



## **Role of Guidance and Counselling in Promoting Mental Health among Secondary School Students in Delta Central Senatorial District of Delta State**

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### **Abstract**

The study examined the role of guidance and counseling in promoting mental health among secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District of Delta State. Three research questions guided the study. The design of the study was the descriptive survey. The population of the study comprised of students in public secondary schools with a total population of 45,318 and 60 Counsellors. A sample of 226 students and 20 counsellors making a total sample of 246 was drawn using multi-stage sampling procedure. The questionnaire was validated in its face and content by three experts, two experts in guidance and counseling and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach alpha reliability method and a coefficient of 0.87 was obtained as a measure of consistency. Generated data was analyzed using the mean and standard deviation. The findings revealed that guidance and counseling services had impact on secondary school students' mental health such as preventing students from experiencing mental health crisis, develop better coping strategies, reduce stress / anxiety and overall well-being. It was concluded that through guidance and counseling, students can get emotional support, skill development, prevention of risky behaviour, increased independence, and help in managing conflict and relationships.

**Keywords:** Guidance and Counselling; Students; Mental Health.



## Introduction

Mental health is a crucial aspect of student well-being, significantly influencing academic performance, social interactions, and overall quality of life. Adolescents, particularly secondary school students, are at a vulnerable stage of development, facing numerous challenges such as academic pressure, peer relationships, identity formation, and family issues. These stressors can lead to mental health problems such as anxiety, depression, and behavioural issues. According to the World Health Organization (2020), 10- 20% of children and adolescents experience mental health disorders, with many of these conditions remaining undiagnosed and untreated. This lack of intervention often leads to negative outcomes such as poor academic performance, school dropout, and harmful behaviours, including substance abuse and self-harm. In recent years, mental health issues among students have become increasingly prevalent and concerning, necessitating proactive approaches within educational institutions. Students face numerous challenges, including academic pressure, social expectations, family dynamics, and personal development, all of which can significantly impact their mental and emotional wellbeing.

Guidance and counseling services have been identified as critical components in supporting student mental health by providing timely emotional and psychological support. Counsellors in schools offer safe spaces where students can express their challenges, fears, and emotional difficulties without judgment, contributing to their overall mental wellbeing. Through effective guidance, students develop coping mechanisms, emotional resilience, and the capacity to address mental health issues like anxiety, depression, and stress (Cahill, et al., 2021). The role of guidance counselors in promoting mental health is vital, as they provide direct support and interventions aimed at improving students' emotional well-being and academic performance. However, despite their importance, many schools in Delta Central either have no professional counselors or operate with counselors who are overburdened with administrative duties, leaving them little time to address students' psychological needs.

In Delta State, Central in particular, the importance of addressing students' mental health is recognized, but the provision of adequate mental health services, especially within schools, remains a challenge. Guidance and counseling services are designed to help students cope with personal, academic, and social challenges. The Federal Government of Nigeria has mandated the integration of guidance and counseling services in schools to support students' mental health and academic success (FRN, 2013). However, the implementation and effectiveness of these services vary significantly, with many schools lacking the necessary resources, trained personnel, and structured programs to address mental health issues adequately (Ayu, et al, 2024). Schools that integrate guidance and counseling within their overall mental health framework tend to witness positive academic and emotional outcomes among students (Ergene, 2020). Despite the clear benefits, however, many schools struggle to adequately provide these services due to limited resources, insufficient counselor training, and the stigmatization of mental health issues (Moore et al, 2023). As a result, many students do not receive the necessary support to overcome emotional difficulties, which can adversely impact their academic progress and social development.

According to Egbochuku (2018), effective school counseling programs lead to improved coping skills, self-esteem, and emotional regulation. Counsellors help students navigate complex social and academic pressures, which, in turn reduces the risk of mental health disorders. Research by Reinke, et al. (2020) found that school counseling programs focusing on mental health positively impacted students' academic engagement and overall school satisfaction. Moreover, it has been demonstrated that schools with integrated mental



health services help reduce instances of student anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts (Gao, et al., 2019). One empirical study by Webb and Brigman (2021) explored the role of school counseling in emotional support and found that students receiving counselling have significant improvements in their emotional well-being and were better equipped to handle stressful situations. Purgason, et al. (2019) highlight the long- term benefits of school counseling, suggesting that early intervention can prevent the escalation of mental health problems in later adolescence. However, they noted the need for sustained support and tailored interventions based on the specific needs of individual students.

Research by Graham and Powell (2019) emphasizes the importance of counseling in schools as a proactive measure for promoting emotional resilience. When students have access to school counsellors, they are more likely to develop coping strategies and problem- solving skills, which are essential for managing stress and reducing the risk of developing long- term mental health disorders. A study conducted by Cahill, et al. (2021) found that students who actively participated in school counseling program showed significant improvements in mental health outcomes, including reduced anxiety levels, improved self-esteem, and better academic performance. In another study, Ayu, et al, (2024) found that schools that had implemented mental health awareness programs alongside counseling services in behavioral issues had improved students' engagement. However, the study highlighted that many schools were still under- resourced and lacked a consistent approach to mental health counselling. Rifani and Ahmad (2023) conducted a study, revealing that schools with well- established counseling services reported reduced levels of anxiety and stress among students. However, the study also highlighted that many schools lacked the resources and trained personnel to address mental health effectively. Sunil and Vyas (2020) found that students who received counseling service showed improvements in their emotional regulation and academic performance. The study noted that consistent access to counseling services helped students develop coping mechanisms for stress and anxiety.

The mental health challenges faced by students are multifaceted and often stem from academic pressures, social issues, and personal problems. According to the World Health Organization (2020) mental health disorders are a leading cause of disability among adolescents. A survey by the National Institute of Mental Health (2021) showed that anxiety disorders affect 31.9% of adolescents, making it the most prevalent mental health challenge in schools. Gao, et al., (2019) identified academic stress as one of the most common issues affecting student mental health. Their study found that the increasing pressure to perform academically can lead to anxiety, depression, and burn out. Additionally, social isolation, bullying, and peer pressure contribute significantly to students' mental health struggles (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2022). Research by Rawat and Gulati (2020) supported these findings, indicating that students often experience heightened anxiety and depression due to social factors such as body image concerns, peer conflicts, and bullying. According to Gómez- Baya, et al. (2021) students experiencing family discord, such as divorce or parental neglect, are more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety. Their research suggests that the emotional fallout from family problems can interfere with academic performance and peer relationships, further exacerbating mental health challenges.

Other prevalent issues include test anxiety and performance- related stress. According to Putwain and Pescod (2020) test anxiety affects nearly 30% of students, and this often goes unaddressed by schools. The study emphasized the importance of early identification and intervention to prevent long-term academic and psychological harm. Anxiety, depression, and stress related to academic performance are among the most common mental health challenges



faced by students. The pressures of academic success, coupled with social and familial expectations, often create high-stress environment that negatively impacts students' mental health (Ergene, 2020). According to research by Moore, et al. (2023) school counselors are frequently required to address issues such as exam stress, social anxiety, and family-related emotional difficulties. These mental health challenges can be pervasive and debilitating if not properly addressed.

Putwain and Pescod (2020) identified some common mental health issues among students such as depression and anxiety, suicidal thoughts and behaviours, stress and burnout. Depression and anxiety are the most prevalent mental health issues among students; often triggered by academic pressure, financial stress and social expectations. Suicidal thought and behavior is another issue. Suicide is a leading cause of death among students. Stress and burnout is also a prevailing problem. Students often face immense pressure to perform academically, leading to stress and burnout which negatively impact their mental health and overall well-being.

However, despite the recognized importance of school counselors in addressing student mental health, several barriers hinder the effective provision of these services. One significant barrier is the limited availability of resources. According to Reinke, et al. (2020) many school counselors report being over worked and lacking adequate time to provide individualized support to all students. Counsellor-to-student ratios are often too high, limiting the ability to provide personalized care and follow-up. Further, stigma around mental health remains a pervasive issue. According to the CDC (2022) many students are reluctant to seek help due to fears of being labeled or judged by peers. In their study, Purgason, et al (2019) identified that cultural and social factors often act as barriers to students accessing mental health services. The stigma associated with seeking mental health support can prevent students from reaching out, particularly in communities where discussing mental health is taboo. Another major challenge is the lack of collaboration between school counsellors, teachers, and parents. Research by Sangganjanavanich, et al. (2021) found that counselors often face resistance from school administration and staff, making it difficult to implement comprehensive mental health programs. Additionally, parental involvement is often minimal, with many parents unaware of the benefits of school counseling or resistant to their children receiving such services (Webb & Brigman, 2021). High student-to-Counsellor ratios, limited resources, and inadequate mental health training are frequently cited as the primary obstacles (Jones & Perry, 2022).

Many schools lack the funding to hire enough counselors to meet the growing mental health needs of their student populations. As a result, counselors are often overburdened, making it difficult to offer individualized attention to students. Ergene (2020) points out that counselors who are over whelmed by high caseloads may struggle to provide timely and effective interventions, leading to a decline in the quality of mental health support offered. Moreover, counselors who are not adequately trained in mental health interventions may find it challenging to address the complex psychological needs of students. Darakhshan and Shameem, (2023) explored the barriers to effective counseling services in Nigerian secondary schools. The study identified inadequate training, high student-counselor ratios, and cultural stigma as the primary barriers, recommending better training for counselors and increased government support. Finally, counselors face challenges related to their training. According to Webb and Brigman (2021) many school counselors feel under prepared to deal with complex mental health issues, particularly those involving trauma, self-harm, or suicidal ideation. This highlights the need for ongoing professional development and training to equip school counselors with the skills necessary to address a wide range of mental health concerns.



## Statement of Problem

Mental health issues among secondary school students in Delta State, Delta Central in particular are becoming increasingly concerning, with students often dealing with anxiety, depression, stress, and behavioural problems. The World Health Organization (2020) highlights that one in five children and adolescents worldwide suffer from a mental health disorder, and most of these issues remain unaddressed in school settings. Educational institutions are often under-resourced and ill-equipped to provide the comprehensive mental health support that students need. While guidance and counseling services are mandated to address these challenges, they are frequently underutilized or narrowly focused on academic guidance rather than addressing students' holistic emotional and psychological needs. Many schools lack qualified counselors trained in mental health interventions, and stigma surrounding mental health often prevents students from seeking help.

Counselors often face over whelming caseloads and limited resources, preventing them from providing adequate care for students in need. As a result, many students struggle with untreated mental health conditions, leading to poor academic performance, absenteeism, and negative social behaviours. Addressing these issues requires an enhanced focus on the role of guidance and counseling in promoting mental health, ensuring that schools are equipped with the resources, training, and policies necessary to support students effectively. These gaps in the provision of guidance and counseling services contribute to unmet mental health needs, resulting in poor academic performance, absenteeism, behavioural issues and in severe cases, school dropouts. Hence, this study seeks to investigate the impact of guidance and counseling services in promoting mental health among secondary school students in Delta Central Senatorial District of Delta State

## Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. Do Guidance and Counselling Services have impact on secondary school students' mental health?
2. What are the most common mental health challenges faced by students?
3. What are the barriers faced by school counselors in providing mental health service to students?

## Methods

This study adopted the descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised of students and in public secondary schools with a total population of 45,318 and 60 Counsellors. A sample of 226 students and 20 counsellors making a total sample of 246 was drawn using multi- stage sampling procedure. In the first stage simple random sampling technique was used to select 5% from the population to arrive at 2,265 and in the second stage simple random was used to select 10% from 2,265 respondents to get a total sampled of 226 while in the third stage purposive sampling technique was used to select 20 counsellors making a total sample of 246 for the study. The instrument used was the questionnaire on Guidance and Counselling Service on Mental Health (GCSMH).

The instrument had two sections, A and B. Section A focused on demographic



information like sex and location. Section B contained items put into three clusters. Cluster I elicited information on impact of guidance and counseling service on student mental health. Cluster II solicited information on the common mental health challenges faced by students and cluster III gathered information on the barriers faced by school counselors in providing mental health service to students. The questionnaire had four-point scale of strongly agreed (SA) =4; agreed (A) =3; disagreed (D) = 2 and strongly disagreed (SD) =1. The questionnaire was validated in its face and content by three experts, two experts in guidance and counseling and one expert in Measurement and Evaluation. The reliability of the questionnaire was established using Cronbach alpha method. The questionnaire was administered to 30 Secondary School Students and Counsellors who are not part of the study. The responses of the students and Counsellors were correlated which yielded a correlation coefficient value of 0.87 which shows that the questionnaire is reliable and good for the study. The researchers administered the questionnaire to the respondents with the aid of four research assistants. To ensure high return, the questionnaire was retrieved from the students and Counsellors same day after responding to the items. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. A mean value of 2.50 was used as the benchmark. This implied that mean value of 2.50 and above was accepted and mean value below 2.50 was rejected

## Results

**Research Question 1:** Do Guidance and Counselling Services had impact on secondary school students' mental health?

**Table 1:** Mean and Standard deviation on Guidance and Counselling Services impact on secondary school students' mental health.

| S/N        | Items                                                                                             | N    | X    | SD   | Decision |
|------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|------|------|----------|
| 1.         | I believe the guidance and counseling Services are essential for students' mental well-being      | 226  | 3.46 | 0.70 | Agree    |
| 2.         | Counselling services have played a role in preventing me from experiencing a mental health crisis | 226  | 3.07 | 0.88 | Agree    |
| 3.         | I have learned more about mental health and self-care through counseling services                 | 226  | 3.03 | 0.94 | Agree    |
| 4.         | I feel the counselors in my school understand and address my mental health needs                  | 226  | 3.39 | 0.80 | Agree'   |
| 5.         | Counselling services have improved my interpersonal relationships with peer sand teachers.        | 226  | 3.25 | 0.82 | Agree    |
| 6.         | The guidance sessions have helped me develop better coping strategies.                            | 226  | 3.22 | 0.82 | Agree    |
| 7.         | I am more confident in seeking help when facing mental health issues due to counseling services   | 226  | 3.12 | 0.81 | Agree    |
| 8.         | Counselling services have contributed to my improved emotional well-being                         | 226  | 3.00 | 0.85 | Agree    |
| 9.         | I feel more supported in handling personal issues due to the availability of counseling services  | 226  | 3.24 | 0.81 | Agree    |
| 10.        | Guidance and counseling services in my school help reduce stress / anxiety                        | 226  | 3.14 | 0.87 | Agree    |
| 11.        | The counseling services provided improve my ability to manage academic pressure                   | 226  | 3.20 | 0.85 | Agree    |
| Grand Mean |                                                                                                   | 3.19 |      |      |          |

Table 1 above showed that students agreed to all the items on the impact of Guidance and Counselling Services on secondary school students' mental health, since their mean score is 2.50 which is the bench mark for acceptance. This signified that guidance and counseling services impacted on secondary school students' mental health. The table showed a grand mean of 3.19.

**Research Question 2:** What are the most common mental health challenges faced by students?

**Table 2:** Mean and Standard deviation on the most common mental health challenges faced by students

| S/N               | Items                                                                                             | N   | X           | SD   | Decision |
|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|-------------|------|----------|
| 1.                | Anxiety related to academic performance is a common issue among students in my school             | 226 | 3.16        | 0.08 | Agree    |
| 2.                | Many students in my school faced challenges of depression                                         | 226 | 3.21        | 0.81 | Agree    |
| 3.                | Bullying or social isolation contributes to mental health difficulties among students             | 226 | 3.24        | 0.79 | Agree    |
| 4.                | Stress from balancing academic and extracurricular activities is a frequent issue                 | 226 | 3.14        | 0.87 | Agree    |
| 5.                | Many students in my school experience difficulties with self-esteem or body image                 | 226 | 3.39        | 0.77 | Agree    |
| 6.                | Loneliness is a common mental health challenges faced by students                                 | 226 | 3.06        | 0.99 | Agree    |
| 7.                | Substance abuse (e.g., drugs or alcohol) is a challenge some students in my school face           | 226 | 3.30        | 0.77 | Agree    |
| 8.                | Test anxiety is a common mental health challenge for students                                     | 226 | 2.85        | 0.97 | Agree    |
| 9.                | Mental health challenges related to family issues (e.g., divorce, loss) are common among students | 226 | 3.07        | 0.89 | Agree    |
| 10.               | Peer pressure significantly impacts the mental health of students in my school                    | 226 | 3.22        | 0.84 | Agree    |
| 11.               | Many students struggle with emotional regulation (e.g., anger management)                         | 226 | 3.10        | 0.95 | Agree    |
| <b>Grand Mean</b> |                                                                                                   |     | <b>3.16</b> |      |          |

Table 2 shows the responses of students on the most common mental health challenges faced by students. The analysis revealed that respondents agreed to all the items on the most common mental health challenges faced by students since their mean score is 2.50 and above which is the region for acceptance. The table also showed a grand mean of 3.16.

**Research Question 3:** What are the barriers faced by school counselors in providing mental health service to students?

**Table 3:** Mean and Standard deviation on barriers faced by school counselors in providing mental health service to students

| S/N | Items                                                                                                               | N  | X    | SD   | Decision |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|------|------|----------|
| 1.  | Many school counselors lack specialized training in mental health, focusing instead on academic career counselling. | 20 | 3.24 | 0.84 | Agree    |
| 2.  | Counsellors often manage large numbers of students, making it difficult to provide individualized attention         | 20 | 3.01 | 0.95 | Agree    |
| 3.  | Stigma surrounding mental health makes it harder for counselors to reach out to students                            | 20 | 3.21 | 0.87 | Agree    |
| 4.  | Schools often lack the necessary infrastructure and materials to support effective mental health interventions      | 20 | 3.09 | 1.03 | Agree    |
| 5.  | There is a lack of time available for counselors to meet all students who need support                              | 20 | 3.18 | 0.75 | Agree    |
| 6.  | Counsellors face challenges in maintaining confidentiality , which discourages students from seeking help           | 20 | 3.03 | 0.94 | Agree    |
| 7.  | The school administration does not prioritize mental health                                                         | 20 | 3.07 | 0.89 | Agree    |



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|                                    |                                                                                           |    |      |      |       |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|------|------|-------|
|                                    | services enough to support counsellors                                                    |    |      |      |       |
| 8.                                 | School counselors struggle to follow up with students due to high caseloads               | 20 | 3.14 | 0.87 | Agree |
| 9.                                 | Lack of parental support or involvement hinders the effectiveness of counseling services. | 20 | 3.25 | 0.87 | Agree |
| 10.                                | Cultural or social factors make it difficult for students to open up to counsellors       | 20 | 2.74 | 0.63 | Agree |
| 11.                                | Teachers and staff do not always collaborate effectively with school counsellors          | 20 | 2.97 | 0.58 | Agree |
| <hr/> <b>Grand Mean 3.08</b> <hr/> |                                                                                           |    |      |      |       |

Table 3 shows the responses of guidance counselors on the barriers faced by school counselors in providing mental health service to students. The analysis indicated that respondents agreed to all the items on the barriers faced by school counselors in providing mental health service to students since their mean score is above 2.50 which is the acceptance region. The table also shows a grand mean of 3.08.

## Discussions

The findings of this study show that guidance and counseling services had impact on secondary school students' mental health such as preventing students from experiencing mental health crisis, develop better coping strategies, reduce stress / anxiety and overall well-being. This is in line with Egbochuku (2018) who found that effective school counselling programs lead to improved coping skills, self-esteem, and emotional regulation. This study is also in agreement with results of Reinke, et al. (2020); Gao, et al., (2019); Webb and Brigman (2021) and Cahill, et al. (2021) found that school counseling programs focusing on mental health positively impacted students' academic engagement and overall school satisfaction; schools with integrated mental health services help reduce instances of student anxiety, depression, and suicidal thoughts; students receiving counseling showed significant improvements in their emotional well- being and were better equipped to handle stressful situations and students who actively participated in school counseling programs showed significant improvements in mental health outcomes, including reduced anxiety levels, improved self-esteem ,and better academic performance.

The findings revealed the most common mental health challenges faced by students such as anxiety related to academic performance, Stress from balancing academic and extracurricular activities, self-esteem or body image, emotional regulation, etc. This is in line with result of Gao, et al., (2019) who identified anxiety, depression, social isolation, bullying and burnout as the most common challenges facing secondary school students' mental health. The findings of this study are also in line with those of Rawat and Gulati (2020) and Gómez-Baya, et al. (2021) whose studies Rawat and Gulati (2020) indicated that anxiety, depression, social factors such as body image concerns, peer conflicts, bullying, family discord such as divorce or parental neglect, emotional fallout from family problems and peer relationships are the mental health challenges secondary school students face.

The result of this finding shows the barriers faced by school counselor in providing mental health service to students. From the findings of this study, it indicated that counselors face a lot of challenges in providing mental health services to students such as high demand and limited resources, stigma around mental health, diverse student needs, time constraints, lack of training or specialization, confidentiality and ethical dilemmas, burnout and emotional toll, parental involvement and resistance, funding and policy barriers. The results



of this study concurred with the findings of Reinke, et al. (2020) whose study found that counselors report being overworked and lacking adequate time to provide individualized support to all students, counsellor-to- student ratios are often too high, limiting the ability to provide personalized care and follow- up and stigma around mental health remains a pervasive issues counselors face. This study also agreed with the findings of Jones and Perry (2022) who in their study identified high student-to- counselor ratios, limited resources, cultural and social factors and inadequate mental health training are the primary obstacles counselors face in providing mental health services to students.

## Conclusion

This study concluded that Guidance and Counselling Services had impact on secondary school students' mental health; anxiety, depression, burnout, social isolation, bullying, family discord, peer conflicts, academic stress, image concern and attention-deficit/ hyper activity disorder (ADHD) are the most common mental health challenges faced by students. Good mental wellbeing can have a positive impact on student's physical health, productivity and overall quality of life. Through guidance and counseling, students can get emotional support, skill development, prevention of risky behaviour, increased independence, and help in managing conflict and relationships. Inadequate training, high students to counselor ratios, limited resources, lack of collaboration between school counsellors, teachers and parents, stigma, cultural or social factors, lack of limited time and lack of follow up are the barriers faced by school counselors in providing mental health service to students.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study it was recommended that:

1. Government should employ professional guidance counselors in secondary schools to reduce high students to counsellor ratios.
2. There should be collaboration between school counsellors, teachers and parents. Counsellors should undergo retraining on mental health interventions. Students should be made to routinely visit counselors in their respective schools especially when they display anxiety and depression.
3. Government should make available the necessary infrastructure and materials to support effective mental health interventions.
4. Workshops and seminars should be organized to the community on the stigma surrounding mental health that makes it difficult for counselors to reach out to students.



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