Assessment of Utilization of Counseling Services by Students in Keren Subzone Secondary Schools, Anseba Region, Eritrea

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ABSTRACT

The trend of discipline in Eritrean high schools is not different from the rest of the world. Despite counselling services being part of education policy and the curriculum, they are still underutilized in many schools in Eritrea. This is supported by the common indiscipline incidents reported in Eritrean schools such as assault, noise making, fighting, theft, vandalism, destruction of school property, cheating in exams, failure to do homework or refusal to take orders from teachers and administrators, unwarranted absenteeism, sneaking from class and in some rare cases smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol. This study assessed the utilization of counselling services by students in Keren Subzone Secondary Schools, Anseba Region, Eritrea. The study adopted a mixed methods research design across a target population of 1515 respondents. Systematic sampling, simple random and purposive sampling were used to select schools and the participants of the study. Questionnaires and interview guides were used for data collection. Data gathered through questionnaires was analyzed using descriptive statistical techniques involving frequencies, percentages and means. Data gathered through interview guides was analyzed and presented using quotes, themes and narrative descriptions. In terms of utilization of counselling services the study revealed that majority of students did not use counselling services in schools. The results also showed that there was lack of proper offices for counselling services, lack of trained counselors, less attention given to the counselling department, lack of awareness from students and lack of counselling facilities. The study recommended that the ministry of education should provide schools with trained counselors.

Keywords: *Secondary school counselling, counselling in Anseba, Eritrea counselling services, Eritrean school counselling, Discipline and counselling*

INTRODUCTION

Counselling services are crucial in management of discipline in schools (Kimotho, Njoka, and Gitumu, 2017). Implementing of counselling programs in schools plays an important role in shaping students' behavior and discipline. Without the exercise of discipline, schools cannot work well. Students in schools need to be fully guided regarding discipline and attitudes that lead to success in life. Counselling helps in opening educational and vocational opportunities for students. It also helps them to acquire the right values and attitudes that would make them productive and useful citizens (Vann, 2013). Discipline in schools is one of the most pressing issues in the education sector in the world today. Like any other organization, every school requires discipline, for no group of people can work together successfully without establishing standards of good behavior, respect and a desirable system of values that lead each person in the group to develop self-control and self-direction (Luti-Mallei and Komo, 2016).

According to Eyo, Joshua, and Esuong (2012), it is believed that the success of any program in school lies on the students' attitude towards it. The way students respond and perceive counselling services will, to a great extent, determine whether or not counselling services are needed or will be effectively utilized in schools. Daud and Bond (2013) conducted a study on cultural values and use of guidance and counselling services in secondary school by students in Malaysia. Their study found out that most students viewed counselling as peripheral in their life. To students, counselling meant punishment for those in trouble. They had various worries about the stigma associated with counselling, including the fear of being interrogated and receiving quizzical looks by other students. As a result, they were anxious and nervous about coming to the counselling unit, and described the same feelings of dread among their peers. Another study was conducted by Cooper (2015) in UK (United Kingdom) secondary schools. The study found out across all studies that clients with a mean age of 13.86 attended 6.35 sessions of counselling. Most clients had family issues, with male respondents mostly having anger problems. On average, in the UK schools, just over 80% of respondents used counselling services. They classified counselling as moderate or very helpful, with teachers giving it a mean 8.22 rating on a 10-point helpfulness scale.

Gallant (2016) carried out a study on high school students' awareness, use, and satisfaction with academic, college preparation, career, and personal, social, or emotional school counselling services in large urban school districts in the United States of America. Results indicated that a high proportion of students reported awareness of school counselling services at their school, and students who reported visiting the school counsellor for specific services were satisfied with services. However, less than 50% reported visiting the school counselling office at least once for college preparation, career, personal, social, or emotional services.

According to Araya (2008), Eritrean youth and students do not readily seek for counselling. The most obvious reason is stigma, followed by the lack of familiarity with psychological explanations of distress and with the process of counselling. In Eritrean society counselors are seen as authority figures regardless of the counselor's attitude and behavioral style. This has

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negative consequences for counselling because students fear approaching the counselors and hence they would have negative attitude to counselling. She further explains that Eritrean youth and students' attitude to counselling is highly influenced by their culture. The Eritrean culture doesn't encourage sharing private issues with strangers. Most families encourage their children not to share information outside and so they encourage sharing to take place with the family setting. Eritrean students experiencing emotional problems tend to feel that they have failed not only to themselves, but also their families. This view is often reinforced by the families and the community. According to the expectation of the society Eritreans are expected to be able to solve their personal problems, or to discuss their problems with family members. Seeking help for problems outside the family is an act that has the potential of bringing disgrace to the family. The cultural background and lack of knowledge about counselling has made the Eritrean students have a negative attitude to guidance and counselling services. Araya (2008) mentioned that Eritrean students were reluctant to share their issues with a counselor due to cultural background, family and many other reasons that she mentions above. However in her review she did not mention whether such factors or views affect counselling on students discipline in a school setting. Araya (2008) further argues that many Eritrean students do not have a clear understanding of what counselling is or how it can help. One way to introduce students to counselling and to learn about their problems and needs at the same time is to have informal conversation in social situations. A school counselor can organize a group gathering where by students share and socialize with other students and talk with the counselor informally. The counselor then can help the students by making suggestions and providing advice within a social context.

Bichanga (2015) carried out a study about students' attitude towards guidance and counselling in public secondary schools in Kajiado County, Kenya. The study found out that all schools recognized the guidance and counselling department. It also revealed that students tend to seek help more frequently from teacher counsellors of their gender. The study further found that lack of competency of the teacher-counsellor, lack of resources and facilities for the guidance and counselling department, double role of teacher counsellor, lack of appropriate time set aside from the school curriculum for guidance and counselling and fear of staff members were among the factors that hindered students from seeking guidance and counselling services. The study explored the attitude of students towards guidance and counselling whether it affects their readiness to sick for help. It is therefore the intention of this study to analyse the utilization of counselling services by students in Keren Subzone secondary schools, Anseba Region, Eritrea.

METHODOLOGY

The study used mixed methods research design. Mixed methods research design, as explained by Creswell (2014), is an inquiry approach involving the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data, the integration of the two forms of data, and the use of distinct designs that may include philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks.

The study targeted students, teachers, and teacher counselors and head teachers. The target population included 5 schools, 1500 students, 100 teachers, 5 teacher counselors, and 5 head teachers. Students and teachers participated in quantitative research, whereas teacher counselors and head teachers participated in qualitative research.

For this study, the researcher used both probability and non-probability sampling procedures to select the respondents. In probability sampling (systematic and simple random sampling) each of the members of the target population, that is students and teachers were given equal chance of being selected, unlike the non-probability sampling where purposive sampling was used to select head teachers and teacher counselors.

The Fischer's formula was used to calculate sample size of the study participants.

$$n = \frac{z^2(p)(q)}{d^2}$$

Where:
n = Sample size
Z = Normal deviation at the desired confidence interval. In this case it will be taken at 95%, **Z** value at 95% is 1.96.
P = Proportion of the population with the desired characteristic.
Q (1-P) = Proportion of the population without the desired characteristic.
d^2= Degree of precision; will be taken to be 5%.
P = the proportion of target population estimated to have a particular characteristic. If there is no reasonable estimate, then 50% (0.5) is used.

Therefore: $n = \frac{Z^2 P(1-P)}{d2}$ =   n= $\frac{(1.96)^2 \text{ x } 0.5 \text{ x } 0.5}{0.05^2}$ = 384

Sample size adjustment is done since the target population is <10,000 using the following formula. $nf = \frac{n}{1 + n/N}$

Where:
nf = The desired sample size for population <10,000
N = Total population during the data collection period =1500
n = the calculated sample size =384
$nf = \frac{384}{1 + 384/1500} = 306$

Therefore, the minimum sample size of the study was 306 students.

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Schools that were part of the study were selected using purposive sampling. Since the number of secondary schools in Keren sub-zone is small; all the five schools were part of the study. A total sample of 306 students from two public and three private secondary schools were used in this study. The sample of 306 students was distributed proportionally to the five schools according to the size of the schools population. The formula used was:

$$\frac{y}{1500} = \frac{x}{306}$$

Y indicates the target population of each school and x indicates the sample size that was calculated for each school. Systematic random sampling was used to select the total amount of samples from grades ten and eleven from each school. After this every fifth student in the list was picked systematically and the process continued until the required sample was reached. The study adopted purposive sampling in selecting school head teachers and teacher counselors.

For this particular study, questionnaires and interview guides were used to collect in depth data concerning the issue under investigation from students, teachers, teacher counselors and head teachers. Questionnaires were administered to the students and teachers while interview guides were administered to the teacher counselors and head teachers.

Data collected was coded and analyzed to help answer research questions. This was done using statistics of description. To summarize and organize data and describe the characteristics of the sample population, descriptive analysis using frequencies, percentages, means, graphs and tables was used. This was done using a computer program Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V24.0) for windows. For qualitative data, the researcher followed five steps in order to analyze data. These steps involved transcription of data obtained from the interviews, organizing the data in line with the objectives of the study, creating a table and putting research objectives into the table and assigning data according to each objective, coding the data, validating the data and finally conclusion of data analysis. The study adopted Plano & Creswell (2008) procedures for concurrent data analysis and interpretation as follows: quantitative data preparation, entry, analysis and presentation of results.

RESULTS

Socio-demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

In this study, demographic data from students, head teachers, teachers and counsellors was sought. This was to ensure that the selected sample represented the entire population. Students' demographic information was categorized based on gender, age, religion, grade and type of school. On the other hand, head teachers, teachers and counsellors demographic information was categorized based on gender, age, academic qualification, years of experience and the type of school.

The results indicated that 46.9% of the respondents fell below the age of 17 years, while 53.1% were 17 years and above. In terms of gender distribution of the students, 59.4% were females while 40.6% were males. Distribution according to religion showed that 46.5% of the student respondents were from the orthodox religious background. Catholics and Muslims were 26.2% and 22.9% respectively. Those from a protestant background were 4.4% making them the smallest group. Further analysis showed that 45.4% of the student respondents were in grade ten and 54.6% were in grade eleven. Furthermore, the respondents from private schools were 27.3%, while respondents from public schools were 72.3%.
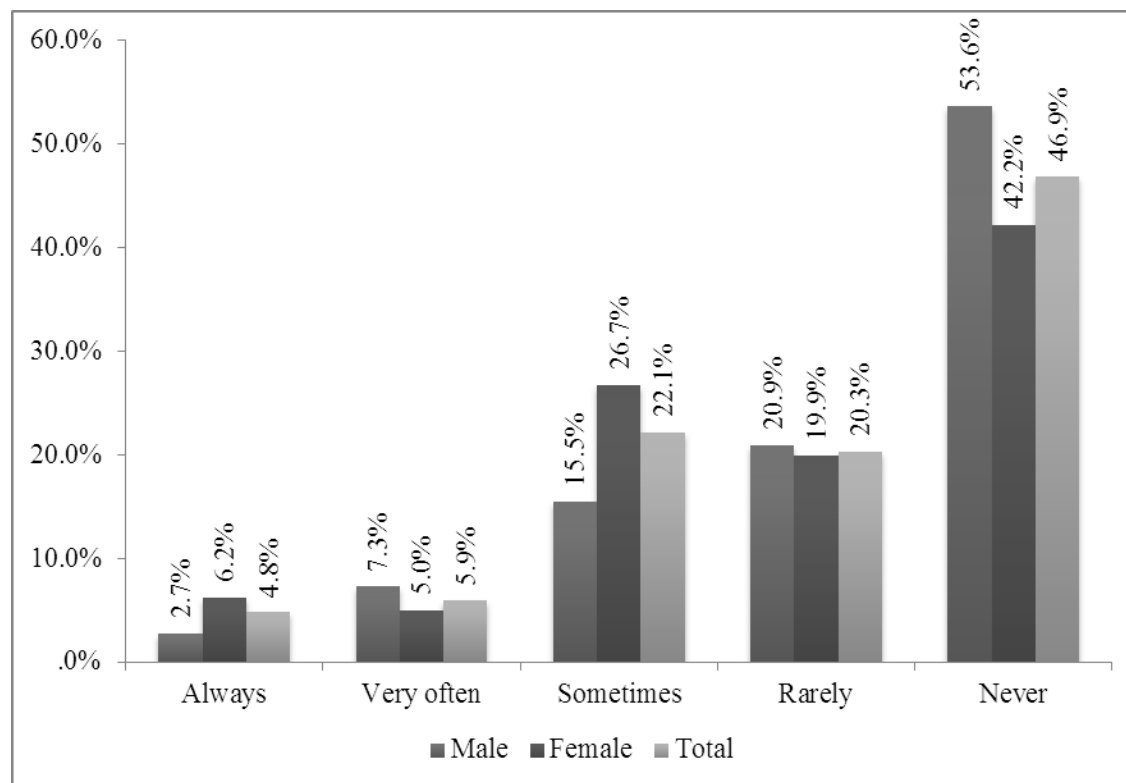
The distribution by gender showed that all the head teachers and counselors were male. 75.5% of the teachers were male were 75.5% as compared to female who were 25.5%. Distribution of the respondents according to type of school showed that head teachers were 40% from public and 60% from private schools and teachers were 37.5% from private and 62.5% from public. The findings further showed that counselors from private schools were 60% and public 40%. Results indicated that all the head teachers and counselors' academic qualifications were Bachelor degree. The majority (93.8%) of the teachers had a Bachelors degree, with the exception of 6.3% who were diploma graduates.

Utilization of Counselling Services by Students in Keren Subzone Secondary Schools

The study sought to establish the utilization of counselling services by students in Keren Subzone secondary schools. To answer this objective, there are a number of items that were analyzed. These included: how often students seek counselling services from teacher counsellors, teachers response on students' seriousness about utilization of counselling services, students seeking for counselling whenever faced with problems according to their religious back ground and students' use of counselling services according to students and teachers responses.

How Often Students Seek Counselling Services from Teacher Counselors

The study aimed to find out the rate at which the students seek counselling services from teacher counselors. Respondents were asked to indicate the rate from 5 choices: always, very often, sometimes, rarely and never. Figure 1 shows the distribution of the participants' responses on how often students seek counselling services from teacher counselors.

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Figure 1 Rate of students seeking counselling services

As indicated in Figure 1, majority (53.6%) of the respondents were male students and 42.2% were female students admitted that they had never gone for counselling services. The results for respondents who said they rarely seek counselling were almost very similar for males (20.9%) and female (19.9%). Respondents who seek counselling sometimes are higher among female at 26.7% than male at 15.5%. The same scenario is shown for respondents who admitted that they always seek for counselling whereby female were 6.2% as compared to males who were only 2.7%.

The findings from the interviews echoed a similar view to this finding. One Head teacher 2 said that:

"Actually there are no structured counselling services in our school. However few attend the little service we have. In general, I would say students' utilization of counselling is very poor in our school."

Teachers' Response on Students' Seriousness about Utilization of Counselling Services

The teachers' response on seriousness of students on utilization of counselling services was sought. Participants were asked to indicate yes in agreement with the statement and no in refusal

to the statement. Figure 2 shows the respondents distribution with regards to students'
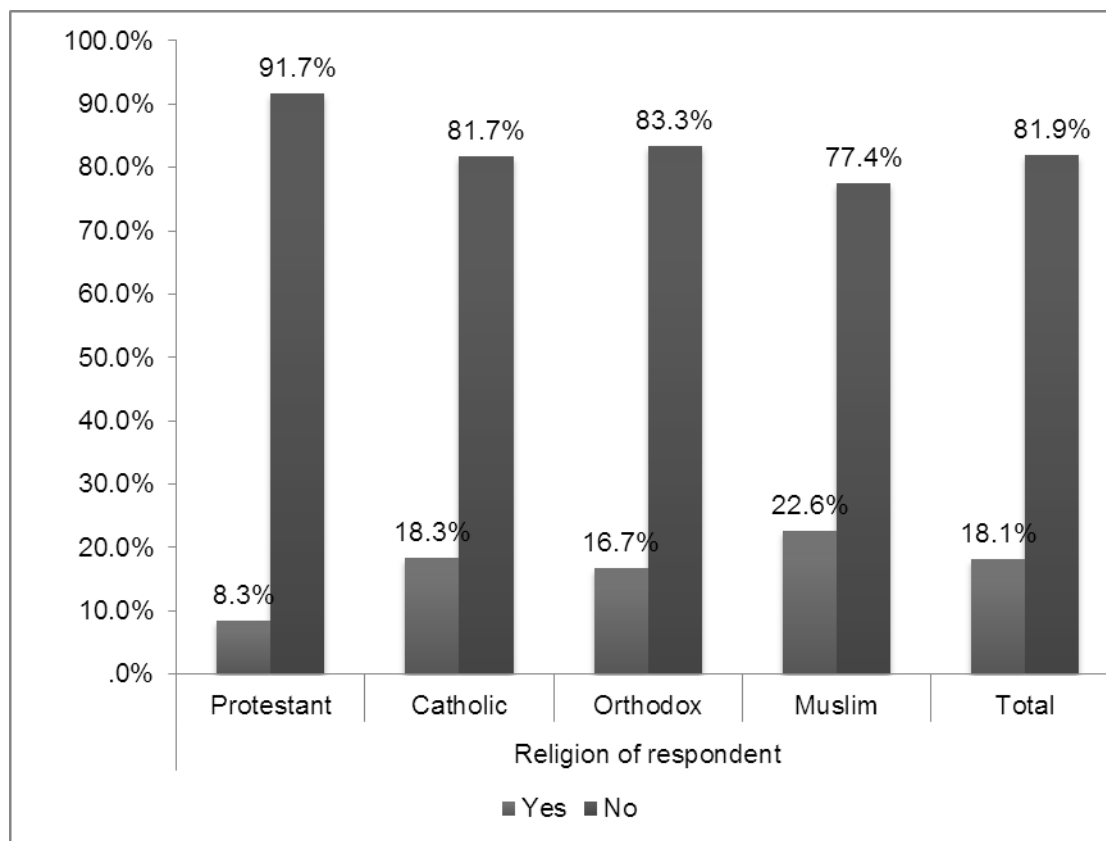seriousness about utilization of counselling services.
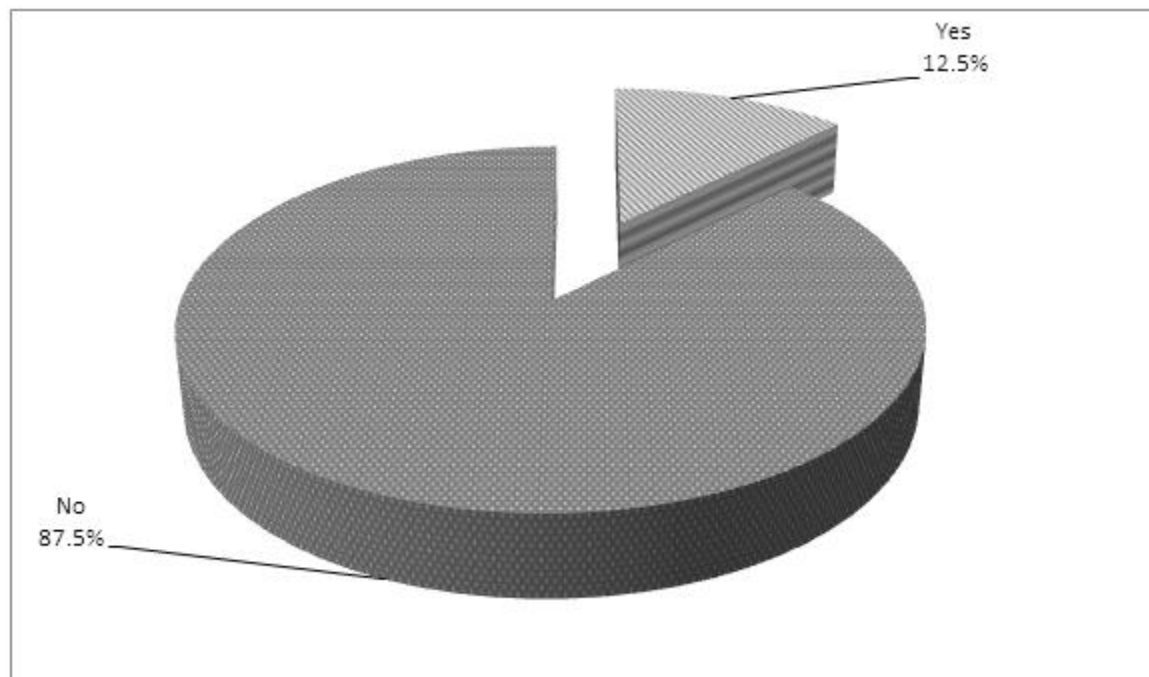
Figure 2 Students' seriousness about counselling services

Findings from the study indicated that most, (87.5%), of the teacher respondents indicated that
students do not take counselling seriously. Only 12.5% of the teacher respondents believed that
students take counselling seriously, which is very low.

**Students seeking for counselling whenever faced with problems according to their religious
back ground.**

The research sought to establish how respondents seek for counselling services based on their
religious background. Figure 3 shows the results.

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Figure 3 Students utilization of counselling according to their religious backgrounds

As shown in Figure 3, most (81.9%) respondents did not seek for counselling services when faced with a problem for all the religions. Only 18.1% for all religions said that they seek counselling when they were faced with problems in school. Muslim students who seek for counselling services when faced with a problem in school were 22.6%. 18.3% respondents were of a catholic background while those of a protestant background were 8.3%. 16.7% of the respondents were of an orthodox background.

Students Use of Counselling Services According to Students and Teachers Responses

The study further sought to examine students' use of counselling services according to students and teachers responses. Participants were asked to indicate as to whether they strongly agree, agree, are undecided, disagree or strongly disagree to six statements. They included: Students voluntarily seek for counselling services, View counselling as part of school program, Students believe counselling solves their problems, Students view counselling as system to curb indiscipline, Students have positive view about counselling and students feel shy to seek counselling services. Table 1 shows the distribution based on students use of counselling services according to students and teachers responses.

Table 1

Students' Response on their Utilization of Counselling Services

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students voluntarily seek for counselling services	f	17	59	16	52	127
	%	6.3	21.8	5.9	19.2	46.9
View counselling as part of school program	f	23	69	27	51	101
	%	8.5	25.5	10.0	18.8	37.3
Students believe counselling solves their problems	f	54	83	38	33	63
	%	20.0	30.7	13.7	12.2	23.3
Students view counselling as system to curb indiscipline	f	13	93	42	40	83
	%	4.8	34.3	15.5	14.8	30.6
Students have positive view about counselling	f	42	97	38	31	63
	%	15.5	35.8	14.0	11.4	23.2
Students feel shy to seek counselling services	f	124	50	34	29	34
	%	45.9	18.5	12.6	10.4	12.6

Key: f: frequency, %: percentage

The findings in Table 1 show that 46.9% of students, strongly disagreed that students voluntarily seek for counselling services. 37.3% also strongly disagreed that counselling was viewed as part of the school program.

In terms of counselling solving students' problem, 30.7% agreed that counselling played a role in solving their problems. However 23.3% strongly disagreed that counselling solves their problems, whereas 13.7% were undecided whether it helps or not. 34.3% agreed that they view counselling as system to curb indiscipline but 30.6% and 14.8% of the respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. However, 35.8% agreed that students have positive view about counselling and finally 45.9% strongly agreed that students feel shy to seek counselling services.

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Table 2

Teachers' Response on Students Utilization of Counselling Services

		Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree
Students voluntarily seek for counselling services	f	1	1	8	2	4
	%	6.3	6.3	50.0	12.5	25.0
View counselling as part of school program	f	1	1	6	3	5
	%	6.3	6.3	37.5	18.8	31.3
Students believe counselling solves their problems	f	2	6	4	1	3
	%	12.5	37.5	25.0	6.3	18.8
Students view counselling as system to curb indiscipline	f	0	7	4	2	3
	%	0	43.8	25.0	12.5	18.8
Students voluntary participate in group counselling	f	0	2	7	3	4
	%	0	12.5	43.8	18.8	25.0
Students have positive view about counselling	f	1	5	6	2	2
	%	6.3	31.3	37.5	12.5	12.5
Students feel shy to seek counselling services	f	2	4	6	3	1
	%	12.5	25.0	37.5	18.8	6.3

Key: f: frequency, %: percentage

Findings from Table 2 indicate that 50% of the respondents were undecided on Students voluntarily seeking for counselling services, while 25% strongly disagreed. 37.5% of the teachers were undecided on the statement questioning if the students view counselling as part of school program while 31.3% and 18.8% respondents strongly disagreed and disagreed respectively. 37.5% of the teachers agreed that students believed that counselling solves their problems. However 25% were undecided. 43.8% of the respondents agreed that students view counselling as a system to curb indiscipline whereas 25% were undecided. Another 43.8% were undecided if the students voluntarily participate in group counselling and 25% strongly disagreed that students voluntarily participate in group counselling. 37.5% of the respondents were undecided for both students have positive view about counselling and students feel shy to seek for counselling services.

The findings from the interview supported this results as exemplified by teacher counselor 5 who said:

Students don't go for counselling voluntarily, because we don't have conducive rooms for counselling, no specific counselor and counselling is done by the student affairs teacher rather than a trained counselor.

DISCUSSION

Findings from the study showed that there was a huge gap between male and female among teachers since male were 75.5% as compared to female (25.5%). The findings correspond to a research in a statistical report of ministry of education. According to Eritrean basic education statistics, females make 20.64 % of the total teacher population in high schools in Eritrea (MoE, 2017).

Further, results from the study indicate that majority (53.6%) of the respondents who were male students and 42.2% who were female students admitted that they had never gone for counselling services. The finding is in line with a study by Wako (2016) carried out in Ethiopia that revealed majority of students were not utilizing school counselling services properly due to lack of awareness, lack of qualified counselors and weak link between counselors and students.

The results indicated that female students seek counselling more than male students. More female students make use of the available counselling service in Keren secondary schools. The present result is similar to the study done by Alemu (2013) in Ethiopia which established that more female students knew the existence of counselling programs in comparison to their male counterparts. Additionally female students utilize counselling services more than the male students. Most female students mentioned that they found comfort from their counselors.

Most of the teacher respondents indicated that students do not take counselling seriously. Only 12.5% of the teacher respondents believed that students take counselling seriously, which is very low. The result makes it very clear that students are not taking counselling seriously as indicated by low utilization of the counselling service. The current findings are similar to those of Haruna (2015) who carried out a study in Nigeria and found out that students did not care much about counselling services in their schools. The study also clarified the factors that made students lose interest in counselling. The factors were lack of adequate and trained professional counselors, poor incentives, lack of proper offices for counselling and lack of confidentiality.

Most (81.9%) respondents did not seek for counselling services when faced with a problem for all the religions. Only 18.1% for all religions said that they seek counselling when they were faced with problems in school. As the result indicates the majority of the respondents shy away from seeking counselling when faced with problems at school regardless their religious background. Additionally, more Muslim students (22.6%) seek for counselling services when faced with a problem in school than other religions. This concurs with a research by Lasode, Lawal and Ofodile (2017) carried out a study in Nigeria and the findings showed that there was big difference between religion of student and use of counselling services. In the findings those coming from Christian religious background made more use of counselling services in comparison to those from other religions. However the current study found out that even though there was no clear cut majority, those who come from a Muslim background made use of counselling service in comparison to other religions.

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46.9% of students strongly disagreed that students voluntarily seek for counselling services. However, 37.3% also strongly disagreed that counselling was viewed as part of the school program. As the results show, majority of students don't utilize counselling services in Keren subzone secondary schools. The results of these findings are similar to those of Bichanga (2015) who carried out a study in Kenya and his findings revealed that students did not go for counselling willingly due to shyness and lack of trust on the school counselor. The study further indicated that students did not give counselling program equal status as other subjects in the school.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the current study, it is evident that counselling services are an important platform for managing students discipline in secondary schools in Keren subzone. Both head teachers, teacher counselors, teachers and students acknowledged the role counselling has on managing students' discipline. However, the findings revealed that counselling services were not implemented fully and utilized by students as expected. The study revealed key factors that affect counselling services which include: lack of trained or qualified counselors, limited counselling facilities, Non-conducive atmosphere for counselling, lack of awareness, students feeling shy, unfriendly and unapproachable teacher counselors, and lack of understanding about counselling services in schools.

Based on the findings, the study recommends that the ministry of education should revise the curriculum for secondary school education to incorporate a well-functioning counselling service, train enough counselors and ensure that counselling services are provided by qualified and trained counselors. Additionally the Ministry of education should put up counselling rooms in every school and come out with a clear guide and policy on how to implement counselling services in schools. Besides the Ministry, counselors should motivate students to make use of the available services and introduce individual, peer and group counselling in schools as part of counselling program. The environment in secondary schools should allow for free and open interaction between students, teachers and teacher counselors for the growth of counselling services in schools. Therefore, concerns arising from students about counselling services in schools should be addressed properly.

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