzin, 2017).

Research Instruments
The researcher made these qualitative assumptions that consist of the methods used in the process of qualitative research (Creswell 2003). The procedures used by the researcher are inductive and are based on the researcher's own experience in collecting and analyzing data. The research here is the product of the values of the researcher. Through an inductive approach, raw textual data is condensed into a brief, summary format. Clear links are established between research objectives and summary findings derived from raw data. A framework of the underlying structure of experiences or processes that are evident from the raw data is developed.

Data from interviews, field notes, and recorded videos through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions will be collected. Field notes will be used to record nonverbal communication and participants' interactions with the environment. The questionnaire was a combination of closed and open-ended questions administered by the researcher orally. A pilot test was carried out before administering the questionnaire to participants. Interviews were semi-structured, employed open-ended questions, and will be based on an interview guide. The researcher will also use a question-and-answer format so that participants may have chances to ask follow-up questions.

Data will be generated through field notes, a voice recorder or cellphone videos, and Google Meet during the interviews with participants. A piloted interview questionnaire was used with all participants. Ten participants were interviewed in two sessions of 45 minutes to 60 minutes each because of their schedules. The interval between interviews was on average one day.

Interview questions were based on the study's three research questions, which explored participants' viewpoints. Follow-up questions will also be made to clarify ambiguous comments and discrepant data. In four instances, participants preferred to discuss the ambiguities over virtual guidance and counseling

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of my study are hereby presented in this chapter which is followed by the discussions which could be explanations on the phenomenological data taken from the experiential confessions of the participants. Further, the very purpose of this study is validated in light of the recent education system in our country during the time of the pandemic. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, guidance counselors are now held accountable for supporting the mental health needs of our Senior High School Students.

This portion will introduce encouraging thoughts from the participants. Through coding, themes were formulated by the researcher for analysis and discussion. Below are the transcripts from the participants that would merit the generated themes. The participants were asked, "How do your school counselors inspire you to uplift your social and emotional needs"? Their answers are anchored on the theme of "sending inspiring quotes". This means that the participants which are the Senior High School students of the Rizal Memorial Colleges, Inc. are all aware that the virtual guidance program of the school still exists and has provided services to all the students of the Integrated Basic Education since the COVID-19 pandemic started.

Sending inspiring quotes. During the pandemic, it is very motivating if somebody will send inspiring messages that would ease the feeling of agony among students. Student life is a beautiful, yet hectic part of life. People go through all kinds of struggles during this time. As students struggle, they need to hear kind and inspiring words from the people in their lives. In a school setting, students will be more motivated and dedicated to their studies if their teachers and guidance counselors send some inspiring, encouraging, and positive messages to students who are suffering during the pandemic. These will help them better prepare themselves for the coming future. Remember that students are the backbone of the nation, and when you inspire them to become more, you build a bright future for the nation. Be humble and teach them to differentiate between good and bad. Help them to find light in their life. Send positive and inspiring messages to students and help them become good humans. Inspire them, guide them, and help them see through your experienced eyes. As a student, the most important thing to remember is that laziness is your worst enemy, and Hard Work is your best friend. Study like there's no tomorrow because if you keep putting off your studies for tomorrow, you'll probably be too late. Time can be your best friend and your worst enemy depending on whether you use it or waste it (Alexander, 2003).

According to the American School Counselor Association (2020), inspiring thoughts are an important aspect to students during the pandemic, as it allows time to process ideas and to reflect on decisions. Indeed, it is perhaps the case that managers, leaders, bosses, and entrepreneurs, undervalue the importance of quiet time. Successful entrepreneurs always have a positive outlook and are usually inspired by successful thoughts and verbatim. We even see individuals, especially sports people, engaging in chanting words or phrases, which empower them to succeed. Time is at a premium to most nowadays, so inspirational quotes bridge the gap between the availability of time and the need for swift words to motivate success.

Inspirational or motivational quotes capture and appeal to your subconscious mind, which indeed is the major portion of your entire mind. Creativity is found subtly embedded in the subconscious mind. Inspirational quotes may instantaneously change your entire thought process, directing your energies towards a positive path. It is clear that when the subconscious is constantly filled with a flow of positive commands, there is an uplift in your general outlook and personality. Psychologists recognize that positivity is vital to recovering from illness, as even the demeanor of the body is affected by negative thoughts (American School Counselor Association, 2020).

Virtual reminding. According to the American School of Counselors (2020), the role of the guidance counselor during the pandemic is to make sure that all programs designed for the students are practical, necessary, and beneficial to students. To achieve such, guidance counselors must always remind the students via virtual reminding that all moves executed have their meaning.

As schools are reopening their doors this fall, students are arriving having experienced significant learning loss, various forms of trauma, and overall disengagement. As licensed professionals trained in promoting students' social-emotional, academic, and postsecondary development, school counselors are key to supporting students' re-adjustment and learning, therefore they must always give reminders to students virtually. Regardless of whether K-12 schools have opted for in-person instruction, a hybrid learning model, or are entirely remote, school counselors need to be trained and have access to the resources and organizational supports necessary for effectively assisting students, especially those most impacted by the pandemic (Cook, 2020).

School counselors were not able to spend as much time as usual counseling students about social-emotional issues, career development, or postsecondary plans. Some of the barriers to counseling were logistical, such as limited privacy, reduced time in students' schedules for meeting with counselors, and missed opportunities for connecting with hard-to-reach students. Counselors were also tasked with tracking down students on attendance issues, supporting teachers, and delivering social service and technology information to families—all important activities that nonetheless detracted from counselors' ability to check in with students and provide the necessary support.

Meanwhile, when the participants were asked the question "Describe your personal experiences with virtual school counseling"? The theme immersed in this question is "good experiences".

Good experiences. Most of the participants describe their personal experiences as good during the virtual counseling. According to Golberstein (2020) "School counselor" is a deceptively simple title. In reality, school counselors play many roles, including social and emotional educator, academic adviser, conflict mediator, wellness coach, mental health therapist, student champion, educational collaborator, and family liaisons. Now, with the advent of the pandemic caused by the novel coronavirus, many school counselors have become connectors and comforters-in-chief not just to students but to parents and school staff. Counseling is a fundamental profession that has made a lot of impacts and distinctively has developed in a variety of ways in the 21st century. Counseling has become a very useful area in the sense that it has improved the lives of people (clients). It has made people understand themselves, maintain good interpersonal relationships, and develop good communication and relationship skills (Buku, 2016; Hays & Erford, 2018).

The development of counseling can be traced back to the formation of guidance associations in the 1950s, the strengthening of school guidance programs, and the training of school counselors in the United States (Bedu-Addo, 2016; Buku, 2016; Hays & Erford, 2018; Taylor & Buku, 2003). The 1960s and 1970s brought about the diversification of counseling into settings like schools, communities, hospitals, and universities. In addition, the 1980s and 1990s saw the licensure movement in counseling, which assisted in improving professionalism by setting guidelines and standards of practice. In the 21st century, technology and globalization have affected the profession, with the birth of online counseling as well as multiculturalism in the profession (Geldard et al., 2015; Sue et al., 2019; Zamani et al., 2010). Due to this globalization, counseling has extended to multiple areas including, but not limited to, stress management, sports and leisure, academic counseling, career counseling, and geriatric and community mental health. All these are underpinned by globalization and technology. This is because the world has become a huge place with interdependent issues and often it is a technology that is used to speed up operations so a lot of problems will be solved in a shorter period.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Since the arrival of COVID-19 in the Philippines, the lives of Filipino students have been upended. Senior High School Students became physically disconnected from their teachers, classmates, and key support systems. Media outlets have highlighted the unique challenges students face in this new reality, calling attention to increased mental health concerns, low levels of motivation, fears about high school to college transitions, and the loss of connection to caring adults. A prominent theme in these stories is students' detachment from school counselors who provide essential academic, social-emotional, and postsecondary counseling. Such accounts paint a dire picture of growing student needs and the myriad challenges educatorsface in responding to such concerns. The students most affected by the pandemic, particularly by the economic fallout it engendered are also likely to be disproportionately impacted by the loss of school based counseling.

In light of this role ambiguity and overload, counselors adapted by embracing their professional independence to implement strategies and programming despite the system they work in. While this finding reveals a resilient profession, it also raises questions about whether this act added to their role stress. That is, coming up with new strategies and seeking out their professional development required more time and energy. While independence was described as a positive quality, it also left counselors feeling lonely, confused, and not supported and raised questions about consistency across schools and districts.

REFERENCES
1. Alexander, C., Kruczek, T., Zagelbaum, A., & Ramirez, M. (2003). A review of the school counseling literature for themes evolving from the Education Trust Initiative. Professional School Counseling, 7(1), 29-34. https://doi:10.5330/PSC.n.2003-7.29
2. American Counseling Association (ACA). (2014). ACA code of ethics. https://www.counseling.org/resources/aca-code-ofethics.pdf
3. American Psychological Association. (2014). What are Telehealth and Telepsychology? https://www.apa.org/pi/disability/resources/publications/telepsychology
4. American School Counselor Association. (2012). ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs (3rd ed.). Author.
5. American School Counselor Association. (2016). Ethical standards for school counselors. Author.https://www.schoolcounselor.org/asca/media/asca/Ethics/EthicalStandards2016.pdf
6. American School Counselor Association. (2017). The school counselor and virtual school counseling. Author.
7. American School Counselor Association. (2019). The essential role of elementary school counselors. Author.
8. American School Counselor Association. (2020). FAQs: Virtual school counselingethics. https://www.schoolcounselor.org/schoolcounselors/legal-ethical/faqs-virtualschool-counseling-ethics?MvBriefArticleId=41868
9. American School Counselor Association. (2020). Planning for virtual/distance school counseling during an emergency shutdown. Author.
10. American School Counselor Association & National Association of School Psychologists. (2020). School Reentry Considerations: Supporting student social and emotional learning and mental health and behavioral health amid COVID-19. Author.
11. Association of Guidance Counselors (2020). Critical Incidents in School Counseling, Third Edition, by Tarrell Awe Agahe Portman.
12. Bedu-Addo, P. K. A. (2016). Guidance and counseling "unmasked" (4th ed.). Approaches Ghana Ltd.
13. Brooks, S. K., Webster, R. K., Smith, L. E. Woodland, L. (2020). The psychological impact of quarantine and how to reduce it: Rapid review of the evidence. The Lancet, 395(10227),912-920. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(20)30460-8
14. Golberstein, E., Wen, H. & Miller, B. F. (2020). Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) and mental health for children and adolescents. JAMA Pediatrics. https://doi:10.1001/jamapediatrics.2020.1456
15. Hatch, J. A., (2002). Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings. Published by: State University of New York Press
16. Marshall, C., & Rossman, C. B. (2006). Designing qualitative research. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.
17. O'Shaughnessy, T. E., Lane, K. L., Gresham, F. M., and Beebe-Frankenberger, M. E. (2003). Children are placed at risk for learning and behavioral difficulties. Remedial Spec. Educ. 24, 27–35. doi: 10.1177/074193250302400103
18. Parker, I. (2005) Qualitative Psychology: Introducing Radical Research. Open University Press, Maidenhead.
19. Racine, N., Hartwick, C., Collin-Vézina, I., & Madigan, S. (2020). Telemental health for child trauma treatment during and post-COVID-19: Limitations and considerations. Child Abuse & Neglect, 110(2). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104698.

----

20. Schwandt, T. (2001). *Understanding Dialogue as Practice. First Published April 1, 2001, Research Article* https://doi.org/10.1177/13563890122209658

21. Vai, Marjorie & Sosulski (2015). *Essentials of Online Course Design A Standards-Based Guide. Retrieved from* https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781315770901/essentials-online-course-design-marjorie-vai-kristen-sosulski

22. Wolfinger, S. (2016). *An exploratory case study of middle school student academic achievement in a fully online virtual school (Doctoral dissertation, Drexel University). Drexel University.*