Influence of Peer Counseling on Students' Behaviour Change in Secondary Schools in Nakuru Municipality

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Abstract: *Peer counseling has become an important and integral part of our secondary schools owing to the dynamism of education and the many problems facing secondary students. The need for peer counselors is one that cannot be overlooked owing to the fact that the teacher counselor is either one or non-existent in most schools. While researchers, educationists and other concerned parties have come to recognise the role of peers as primary socialisation agents among adolescents, they have not seriously questioned the role played by peer counselors in influencing behaviour change in Kenya. This study examined the influence of peer counseling on the behaviour change of secondary school students in Nakuru Municipality. The study adopted an ex-post facto research design. Twelve schools with a total population of 7438 students were identified as having active peer counseling programmes. A sample of 14 teacher counselors, 31 peer counselors and 131 students who have consulted peer counselors were chosen using stratified, purposive and simple random sampling techniques from 9 public and 3 private secondary schools. The pilot study was done for the purpose of establishing the reliability and the construct reliability of the instruments. The teacher counsellors', peer counsellors' and students' questionnaires were examined for face and construct validity by experts from the Department of Psychology. Their comments were used to improve the instruments before they were used in the actual study. The data was analysed by the use of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22 for Windows. Frequencies and percentages were used to describe the data. The influence of the dependent variables on the independent variable was determined by testing the relationship using the Pearson Product Correlations Coefficient. The results of the study revealed that the training and resources for Peer Counselling were inadequate. The results also revealed that Peer Counselling influences students' academic performance however it does not influence their social and emotional behaviour. The study recommended training of both teacher and peer counsellors and allocation of adequate funds and resources to school peer counselling programmes.*

Keywords: Behaviour change, peer counselling, para professional, Teacher Counsellor, Influence

1. Background of the Study

Peer Counseling is the encouraging concerted effort to harness the capacity which group members sharing common interests may console, appease, be friend, mediate and reconcile those who are alienated from one another informally without resorting to discipline or depending on professionals or those in authority within the organisation or institution (Arudo, 2006). Peer counselors are paraprofessionals selected from the group to be trained, and given ongoing supervision to perform some key function generally performed by a professional (Ndichu, 2005). While the traditional paradigm held that people are to be treated by professionals, this is no longer the prevailing conception. It is widely accepted that a person naturally tends to turn, in time of trouble, to a friend or to someone he/she knows rather than to a professional. Peer counseling typically involves the use of members of a given group to effect change among other members of the same group. It addresses change both at the individual level by attempting to modify a person's knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, or behaviour and at the group or societal level by modifying norms and stimulating collective action that leads to changes in programmes and policies (Peer Education and HIV/AIDS, 2003).

Peer counseling has become an important and integral part of our secondary schools owing to the dynamism of education and the many problems facing secondary school students. The large number of students in secondary schools, limited number of trained teacher counselors, heavy workload, socio-economic and technological challenges all put pressure on teachers counselors, students, parents and society.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

While researchers, educationists and other stakeholders have come to recognise the role of peers as primary socialisation agents among adolescents, they have not seriously questioned the role played by peer counselors in influencing behaviour change. As primary socialisation agents peers provide informal and sometimes formal instructional lessons on some issues to each other as they communicate verbal and non-verbal information. Through the verbal and non-verbal reinforcement of expected behaviour patterns, adolescent students inevitably learn from their peers in their day to day interaction. Although, peer counseling programmes exist in secondary schools in Nakuru and Kenya as a whole, most of the studies assessing their influence on student behaviour have been conducted in Western countries. Little information is available on the extent to which peer counseling programmes have assisted in raising the behaviour of secondary school students locally. It is vital that the influence of peer counseling on student behaviour change is established in order to justify key strategies adopted in these counseling programmes in curbing negative student behaviour. The study sought to establish the influence of peer counseling on students' behaviour in secondary schools in Nakuru Municipality.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

This study aimed at examining the influence of peer counseling on the behaviour change of secondary school students in Nakuru Municipality. It explored the positive impact peer counseling has had on the previously maladjusted students. Students' academic, psycho-social and physiological needs fulfillment after treatment were examined.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

The specific objective of the study was to examine the status of peer counselling in secondary schools in Nakuru Municipality.

1.4 Significance of Study

The findings of the study aim at creating awareness on the changing attitude of students towards peer counseling. Students who get adequate knowledge through peer counseling engage in responsible and sound activities. It will assist peer counseling programme providers in reviewing and blending programmes with appropriate ones that target students' behaviour change. By understanding the influence of peer counseling on students' behaviour change school professionals may use it to their benefit to increase student's self-motivation to exert effort toward achieving successful task completion or to increase student's resistance to negative peer influence.

2. Literature Review

Introduction
This chapter represents a summary of review of the literature on History of School Guidance and Counseling, Concept of peer counseling, influence of peer counseling, areas of concern in peer counseling, peer counseling in Nakuru, peer counseling in private and public schools and the theoretical framework. The conceptual framework is given at the end of the chapter.

History of School Guidance and Counseling
School counseling formally started at the turn of the twentieth century, although a case can be made for tracing the foundations of counseling and guidance principles to ancient Greece and Rome with the philosophical teachings of Plato and Aristotle (Okumu, 2007). There is also evidence to argue that some of the techniques and skills of modern-day guidance counselors were practiced by Catholic priests in the middle Ages, as can be seen by the dedication to the concept of confidentiality within the confessional.

Development of Guidance and Counseling in Africa
Most sub-Saharan African societies have, in the past, been held together by elements unique to the region. The most outstanding of these elements are: the extended family system, including the clan and the tribe; chieftaincy, taboos, various forms of initiation, and close links with ancestors and elders. The village is the focal point of society. While each one of these elements is important, only a few are used to illustrate the role of counselling in present-day sub-Saharan African societies.

Basically, traditional chiefs had multiple roles which included serving as a symbol of authority and as a regulator. Since these roles were accepted and respected by all, there was a clear direction in the day-to-day affairs of society. The elders, the chief included, were a valuable source of guidance and counselling for boys and girls. In most cases, the chiefs were regarded as a vital link between ancestors and the present generation.

School Guidance and Counseling in Africa
Many African Ministers of Education realized the growing number of social problems that face the African adolescents. School guidance and counseling was then introduced in their countries to find solutions to these challenges (UNESCO 1998 in Chireshe, 2006). UNESCO further states that SGC services were introduced in African states to counteract unprecedented economic and social changes in African societies. Adegole and Culbreth (2000) in Chireshe (2006) add that the gradual breakdown of the extended family network has led to introduction of school counseling.

In white and coloured South Africa SGC was introduced in the 1960s through the South African National Educational policy Act 39 of 1967. It was later introduced in the black education system in 1981. Mathabe and Temane (1993) in Chireshe, (2006) assert that SGC services were originally seen as instruments for the government imposition of religious, cultural and vocational ideologies and value systems.

School Guidance and Counseling in Kenya
SGC services peer were introduced in secondary schools by the government of Kenya in the 1970's. The services were introduced during this period when weakening of the traditional family ties as a result of urbanization and education were evident (Nasibi, 2003). Today, the government has strengthened guidance and counselling services in secondary schools because of problems such as drug abuse, immoral behaviour, cheating in examinations, high school dropout rates and students' unrest (Mathenge, 2008; Opondo, 2008).

The Concept of Peer Counseling
Peer counseling in schools is a process where students are trained in helping skills to offer, under supervision, listening, support, and alternatives to other students, and to educate and influence their peers by modifying their knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, or behaviour (Deutsch & Swartz, 2002). The American School Counselors' Association defines peer counseling as a variety of interpersonal helping behaviours assumed by non-professionals/paraprofessionals who undertake a helping role with others.

Peer Counseling in Nakuru Schools
The Catholic Church in Nakuru has greatly assisted in the implementation of peer counseling programmes. In 1996, the health department of the Catholic Diocese of Nakuru carried out a survey on 'knowledge, attitude and practice of Reproductive Health (RH) issues among the youth". It was found that young people in and out of school suffer from acute problems due to inadequate knowledge on RH and its consequences. When confronted with sexual or anti-social

problems, the study found that youth often turn to their peers for information. Their peers however lack the accurate information and appropriate education that will lead to effective preventive behaviour. With this information, the Peer Counseling Programme was designed.

The Peer Counseling Programme (PCP) is aimed at changing high risk behaviour of youth in and out of school by offering accurate information and appropriate education on RH issues. This information can then be shared with other youth. The programme goes a step further and provides curative services for those youth who are already victims of various high risk behaviours (www.cathdnkenya.org).Issues covered in peer counseling programme include: Reproductive Health, Sexuality ,Adolescent and youth crisis, STDs, HIV/AIDS, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Life Skills, Vocations, Gender, Counseling Skills, Drug/Substance Abuse and Prevention. Quite a number of schools in Nakuru in partnership with the Catholic Church have had student peer counselors trained to assist teacher counselors in helping students in secondary schools.

Peer Counseling and Students' Behaviour Change
Santrock (2010) reveals that adolescents of which secondary school students are happier spending time and communicates more with peers than adults. As a result, conflict between adolescent and their parent's increases at this time as the adolescent strives for independence and lesser adult supervision. Adolescents also associate with friends of the opposite sex much more than in childhood and tend to identity with larger groups of peers based on shared characteristics. Melgosa (2001) asserts that group socialization in children and adolescents are shaped more by their peers than parents. As a member of a group, the adolescent tries to behave according to group norms. He wants social recognition through self-assertion which depends on the approval of the group. The school community with well-developed peer counselling programme would provide a valid setting to influence students' academic, social and emotional behaviour change.

Academic Behaviour Change
Peers are willing to listen to other peers, peer counseling can therefore play an important role in establishing communication with distressed classmates and friends, as well as steering them to professional help if it is needed. This is further asserted by Erikson (1968), from his life-crisis perspective, where he points out that friends offer constructive feedback and information on self-definitions and perceived commitments. At the same time, they learn about their limitations and are assured of the support and expertise of their peer counseling teachers for consultation. Ebreo (2002) state that peer-led, school-based interventions conducted in middle school and or during the first few years of high school have the potential for reaching a broad segment of youth at a time when risk behaviours have yet to be initiated or are just being explored. Baginsky (2000) in his study reported that peer counseling contribute to an overall improvement of behaviour of secondary school students. Academic performance is an area where many studies indicate that peer counseling has considerable influence. Studies by Bauer, Sapp and Johnson (2000), Sink

and Stroh (2003) in Disiye, Kodero and Ongeti (2011) reported a positive influence of peer counseling on students' academic performance and higher test scores.

Social Behavior Change
Due to the equality of age, status or educational background, peers are intimate in character, there is relative familiarity and members are closely identified with each other. As a result, they become sensitive to each other's approval and disapproval, which means that group pressure upon the individual, is great. Peers thus serve greatly in correcting extremes and deviations of behaviour among members. A young person's peer group has a strong influence on the way he or she behaves. This is true of both risky and safe behaviours. Not surprisingly, young people get a great deal of information from their peers on issues that are especially sensitive or culturally taboo. Peer counseling seeks to make use of peer influence in a positive way.

Emotional Behavior Change
Although too many Kenyan youth still lack access to secondary or even primary education, for those young people who do attend school, the school setting provides an important venue to transmit information and skills that can protect youth against risky behaviours. Adolescence has always been complicated everywhere, but today young people face problems their parents and grandparents may never have dreamed of—problems like:

Pressure to have sex, Drugs in schools and the community, Parents who are too busy or shy to talk with their children about the changes they are going through, Sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, Being orphaned because of AIDS or accidents, Wars and political instability. To cope with all these things and to get through adolescence safely, they need to be strong, creative, resourceful and hopeful (Family Care International, 2002).

Conceptual Framework
Peer Counseling programme determine the end behaviour of students. When the programme is available, it enables the students' needs to be identified. The school environment in conjunction with the home environment and parental expectation may lead to a well-adjusted individual with improved intrapersonal and interpersonal relations. When the programme is unavailable, the students' needs may not be appropriately identified. The school environment may not be able to liaise with the home environment and parental expectations, thus leading to a maladjusted individual with poor intrapersonal and interpersonal relations, poor academic grades, low self- esteem and poor self- concept.

When peer counseling has been offered to a student the environment enables him/her to adjust their behaviour. This greatly depends on the influence of the home environment, school, peer group and one's religion. When all these variables favor counseling , a well behaved student is the end result and the reverse is true. Peer counseling therefore strives to arrest the extraneous variables in order to achieve the desired behaviour as shown in Figure 2.1.
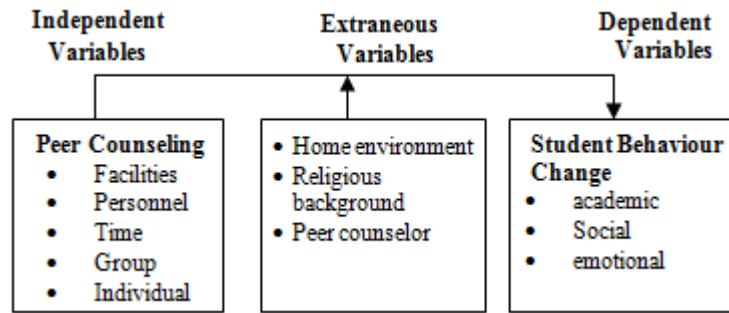
Figure 2.1: Relationship between Peer Counseling and Student Behaviour Change

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research methodology that was used to carry out the study. It covers the research design, location of the study, target population, sampling procedures and sample size, instrumentation, data collection procedures, data analysis and summary of the analytical procedures to be used in the study

3.2 Research Design

The study adopted *the ex-post facto* research design. Kathuri and Pals (1993) defined ex-post facto research as a systematic empirical inquiry in which the researcher does not have direct control of independent variables because their manifestation has already occurred or because they cannot be manipulated.

3.3 Location of the Study

The study was conducted in Nakuru Municipality. Nakuru is an agricultural and business area attracting people of diverse cultural, religious, and educational background. It's a cosmopolitan town therefore providing a representation of almost the whole population of students in the county.

3.4 Population of the Study

Table 1: Distribution of Secondary Schools with Peer Counseling Programmes by Type, Teacher Counselors, Peer Counselors and Students in Nakuru Municipality

Type of School	Number of Schools	Teacher Counselors	Peer Counselors	Students
Mixed Day Public	8	8	26	4620
Mixed Day Private	2	2	6	247
Girls Boarding Public	1	1	14	773
Girls Boarding Private	1	1	14	379
Boys Boarding Public	1	1	22	906
Boys Boarding Private	1	1	10	413

3.5 Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

Table 2: Distribution of Schools, Teacher Counselor, Peer Counselor and Students Sampled

Type of School	Number of Schools	Teacher Counselors	Peer Counselors	Students
Mixed Day Public	6	6	20	70
Mixed Day Private	2	2	4	21
Girls Boarding Public	1	1	2	12
Girls Boarding Private	1	1	2	12
Boys Boarding Public	1	1	2	12
Boys Boarding Private	1	1	2	12
Total	12	12	32	139

3.6 Data Analysis

Data was checked for accuracy of the responses, coded, and entered into the computer and analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 22.0 for windows.

Frequencies and percentages were used to describe and summarize the qualitative data. The influence of the dependent variables on the independent variable was determined by testing the relationship using the Pearsons Product Moment Correlation.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the analysed data, their interpretation and discussion of the research study findings. This study has examined the influence of peer counseling on the behaviour change of secondary school students in Nakuru Municipality. The analysis was based on themes derived from the following research objective: to examine the status of peer counselling in secondary schools in Nakuru Municipality.

4.1.1 Status of Peer Counseling in Secondary Schools in Nakuru Municipality
The objective of this study was to examine the status of peer counselling in secondary schools in Nakuru Municipality. To do this the researcher picked on a few aspects of the status of peer counselling such as services offered, reasons for seeking counselling, resources for peer counselling, training for peer counsellors and service delivery in the different schools in the study.

4.1.2 Counselling Services in Schools

The first aspect of the status of peer counselling the researcher examined was the counselling services offered in schools. This is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: Counselling Services Offered in Schools

Counseling services	Teacher counselors, n = 14		Peer Counselors n = 31	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Academic	14	100.0	13	41.9
Social	10	71.4	16	51.6
Personal	8	57.1	14	45.2
Career/vocational	12	85.7	-	-
Health	10	71.4	5	16.1
Spiritual	11	78.6	12	38.7

Table 3 shows the services offered in schools the peer and teacher counsellors were both respondents. In academics all 14 teachers offered services, social issues 71.4%, personal matters 57.1%, 85.7% of the teacher counsellors were consulted on career matters. On health issues 71.4% teachers and for spiritual matters 78.6% of teacher counsellors were consulted. An observation of the services offered by the teachers show that they tend to attend to students in most areas of counselling with academics at the highest. This is apparent because in school the core activity is academics it is however glaring that few teachers are presented with personal issues. Adolescents widely seek support from their peers when it comes to personal issues. They readily identify with those who seem to have undergone or are going through experiences similar to theirs. Many authors agree that when adolescents seek help they prefer to consult their peers rather than adults particularly with interpersonal problems (Boldero & Fallon, 1995;Carr & Sanders,1980; Cowie, 1999;de Rosenroll & Dey, 1990; Frydenberg & Lewis, 1993; Tishby, et al, 2001in Geldard 2005). This is evident when looking at the issues peer counsellors deal with from students in that the majority present with issues on social at 51.6% and personal issues at 45.2%.

Peer counsellors also offered services on academic issues 41.9%, health 16.1% and spiritual matters 38.7%. It is however observed that no services are offered on careers. This is because peers are not skilled on careers and career choices; they are themselves students and are not trained nor experienced in this area.

5. Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Summary

This research was undertaken to establish the influence of peer counselling on behaviour change of secondary students in Nakuru municipality. This entailed the status of peer counselling and the influence of peer counselling on students' academic performance, social and emotional behaviour change. The study interviewed a selected sample of 131 secondary school students who had undergone peer counselling, 31peer counsellors and 14 teacher counsellors. The results of the study demonstrated that:

1) Only 25.8% teachers in charge of the guidance and counselling departments are trained in counselling. The peer counsellors have inadequate training with 25% and less having training in any one counselling area. The resources for peer counselling are moderately available in schools that have peer counselling programmes.
2) The relationship between peer counselling and students' academic behaviour was significant at the 0.05 level, r (130) = 0.211, p < 0.05. This indicates that peer counseling positively influences change in students' academic behaviour and competencies.
3) The relationship between peer counselling and students' social behaviour was however not significant at the 0.05 level, r (130) = 0.072, p > 0.05. This means that peer counseling does not influence change in students' social behavior.
4) The relationship was also not significant between peer counselling and students' emotional behaviour at the 0.05 level, r (130) = 0.077, p > 0.05. This is indicates that peer counseling does not influence change in students' emotional behavior.

5.2 Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were made:

1) Peer counselling in secondary schools in Nakuru Municipality regarding areas such as service delivery, training of both teacher and peer counsellors and resources available were found to be inadequate.
2) Peer counseling positively influences change in students' academic behaviour and competencies. This concurs with the findings of Bauer, Sapp and Johnson (2000) that actual academic achievement of students is more affected by fellow students than by other factors in the school.
3) Peer counseling does not influence change in students' social behavior. Peer counseling does not also influence change in students' emotional behavior. The researcher attributed these to inadequate or even lack thereof training offered to peer counselors. Training is one of the basic pillars in effective peer counseling.

5.3 Recommendations

The following can be done to enhance peer counselling in secondary schools within the Nakuru municipality:

1) The Ministry of education, Teachers Service Commission and school administrators need to ensure all teachers heading the guidance and counselling departments have training in professional counselling skills.
2) The peer counsellors in secondary schools need to be given quality, detailed and progressive training in peer counselling.
3) The school administrators and Boards of Management to ensure funds are allocated to support the activities of guidance and counselling departments like peer counselling programmes. This coupled with progressive training adequate funds will go a long way to ensure that peer counselling influences change in students' behaviour.

6. Areas for Further Research

Two areas of study need to be undertaken in the municipality in the future, they include:
1) The factors causing lack of change in social and emotional behaviour of students who have undergone peer counselling.
2) Factors that have led to lack of peer counselling programmes in most secondary schools in the municipality.

7. Acknowledgement

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