

Counseling and Guidance Needs of Students in Rehabilitation School of Semnan University of Medical Sciences

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Abstract

Background & Objective: Identification of the counseling needs of students contributes to the improvement of guidance and counseling process in universities, thereby laying a proper foundation for the academic achievement of these individuals. This study aimed to determine the counseling needs of students in the rehabilitation school of Semnan University of Medical Sciences, Semnan, Iran in 2017.

Materials and Methods: This descriptive-cross sectional research was performed on 193 students. Data were collected using a 34-item questionnaire scored based on a four-point scale to determine the counseling needs of students in different areas. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were confirmed by content validity and Cronbach's alpha coefficient.

Results: In this research, the mean priority of counseling needs of students in order of importance was 2.59 ± 0.80 , 2.55 ± 0.73 , 2.54 ± 0.75 , 2.47 ± 0.76 , and 2.42 ± 0.82 in the fields of occupational, individual growth and development, educational, psychological and emotional, and family and marriage needs, respectively. According to the results, female students had a higher need for counseling ($P=0.018$). On the other hand, no significant difference was observed between students studying in different fields and with different GPAs in terms of mean counseling needs.

Conclusion: According to the results of the study, the highest counseling priority was related to occupational and individual growth and development needs. Therefore, it is recommended that universities and higher education centers pay attention to the provision of an opportunity for growth and academic achievement of students and to the prevention of their academic failure in the design of student counseling programs.



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Introduction

A society's growth and excellence largely depend on the physical, mental, and social health of its members, especially the youth. In this regard, universities play an important role in youth education. Young individuals face many educational, growth, family, social, occupational, and behavioral problems following entering the university, which can lead to their academic dropout and several problems for families and the community. This entails the provision of counseling and guidance services in universities (1, 2). Counseling services started in Iran scientifically and specifically with the establishment of the first counseling center at the University of Tehran and similar centers in other universities (3). An advisor is a faculty member identified as the first level of communication of students with the educational system. In addition, advisors help students identify their talents and interests, learning methods, planning, decision-making, creating a spirit of cooperation, solving educational and disciplinary problems, compatibility with the university and dormitory environment, and adaptation to dormitory people from different cultures and ethnicities with various tastes (4). An advisor plays

a key role in the guidance, counseling, and support of students to reach their goals, especially those who come from another city or village and deal with new issues (5). Students' access to counseling services should not be limited to critical situations, and counseling services must grow in accordance with the increasing complexity of different areas of life. Needs assessment and accurate recognition of areas in which students should be guided are among the fundamental tasks performed to identify and discover the actual needs of students.

In this regard, determining the social, individual, educational, and occupational needs of students contributes to successful planning in these areas (6). According to studies, while several studies have been conducted on needs assessment in relation to training and educational planning (6-8), there is a paucity of research on guidance and counseling in universities and higher education centers. Given the constant changes in life situations of people in the modern era, it is no surprise that the needs of individuals, especially students in universities and higher education, are constantly changing (9, 10). Different needs require different guidance and counseling, and the improvement of providing suitable counseling

services to students necessitates needs assessment of their problems and desires.

Therefore, a periodic assessment of the counseling needs of students is one of the tools required for proper planning in this field. Investigations have shown that scant research has been conducted on guidance and counseling in universities. In a research, Rezaei et al. evaluated the quality of counseling and guidance program for students in eight schools of Shiraz University of Medical Sciences, reporting that these services should be based on the constantly changing needs of students in order to improve the quality of counseling (3). Assessing the counseling and guidance needs of students in Islamic Azad University Shahrekord Branch, Rabiei et al. showed that the first counseling needs of students were related to the increase of their self-confidence and concentration method (11). In addition, Shakurnia et al. conducted a research in Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences to determine the counseling needs of students. According to students' opinions, they were most in need of advice on personal growth and development and job needs (12). In another study, Rafiei et al. evaluated the guidance and job counseling needs of Isfahan University students, reporting that the need to become familiar with job skills as the most important priority for students' needs (13). Another study performed to assess the counseling needs of nursing students revealed that the students had the most need in the field of occupation counseling (14).

Several studies have been performed on the counseling and guidance needs of students in various countries (15-17). For instance, Newton et al. reported that the most important needs for student counseling were counseling on depression and stress (15). In a research by Karimi et al. in Kenya, career, educational, personal needs, and life skills were the most important priorities for student counseling (16). Evaluation of counseling needs of students in universities of Turkey revealed that the most important counseling priorities of students were educational, communication, developmental, occupational and psychological-emotional needs (17, 18). Moreover, in a study conducted in Hong Kong, most needs of students were related to counseling on professional issues of research methods and academic advancement (19). Guiding and helping students in their problems and prevention of academic dropouts are among the most important responsibilities of universities. Therefore, in order to provide the necessary information to guide students, a continuous needs assessment should be done and the priorities required by students should be determined. Therefore, in order to provide the information required for the guidance of students, needs assessment of these individuals must be constantly

carried out and their priorities must be determined. Given the lack of a research in this area in Semnan University of Medical Sciences, the present study aimed to determine and prioritize the counseling and guidance needs of students in the rehabilitation school of Semnan University of Medical Sciences.

Materials and Methods

This descriptive, cross-sectional research was performed in Semnan University of Medical Sciences in 2017 and was confirmed by the ethics committee of the university with the ethical code of IR.Semums.REC.1995.225. The statistical population included all students studying in the rehabilitation school of the mentioned university. In total, 193 students in the departments of speech therapy, physiotherapy, and occupational therapy were enrolled in the study. The inclusion criterion was passing at least one semester in the university. The research tool was a student needs assessment and counseling assessment questionnaire prepared by Rabiei et al. in 2009 to evaluate the needs of students in Islamic Azad University Shahrekord Branch. The reliability of the questionnaire was estimated at the Cronbach's alpha of 0.89 (11), and the validity of the revised questionnaire was assessed using the opinions of professors. Moreover, reliability was determined at the Cronbach's alpha of 0.90 by implementing the research on 20 students in the rehabilitation school (who were not among the research participants). The questionnaire encompasses two sections; the first section includes demographic characteristics of students such as age, place of residence, the field of study and year of admission, whereas the second section contains 34 items on counseling and guidance needs of students in five areas of individual growth (eight items), occupational needs (six items), educational needs (seven items), family and marriage (seven items), and emotional-psychological needs (six items). The students were asked to determine their level of need for each of these items. In addition, the items were scored based on a four-point scale, including I severely need this (4), I need this to some extent (3), I need this a little (2), and I do not need this (1). Moreover, the minimum and maximum scores of the area of individual growth were 8 and 32, respectively, the areas of occupational and emotional-psychological were 6 and 24, respectively, and the areas of education and family and marriage were 7 and 28, respectively. For the entire questionnaire, the minimum and maximum scores were 34 and 136, respectively. The questionnaire was provided to students in-person and they were ensured of the confidentiality terms regarding their personal information. It is notable that the research objectives were explained and consent was obtained from the participants prior to the study. Data analysis included estimating the

mean scores in each area and the total score of the questionnaire for each student. In this regard, the scores allocated were in the range of one-four. Furthermore, data analysis was performed in SPSS version 18 using Shapiro-Wilk test (to assess the normal distribution of the data), student t-test (to compare the mean of two independent groups with a normal distribution), Mann-Whitney U (to compare two independent groups with abnormal data distribution), one-way ANOVA (to compare the mean of more than two independent groups with a normal distribution), and Friedman test (to compare a trait between more than two independent groups with abnormal distribution). Notably, a P-value of 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

Results

In this study, 14 out of 194 questionnaires distributed were removed due to incomplete responding. In the end, 179 questionnaires were analyzed. According to the results, 122 students were female (68.2%) and the rest were male (N=57, 31.8%). The mean age of the participants

was 21.2 ± 2.6 years. In terms of field of study, 40.8% of the students were studying in the physiotherapy discipline, whereas 30.2% and 29.1% of participants were studying in the fields of speech therapy and occupational therapy, respectively. Regarding the place of residence, 81.6% of the students were living in dormitories and the rest were residing in other places. In terms of marital status, 88.8% of the students were single and the rest were married. According to the evaluation of the counseling needs of students, their most and least counseling needs were related to the fields of occupation and individual growth (with a mean of 2.59 ± 0.80 and 2.55 ± 0.73 , respectively), and family, marriage and emotional-psychological fields (with a mean of 2.42 ± 0.82 and 2.47 ± 0.73 , respectively). Overall, female students had more counseling needs, compared to male participants ($P=0.018$), which applied to most areas. However, no significant difference was observed between male and female students regarding counseling needs in the field of family and marriage (Table 1).

Table 1: Average and standard deviation of the counseling needs of the Faculty of Rehabilitation students, according to the fields and the difference in needs depends on gender (2017).

Field of needs	Gender						p-value
	Girl(n=122)		Boy(n=57)		All students		
	Average	standard deviation	Average	standard deviation	Average	standard deviation	
Individual growth	2.65	0.71	2.34	0.75	2.55	0.73	0.005
Job needs	2.68	0.79	2.40	0.80	2.59	0.80	0.023
Educational needs	2.62	0.74	2.35	0.76	2.54	0.75	0.017
Family and marriage	2.45	0.79	2.34	0.87	2.42	0.82	0.350
Emotional and psychological	2.58	0.73	2.26	0.80	2.47	0.76	0.004
Total questions	2.60	0.65	2.34	0.71	2.51	0.68	0.018

There was no significant difference among students in various fields of study (Table 2) with different GPAs (Table 3) and in various areas in terms of counseling needs.

Table 2: Average and standard deviation scores of counseling needs of students of the Faculty of Rehabilitation Separate the field of study (2017).

Field of needs	Field of study						p-value
	Physiotherapy		Speech therapy		Occupational therapy		
	Average	standard deviation	Average	standard deviation	Average	standard deviation	
Individual growth	2.52	0.77	2.70	0.72	2.42	0.67	0.132
Job needs	2.52	0.86	2.71	0.72	2.57	0.79	0.404
Educational needs	2.44	0.81	2.69	0.75	2.51	0.65	0.183
Family and marriage	2.34	0.85	2.57	0.78	2.37	0.80	0.252
Emotional and psychological	2.45	0.83	2.64	0.74	2.35	0.66	0.129
Total questions	2.45	0.75	2.66	0.66	2.44	0.59	0.157

Table 3: Average and standard deviation scores of counseling needs of students of the Faculty of Rehabilitation Separate GPA (2017).

Field of needs	<17(n=85)		>17(n=59)		p-value
	Average	standard deviation	Average	standard deviation	
Individual growth	2.48	0.72	2.59	0.68	0.307
Job needs	2.62	0.83	2.56	0.71	0.586
Educational needs	2.54	0.68	2.51	0.76	0.795
Family and marriage	2.29	0.77	2.52	0.79	0.063
Emotional and psychological	2.44	0.74	2.49	0.71	0.705
Total questions	2.47	0.64	2.53	0.64	0.529

The prioritized counseling needs of students were related to “the increase of concentration” in the area of individual growth and development, “learning entrepreneurial method” in the field of

occupational needs, “learning how to manage time” in the area of educational needs, and “how to live with content” in the area of psychological-mental needs (Table 4).

Table 4: Priority of students' counseling needs in the fields studied in the students of the Faculty of Rehabilitation of the University of Medical Sciences (2017).

Field	questions	The intensity of the need								Average	standard deviation	p-value
		I do not need		I need a little		I need it to some extent		I desperately need it				
		Number	percent	Number	percent	Number	percent	Number	percent			
Individual growth	1- Hesitation Solution	34	19.0	52	29.1	53	29.6	40	22.3	2.55	1.04	0.001
	2- How to increase concentration	27	15.1	40	22.3	63	35.2	49	27.4	2.75	1.02	
	3- The correct method of communication with others	38	21.2	47	26.3	57	31.8	37	20.7	2.52	1.05	
	4- How to deal with annoying thoughts	24	13.4	56	31.3	49	27.4	50	27.9	2.70	1.02	
	5- How to defend your rights	35	19.6	59	33	51	28.5	34	19.0	2.47	1.01	
	6- Creative thinking	34	19	50	27.9	66	36.9	29	16.2	2.50	0.98	
	7-The method of Criticism	49	27.4	65	36.3	34	19.0	31	17.3	2.26	1.05	
Job needs	8- How to increase self-confidence	32	17.9	46	25.7	57	31.8	44	24.6	2.63	1.04	0.001
	1-The method of finding Job in the community	30	16.8	50	27.9	53	29.6	46	25.7	2.64	1.04	
	2-Familiarity with job opportunities	33	18.4	42	23.5	56	31.3	48	26.8	2.66	1.07	
	3-Identify job interests	35	19.6	55	30.7	50	27.9	39	21.8	2.52	1.04	
Educational needs	4-Familiarity with existing jobs in the community	32	17.9	66	36.9	48	26.8	33	18.4	2.46	0.99	<0.001
	5-The method of Entrepreneurship	26	14.5	43	24.0	63	35.2	47	26.3	2.73	1.01	
	6-The method of Employment adaptation	34	19.0	55	30.7	50	27.9	40	22.3	2.54	1.04	
	1-Timing method	22	12.3	41	22.9	65	36.3	51	28.5	2.81	0.99	
	2- A method of arranging a plan for studies	29	21.8	52	29.1	55	30.7	33	18.4	2.46	1.03	
	3-The method of correct study	32	17.9	48	26.8	50	27.9	49	27.4	2.65	1.07	
	4- How to encourage studying	24	13.4	44	24.6	58	32.4	53	29.6	2.78	1.02	
5-Examination Skills	34	19.0	54	30.2	51	28.5	40	22.3	2.54	1.04		
6- Familiarity with educational regulations	51	28.5	69	38.5	37	20.7	22	12.3	2.17	0.98		
7-How to reduce test anxiety	46	25.7	56	31.3	47	26.3	30	16.8	2.34	1.04		

Continue of Table 4: Priority of students' counseling needs in the fields studied in the students of the Faculty of Rehabilitation of the University of Medical Sciences (2017).

Family and marriage	1-How to socialize with your spouse	49	27.4	51	28.5	45	25.1	34	19.0	2.36	1.08	<0.001
	2- The method of Parenting	43	24.0	44	24.6	54	30.2	38	21.2	2.49	1.08	
	3-How to help family members	51	28.5	53	29.6	49	27.4	26	14.5	2.28	1.03	
	4-How to coordinate between spouse and parents	42	23.5	47	26.3	48	26.8	42	23.5	2.50	1.09	
	5-The correct behavior during the nomination	51	28.5	50	27.9	39	21.8	39	21.8	2.37	1.012	
	6- How to deal with life's problems	35	19.6	50	27.9	44	24.6	50	27.9	2.61	1.09	
	7-The correct method of interaction with the opposite sex	56	31.3	41	22.9	50	27.9	32	17.9	2.32	1.10	
Emotional and psycho	1-How to deal with stress in life	35	19.6	52	29.1	47	16.3	45	25.1	2.57	1.07	
	2-How to deal with anger and aggression	33	18.4	65	36.3	45	25.1	36	20.1	2.47	1.01	
	3-How to live happily	29	16.2	47	26.3	55	30.7	48	26.8	2.68	1.04	
	4-How to deal with depression	40	22.3	63	35.2	48	26.8	28	15.6	2.36	1.00	
	5-How to solve suspicion and pessimism	28	15.6	46	25.7	70	39.1	35	19.6	2.63	0.97	
	6-How to adapt to the university environment	58	52.4	62	34.6	34	19.0	25	14.0	2.15	1.03	

Discussion

The present study aimed to identify and determine the guidance and counseling needs of students for better planning of counseling and guidance services in universities. According to the results, the greatest need of students was related to the occupational area. In this regard, the entrepreneurial method, learning about job opportunities, and how to find a job in the society had a higher priority. Studies performed in Pakistan and Hong Kong assessing the counseling needs of students reported that the most important counseling needs of students were related to the occupational area (19, 20). This finding is somehow congruent with the results of other studies that reported occupational needs as the second priority in the area of student counseling needs (12, 21, 22). However, the finding is inconsistent with the results obtained by Rabiei et al., according to whom the occupational needs had a lower priority (11). This lack of consistency might be related to the type of research population. The current research was performed on students studying in different rehabilitation disciplines with similar occupational needs and concerns, whereas the research population in the aforementioned study involved students in Islamic Azad University studying in various disciplines. Moreover, Rafiei et al. marked a difference between medical and agricultural students regarding counseling needs (13). It could be concluded that different occupational needs of students were due to the difference in their needs related to their field of study and future job.

According to the results of the present study, the second priority of student counseling needs was related to the area of individual growth and development. In this context, the prioritized issues included how to increase concentration, how to deal with intrusive thoughts, and how to increase self-confidence. Considering that the root of many student problems in the university environment can be traced to individual, developmental and communication issues, it seems crucial to provide education on personal growth and development for these individuals. Therefore, it is suggested that this area be considered by the authorities as the single most important need of students. In this respect, our findings are in line with the results of similar studies. For instance, Shakoomia et al. considered the most important student counseling needs to be related to the field of individual growth and development (12). Moreover, in a research performed to assess the counseling and guidance needs of students in Islamic Azad University, Shahrekord Branch, methods to increase self-confidence and concentration were identified as the most important counseling needs of the participants (11).

According to the results of the present research, the third counseling priority of students was related to educational issues, where the issues of how to manage time, how to become motivated to study and proper studying approaches had higher importance. Some studies showed that study and learning approaches and time management techniques were the main problems of most students in universities, introducing them as causes

of academic failure of students (23-25). This shows the importance of finding a solution to this problem by the authorities. Educational needs have been identified as the third counseling priority of students in other studies as well (9, 15, 26), which is consistent with our findings. However, studies conducted in Turkey and Nigeria introduced educational needs as the first counseling priority of students (18, 22), which is somehow incongruent with our findings. This lack of consistency might be due to cultural and social differences in universities, educational laws, and the process of educational affairs in these educational institutions.

In the present study, the fourth priority was related to the psychological-emotional needs of students. However, researchers have prioritized the psychological-emotional needs of students differently. This area has been recognized as the most important counseling need of students in some studies while others have considered moderate or low priority for this issue (27, 28). This lack of consistency between results might be due to cultural and social factors governing universities, as well as gender volume and composition of individuals assessed. In addition, since these studies gathered information by questionnaires and self-report, some students might not disclose their psychological-emotional needs completely due to various reasons. In a research performed in Greece to evaluate the counseling of students, it was declared that students with psychological-mental problems had a more negative attitude toward student counseling centers and referred to these centers to solve their problems less than other students (26).

According to the results of the current study, student counseling needs in the family and marriage area had the lowest priority. The number of students who may have these problems and need this type of counseling may not be significant due to the high volume of curriculum and other problems during university studies, which limit the time of students for dealing with family issues and marriage. On the other hand, the number of married students at university is low. This justifies the low priority of student counseling needs in the family field. In addition, it could be the reason for the lack of assessment of the family counseling needs of students in most studies. However, in a research by Shakoomia et al. in Ahvaz Jundishapur University of Medical Sciences, the counseling needs of students in the field of family and marriage had the lowest priority, which is consistent with our findings (12).

Our findings were indicative of a significant difference between male and female students in terms of all counseling needs. According to the results, female students had a higher need for counseling, compared the male participants. Other

studies have yielded similar results. Evaluation of counseling needs of students in these studies demonstrated a higher need for counseling in female students, compared to male students. Overall, female students had low satisfaction with life circumstances, higher depression and stress, and lower psychological health, which increased their need for guidance and counseling (12, 15, 26). Assessing the counseling needs of students over a course of 11 years in Turkey, Dogan reported a higher desire for counseling in female students, compared to male students. According to this scholar, the higher willingness to refer to the counseling center among students was due to their positive attitude toward these places. He believed that male students found the need for counseling and referral to counseling centers a sign of weakness. Therefore, they lacked a positive attitude toward student counseling centers and less disclosed their needs in this area (10). This difference between male and female students in Iran might be due to the specific culture of the society since the latter are more supported by the family and are more dependent on them. Meanwhile, male students have more liberation and autonomy.

It is suggested that the authorities pay special attention to a continuous survey of students about the quality of counseling services and periodic needs assessment as a fundamental solution for the success of centers. Therefore, needs assessment in universities to achieve this important goal should be implemented as an important part of this program. Our findings, in addition to the results of similar studies, can be used to solve students' problems and prevent their academic failure.

One of the major drawbacks of the present study was including only the students of the rehabilitation school of Semnan University of Medical Sciences. Therefore, the generalization of the results must be carried out with caution.

Conclusion

According to the results of the present study, the need for counseling had the highest priority in the occupational field and individual growth and development. Therefore, it is suggested that special attention be paid to the provision of the opportunity to academically grow and flourish and to the prevention of academic failure of students by higher education centers when designing student counseling programs. The difference between our findings and the results of other studies showed that cultural and social differences could affect the counseling needs of students. Therefore, conducting similar assessments in this field could be enlightening. It is recommended that the counseling needs of students be evaluated periodically to suitably design and use counseling programs for students.

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