**Original Research Article**

**Counselling and Service Utilization Needs Among Grade 12 Senior High School Students in Davao City,** **Philippines**

**ABSTRACT**

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| **Aims:** The study aimed to determine the counseling needs of Grade 12 Senior High School students from medical school in Davao City, and the extent to which they utilize the school's counseling services. It also examined the relationship between counseling needs and service utilization, the challenges students face in accessing services, and student suggestions for improvement.**Methodology:** Quantitative data was collected from 277 Grade 12 students using a survey questionnaire. Qualitative data was gathered through semi-structured focus group discussions with 15 students selected via purposive sampling. Data analysis included statistical analysis for the quantitative data and thematic analysis for the qualitative data.**Study design:** The research utilized a mixed-methods approach, specifically an explanatory sequential mixed-method design. Quantitative data was collected and analyzed first, followed by qualitative data collection through semi-structured focus group discussions to explain the quantitative findings.**Place and Duration of the Study:** The study was conducted at a medical school in Davao City. The duration of the study spanned from February-May 2025.**Results:** The quantitative results showed a high overall level of counseling needs among the students, with school concerns being the highest area of need. The utilization of counseling services was moderate. A significant relationship was found between counseling needs and service utilization. Qualitative findings revealed challenges such as limited awareness of services, availability of counselors, and stigma, and included student recommendations for improvement.**Conclusion:** The study provides insights into the counseling needs and service utilization of senior high school students. The findings highlight the need for enhanced awareness, accessibility, and effectiveness of counseling services to better support students' academic, personal, and social well-being. |
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*Keywords: Counseling Needs, Utilization of Counseling Services, Senior High School Students, School Counseling, Mental Health Awareness, Student Well-being, Mixed Method.*

1. **INTRODUCTION**

According to Sukor and Ali (2020), students today face increasing academic, social, and personal challenges, reinforcing the need for accessible school counseling services. However, stigma, misconceptions, and institutional limitations often prevent students from seeking help, leading to the underutilization of counseling resources. Studies from various countries illustrate this gap. In China, a lack of awareness leads to underutilization, particularly among high school seniors grappling with future anxieties (Wang & Liu, 2019). This trend extends to developed nations like the U.S.A., where despite mandated programs, stigma and a mismatch between available and needed services deter students from seeking help (Rickwood et al., 2017). Cultural factors, such as the fear of judgment in South Korea (Park & Lee, 2019) and challenges in visibility and accessibility in Brazil (Silva et al., 2021), further contribute to this underuse. Even in Nairobi, Kenya, the perceived empathy of counselors significantly impacts whether students will engage with services (Nyandoro & Kinga, 2023). The Philippines mirrors these global concerns, with a significant number of Filipinos, including students, grappling with mental health issues (Department of Health, 2020). This study aims to examine the awareness, accessibility, and institutional barriers affecting the engagement of Grade 12 students at a medical school in Davao City with counseling services. Given the moderate utilization despite high demand, this research seeks to assess counseling needs, utilization rates, and challenges to refine existing programs, eliminate obstacles, and develop strategies for more effective and accessible student support. Furthermore, this study addresses the lack of localized research in Davao City, aiming to strengthen institutional frameworks and enhance awareness, ensuring students receive the necessary guidance to navigate academic and personal difficulties.

1. **MATERIAL AND METHODS**

 **2.1 Research Design**

The study utilized a mixed-method approach that incorporated an explanatory sequential design. Mixed methods research allows for the integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, resulting in a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research topic. By combining numerical data with experiential insights, this research methodology addresses complex issues that may be overlooked when using single method alone (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). It also enables triangulation, enhancing the credibility and reliability of the findings by cross-verifying information from different sources.

 Following the explanatory sequential design, quantitative data is collected first (Creswell & Creswell 2018), followed by qualitative data collection to further clarify the context and initial findings (Creswell, 2014). This two-phase design was appropriate for the study as it allowed for initial data to guide the deeper exploration of counseling service usage and student needs. A survey collected numerical data on counseling needs and utilization of counseling services, while semi-structured interview provided deeper insights into the students’ experiences and perspectives.

**2.2 Research Environment**

The research was conducted at a medical school in Davao City, a private, non-sectarian institution located at General Malvar Avenue in Davao City. Established in 1975, it initially focused on medical courses. The Senior High School Department, which opened in 2016, offers five strands: STEM, ABM, HUMSS, GAS, and TVL.

**2.3 Research Respondents**

 The research included two phases which has two sets of participants: a quantitative online survey respondents and qualitative semi-structured interview participants.

**2.3.1 Phase 1: Quantitative Online Survey**

 Simple random sampling was used to ensure that each sample has an equal chance of being selected (Bobko et al., 2009). The total number of student respondents is 277 Grade 12 senior high school students in all strands.

**2.3.2 Phase 2: Qualitative Semi-Structured Interview**

Purposive sampling was used to identify the 15 participants that were selected based on the following criteria:

1. A grade 12 senior high school student currently enrolled at a medical school in Davao City, Inc., specifically in a blended learning class;

2. The student ranked the highest in counseling needs in the previous survey; and

3. The student has utilized the counseling services in a medical school in Davao City.

**2.4 Research Instrument**

The study utilized online surveys and semi-structured in-depth interviews for data collection.

**2.4.1 Phase 1: Quantitative Survey Questionnaires**

 This study utilized one adapted questionnaire. One with 20 questions on counseling student needs, and another 20 questions on the utilization of school counseling services. Both using a 5-point Likert Scale(Table 1&2).

**Table 1. Counseling Needs Interpretation**

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Level** | **Range of Means** | **Description** | **Interpretation** |
| 5 | 4.20 – 5.00 | Very High | This means that the need for counseling among students is extremely high, with many students experiencing issues that require immediate intervention. |
| 4 | 3.40 – 4.19 | High | This means that the need for counseling is significant, with a large number of students experiencing issues that necessitate regular support. |
| 3 | 2.60 – 3.39 | Moderate | This means that the need for counseling is relatively low, with fewer students having minor issues. |
| 2 | 1.80 – 2.59 | Low | This means that the need for counseling is relatively low, with fewer students having minor issues. |
| 1 | 1.00 – 1.79 | Very Low | This means that the need for counseling is minimal, with most students managing well and having little to no need for formal counseling support. |

**Table 2. Utilization of School Counseling Services Interpretation**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Level** | **Range of Means** | **Description** | **Interpretation** |
| 5 | 4.20 – 5.00 | Very High | This means that the utilization of school counseling services is outstanding, where students effectively access and benefit from counseling services. |
| 4 | 3.40 – 4.19 | High | This means that the utilization of school counseling services is strong, where students actively use counseling services and experience positive outcomes. |
| 3 | 2.60 – 3.39 | Moderate | This means that the utilization of school counseling services is adequate, where students are using the services but the level of engagement may be inconsistent. |
| 2 | 1.80 – 2.59 | Low | This means that the utilization of school counseling services is low, where students are using the services infrequently or ineffectively; indicating a need for enhanced support. |
| 1 | 1.00 – 1.79 | Very Low | This means that the utilization of school counseling services is lacking, where students rarely access or benefit from the services, indicating a critical need for major improvements. |

**2.4.2 Phase 2: Qualitative *Semi-Structured Interview***

The Semi-Structured Interview used six researcher-made questions to explore themes related to counseling needs and utilization of counseling services. Discussions were recorded and transcribed.

**2.5 Data Gathering Procedure
2.5.1 Phase 1: Quantitative Online Survey**

Consent was obtained from school authorities. The survey was distributed via Google Forms. Respondents were informed and compensated. Responses were reviewed, analyzed, and tallied.

**2.5.2 Phase 2: Qualitative *In-depth Interview***

 Consent was obtained, and interviews were schedule base on the participants’ convenience. Each session lasted for 10-15 minutes, and recording were made with permission. Data were transcribed, documented, and analyzed thematically.

**2.6 Data Analysis**

**2.6.1 Phase 1: Quantitative Analysis**

Mean was used to determine the level of counseling needs and the level of utilization of school counseling services (Calmorin, L. & Calmorin, M., 2007). Pearson correlation coefficient was used to determine and analyze the relationship of counseling needs and utilization of school counseling services (Turney, 2022).

**2.6.2 Phase 2: Qualitative Analysis**

Thematic analysis was used to identify and analyze the patterns or themes to minimally organize and describe the data set in detail (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

**2.6.3 Phase 3: Triangulation**

Triangulation was used to enhance the reliability and validity of research results, in which it entails the utilization methods, data sources, or viewpoints to achieve a more thorough understanding of the research issue (Alele et al., 2023).

**2.7 Scope and Delimitation of the study**

The study focused on Grade 12 students at a medical school in Davao City during the 2024–2025 school year, using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design. to examine and clarify the connection between counseling needs and utilization of school counseling services among Grade 12 Senior High School Students at a medical school in Davao City, using both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews for in-depth insights.

 The study focused on Grade 12 Senior High School students at a medical school in Davao City during the school year of 2024-2025, using an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design.

1. **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**3.1 Quantitative Results**

**Table 3. Level of Counseling Needs among Grade 12 Students in a medical school in Davao City**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Counseling Needs** | **Mean**  | **Description** |
| Personal Concerns | 3.30 | Moderate |
| School Concerns | 3.79 | High |
| Counseling Concerns | 3.76 | High |
| Post-Secondary Plans | 3.57 | High |
| **Overall** | **3.65** | **High** |

#### **Legend:** 1.00–1.79 = Very Low; 1.80–2.59 = Low; 2.60–3.39 = Fair; 3.40–4.19 = High; 4.20–5.00 = Very High

As presented in Table 3, the overall mean score for the Level of Counseling Needs among Grade 12 students was 3.65, categorized as High, indicating that students generally require substantial support from counseling services to navigate their academic and personal lives. Among the indicators, School Concerns had the highest mean of 3.79, also categorized as High, showing that students are significantly affected by academic pressures, workload, and school-related challenges that impact their performance and well-being. Counseling Concerns follows closely with a mean of 3.76 or High, indicating that students are aware of the importance of counseling services and express a strong desire for more frequent and accessible support. Post-Secondary Plans had a mean of 3.57 or High, suggesting that many students are uncertain or anxious about their future education and career paths, seeking guidance in making informed decisions. Lastly, Personal Concerns had the lowest mean of 3.30 or Moderate, indicating that while personal and emotional issues are present, they may be underreported or considered less of a priority by students. Overall, the data suggests that academic-related concerns and future planning are the most critical areas where students seek help, highlighting the importance of strengthening guidance programs that address both educational and career development needs.

**Table 4. Level of Utilization of School Counseling Services among Grade 12 Students**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Utilization of Counseling Services** | **Mean**  | **Description** |
| Personal Concerns Services | 2.66 | Moderate |
| School Concerns Services | 2.96 | Moderate |
| Counseling Concerns Services | 2.86 | Moderate |
| Career Concerns Services | 2.93 | Moderate |
| **Overall** | **2.85** | **Moderate** |

As presented in Table 4, the overall mean score for the Level of Utilization of School Counseling Services among Grade 12 students was 2.85, categorized as Moderate, indicating that while students recognize the availability of counseling services, they do not fully engage with them. Among the indicators, School Concerns Services had the highest mean of 2.96, also categorized as Moderate, showing that students are more likely to seek help for academic-related issues compared to other concerns. Career Concerns Services follow closely with a mean of 2.93 or Moderate, indicating that students moderately utilize counseling services for guidance on future plans but may still lack consistent access or awareness. Counseling Concerns Services had a mean of 2.86 or still Moderate, suggesting that students occasionally consult counselors but may face barriers such as stigma, limited time, or lack of trust. Lastly, Personal Concerns Services had the lowest mean of 2.66 or Moderate, indicating that students are least likely to seek help for emotional or personal issues, possibly due to privacy concerns or discomfort in sharing personal matters. Overall, the data suggests that although counseling services are moderately utilized, there is a need to increase awareness, accessibility, and trust in these services to encourage more consistent student engagement.

**Table 5. The relationship between Counseling Needs and utilization of School Counseling Services**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| ***P* value** | **Interpretation** | **Decision**  |
| <.001 | Significant | Reject Ho |

The table 5 clearly shows that the p - value of <.001 indicates a significant relationship between Counseling Needs and Utilization of School Counseling Services among grade 12 students. Thus, we rejected the Null Hypothesis (Ho), supporting the conclusion that Counseling Needs has a significant impact on the Utilization of School Counseling Services among Grade 12 Students in a medical school in Davao City.

**3.2 Qualitative Results**

**3.2.1 The challenges faced by grade 12 students in utilizing School Counseling Services to meet their Counseling Needs.**

**Table 6. Descriptions of the Challenges faced by grade 12 students in utilizing School Counseling Services**

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| --- | --- | --- |
| **Themes** | **Description** | **Supporting Participant Quote** |
| Limited Awareness of Available Counseling Services | The limited awareness of available counseling services presents a significant barrier to student access. It is found that learners' awareness of the guidance and counseling services offered in schools directly influences their likelihood of utilizing these resources (Luz, 2023). | “…and there are also some students who are really not aware that the school offers counseling, so that's why they just don't bother because they are not aware.” – (S8, L8) |
| Availability of Counselors | School counselors offer multifaceted guidance encompassing academic, career, and personal development. However, a persistent shortage of school counselors nationwide greatly impacts the capacity of schools to provide personalized attention and support to students (DelaGarza, 2024). | “Limited counsel availability in high school to counsel issues often results in long wait times, confidentiality concerns…” – (S5, L20) |
| Stigma and fear of being judged | Many individuals resist counseling due to the fear of judgment, whether from the counselor or from peers who might discover their involvement in therapy (Brenner, 2023). | “Students might also find it difficult to share their experiences and thoughts because they might be judged or they are afraid.” – (S12, L12) |

Table 6 reveal that Grade 12 students face three main challenges in utilizing school counseling services. First, Limited Awareness of Available Counseling Services shows that many students are simply unaware that these services exist, which prevents them from seeking help. Second, Availability of Counselors reflects the shortage of school counselors, leading to long wait times and less personalized support. Finally, Stigma and Fear of Being Judged highlights how fear of negative perception from peers or counselors discourages students from opening up. These findings emphasize the need for improved promotion, accessibility, and destigmatization of school counseling services.

**3.2.2 The extent of grade 12 students' Utilization of School Counseling Services at a medical school in Davao City**

**Table 7. Grade 12 Students' Awareness and Utilization of School Counseling Services**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Themes** | **Description** | **Supporting Participant Quote** |
| Aware But Never Availed Counseling Services | Regardless of a school’s provision of a system of support and services to students, there are still a variety of beliefs and barriers that hinder the ability of students to seek help from their school counselor (Auger et al., 2019).  | “Honestly, I never sought any school services, not even once. If it was just me, I try to handle my problems by myself with the help of my friends, teachers, or anyone who can help me.” – (S9, L39) |
| Aware And Utilized Counseling Services Occasionally | Due to students’ heightened curiosity, they naturally try to explore different career choices. They generally understand traditional guidance services and individual counseling, particularly when it comes to aligning their career choices with their professional goals (Darwin et al., 2020). | “I have sought help a few times throughout the years, primarily for academic advising in college and application guidance.” – (S5, L35) |
| Not Aware And Never Availed Counseling Services | Many students remain unaware of available support because it hasn’t been communicated effectively. Ineffective promotion can lead to high levels of unawareness of services that exist on campus (MacDonald et al., 2022). | “Maybe, if they show a little more engaging *uhm…* engaging so that the students can know that there are counselors who are ready to help them face their struggles.”- (S15, L60) |

Table 7 reveal that Grade 12 students at a medical school in Davao City, Inc. utilize school counseling services to varying extents, shaped by their awareness and personal experiences. First, Aware But Never Availed Counseling Services shows that while some students know about the services, they choose to rely on personal coping strategies or support from friends and teachers instead. Second, Aware and Utilized Counseling Services Occasionally reflects students who have accessed counseling mainly for academic or career guidance, particularly during key decision-making points. Finally, Not Aware and Never Availed Counseling Services highlights how lack of effective promotion contributes to students remaining unaware of available support. These findings underscore the importance of increasing visibility and approachability of counseling services to enhance student engagement..

**3.2.3 Students’ Recommendations for Improvement of the accessibility and effectiveness of School Counseling Services at a medical school in Davao City**

**Table 8. Students’ Recommendations for Improvement of the accessibility and effectiveness of School Counseling Services**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Themes** | **Description** | **Supporting Participant Quote** |
| Enhancing Awareness and Promotion of Counseling Services | Regularly assessing and prioritizing mental health policies and programs is essential to guarantee their effectiveness in order for students to succeed during challenging times (Wiedermann et al, 2023). | “All I can say they should spread awareness that there are services that they offer at school, so that the students are aware.” -(S8, L68) |
| Accessibility and Convenience of Counseling Services | Virtual counseling has made support more flexible, as this enables students to address their needs at their own convenience and in a comfortable setting. It also provides the opportunity for students to engage in discussions anonymously, which is particularly beneficial for those who feel hesitant to share personal information (Jaber and Al-Hroub, 2022). | “It could be more accessible if there was an online platform since some students are sort of afraid to express their thoughts personally but not on online platforms.” -(S9, L84) |
| Availability of Counselors | An effective counseling program forges a sense of community and belonging in students, and by the individual engagement of students in the program, this provides an optimistic environment in school, wherein students feel heard and supported (DeLaGarza, 2024). | “They should add counselors, especially during these peak periods, like exams or like the needs of other students.” -(S9, L69) |

Table 8 reveal that Grade 12 students at a medical school in Davao City, Inc. have clear recommendations for improving the accessibility and effectiveness of school counseling services. First, Enhancing Awareness and Promotion of Counseling Services emphasizes the need for better communication and visibility of available services so students can easily recognize and access support when needed. Second, Accessibility and Convenience of Counseling Services highlights the demand for flexible options such as virtual counseling, which can provide comfort and anonymity for students hesitant to seek help in person. Finally, the Availability of Counselors points to the importance of increasing the number of counselors, especially during high-stress periods, to ensure students feel supported and heard. These recommendations stress the value of proactive, student-centered improvements in the counseling program.

1. **CONCLUSION**

The study established a significant relationship between the counseling needs of Grade 12 students and their utilization of school counseling services at a medical school in Davao City, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This finding confirms that students with higher counseling needs are more likely to access and utilize available counseling services, underscoring the crucial role that perceived need plays in service engagement. The qualitative findings further revealed that students face multiple barriers-including lack of awareness, social stigma, and competing academic priorities-that hinder their full utilization of counseling services. Many students expressed difficulty in balancing their academic responsibilities with seeking help, and some reported misconceptions about the purpose and benefits of counseling. Limited awareness and prevailing stigma often result in delayed engagement or reliance on informal support systems rather than professional assistance. Overall, the study highlights the importance of enhancing both the visibility and accessibility of school counseling services. It also emphasizes the need for targeted interventions to address misconceptions and reduce stigma, as well as the importance of proactive outreach and student-centered improvements in counseling programs.

**CONSENT**

All participants and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study, and their consent was obtained before conducting the interviews and survey. The ethical guidelines for confidentiality, voluntary participation, and respect for participants' rights were strictly followed.

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