

## **Dilemmas in School Counseling Services**

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Need of school counseling has grown rapidly in various countries. This article ascertains principal dilemmas in School Counseling in Pakistan that were identified through panel discussions, focus groups, and dialogues held with academic psychologists ( $n=6$ ; teaching school counseling with basic training), undergraduate students ( $n=2$ ; intends to choose school counseling as majors), graduate students ( $n=4$ ; major school counseling), and practicing professional school psychologist ( $n=3$ ). The findings highlight the Internal Dilemma, including ideational process, personal improvement, completion purpose of professional school counseling, training requisite, pedagogical apprehensions, pragmatic action research, school counseling services to rural and urban areas, and dissemination of awareness about school counseling to society; External Dilemma, including course contents' upgrading, creative pedagogy, specialized training in school counseling, obscure research methods (laboratory experiments, neuropsychological research), the feasibility of research in a developing country, and cross-cultural framework in the theory-practice discrepancy, and System Dilemma referring to the school counseling specialization and training programs in Pakistan. The preliminary analysis indicated the discrepancy in school counseling in terms of specialization, needs, and availability of school counseling psychologists. Currently, there is a serious need of specialization in school counseling in Pakistan. Few propositions towards addressing the issues are discussed.

*Keywords:* School counseling, need of specialization, cultural studies, participatory research, service development, social policy

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The development of school counseling as academia discipline and practicing profession (scientist-practitioner professional) in many Asian countries is beginning to establish gradually (Tan, 2016). Pakistan's academic programs offer specific specializations including mainly in clinical and health psychology whereas, school counseling receives partial attention with almost no postgraduate opportunities for academic degree programs. Some evidence suggests that students select Psychology degree program with either with realistic or perceived expectations and preconceived notions about the discipline of Psychology (Suheyl, 2012). Society too at large has high expectations from this discipline. A school counseling psychologist is expected to not only understand students' mental health phenomena, both theoretically and empirically, but also have practical implications of this understanding towards the school's betterment (Lai-Yeung, 2011; Suheyl, 2012).

The discipline of Psychology in Pakistan at large is distributed into Clinical Psychology and Applied Psychology and the two domains are marginally diverse in pedagogy approaches and curriculum. Clinical Psychology is perceived as the foremost academic program and specialization for professional success and academic accomplishments. However, a Clinical Psychologist who is specialized in assessment and treatment of psychological illness and severe psychopathology finds a non-clinical occupation specifically designed for a School Counseling Psychologist's specialty daunting. Many academic institutes have established courses to create uniformity across many Psychology Institutions in the region and somehow this overall progress has led to higher success in Clinical Psychology domain than School Counseling. In order to develop and establish School counseling programs, continuous process of consultation and need assessment of the nomenclature is required in all departments (Hayes, 2001).

In view of students' preconceived notions and societal role expectations, school counseling has faced the challenge to flourish and gain recognition. To assess whether the role expectations are justified, evaluation of academic pedagogy and curriculum, student

competencies, specialization programs, training, skills, aptitude, and professional achievements are needed (Bunce & Willower, 2001). Inopportunately, this perspective of comprehending school counseling and action research has been overlooked in the vehemence of identifying connections between pathological states or mental health disorders in the clinical setting. However, the school counseling has been germinating for years and gradually rooted into the research body. This undervalued field has gained recognition in recent years through indigenous research and community-based involvement and need-based work.

Formal and informal information was gathered from various resources to enrich the significance of key issues related to school counseling services provision in Pakistani society. This systematic qualitative study has been able to synthesize all feedback into a scientific inquisition. The purpose of this paper is to insulate actual and perceived incongruities and scarcities in academic and professional settings of school counseling and extract an action and interventional remedial path for the provision of services.

### **School Counseling in Pakistan**

Over the years, school counseling (marginally at graduate level) discipline has evolved in terms of program modules, course content, and creative curriculum, interactive pedagogy, advanced training, action research, assessment and evaluation system, and theory-empirical interaction in standard accordance with the progress of school counseling around the globe (D'Rozario & Romano, 2008). It has been observed that this process has ascended awareness in public and policy-making bodies about the demand and certainty of school counseling discipline, relevance in the job market, response from the student community, and the urgency of availability of foreign qualified school counseling psychologists whose contribution can meet all needs. However, at the same, the discipline of school counseling in developed countries has support from its society, by its training and

researches and delivers its psychological awareness and knowledge for the services of the community (McMahon, & Patton, 2001). The work of practically employing scientific psychological understanding towards social problems' resolution requires readdressing of conceptual and empirical models proposed by researchers beyond the scope of merely Clinical Psychology discipline. It is needed to evaluate whether these models have validity in diverse school counseling-related issues at cross-cultural context and not only the experimental setting where they were conceived and settled. It involves soliciting goals of academic School counseling, practice, and research, but above all providing services to a larger community for the betterment of society. Previous researches have indicated that objectives of constructing a particular curriculum may not be perspicuous to the tutor especially due to lack of specialization in a particular subject such as School Counseling discipline where instructor's lack of professional degree and specialization hinders the learning process for students in many psychology departments in the region. It has been observed that the inconsistency between supposed objectives of academic school counseling within tutors, teachers, and students and perceived accomplishment in achieving these goals contrast greatly with the harmony that existing school counseling programs, especially for postgraduate studies, are behind in delivering the actual goals (Paisley, & McMahon, 2001; Tatar, 2001). There is a scarcity of studies that have addressed the school counseling discipline in South Asian countries particularly in Pakistan. Given this, the purpose of the current study is to:

- 1) Develop a framework of the primary need of the subject of school counseling in Pakistan
- 2) Understand present dilemmas, expectations and requirements specified by instructors, students, professionals and community about the subject of school counseling. Following the same process, additional ancillary objectives were developed as the work progressed:
  - a. Enumerate and elucidate objectives of academic school counseling in Pakistan

- b. Itemize principal requirements of professional school counseling
  - c. List key goals in the provision of school counseling services to Pakistani society
- 3) Assess successful accomplishments of the objectives and to reduce the discrepancy between perceived and actual services provided to community and society.

## **Method**

### **Research Design**

The current ethnographic qualitative study followed above mentioned specific goals. The themes regarding school counseling in Pakistan were identified through panel discussions, focus groups, and dialogues held with school counseling psychological researchers, practicing mental health practitioners, pedagogical school counseling psychologists, and school counseling student body. During the discussions and interviews conducted with school counseling students, teachers, researchers, mental health practitioners and community members, all the specific goals and domain of investigations were covered.

### **Participants**

The participants of the current study included a working group consisting of academic psychologists ( $n=6$ ; teaching School counseling with basic training), undergraduate students ( $n=2$ ; intends to choose school counseling major), graduate students ( $n=4$ ; major school counseling), and practicing professional school psychologist ( $n=3$ ). The age of the participants ranged from 25-40 years. Snowball sampling technique was employed to approach the participants.

### **Procedure**

The aim of the working group was to build a framework of inquiry for assessing the state of School counseling subject in

Pakistan and then establish future plans for improvement. Approximately 70 minutes semi-structured interviews and panel discussions were conducted at researcher's office thrice every month for under a year with mutual consent. The working group followed the guideline established in the beginning of the research and every meeting contained pre-defined outlined related to different school counseling perspectives. In the interviews, they expressed their views about the state of school counseling discipline in Pakistan from a global perspective and its future directions. Students were specifically articulate to express their concerns, if they have. This process directed towards the establishment of a working group for this exploration.

Group members discussed their distinct outcomes collected out of pre-post panel discussion. Information was recurrently exchanged including the status on the updation through emails. The discussions were transcribed and the content of meetings was analyzed. Through the process of thematic qualitative examination, core theme was generated. They had indicated to present some working suggestions for establishing and endorsing the resolution to strengthen School counseling discipline on many grounds. This article reports the initial outcomes of the working group and testing phase of further studies.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To conduct this research, ethical considerations were strictly followed including identifying, addressing and briefing the study participants, and reassurance of anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality. Ethical concerns related to the anonymity and privacy of the research participants' data were handled in a way that ensured maintenance of confidentiality and privacy of study participants. All participant of the research acknowledged understanding about the study and consented for their willful participation. Ethical consideration included the appropriate method and prevention of the incorrect use of information.

## **Results and Discussion**

The article concentrated on views of school counseling instructors, mental health practitioners and students about both questions of the discipline of school counseling: academic school counseling and professional services towards society. The data analyzed and precised in this paper was not only comprised of the outlooks of the working group but the qualitative data as well. Thematic analysis was used to identify the key themes; given below are the principal themes that emerged:

### **Ideational process**

Research methods are endorsed as a style of progression in learning skills that guides on procedural learning. Beginner learners in school counseling conveyed minimum attentiveness and found the slight significance of research methods (Lai-Yeung, 2011). Researches methods cannot be fully comprehended unless researchers are fortified with academic reasoning, empirical understanding, and conceptual coherence. This point was stressed many times during the meetings. The researchers and academic psychologists expressed that theoretical reasoning which is the foreground of a high feature research can enhance among research students because School counseling has action based research potential. Professional and practicing psychologists added that deficit was in the ideational thinking among senior researchers especially from those who advocate other than School counseling discipline.

### **Completion purpose of professional school counseling**

The specific and specialized goals of a school counseling program have been developed but not properly reinforced by policymakers, program implementers, and academic body. School counseling still has not earned its place as a doctoral program because somehow it is listed below in priority than Clinical, Applied or Health psychology domains. Every department from every university has follow almost the same coursed designed for a

long time as what other departments from other local universities have used. The explicit or implied wide-ranging goal that group participants assumed were “*carrying understanding of mind and behavior in terms of School counseling*”, “*in-depth comprehension of individuals apart from pathological illness models*”, “*training in action research*”, “*theoretical and empirical knowledge by foreign qualified School counseling Psychologists*”, “*supervisors trained and specialized in School counseling*”, “*skills incorporated needed for a job market*”. Upon asking if those goals were fulfilled, 85% of participants (in further individual interviews) responded that since no academic program offers specialization distinctively in School counseling, hence, the answer was in negative.

### **Training requisite**

The participants expressed that high expertise, specialization, professional training, knowledge, and practice in professional services and area should be priority for two central reasons: employment and services for society. Instead of instigating theory-driven course curriculum, acquisition of skills and expert supervised training should be a priority which is a pre-requisite for a profession like school counseling. Furthermore, specific school counseling areas like youth school counseling, family school counseling, drug counseling, career counseling, couple counseling, group counseling, specific psychosocial problems like grief and bereavement counseling, and psychotherapy are needed.

### **Pedagogical apprehensions**

Both course curriculum content and curriculum pedagogy was expressed by participants as constantly evolving domains in school counseling. School counseling taught at graduate level seems barely according to international standards which needs to constantly improve and reviewed. However, the current theme in the discussion was a requirement for creative pedagogical methods which, instead of instigating apprehensions towards instructor, instructor’s teaching style and the course itself, should create more discussions, brainstorming activities, creative explanation,

engaging classroom and creative pedagogical methods for the active learning environment. This led to raising the question that who is a good teacher or good teachers can also be good researchers. Suggestions were given for training methods in teaching, supervision, updated research methods, contemporary curriculum, and minimum student-teacher communication gap.

### **Pragmatic action research**

The utility, feasibility, and expediency of research in a developing country were questioned comparing cross-cultural context, East-West individualistic and collectivistic culture difference, and role of indigenous research in the betterment of locality (Mukhtar & Mahmood, 2018; Tan, 2016; Mukhtar & Mahmood, 2019). Furthermore, the focus of research was on social issues, the practical implication of research, exploratory domains and integrating research findings to construct the practicality of School counseling research implications in the society. Many other Psychology disciplines have diverse research methods, School Counseling, however, advocates specifically action research. More research methods like laboratory research, neuroscience, neuropsychological research methods, experimental designs, qualitative studies, and meta-analysis and review articles should be part of the research as well.

### **School counseling services to rural and urban areas/ disseminate awareness about school counseling to society**

It is assumed that psychological knowledge and expertise should be available at large and all service should be disseminated to the society. However, how to deliver these services and what are the interferences in this process are the key elements. Various methods and modes of application were suggested by the participants. Many small towns, villages, and countryside residents were found to be unaware of the psychological process as whole and School counseling in particular. For that need-based training and crisis-management training should be incorporated. More knowledgeable professionals in specialized areas should visit

these areas to communicate with people and disseminate awareness about school counseling services. Policy makers and government's role in making them accessible is required. It was general agreement that school counseling services in rural areas should be a priority and for which small and effective videos, documentaries, television shows and easy reading material on various psychological themes, problems, mental health, and parental child-rearing styles, neuropsychological problems, and underlying causes of these problems can be highlighted through awareness based approaches.

### **Personal improvement**

The foremost significant and most neglected element in School counseling discipline, in fact, all academic programs was seen as personal growth, character building, and socialization reflected in civility, indulgence towards self, life skills and understanding of transcendence and meaningfulness. It was also expressed that diverse situations, learning experiences, exposure, and variation of procedures can help accomplish these goals; character building goals in education, workshops and groups on interpersonal approaches, public service, pro-social activities, reading wide range of material from literature to fiction, reflection and inclusion of cross-cultural experience through acquisition of other languages and watching diverse genres from movie to television shows, and interacting with nature can help to acquire positivity, humaneness, and personal growth.

The above mentioned discussion highlights the *Internal dilemma*, including ideational process, personal improvement, completion purpose of professional school counseling, training requisite, pedagogical apprehensions, pragmatic action research, school counseling services to rural and urban areas, and dissemination of awareness about school counseling to society; *External dilemma*, including course contents' upgrading, creative pedagogy, specialized training in school counseling, obscure research methods (laboratory experiments, neuropsychological research), the feasibility of research in a developing country, and

cross-cultural framework in the theory-practice discrepancy and *System dilemma* refers to the school counseling specialization and training programs in Pakistan. The preliminary analysis indicated the discrepancy in school counseling in terms of specialization, needs, and availability of school counseling psychologists.

### **Implications of study**

This study would help in implementing interventions to promote the consolidation or increment of resources that constitute a framework based on concrete and feasible actions. The aim of the study was evaluating the state of school counseling and its services and achieving the matching goals. The research was motivated by a larger goal to identify, acquire and implement means of provision of school counseling services to the society. Service providers, recipients and beneficiaries could be helped through a comprehensive understanding of the key theme related to school counseling services.

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