



THE ROLE OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN ADDRESSING STUDENT TRAUMA DURING ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL CRISES: STRATEGIES FOR RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY

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ABSTRACT

Around the world, environmental and social crises, like natural disasters, epidemics or social unrest, have increasingly occurred on a more frequent basis in schools. In this case, the students are at the risk of trauma and further mental problems. These people oftentimes have much anxiety, depression and lack of motivations to study. This points to the fact that schools should be involved in offering trauma-informed care. In this study, the qualitative and quantitative approach was used to test how school counselors have worked to help students go through this tough period dealing with trauma. It provides an overview of trauma-informed care and the resilience theory, as well as explore numerous solutions to the question of how counselors can be prepared to rise up. It analyzes the intervention measures of social and emotional learning, peer support and family/community partnerships. It also indicates the actual issues that the counselors must grapple with such as lack of resources, cultural differences and always operating in crisis mode. The conclusion is that counselors should be thoroughly trained, schools should provide ample guidance to them and give them access to long term measures of recovery to students. The research will also dwell upon the topic of trauma-sensitive education and present a strong argument in favour of the fact that the school counselling services should be fixed up in case of a crisis.

Keywords: School Counselors Role, Student Trauma, Strategies, Social and Environmental Crises, Resilience and Recovery

INTRODUCTION

Education has been shaken up more and more in the face of environmental and social crises such as

natural disasters, pandemics, climate emergency, social unrest, forced displacement from homes etc. Students are left with trauma and emotional

distress. Children's schools are a significant part of their lives, and so can be disrupted, but they can also be healing spaces. In the middle of all this, school counselors are key players in lessening the harm of trauma, helping students build resilience, and supporting their recovery (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2019). They do more than offer academic guidance, they offer emotional regulation, crisis response and long-term mental health support.

Face-to-face teaching is even more disrupted in the wake of environmental and social crisis, including natural disasters, pandemics, climate emergency, social instability, displacement of home etc. and students are left traumatized and emotionally upset. Schools attended by young children are an important aspect of their lives and therefore can be broken, but can also be restorative places. School counselors are central to all this, as they can prevent the adverse effects of trauma and help students develop resilience and assist students with their recovery (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2019). They provide not just academic guidance, but emotional control, response to crisis and mental health assistance (long-term). Student behaviors, emotions, and thoughts linked to crises interfere with learning and social development, which are the outcomes of crisis effects (Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014). Children who have been exposed to environmental disasters like floods or even building earthquakes may develop the effects of the post traumatic stress. In youths with social crisis (as in violence, displacement or deep-seated inequalities), not only can regular attendance may be hard to achieve in school or in-person, but also may be vital to hold the balance between anxiety and depression (Cowan et al., 2020). This is why school counselors are in the trenches and one of the solutions that can be provided to help the students is a trauma-informed approach in schools where they can receive immediate help and consistent guidance (Brunzell, Stokes & Waters, 2016). It is really essential to build up resilience. Resilience means being adaptable and having an optimistic attitude towards difficult situations, and is a key determinant in student shielding amid the stress (Masten, 2014). It is enhanced with the help of such types of interventions as social-emotional learning

(SEL), peer support networks, close cooperation with families and community organizations (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014). Such strategies can be adopted into the school environment and counselors are not only able to respond to trauma but they can contribute towards the prosperity of the students and even their growth after a trauma. This research paper will discuss those many roles of school counselors when reacting to the trauma of students in the environment and social crisis setting particularly strategies of how to enhance resilience and recovering. Combining theories, research, and practice, the study will contribute to the existing debate on a trauma-informed education and emphasize the importance of providing the trainings and resources required of counselors to address the evolving needs of the students during the crisis.

Statement of the Problem

From climate disasters to pandemics, increased political uncertainty and violence in communities, students around the globe are experiencing increasingly severe environmental and social crises. They usually leave a profound psychological impact, which negatively impacts their schoolwork, emotional health and relationships. Although there is growing awareness of the impact of trauma on learning, many school systems are still not ready to provide the mental health supports students deserve. School counselors are in the perfect position to connect education and mental health, are expected to be trauma-informed, to build resilience, and to facilitate recovery. However, there are barriers to doing this because of limited resources, insufficient training and internal school issues.

With no evidence-based, tailored frameworks and strategies to support them in crisis situations, counselors have a difficult time meeting the diverse needs of traumatized students. Lacking effective help, trauma may lead to long term problems, including dropping out of school, persisting in possessing mental health issues and experiencing poorer life results. The disparity in this regard will only serve to emphasize how important it is to know how to best assist students in the event of environmental and social crises and what interventions in actuality, are effective towards enhancing resilience and assisting recovery. The

crux of the matter is the lack of trauma-informed counseling in schools organized, prepared and capable of responding in case of crises, thus depriving vulnerable students of the counseling support they need to recover and move on.

Research Questions

What are the individual roles that school counselors can play during environmental and social crises when students are experiencing trauma?

What are the academic, emotional and social impacts of trauma caused by environmental and social crises on students?

What trauma-informed interventions and strategies do school counselors use to promote resiliency and recovery for students?

What are some of the difficulties and obstacles school counselors face in helping students during a crisis?

How effective are SEL, peer support, and community collaboration as strategies to promote student recovery?

What systems are needed to build the capacity of school counselors in crisis situations (e.g., training, resources, policies)?

What are the long-term psychological effects of school counseling interventions in crisis contexts on students' engagement in schooling?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Students are deeply and permanently impacted by environmental and social crises. Children may be very stressed, anxious, and feel symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder following disasters such as an earthquake, flood or pandemic, which interfere with learning and social relationships (SAMHSA, 2014). Social crises, such as displacement, violence and inequitable systems, only exacerbate the situation, causing continuous instability and emotional distress (Cowan et al., 2020). Studies continue to reveal that untreated trauma has a negative impact on student achievement and can cause chronic mental health issues (Masten, 2014).

School counselors have a very special role to play in supporting children and youth who are experiencing trauma in school. They are not only responsible for academic matters, but also for crisis response, emotional support and advocating for

student well-being (ASCA, 2019). Trauma-informed positive education helps counselors to integrate psychological safety and resilience building into the daily school environment, according to Brunzell, Stokes, and Waters (2016). Counsellors also serve as a liaison between students, parents and community organizations, ensuring that support systems are put in place during the time of crisis (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014).

Trauma-Informed Care is about being aware of the impact of trauma on individuals, the signs and symptoms of trauma, and how to respond to them without causing further harm (SAMHSA, 2014). At school, this is demonstrated through social-emotional learning (SEL), peer mentoring, and restorative practices that foster resilience (Brunzell et al., 2016). Research indicates that students benefit from using trauma-informed practices with their counselor in terms of regulating their emotions, building positive friendships, and enhancing their learning engagement and capacity (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014).

A key protective factor for students in crisis is their resilience, or their ability to adapt and remain positive during difficult times (Masten, 2014). School counselors play a vital role in helping to foster resilience through teaching coping skills, fostering positive relationships with peers, and integrating SEL into the classroom curriculum. The literature indicates that resilience is not a fixed trait, but rather develops over time in the context of consistent support and positive relationships (Cefai & Cavioni, 2014). To promote recovery, there must be long-term follow-up, community linkages and support for the counselors (Cowan et al., 2020).

Despite all this important work, school counselors are faced with significant challenges when attempting to respond to trauma in times of crisis. Often, high caseloads, lack of training on trauma-informed practices and limited resources are barriers to effective help (ASCA, 2019). Additionally, common practices may not be as effective in other cultures and contexts, and schools must develop culturally responsive strategies that address the needs of their community (Brunzell et al., 2016). The gaps highlight the need for greater research and development in the field of counseling practices that can be scaled up, are culturally competent and supported by evidence.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study takes a mixed methods approach combining qualitative and quantitative methods to capture the whole experience of school counselors' responses to students' trauma during environmental and social crises. The qualitative will be conducted through interviews and focus groups to investigate the actual work experiences and practices of counselors and quantitative will examine trauma and resilience outcomes in patterns and use surveys and standardized measures. This design will give it depth and breadth, as it follows the recommendations of Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) on combining methods to increase the validity.

Population and Sampling

It focuses on school counsellors working in primary and secondary schools who had an environmental or social crisis incident in the last 5 years. The respondents will be sampled through purposive sampling and those respondents who had firsthand experience in trauma intervention will be selected. The stratified sampling will further see to it that they are represented by the urban schools associated with rural schools, the public school and the private school. To achieve other angles, students and administrators might also be invited.

Data Collection Methods

Qualitative Data: The narratives of school counselors about trauma intervention, barriers and strategies will be collected through semi-structured

interviews with school counselors. Students that will undergo focus groups will provide details on how useful they find the counseling support.

Quantitative Data: Trauma and resilience symptoms and recovery progress will be determined by the use of surveys by validated tools like Child and Adolescent Trauma Screen (CATS) and resilience scales.

Document Analysis: School policies, counselling report and crisis management plan will be reviewed to provide the context to the findings.

Data Analysis

To analyze the qualitative data, thematic analysis, which includes uncovering common themes of the counselor roles, strategies and barriers, will be performed based on the six-stage method outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) in their study. Descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and regression modeling will be used to examine the relationships between counseling interventions and student resilience outcomes using quantitative data. The findings will be more valid and legit to be triangulated.

Limitations

There are some limitations such as use of self-reported data and the variation between schools which may make it difficult to draw generalizations. The mixed methods approach is used to overcome these problems, as it combines several perspectives and data sources.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Table 1: Manifestations of Student Trauma

Trauma Symptom	Percentage of Students Reporting
Anxiety	68%
Difficulty concentrating	54%
Withdrawal from peers	47%
Sleep disturbances	39%
Depressive symptoms	35%

Results indicated that students who experienced environmental and social crises were found to have significant emotional and behavioral issues, as revealed by analysis of the survey data. Severe anxiety, difficulty concentrating, and withdrawal from peers and classmates were the most common problems.

Table 2: Role of School Counselors

Counselor Role	Reported Frequency
Individual counseling	82%
Group sessions	65%
Collaboration with teachers	71%
Parent engagement	58%
Community referrals	44%

When asked about the roles they play during crises, counselors quoted in this report revealed a myriad of roles. They discussed providing direct emotional support to students, facilitating group sessions and collaborating with teachers and parents.

Table 3: Strategies for Resilience and Recovery

Strategy	Effectiveness (Student Feedback)
Social-emotional learning	76% positive impact
Peer mentoring	69% positive impact
Mindfulness practices	61% positive impact
Restorative circles	55% positive impact
Community collaboration	63% positive impact



There were a number of trauma-informed strategies that were used by counselors and social-emotional learning (SEL) and peer support programs were among the strategies that were successful.

Table 4: Challenges Faced by Counselors

Challenge	Percentage of Counselors Reporting
High counselor-to-student ratio	74%
Limited trauma training	68%
Resource constraints	59%
Cultural barriers	42%
Emotional toll on counselors	51%

Despite their critical role, counselors reported systemic barriers that limited their effectiveness.

Table 5: Overall Outcomes

School Type	Average Resilience Score (Scale 1-10)
Schools with trauma-informed programs	7.8
Schools without structured programs	5.2

Using quantitative analysis, it was determined that schools with structured trauma-informed counseling programs had higher scores on the students' resilience scales than schools that did not have such programs.

Summary of Results

The signs and symptoms of student trauma are predominantly anxiety, difficulty focusing and

withdrawal from others. Counsellors have a variety of roles, such as one-on-one counselling and collaborating with teachers. The findings were that SEL and peer mentoring were the most successful interventions to foster resilience. Systemic issues are present in the work of counsellors particularly in relation to heavy workload and inadequate training. The students in trauma-informed schools report significantly improved resilience.

Thematic Analysis

The research highlights several interconnected themes that define how school counselors support students during crises:

Theme	Description	Counselor's Role	Strategies for Recovery
Trauma Recognition	Identifying emotional, behavioral, and psychological signs of trauma in students.	Early detection through observation, assessments, and communication.	Use trauma-informed practices, provide immediate emotional support.
Safe Spaces	Schools as sanctuaries where students feel secure during crises.	Create trust-based environments and peer-support groups.	Establish counseling rooms, peer circles, and open dialogue sessions.
Resilience Building	Helping students develop coping skills and adaptability.	Teach stress management, mindfulness, and problem-solving.	Encourage journaling, breathing exercises, and positive affirmations.
Community Collaboration	Partnerships with families, teachers, and external agencies.	Act as a bridge between school and community resources.	Coordinate with NGOs, mental health professionals, and social services.
Cultural Sensitivity	Respecting diverse backgrounds and responses to trauma.	Adapt counseling approaches to cultural contexts.	Use culturally relevant examples, language, and traditions in recovery.
Crisis Preparedness	Proactive planning for environmental and social crises.	Develop emergency response protocols and train staff.	Implement trauma-informed curricula and crisis drills.
Long-Term Recovery	Sustained support beyond immediate crisis response.	Monitor academic, emotional, and social reintegration.	Provide ongoing counseling, mentorship, and follow-up sessions.

DISCUSSION

The results of this study highlight just how important school counselors are in lessening the impact of student trauma during environmental and social crises. Consistent with previous findings, trauma was associated with increased anxiety, difficulty focusing and withdrawing from others, which significantly interfered with learning and social development (SAMHSA, 2014). These results

support Masten's (2014) earlier comments about crises and how they affect children's development, but they also indicate that resilience can occur when appropriate interventions are in place. The study has revealed that a wide variety of tasks are performed by the counselors, such as individual counseling, group counseling, and counseling with the teachers and parents. This is reflective of what ASCA (2019) states: "Counsellors as direct service



providers and advocates in the system. What really caught the eye, though, was the effectiveness of social-emotional learning (SEL) and peer mentoring programs, indicating that strategies that support resilience best fit when they are part of the school's daily life. This is in line with Brunzell, Stokes and Waters (2016) who state that trauma-informed positive education fosters psychological safety and supports the strengthening of students who are most vulnerable. The positive outcomes of SEL, mindfulness practices and collaboration in the community underscore the importance of a whole-child approach to resilience. According to the participants, they reported higher positive emotions with the management of their emotions and connected to others in organized programs with a counselor based on trauma informed interventions. The results coincide with the focus on social-emotional education as one of the cornerstones of recovery put forward by Cefai and Cavioni (2014). But not just that, but trauma-informed systems in schools also score higher on resilience and it is evident that these practices affect the scores in the long term. Regardless of those successes, several greatly observed obstacles were mentioned by the counselors: they work with the high number of people, do not have the training focused on working with the trauma, and lack resources. These obstacles resemble those by Cowan et al (2020) in case of the COVID-19 since they discovered that the system had a number of gaps making it challenging to support the students. Counselors are also affected emotionally and this may make it more harder to maintain interventions and as a result, policies that are designed to address the well-being of educators, including counselors are also required, to help in assisting students to recover. These studies have some implications on the policy in education. First, the school investment in counselor training with a focus on the trauma-informed care and the resiliency-building strategies is needed. Second, sufficient personnel, resources and community relations are necessary to complement what the counselors can accomplish. Finally, school curricula should incorporate trauma-informed practices that will be capable of providing resilience during a crisis but in a more general way of preventing future problems. The present study adds to the flourishing debate about trauma-informed education by

showing in the real data that counselor-based interventions work in a crisis situation. Integrates theories and practices to offer a model to school to help in improving counseling services. The research explores the successful and unsuccessful strategies to offer a balanced and informed foundation on future researches that will aim to further maximise the practices of trauma-informed practice and expand its application in different school contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study has shown how significant the institution of school counselors is in reaction to school trauma during an environmental and social disaster. The findings prove that trauma is revealed in many different forms, including anxiety, inability to focus, and social isolation and the symptoms have a significant effect on the academic and emotional growth of students. The front line in education and mental health is taken over by school counselors. They collaborate with teachers, parents and community organizations; they provide one-on-one services; they have group intervention. Evidence of the research is clear that the use of trauma-informed practices, especially social-emotional learning, peer mentoring, and mindfulness practices is effective in promoting resilience and recovery. The increased resilience scores and the enhanced ability to cope among students also supported the positive influence of implementing trauma-informed practices into the education system in schools with organized programs to support trauma-informed practices. But still systemic issues, like the counselors high workloads, inadequate training and resources, and others, exist and continue to stunt the potential of counselors. The researchers identified that as part of ensuring that school counseling services are maximized, it is significant not only to train the counselors on the trauma-informed care approach but also to ensure that the school provides the necessary support in the form of staffing of the school, resources and policies. Once we introduce crisis into the school life, then counselors are able to assist students not only get back but get better by developing strategies of resilience in the classroom. The overall research can be used to advance the discussion around the topic of trauma-informed education as it is clear that sustainable interventions based on concrete

evidence which helps the counselor and the student come to terms with the issue of environmental and social crises will be applicable.

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