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The opinions of school counselors on the use of information and communication technologies in school counseling practices: North Cyprus schools

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this study was to determine school counselors' opinions concerning the use of information and communication technology (ICT) in school counseling practices. The participants were 61 school counselors (54 female, 7 male) who worked in middle (17), high (23), middle/high (19), and primary (2) schools. The mean age was 33.4 years. The Internet Usage Questionnaire was used to collect participants' opinions. The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, the Mann Whitney U test and the Kruskal Wallis test. The results of this study revealed that the school counselors had overall positive opinions about the use of ICT in school counseling. No significant differences were found according to gender, age, degree, work setting, seniority, or student/school counselor ratio. The results also revealed that school counselors had positive opinions about using web pages and computer-based programs, somewhat positive opinions about using Internet-based interventions, and negative opinions about using online counseling.

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1. Introduction

Technological developments in the 21st century, known as the Information Age, have been effective in fields such as education, communications, and business management (Van Horn & Myrick, 2001). As a result, many occupational fields are attempting to improve the quality of their services and customer satisfaction through the use of this rapid development of technology.

Information and communication technologies (ICTs), currently used as an umbrella term for technology, refer to all kinds of visual, aural, printed and written technological tools providing rapid flow of information and thought (Karataş, 2011).

The rapid development of ICT has impacted the psychological counseling profession (Hayden, Poynton, & Sabella, 2008). Computer-based psychological counseling applications increased with the development of ICT (Reimer-Reiss, 2000). Furthermore, as Internet use became widespread, new Internet-based counseling applications through e-mail, web pages, electronic bulletins, online publishing, videoconferencing, and chat rooms appeared (Savaş & Hamamcı, 2010). The terms e-counseling, cyber counseling, online counseling, and Internet counseling are used interchangeably to describe Internet-based counseling applications. The National Board for Certified Counselors (NBCC) uses the term cyber counseling and defines it as follows: "The counselor and the client are in distant and separate environments and communicate through the internet using electronic devices" (Manhal-Baugus, 2001, p.550).

Due to its rapid development, ICT has been included in the pre-service training of counselors. The Counsel for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) noted the necessity of acquiring ICT-related proficiencies, including the following:

> ... "making use of ICT in career counseling applications; presentations through computers or using computer equipment; using computers as a source to help students, families, and educators in the fields of academia, careers, and personal/social matters" (Owen & Korkut-Owen, 2012, p.53).

The role that technology would play in the future of school counseling was first predicted in the 1980s (Grosshandler, 2012). In the 1990s, school counselors were urged to consider computers and related technologies as teammates (Gerler, Ciechalski, & Parker, 1990). Furthermore, it was emphasized that technology would enhance service quality (Casey, 1995; Gerler & Edwin,

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1995; Van Horn & Myrick, 2001). Following the year 2000, it was stated that school counselors must become a part of the technological revolution (Eichenholtz, 2001).

Van Horn and Myrick (2001) indicated that, within the scope of school counseling services, computer technologies can be used to obtain and share information on distant educational institutions, to research universities and professions, to administer counseling interventions, to form networks, and to receive education and supervision. Sabella (2003) shed light on how school counselors can use technology by establishing the following four main fields:

(i) information/resources (utilizing the web as a dynamic information library of words, graphics, videos, and a 3-dimensional environment); (ii) communication/cooperation (utilizing chat rooms, electronic bulletins, cyber classroom environments, video conferences, online conferences, electronic services, and e-mail for people to meet, exchange information, and make joint decisions); (iii) interactive/productivity (transmitting information to computers using software and computer-based programs and using computers to process data); (iv) providing counseling services in cyber space or online interactively.

The literature has shown that counseling continues to develop through its use of ICT (Hines, 2002), that the concept of modern counseling services should be supported (Başak, Uysal, & Aşıcı, 2010), that technology can make counselors' workloads more manageable in schools where the student/school counselor ratios are high (Hayden et al., 2008), and that ICT is accepted as indispensable in school counseling applications (Grosshandler, 2012). However, there are discrepancies in the research findings on the use of ICT in school counseling (Başak et al., 2010).

On the one hand, it has been shown that computer technologies are not used sufficiently in the development of school counseling (Baker, 2001; Glasheen & Campbell, 2009). Several studies have found that school counselors do not believe that ICT use will enhance the quality of services (Cabaniss, 2001), that computers should play an important role in school counseling services (Bluhm & Kishner, 1988), or that computers are applicable in schools (Savaş, 2006). On the other hand, research has shown that the Comprehensive Developmental Counseling Program is especially used in the guidance curriculum guidance syllabus and system support dimensions; however, all dimensions of school counseling program (including guidance curriculum, individual student planning, responsive service and system support) are positively affected by the use of technology (Hayden et al., 2008). Within the framework of school counseling programs, technology can be used to communicate via e-mail, access professional sources, communicate with remote colleagues, obtain vocational support, and receive program and planning support (Bowers, 2002). In the "What School Counselors do with Technology study", Sabella (2005) found that the counselors utilized e-mail and web sites for communication. Similarly, one study showed that in counseling programs, the Internet and e-mail are the second and third most used technology resources after Microsoft Word (Grosshandler, 2012). Furthermore, a separate study discovered that ICT usage increased the productivity of school counselors (Owen & Korkut-Owen, 2012). In a pilot study of a school-based online counseling application, the participants (students and school counselors) showed great interest in the application and welcomed it with enthusiasm (Glasheen & Campbell, 2009). Research has also demonstrated that school counselors use computers and the Internet for student and teacher/administrator groups (Başak et al., 2010). In addition, one study found that school counselors had generally positive opinions about implementing school counseling services through the Internet (Savaş & Hamamcı, 2010).

To date, no data on the use of ICT in school counseling services in North Cyprus have been collected. Nevertheless, in 2012, the Cyprus Turkish Counseling Association and the Cyprus Turkish Secondary Education Teachers Union, (KTOEOS, 2012) reported issues regarding cooperation with other school staff, a lack of physical space (eg. an insufficient number of offices and inadequate equipment to save documents), inadequacies in following innovations in the field, limited tools and resources, and limitations in collaboration with colleagues. In addition, school counselors are under time constraints because of assigned duties that fall outside of their field of work (Beidoğlu & Batman, 2010). It is a noticeable shortfall that there are no studies on the use of ICT among the members of a profession that struggles with the above issues. The use of ICT in school counseling services can be recommended to overcome the above-mentioned problems and enhance the quality of service (Başak et al., 2010). Despite the mixed findings in the literature, the rapid forward movement of ICT is expected to affect, or has already begun to affect, school counseling services in North Cyprus. A computer infrastructure in schools and school counselors' ICT knowledge and skills are prerequisites for such technology use. The opinions of school counselors are essential in planning ICT infrastructure and in-service projects. Hence, the current study aimed to gather and analyze the opinions of school counselors in North Cyprus concerning the use of ICT in counseling services in schools.

The following research questions were addressed:

(1) What are school counselors' general opinions concerning the use of ICT in conducting counseling services?
(2) Are there significant differences in the general opinions of school counselors according to their gender, age, level of education (bachelor's, master's, Ph.D.), tenure, grade level/type of school, or number of students they serve?

2. Methodology

The study employed a descriptive approach to identify school counselors' opinions concerning the use of ICT in school counseling services.

2.1. Participants

A total of 85 school counselors who worked at state and private secondary schools (middle school and high school) participated in the current study. The participants were recruited via e-mail using e-mail addresses that were obtained from the Cyprus Turkish Psychological Counseling and Guidance Association; people with missing e-mail addresses were contacted by telephone. The study questionnaire was e-mailed to the participants. One week later, a reminder to complete and return the survey was e-mailed. The return rate of the scale was 42.5% (34). An additional 27 people were recruited in person to increase the return rate. Therefore, 61 school counselors (71.8%) were reached.

Of the participants, 54 were female (88.5%) and 7 were male (11.5%). Their average age was 33.4 years (age distribution: 24–55). In terms of education level, 67.2% (42) of the participants had undergraduate degrees, 26.2% (16) had a master's degree, and 4.9% (3) had Ph.D.s. Furthermore, 27.8% (17) worked at middle schools, 37.7% (23) worked at high schools, 31.1% (19) worked at middle/high schools and 3.2% (2) worked at primary schools. The participants' average number of working years was 10.4 (working years distribution: 6 months–24 years), with a standard deviation of 6.1. Regarding the type of institution, 18% (11) of the participants worked in vocational high schools, 55.7% (34) worked in standard high/middle schools, 1.6% (1) worked in a science high school, 6.6% (4) worked in Anatolian high schools, and 14.8% (9) worked in college type schools. Of the participants, 9.8% worked

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