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“I’m putting all my efforts into saving a life”: Challenges to School Counselors in the Kingdom
of Bhutan

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List of Abbreviations

ASCA American School Counseling Association

CBI Counselor Burnout Inventory

CECD Center for Counseling Division (Bhutan)

COVID-19 Coronavirus Disease of 2019

DYS Division of Youth and Sports (Bhutan)

EST Ecological Systems Theory

ISSCA International Survey of School Counseling Activities

MHL Mental Health Literacy

MoE Ministry of Education (Bhutan)

MoESD Ministry of Education and Skills Development (Bhutan)

MoH Ministry of Health (Bhutan)

MSPSS Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support

RA Research Assistant

RGoB Royal Government of Bhutan

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT)

WHO World Health Organization

WSA Whole School Approach

UNICEF United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

Abstract

International research contends that school counselors are uniquely positioned to support the mental health needs of children and youths in schools yet face multiple challenges such as misconceptions about their roles. This doctoral research seeks to contribute to the field of school counseling research by investigating school counselors in the Kingdom of Bhutan where school counseling services were recently implemented but have yet to be examined. To address this knowledge gap, three studies were carried out to explore the most important challenges faced by school counselors in Bhutan.

First, a systematic literature review investigated the most prevalent needs of school counseling services in East and Southeast Asia which retrieved 109 studies from 14 countries. The analysis and summary of results revealed nine areas of need affecting school counseling services in this region of the world, the three most important being the need for up-to-date training, the need for a model of counseling practice and the need to overcome stigma towards mental health issues.

Second, a survey of 162 of the 179 school counselors registered in the Kingdom of Bhutan investigated their daily tasks, their roles and responsibilities including how these are perceived by 65 of their colleagues, namely, 49 school teachers and 16 school principals, and their challenges and resources. Significant differences on the International Survey of School Counseling Activities (ISSCA) (Carey et al., 2020) revealed confusion in the roles and responsibilities perceived by school counselors and their colleagues. A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) analysis of responses to open-ended questions further revealed that school counselors were hindered by insufficient initial training, by the need for material resources such as a counseling room, by insufficient time and opportunities for students to see the school counselor and by the issue of stigma towards mental health issues. Third, online and in-person interviews of 28 Bhutanese school counselors investigated, using thematic analysis by Braun and

Clarke (2006), their perceived challenges and resources in more depth. Results both confirmed the review and survey study findings and revealed further challenges potentially unique to Bhutan such as the need for one female and one male school counselor in every school.

Triangulation of results guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory

(Bronfenbrenner, 1995) revealed Bhutanese school counselors' 12 most important challenges.

These are (1) role confusion, (2) the lack of communication and collaboration with stakeholders, (3) the lack of initial training, (4) the lack of supervision, (5) the role of the COVID-19 pandemic, (6) the role of stigma towards mental health issues, (7) the importance and lack of social support, (8) the role of corporal punishment in Bhutanese schools, (9) the lack of material resources, (10) the need for one female and one male school counselor in each school, (11) the lack of time and opportunities for students to see the school counselor, and finally (12) that the school counseling profession is still relatively new and needs time to establish itself.

While these results shed light on the phenomenal efforts of school counselors in the Kingdom of Bhutan, they also serve to illustrate a profession that is as complicated as it is systematically isolated and disempowered, ultimately hindered from achieving its potential to support Bhutanese children and youths' mental health. The findings of this doctoral research contribute to global research on school counseling, suggest new research paths, such as the need to investigate students' experiences of school counseling services, and propose specific policy changes to improve school counseling in Bhutan.

Keywords: Bhutan, school counseling, ecological systems theory, child and youth mental health, mixed methods

Zusammenfassung

Die internationale Forschung zeigt, dass Schulberater:innen („school counselors“) in einer einzigartigen Position sind, um auf die psychologischen Bedürfnisse von Kindern und Jugendlichen im schulischen Kontext einzugehen. Dennoch sehen sie sich mit zahlreichen Herausforderungen konfrontiert wie zum Beispiel Missverständnissen in Bezug auf ihre Rolle. Diese Doktorarbeit soll einen Beitrag zur Schulberatungsforschung leisten, indem sie das kürzlich eingeführte und bisher wenig erforschte Schulberatungssystem im Königreich Bhutan untersucht. Um diese Wissenslücke zu schließen, wurden drei Studien durchgeführt, die die zentralen Herausforderungen für Schulberater:innen in Bhutan beleuchten.

Zunächst wurde eine systematische Literaturrecherche zu den häufigsten Bedürfnissen von Schulberatungsdiensten in Ost- und Südostasien durchgeführt, bei der 109 Studien aus 14 Ländern analysiert wurden. Die Auswertung und Zusammenfassung der Ergebnisse ergab neun Bedarfsbereiche für Schulberatungsdienste in dieser Region der Welt. Die drei wichtigsten davon sind der Bedarf an aktueller Ausbildung, die Notwendigkeit eines praxisorientierten Modells für die Schulberatung und die Überwindung der Stigmatisierung psychischer Gesundheitsprobleme. Zweitens untersuchte eine Umfrage 162 der 179 im Königreich Bhutan registrierten Schulberater:innen ihre täglichen Aufgaben, ihre Rollen und Verantwortlichkeiten und wie diese von 65 ihrer Kollegen, nämlich 49 Lehrern und 16 Schulleitern, wahrgenommen werden, sowie ihre Herausforderungen und Ressourcen. Signifikante Unterschiede im „International Survey of School Counseling Activities“ (ISSCA) (Carey et al., 2020) zeigten Missverständnisse in der Wahrnehmung der Rollen und Verantwortlichkeiten. Zudem ergab eine SWOT-Analyse (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats - Stärken, Schwächen, Chancen und Risiken) der Antworten auf offenen Fragen, dass Schulberater:innen durch unzureichende Ausbildung, mangelnde materiellen Ressourcen, wie zum Beispiel einem Beratungszimmer, unzureichende

Zeit und Gelegenheiten für die Schüler, den/die Schulberater:in aufzusuchen, und die Stigmatisierung psychischer Gesundheitsprobleme behindert werden. Drittens wurden Online- und persönliche Interviews mit 28 bhutanischen Schulberater:innen durchgeführt, um anhand der thematischen Analyse von Braun und Clarke (2006) die von ihnen wahrgenommenen Herausforderungen und Ressourcen genauer zu untersuchen. Die Ergebnisse bestätigten die Erkenntnisse der Literaturrecherche und der Umfrage und ergab weitere Herausforderungen, die möglicherweise nur in Bhutan auftreten, wie zum Beispiel der Bedarf an einem Schulberater und einer Schulberaterin in jeder Schule.

Anhand einer Triangulation der Ergebnisse, die sich an Bronfenbrenners Theorie der ökologischen Systeme (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) orientierte, wurden die 12 wichtigsten Herausforderungen für Schulberater:innen im Königreich von Bhutan identifiziert. Dazu gehören (1) Verwirrung hinsichtlich ihrer Rolle, (2) fehlende Kommunikation und Zusammenarbeit mit Schulkollegen, (3) unzureichende Ausbildung, (4) unzureichende Supervision, (5) die Auswirkungen der COVID-19-Pandemie, (6) die Stigmatisierung psychischer Gesundheitsprobleme, (7) die Bedeutung sozialer Unterstützung bei gleichzeitigem Mangel daran, (8) die Rolle körperliche Bestrafung in Schulen in Bhutan, (9) der Mangel an materiellen Ressourcen, (10) der Bedarf an einem Schulberater und einer Schulberaterin in jeder Schule, (11) unzureichende Zeit und Möglichkeiten für Schüler, den/der Schulberater:in aufzusuchen, und schließlich (12) die Tatsache, dass dieser Beruf noch sehr jung ist in Bhutan.

Obwohl diese Ergebnisse die phänomenalen Bemühungen Schulberater:innen in Bhutan verdeutlichen, heben diese 12 Herausforderungen einen Beruf hervor, der ebenso kompliziert wie systematisch isoliert und entmachtet ist. Letztlich sind Schulberater:innen in Bhutan daran gehindert, ihr Potenzial zur Unterstützung der psychischen Gesundheit bhutanischer Kinder und

Jugendlicher auszuschöpfen. Die Ergebnisse dieser Arbeit leisten einen Beitrag zur internationalen Forschung im Bereich der Schulberatung, eröffnen neue Forschungsrichtungen, wie etwa die Untersuchung der Perspektiven von Schülerinnen und Schülern auf Schulberatung, und schlagen spezifische Reformen vor.

Schlüsselworte: Bhutan, Schulberatung, psychische Gesundheit von Kindern, Umfrage, Interview

Résumé

Les conseillers scolaires (« school counselors ») sont, selon la recherche internationale, idéalement placés pour répondre aux besoins de santé mentale des enfants et des jeunes. Cependant, ils seraient confrontés à de nombreux défis au quotidien tel qu'un manque de clarté quant à leurs rôles professionnelles. Cette thèse doctorale examine le cas des conseillers scolaires au Royaume du Bhoutan qui ont été récemment mises en place mais peinent à être étudiées. Pour combler cette lacune, trois études ont été menées afin d'explorer les principaux défis auxquels sont confrontés les conseillers scolaires au Bhoutan.

Tout d'abord, les besoins des conseillers scolaires en Asie de l'Est et du Sud-Est ont été étudiés à l'aide d'une analyse documentaire de 109 études provenant de 14 pays. L'analyse et la synthèse des résultats ont révélés neuf domaines de besoins. Les trois plus importants étant celui d'une formation actualisée, d'un modèle de pratique précis et de surmonter la stigmatisation des personnes atteintes de problèmes de santé mentale. Deuxièmement, une étude par sondage en ligne menée auprès de 162 des 179 conseillers scolaires enregistrés au Bhoutan a examiné leurs tâches quotidiennes, leurs rôles professionnelles, y compris comment ces derniers sont perçus par 65 de leurs collègues, à savoir 49 enseignants et 16 directeurs d'école, ainsi que leurs défis et leurs moyens dont il dispose au quotidien. L'analyse de leur réponse au sondage « International Survey of School Counseling Activities » (ISSCA) (Carey et al., 2020) a révélé des désaccords quant à leurs rôles professionnelles. De plus, une analyse « Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats » (SWOT) des autres réponses au sondage a révélé que les conseillers scolaires sont accablés en outre par le manque d'une formation adéquate, par le manque de ressources matérielles telles qu'un bureau de consultation, par le manque d'occasion pour les élèves d'école de consulter le ou la conseiller/ère scolaire ainsi que la stigmatisation des personnes atteintes de problèmes de santé mentale. Troisièmement, des interviews en ligne et en présentielle avec 28

conseillers scolaires bhoutanais ont permis d'approfondir, à l'aide de l'analyse thématique de Braun et Clarke (2006), la compréhension de leurs défis et leurs moyens au quotidien. Les résultats ont confirmé ceux du sondage et ont de plus révélé d'autres défis uniques au Bhoutan tels que la nécessité d'avoir une conseillère ainsi qu'un conseiller scolaire dans chaque école.

La triangulation des résultats guidée par la théorie des systèmes écologiques de Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) a révélé les 12 défis les plus importants auxquels sont confrontés les conseillers scolaires au Bhoutan. Il s'agit (1) du manque de définition quant à leurs rôles professionnelles, (2) du manque de communication et de collaboration avec leurs collègues, (3) du manque de formation initiale, (4) du manque de supervision, (5) du rôle de la pandémie de COVID-19, (6) du rôle de la stigmatisation, (7) de l'importance et du manque de soutien social, (8) du rôle persistant de la discipline dans les écoles bhoutanaises, (9) du manque de ressources matérielles, (10) de la nécessité d'avoir une conseillère ainsi qu'un conseiller scolaire dans chaque école, (11) du manque d'occasion pour les élèves de consulter le ou la conseiller/ère scolaire, et enfin (12) le fait que cette profession soit encore très jeune et ai besoin d'avantage de temps pour s'établir.

Tandis que les résultats de cette recherche soulignent le travail immense et incontestable des conseillers scolaires bhoutanais, ils témoignent aussi d'une profession qui est d'autant plus complexe qu'elle est systématiquement isolée et se trouve désemparée, l'empêchant ainsi de réaliser son potentiel de soutien à la santé mentale des enfants et des jeunes bhoutanais. Ces résultats contribuent à la recherche mondiale sur les conseillers scolaires, mettent en évidence de nouvelles pistes de recherche, telles que la nécessité d'étudier les perspectives des élèves, et suggèrent des changements de politique spécifiques afin d'améliorer les conditions d'exécution de la mission des conseillers scolaires au Bhoutan.

Mots clés: Bhoutan, conseillers scolaires, santé mentale, sondage, interview

1. Introduction

“Who doesn’t need counseling? Everyone can benefit. I could use counseling”

Prime Minister of Bhutan the Honorable Dasho Lotay Tshering

School counselors are today an integral part of the education system in schools around the world (Carey et al., 2017; Harris, 2013) and are uniquely positioned within the complex school environment to support children and youths’ mental health (Cinotti, 2014; Harrison, 2021; Mullen et al., 2017). Amidst rising global mental health issues, the services school counselors provide are today needed more than ever (Baranne & Falissard, 2018; Norwich et al., 2022; Shim et al., 2022; WHO., 2021a, 2021b). Yet, while ample evidence attests to the benefits of school counseling for the academic, social and emotional development of children and youths (Ahmed et al., 2023; Carey et al., 2017; Mahoney et al., 2021; Rutter, 1991), persistent challenges prevent school counselors from supporting children and youth’s mental health. These include confusion around the roles and responsibilities of school counselors, a lack of stakeholder support, a lack of supervision and, more recently, the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Brillon et al., 2022; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Moyer, 2011; Mullen et al., 2017; Savitz-Romer et al., 2021). Addressing the challenges school counselors face is key to prevent burnout, an unfortunately common occurrence for this specific line of work (Bardhoshi et al., 2014; Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Fye et al., 2020; Moyer, 2011; Mullen et al., 2017).

In the Kingdom of Bhutan, the school counseling profession was first introduced in 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2010). As of 2019, a reported 119 school counselors were active across the Kingdom (Ministry of Education, 2019). However, very little research is publicly available to

date about Bhutanese school counselors and the challenges they face. Yet, research studies, news articles and government documents reporting on increased problematic digital media use, substance use, suicide rates, pervasive stigma towards mental health issues and the consequences of strict lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic (Dorji et al., 2017; Lhadon, 2014; Nirola et al., 2015; Schuelka & Maxwell, 2016; Tamang & Dorji, 2021) underline the need for school counseling services in schools in Bhutan. These concerns are further compounded by limited access to mental health resources in the Kingdom (Sacra & Nichols, 2018; Tietjen, 2023; WHO., 2022a) putting school counselors in a unique position shouldering alone the responsibility for Bhutanese children and youths' mental health. What is more, the rare studies available investigating school counseling services suggest significant challenges to the profession that warrant attention such as misconceptions about school counselors' roles and responsibilities (Dem & Busch, 2018; Guth et al., 2015; Jamtsho, 2017).

The dearth of systematic research impedes progress, hindering Bhutanese school counselors from supporting children and youths to live their best possible lives. That is why the aim of this doctoral research is to explore the school counseling profession in Bhutan. The specific problem addressed is the knowledge gap in this field of research, namely, the lack of data on challenges faced by Bhutanese school counselors. To this end, the first, mixed methods investigation of these challenges involving a large cohort of Bhutanese school counselors was carried out.

This doctoral research conducted three studies. First, a systematic literature review investigated the most prevalent needs of school counseling services in East and Southeast Asia. Second, a survey study was carried out of 162 of the 179 school counselors registered in the Kingdom of Bhutan to investigate their demographics, daily activities, their roles and responsibilities, including how these are perceived by 49 of their school teacher and 16 of their

school principal colleagues, and their challenges and resources. Third, individual interviews with 28 school counselors were carried out to investigate their perceived challenges and resources in more depth. The research questions of this doctoral research center inquiry pertaining to Bhutanese school counselors' most important challenges and attempted to understand and describe what those challenges are. The resulting data was triangulated and organized in-line with an ecological model, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (EST) (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Ecological models such as the EST emphasize that individuals, settings, communities, and broader cultural and sociopolitical contexts influence and are influenced by one another (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The results contribute to international school counseling research by providing data from a specific and understudied cultural context and, furthermore, suggest specific, practical implications which have the potential to benefit and improve the school counseling profession in Bhutan.

2. Background and Contextualization

2.1 Global Child and Youth Mental Health

Mental health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a state of well-being in which individuals can realize their potential, cope with life's stresses, work productively, and contribute to their community (WHO, 2022b). Child and youth mental health is a growing concern around the world. This population is characterized by significant challenges and stressors which may be dealt with using under-developed coping skills (Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2016). Around 10%-14% of the world's children and youths live with a mental disorder (Kieling et al., 2024; Polanczyk et al., 2015; WHO., 2021a, 2022b) and half of lifetime mental health disorder cases begin before the age of 14 years old (Jones, 2013; Patalay & Fitzsimons, 2018; WHO., 2021b). More specifically, recent reports suggest that around 4.6% of adolescent boys, aged 10 to 14 years, suffer from attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and around 5.5% of adolescent girls, aged 10 to 19 years, from anxiety. Other disorders include conduct disorders, intellectual disability, bipolar disorders, eating disorders, autism, schizophrenia, and personality disorders (UNICEF, 2021). More alarmingly, these rates are reported to be on the rise (World Health Organization, 2018) despite increases in the availability of treatment (Jorm et al., 2017; Patel et al., 2018).

Short-term consequences of mental health disorders in children and youths in schools, hereinafter also referred to as students, include impaired learning that can act as a barrier to academic achievement (Sharma & Sharma, 2021; Wickersham et al., 2021), bullying (WHO., 2022b) and dropping out of school before completing basic education (Hjorth et al., 2016). Long-term consequences over the life-course include self-harm, drug use and criminal behaviors (Clayborne et al., 2019; Hopper et al., 2013; Underwood & Washington, 2016), developing a comorbid disorder (Ormel et al., 2015; Shevlin et al., 2017) and suicide, the second leading cause

of death among girls and third most common cause of death among boys aged 15 to 19 years old (WHO., 2018). From an economic perspective, this phenomena has been found to carry substantial costs for the healthcare system in the United States (Tkacz & Brady, 2021). In sum, escalating incidence of mental health disorders among children and youths is a significant threat to future global population health and, consecutively, a public health matter of international concern (Castelpietra et al., 2022; Child & Collaborators, 2019; Norwich et al., 2022; Shim et al., 2022; Wiens et al., 2020).

Yet, while childhood and adolescence are ages characterized by vulnerability, they are also windows of opportunity for mental health development including developing emotional regulation mechanisms (Young et al., 2019) and coping skills to overcome adversity (Kendall-Taylor, 2020; Smetana et al., 2006; WHO., 2022b). That is why special attention should be paid to mental health prevention and promotion beyond just treatment. Mental health prevention encompasses measures aimed at reducing the risk for the development of mental disorders, such as through early detection, and are meant to be offered before disorders have the chance to develop (National Research Council, 2009). Mental health promotion aims to increase mental health by improving an individual's coping strategies, resilience and capacity for well-being, namely, empowering them to improve their mental health (Kalra et al., 2012; Singh et al., 2022) and to overcome adversity (Fenwick-Smith et al., 2018; Zimmerman et al., 2013). Mental health prevention and promotion measures can help to avoid adverse developmental consequences (Fineberg et al., 2013) such as by improving academic outcomes (Dix et al., 2020). Because mental health disorders peak in adolescence (Kieling et al., 2024) and because there have never been more children and youths than there are now with reports predicting that this population will reach 2.1 billion in 2042 (United Nations, 2021), prevention and promotion services for children and youths is paramount.

In the search for effective prevention and promotion solutions, the potential role of schools has gained increasing attention. Schools are ubiquitous and powerful institutions in children and youths' lives (Rutter, 1991) with a potentially pivotal role for their mental health, not least because of the amount of time children and youths spend there (Fazel et al., 2014; Hoover & Bostic, 2021; Kern et al., 2017; WHO., 2020a; Wong et al., 2022). Schools provide a structured environment that is ideal for implementing services to support students' mental health (Ahmed et al., 2023; Kern et al., 2017; Langer et al., 2015) offering "optimal feasibility, cost-effectiveness, scalability, and equity" (Kagstrom et al., 2023, p. 1). School-based mental health services refer to "any program, intervention, or strategy applied in a school setting that is specifically designed to influence students' emotional, behavioral, and/or social functioning" (Rones & Hoagwood, 2000, p. 224). These services have the potential to remove barriers, such as logistical, thus representing potential access points (Doll et al., 2017; Graaf et al., 2023). A review of school-based mental health services in the United States found that these improve academic success, improve psychosocial functioning and can reduce the risk of poor mental health later on in life (Hoover & Bostic, 2021). School-based mental health services are especially valuable in the face of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic during which mental health challenges among children and youths around the world were exacerbated in part as a result of lockdowns (Bussières et al., 2021; Hossain et al., 2022; Jones et al., 2021; Loades et al., 2020; Varma et al., 2021) which affected over 90% of children and youths worldwide (UNESCO, 2022).

In sum, rising mental health issues among children and youths cannot be overlooked and concerted efforts need to be made towards prevention and promotion. In the search for solutions, school-based mental health services should be addressed, which include those provided by school counselors.

2.2 School Counseling

Traditionally perceived as sites of learning, schools have more recently developed into sites of social and emotional development (Kostenius et al., 2020; OECD, 2023; Walker et al., 2021). Alongside teachers and principals, new actors have been introduced such as school nurses, social workers and school counselors. The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) provided the first definition of school counseling services in response to the lack of clarity of the role of school counselors and the lack of consistency in how school counseling was being practiced. According to the ASCA, school counselors are accredited educators who improve outcomes for all students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program which aims to provide academic and career advice and promote social-emotional competencies (ASCA, 2019a). This definition of school counseling will hereafter be used for the remainder of this doctoral research presented in this manuscript.

The ASCA also proposed a model, the ASCA National Model, today one of the most recognized school counseling models worldwide (Carey et al., 2017), which provides a framework of school counselors' roles and responsibilities in the United States. The latest iteration, the ASCA National Model 4th edition, was published in 2019 (ASCA, 2019a). According to this model, school counselors provide students with academic, social, and emotional support. They work to improve students' ability to function, grow, and succeed academically, socially, and emotionally by participating in academic planning and advising, such as on time management, organizing orientation for new students, interpreting tests and providing academic support services (ASCA, 2019a). The roles defined by the ASCA National Model include providing short-term counseling to individual students and groups of students such as relationship or career advice, carrying out programs such as substance use or bullying prevention, collecting and evaluating data on programs they provide in order to quantify their efficacy and

making referrals for students who need additional support for instance for students demonstrating depressive symptoms or suicidal ideation (ASCA, 2019a).

While other professions within the school, such as the teacher profession, and specifically the traditional teacher-student dyad, are ancient and well embedded in school systems, by contrast, the school counseling profession and counselor-student dyad are relatively new (Schmidt, 2008). The school counseling profession was first introduced over 100 years ago in schools in the United States to address the growing need for guidance and support within educational systems, particularly as society and the economy became more complex, and was formalized around the 1950s by the ASCA (Falco et al., 2011). Since then, the profession has been steadily growing with more and more schools in countries across the world choosing to implement school counseling services (Carey et al., 2017; Harris, 2013). It is now widely recognized that school counselors are uniquely positioned to support children and youths' mental health (Morris et al., 2021) and that they shoulder the enormous responsibility of supporting students in this vulnerable phase of their development fraught with numerous risks (Ogden & Hagen, 2018; Vijayakumar et al., 2018).

Research has thus far demonstrated numerous benefits of school counseling (Harris, 2013; O'Connor, 2018) such as long-term academic and social-emotional benefits for students (Carey et al., 2017). For instance, a literature review of school counseling in the United Kingdom found that school counseling services were effective at reducing psychological distress, improving mental health and helping students to achieve their personal goals (Cooper, 2013). Moreover, analysis of data from middle schools in North Carolina in the United States from 2009 to 2015 revealed that implementing school counseling services significantly improved attendance (Akos et al., 2019). As such, school counselors represent potential systemic change agents (ASCA,

2022). However, various well-documented challenges prevent school counselors from supporting children and youths' mental health and put them at risk of experiencing burnout.

2.3 Challenges to School Counselors

According to international school counseling research, specific challenges hinder school counselors from implementing school counseling services and put them at risk of burnout. Burnout is the psychological phenomenon related to job-stress defined by the experience of an individual of a physical and emotional state of exhaustion (Maslach & Leiter, 2017). Symptoms of burnout can be physical, such as low energy, irritability, exhaustion, illness, and insomnia, and emotional, such as feelings of cynicism towards the job, feelings of ineffectiveness, feelings of being overwhelmed or frustrated, all of which can lead to absenteeism (Freudenberger, 1974; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Maslach & Leiter, 2017). As a result, their work is compromised (Lee et al., 2010; Morse et al., 2012). Helping professionals such as medical staff and counselors are often exposed to chronic stress which can develop into burnout (Maor & Hemi, 2021; Mullen & Crowe, 2017; Nelson et al., 2018). That is why Lee et al. (2010) provide a definition of burnout specifically for counselors as “the failure to perform clinical tasks appropriately because of personal discouragement, apathy toward system stress, and emotional/physical drain” (Lee et al., 2010, p. 143). School counselors are thought to be especially vulnerable to burnout compared to other mental health workers owing to their unique role within the school environment (Dorociak et al., 2017; Fye et al., 2020; Holman & Grubbs, 2018; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Merriman, 2015; Mullen et al., 2017). Reported challenges specific to school counselors which are conducive to burnout include role confusion, a lack of stakeholder support, a lack of supervision and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.3.1 Role Confusion

The specific role of school counselors has long been a subject of debate (Burnham et al., 2024; Clark & Amatea, 2004). The school counseling profession is inherently dynamic (Cinotti, 2014) with international research on school counseling pointing to school counselors' evolving roles and expanding responsibilities in line with the ever-changing needs of students (Amundson et al., 2015; Blake, 2020; Carey et al., 2017; Cinotti, 2014; Hohenshil et al., 2015), changing school structures and political and societal changes (Amundson et al., 2015; Carey et al., 2017; Cinotti, 2014). While, in the United States, they were originally only tasked with providing career advice, today, school counselors around the world are expected to carry out individual and group counseling with students, execute programs such as on cyberbullying awareness and prevention, work closely with parents and collaborate with external institutions, for instance, to make referrals to psychiatric services (ASCA, 2019a; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Therefore, school counselors shoulder "the most multifunctional role in schools" (Harrison, 2021, p. 1) and are pressured to "do it all" (Gillen et al., 2024). To complicate matters, school counselor roles and responsibilities differ across various countries in accordance with different cultural, national, legal, educational, and societal factors and needs (Harrison, 2021; Martin et al., 2015).

In addition to having multiple roles and responsibilities within the school, a major challenge to the school counseling profession lies wherein counselors being assigned additional, non-counseling tasks such as taking care of discipline and detention cases and monitoring lunches or exams (Kim & Lambie, 2018). For instance, in a sample of 91 school counselors in the United States surveyed about the discrepancies between their expected roles and their actual roles, they reported spending an average 36% of their time on inappropriate roles such as administrative tasks (Burnham et al., 2024). This in turn leads to role confusion, namely, the uncertainty resulting from dealing with tasks unrelated to school counseling (Blake, 2020; Cervoni &

DeLucia-Waack, 2011). Role confusion further encompasses role conflict and role ambiguity. Role conflict is defined as having two or more responsibilities that may be in conflict with each other, for example, being tasked to advocate for students but at the same time to act as disciplinarians (House & Martin, 1998) which can leave school counselors feeling overwhelmed (Fye et al., 2020). Another example of role conflict include cases where school counselors are asked to take on roles assigned by supervisors rather than roles defined by their job description (Wilkerson, 2009). Role ambiguity is defined as having no clear definition of job responsibilities (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Culbreth et al., 2005) which can negatively affect job satisfaction (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Patton, 2019).

As a result of role confusion, school counselors are often assigned inappropriate tasks, such as administrative duties (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021), while having to neglect appropriate tasks which can lead to feelings of frustration (Falzon et al., 2020) effectively becoming the “dumping ground for tasks that did not fit under someone else’s job description” (Blake, 2020, p. 320). Yet, burdening counselors with these inappropriate tasks has been shown to contribute to low job satisfaction and to result in high turnover rates and burnout (Blake, 2020; Holman et al., 2019). For instance, in a survey study of 175 school counselors in the United States, self-reported time spent on non-ASCA recommended duties was a negative predictor of job satisfaction (Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011). In another survey study of 449 school counselors in the United States, carrying out inappropriate duties such as substitute teaching, standardized test administration, master scheduling, and disciplining students was associated with high levels of stress and exhaustion (Holman et al., 2019). Conversely, in a survey study of 1280 school counselors in the United States, self-reported alignment of roles with the school counseling program was associated with higher career satisfaction and commitment (Baggerly & Osborn, 2006).

2.3.2 Lack of Stakeholder Support

School counselors work with multiple stakeholders, for instance teachers, principals and parents, and each may have different expectations of school counselors. The support school counselors receive from stakeholders is essential (Reiner et al., 2009; Ruiz et al., 2018) with the relationship with the school principal being perhaps the most important for the school counselor (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006). School principals are usually positioned to make ultimate decisions in the school, such as on hiring staff, and are responsible for assigning tasks to school personnel and communicating the roles and functions of staff members (Clemens et al., 2009).

Sufficient stakeholder support, namely, collaborative and respectful relationships with colleagues in the school characterized by regular communication, is critical for school counseling (DeSimone & Roberts, 2016; Goodman-Scott et al., 2018; Levin et al., 2020). For example, in a study of 218 school counselors in the United States, increases in self-reported occupational support, such as from the school principal, were associated with increased feelings of self-reported personal accomplishment and decreased emotional exhaustion (Lambie, 2007). However, stakeholder support is often perceived to be lacking (Carey et al., 2017), in part because of misconceptions about school counseling which hinder collaboration as was found in an interview study of 19 school counselors in Singapore (Low, 2015) or because of conflicting opinions about school counseling priorities such as was found in a survey study of 1466 school principals in the United States (Yavuz et al., 2017). This is problematic as a lack of stakeholder support is a risk factor for burnout. For instance, in a survey study of 993 school counselors in the United States, perceived organizational support, namely, whether school counselors felt encouraged and respected by their school colleagues, was found to be a significant predictor of burnout (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021). In another study survey study of 214 school counselors in Türkiye, significant negative relationships were found between perceived support from

colleagues, and self-reported feelings of burnout, namely, perceived support acted as a burnout deterrent (Yildirim, 2008). In addition, lack of stakeholder support of school counseling services can negatively affect the school climate (Rock et al., 2017), namely, student and school staff's feelings and experiences of a school's environment (Peterson & Skiba, 2000), and students' academic achievement (Yavuz et al., 2017).

2.3.3 Lack of Supervision

Supervision is the act by a professional in a given field who has more experience and knowledge than another professional working with them. This supervisor uses their experience and knowledge to help guide the lesser-experienced colleague (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006; Fye et al., 2020; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). Mental health professions around the world rely on supervision for professional support and guidance (Peters, 2017). This is especially true for school counselors on account of their both unique and dynamic roles within the school system (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006). Supervision is further an important form of mentoring, providing professional and emotional support, feedback, advice and insight and allowing school counselors to develop their skills (Bledsoe et al., 2019; Perera-Diltz & Mason, 2012). Research indicates that school counselors perceive these services as essential beyond other opportunities for professional development such as trainings and workshops (Duncan et al., 2014) in part because it increases their professional confidence and helps them to be more empathetic towards students (Randick et al., 2018).

Supervision can counteract burnout in school counselors by reducing stress and increasing their sense of self-efficacy and well-being (Bardhoshi et al., 2019; Fye et al., 2020; Merriman, 2015; Randick et al., 2018). For example, Moyer (2011) found in a survey study of 382 school counselors in the United States that the amount of supervision received was a significant negative

predictor for burnout while Duncan et al. (2014) found in a survey study of 118 school counselors in the United States that supervision was perceived as important both for professional and personal growth. Furthermore, Kovač et al. (2017) conducted a pre- and post-test study with 30 primary school counselors in Slovenia for which they received one hour of weekly individual clinical supervision over four weeks. Survey data gathered before and after the supervision intervention revealed that participation in supervision lead to significantly reduced perceived stress by the end of the four weeks.

However, the few studies available on school counseling supervision frequently report that school counselors do not or hardly ever receive this valuable source of support (Bledsoe et al., 2019; Duncan et al., 2014; Page et al., 2001; Somody et al., 2008) or that they receive supervision by a supervisor with inadequate training (DeKruyf & Pehrsson, 2011). For instance, in an interview study of 11 school counselors in the United States, participants reported not receiving supervision often enough and, when it was received, was mostly administrative (Bultsma, 2012). In a study of 147 school counseling supervisors in the United States, DeKruyf et al. (2013) further found that 54% indicated having received little or no supervision training.

2.3.4 The COVID-19 Pandemic

On March 10th 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the novel COVID-19 disease to be a global pandemic (WHO., 2020b). In response to this unprecedented crisis, measures were implemented including social distancing, quarantining for long periods of time, school closures, economic constraints, strained familial relationships, and increased violence which were found to severely impact children and youths' mental health around the world (Fegert et al., 2020; Hawes et al., 2022; Park et al., 2024; Pattison et al., 2021; UNICEF, 2022; Viner et al., 2022). Consequences of these measures known to date include increased levels of anxiety,

depression and substance use and increased instances of domestic violence, of teen pregnancy and of suicide attempts (Ellis et al., 2020; Fegert et al., 2020; Hawes et al., 2022; Hoffman & Miller, 2020; Hossain et al., 2022; Magson et al., 2021; Pattison et al., 2021). For instance, a systematic review by De Miranda et al. (2020) found increased rates of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic symptoms among children and adolescents since the start of the pandemic. Moreover, in a survey of 1784 children in China, Xie et al. (2020) found 22.6% reporting depressive symptoms and 18.9% reporting anxiety symptoms as a result of school closures. Consequently, the need for school counselors to be prepared to support children and youths for such unforeseeable events was made evident. In some cases, school counselors were even perceived by their communities as emergency workers (Twenge & Joiner, 2020).

For school counselors, the COVID-19 pandemic increased the risk of burnout (Brillon et al., 2022; Twenge & Joiner, 2020; Weisbrot & Ryst, 2020). Among numerous other challenges, school counselors had to transfer to online counseling almost overnight to continue providing their services which confronted them with additional challenges owing to a lack of training and equipment (Mielgo-Conde et al., 2021). In a sample of 1060 school counselors in the United States surveyed three months after the start of the pandemic, self-reported difficulties included decreased contact with students because of having to move counseling activities online and, concurrently, increased student mental health needs (Savitz-Romer et al., 2021). Other studies also found that the pandemic increased role confusion with school counselors having to take over non-counseling tasks such as standing in for absent teachers (Blake, 2020; Savitz-Romer et al., 2021). Furthermore, in a mixed methods study which surveyed 915 school counselors and carried out focus groups with 46 school counselors in the United States, perceived increases in students' mental health issues as a result of the pandemic were positively correlated with increases in school counselors' experiences of job stress including increased role confusion and work

overload (Alexander et al., 2022). Similar results were also found in a survey study of 675 school psychologists in the United States (Schaffer et al., 2021) and in an interview study of 12 school psychologists in Australia (Reupert et al., 2022). The latter further reported not feeling sufficiently prepared for online counseling and experiencing difficulties maintaining contact with students during lockdowns (Reupert et al., 2022).

2.3.5 Burnout

School counselors have the ability to positively impact students' lives (Ahmed et al., 2023; Carey et al., 2017; Mahoney et al., 2021; Rutter, 1991). However, specific challenges prevent them from implementing school counseling services and put them at risk of experiencing burnout. This is especially concerning as school counselors experiencing burnout are less able to attend to their roles and responsibilities because their emotional resources may be depleted so that they are in turn unable to meet the mental health needs of students (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Mullen et al., 2017; Pyne, 2011). One survey study by Mullen et al. (2017) of 750 school counselors in the United States found, for instance, that school counselors experiencing burnout decreased the amount of time spent on direct student services, namely, individual counseling. Other studies have found that they may not be able to provide adequate care owing to a reduced ability to be empathetic and attentive, and may even develop feelings of negativity towards clients (Morse et al., 2012; Thompson et al., 2011) in turn impacting the counseling relationships with students (Lambie, 2007; Maslach & Leiter, 2017), students' welfare (Holman & Grubbs, 2018) and their relationship with stakeholders (Wilkerson & Bellini, 2006). Finally, school counselor burnout can increase the likelihood of school counselors leaving the mental health profession entirely (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016).

2.3.6 Conclusion: The Need to Understand Challenges to School Counselors

Potential triggers for burnout in school counselors include role confusion, lack of stakeholder support, lack of supervision and the consequences of crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. These challenges are further compounded by the singularity of the school counseling profession, whose roles and responsibilities continue to grow and expand in line with students' increasingly complex mental health needs (Blake, 2020; Harrison, 2023; Hohenshil et al., 2015; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Lambie & Williamson, 2004; Savitz-Romer et al., 2021). That is why research investigating the challenges faced by school counselors is vital.

2.4 Bhutan

The Kingdom of Bhutan is referred to as “Druk Yul”, which means the Land of the Thunder Dragon, and the last “Shangri-La” because of its unique cultural traditions and pristine natural landscapes (Schroeder, 2017). Nested in the Himalayas between China and India, the Kingdom is famous for its unique economic and political philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH) used to measure national sustainable development and well-being instead of traditional metrics such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Wangchhuk, 2008). Its landscape is dotted by cities, including its capital, Thimphu, and very remote, rural villages not accessible by car that are spread over 20 districts or Dzongkhas (Schroeder, 2017). A diverse nation, there are a recorded 19 different languages and local dialects. Dzongkha is also the name of the official national language while English is the administrative language for government and educational bodies (Pelzang, 2012). According to the Annual Education Statistics of 2023, there are 526 schools in Bhutan, with 154,140 students and 10,158 school teachers (Ministry of Education and Skills Development, 2023). Mirroring Western education systems, mainstream education in Bhutan comprises compulsory education from primary school to secondary school, with seven years of primary education, which starts at the age of six, then six years of secondary education. This then

culminates in national end-of-school exams, namely the Bhutan Certificate of Secondary Education (BCSE), after which students can enter tertiary education such as a technical college, vocational college, or university (Schuelka & Maxwell, 2016). These 13 years of basic education are guaranteed by the education policy of the Bhutanese government and all curricula and assessments are regulated and administered by the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD), until recently called the Ministry of Education (MoE). This is to ensure that all children are equipped with knowledge, values and skills in accordance with the Constitution of Bhutan which recognizes education as a basic right (Ministry of Education, 2020b; Sharma et al., 2021). To ensure access to education of all children in the mountainous country, many students who live in very remote, rural regions attend boarding schools (Lester et al., 2020; Schuelka & Maxwell, 2016). Official numbers of regular day schools and of boarding schools are not publicly available (Ministry of Education and Skills Development, 2023).

2.5 Challenges to Bhutanese Children and Youths

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a country in transition undergoing rapid economic and social changes. It is reported to be one of the fastest growing economies in East and Southeast Asia and has experienced a recent, drastic reduction in poverty (The World Bank, 2024; Walcott, 2011). The Kingdom also moved from an absolute monarchy to a constitutional monarchy in 1953 and the first, Western-styled, modern schools opened in 1961, slowly replacing traditional, monastic education (Ministry of Education, 2020b; Schuelka & Maxwell, 2016). The new education system quickly expanded with the help of the government of India (Sharma et al., 2021). In addition, as a result of the sudden import of television, radio and internet in 1999 (Sakra & Nichols, 2018) and of recently opening its doors to tourism (Wangchuk, 2024), Bhutanese citizens were abruptly exposed to other lifestyles and values that have been embraced by the young but which have created tensions with traditions (Sherab et al., 2017). This rapid

globalization has caused a significant culture shift characterized by dramatic life-style changes, increased consumerist behaviors, intergenerational divides, changes in family structures and accelerated rural to urban migration and outmigration abroad (Calabrese & Dorji, 2014; Sacra & Nichols, 2018). Moreover, increased prevalence of nuclear families and separation from extended families, increased divorce rates and a sharp rise in youth unemployment are fueling concerns about the country's development prospects (Calabrese & Dorji, 2014; Lester, 2015; Phuntsho et al., 2022; Resources., 2022; Sacra & Nichols, 2018; The World Bank, 2024). Research studies, news articles and government documents further warn of increases in problematic digital media use, substance use and suicide rates as rising public health concerns in Bhutan further compounded by a lack of mental health resources for children and youths, pervasive stigma towards mental health issues and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic (Dorji et al., 2017; Lhadon, 2014; Nirola et al., 2015; Schuelka & Maxwell, 2016). Each of these challenges and, where available, supporting empirical research, will be presented individually.

2.5.1 Problematic Digital Media Use

Problematic digital media use, the excessive and uncontrolled use of digital media that leads to functional impairment in daily life (Marino, 2020) is a growing global concern. Children and youths around the world are increasingly exposed to screens such as televisions, computers, smartphones, and tablets (Lissak, 2018). Digital technologies have notable benefits for children and youths such as enhanced communication skills and social media platforms such as Facebook and WhatsApp can create a space for adolescents to communicate and connect with one another (Jackson, 2008; UNICEF, 2021). However, excessive consumption of digital media can cause developmental delays (Madigan et al., 2019), exacerbate mental health disorders in adolescents, such as depression, anxiety and low self-esteem (Ivie et al., 2020; Rozgonjuk et al., 2020; Woods & Scott, 2016), and online platforms, such as social media, are potential vectors for

cyberbullying (Fisher et al., 2016; Patchin & Hinduja, 2015). There is further evidence that excessive digital media use became a greater issue during the COVID-19 pandemic as students spent increasingly more time online during lockdowns with some reports finding a doubling of screen time (Wiederhold, 2020). According to news reports, problematic digital media use is a growing concern in Bhutan (Seldon, 2019; Tamang, 2024; Yuden, 2021) but research studies, such as on prevalence rates, are lacking. One rare cross-sectional, mixed methods study of digital media usage by Tenzin et al. (2019) found, for instance, that of 721 adolescents surveyed in 12 schools, 248 (34.4%) met the criteria for internet addiction on the Internet Addiction Test (Kaya et al., 2016).

2.5.2 Substance Use

Substance use refers to the use of “substances, including alcohol, tobacco products, drugs, inhalants, and other substances that can be consumed, inhaled, injected, or otherwise absorbed into the body with possible dependence and other detrimental effects” (US Centers for Disease Control, 2023). Substance use during the sensitive life period of childhood and adolescence can be detrimental to further development (Erskine et al., 2015; Steinberg, 2005), for instance, because of resulting violence and accidents (Gutierrez & Sher, 2015; Hall et al., 2016). Substance use rates are on the rise in Bhutan (Lhadon, 2014; Nirola et al., 2015). There are currently no official numbers available concerning the type or amount used among children and youths although news articles report that the most often used substances include cannabis, pharmaceutical drugs, alcohol and solvents (Dema, 2024; Pem, 2017; Sharma, 2024). The 2016 WHO Global School-based Student Health Survey of 7,576 Bhutanese secondary school students aged 13 to 17 years old from 50 schools further found that 28.3% of males and 5.3% of female respondents had used cannabis one or more times in their lifetime (Ministry of Health, 2017). In addition, 33.4% of male students and 16.1% of female students reported that they currently drank

alcohol. Of those reporting ever having drunk alcohol, 58% of male and 52.4% of female students further reported initiating alcohol use before the age of 14. These rates are concerning as they are considerably higher than in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand (World Health Organization, 2017). For comparison, these rates are much higher than in Nepal, where 5% of male and 2.5% of female students reported ever using cannabis, and 6.7% of male and 3.6% female students reported current use of alcohol, despite easier access to substances (World Health Organization, 2017).

2.5.3 Increased Suicide Rates

A twofold increase in suicide rates was observed from 2011 to 2015 according to the Royal Bhutan Police so that suicide was declared as one of the leading causes of death in Bhutan (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2015). Moreover, the 2016 WHO Global School-Based Student Health Survey revealed high rates of suicide acts and intentions with 11% of 5809 surveyed students reporting having attempted suicide one or more times during the 12 months before the survey (Dema et al., 2019; Ministry of Health, 2017). As a consequence, a 3-year suicide-prevention action plan was initiated by the Royal Government of Bhutan (RGoB) in 2015 (Royal Government of Bhutan, 2015) followed by an eight-year Mental Health Strategy and Action Plan by the Ministry of Health (MoH) (Ministry of Health, 2015) in an attempt to counteract this alarming trend.

2.5.4 Lack of Mental Health Resources for Children and Youths

The issues seen above are further compounded by a lack of access to mental health services in Bhutan. The first mental health plan was published in 1997, the first psychiatrist implemented in 1998, and the first psychiatric ward inaugurated in 2003 (Calabrese & Dorji, 2014; Health., 2023; Nirola et al., 2015; Pelzang, 2012; Sharma & Joshi, 2024). Today, Bhutanese citizens, especially

children and youths, still have limited access to mental health resources. For the Bhutanese population of around 700,000 citizens, of which 154,140 are children and youths in schools according to government data (Ministry of Education and Skills Development, 2023), there are currently four psychiatrists and 16 clinical counselors, but no mental health services exclusively for children and youths (Sacra & Nichols, 2018; Sharma & Joshi, 2024; Tietjen, 2023; WHO., 2022a)

2.5.5 Stigma towards Mental Health Issues

Stigma is multidimensional process understood as “a sign of disgrace or discredit, which sets a person apart from others” (Byrne, 2000, p. 65). Stigma can lead to and enable negative labels and stereotypes in some populations as it is embedded in prejudices over what mental health issues look like and how symptoms are portrayed. This can result in shame, which means symptoms are hidden and ignored (Choudhry et al., 2016), and a reluctance to seek help (Van der Boor & White, 2020). Mental health studies in Bhutan almost consistently mention the ubiquitous role of stigma (Calabrese & Dorji, 2014; Gyeltshen et al., 2024; Pelzang, 2012; Sharma & Joshi, 2024; Tietjen, 2023), a lack of awareness about mental health issues and mental health treatment being perceived as a new approach to health care (Calabrese & Dorji, 2014; Lester et al., 2018; Pelzang, 2012) especially in rural parts of the Kingdom (Sharma & Joshi, 2024). This is due in part to the role of traditional health beliefs according to which mental illnesses are caused by black magic, evil spirits, witchcraft, a curse, or ‘karma’ of previous life, views which contribute to the stigmatization of people with a mental disorder and a belief that such disorders are incurable (Calabrese & Dorji, 2014; Pelzang, 2012; UNICEF Bhutan, 2021). As a result, those affected by mental disorders seldom seek help or delay seeking help until their symptoms are serious (Dorji et al., 2017; Pradhan & Lhamo, 2023). However, the situation is also believed to be changing in Bhutan with the number of patients seeking treatment slowly increasing as

improvements with treatment are gradually being witnessed. This is evidenced by data showing that 6,800 mental health cases were reported to hospitals in Bhutan in 2020 compared to 4,200 in 2019 (UNICEF Bhutan, 2021).

2.5.6 The COVID-19 Pandemic

The first case of COVID-19 in Bhutan was reported in March 2020 (Tsheten, Chateau, et al., 2023). That same month, a nation-wide lockdown was imposed, including school closures, and again in August 2020 (Palden, 2020; Tamang & Dorji, 2021) which forced education to be moved online almost overnight (Sharma et al., 2021; Wangdi et al., 2021). The government further imposed 21-day quarantines for those who tested positive for COVID-19 in designated quarantine centers (Tamang & Dorji, 2021). While these measures were especially restrictive, as a result, only 21 COVID-related deaths have so far reported been in the Kingdom (Ministry of Health, 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences took its toll on Bhutanese children and youths' mental health (Tsheten, Chateau, et al., 2023). Increases in mental health issues were recorded with overall depression rates rising from an average prevalence of 16 per 10,000 in 2020 to 32 per 10,000 in 2021 and for anxiety 18 per 10,000 in 2020 to 55 per 10,000 in 2021 (Ministry of Health, 2021). The lockdowns and restrictions negatively impacted children and youths with reports of children and youths of families who didn't have the technology for online schooling falling behind and of increased violence towards them (Sharma et al., 2021). A look at Bhutan's Annual Education Statistics since 2019 further shows a steady increase in drop-out rates of students in their final year of school with 2.3% in 2019 (Ministry of Education, 2019), 7.4% in 2020 (Ministry of Education, 2020a), 5.8% in 2021 (Ministry of Education, 2021), 10.5% in 2022

(Ministry of Education, 2022) and 12.5% in 2023 (Ministry of Education and Skills Development, 2023).

2.6 School Counseling in Bhutan

In response to concerns about increases in mental health disorders, substance use and suicide rates, the Kingdom of Bhutan recently introduced clinical counseling, addiction counseling and school counseling services (Dem & Busch, 2018). The official title in Bhutan is “School Guidance Counselor” but will be referred to as school counselor for the remainder of this manuscript. School counseling was developed in collaboration with counselors from the United States who trained teacher-counselors in Bhutan to become the first, full-time counselors in the country (Guth et al., 2015). The first 12 school counselors were deployed in schools in Bhutan in 2010 (Ministry of Education, 2010) and in 2018 there were a reported 119 school counselors working across the country with new graduates every year (Ministry of Health, 2019). The MoESD also published a Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010) in 2010 which was partially influenced by the then version of the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2003). According to this framework, a school counselor is “a professional member of an educational team in primary, middle, and high schools who assists students in their personal, social, academic, and career development through a range of services including individual counseling, group counseling, and specialized classroom teaching” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 14). The framework describes school counselors’ roles and responsibilities, provides principles of school counseling and objectives of the school counseling program and how it should be administered, such as the need for a “quiet, private comfortable room” for counseling (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 16). It also provides guidelines on consultation, namely when school counselors engage with staff and other stakeholders to improve educational outcomes and mental health of students (Hall & Lin, 1994), appraisals, career advice,

making referrals, supervision, handling critical incidents, working with substance use and suicidal behaviors among students, and specifically states that they are not responsible for disciplinary action. Finally, it provides a code of ethics about confidentiality and recommendations on providing awareness and orientation to school staff about the roles, tasks and aims of school counselors.

2.7 Challenges to School Counselors in Bhutan

Considering the singularity of the Kingdom and the rapid social and economic changes it is undergoing, there is a compelling case for investigating the school counseling profession in Bhutan. Yet, in absence of research, little is currently known about the challenges this profession faces. A few notable exceptions include a narrative interview study of four, first generation Bhutanese school counselors' professional experiences by Dem and Busch (2018), which revealed a number of significant concerns. These include (1) a lack of stakeholder support namely from teachers and school principals who hold misconceptions about school counseling, such as that school counselors provide immediate solutions to complicated issues, (2) role confusion because of being expected to carry out disciplinary measures and other administrative duties, (3) stigma and skepticism towards counseling, (4) insufficient training and preparation and (5) a lack of supervision. All of the above were reported by school counselors to negatively impact their work performance, leading to burnout. Similarly, a phenomenological interview study by Lester et al. (2018) of 11 Bhutanese school counselors, two of whom worked in schools, also reported on misconceptions about counseling, namely that counselors provide advice and immediate solutions to complicated issues, and about confidentiality, in part because of families expecting to be closely involved in the counseling process. They also mentioned the issues of insufficient training of counselors, stigma towards mental health issues and how the concept of having set counseling appointments was difficult to implement. Finally, in an interview study by

Jamtsho (2017) of eight teachers, of which four were teachers with school counseling training, on their experiences with wellbeing leadership roles, it was reported that their school colleagues did not understand school counseling services but instead perceived them as a disciplinary measure. There is no existing research using mixed methods and a large cohort investigating Bhutanese school counselor's challenges hindering them from supporting students' mental health.

To conclude, child and youth mental health issues are a considerable public health concern in Bhutan making school counselors important front-line actors. However, they are faced with a number of challenges and are potentially unable to support students' mental health and meet their professional requirements as stated in the Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010). That is why research seeking to understand the challenges to school counseling in Bhutan is crucial and timely.

3. Research Aims

3.1 Research Questions and Study Context

The overarching research question is “What are the most important challenges to school counselors in Bhutan?”.

The following three secondary questions guide this doctoral research which are addressed by three individual studies:

1. What are the needs of school counselors in East and Southeast Asia according to a review of the literature?
2. What are the demographics, daily activities, roles and responsibilities, and challenges and resources perceived by Bhutanese school counselors and their colleagues according to a large-scale survey?
3. What are the most important challenges and resources perceived by Bhutanese school counselors according to interview methods?

A broad question was chosen, namely, one which focuses on challenges to school counselors from their perspectives, rather than limiting the analysis to a specific theme, such as burnout, and multiple research methods were used including a literature review, a survey and interviews. The goal was to gain insight into school counselors’ subjective and genuine experiences allowing for a rich understanding of school counseling from their perspective as such data is not publicly available. Based on the reviewed research on international school counseling and on research about counseling and mental health in Bhutan, insight into the most important challenges to Bhutanese school counselors was anticipated for this doctoral research. More specifically, it was expected that Bhutanese school counselors would report being affected by role confusion, lack of stakeholder support, lack of supervision and the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic

similarly to what was found in other countries, and additionally, that they would be affected by challenges that are potentially unique to Bhutan, such as stigma towards mental health issues.

Initial contact had been established with university researchers in Bhutan before the doctoral research work began. With their help, it was possible to prepare a study proposal and to be put in touch with government officials responsible for school counseling services in Bhutan. Upon contact with the latter, they responded most positively to the study proposal so that a productive collaboration ensued. Before starting the investigation, ethical approval for the integral doctoral research was obtained from the ethics committee of the Department of Education and Psychology of the Free University of Berlin, Germany, and from the MoESD in Bhutan.

3.2 Theoretical Framework: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1995)

The phenomenon under investigation is the profession of school counseling in the Kingdom of Bhutan, specifically the most important challenges that school counselors face. The guiding conceptual framework is an ecological one, namely, Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). According to this framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), the different environments that an individual experiences exist within a system of levels that are interrelated and contained within one another. There are five of these levels around the individual: the Microsystem, the Mesosystem, the Exosystem, the Macrosystem and the Chronosystem. The Microsystem is the person's immediate environment including friends, family, classmates, teachers and neighbors. For school counselors this can include their relationships with their colleagues, supervisors and students. The Mesosystem is the interactions among elements of a person's Microsystem. For school counselors this can include school polices. The Exosystem concerns events and situations which affect the individual and are beyond their control. For school counselors this can include

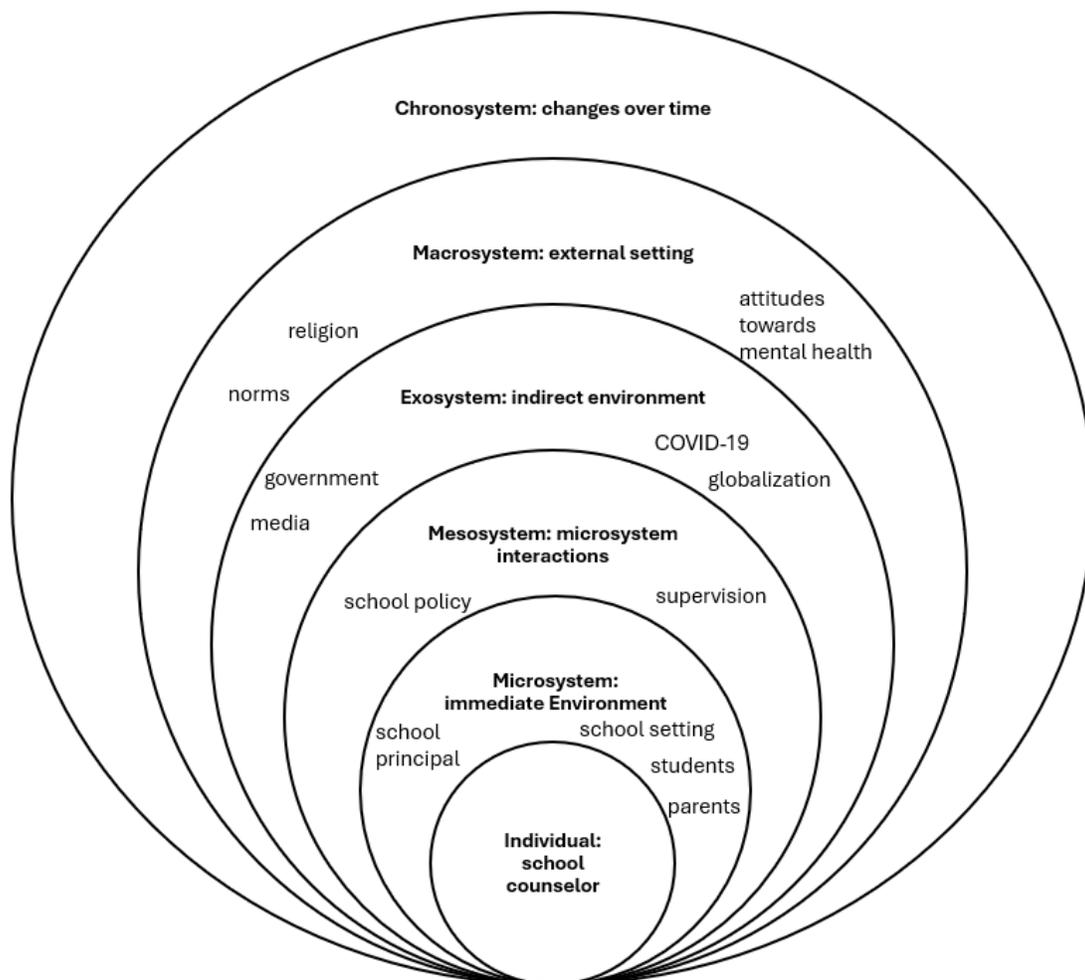
events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The Macrosystem is the external setting, namely the culture and society within which they live, including values, beliefs and ideologies. Finally, the more recently added Chronosystem refers to the passage of time and how this affects the individual. For school counselors, this could include the evolution of the school counseling profession over time.

Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) is conventionally used in empirical research to understand children's development, wherein the child is located at the center of the model. Such applications have been used to investigate, for example, children's sense of belonging in school (El Zaatari & Maalouf, 2022) or the risk and protective factors affecting refugee children's mental health (Arakelyan & Ager, 2021). Within the field of school counseling, studies applying Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), wherein school counselors themselves are located at the center of the model, have been carried out, for instance, to understand the challenges and conflicts perceived by school counselors working with foster-care children, such as was done by Levkovich et al. (2023) or to understand the roles perceived by school counselors working with students from minority backgrounds, such as was done by Savitz-Romer and Nicola (2022). Research by Levkovich et al. (2023) shed light on the need to train school counselors to look after children in foster care, to form a peer group specifically for school counselors working with foster care children and to involve the whole school when a child in foster care is enrolled in order to facilitate communication and collaboration with stakeholders. Research by Savitz-Romer and Nicola (2022) revealed the need to resolve misconceptions about school counselors among school stakeholders, namely, other school staff working in the school, such as teachers, by informing about appropriate school counselor roles and tasks, and establishing policies which allow counselors to dedicate sufficient working time to students.

Based on these past applications of Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) investigating school counselors, for the present doctoral research, Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) was adapted to school counselors' ecological environment. The aim was to organize the resulting challenges to school counselors in Bhutan revealed by this doctoral research according to this adapted model. This adaptation is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1

Adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) showing the system of levels school counselors exist in



In line with this adaptation of Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), it was assumed that school counselors exist in a synergistic system of levels that interact with each other, rather than considering school counselors as individuals acting alone and independently from their environment. More specifically, the school counseling profession is both a function and consequence of the multiple levels in which it operates. It is affected by the different interactions and changes at all levels of the model and can in-turn affect other levels. Ultimately, school counselors function at the nexus of this complicated and dynamic system for the benefit of students' mental health.

As such, for this doctoral research, it was assumed that applying Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) with school counselors at the center would help to understand the challenges Bhutanese school counselors face, how these challenges are organized and how they might influence each other rather than, for instance, focusing only on individual resources, such as self-efficacy (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021; Mullen & Lambie, 2016), namely, the self-held beliefs counselors hold about their ability to work effectively (Larson & Daniels, 1998). It was further expected that applying an ecological lens would provide a broad and complex understanding of the landscape Bhutanese school counselors work in, including the potentially fundamental role of culture, about the challenges they face and in what way these challenges are interrelated rather than investigating individual challenges in isolation.

3.3 Significance

The significance of this doctoral research is its attempt to fill the gap in the literature on school counseling services in the Kingdom of Bhutan. Findings pertaining to the most important challenges to Bhutanese school counselors were expected to shed light on this understudied profession and suggest improvements where these are warranted, first, for the benefit of

Bhutanese school counselors themselves, for their schools and their students and, second, to inform international school counseling research.

For the Kingdom of Bhutan, such information can contribute to the advancement of the school counseling profession by providing insight into the work of school counselors and determining which challenges they need overcome. Identifying and understanding these challenges is essential as such information can inform necessary policy changes for the improvement of school counseling services. Over the long-term, such changes can lead to an improved school climate, changing the course of mental health for Bhutanese students, and to healthier, better adjusted adults. This is imperative considering the rise in mental health issues faced by children and youths in Bhutan seen above.

Second, using mixed methods, this study delves into the nuanced landscape of school counseling services by reaching as many school counselors as possible in an understudied setting, namely the Kingdom of Bhutan, where school counseling services have recently been implemented. Resulting data can inform the international research community by contributing different or innovative ideas to countries with more established school counseling traditions and by broadening the international perspective about the fundamental nature of school counseling. Providing a perspective from an Eastern, under-researched region could further be valuable for global school counseling research by, for instance, challenging traditional Western paradigms of school counseling.

In sum, the findings of this doctoral research have the potential to help shape the future of school counseling and of children and youths in Bhutan and to promote international development, innovation and collaboration for school counseling services everywhere.

4. Publications and Aims of Empirical Contributions

For this doctoral research, three separate studies were carried out and either published in peer-reviewed journals or are under review.

4.1 Study I: A systematic literature review of school counseling needs in East and Southeast Asia ([Appendix A](#))

The first study was a literature review of school counseling needs in East and Southeast Asia. The review retrieved 109 studies from 14 countries published between 2011 and 2023. The Taxonomy of Policy Levers to Promote High Quality School-Based Counseling (Aluede et al., 2020; Morshed & Carey, 2020) was used to identify and categorize school counseling needs including similarities and differences between countries. It was expected that this study would unearth the most prevalent school counseling needs in this part of the world which could inform school counseling policy and help to formulate recommendations that could increase the potential of this profession. The aim was also to situate the Bhutanese school counselor data from the subsequent survey and interview study within its geographical context so that Bhutanese school counselors' challenges may be better understood.

4.2 Study II: A survey study of Bhutanese school guidance counselors' roles, responsibilities, challenges, and resources ([Appendix B](#))

The second study was an online survey of 162 of the 179 school counselors registered in Bhutan including 49 of their school teacher and 16 of their school principal colleagues. A survey developed especially for this study was used to assess their demographics and daily activities and their perceived challenges and resources. This survey included the International Survey of School Counseling Activities (ISSCA) (Carey et al., 2020) which was used to investigate Bhutanese school counselors' perceived roles and responsibilities. It was hypothesized that, based on

international school counseling research and the Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010), Bhutanese school counselors' ratings of the appropriateness of administrative activities would be significantly lower than ratings on all other dimensions of the ISSCA (Carey et al., 2020). In addition, it was hypothesized that school stakeholders' ratings of the appropriateness of ISSCA (Carey et al., 2020) activities related to administrative tasks would be significantly higher than school counselors' ratings of these activities. Finally, open-ended questions were used to investigate Bhutanese school counselors' self-reported challenges and resources which were analyzed using Leedy and Ormrod (2001)'s method of content analysis and organized by means of a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis. The aim of this study was to gather data, from a large and representative sample, on Bhutanese school counselors' demographics, daily activities, their perceived roles and responsibilities including how this compares to their colleagues' views, and their perceived challenges and resources.

4.3 Study III: A “growing noble profession”, a “magician”, or an “emotional trash can”: an interview study of Bhutanese school guidance counsellors' perceived challenges and resources ([Appendix C](#))

The third and last study was a qualitative, interview study of 28 school counselors, of which 19 took place online and nine in-person, investigating their perceived challenges and resources. The resulting data was analyzed using a phenomenological approach to inquiry. This data was coded using thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006) and guided by Martin et al. (2015)'s model of 11 factors which influence school counseling. It was expected that interview data from a large, representative sample would provide a more nuanced understanding of the different, perceived challenges Bhutanese school counselors are facing and the resources that support them. The aim was to obtain in-depth information on the most important challenges and resources

perceived by Bhutanese school counselors which would help to further understand the data from the survey study and reveal additional challenges otherwise unknown.

An overview of all three studies can be found in Table 1. The material submitted together with the manuscripts, including invitations to participate, data collection materials and consent forms, are included in the appendix.

Table 1

Overview of all three studies carried out towards this doctoral research

	Title	Journal	Citation	Author Contributions
Study I	“A systematic literature review of school counselling needs in East and Southeast Asia.”	British Journal of Guidance and Counselling	Larran, J., & Hein, S. (2024). A systematic literature review of school counselling needs in East and Southeast Asia. <i>British Journal of</i>	Julie Larran: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation, Funding acquisition. Sascha Hein: Formal analysis, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision.

			<p><i>Guidance & Counselling</i>, 1–19.</p> <p>https://doi.org/10.1080/03069885.2024.2342800</p>	
Study II	<p>“A survey study of Bhutanese school guidance counselors’ roles, responsibilities, challenges, and resources.”</p>	<p>Psychology in the Schools</p>	<p>Under review</p>	<p>Julie Larran: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing- Original draft preparation, Visualization, Funding acquisition. Sascha Hein: Formal analysis, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision.</p>
Study III	<p>“A “growing noble profession”, a “magician”, or an “emotional trash can”: an interview study of</p>	<p>International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling</p>	<p>Under review</p>	<p>Julie Larran: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data curation, Writing-</p>

	Bhutanese school guidance counsellors' perceived challenges and resources.”			Original draft preparation, Visualization, Funding acquisition. Sascha Hein: Formal analysis, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision.
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5. Results

This doctoral research investigated the challenges faced by school counselors in the Kingdom of Bhutan by analyzing data from a literature review of school counseling in the surrounding geographical region along with survey and interview data obtained from Bhutanese school counselors and their colleagues. The findings from all three studies had up to now been analyzed independently. In the following sections, these findings will be summarized and triangulated to answer the overarching research question, namely, what are the most important challenges to school counselors in Bhutan.

5.1 Summary of Results

The first study was a literature review of school counseling needs in East and Southeast Asia. The review retrieved 109 studies from 14 of the 23 countries and geographic regions included in the literature search. These were Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Indonesia ($n = 16$; 14.7%) had the most references about their school counselling systems followed by India ($n = 14$; 12.8%). These 109 studies were of various nature including survey studies, interview studies, program implementation studies, reviews, and theses. Analysis and summary of results revealed the nine most important areas of need affecting school counseling services in this region of the world. These are (1) the need to provide up to date training that is (2) licensed and/or (3) accredited, (4) the need to apply a model for school counseling practice with (5) specific school counseling roles and (6) specific stakeholder collaboration methods, (7) the need to overcome stigma towards mental health issues, (8) the need for regular supervision, and (9) the need for policy alignment, namely, the need for school counseling policies to align with school policies.

The second study was an online survey study of 162 of the 179 school counselors registered in Bhutan, including 49 of their school teacher and 16 of their school principal colleagues, to investigate school counselors' demographics, daily activities, their roles and responsibilities and their self-reported challenges and resources. Analysis of data from the ISSCA (Carey et al., 2020) revealed significant confusion about the roles and responsibilities perceived by school counselors and their colleagues, namely, these findings confirmed both hypotheses laid out for this study: Bhutanese school counselors' rated the appropriateness of administrative activities significantly lower than other activities but school stakeholders rated these same activities as significantly higher compared to school counselors. Content analysis of qualitative data, namely, responses to open-ended questions, further revealed that school counselors are affected by a lack of material resources, such as a counseling room, stigma towards counseling and mental health issues, insufficient initial training, the role of school corporal punishment in Bhutanese schools and by the fact that the profession needs more time to establish itself. It also revealed that, while the COVID-19 pandemic hindered school counselors who had to suddenly move their counseling services online, it also raised awareness about mental health issues and recognition for the counseling profession.

The third study was an interview study of Bhutanese school counselors investigating their perceived challenges and resources. The interviews were carried out with 28 Bhutanese school counselors, including 15 female and 13 male school counselors, of which 19 were from day schools and nine from boarding schools from across the country and whose experience ranged from one to ten years. Thematic analysis of the interviews confirmed the survey study findings including the issue of role confusion, of the lack of material resources, such as a counseling room, of stigma towards counseling and mental health issues, of insufficient initial training, of the role of school corporal punishment in Bhutanese schools, of the ambiguous role of the

COVID-19 pandemic and of the profession needing more time to establish itself. It also revealed additional challenges, such as the important role of social support, namely the support from the entire social network including colleagues, peers and the wider community, and the need for one female and one male school counselor in every school.

5.2 Triangulation of Results, Integration into Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) and Comparison with Empirical Research

Triangulation is the practice of converging data from different research methods, such as from qualitative and quantitative methods, investigating the same phenomenon (Jick, 1979). This method of incorporating data from multiple sources employing various research methods was used as it strengthens the reliability and internal validity of a study rather than analyzing data from individual sources in isolation (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The three data sets were combined to merge the different perspectives of all three studies and to give a more comprehensive account of challenges school counselors in Bhutan face, leading to a conclusion of the study that is nuanced, reliable and plausible. The most important challenges revealed by this analysis are reported below followed by convergences and divergences between all three studies. Next, these challenges are organized according to the different levels school counselors exist in in-line with Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), namely, the Microsystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem, Macrosystem and Chronosystem, and contrasted with national and international research.

A literature review of school counseling in East and Southeast Asia supplemented by a representative survey study and an in-depth, interview study of Bhutanese school counselors in Bhutan revealed that the most important challenges Bhutanese school counselors face are (1) role confusion, (2) the lack of communication and collaboration with stakeholders, (3) the lack of

initial training, (4) the lack of supervision, (5) the role of the COVID-19 pandemic and, (6) the role of stigma towards mental health issues. Furthermore, by comparing the survey and interview data on school counselors in Bhutan with the results of the literature review of school counseling services in East and Southeast Asia and with national and international school counseling research, it was possible to discern specific challenges apparently specific to Bhutanese school counselors including (7) the importance and lack of social support, (8) the role of corporal punishment in Bhutanese schools, (9) the lack of material resources, such as a counseling room with a computer, (10) the need for one female and one male school counselor in each school, (11) the lack of time and opportunities for students to see the school counselor, and finally (12) that the school counseling profession is still new and needs more time to establish itself.

The data from all three studies present convergences and divergences. All three studies converge on the need for clearly defined roles, for additional training, for regular supervision and on the issue of stigma towards mental health issues. The survey study and interview study, namely data only from Bhutan, further converge on the issue of the role of corporal punishment in schools, the need for more time and opportunities for students to see the school counselor and the need for more time for the profession to establish itself in the Bhutanese school system. The interview study revealed in addition the importance of social support, such as through peer consultation with other school counselors, but which was lacking from school stakeholders, and the need for one female and one male school counselor in each school. Interestingly, the Bhutanese school counselor data did not converge with the literature review data on the need to apply a model for school counseling practice. A possible explanation for this could be that there already exists a model of school counseling in Bhutan, namely the Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010).

In-line with Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), the 12 most important challenges faced by school counselors in Bhutan are summarized in Table 2. Challenges found to only apply to Bhutan are in bold.

Table 2

Bhutanese school counselors' 12 most important challenges, with challenges found only to apply to Bhutan in bold

Bronfenbrenner's EST Level	Description	Challenges
Microsystem	Role of relationships with supervisors, peers, and students, role of immediate school setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role confusion • Lack of communication and collaboration with stakeholders • Importance and lack of social support • Lack of material resources such as a counseling room with a computer
Mesosystem	Role of school polices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient initial training • Lack of supervision • Need for one female and one male school counselor in schools

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Insufficient time and opportunities for students to see the school counselor
Exosystem	Role of events that affect school counselors that are beyond their control	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The ambivalent effect of the COVID-19 pandemic
Macrosystem	Role of culture and society including values, beliefs and ideologies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenge of stigma towards mental health issues • The role of corporal punishment in schools
Chronosystem	Role of time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School counseling is relatively new and needs time to establish itself

5.2.1 Microsystem

At the Microsystem, namely, the immediate environment of the school counselor, school counselors are negatively impacted by role confusion, by insufficient communication and collaboration with stakeholders, by a lack of social support and by a lack of material resources, such as not having a counseling room with a computer.

The challenge of role confusion was found in all three studies. Namely, school counselors in Bhutan and the surrounding region are often assigned tasks they are not responsible for, such as record-keeping and other administrative duties or substituting for absent teachers, in part because of a lack of role clarity. As a result of this, they feel unable to help students with their issues.

Similar barriers have been reported on in school counseling research from other countries, such as the United States where role confusion is a common theme in school counseling research (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021; Burnham et al., 2024; Cervoni & DeLucia-Waack, 2011; Clark & Amatea, 2004; Fye et al., 2020; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Lambie & Williamson, 2004) but also Barbados (Griffin & Bryan, 2024) and the Czech Republic (Müllerová & Šmahaj, 2023). For instance, in a survey study of 58 international school counselors in schools around the world, participants reported not feeling supported, understood or trusted by their school colleagues in part because of the lack of role clarity about their profession and resulting role confusion (Inman et al., 2009).

The need for better stakeholder communication and collaboration was also found in all three studies. Studies retrieved in the review mentioned for instance the need specifically for regular consultation meetings, for a collaborative partnership model between school counselors and school stakeholders and for specific referral procedures. The survey and interview study revealed that Bhutanese school counselors reported trying wherever possible to orient their colleagues on the roles and responsibilities of school counselors but that their efforts were perpetually insufficient. They reported that their colleagues had inaccurate and unrealistic expectations of school counselors, perceiving them as merely giving advice, as being responsible for disciplinary measures and whose services provide immediate results to complicated issues. A possible explanation is that one cannot physically see school counselors' work and the results of their efforts. Moreover, international school counseling research contends that the need for a collaborative relationship with colleagues in the school characterized by regular communication is necessary, for instance, for the benefit of the overall school climate (DeSimone & Roberts, 2016; Goodman-Scott et al., 2018). In a literature review of social work services in schools in Norway, lack of clear communication and collaboration procedures were similarly reported as a

problem which resulted in false expectations about school social workers' responsibilities (Singstad et al., 2024). Conversely, in the United States, collaborations or partnerships between school counselors and school stakeholders, including with other members of the community, have been found to improve perceptions of counseling services (Anderson-Butcher et al., 2016).

Social support can be defined as the “emotional and instrumental support as well as advice and information provided by persons in one’s social network” (Yildirim, 2008, p. 604). It is distinct from other resources, such as material, and is provided by colleagues, such as school teachers or the school principal, school counselor peers, supervisors, parents, friends, family and other members of the community through different activities, such as consultation (Gunduz, 2012; Holman & Grubbs, 2018; Pyne, 2011; Yildirim, 2008; Young & Lambie, 2007). The importance of social support, while not explicitly named as such, was found in the survey and interview studies of Bhutanese school counselors potentially indicating a theme specific to school counseling in Bhutan. More specifically, beyond just stakeholder support, support from the entire social network including from other school counselors and from external institutions, such as clinical counselors, was found to be especially important for Bhutanese school counselors. This form of support was also found to be lacking, especially from school teachers, the school principal and the government. Crucial is furthermore the finding that all surveyed Bhutanese school counselors reported being in touch with each other, for instance, to discuss very difficult cases, and valued their internal network. Only this finding, that social support specifically from peers was important to them, can be compared with international literature. This finding is corroborated by studies where peer consultation, also referred to as *intervision* in German literature (Lippmann, 2013), was found for instance to act as a surrogate for supervision in situations where supervision was not available (Butler & Constantine, 2005; Thomas, 2005). While no available research has specifically investigated school counselors' perceived social

support, a survey study of 993 school counselors in the United States investigating perceived organizational support, namely support specifically from colleagues, found that a lack hereof is predictive of burnout (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021).

Finally, the lack of material resources, especially the lack of a counseling room and a computer, was mentioned in the survey and interview studies of Bhutanese school counselors but not in the review of school counseling in the surrounding region. Yet, the Framework for Guidance and Counseling in Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010) mentions the need for an “uninterrupted access to a reasonably quiet, private comfortable room” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 16). Comparable findings are hard to find save for an interview study of challenges experienced by 15 school counselors in Ghana (Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024) and an ethnographic study of five school counselors in Barbados (Griffin, 2019) which similarly mentioned not having a counseling room as a challenge. As little, conclusive research is available, it is assumed that this challenge is specific to Bhutan at this time.

5.2.2 Mesosystem

At the Mesosystem, namely the interactions between actors at the Microsystem which include the influence of school policy, school counselors are negatively impacted by insufficient initial training, for instance, to deal with substance use issues, insufficient supervision, by the need for one female and one male school counselor in each school and by the problem that students don't have enough time and opportunities to see the school counselor.

The need for more comprehensive and up-to-date initial training relevant to the reality of the school environment and to students' complex needs, such as training on problematic digital media use or substance use, was a common finding from all three studies. This issue is further a recurrent theme in international school-based mental health research. In the United States,

findings from a national survey of 1052 school counselors revealed they felt on average only moderately prepared by their training for the realities of the school counseling job (Goodman-Scott, 2015). Moreover, in an interview study of nine school psychologists in Australia, most self-reported feeling unprepared for the job (Quigley & Hyde, 2023) and in exploratory mixed methods research involving 49 school psychologists in Lebanon, it was also found that their initial training did not adequately prepare them for their field work, such as to handle specific mental health disorders (Mansour et al., 2023).

Regular supervision with a trained supervisor, for instance, for school counselors to discuss complicated cases such as those involving self-harm, was found to be lacking in all three studies but also perceived as an important resource providing advice and psychological support essential for skill development. This finding is consistent with international research showing that supervision can counteract burnout by reducing stress and increasing school counselors' sense of well-being (Bardhoshi et al., 2019; Fye et al., 2020; Merriman, 2015; Randick et al., 2018) but that it is often lacking (Duncan et al., 2014; Page et al., 2001; Somody et al., 2008) or inadequate (DeKruyf & Pehrsson, 2011). These findings are also in line with research indicating that school counselors do not or hardly ever receive this valuable source of support (Duncan et al., 2014; Page et al., 2001; Somody et al., 2008). For instance, a review of school counseling research in the United States revealed that school counselors recognize the importance of this practice but, for the last 45 years, have reported often not receiving the supervision services required by the ASCA National Model (Bledsoe et al., 2019).

The need for one female and one male school counselor in all schools was revealed in the survey and interview study of Bhutanese school counselors, but not in the review of school counseling in the surrounding region, potentially indicating a challenge that is specific to school

counseling in Bhutan. This finding is particularly interesting if one considers the plethora of research investigating the student-to-counselor ratio in schools, which is recommended at 250-to-1 by the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019a). This recommended ratio is seen as necessary to provide quality counseling as school counselors managing too many cases is negatively associated with students' academic achievement (Goodman-Scott et al., 2018) and positively associated with stress and burnout among school counselors (Mullen et al., 2020). Yet, this ratio is rarely respected in schools in the United States (Hilts et al., 2023) and even considered by some as controversial (Nicola, 2023). The Framework for Guidance and Counseling in Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010) does not suggest a specific ratio neither was one mentioned in the survey or interview study of Bhutanese school counselors. While it should not be assumed that the need for a specific student-to-counselor ratio does not apply in Bhutan, the findings of this doctoral research perhaps challenge this idea. Namely, while the question of optimal caseload size, often discussed in American literature, may well apply to Bhutan, the question of the gender of the school counselor is perhaps more relevant. This is consistent with research on gender differences in relation to seeking help from a school counselor, more specifically that girls are more likely to seek help than boys (Allouche et al., 2021). However, the role of the gender of a school counselor in relation, for instance, to the gender of students, remains understudied. In one rare study carried out of 342 adolescents in Turkey, it was found that the gender of the school counselor affected male adolescents' decisions to go to the school counselor but not those of female adolescents (Yılmaz-Gözü, 2013).

The problem of students not having enough time and opportunities to see the school counselor was revealed in the survey study and interview study. More specifically, Bhutanese school counselors expressed their concern that students are able to go to the school counselor for individual counseling only during lunchbreaks or after school, effectively leaving very little time

for students to see the school counselor at all. This was not found in other studies, whether in the literature review of surrounding regions or from international studies. Therefore, this challenge is potentially specific to the school counseling profession in Bhutan.

5.2.3 Exosystem

At the Exosystem, namely the role of events which affect school counselors but are beyond their control, school counselors were negatively impacted by the lack of resources to cope with the COVID-19 pandemic although the crises did help to raise awareness about mental health issues.

The findings pertaining to the negative effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on school counseling services in Bhutan was revealed by the survey and interview study but not in the literature review of East and Southeast Asia. One explanation for this could be that the review was limited to studies published between 2010 and 2022 so that few studies were retrieved which reported on the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey and interview study of Bhutanese school counselors revealed that, in Bhutan, moving everything online made counseling less efficient, increased school counselors' work burden and increased their distance from students because of a lack of infrastructure such as a reliable internet connection. Yet, the pandemic also presented school counselors with an opportunity to learn about online counseling which increased their counseling skills. Moreover, among the wider Bhutanese society, the pandemic helped to raise awareness about mental health issues which brought positive, public attention to school counseling among other community members beyond the school. This ambivalent effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on school counseling services has also been noted in global school counseling research (UNICEF, 2022) including in Australia (Berger et al., 2023; Reupert et al., 2022), Turkey (Akgül & Atalan Ergin, 2022) and in the United States (Behl et al., 2024;

Greenidge et al., 2023). For example in the United States, in an interview study of 14 school counselors, participants reported numerous challenges from having to rapidly move their counseling online but also reported how stakeholders advocated for school counselors as change agents during those times of crisis and how families reached out to them for support when they wouldn't have done so before the pandemic (Greenidge et al., 2023).

5.2.4 Macrosystem

At the Macrosystem, namely the external setting including the role of culture, school counselors are negatively impacted by the challenge of stigma towards mental health issues and by the role of corporal punishment in schools.

Findings from all three studies point to the role of stigma towards mental health issues as a barrier to students seeking help from the school counselor and to the school counseling profession being accepted. This is in part due to traditional beliefs about mental health, namely, that mental health issues are caused by karma or black magic and are incurable, because of feelings of shame associated with mental health issues and because it is considered unacceptable to share issues with adults outside of the family. These results are in line with mental health research in Bhutan (Calabrese & Dorji, 2014; Pelzang, 2012; UNICEF Bhutan, 2021) and with global research such as an international literature review of school-based mental health services which also found that stigma acted as a barrier to seeking help among children and youths (Radez et al., 2021). In addition, in a survey study of the perceptions of 49 youths towards mental health service providers in Canada, a majority reported stigma as the most important barrier to accessing mental health services (Bowers et al., 2013).

The issue of the role of school corporal punishment was mentioned in the survey and interview study of Bhutanese school counselors indicating a challenge that is specific to school

counseling in Bhutan. More specifically, Bhutanese school counselors reported being told that corporal punishment, a traditional school practice, was more effective than counseling at resolving students' issues. However, the Kingdom of Bhutan ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the 1st of August 1990 which condones all forms of violence against children (UNCRC, 1989) and moreover section 215 of the Child Care and Protection Act of Bhutan 2011 states, "a person shall be guilty of the offense of battering a child if a person purposely uses physical force or causes the child to be subjected to physical force." Ultimately, corporal punishment is banned in schools in Bhutan. In the United States, corporal punishment is banned in 29 states (Gershoff & Font, 2016) and is recognized as an ineffective and potentially harmful practice (Allison et al., 2023; Jones & Pells, 2016) whereas schools that implement mental health services are less likely to use corporal punishment (Heekes et al., 2022). Systematic research is currently not publicly available from Bhutan or East and Southeast Asia, but studies suggest that it remains a contentious issue rooted in tradition although attempts are being made to prohibit the practice (Feng, 2021). For instance, in a study of 519 students in India, corporal punishment in schools was found to be associated with anxiety and depression (Deb et al., 2016) and in a survey of 160 teachers in India, some reported favoring corporal punishment to control students' behavior over providing counseling because they perceived the provision of counseling as ineffective and impractical (Cheruvath & Tripathi, 2015).

5.2.5 Chronosystem

Finally at the Chronosystem, namely the role of time, school counselors are negatively affected by the profession being in early stages of implementation as was found in the survey study and interview study of Bhutanese school counselors. Namely, counseling is still relatively new and needs time to establish itself in Bhutanese schools and to become a more integral part of the Bhutanese educational system. This was not found in other studies, whether in the literature

review of surrounding regions or from international studies. Therefore, this challenge is potentially specific to the school counseling profession in Bhutan.

5.3 Comparison with Empirical Research from Bhutan

The results of this doctoral research corroborate the results of Dem and Busch (2018)'s narrative interview study of four, first-generation, Bhutanese school counselors. This study revealed similar challenges including (1) a lack of stakeholder support from colleagues who have misconceptions about school counseling, such as that it is only advice-giving and provides immediate results, (2) role confusion, (3) stigma towards mental health issues because of traditional beliefs about health, (4) insufficient training and (5) a lack of supervision. The results are further in line with findings from a phenomenological interview study of 11 Bhutanese counselors, two of whom worked in schools (Lester et al., 2018), and of an interview study of eight teachers of whom four were teachers with school counseling training (Jamtsho, 2017). Both also reported misconceptions around school counseling, for example that it is merely advice-giving. Stigma towards mental health issues is also reported as a significant barrier to seeking help from counselors in research on counseling services in Bhutan by Calabrese and Dorji (2014). Finally, in an interview study of 10 school teachers in Bhutan investigating teacher stress (Dorji, 2024), it was also found that having to take on non-teaching duties, such as shouldering administrative duties, feeling insufficiently trained to handle certain tasks, such as dealing with parent complaints, and a lack of workplace support, such as from the school principal, negatively impacted teaching duties. These results indicate that, rather than just school counseling-level changes, school-system level changes are perhaps warranted to improve the challenges faced by school counselors.

6. Discussion

6.1 Response to the Research Question: “What are the most important challenges to school counselors in Bhutan?”

This doctoral research sheds light on the phenomenal efforts of school counselors in the Kingdom of Bhutan who are committed to providing one-on-one counseling with Bhutanese students, administering programs, such as on substance use, dealing with ever more complicated challenges to student mental health and handling crises such as suicide cases. The results of this work also revealed the 12 most important challenges to Bhutanese school counselors which warrant attention namely (1) role confusion, (2) the lack of communication and collaboration with stakeholders, (3) the lack of initial training, (4) the lack of supervision, (5) the role of the COVID-19 pandemic, (6) the role of stigma towards mental health issues, (7) the importance and lack of social support, (8) the role of corporal punishment in Bhutanese schools, (9) the lack of material resources, such as a counseling room with a computer, (10) the need for one female and one male school counselor in each school, (11) the lack of time and opportunities for students to see the school counselor, and finally (12) that the school counseling profession is still new and needs more time to establish itself. In summary, it could be concluded that school counseling in Bhutan is an inherently complicated profession and that school counselors are systematically isolated and disempowered. These inferences will be discussed in relation to the results of this doctoral research and to international school counseling literature.

The results of this doctoral research suggest a profession that is inherently complicated. Prior to data collection and analysis, it was assumed in-line with Bronfenbrenner’s EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) that Bhutanese school counselors work within a complicated environment, an intricate network of 5 proximal and distal levels interacting with each other: the Microsystem, the Mesosystem, the Exosystem, the Macrosystem and the Chronosystem. Because

multiple challenges were found at all levels of the model, it could be argued that the findings of this doctoral research confirm this assumption and further indicate not just a complicated environment but an inherently complicated profession that needs to be further understood. It could be further argued that Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), despite its intricacy and ability to analyze complicated systems in mental health research, provides a perspective perhaps too simplistic to reflect the complexity of the school counseling profession in Bhutan. For instance, the survey and interview studies of Bhutanese school counselors revealed how much they appreciate and maintain their school counselor network, seen as a valued source of support and advice, and collaborating with external institutions such as clinical counselors. However, it is not immediately clear where peer consultation and the role of external institutions can be logically situated in Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Further investigation is needed which could help towards drafting a more appropriate model. The apparent complexity of this profession revealed by this doctoral research could also serve to explain why it is difficult to understand and accept in Bhutanese society. Certainly, attempts to simplify the profession, for instance, by understanding it as merely advice-giving or a discipline measure, overlook this complexity and undermine the work of school counselors.

The results further suggest a profession that is isolated. Although all surveyed Bhutanese school counselors reported being in contact with each other, they remain isolated within their schools as a result of being insufficiently integrated and established within Bhutanese school systems because of role confusion, lack of communication and collaboration with stakeholders, such as through consultation, and lack of supervision. This is evidenced by challenges in their immediate environment, or Microsystem, where they must handle inaccurate and unrealistic misconceptions, such as being expected to provide immediate results to complicated issues, and the belief that their services do not work because the results of their efforts cannot physically be

seen and are shrouded in confidentiality. They are further impacted by challenges in the Macrosystem, namely cultural challenges, including stigma towards mental health issues which are associated with feelings of shame which discourage students from seeking help, and at the Chronosystem, namely, that not enough time has passed for them to become integrated within Bhutanese schools.

Finally, the results indicate that school counselors are disempowered in that they are under-resourced, for instance, because of insufficient training, not having the necessary material resources, and not being able to support students with specific mental health issues on account of their gender or simply because students don't go to see the school counselor as they don't have enough time to. This is evidenced by challenges at the Microsystem, such as not having an adequate counseling room and at the Mesosystem, namely, school policies not offering enough resources, such as supervision.

Based on the results of this doctoral research, it would be unrealistic to deny to the substantial role Bhutanese school counselors have had in the last ten years and for their potential to have an even greater impact on students' mental health. However, they seem to be currently overextended which potentially, on account of the myriad challenges they face, dilutes their efficacy and increases the risk that they experience burnout. As a result, they cannot adhere to the role description defined by Framework for Guidance and Counseling in Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010). The framework provides the following school counselor role description: "The School Guidance Counselor will work within a regional team to develop, implement and review student support programs and provide services and support to schools in the areas of student wellbeing, behavior management, mental health, disability, student learning and motivation, and emergency management and child protection" (Ministry of Education, 2010, p.

21). Unlike what is expected of them in the framework, they are not yet completely able to effectively work in a team, whether local or regional, and are not able to fully support students with their mental health concerns.

The proposed conclusion that the school counseling profession in Bhutan is complicated, isolated and disempowered is further plausible if international research is considered. The finding that school counseling needs to be understood as a complicated profession is in line with an interview study of 67 school-based mental health providers in the United States on how to effectively provide mental health services (Lakind et al., 2023). Likewise guided by an ecological model, it was found that school-based mental health providers need to adopt a flexible and interdisciplinary approach to overcome barriers to their work within the complicated school environment. These findings are also in line with research work on school counselor supervision by Dollarhide and Miller (2006) who argue that school counselors need supervision services by trained providers specialized in the school environment to help school counselors manage what they also perceive to be a complicated profession. Finally, the conclusions that school counselors are isolated and disempowered is in line with research on school counseling in Hong Kong which found that a combination of a weak tradition of counseling and poor public understanding of counseling, including stigma towards mental health issues, contributed to school counselors being marginalized (Harrison, 2021).

6.2 Implications

Based on the above results, actions are urgently required to support the school counseling profession in Bhutan. These include the need to increase initial training, the need to enforce the requirement that all school counselors have a counseling room, the need for structural changes within schools so that students have sufficient time and opportunities to go to the school

counselor, the need to implement more school counselors, such as one female and one male school counselor in each school, and the need for more time for the school counseling profession to establish itself in Bhutanese schools. In addition, three concrete implications are suggested in line with the findings of this doctoral research. These are the need to nurture social support by updating the Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010), the need to implement specific school-based mental health programs in schools and the need to initiate destigmatizing measures. It is hoped that these implications, which will be presented below, help to cement the recognition school counselors deserve, to integrate their professional identity within schools, to allow them to become empowered agents of change, to avoid burnout, to support students' mental health and, in times of crisis, to save lives.

Policymakers should seek to support school counselors with required changes and not expect them to shoulder the responsibility of initiating such changes alone, which could be counterproductive given their isolated and disempowered status. Moreover, the study results and proposed implications should not be understood as a critique of the MoESD. Rather, the exceptional efforts of the MoESD towards school counseling services should be kept in mind. Personal communications with MoESD staff, with school counselors and other stakeholders constantly emphasize the tireless efforts made by the MoESD towards continuously improving school counseling services, such as by always proposing workshops and training programs and by recently increasing the mandatory school counseling internship from three to six months.

6.2.1 Nurture Social Support by Updating the Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010)

Beyond solely occupational support, the importance of nurturing Bhutanese school counselors' social support was a noteworthy finding of this doctoral research. This includes support from stakeholders, from other school counselors, from external institutions, such as

clinical counselors, and through supervision. As was found in all three studies, pervasive misconceptions and insufficient communication and collaboration, such as through consultation, with school stakeholders and with external institutions and lack of supervision appear to impede school counselors' work, leaving them isolated and disempowered. That is why it is recommended that more efforts should be made to facilitate communication and collaboration with school stakeholders, school counselor peers, supervisors and with outside institutions, such as clinical counselors, for instance, for the process of making referrals. The latter is especially important to nurture mental health in schools as, according to international research, collaboration with outside services and institutions helps school counselors maximize their capacity (Eklund et al., 2020; Hoover & Bostic, 2021; Light-Shriner et al., 2023) despite challenges such as lack of time (Bryan et al., 2019; Gormley et al., 2024).

Empirical evidence from the school counseling literature specifically of the benefits of increasing social support, such as through improved communication and collaboration with school stakeholders, is not available. However, one suggestion to nurture social support could be to update the Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010). An updated version of the framework, which could include clear role descriptions, a list of appropriate and inappropriate school counseling activities similar to the ones in the ASCA National Model (ASCA, 2019a), specific guidelines about communication and collaboration, such as by mandating regular meetings with the school principal, proposing systematic consultation protocols, mandating regular peer consultation, mandating regular supervision and providing specific steps on how to make referrals, would surely help to clear up any misconceptions about the school counseling profession and would constitute a first step towards nurturing vital social support. Unfortunately, in absence of research investigating such

frameworks especially outside the United States (Geesa et al., 2022) it cannot be predicted whether such a framework would be effective.

6.2.2 Implement Mental Health Literacy programs or a Culture of Counseling

Ensuring appropriate mental health services in educational settings to protect students' mental health against the effect of crises is a crucial debate accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic (Wiedermann et al., 2023). In Bhutan, school counseling services will undoubtedly continue to be shaped in response to the current and future needs of Bhutanese students and of society including future crises that could arise. As a preventative measure, specific programs could be implemented, such as training school counselors to teach students coping skills to bolster resilience and to overcome stigma in schools so that students may thrive even in times of crisis.

Although school counselors reported on many mental health programs that had already been implemented in schools in Bhutan, one specific program suggestion that could overcome the challenges underlined by this doctoral research are Mental Health Literacy (MHL) programs. MHL was described by Anthony Jorm and colleagues as people's "knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management, or prevention" (Jorm et al., 1997, p. 182). Today, MHL incorporates knowledge of mental health disorders and of mental health resources, awareness of stigma and measures to increase proactive maintenance of good mental health (Kutcher et al., 2016; Thornicroft et al., 2022). MHL also seeks to promote help-seeking behaviors, namely, the attempt to obtain external assistance to deal with mental health concerns from formal, such as from mental health practitioners, and informal, such as from friends or family, sources of help (Rickwood & Thomas, 2012). Lack of MHL among students has been found to be a negative predictor of help-seeking owing to difficulties recognizing mental health issues, misconceptions about confidentiality and subconscious stigma towards mental health

issues (Huggins et al., 2016; Jorm, 2012; McPhail et al., 2024; Nobre et al., 2021; Radez et al., 2021; Suwanwong et al., 2024). Conversely, high rates of MHL, for instance, as a result of taking part in an MHL program, can help to counteract erroneous beliefs and dispel stigma by increasing knowledge of and improving attitude towards mental illness (Milin et al., 2016; Wei et al., 2023), encouraging an environment conducive to dialogue (Marinucci et al., 2022; Morgan et al., 2018), increasing resilience (Szeto et al., 2024) and encouraging help-seeking (Calear et al., 2021; Gulliver et al., 2010; Radez et al., 2021). Examples of MHL-based programs include Headstrong (Perry et al., 2014), Finding Space for Mental Health (Campos et al., 2018) and Youth Aware of Mental Health (Lindow et al., 2020). For instance, a review of the mental health program The Guide implemented in six countries with 4298 children and youths found that it was successful at increasing participants' MHL across different cultural settings (Nazari et al., 2024).

Government and policymakers could also seek to implement a “culture of counseling” in Bhutanese schools. This can be understood as the opposite of the culture of corporal punishment or exclusively of academic achievement, instead aiming for a supportive and non-stigmatizing school climate that encourages help-seeking (Gulliver et al., 2010; Patel et al., 2007; Wiedermann et al., 2023; Wong et al., 2022). A culture of counseling could help to create an environment in which students feel it is safe to discuss mental health challenges, such as problematic digital media use, substance use and suicidal thoughts and behaviors in spite of stigma. Different frameworks have been proposed to achieve this such as the UNESCO's Happy Schools Initiative, which seeks to make happiness central to education policy (UNESCO, 2024). Another framework is the “Whole-School Approach” (WSA) to school counseling. The WSA argues away from making school counselors the sole responsible individual for students' mental health, instead involving the participation of teachers, school management, and other members of the community in a collaborative approach which is overseen by the school counselor (Aluede et al.,

2007). In one international literature review, the WSA was found to positively affect some areas of health such as tobacco use (Langford et al., 2014). This approach was further adopted in schools in Hong Kong (Lim et al., 2010), where the focus of guidance and counseling changed from a remedial to a preventative service, and is recommended as an effective approach to support student mental health in the European Union (Cefai et al., 2021). In Bhutan, it would be necessary to ensure that a culture of counseling or WSA are compatible with the local, cultural context. This is important as other studies carried out in Bhutan (Lester et al., 2018; Sacra, 2017) underline the need for culturally-relevant mental health interventions that local users would perceive as useful rather than implementing “imported” Western-style methods which might be perceived as alien.

6.2.3 Initiate Further Destigmatization Measures

Another important challenge revealed by this doctoral research is the pervasive role of stigma. That is why it is recommended that, beyond schools, additional concerted efforts be made to introduce country-wide initiatives to further destigmatize mental health and counseling as part of a wider public health measure. The emphasis on “additional” and “further” is key as such campaigns have already been carried out at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. The then Prime Minister of Bhutan the Honorable Dasho Lotay Tshering expressed the benefit of counseling exclaiming during a speech “Who doesn’t need counseling? Everyone can benefit. I could use counseling” (Namgyel & Milbert, 2021) to encourage Bhutanese citizens to reach out to counselors during lockdowns. The government also encouraged Bhutanese citizens via social media to seek help from counselors during these times of crises with the #OnMyMind campaign (UNICEF Bhutan, 2021). Additional research would be necessary to investigate what nationwide mental health destigmatizing measures could be implemented specifically in Bhutan. For example, in their personal commentary on the effects of COVID-19 on mental health in Bhutan

and the role of stigma, Tsheten, Château, et al. (2023) suggest having a stall at each “Tshechu” (important local festivals held multiple times a year in Bhutan) to raise awareness about mental health and building a national agenda to destigmatize mental health issues.

6.3 Strengths and Limitations

A number of strengths define this doctoral research and attest to the validity of its results.

First, a notable strength of this doctoral research is its mixed methods approach in conjunction with its large sample. A review of school counseling in 14 countries together with a survey study supplanted by an interview study was carried out and the results triangulated to obtain an understanding of challenges to school counseling that is nuanced, reliable and plausible. In addition, the survey and interview sample for this doctoral research were both substantial and representative on account of participants being diverse in age, gender, experiences and locations resulting in a dataset generalizable to the population of interest. Together, it was possible to uncover a broad range of challenges included expected ones, such as role confusion, and unexpected ones, such as the importance of social support.

Second, an ecological lens, namely Bronfenbrenner’s EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) was applied to gain a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the challenges that affect school counselors rather than a more linear evaluation method. This way, it was possible to understand how they are related to each other within the school counselors’ environment rather than investigating challenges in isolation. Bronfenbrenner’s EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) was a powerful tool for the analysis of these challenges, allowing for specific measures necessary in school counselors’ proximal and distal environment to be suggested, such as specific mental health programs to be implemented in schools, and destigmatization measures to be implemented on a national scale.

A third and considerable strength of this study is the genuine interest and motivation from all involved in Bhutan. While it was difficult to obtain a visa and travel to Bhutan, all who participated in this doctoral research, whether school counselors, other school staff, or actors within the government who authorized the study, were highly committed and reliable. Out of this endeavor, a productive collaboration ensued and valuable support was received on the ground.

Finally, school counseling was investigated in a part of the world that had until now received little attention. As a result, data was provided from an underrepresented region which potentially challenge traditional, Western paradigms of school counseling, such as the need for a defined student-to-counselor ratio, suggesting instead the need for one female and one male school counselor in each school. The results also serve to highlight different school counseling challenges that are important specifically to Bhutanese school counselors, such as the lack of social support and the role of corporal punishment.

However, this doctoral research is not without its limitations which will be elucidated upon herein.

First is the potential effect of social desirability, the tendency to present reality to align with what is perceived to be socially acceptable (Bergen & Labonté, 2020) which may have skewed the findings. Measures outlined by Bergen and Labonté (2020) to limit the effects of social desirability bias were followed including ensuring privacy, anonymity, confidentiality, explaining the study in detail and developing rapport where possible. Nevertheless, social desirability bias may have influenced the results of this doctoral research and hidden other important challenges such as school counselors feeling that their work is unrewarding. In addition, because the researcher was foreign, participants may have responded differently to the survey and interview

than if the researcher had been a Bhutanese national. As a result, the data might not authentically reflect participants' true beliefs.

Second, considering the cultural singularity of the Kingdom, using only a literature review, survey and an interview may have been insufficient to understand Bhutanese school counselor's challenges. More in-depth research methods, such as ethnographic, could have been used.

Ethnographic methods investigate the shared patterns of behaviors, language, and actions of a specific cultural group in a natural setting (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) rendering it an ideal method to investigate cultural phenomena such as the role of stigma. However, these methods require prolonged time in the field which was unfortunately not possible. Because of strict administrative laws, obtaining a visa is both expensive and difficult as a personal invitation is needed even for a short stay of less than two weeks. Additionally, in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government enforced the closure of all borders rendering a trip to Bhutan virtually impossible for most of 2020, 2021 and 2022.

Third, the researcher's identity, including language skills and possible biases, may have influenced the validity of the results although every measure was employed to avoid such biases, for example, by piloting the data collection tools with the help of Bhutanese school counselors. This could have been remediated by having a researcher of Bhutanese nationality closely collaborate with the researcher who might have been more informed about the cultural context which could have helped to avoid such biases. For example, they could have carried out the data collection in the local language or dialect, helped the researcher to identify potential biases by comparing their interpretation of the results with the interpretation of the researcher and helped the researcher to identify Bhutanese school counselors' challenges and organize them in-line with Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

Finally, only school counselors and their colleagues, namely school teachers and school principals, were invited to participate in this doctoral research. Data on Bhutanese students' views of school counseling services would have been desirable. This would have allowed for a more nuanced understanding of the work school counselors do such as by allowing for a comparison of the challenges school counselors perceive to those perceived by students. Students' perspectives of school counseling have been explored in the United States such as in a study analyzing the essays of 273 students investigating the impact of school counseling services on academic, career and social and emotional needs which identified school counselors' important role in providing career advice and emotional support during crisis situations (Ohr et al., 2016). In addition, studies could be carried out with students to understand barriers to seeking help such as was done in a survey study of 3584 students' attitudes toward accessing school counseling services in the United States which identified stigma, worries about confidentiality and the desire to manage problems on their own as significant barriers (Auger et al., 2018). Similarly, an interview study of 40 secondary school students in Guyana also revealed shame and stigma about mental illness and limited awareness and negative beliefs about mental health services as important barriers to seeking help (Arora & Persaud, 2020).

6.4 Recommendations for Future Research

The results of this doctoral research open new avenues for future investigations which will be described below. It will be necessary to pursue these suggestions to further understand the challenges faced by school counselors in Bhutan.

First, it is recommended that social support be further investigated. In the domain of organizational psychology and occupational health, social support in the workplace, including the provision of supervision and absence of home stress, is vital for overall well-being (Dunseath et

al., 1995; LaRocco et al., 1980). Social support is a protective factor for mental health among nurses in China, (Feng et al., 2018) and Turkey (Öksüz et al., 2019; Tasdan & Yalcin, 2010; Tuna & Aslan, 2018), among female doctors in China (Wang et al., 2020) and among teachers in Korea (Yuh & Choi, 2017) and China (Ho & Chan, 2017). Interestingly, no studies have so far been published investigating the role of social support among school counselors. Future studies could administer a scale such as the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988), which assesses the extent of social support one perceives from family, friends and significant others. It could be adapted specifically to Bhutanese school counselors by adding items pertaining to support from colleagues. Such research could investigate the potential cultural dimension of this finding, namely, whether social support is particularly important for school counselors specifically in countries in the East, such as Bhutan, or whether social support is just as important also for school counselors in countries in the West, such as in the United States.

Second, the role of stigma should be further investigated using ethnographic methods, the above-seen administrative barriers permitting. Ethnographic methods, unlike other methods which seek to reduce data, focus on the complexity of phenomena under investigation and provide rich and holistic descriptions of perceptions, behaviors and social interactions. Their implementation and execution usually requires extensive, on the ground exposure to the population under investigation (Reeves et al., 2008). Ethnographic methods could help to understand whether schools can become sites of destigmatization such as by investigating whether students believe that mental illnesses are caused by black magic and are incurable (Calabrese & Dorji, 2014; Nirola et al., 2015; Pelzang, 2012). For example, an ethnographic study in Barbados, for which five school counselors were followed (Griffin, 2019), revealed that role confusion, including the need to update the role description of school counselors established

in 1987, being made to do non-counseling tasks, such as working as a substitute teacher, the need for ongoing training relevant to students' needs and the problem of stigma around help-seeking, were significant challenges to school counselors. This research method also uncovered more specific and nuanced concerns, such as the counselors' needs for representation at the Ministry of Education in Barbados when school counseling policies are being developed, and the need for a database to facilitate liaisons with external institutions and agencies (Griffin, 2019). Moreover, ethnographic methods could also contribute to nation-wide destigmatization efforts by helping to understand the specific type of stigma prevalent in schools, such as is suggested by Corrigan and Watson (2002) who propose a multidimensional concept of stigma.

Third, future research should further investigate the risk factors for burnout and attrition in school counselors with the goal of improving job satisfaction and retention. For example, the Job Demands-Resources model (Demerouti et al., 2001) could be used to analyze these factors. According to this model, demands are physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that require sustained physical or psychological effort or skills, therefore, that are associated with certain costs whereas resources are physical, psychological, social, or organizational aspects of the job that serve to achieve work goals, reduce demands or somehow contribute to personal growth (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). For instance, a study investigating this model among 993 school counselors in the United States found that perceived organizational support was a negative predictor of burnout while high caseloads was a positive predictor (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021). Future research could also administer the Counselor Burnout Inventory (CBI) (Lee et al., 2007) to understand potential risk factors for burnout. The CBI (Lee et al., 2007) has five subscales: "Exhaustion," "Incompetence," "Negative Work Environment," "Devaluing Clients," and "Deterioration in Personal Life." Administering the CBI (Lee et al., 2007) with Bhutanese school counselors could help to understand how they perceive and

experience burnout, such as whether a multidimensional definition of burnout is more appropriate than a unidimensional one. For example, the CBI (Lee et al., 2007) was administered to 227 school counselors in the United States by Fye et al. (2020) along with surveys of perceived stress, coping responses, role conflict and job satisfaction. Using regression analysis, they found that individual, such as perceived stress and coping processes, and organizational, such as job satisfaction and role stress, factors explained 66% of variance for the subscale “Negative Work Environment.” In Bhutan, future studies could attempt to understand the different dimensions of burnout in relation to different ecological levels surrounding school counselors, how burnout can be holistically prevented and whether a retention strategy to ensure school counselors do not feel compelled to leave the profession as a result of burnout would be of value. Research employing the CBI (Lee et al., 2007) could also help to understand the importance of specific resources to Bhutanese school counselors such as social support and how these potentially prevent burnout.

Fourth, the school counseling profession in Bhutan should continue to be monitored and evaluated including how perceived challenges evolve over time. Now that there is more comprehensive data on school counseling services in Bhutan, including demographics, daily tasks, perceived roles and responsibilities and perceived challenges and resources, specific measures can be carried out, such as the School-Based Mental Health Services and Advocacy Survey (Eklund et al., 2016) which investigates the types of mental health services provided and the facilitators and barriers to providing these services, along with measures of job satisfaction such as the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (Weiss et al., 1967). Repeatedly administering these tools along with the ISSCA (Carey et al., 2020), the MSPSS (Zimet et al., 1988) and the CBI (Lee et al., 2007), could help to understand school counselor roles and responsibilities, perceived social support, burnout, how these are related and how they evolve overtime including,

for instance, how these are affected by specific policy changes such as the implementation of one female and one male school counselor in each school.

Finally, as student's perspectives were not examined, it is recommended that future studies investigate the experience of school counseling among Bhutanese students themselves. Their views could help to understand their experiences of school counseling and potential barriers to help-seeking such as the role of stigma. Failure to seek help is a significant challenge to resolving mental health issues whereas engaging in help-seeking can protect from mental health issues (Fenwick-Smith et al., 2018). Understanding help-seeking behaviors in students is further important as studies from around the world consistently report on students' failure to seek help where needed, such as from school counselors, even if mental health services are available (Choudhry et al., 2016; DeLuca, 2020; Derr, 2016; Newlove-Delgado et al., 2022; Radez et al., 2021; Tully et al., 2019; Van der Boor & White, 2020) with some studies finding global utilization rates of only between 15% and 25% (O'Connor & Coyne, 2017) and only 1-2% in India, Vietnam and China (Mori et al., 2024). In Bhutan, survey studies could be carried out to assess students' tendency to seek help from the school counselor such as by administering the General Help-seeking Questionnaire (Wilson et al., 2005) which measures participant's intention to seek help for personal and emotional problems.

6.5 Conclusion

School counselors in Bhutan are uniquely positioned to support Bhutanese children and youths' mental health, shouldering a role that is a crucial for the future of the Kingdom. Three studies employing various methods interpreted using an ecological lens, Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), helped to identify this profession's most important challenges, policy implications and suggestions for future research. The immense efforts Bhutanese school

counselors invest into supporting students' mental health is undeniable. However, the findings from all three studies converge in affirming that they are hindered from implementing school counseling services by 12 important challenges. Taken together, these results suggest that Bhutanese school counselors are not yet able to fulfill their purpose according to the Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010) and achieve their potential due to the latent complexity of their profession and to being systematically isolated and disempowered. Currently, they are hindered from capitalizing on their unique position in supporting children and youths' mental health although their services are needed in the face of growing mental health concerns in the Kingdom. It is argued that these challenges should imperatively be addressed through policy changes, such as by aiming to implement a culture of counseling in Bhutanese schools, which could avert the risk of school counselors experiencing burnout or leaving the profession entirely. Attrition is a current problem affecting the teaching profession in Bhutan (Drukpa, 2023) with reports of teacher shortages in the media (Kuensel, 2023). It is also believed to be happening with the school counseling profession although official numbers are not publicly available (Yuden, 2023). Finally, more research is needed to further understand the roles of the lack of social support, of stigma and other potential risk factors for burnout, to monitor changes over time and to investigate students' perspectives of school counseling.

Concerted efforts are required to address the challenges faced by school counselors in the Kingdom of Bhutan, a country in rapid transition. Trained and experienced school counselors familiar with the school settings and students' issues leaving the profession before they are able to achieve their potential would be catastrophic. It is hoped that the conferred data successfully gives voice to Bhutanese school counselors' concerns, provides justification for the strengthening

of this profession and gives momentum to enact changes for the benefit of Bhutanese school counselors and of Bhutanese students' mental health.

7. Addendum

“If research hasn’t changed you as a person, then you haven’t done it correctly”.

(Wilson, 2020)

I identify as a Euro-Western white female. Hence, this doctoral research involved the analysis of data from a non-Euro-Western country by a Euro-Western researcher. I strove wherever possible to be aware of my own biases and make neither expectations nor assumptions. Instead, I sought to approach the investigation solely as a mediator of Bhutanese school counselors’ voices rather than as a person with higher knowledge. Despite the geographical, linguistic and cultural barriers between the participants and myself, it was important for me that I understood Bhutanese school counselors and, reciprocally, that I was understood by them, that I was open at all times to learn from them, that they had sufficient time and space to express themselves comfortably and that they felt they were being listened to. My main priority was to “get the story right, tell the story well” (Smith, 2012, p. 226). Moreover, I tried wherever possible to show humility and respect towards the Kingdom of Bhutan, its citizens and culture by, for instance, wearing the national dress at all times during my two stays in Bhutan, the “Go” for men or “Kira” for women, which is mandatory in government and educational buildings.

More importantly, during the research process, I strove to avoid unintentional but potentially imperial and colonial practices, such as helicopter research, where researchers from wealthier countries, usually called global north, travel to a developing country, usually called global south, to collect data but then analyze the data and publish the results elsewhere with little involvement from participants (Haelewaters et al., 2021). For this reason, I researched and applied post-colonial and decolonizing methods wherever possible. To achieve this, I studied the works of

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Tuhiwai Smith, 2021) which I sought to apply throughout this doctoral research. Decolonizing methods refer to the decolonization and indigenization of Euro-Western research methodologies to effectively avoid academic imperialism by centering participants' concerns and worldviews and focusing on their perspectives (Chilisa, 2019). The term "Indigenous" is understood here as persons native to a place whose cultural heritage differs from traditions that are associated with Euro-Western societies but who have not necessarily been subjugated to colonialization at some point in history (Chilisa & Malunga, 2012). There is growing interest in post-colonial and decolonizing methods due to mounting criticisms of Euro-Western research methodologies. These tend to be based on strong epistemological assumptions, such as the superiority of the Euro-Western scientific paradigm, which follows strict rules from data collection tool development to dissemination, and on Euro-Western thought as the sole possible framework for gaining knowledge (Kovach, 2009; Liamputtong, 2010; Mbah & Bailey, 2022; Smith, 2012). As a result, significant power imbalances may arise so that results and their dissemination fail to benefit participants or respect their self-determination, instead purely serving the interests of the researcher (Mbah & Bailey, 2022). That is why I applied the following decolonizing methodologies proposed by Thambinathan and Kinsella (2021): (1) exercising critical reflexivity, (2) reciprocity and respect for self-determination, (3) embracing "Other(ed)" ways of knowing, and (4) embodying a transformative praxis.

1. Exercising Critical Reflexivity

Exercising critical reflexivity strives for a lucid understanding of underlying biases and assumptions (Smith, 2012) and to uncover potential, latent power imbalances such as hierarchical barriers between researchers and participants (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). Reflexivity is the act of reflecting about how the researcher's role, their personal background and their experiences shape their interpretation of the data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I addressed this using meta-

reflexive journaling to be aware of potential Euro-Western-centric bias and assumptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Whenever possible, I made sure to regularly write down thoughts about the phenomena under investigation in a reflexivity journal such as values, interests and new insights, how these evolve over time and how these may contribute to the analysis of the data (Denzin et al., 2008; Maxwell, 2013). This helped me to be more aware of the influence of my own biases and assumptions and to bracket my own self-interests and motivations, namely, to distance myself from my experiences of the phenomenon which is important during data analysis (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). In addition, I maintained an audit trail including timelines, meeting protocols and memos (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017). My aim was to be aware and conscientious as much as possible of potential, latent power imbalances (Patton, 1990).

2. Reciprocity and Respect for Self-Determination

Reciprocity and respect for self-determination recognize the importance of reciprocal relationships and consent. This is achieved by breaking researcher-participant dualism as two independent entities (Ponterotto, 2010) instead seeing the data collection procedure as a collaborative process between two empowered parties, and by understanding the consent procedure as an on-going process rather than a series of single actions, from data collection to dissemination of results (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). I addressed the former by making sure to co-create the research design by means of piloting (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). I carried out the piloting of the data collection tools with four Bhutanese school counselors, two Bhutanese school teachers and one Bhutanese school principal who volunteered to help with the piloting, practiced with the data collection tools and gave valuable feedback. Moreover, I collaborated closely with the senior school counselor at the MoESD and another experienced school counselor who I regularly consulted with about the validity of the research work. As such, I sought to involve participants as much as possible in the research process and to provide them with

opportunities to decide on the direction of this doctoral research. I addressed the latter by making sure to remind participants during all consent procedures, and whenever possible during the course of the investigation, that any time invested and all contributions were invaluable, that I myself am merely a student learning about a specific field and that they, the participants, were the experts in that field.

3. Embracing “Other(ed)” Ways of Knowing

Embracing “Other(ed)” ways of knowing strives for meaningful inclusion of participants’ knowledge and recognizes diverse forms of epistemological thinking which challenge the belief that Euro-Western methods are the only forms of knowing (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). I addressed this by engaging wherever possible in active listening, namely intensely listening to and respecting the participant’s voice, their interpretations of events and their story and summarizing and reflecting back key points raised by the participants to check that meaning was interpreted appropriately (Sciarra, 1999). This helped to maintain focus on the meaning of the phenomenon under investigation according to participants themselves rather than the meaning that I brought to the research. I also offered participants that they read their interview transcripts and provide feedback after all interviews were transcribed but before coding analysis commenced. Of the 28 school counselors who participated, eight requested a copy of the transcript and none provided corrections or other feedback. In addition, I carried out member-checking, an imperative for establishing credibility and trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 1994), wherein participants are shown the analysis procedure and results and are given the opportunity to provide feedback, allowing the researcher to establish the fit between respondents’ views and the researcher’s representation of them (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The aim of member-checking was to meaningfully involve participants in the analysis of the data, namely, in the construction of knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation which might potentially

challenge my interpretation of the data. Following completion of the data analysis of all three studies, I carried out member-checking by organizing an in-person meeting with four school counselors and one vice principal in April 2023 in Thimphu, Bhutan, and online meetings in June 2023 which I invited all school counselors to participate in. In the end, two online meetings took place which were attended by a total of 37 school counselors. During these meetings, I presented the results of the integral study including the analysis procedure and implications for policy and for future research, answered questions, listened to feedback and finally, invited all participants to take part in an anonymous feedback survey. In this survey, I asked participants what results they did and didn't agree with, to rate the accuracy of these results and to rate how well I communicated with them. During the in-person meeting, participants voiced their gratitude for this research endeavor and expressed that they felt the results, namely the most important challenges to school counselors, were representative of their experiences. They further expressed the need to raise awareness in schools and the population at large about counseling and mental health issues and the need for more capacity building. The survey data, obtained in-person and online from a total of 39 school counselors, unanimously expressed that the results accurately reflect the challenges they face. They further rated on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 = "very inaccurate"; 5 = "very accurate") the accuracy of the result on average 4.43 and the communication with me (1 = "very bad communication"; 5 = "very good communication") on average 4.8. In sum, member-checking helped to support the validity of the findings by meaningfully including participants in the interpretation of results.

4. Embodying a Transformative Praxis

Finally, embodying a transformative praxis pertains to practices beyond the passive, academic research process towards active empowerment of participants (Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021). In order to achieve this, namely, to carry out research that is both meaningful and useful to school

counselors, I made it my goal to carry out research that is relevant to Bhutanese school counselors and to establish a long-lasting, sustainable and trusting relationship to lay the groundwork for further such research (Mbah & Bailey, 2022). This relationship began in the form of a three-day workshop on school counseling advocacy in January 2021, before the recruitment and data collection, which between 103 school counselors participated in. During and after the research process, I also tried wherever possible to maintain regular contact with school counselors by email and through a website I had set-up where I posted regular study updates. As a result, future research collaborations are planned with school counselors and with the MoESD to further investigate school counseling services in Bhutan.

Definitions of Terms

Burnout: a psychological phenomenon associated with an individual's psychological reaction to on-going job stressors because of the inability to meet their own needs due to physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion (Maslach et al., 2001).

Consultation: the process wherein school counselors engage with staff and other stakeholders to improve students' educational outcomes and mental health (Hall & Lin, 1994).

Dzongkha: refers both to the official language of Bhutan and to the 20 regions of Bhutan.

Help-seeking: the act of attempting to obtain external assistance to deal with mental health concerns as an adaptive coping mechanism which encompasses formal, such as from mental health practitioners, and informal, such as from friends or family, sources of help (Rickwood & Thomas, 2012).

Mental health: a state of well-being in which individuals can realize their potential, cope with life's stresses, work productively, and contribute to their community (WHO., 2022b).

School counselor: accredited educators who improve outcomes for all students by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program which aims to provide academic and career advice and promote social-emotional competencies (ASCA, 2019a).

Role confusion: the uncertainty occurring from dealing with tasks unrelated to counseling because of misunderstandings about the role (Blake, 2020).

School-based mental health: the delivery of "any program, intervention, or strategy applied in a school setting that was specifically designed to influence students' emotional, behavioral, and/or social functioning" (Rones & Hoagwood, 2000, p. 224).

Social support: the “emotional and instrumental support as well as advice and information provided by persons in one’s social network” (Yildirim, 2008, p. 604).

Stigma: disgrace or discredit towards a person perceived as other (Byrne, 2000) which can lead to and enable negative labels and stereotypes resulting in feelings of shame (Choudhry et al., 2016).

Supervision: the process in which a more experienced professional works with another professional to guide them and develop and improve skills (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006).

Triangulation: the practice of converging data from different research methods, such as from qualitative and quantitative methods, investigating the same phenomenon (Jick, 1979).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Study I

Larran, J., & Hein, S. (2024). A systematic literature review of school counselling needs in East and Southeast Asia. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 1–19.

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A systematic literature review of school counselling needs in East and Southeast Asia

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [SH], upon request.

Ethics Statement

In accordance with the British Journal of Guidance & Counselling's policy and ethical obligations as a researcher, all authors report no financial, institutional or other competing interests that may affect the research reported in the enclosed paper.

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Abstract

This systematic literature review investigated school counselling needs in East and Southeast Asia based on 109 studies from 14 countries published since 2011. School counselling needs were categorised using an international taxonomy (Morshed & Carey, 2020, Development of a taxonomy of policy levers to promote high quality school-based counseling. *Journal of School-Based Counseling Policy and Evaluation*, 2(2), 95–101). We found similarities and differences between the countries and nine main needs characterising the region. These include the need for (1) up-to-date training, (2) country specific models of school counselling practices stating school counsellors' roles and responsibilities, and (3) overcoming societal-level barriers such as stigma towards mental health. We recommend context-sensitive steps to policymakers seeking to improve school counselling services.

Keywords: school counselling, school-based mental health, Asia, policy, literature review, good health and well-being

Highlights

- School counselling needs across East and Southeast Asia present certain similarities such as the need to provide school counsellors with up-to-date, relevant training, and the need for the school counselling profession to be guided by a specific school counselling model.
- The Taxonomy of Policy Levers to Promote High Quality School-Based Counselling is a useful tool to identify specific levers to improve school counselling services.
- New levers are suggested focusing on providing up-to-date training and regular supervision to school counsellors, aligning school counselling policy with the school environment and taking initiatives to overcome societal level barriers such as stigma towards mental health.

Introduction and Background

Students around the globe face challenges such as changing job markets leading to increased academic competition (Hohenshil, Amundson, & Niles, 2015), crises such as natural disasters or the COVID-19 pandemic (Loades et al., 2020), as well as emerging mental health disorders such as media addiction (Kok & Low, 2017). School counsellors can play an important role in the development and well-being of students in the face of these challenges. According to the American School Counsellor Association (ASCA), which provided the first definition and framework of school counselling services, school counsellors are accredited educators who improve student outcomes for all students by implementing a comprehensive school counselling program to provide academic and career advice and promote social-emotional competencies (ASCA, 2012). A scoping review of the implementation of state-funded school counselling in 90 countries found that the school counselling profession is firmly established in 62 countries, is spreading worldwide, and is rapidly evolving (Harris, 2013). While there is increasing international evidence for the advantages of school counselling services (Harris, 2013, 2014), such as long-term academic and social-emotional benefits for students (Carey et al., 2017), few studies have specifically investigated school counselling needs in East and Southeast Asia.

School Counselling in East and Southeast Asia

Although much research is available investigating school counselling in North America and Europe, little is known about how this profession is faring in societies in East and Southeast Asia, two regions representing most of the world's children and youth, and where school counselling has recently found footing (Calabrese & Dorji, 2014). Past research comparing how school counselling is practiced in different regions around the world has revealed differences between Asia and the West. For instance, Kok (2013) conducted an interview study with 11 school counsellors in Singapore and found that the school counsellor

role is more multifaceted and flexible than in the West, characterized by multiple approaches such as one-to-one counselling, group work, implementing a class curriculum, and consulting with parents and outside agencies in the community such as psychiatric services.

Research investigating school counselling services in East and Southeast Asia is further necessary because this region is experiencing rapid changes. These include sudden economic growth resulting in a rapidly changing career landscape (such as the rise of information technology in what used to be agriculture-based societies), increasing youth unemployment, and more complex mental health challenges such as substance and media dependency (OECD, 2004; Patwa et al., 2019).

In addition, the available research on school counselling services in East and Southeast Asia predominately underlines the importance of further investigation. This includes research showing how school counselling services address the emotional needs of students in Singapore (Yeo & Lee, 2014), initiate positive changes in schools in Japan by for instance facilitating rewarding learning experiences for students (Chan et al., 2015), and even cost-benefit advantages of school counselling services in South Korea (Ministry of Education, 2010). To conclude, a review of school counselling in East and Southeast Asia is warranted to better understand this profession in this part of the world and to formulate recommendations that could increase its potential.

The Present Study

The present study aimed to conduct the first systematic literature review of school counselling services in East and Southeast Asia. More specifically, the present study sought to determine the most prevalent school counselling needs in both regions. To this end, a systematic literature review was carried out guided by the Taxonomy of Policy Levers to Promote High Quality School-Based Counselling (Aluede et al., 2020; Morshed & Carey, 2020) (henceforth, the Taxonomy of Policy Levers). Policies are understood as all forms of

government orders that guide resources from the national (government) to local (school decision-maker) level and are specifically meant to strive to improve students' well-being. Examples of school counselling policy include licensing requirements, mandating a student-to-school counsellor ratio, or implementing best practices around confidentiality (Carey et al., 2017). Perhaps the most widely recognised policy guide is the American School Counsellor Association (ASCA) school counselling model, which recommends, for instance, a specific student-to-school counsellor ratio of 250:1 (ASCA, 2012). School counselling policies can shape school counsellors' working conditions, and policy analysis can help to determine compliance, namely fidelity of policy implementation, identify gaps, and evaluate the effectiveness of policies to ensure they are aligned with the needs of schools and students (Savitz-Romer et al., 2024; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2022). In response to the lack of international school counselling policy research and to support effective school counselling practice globally, the Taxonomy of Policy Levers (Aluede et al., 2020; Morshed & Carey, 2020) was developed, consisting of a comprehensive list of government policies, or levers, based on the analysis of international school counselling policy research. It consists of 25 policy levers grouped under eight policy foci: (A) school counsellors' initial competence, (B) continuing competence, (C) effective school counselling practices, (D) planning and evaluation of school counselling, (E) distinct school counsellor roles, (F) hiring of school counsellors, (G) the continual improvement of the school counselling system, and (H) enhancing the capacity of educational leaders to support the implementation of high quality school-based counselling services. One example is lever C1, "Advocating for best practices" under focus C "Promoting the use of effective school counselling practices".

Few studies investigating school counselling services have sought to translate empirical findings into policy levers. In one mixed method study of how 56 school counsellors in Hong Kong perceive their roles and professional identity, it was found that school counsellors

reported feeling unable to adequately address students' issues because of a lack of role clarity, feeling marginalised within the school setting, not receiving the necessary support from school leaders, feeling targeted by stigma towards counselling and having few opportunities to improve their skills (Harrison et al., 2022). The authors of the study conclude that these results highlight the need to address seven levers of the Taxonomy of Policy Levers (i.e. A1, C1, C2, D1, E1, E2, and F6). As such, the Taxonomy of Policy Levers is a valuable tool for investigating school counselling policy needs and was, therefore, used to guide this review.

Methodology

Procedure

This systematic literature review adhered to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) method (Moher et al., 2010). A literature search was carried out in June 2023. To cover a wide range of articles that were published recently, the review sought to investigate studies published in the last ten years. It was initially intended to investigate research from 2011 to 2021, but this was extended another two years to 2023 due to the emerging literature on school counselling services during the COVID-19 pandemic. As such, different key terms related to school counselling and other school-based mental health services were used in the search, including school psychology, in the last 12 years, namely between 2011 and 2023. Keyword searches were run in English, German, and French within the databases PsycInfo, MedLine, Embase, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), ProQuest Social Sciences, and PubMed. Furthermore, to cover a wide geographical area with little available research, the literature search included 23 countries and geographic regions in East and Southeast Asia from Pakistan to Japan, more specifically, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Laos, Malaysia,

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Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Thailand, Tibet, and Vietnam. The exact search query can be found in Table A in the Appendices.

This search yielded 4599 records, of which 3353 duplicates were removed, resulting in 1246 records. These records were then uploaded to Rayyan QCRI, a free, systematic review web tool to screen and select references according to specific inclusion criteria (<https://www.rayyan.ai/>). Inclusion criteria included whether the study was published between 2011 and 2023, from or about one of the 23 countries and geographic regions of interest, whether it was published in English, French, or German, and whether it mentioned school counselling or other school-based mental health services such as “school-based counselling” or “school psychology” or other search terms related to school counselling (Table A, Appendices). For example, a study about students’ perceptions of school-based child and family counselling in Macao, China (Van Schalkwyk, 2014) was included in the review whereas a study about sexual health information provided by school nurses in Taiwan or a study about school guidance counselling services in Nigeria were not included. References with and without peer review were considered.

A trained research assistant (RA) independently reviewed a subsample of 100 references (29.41%) to assess agreement. The aim of involving a second coder to assess coding reliability was to ascertain which title and abstract were seen as relevant to the review by both raters. The RA was trained by the primary investigator (PI) [JL] to use Rayyan QCRI by being explained the inclusion and exclusion criteria central to the study and by practicing coding 50 references. Next, both the RA and PI went over these 50 references to check for agreements and disagreements, before the RA proceeded with the official coding task of a subsample of 100 references. When both raters’ ratings (i.e. whether to include or exclude studies from the full-text review) of this subsample were compared, an inter-rater agreement

of 92% was found, which was deemed satisfactory. All disagreements were discussed and resolved.

Based upon the title and abstract screening, the PI included 340 references that met the inclusion criteria for full-text review, including eight additional references identified through index hunting. All were published in English, and no references were found in German or French. Next, the 348 studies were uploaded to MAXQDA, a software programme for qualitative data analysis, and the PI carried out a full-text review. MAXQDA was used as it is an easy-to-use software to efficiently code texts and visualise qualitative data using colours and counts. Moreover, it can be used by multiple users and has a function specifically to determine inter-coder reliability. MAXQDA was used to code all 109 studies, distinguish patterns, and draw conclusions about the coded excerpts such as commonalities between the excerpts that suggest specific themes. This allowed for a list of themes specific to the studies to be developed, including the number of times each study mentioned each theme and an easy-to-access repertoire of the excerpts relevant to each theme.

To assess coding reliability using the Taxonomy of Policy Levers (Aluede et al., 2020; Morshed & Carey, 2020), a trained RA independently reviewed a subsample of 15 (13.76%) studies. The RA was trained by the PI to use MAXQDA to code 15 studies specifically for the qualitative analysis central to the study by being shown the code book and three already coded studies. The RA then coded three practice studies themselves before going over these codes together with the PI to check for agreements and disagreements, namely which foci and levers were extracted by both raters. They then proceeded with the coding of 15 studies. In the end, the inter-rater agreement was 33.4%. This divergence was discussed in depth, during which it was concluded that the main reason for such differences was due to the PI's in-depth familiarity of the international school counselling literature. All individual coding

disagreements were then discussed and resolved so that, in the end, both raters agreed on the coding.

In the end, 109 studies were selected during the full-text review for data extraction as they were found to mention specific needs, which were in turn categorised using the Taxonomy of Policy Levers (Aluede et al., 2020; Morshed & Carey, 2020). The exact data extraction process of these 109 full-text studies is described below.

A flow chart of the search and reference selection processes is presented in Figure 1.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Data Extraction using the Taxonomy of Policy Levers

The Taxonomy of Policy Levers (Aluede et al., 2020; Morshed & Carey, 2020) was used for the data extraction of all 109 articles. For the data extraction process, all full-text references were analysed for specific needs, which were categorised using the Taxonomy of Policy Levers. The process was deductive at first, namely all identified needs were coded according to the Taxonomy of Policy Levers. However, it was found that not all needs mentioned in the 109 full-text references could be categorised under a specific lever or foci of the Taxonomy of Policy Levers, so new ones were suggested, and an inductive approach was employed. Furthermore, some levers under specific foci were collapsed together as it was not possible to categorise each need under a specific lever.

The following changes were made to the Taxonomy of Policy Levers for the analysis. We found recurring mentions of the need for relevant training (stated in 54 references), the need for regular supervision (stated in 27 references), the need for specific guidelines on stakeholder collaboration (stated in 41 references), the need to train and hire more school counsellors (stated in 27 references), and the need to motivate and retain school counsellors

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(stated in 8 references). These themes, which were not in the original Taxonomy of Policy Levers, were added. More specifically, (1) a new lever “A4: Provide training relevant to current needs of students” was added to the focus “A. Assuring the initial competence of school-based counsellors”; (2) a new lever “B4: Provide regular supervision” was added to the focus “B. Assuring the continuing competence of school counsellors”; (3) a new lever “D2. Developing a model of stakeholder collaboration” was added to the focus “D. Ensuring that school counselling activities are planned organised, and evaluated well in schools”; (4) new levers “F9. Need to train and/or hire more school counsellors” and “F10. Motivation and retention” were added to the focus F.

In addition, 37 references discussed stigma around mental health as a significant barrier to students seeking school counselling services, and 26 references raised the issue of inconsistencies between the aim of school counselling services and the school environments they are meant to serve, indicating misalignment of school counselling policies. These issues were added as two new foci. More specifically, a new focus “I. Initiatives to overcome societal-level barriers” with three levers “I1. Need to overcome stigma towards mental health and school counselling”, “I2. Need for more awareness of mental health and counselling such as through campaigns”, and “I3. Need to overcome cultural barriers such as inappropriateness of sharing issues with adults outside the family”, and a new focus “J. Policy alignment”. These were added as their own separate foci rather than new levers under any of the other foci as they were not deemed to be categorizable under any of the existing foci.

Conversely, some levers were collapsed together because it was not possible to clearly differentiate between them during analysis. Both levers under the focus “G. Ensuring that the country’s school counselling system continuously improves” were collapsed together and the focus “F1. Suggesting that schools have counsellors” were collapsed together with “F2. Mandating that schools have counsellors” and “F6. Funding school counselling positions in

schools” was collapsed with “F7. Hiring school counsellors and placing them in schools” because the analysis did not allow to sufficiently differentiate between funding and hiring policies.

Results

The 109 studies in the analysis originated from 14 of the 23 countries and geographic regions included in the literature search. These were Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Countries and geographic regions from which no eligible studies were found include Afghanistan, Cambodia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, and Tibet. The 109 studies kept for analysis consisted of various research methods, including general descriptions, survey studies, interview studies, programme implementation studies, reviews, and theses on school-based mental health staff such as school counsellors, school psychologists, school guidance and vocational counsellors, teacher counsellors, social workers, and clinical psychologists. An overview of the studies’ general characteristics can be found in Table 1.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

Indonesia (n = 16; 14.7%) had the most references about their school counselling systems, followed by India (n = 14; 12.8%). Most (n = 83; 76.1%) of the references referred explicitly to school counselling services rather than other professions, such as school psychologists or teacher counsellors. Of the 109 references, 50 (45.9%) were peer-reviewed studies, 38 (34.9%) were qualitative studies, 27 (24.8%) were general descriptive country case studies of school counselling services in a specific country, and 26 (23.9%) were quantitative studies.

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The rest were books or book chapters (8; 7.3%), reviews (3; 2.8%) or theses (2; 1.8%). The most peer-reviewed studies (n = 7; 7.1%) were from or about Hong Kong, and the most studies that were not peer-reviewed were from or about Indonesia (n = 12; 12.1%). An analysis of findings by year was not feasible as there was an unequal and irregular distribution of references ranging from two (1.8%) publications (2011 and 2016) to 15 (13.8%) (2022).

The levers identified in each study and changes made to the Taxonomy of Policy Levers marked in bold can be found in Table 2. A list of all 109 references and their identified levers and foci can be found in Table B, and a table of needs identified in each country and geographic region in Table C of the Appendices.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

The most often mentioned levers and foci were (1) “A4: Provide training relevant to current needs of students” (n = 54; 49.5%), (2) “D1. Developing or adopting a model for school counselling practice” (n = 53; 48.6%), (3) “I. Initiatives to overcome societal-level barriers” (n = 46; 42.2%), (4) “E2. Developing or adopting a role statement for school-based counsellors” (n = 45; 41.3%), (5) “D2. Developing a model of stakeholder collaboration” (n = 41; 37.6%), (6) “A1. Licensing/certifying school-based counsellors” (n = 35; 32.1%), (7) “A2. Accrediting school counsellor training programmes (n = 31; 28.4%)”, (8) “B4. Providing regular supervision” (n = 27; 24.7%), and (9) “J. Policy alignment” (n = 26; 23.9%).

These levers and foci are presented below along with examples from the 109 studies.

1. Providing relevant and up-to-date initial and continuous training

Fifty-four studies (49.5%) mentioned the need to provide training specific to students' current needs, such as problematic media usage or substance abuse. This was not a specific lever in the original Taxonomy of Policy Levers, so it was added as "A4. Providing initial and regular training relevant to current needs of students". Examples from the review results include:

"There needs to be new changes brought in to address challenges like internet addiction [...] and alcohol problems [...] which is rising in India. With the increasing number of global concerns arising in India, the curriculum might need a thorough enhancement to be able to keep up with the rising demands [India] (Thomas & Dey, 2020, p. 24)

School counsellors need initial and ongoing training that is up-to-date, congruent with the reality of the local school settings, and relevant to the needs of students, such as career advice, the inclusion of special needs students, LGBTQI+ rights, media use, cyberbullying, substance use, the increasing multicultural diversity within classrooms, sexual health, and crises (Yi et al., 2023). This is especially important given the rapidly changing context of the region under investigation reflected, for instance, in reports of increased divorce rates among families in Singapore (Kok & Low, 2017). Policies need to ensure school counsellors are prepared to manage such issues.

Furthermore, this need was mentioned the most in studies from or about India (n = 9; 8.3%), Malaysia (n = 8; 7.3%) and Indonesia (n = 7; 6.4%). Studies published from or about India mentioned mostly the need for training on stakeholder collaboration such as with teachers and parents:

"The present study calls for the inclusion of further counsellor training in handling obstacles in the academic syllabus of school counsellors. This could help them in gaining adequate knowledge on the importance of inclusion of parents, ways to approach them, the

process of inclusion, and managing the obstacles in the counsellor process” [India] (Vaishnavi & Kumar, 2018, p. 364).

In Indonesia, the need for training with technology was mentioned the most while different areas of training such as to deal with changing career horizons were mentioned in research from or about Malaysia.

2. Implementing a school counselling model

Fifty-three studies (48.6%) mentioned the need to develop and implement a school counselling model: “D1. Developing or adopting a model for school counselling practice”.

This lever was in the original Taxonomy of Policy Levers and referred to developing a school counselling model and promoting its implementation through training and evaluation (Morshed & Carey, 2020). Examples from the review results include:

“most schools in the region are either not using any model of counselling or importing and adapting a model such as the ASCA National Model. This is problematic because, without clear frameworks delineating their roles, counsellors may experience role confusion [Vietnam] (Harrison, 2022, p. 545).”

School counselling services require a carefully developed and systematically implemented model, framework, or guidelines rather than letting other stakeholders, who might not know students’ needs, decide on how to implement school counselling services (Carey et al., 2017). This model should include clear procedures for handling specific cases (such as bullying or abuse) or making referrals to external mental health institutions. Recommendations on how to begin developing such a model can be found in the chapter “What Government Policy Makers Need to Know About School-Based Counseling” in the first handbook on school-based counselling policy research by Carey et al. (2017).

Furthermore, this need was mentioned the most by research from or about India (n = 9; 8.3%), Malaysia (n = 6; 5.5%) and Vietnam (n = 6; 5.5%). More specifically, research from

these countries expressed the need for a model of school counselling that is comprehensive and suited to the local context and culture:

“However, in India, there are no standardised models or bodies that inform the practice of school counselling. Although currently there is a policy that suggests that all schools have school counselling, it does not articulate how they should function or how the school counselling programme needs to be implemented. Therefore there is an urgent need to clarify the roles and expectations from a school counsellor in India” [India] (Thomas et al., 2017, p. 315).

3. Initiatives to overcome societal-level barriers

Forty-six studies (42.2%) mentioned the need for initiatives to overcome societal-level barriers. This aspect was not a specific lever or focus on the original Taxonomy of Policy Levers, so it was included as an additional focus: “I. Initiatives to overcome societal-level barriers”. This was, in turn, split into three different levers “I1. Need to overcome stigma towards mental health and school counselling”, “I2. Need for more awareness of mental health and counselling such as through campaigns” and “I3. Need to overcome cultural barriers such as inappropriateness of sharing issues with adults outside the family”. Examples from the review results include:

“To counteract this conception, psycho-education to minimise such stigmatisation and to normalise help-seeking from school counsellors should commence as the students start their secondary education. Regardless of culture and age, stigmatisation appears to be a contributing factor towards the formation of negative attitude towards school counselling” [Singapore] (Hafiz & Chong, 2023, p. 8).

Shame and stigma around mental health issues and seeking mental health help, especially not sharing issues with adults outside of the family and school staff being perceived as figures of authority, are significant barriers to school counselling. These results were

reiterated in 14 (12.8%) of the studies under investigation. Harrison (2019), for instance, conducted an interview study with 25 Chinese students and eight counsellors in Hong Kong and found that students initially had difficulty talking to the counsellor because of feelings of shame around sharing issues outside of the family circle. This feeling was described as inherent to the local culture (Kim et al., 2009) and further illustrated by the idiom in Sri Lanka “home fires must be kept confined to the home” (Jayawardena & Gamage, 2022, p. 25). The studies also mentioned the need for more awareness, whether at the national level or individual school level, about mental health and counselling. Government-lead initiatives should be taken to overcome this societal-level barrier, such as initiatives to increase mental health literacy in schools (Kagstrom et al., 2023), namely knowledge about recognition, management, and prevention of mental health disorders (Jorm, 2012). This can be achieved through dissemination or regular awareness programmes with students, parents, and school staff, and increasing the visibility of and trust in school counselling services (Kok & Low, 2017). Such initiatives would help elucidate the role of the school counsellor and encourage help-seeking behaviours among students (Kok, 2013).

The most often mentioned lever under this focus was “11. Need to overcome stigma towards mental health and school counselling” which was mentioned the most by research from or about Malaysia (n = 7; 6.4%) and India (n = 6; 11%). These studies mentioned mostly the issue that counselling is perceived as only necessary for those with serious problems and the problematic cultural barrier in which issues are discussed only within the family and not with adults beyond the family circle:

“Many Indian parents believe that in order to seek help from a professional such as a counsellor or a psychologist one must have severe mental health issues and such professionals are not to be approached for small problems” [India] (Akos et al., 2014, p. 173);

“Shame and face-saving reactions within the patriarchal family structure result in the school students’ reluctance to disclose their personal problems to outsiders, for it might reflect negatively on the family system” [Malaysia] (Kok & Low, 2017, p. 282).

4. Clear roles

Forty-five studies (49.1%) mentioned the need to clearly define school counsellors’ roles which falls under the lever “E2. Developing or adopting a role statement for school-based counsellors”. Examples from the review results include:

“In the absence of a specific job description, counsellors were sometimes required to fill in for duties that were not assigned to any other particular staff member such as monitoring detention and discipline” [Sri Lanka] (Jayawardena & Gamage, 2022, p. 29).

These results underlie the need to clearly define school counsellors’ roles, such as developing a specific role statement and a specific job description to differentiate the school counsellor role from other professions like a social worker and school nurse (which falls under “E1. Developing a distinct job classification and description for school-based counsellors” mentioned in 19 studies). This is important to avoid role ambiguity and confusion, which can lead to work overload and burnout (Dem & Busch, 2018). Role clarification is also essential to help clear misconceptions about school counselling such as that they provide students with immediate solutions to complicated issues like substance dependency (Jayawardena & Gamage, 2022).

Furthermore, this need was mentioned the most by research from or about India (n = 7; 6.4%) resulting in the school counsellors being made to do work that shouldn’t be the responsibility of the school counsellor:

“Studies conducted in India have highlighted several challenges that school counsellors face. There exists immense role confusion and misconceptions among stakeholders regarding a school counsellor’s role (Kakar & Oberoi, 2016; Thomas & Dey, 2020). The role confusion

is evident as many administrators expect counsellors to be involved in non-counselling administrative tasks, such as liaison between the administration and teachers, handling parents' concerns, invigilation duties, maintaining student records, acting as substitutes, and assisting in other routine tasks" [India] (Sadana & Kumar, 2023, p. 2).

5. Improved stakeholder collaboration

Forty-one studies (37.6%) mentioned the need to improve collaboration with school staff, families, outside agencies, and the community. This was not a specific lever in the original Taxonomy of Policy Levers, and so it was added as "D2. Developing a model of stakeholder collaboration". Examples from the review results include:

"All of the 82 counsellors acknowledged that, in order to provide effective school counselling services, collaboration among all the stakeholders from the educational and local community needs to improve. To enhance the provision of public school counselling services in Malaysia, the researchers propose a partnership model between the different stakeholders" [Malaysia] (Low et al., 2013, p. 195).

Poor stakeholder collaboration was mentioned as a significant barrier to implementing school counselling services. What is needed are clear collaboration guidelines with school staff, such as teachers or the school leadership, with parents, and, where necessary, with external stakeholders to facilitate referrals to mental health services. Such guidelines would help school counsellors to appropriately handle referrals, for instance, because of suspected undiagnosed disorders such as dyslexia, but also consultations with families and confidentiality with school staff.

Furthermore, this need was mentioned the most by research from or about Singapore (n = 7; 6.4%), more specifically the need for a better planned collaboration model, often in order to improve stakeholder collaboration:

“Therefore, for school counselling to be effective, a collaborative model among all parties the family, the teachers and the community will be needed. Schools need to establish some workflows so that a multi-disciplinary collaboration among all parties involved might be effective” [Singapore] (Kok, 2013, p. 540)

6. Licensing and 7. Accrediting of school counsellor training

Thirty-five studies (32.1%) mentioned the need for licensing (“A1. Licensing/certifying school-based counsellors”) and 31 studies (28.4%) for accreditation (“A2. Accrediting school counsellor training programs”) of school counsellor training. Examples from the review results include:

“Establishing a certification or licensure process in school psychology in Taiwan is also recommended, such as the development of a unified licensure examination at the national level by professional associations and legislators, to ensure that training and services are provided” [Taiwan] (Fan et al., 2021, p. 8).

More specifically, these levers imply that the legal obligations for school counsellor training, such as the content of training courses and the requirement to have undergone an internship, must be defined (Dizon & Chavez, 2022). This is important to guarantee the competencies of school counsellors and the quality of school counselling services, to establish ethical standards, and for the profession to be recognised, respected, and trusted. In their qualitative analysis of open-ended survey questions of 227 students in Malaysia, Chen and Kok (2017) found, for instance, that students did not trust school counsellor’s competencies because of their lack of professional training in school settings. Furthermore, both needs were mentioned the most by research from or about India (A1, n = 8; 7.3%; and A2, n = 7; 6.4%), more specifically expressing a lack of licencing and or accreditation:

“without coherent and recognized programs, counselors are still struggling to establish their professional identity. With no accredited degree granting programs in school counseling

currently being offered by any higher education institutions in India, school counseling licensing requirements do not exist” [India] (Akos et al., 2014, p. 174).

8. Provide supervision

Twenty-seven (24.7%) studies mentioned the need for systemic supervision or at least some form of mentoring by a trained senior school counsellor. This was not a specific lever in the original Taxonomy of Policy Levers, so it was added as “B4. Provide regular supervision”. Examples from the review results include:

“Counsellors feel isolated by nature of their training and work, and reported that supervision was able to reduce those feelings of isolation. [...] They are also able to build networks of support across different schools. Supervision is essentially a source of support and help for them” [Singapore] (Tan, 2019, p. 441).

It is argued that school counsellors need regular, efficient supervision as it is a source of advice and psychological support which can improve their competencies (Miserentino & Hannon, 2022).

Furthermore, this lever was mentioned the most by research from or about Hong Kong (n = 4; 3.7%) and South Korea (n = 4; 3.7%), mostly expressing that this important support is limited or non-existent:

“They are generally managed by individuals with little experience in or understanding of counselling: They may not receive adequate professional development or supervision, another barrier to a strong professional identity (DeKruyf et al., 2013), and are unable to use their training and skills to good effect” [Hong Kong] (Harrison, 2023, p. 144).

“Environmental support can be provided through supervision that directs novice school counselling to be aware of the complex emotions that are being aroused during counselling” [South Korea] (Hong et al., 2023, p. 342).

9. Policy alignment

Twenty-six studies (23.9%) mentioned the need for school counselling policies to align with school policies, such as LGBTQI + rights, confidentiality, academic competitiveness, and discipline. That is why an additional focus, namely “J. Policy alignment”, is suggested. Examples from the review results include:

“School counsellors reported that the management of cyberbullying frustrated them as there were no clear policies. Suppose the bullying definition also encompasses cyberbullying with policies on bullying adapted to include cyberbullying actions. In that case, school counsellors may be more empowered to manage and resolve such cases” [Malaysia] (Chan et al., 2020, p. 9).

These studies expressed the concerns of school counsellors frustrated at being the sole responsibility for student’s well-being in a school climate dominated by exams and academic achievement (Carey et al., 2017; Wong & Yuen, 2019). School counselling services need to be harmonised with educational policy. If the school counselling model prioritises well-being, but the school policy underscores academic achievement, then school counsellors will be conflicted.

Furthermore, this focus was mentioned the most by research from or about India (n = 5; 4.6%):

“There are various domains of child development, whereas to a large, extent policies have primarily focused on a child’s aca-demic and vocational development. While this is essential in the school context, if one subscribes to the holistic development of the child, then a broader focus from vocational counselling alone toward a more comprehensive and integrated program may be necessary” [India] (Thomas et al., 2017, p. 324).

Other levers

Additional levers were added, namely “F9. Need to train and/or hire more school counsellors” (n = 27; 24.8%) and “F10. Motivation and retention” (n = 8; 7.3%). The

suggested lever F9 refers to the expressed need for more school counsellors in general to help students with their issues. These include the need for more school counsellors specifically in schools in rural areas as opposed to schools in urban areas (Pham & Akos, 2020) or at specific school levels such as primary schools (Harris, 2013). The suggested lever F10 refers to issues of professional motivation and retention, namely making sure the school counselling profession is attractive enough to encourage students to pursue this career, such as by providing a competitive salary, and to avoid school counsellors leaving the profession because of low job satisfaction. All other foci and levers were mentioned in one to 15 of the 109 reviewed studies or not at all. The reason could be that the school counselling profession is still relatively new in East and Southeast Asia. Harris (2014), in their report on school counselling worldwide, found evidence of the implementation of school counselling services, such as studies and government documents, available for China since 2002, Hong Kong since 2003, Indonesia since 2003, Japan since 2005, Malaysia since 2010, Singapore since 2003 and Vietnam since 2008 while no information was available for other countries in the region. As a result, more research and policy development is needed to address structural questions in detail, such as around funding, leadership, best practices, or continuous improvement of school counselling services through relicensing, monitoring, and evaluation.

Discussion

Using a systematic literature review, it was possible to categorise school counselling needs mentioned in 109 studies from 14 East and Southeast Asian countries and geographic regions into different policy foci and levers of the Taxonomy of Policy Levers (Aluede et al., 2020; Morshed & Carey, 2020). As a result, nine prevalent needs were identified including the need to provide up to date training that is licensed and/or accredited, the need to apply a model for school counselling practice with specific school counselling roles and specific stakeholder

collaboration methods, the need to overcome stigma towards mental health and school counselling, the need for regular supervision, and the need for policy alignment.

The countries and geographic regions investigated in this analysis can be further categorised into three groups: (1) countries and geographic regions where school counselling has been considerably investigated and for which data are already available for specific school counselling needs: China, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore and Philippines and Vietnam; (2) countries and geographic regions where literature on school counselling is emerging but for which little data are available on specific school counselling needs: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Japan, Sri Lanka, and Taiwan; (3) countries and geographic regions for which no research on school counselling could be identified in this review: Afghanistan, Cambodia, Maldives, Mongolia, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, Thailand, and Tibet. This grouping can be useful for practitioners and researchers as it allows to determine which countries and geographic regions need to encourage initiatives to begin publishing research on school counselling services (group 3), which countries and geographic regions may benefit from increasing their initiatives to start providing practical implications (group 2), and, finally, which countries and geographic regions already have data available about school counselling needs which should be leveraged to address these needs and monitor their progression (group 1).

The results of this study can further be discussed in relation to the Taxonomy of Policy Levers to Promote High Quality School-Based Counselling (Aluede et al., 2020; Morshed & Carey, 2020). It shows on one hand the usefulness of the taxonomy for carrying out such a review to unearth specific needs as well as proposing some minor changes to it, including adding levers on the need for training and supervision and foci on the need to overcome stigma.

The findings of this investigation are comparable with findings from similar research. First, these findings provide the first step towards country comparisons of school counselling needs which could be consolidated by further research in which school counsellors from each country are directly asked about their attitudes towards the different levers of the Taxonomy of Policy Levers, allowing for a more direct comparison between countries and regions, such as was done with 56 school counsellors in Hong Kong by Harrison et al. (2022). This study also builds on previous research on school counselling in general including the scoping review of the implementation of state-funded school counselling in 90 countries by Harris (2013). More specifically the results of this study provide a different perspective on how to review school counselling services cross-nationally, namely investigating school counselling service needs, which provide information to practitioners and policymakers. To consolidate these findings in a way such as to inform practitioners and policymakers, we suggest a hypothetical roadmap of specific steps.

Roadmap toward context-sensitive school counselling models in East and Southeast Asia

The results of this study suggest several steps policymakers in East and Southeast Asia looking to implement or improve school counselling services should consider. The following roadmap is a suggestion based on the most prevalent needs identified by the review and is open to discussion and feedback.

Based on the results of the review, as an immediate first step, policymakers must design and implement a school counselling model. The design of such a model must be informed by empirical evidence of the de facto roles and responsibilities of school counsellors in the respective context. Such crucial work is underway, for instance, in Bhutan (citation withheld for peer review) where a recent study found that school counsellors' views differed from the views of teachers and principals concerning whether they should be responsible for

administrative duties, indicating that school counsellors' roles and responsibilities need to be more clearly defined and communicated. Such research provides an important evidence base for designing or refining context-sensitive school counselling models. Further, the school counselling model must define collaboration procedures with stakeholders, such as regular consultation meetings with school principals and procedures for making referrals to mental health service providers. This model should also specify the training school counsellors must receive, both initially and continuously, which should reflect students' needs and be recognised, through licensure and/or accreditation, to guarantee the profession's effectiveness and credibility. This model should also guarantee the provision of systematic supervision and should undergo monitoring and regular reviews and be adapted according to changing needs, such as the increasing multicultural composition of classrooms (e.g. in South Korea; Lee & Yang, 2017).

As a second step, measures should be taken to assure policy alignment, namely that policies reflect the actual needs on the ground, such as marginalised and minoritized students' rights or the school's priorities placed on academic exams, and that these are implemented accordingly.

Finally, measures should be taken nationally to destigmatize mental health so that school counselling services are better accepted and students are encouraged to seek help, such as through media campaigns or organising regular school counselling information events with parents. A diagram of this roadmap is presented in Figure 2.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

It is further suggested that this roadmap can help researchers, practitioners and policymakers to identify which next steps to consider when looking to improve school

counselling services in their specific country or geographic region. The review revealed, for instance, that school counselling services in India should consider further steps at each level of the roadmap. These include the need for up-to-date and relevant training, the need to implement a school counselling model, and the need for more clear roles and responsibilities at level 1, the need to align school counselling services with other school policies at level 2, and the need to overcome societal barriers about mental health and counselling at level 3. The review also revealed that school counselling services in Singapore should consider further steps at level 1 of the framework to improve stakeholder collaboration. School counselling in Malaysia should consider the need for up-to date and relevant training and the need to implement a school counselling model, both at level 1, and the need to overcome societal barriers to mental health services and counselling, at level 3.

Strengths and limitations

A notable strength of this study is its emphasis on 23 countries and geographic regions that are generally under-represented in school-based mental health research. It further used a broad definition of school counselling to include different definitions of school-based mental health services. This review can serve as a base from which future school counselling research can be undertaken. In addition, it can help policymakers to better understand and improve their school counselling needs.

However, there are several limitations. First, the scope of the study was restricted by the investigator's language skills, so a limited range of literature was included, namely studies published in English, French, or German. Second, cultural aspects of the study may have been misrepresented due to a lack of knowledge and understanding of the local characteristics of the profession. Because of their background, the authors may have had specific prejudices they were unaware of, although they made every effort to be aware of their own biases and Westernised experiences. They tried not to overgeneralise the results but to recognise the

differences between and within all countries and geographic regions included in the analysis.

Third, this review did not include grey literature because of its broad geographic scope.

Instead, a wide range of references were analysed, including studies that were not peer-reviewed. Thus, literature such as specific reports and briefs might have been missed that were not indexed in the electronic databases used in this study.

Future directions

The results of the present study provide suggestions on how to implement effective school counselling services. Future studies could investigate how needs differ between schools, countries, or regions, such as how provinces of a country differ in their implementation of a school counselling model.

Furthermore, the results of the present study provide a starting point for comparative research as it revealed, for instance, the significant need for relevant and up-to-date training, the need for a school counselling model and the need to overcome stigma in India and Malaysia, as well as the need for improved stakeholder collaboration in Singapore. This would be important as such differences may reflect the presence or absence of existing policies in these regions. For instance, India does not have a structured school counselling system including a specific model and role description (Choudhury & Choudhury, 2023) which was why this was found in the review to be a prevalent need in India. In contrast, this was not found to be a prevalent need in South Korea, where WEE (We + Education + Emotion) have been implemented, counselling offices where school counsellors offer mental health services for children and adolescents (Lee & Yang, 2017). The WEE project oversees Korea's school counselling services by monitoring services and offering training to school counsellors seeking to develop their skills and is funded by the Ministry of Education.

Another question that should be addressed in future research is the position, or “embeddedness” (Harrison, 2019, p. 480) of the school counsellor within the school, namely whether they should be central, well integrated, and active within the school system, such as employing teacher-counsellors, or whether they should be located more on the periphery, maintaining a certain distance from other school staff. While the latter option may seem important for maintaining confidentiality, school counsellors positioned on the fringes of the school system run the risk of them being seen as outsiders and experiencing feelings of isolation (Van Schalkwyk, 2014). This question is often raised in studies investigating the “Whole-School Approach”, an idea of a collaborative approach to school counselling involving the participation of teachers, school management, and other members of the community but which is overseen by the school counsellor (Aluede et al., 2007).

Finally, similar reviews to the one in the present study should be carried out in other regions of the world, such as the African or European continent, to see how these results compare worldwide and to further inform global school counselling research.

Conclusions

Policies are about translating “should” into reality (Carey et al., 2017). They should reflect local values directed towards child and youth mental health and direct funding and other resources towards areas of need to uphold these values (Young & Lambie, 2007). This systematic literature review represents an inaugural effort to understand school counselling needs in a part of the world that is not well-represented in the literature, namely in East and Southeast Asia. Aided by the Taxonomy of Policy Levers to Promote High Quality School-Based Counselling (Aluede et al., Citation2020; Morshed & Carey, 2020), the results of the review revealed the nine most prevalent school counselling needs, which could help researchers, policymakers, and school counsellors to better understand and improve this

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profession as well as provide impetus for further research on the subject. First steps should be taken to meet school counsellors needs by (1) implementing a school counselling model including specific roles and responsibilities, collaboration procedures, systematic supervision requirements, and a designated, accredited training course allowing school counsellors to be prepared on the most up-to-date information about issues affecting students, (2) by aligning this model with school policies, and (3) by designating initiatives to overcome societal-level barriers towards mental health services. Considering these steps is crucial as school counsellors in East and Southeast Asia will likely have an increasingly important role in the future.

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Tables**Table 1**

Overview of 109 studies reviewed that included information about school counselling policy barriers and needs (n = number of studies)

Publication year	<i>n</i>	%
2011	2	1.8
2012	5	4.6
2013	10	9.2
2014	10	9.2
2015	8	7.3
2016	2	1.8
2017	10	9.2
2018	5	4.6
2019	11	10.1
2020	13	11.2
2021	9	8.3
2022	15	13.8
2033	9	8.3
Countries and geographic regions		
Bangladesh	1	0.9
Bhutan	2	1.8
China	9	8.3
Hong Kong	12	11
India	14	12.8

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Indonesia	16	14.7
Japan	3	2.8
South Korea	9	8.3
Malaysia	9	8.3
Philippines	6	5.5
Singapore	8	7.3
Sri Lanka	2	1.8
Taiwan	3	2.8
Vietnam	7	6.4
Multiple	8	7.3

 Job description of person implementing school
 counselling services

School counsellor	83	76.2
School guidance and vocational counsellor	9	8.3
Teacher counsellor	8	7.3
School psychologist	4	3.7
Clinical psychologist counsellor	2	1.8
Social worker	1	0.9
Multiple	2	1.8

 Study type

Qual. interview	38	34.9
Country case study of school counselling services	27	24.8

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Quant. survey	26	23.9
Book or book chapter	8	7.3
Program evaluation	5	4.6
Review	3	2.8
Thesis	2	1.8

Table 2

Taxonomy of Policy Levers (Aluede et al., 2020; Morshed & Carey, 2020). Additional levers and levers collapsed together are indicated in bold (n = number of studies mentioning the foci or lever)

Foci	Levers	n	%
A. Assuring the initial competence of school-based counselors	A1. Licensing/certifying school-based counselors	35	32.1
	A2. Accrediting school counselor training programs	31	28.4
	A3. Providing funding to improve the quality of school counselor training programs	2	1.8
	A4: Providing initial and regular training relevant to current needs of students (new lever)	54	49.5
	B1. Requiring professional development for relicensing	0	0

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B. Assuring the continuing competence of school counselors	B2. Providing support for professional development education for school counselor	11	10.1
	B3. Requiring periodic personnel evaluation of school counselors	0	0
	B4: Providing regular supervision (new lever)	27	24.8
C. Promoting the use of effective school counseling practices	C1. Advocating for best practices	16	14.7
	C2. Developing and disseminating resources to support effective practice	22	20.2
D. Ensuring that school counseling activities are planned, organized, and evaluated well in schools	D1. Developing or adopting a model for school counseling practice	53	48.6
	D2. Developing a model of stakeholder collaboration (new lever)	41	37.6
E. Promoting a distinct school counselor role in schools	E1. Developing a distinct job classification and description for school-based counselors	19	17.4
	E2. Developing or adopting a role statement for school-based counselors	45	41.3
	E3. Mandating that some school counseling-related activities are delivered in schools	0	0
F. Promoting the hiring of school counselors in schools	F1/F2. Suggesting/Mandating that schools have counselors (2 levers combined)	7	6.4
	F3. Requiring that only qualified counselors be employed in schools	6	5.5
	F4. Suggesting appropriate student to counselor staffing ratio	0	0

	F5. Mandating appropriate student to counselor staffing ratio	7	6.4
	F6/F7. Funding/Hiring school counselors and placing them in schools (2 levers combined)	6	5.5
	F8. Mandating the number of school counselors to be hired in each year	1	0.9
	F9. Need to train and/or hire more school counsellors (new lever)	27	24.8
	F10. Motivation and retention of school counselors (new lever)	8	7.3
G. Ensuing that the country's school counseling system continuously improves	2 levers combined	13	12
H. Enhancing the capacity of educational leaders to support the implementation of high-quality school-based counseling services	H1. Developing school-based counselor leaders at the state/national level	15	13.8
	H2. Developing school-based counselor leaders at the district and school levels	1	0.9
	H3. Educating school leaders on the effective management of school-based counseling programs and supervision of school-based counselors	6	5.5
	I1. Need to overcome stigma towards mental health and school counseling (new lever)	37	33.9

I. Initiatives to overcome societal level barriers (new focus)	I2. Need for more awareness of mental health and counseling such as through campaigns (new lever)	26	23.9
	I3. Need to overcome cultural barriers such as inappropriateness of sharing issues with adults outside the family (new lever)	16	14.7
J. Policy alignment with the school setting (new focus)	none	26	23.9

Figures

Figure 1

Flow chart of the literature search

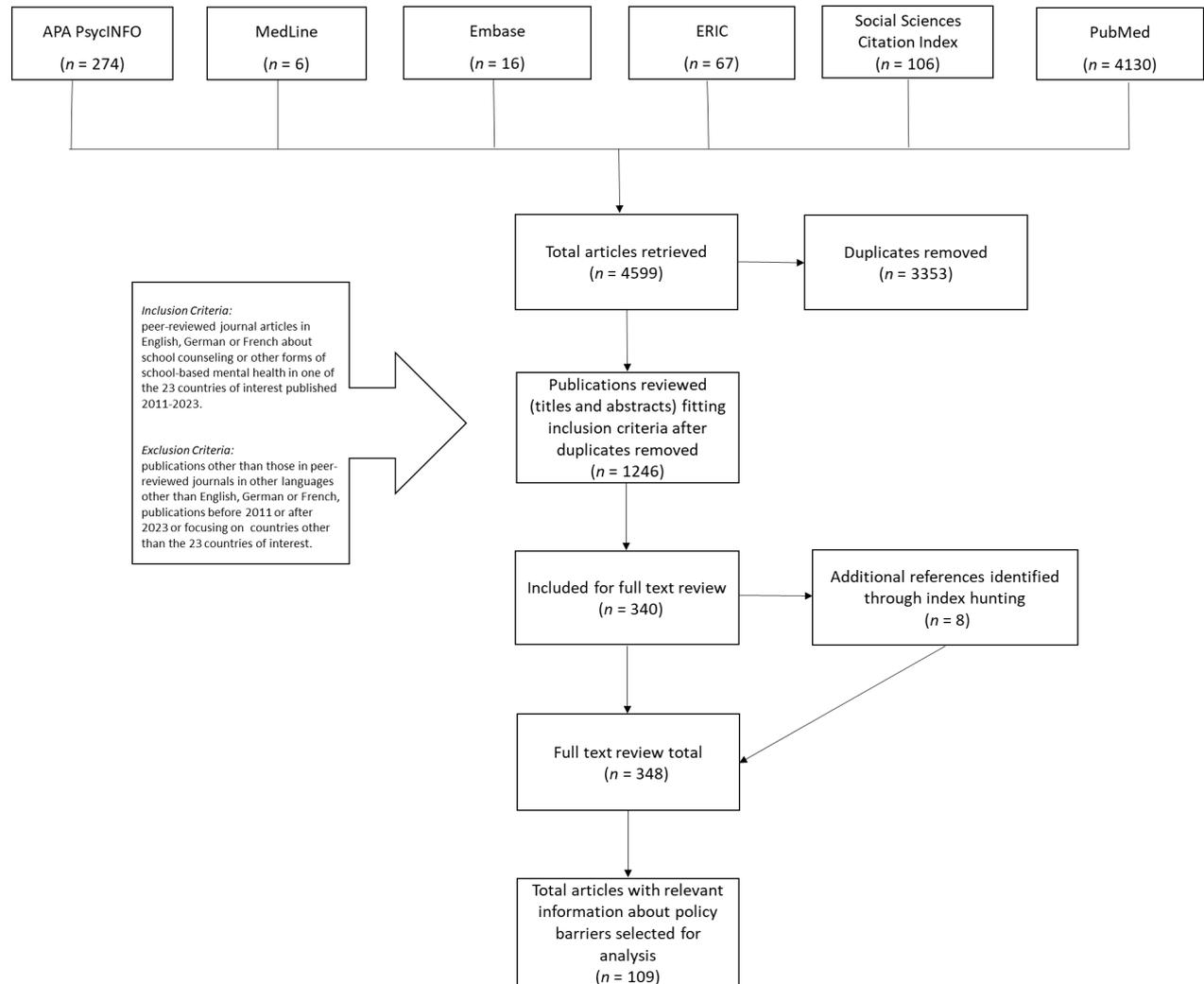
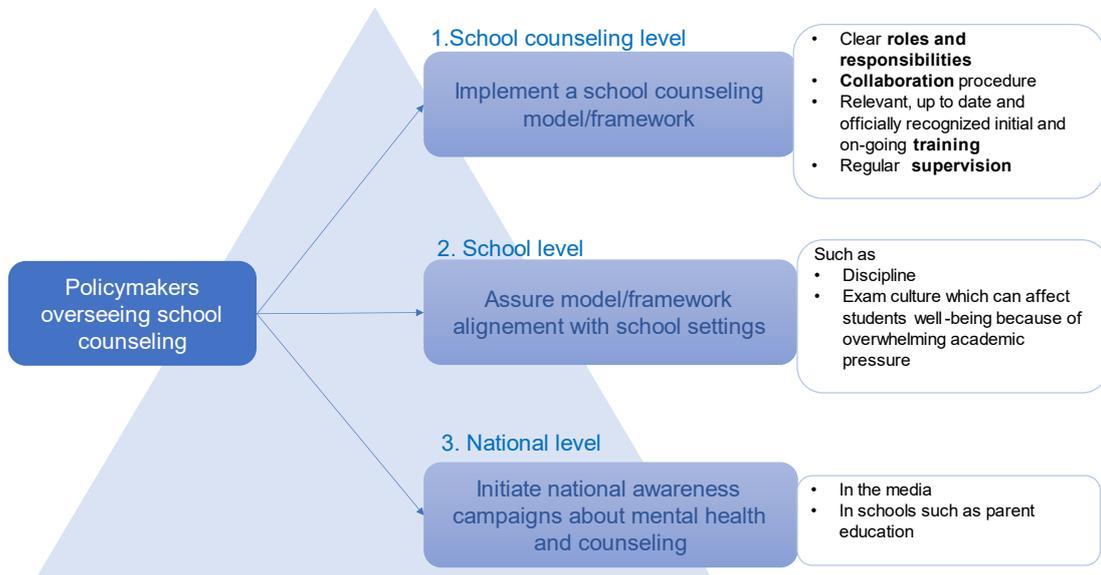


Figure 2

Model of recommended steps towards the improvement of school counselling services



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Appendices (Study I)

Appendix 1

Table A: String of search terms used for the literature review, search date 29.06.2023

Language	Keywords	APA Psychinfo (EBSCO)	MedLine (Ovid)	Embase (Ovid)	ERIC (ProQuest)	SSCI (Web of Science)	PubMed	TOTAL
English	("school counselor" OR "school counsellor" OR "school counseling" OR "school counselling" OR "school psychologist" OR "educational psychologist" OR "career guidance and counseling" OR "career guidance and counselling" OR "counselor educator" OR "counsellor educator" OR "school social worker") AND (East Asi* OR South Asia* OR South-East Asia* OR Afghanistan OR Bangladesh OR Bhutan OR Cambodia OR China OR “Hong Kong” OR India OR Indonesia OR Japan OR Korea OR Laos OR Malaysia OR Maldives OR	274	6	16	67	106	4130	4599

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Mongolia OR Myanmar OR Nepal
OR Pakistan OR Singapore OR "Sri
Lanka" OR Taiwan OR Thailand
OR Tibet OR Vietnam)

German	(Beratungslehr* OR Schulberat* OR Schulpsycholog* Schulseelsorg* OR Erziehungspsycholog* OR Bildungspsycholog*) AND (Bhutan OR Ostasien OR Südasian OR Südostasian OR Afghanistan OR Bangladesch OR Kambodscha OR China OR "Hong Kong" OR Indien OR Indonesien OR Japan OR Korea OR Laos OR Malaysia OR Malediven OR Mongolei OR Myanmar OR Nepal OR Pakistan OR Singapur OR Sri Lanka OR Taiwan OR Thailand OR Tibet OR Vietnam)	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
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Appendix 2

Table B: Coded studies and their characteristics and Taxonomy levers

	Year	Author	Title	Country or geographic region	Peer reviewed	School Counseling Type	Paper Type	Mentioned Levers	Citation
1	2011	Wang, L. F., Kwan, K. L. K., & Huang, S. F.	<i>Counseling Psychology Licensure in Taiwan Development, Challenges, and Opportunities</i>	Taiwan	yes	school counsellor	description	A1 A2 C1 D1 E1 I2	Wang, L. F., Kwan, K. L. K., & Huang, S. F. (2011). Counseling psychology licensure in Taiwan: Development, challenges, and opportunities. <i>International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling</i> , 33(1), 37-50.
2	2012	Garcia, J. A.	<i>Charting Directions for Counselor Education in the Philippines</i>	Philippines	no	school counsellor	description	A1 A2 A4 B4 E2 F5 F9 J	Garcia, J. A. (2012). Charting directions for counselor education in the Philippines. <i>Philippine Journal of Counseling Psychology</i> , 14(1), 119-141.

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3	2012	Kwok, D. K., Winter, S., & Yuen, M.	<i>Heterosexism in school the counselling experience of Chinese tongzhi students in Hong Kong</i>	Hong Kong	no	school counsellor	qual./interview of students	A4 J	Kwok, D. K., Winter, S., & Yuen, M. (2012). Heterosexism in school: the counselling experience of Chinese tongzhi students in Hong Kong. <i>British Journal of Guidance & Counselling</i> , 40(5), 561-575.
4	2012	Lee, S. M., Suh, S., Yang, E., & Jang, Y. J.	<i>History, Current Status, and Future Prospects of Counseling in South Korea</i>	South Korea	yes	school counsellor	description	A1 A2 A4 E1 E2 I1 I2	Lee, S. M., Suh, S., Yang, E., & Jang, Y. J. (2012). History, current status, and future prospects of counseling in South Korea. <i>Journal of Counseling & Development</i> , 90(4), 494-499.
5	2012	Pirta, R. S.	<i>Challenges for a school psychologist</i>	India	no	school psychologist	description	A4	Pirta, R. S. (2012). Challenges for a school psychologist. <i>Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology</i> , 38(1), 9-21.

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6	2012	Sun, V. J., & Yuen, M.	<i>Career guidance and counseling for university students in China</i>	China	yes	school guidance and vocation	description	C1 D1	Sun, V. J., & Yuen, M. (2012). Career guidance and counseling for university students in China. <i>International journal for the advancement of counselling</i> , 34(3), 202-210.
7	2012	Yuen, M., Lau, P. S., Lee, Q. A., Gysbers, N. C., Chan, R., Fong, R. W., ... & Shea, P. M.	<i>Factors influencing school connectedness Chinese adolescents' perspectives</i>	Hong Kong	no	school guidance and vocation	qual./interview of students	J	Yuen, M., Lau, P. S., Lee, Q. A., Gysbers, N. C., Chan, R., Fong, R. W., ... & Shea, P. M. (2012). Factors influencing school connectedness: Chinese adolescents' perspectives. <i>Asia Pacific Education Review</i> , 13(1), 55-63.
8	2013	Chui, W. H.	<i>School social work: Current practice and research.</i>	multiple or comparison	N/A	social worker	book	E1 E2	Chui, W. H. (2013). School social work: Current practice and research. Nova Publishers.
9	2013	Harris, B.	<i>Scoping report: International schoolbased counseling</i>	multiple or	N/A	school counsellor	review	F9	Harris, B. (2013). Scoping report: International

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				compariso n						schoolbased counseling.
10	2013	Kok, J. K.	<i>The role of the school counsellor in the Singapore secondary school system</i>	Singapore	yes	school counsellor	qual./interview of school counsellors	D1 D2 I1		Kok, J. K. (2013). The role of the school counsellor in the Singapore secondary school system. <i>British Journal of Guidance & Counselling</i> , 41(5), 530-543.
11	2013	Low, S. K., Kok, J. K., & Lee, M. N.	<i>A holistic approach to school'-based counselling and guidance services in Malaysia</i>	Malaysia	yes	school counsellor	mixed methods analysis with school counsellors	A1 A2 A4 B2 C1 C2 D1 E2 F2 F9 I1 I3		Low, S. K., Kok, J. K., & Lee, M. N. (2013). A holistic approach to school-based counselling and guidance services in Malaysia. <i>School Psychology International</i> , 34(2), 190-201.
12	2013	Luk-Fong, P. Y. Y.	<i>External conditions affecting a harmonious family': Lessons learned from a school-based parent education programme in Hong Kong</i>	Hong Kong	yes	school counsellor	description	A4		Luk-Fong, P. Y. Y. (2013). 'External conditions affecting a harmonious family': Lessons learned from a school-based parent education programme in Hong Kong. <i>School Psychology</i>

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									<i>International, 34(2), 166-176.</i>
13	2013	Mohd Daud, N. A., & Bond, T.	<i>Cultural values and attitudes towards guidance and counselling services in one secondary school in Malaysia: The role of a school cultural system</i>	Malaysia	yes	school counsellor	interviews and ethnographic observation of students	I1	Mohd Daud, N. A., & Bond, T. (2013). Cultural values and attitudes towards guidance and counselling services in one secondary school in Malaysia: The role of a school cultural system. <i>British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 41(5), 544-558.</i>
14	2013	Nguyen, D. T., Dedding, C., Pham, T. T., Wright, P., & Bunders, J.	<i>Depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among Vietnamese secondary school students and proposed solutions: a cross-sectional study.</i>	Vietnam	yes	school counsellor	survey of students	F6 I2	Nguyen, D. T., Dedding, C., Pham, T. T., Wright, P., & Bunders, J. (2013). Depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation among Vietnamese secondary school students and proposed solutions: a cross-sectional study. <i>BMC public health, 13(1), 1-10.</i>

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15	2013	Shin, H., Yuen, M., Lee, J., & Lee, S. M.	<i>Cross-cultural validation of the counselor burnout inventory in hong kong</i>	Hong Kong	yes	school counsellor	survey of school counsellors	E2 F9	Shin, H., Yuen, M., Lee, J., & Lee, S. M. (2013). Cross-cultural validation of the counselor burnout inventory in Hong Kong. <i>Journal of employment counseling</i> , 50(1), 14- 25.
16	2013	van Schalkwyk, G. J. V., & Sit, H. H.	<i>Evaluating school- based psychological and counselling services in Macao using a qualitative approach</i>	China	yes	counsellor	qual./intervi ew of school counsellors and school stakeholders	A1 A2 A4 B4 D1 D2 H1	Schalkwyk, G. J. V., & Sit, H. H. (2013). Evaluating school- based psychological and counselling services in Macao using a qualitative approach. <i>School Psychology International</i> , 34(2), 154-165.
17	2013	Yip, C. W.	<i>An examination of the role, challenges and needs of the Singapore school counselling service</i>	Singapore	N/A	school counsellor	PhD thesis: interview of school counsellors	A4 B4 D2 I1	Yip, C. W. (2013). An examination of the role, challenges and needs of the Singapore school counselling service (Doctoral dissertation, Monash University).

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18	2014	Akos, P., Jain, S., & Gurjar, S.	<i>School Counseling in India</i>	India	no	school counsellor	description	A1 A2 A4 C1 D1 E2 I1 I2 I3	Akos, P., Jain, S., & Gurjar, S. (2014). School Counseling in India. <i>Journal of Asia Pacific Counseling</i> , 4(2).
19	2014	Harris, B.	<i>Journal of Counselling in the Asia-Pacific region: Locating school counseling in the Asian- Pacific region in a global context.</i>	multiple or compariso n	no	school counsellor	review	A1 A2 A3 E2	Harris, B. (2014). Journal of Counselling in the Asia-Pacific region: Locating school counseling in the Asian-Pacific region in a global context. Brief reflections on a scoping review of school counseling internationally. <i>Journal of Asia Pacific Counseling</i> , 4(2), 217-245.
20	2014	Ishak, N. M., & Bakar, A. Y. A.	<i>Counseling services for Malaysian gifted students: An initial study</i>	Malaysia	yes	school counsellor	survey of students	A4 I1 I3	Ishak, N. M., & Bakar, A. Y. A. (2014). Counseling services for Malaysian gifted students: An initial study. <i>International Journal for the Advancement</i>

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										<i>of Counselling, 36(4), 372-383.</i>
21	2014	Ito, A.	<i>School counselor roles and challenges in Japan</i>	Japan	no	clinical psychologist counsellor	description	A1 A2 A4 C2 D2 E2 F6		Ito, A. (2014). School Counselor Roles and Challenges in Japan. <i>Journal of Asia Pacific Counseling, 4(2), 217 -246.</i>
22	2014	Shi, Q., Liu, X., & Leuwerke, W	<i>Students' Perceptions of School Counselors An Investigation of Two High Schools in Beijing, China</i>	China	yes	school counsellor	mixed methods analysis with students	A1 A2 A4 F9 I1 I3		Shi, Q., Liu, X., & Leuwerke, W. (2014). Students' Perceptions of School Counselors: An Investigation of Two High Schools in Beijing, China. <i>Professional Counselor, 4(5), 519-530.</i>
23	2014	Suh, S., Darch, E., Huffman, S., & Hansing, K.	<i>School counseling practice in the United States and its implications for Asia-Pacific countries</i>	multiple or comparison	no	school counsellor	description	A1 A2 B4 D1 E2 F9 G H1		Suh, S., Darch, E., Huffman, S., & Hansing, K. (2014). School counseling practice in the United States and its implications for Asia-Pacific countries. <i>Journal of Asia Pacific Counseling, 4(2), 131-145.</i>

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24	2014	van Schalkwyk, G. J.	<i>Perceptions of school-based child and family counseling in Macao</i>	China	no	school counsellor	qual./interview of school stakeholders and students	A1 A2 A4 B4 C2 D1 D2 E1 E2 F6 I1	Van Schalkwyk, G. J. (2014). Perceptions of school-based child and family counseling in Macao (SAR). <i>Journal of Asia Pacific Counseling</i> , 4(2), 147-158.
25	2014	Yeo, L. S., & Lee, B. O.	<i>School-Based Counseling in Singapore</i>	Singapore	no	school counsellor	description	A1 A4 B2 B4 C2 D1 D2 E2 F6 I1 I2	Yeo, L. S., & Lee, B. O. (2014). School-based counselling in Singapore. <i>Journal of Asian Pacific Counselling</i> , 4(2), 69-79.
26	2014	Yu, K., Suh, S., & Lee, S. M.	<i>Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis of school counseling in Korea</i>	South Korea	no	school counsellor	review	A1 A2 A4 D1 D2 E1 E3 F3 F9 F10 H1	Yu, K., Suh, S., & Lee, S. M. (2014). Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis of School Counseling in Korea. <i>Journal of Asia Pacific Counseling</i> , 4(2).
27	2014	Yuen, M., Chan, R. T., & Lee, B. S.	<i>Guidance and counseling in Hong Kong secondary schools</i>	Hong Kong	no	multiple	description	A4 B4 D2 G H1 H3 I2	Yuen, M., Chan, R. T., & Lee, B. S. (2014). Guidance and Counseling in Hong

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										Kong Secondary Schools. <i>Journal of Asia Pacific Counseling</i> , 4(2).
28	2015	Gunawan, N. E., & Wahab, R.	<i>Counseling in Indonesia History, Identity, Trends and Challenges</i>	Indonesia	no	school counsellor	description	A1 A2 A4 B4 C1 D1 D2 E1 F3 F9 H1 I1 J		Gunawan, N. E., & Wahab, R. (2015). Counseling in Indonesia: History, Identity, Trends and Challenges. In <i>Third 21st CAF Conference at Harvard, in Boston, USA</i> (Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 2330-1236).
29	2015	Guth, L. J., Lorelle, S., Hinkle, J. S., & Remley, T. P.	<i>Development and Implementation of an International Counseling Outreach Effort in Bhutan</i>	Bhutan	yes	school counsellor	description	C2 D1 F9 I1		Guth, L. J., Lorelle, S., Hinkle, J. S., & Remley, T. P. (2015). Development and implementation of an international counseling outreach effort in Bhutan: A group stage conceptualization. <i>The Journal for Specialists in Group Work</i> , 40(1), 22-37

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30	2015	Hohenshil, T. H., Amundson, N. E., & Niles, S. G.	<i>Counseling around the world: An international handbook</i>	multiple or comparison	N/A	multiple	book	A1 A4 B4 E2 F10 J	Hohenshil, T. H., Amundson, N. E., & Niles, S. G. (Eds.). (2015). <i>Counseling around the world: An international handbook</i> . John Wiley & Sons.
31	2015	Low, P. K.	<i>Stakeholders' Perceptions of School Counselling in Singapore</i>	Singapore	no	school counsellor	qual./interview of school counselors and school stakeholders	D1 D2 E2	Low, P. K. (2015). Stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling in Singapore. <i>Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools, 25</i> (2), 200-216.
32	2015	Tajan, N.	<i>Adolescents school non-attendance and the spread of psychological counselling in Japan</i>	Japan	yes	clinical psychologist counsellor	qual./interview of school counsellors	A1 A2 A4 D2 E2 F2 F3 F11	Tajan, N. (2015). Adolescents' school non-attendance and the spread of psychological counselling in Japan. <i>Asia Pacific Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy, 6</i> (1-2), 58-69.
33	2015	VanderGast, T. S., Foxx, T. S., Flowers,	<i>A Window into South Korean Culture Stress</i>	South Korea	no	school counsellor	survey of students	E1 E2	VanderGast, T. S., Foxx, S. P., Flowers,

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		S. P., Flowers, C., Rouse, A. T., & Decker, K. M.	<i>and Coping in Female High School Students</i>								C., Rouse, A. T., & Decker, K. M. (2015). A Window into South Korean Culture: Stress and Coping in Female High School Students. <i>Journal of School Counseling, 13</i> (13), n13.
34	2015	Venkatesan, S., & Shyam, H. R.	<i>Professional identity of school counselors in India</i>	India	no	school counsellor	mixed methods analysis with school stakeholders	A1 A2 C2 E1 E2 F2 F1 I1			Venkatesan, S., & Shyam, H. R. (2015). Professional identity of school counselors in India. <i>Journal of the Indian Academy of Applied Psychology, 41</i> (1), 25.
35	2015	Wang, C., Ni, H., Ding, Y., & Yi, C.	<i>Chinese teachers' perceptions of the roles and functions of school psychological service providers in Beijing</i>	China	yes	school psychologis t	qual./intervi ew of teachers	A1 A2 A4 B2 B4 D2 E2 F2 F3 F5 F9 I1 I2			Wang, C., Ni, H., Ding, Y., & Yi, C. (2015). Chinese teachers' perceptions of the roles and functions of school psychological service providers in Beijing. <i>School Psychology International, 36</i> (1), 77-93.

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36	2016	David, N.	<i>Classrooms and Counsellor Ethics: A Daily Balancing Act</i>	India	no	school counsellor	description	A1 A2 A4 B4 D1 D2 E2 J	David, N. (2016). <i>Classrooms and Counsellor Ethics: A Daily Balancing Act</i> . In <i>Ethical Issues in Counselling and Psychotherapy Practice</i> (pp. 73-86). Springer, Singapore.
37	2016	Tammana, S.	<i>The role of a school counsellor</i>	India	no	school counsellor	description	D1 I1 I2	Tammana, S. (2016). <i>The role of a school counsellor</i> . In <i>Counselling in India</i> (pp. 163-181). Springer, Singapore.
38	2017	Amat, M. I., Johari, K. S. K., & Shafie, A. A. H.	<i>School-based counseling in Malaysia as Southeast Asian country</i>	Malaysia	N/A	school counsellor	book / book chapter	A1 A2 A4 B2 B4 C1 D1 D2 E2 F9 F10 G H1 I1 J	Amat, M. I., Johari, K. S. K., & Shafie, A. A. H. (2017). <i>School-based counseling in Malaysia as Southeast Asian country</i> . In <i>International handbook for policy research on school-based counseling</i> (pp. 341-352). Springer, Cham.

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39	2017	Bagrodia, P., & Bhatia, S.	<i>Exploring perspectives on the hiring of school counsellors: From directive to direction</i>	India	yes	school counsellor	qual./interview of school counsellors and school principals	A1 A2 D1 D2 E2 F9 H1	Bagrodia, P., & Bhatia, S. (2017). Exploring perspectives on the hiring of school counsellors: From directive to direction. <i>Psychological Studies</i> , 62(4), 428-438.
40	2017	Basith, A., & Fitriyadi, S.	<i>Analysis of the implementation of guidance and counseling supervision at senior high schools</i>	Indonesia	no	school counsellor	qual./interview of school counsellors	B4	Basith, A., & Fitriyadi, S. (2017). Analysis of the implementation of guidance and counseling supervision at senior high schools. <i>Indonesian Journal of School Counseling</i> , 2(1), 8-13.
41	2017	Chen, K. S., & Kok, J. K.	<i>Barriers to seeking school counselling: Malaysian Chinese school students' perspectives</i>	Malaysia	yes	school counsellor	qual./survey of students	A1 A2 A4 B4 C2 D1 D2 E2 I1 I2 I3 J	Chen, K. S., & Kok, J. K. (2017). Barriers to seeking school counselling: Malaysian Chinese school students' perspectives. <i>Journal of psychologists and counsellors in</i>

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										<i>schools, 27(2), 222-238.</i>
42	2017	Kok, J. K., & Low, S. K.	<i>Proposing a collaborative approach for school counseling</i>	Malaysia	yes	school counsellor	mixed methods analysis of school counsellors	A4 C2 D1 D2 E2 H3 I1 I2 I3		Kok, J. K., & Low, S. K. (2017). Proposing a collaborative approach for school counseling. <i>International Journal of School & Educational Psychology, 5(4)</i> , 281-289.
43	2017	Lee, S. M., & Yang, N.	<i>School-based counseling policy, policy research, and implications: Findings from South Korea</i>	South Korea	N/A	school counsellor	book / book chapter	A1 A2 A4 B4 D1 D2 E2 G H1		Lee, S. M., & Yang, N. (2017). School-based counseling policy, policy research, and implications: Findings from South Korea. In <i>International handbook for policy research on school-based counseling</i> (pp. 305-314). Springer, Cham.
44	2017	Morshed, M. M.	<i>Policy and Practice of School-Based Counseling in</i>	Bangladesh	N/A	school counsellor	book / book chapter	A1 A2 A3 C1 D1 E1		Morshed, M. M. (2017). Policy and Practice of School-

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			<i>Bangladesh: Current Provisions and Future Directions</i>					E2 F5 F9 G H1 I1 I2 J	Based Counseling in Bangladesh: Current Provisions and Future Directions. In <i>International Handbook for Policy Research on School-Based Counseling</i> (pp. 327-339). Springer, Cham.
45	2017	Thomas, E., George, T. S., & Jain, S.	<i>Public policy, policy research, and school counseling in India</i>	India	N/A	school counsellor	book / book chapter	A1 A2 A4 D1 E1 E2 F2 F3 H1 J	Thomas, E., George, T. S., & Jain, S. (2017). Public policy, policy research, and school counseling in India. In <i>International Handbook for Policy Research on School-Based Counseling</i> (pp. 315-326). Springer, Cham.
46	2017	Yuan, R.	<i>Exploring pre-service school counselling teachers' learning needs: perceptions of teacher educators and student-teachers.</i>	Hong Kong	no	teacher counsellor	qual./interview of school counsellors and teachers	A4 B2 B4 F9 I1 I2 I3 J	Yuan, R. (2017). Exploring pre-service school counselling teachers' learning needs: perceptions of teacher educators and student-teachers. <i>Journal of Education</i>

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										<i>for Teaching, 43(4), 474-490.</i>
47	2017	Yuen, M., Lee, Q. A., Chan, R., & Kurihara, S.	<i>School-based counseling policy, policy research, and implications: Findings from Hong Kong and Japan</i>	multiple or compariso n	N/A	school counsellor	book / book chapter	A1 A2 A4 D1 D2 F2 G		Yuen, M., Lee, Q. A., Chan, R., & Kurihara, S. (2017). School- based counseling policy, policy research, and implications: Findings from Hong Kong and Japan. In <i>International handbook for policy research on school- based counseling</i> , Springer (pp. 279- 303). Springer, Cham.
48	2018	Dem, K., & Busch, R.	<i>Complexities of a Bhutanese school counselling community A critical narrative insight</i>	Bhutan	no	school counsellor	qual./intervi ew of school counsellors	A4 B4 E1 E2 I1 I2		Dem, K., & Busch, R. (2018). Complexities of a Bhutanese school counselling community: A critical narrative insight. <i>Australian Community Psychologist, 29(1),</i> 54-71.
49	2018	Lim, X. H. C., & Wong, P. Y.	<i>Interprofessional collaboration between social workers and</i>	Singapore	yes	school counsellor	qual./intervi ew of	C1 D1 D2 E1		Lim, X. H. C., & Wong, P. Y. (2018). Interprofessional

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			<i>school counsellors in tackling youth at-risk behaviour</i>				school counsellors		collaboration between social workers and school counsellors in tackling youth at-risk behaviour. <i>Asia Pacific Journal of Social Work and Development</i> , 28(4), 264-278.
50	2018	Liu, W., Yuan, R., & Zhang, H.	<i>An exploratory study of school counselling teachers motivation changes</i>	China	yes	teacher counsellor	case study interviews of 2 school counsellors	A4 J	Liu, W., Yuan, R., & Zhang, H. (2018). An exploratory study of school counselling teachers' motivation changes. <i>Journal of Education for Teaching</i> , 44(2), 237-240.
51	2018	Low, P. K. F.	<i>Stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling in Singapore: a mixed method study.</i>	Singapore	N/A	school counsellor	PhD thesis	D1 D2	Low, P. K. F. (2018). Stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling in Singapore: a mixed method study, (PhD Thesis), University of Southern Australia.
52	2018	Vaishnavi, J., & Kumar, A.	<i>Parental involvement in school counseling services: Challenges</i>	India	yes	school counsellor	qual interview of	A4 I1 I2	Vaishnavi, J., & Kumar, A. (2018). Parental involvement

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			<i>and experience of counselor</i>			school counsellors			in school counseling services: Challenges and experience of counselor. <i>Psychological Studies</i> , 63(4), 359-364.
53	2019	Fauzan, L.	<i>Professional Identity of Middle School Counsellors in East Java, Indonesia, and the Development Efforts</i>	Indonesia	yes	school counsellor	survey of school counsellors	E1 E2	Fauzan, L. (2019). Professional Identity of Middle School Counsellors in East Java, Indonesia, and the Development Efforts. <i>International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change</i> , 5(5), 60-72.
54	2019	Garcia, J. A. S.	<i>Mental Health-Related Concerns of Filipino Adolescents Selected Findings from Global School-Based Health Survey and Implications to School Counseling</i>	Philippines	no	school counsellor	survey of students	D1 D2	Garcia, J. A. S. (2019). Mental Health-Related Concerns of Filipino Adolescents: Selected Findings from Global School-Based Health Survey and Implications to School Counseling. <i>Philippine Journal of Counseling Psychology</i> , 21(1), 115-126.

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55	2019	Harrison, M. G.	<i>Relationship in context: Processes in school-based counselling in Hong Kong</i>	Hong Kong	yes	school counsellor	qual./interview of school counsellors and students	D2 E2 I1 I2 I3	Harrison, M. G. (2019). Relationship in context: Processes in school-based counselling in Hong Kong. <i>Counselling and Psychotherapy Research</i> , 19(4), 474-483.
56	2019	Liu, X., & Williams, A.	<i>Exploring how Chinese primary school psychological counsellors understand and use therapeutic stories</i>	China	yes	school counsellor	pre post investigation	A4 D1	Liu, X., & Williams, A. (2019). Exploring how Chinese primary school psychological counsellors understand and use therapeutic stories. <i>International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling</i> , 41(1), 137-154.
57	2019	Patwa, S. S., Peverly, S. T., Maykel, C., & Kapoor, V.	<i>Roles for school psychologists in the challenging Indian education landscape</i>	India	yes	school psychologist	description	A1 A2 C1 D1 I1	Patwa, S. S., Peverly, S. T., Maykel, C., & Kapoor, V. (2019). Roles for school psychologists in the challenging Indian education landscape. <i>International Journal of School & Educational</i>

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									<i>Psychology, 7(2), 94-101.</i>
58	2019	Tan, S. Y.	<i>Clinical group supervision experiences of Singapore school counsellors</i>	Singapore	yes	school counsellor	qual./interview of school counsellors	B4 E1	Tan, S. Y. (2019). Clinical group supervision experiences of Singapore school counsellors. <i>British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 47(4), 432-445.</i>
59	2019	Tran, L., Huynh, S. V., Dinh, H. D., & Giang, V. T.	<i>Improving the Self-Awareness Capacity of Secondary School Students by Forming a School Counseling Model Based on Student Capacity Development Orientation in Vietnam</i>	Vietnam	no	school counsellor	survey of students	D1	Tran, L., Huynh, S. V., Dinh, H. D., & Giang, V. T. (2019). Improving the Self-Awareness Capacity of Secondary School Students by Forming a School Counseling Model Based on Student Capacity Development Orientation in Vietnam. <i>Problems of Education in the 21st Century, 77(6), 722-733.</i>

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60	2019	Van, S. H., Thien, V. G., Tat, T. D., Tran, L., & Duc, H. D.	<i>The Stress Problems and the Needs for Stress Counseling of High School Students in Vietnam</i>	Vietnam	yes	school counsellor	survey of students	C2 D1	Van, S. H., Thien, V. G., Tat, T. D., Tran, L., & Duc, H. D. (2019). The Stress Problems and the Needs for Stress Counseling of High School Students in Vietnam. <i>European Journal of Educational Research</i> , 8(4), 1053-1061.
61	2019	Wong, L. P., & Yuen, M.	<i>Career guidance and counseling in secondary schools in Hong Kong A historical overview</i>	China	no	teacher counsellor	description	G J	Wong, L. P., & Yuen, M. (2019). Career guidance and counseling in secondary schools in Hong Kong: A historical overview. <i>Journal of Asia Pacific Counseling</i> , 9(1), 1-19.
62	2019	Yuan, R., Liu, W., & Lee, I.	<i>Confrontation, negotiation and agency: exploring the inner dynamics of student teacher identity transformation during teaching practicum</i>	China	yes	teacher counsellor	qual./intervi ew of school counsellors	B2 C2 D1 F9 I1 J	Yuan, R., Liu, W., & Lee, I. (2019). Confrontation, negotiation and agency: exploring the inner dynamics of student teacher identity

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									transformation during teaching practicum. <i>Teachers and Teaching</i> , 25(8), 972-993.
63	2019	Yuen, M., Yau, F. S., Tsui, J. Y., Shao, S. S., Tsang, J. C., & Lee, B. S.	<i>Career education and vocational training in Hong Kong Implications for school-based career counselling</i>	Hong Kong	yes	teacher counsellor	description	C2 J	Yuen, M., Yau, F. S., Tsui, J. Y., Shao, S. S., Tsang, J. C., & Lee, B. S. (2019). Career education and vocational training in Hong Kong: Implications for school-based career counselling. <i>International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling</i> , 41(3), 449-467.
64	2020	Aluede, O., Brady, B., Jin, Y. Y., Morshed, M. M., & Carey, J. C.	<i>Development of the taxonomy of policy levers to promote high quality school-based counseling: An initial test of its utility and comprehensiveness</i>	South Korea	yes	school counsellor	description	A1 B4 C1 E2 F8 G J	Aluede, O., Brady, B., Jin, Y. Y., Morshed, M. M., & Carey, J. C. (2020). Development of the taxonomy of policy levers to promote high quality school-based counseling: An initial test of its utility and comprehensiveness.

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										<i>Journal of School-Based Counseling Policy and Evaluation</i> , 2(2), 102-112.
65	2020	Chan, N. N., Ahrumugam, P., Scheithauer, H., Schultze-Krumbholz, A., & Ooi, P. B.	<i>A hermeneutic phenomenological study of students' and school counsellors' "lived experiences" of cyberbullying and bullying</i>	Malaysia	no	school counsellor	qual./interview of students and school counsellors	A4 C2 D1 D2 E2 I2 I3 J		Chan, N. N., Ahrumugam, P., Scheithauer, H., Schultze-Krumbholz, A., & Ooi, P. B. (2020). A hermeneutic phenomenological study of students' and school counsellors' "lived experiences" of cyberbullying and bullying. <i>Computers & Education</i> , 146, 103755.
66	2020	Darwin, M. R., Farozin, M., & Retnawati, H.	<i>What Career Guidance and Counseling Services Are Needed by Senior High School Students?</i>	Indonesia	no	school counsellor	qual./interviews of students	I2		Darwin, M. R., Farozin, M., & Retnawati, H. (2020). What Career Guidance and Counseling Services Are Needed by Senior High School Students?. <i>JPI (Jurnal Pendidikan</i>

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Indonesia), 9(4), 608-617.

67	2020	Giang, T. V., Tran, L., Huynh, V. S., Nguyen-Thi, M. L., & Nguyen-Thi, D. M.	<i>Vocational Orientation and the Need for Establishing Career Counselling Office in Vietnamese Schools</i>	Vietnam	no	school guidance and vocation	survey of students	C2 D1	Giang, T. V., Tran, L., Huynh, V. S., Nguyen-Thi, M. L., & Nguyen-Thi, D. M. (2020). Vocational Orientation and the Need for Establishing Career Counselling Office in Vietnamese Schools. <i>Journal of Technical Education and Training</i> , 12(2), 46-54.
68	2020	Harrison, M., & Lam, P.	<i>Understanding the perspectives of counsellors and clients in school-based counselling in Hong Kong. Expanding Horizons</i>	Hong Kong	no	school counsellor	qual./intervi ew of students and school counsellors	I1 I3	Harrison, M., & Lam, P. (2020). Understanding the perspectives of counsellors and clients in school-based counselling in Hong Kong. <i>Expanding Horizons in Health Communication: An Asian Perspective</i> , 47- 66. Singapore: Springer.

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69	2020	Ifdil, I., Hariko, R., Bariyyah, K., Zola, N., & Amalianita, B.	<i>Evaluation of the understanding of School Counselors on Individual Counseling Process in Indonesia</i>	Indonesia	no	school counsellor	survey of school counsellors	B2		Ifdil, I., Hariko, R., Bariyyah, K., Zola, N., & Amalianita, B. (2020). Evaluation of the understanding of School Counselors on Individual Counseling Process in Indonesia. <i>TEST Engineering & Management, 83,</i> 10352-10356.
70	2020	Nguyen-Thi, M. H., Huynh, V. S., Giang, T. V., & Bui, H. Q.	<i>Many Social Problems in Vietnam Stem from the Communication Problems among High School Students While No School Counseling Support Is Provided-- the Urgent Need of Forming School Counseling Model for Vietnamese High School Students</i>	Vietnam	no	school counsellor	qual./intervi ew of students and teachers	A1 A2 A4 B2 D1 I3		Nguyen-Thi, M. H., Huynh, V. S., Giang, T. V., & Bui, H. Q. (2020). Many Social Problems in Vietnam Stem from the Communication Problems among High School Students While No School Counseling Support Is Provided--the Urgent Need of Forming School Counseling Model for Vietnamese High School Students. <i>European Journal of Contemporary</i>

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									<i>Education, 9(1), 102-113.</i>
71	2020	Nishio, A., Kakimoto, M., Horita, R., & Yamamoto, M.	<i>Compulsory educational mental health support system in Japan</i>	Japan	yes	school counsellor	description	A4	Nishio, A., Kakimoto, M., Horita, R., & Yamamoto, M. (2020). Compulsory educational mental health support system in Japan. <i>Pediatrics International, 62(5), 529-534.</i>
72	2020	Pham, A. K., & Akos, P.	<i>Professional school counseling in Vietnam public schools</i>	Vietnam	no	school counsellor	description	A1 A2 A4 C1 C2 D1 D2 E2 F6 F9 G H1	Pham, A. K., & Akos, P. (2020). Professional School Counseling in Vietnam Public Schools. <i>Journal of Asia Pacific Counseling, 10(2), 37-49.</i>
73	2020	Suranata, K., Rangka, I. B., & Permana, A. A. J.	<i>The comparative effect of internet-based cognitive behavioral counseling versus face to face cognitive behavioral counseling in terms of student's resilience</i>	Indonesia	yes	school counsellor	pre post investigation	A4	Suranata, K., Rangka, I. B., & Permana, A. A. J. (2020). The comparative effect of internet-based cognitive behavioral counseling versus face to face cognitive

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										behavioral counseling in terms of student's resilience. <i>Cogent Psychology</i> , 7(1), 1751022
74	2020	Thomas, E., & Dey, A. M.	<i>Role of School Counselors and the Factors that Affect their Practice in India</i>	India	no	school counsellor	survey of school counsellors	A1 A4 C1 C2 E2 G H1 I1 J		Thomas, E., & Dey, A. M. (2020). Role of School Counselors and the Factors that Affect their Practice in India. <i>Journal of School-Based Counseling Policy and Evaluation</i> , 2(1), 22-28.
75	2020	Velavan, J.	<i>A family physician's journey in exploring sexual health perceptions and needs in a boarding school community</i>	India	yes	school counsellor	qual./interview of school counsellors and school stakeholders	A4 J		Velavan, J. (2020). A family physician's journey in exploring sexual health perceptions and needs in a boarding school community. <i>Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care</i> , 9(1), 395-401.
76	2020	Vyas, M.	<i>A Study of School Counselling and Strategies to Support</i>	India	no	school counsellor	survey of students and counselor	C1, D1, I1		Vyas, M. (2020) A Study of School Counselling and Strategies to Support

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			<i>Models of Mental Health in Students</i>				report analysis			<i>Models of Mental Health in Students, Journal of Critical Reviews, 7(19), 12494-12507.</i>
77	2021	Bustamam, N., Rosita, D., Asfaruddin, K., Yahya, M., & Zuliani, H.	<i>School Counsellor Needs for Competency Enhancement</i>	Indonesia	no	school counsellor	qual./interview of school counsellors	A4 D1 E2 F5 F9		Bustamam, N., Rosita, D., Asfaruddin, K., Yahya, M., & Zuliani, H. (2021, September). School Counsellor Needs for Competency Enhancement. In <i>2nd International Conference on Science, Technology, and Modern Society (ICSTMS 2020)</i> (pp. 491-494). Atlantis Press.
78	2021	Fan, C. H., Juang, Y. T., Hsing, C. P., Yang, N. J., & Wu, I.	<i>The development of school psychology in Taiwan: Status Quo and future directions</i>	Taiwan	yes	school psychologist	description	A1 A2 A4 B2 B4 D1 D2 E1 E2		Fan, C. H., Juang, Y. T., Hsing, C. P., Yang, N. J., & Wu, I. (2021). The development of school psychology in Taiwan: Status Quo and future directions. <i>Contemporary School</i>

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311-320.

79	2021	Fathoni, A., Muhibbin, A., Arifin, Z., Habiby, W. N., & Ismail, M. E.	<i>Implementation of guidance and counselling services to Muhammadiyah elementary schools, Surakarta, provincial central Java, Indonesia</i>	Indonesia	yes	school counsellor	description	B4 D1 F9 J	Fathoni, A., Muhibbin, A., Arifin, Z., Habiby, W. N., & Ismail, M. E. (2021). Implementation of guidance and counselling services to Muhammadiyah elementary schools, Surakarta, provincial central Java, Indonesia. <i>Kasetsart Journal of Social Sciences, 42(1), 177- 184.</i>
80	2021	Hardiansyah, A. R., Meitasari, A., Widiantaka, K. P. S. E., & Asrowi, A.	<i>A Critical Review of School Counseling Services in High School During Pandemic COVID-19.</i>	Indonesia	no	school counsellor	review	A4	Hardiansyah, A. R., Meitasari, A., Widiantaka, K. P. S. E., & Asrowi, A. (2021, September). A Critical Review of School Counseling Services in High School During Pandemic COVID-19. In Proceedings of the 5th International

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									Conference on Learning Innovation and Quality Education (pp. 1-5).
81	2021	Harrison, M.	<i>School Counselling in an Asian Cultural Context: Insights from Hong Kong and the Asia-Pacific Region</i>	multiple or comparison	N/A	school counsellor	book / book chapter	F01 I1 I3	Harrison, M. (2021). <i>School Counselling in an Asian Cultural Context: Insights from Hong Kong and the Asia-Pacific Region</i> . Routledge.
82	2021	Harrison, M. G., Tam, C. K. Y., & Yeung, S. S.	<i>Counselling support for the mental health of children in Hong Kong's international schools during the COVID-19 pandemic: parents' perspectives</i>	Hong Kong	yes	school counsellor	qual./interviews of parents	D1 D2 E1 E2 H3	Harrison, M. G., Tam, C. K. Y., & Yeung, S. S. (2021). <i>Counselling support for the mental health of children in Hong Kong's international schools during the COVID-19 pandemic: parents' perspectives</i> . <i>Educational and Developmental Psychologist</i> , 1-12.
83	2021	Huynh, V. S., & Giang, T. V.	<i>The competency-based school counseling model in high schools: A Vietnamese case</i>	Vietnam	no	school counselor counsellor	pre post investigation	A1 A2 C2 D1 D2 F5 F9 F10 G I2 J	Huynh, V. S., & Giang, T. V. (2021). <i>The competency-based school counseling model in</i>

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									high schools: A Vietnamese case. <i>Children and Youth Services Review</i> , 120, 105713.
84	2021	Sadana, A., & Kumar, A	<i>Exploring novice Indian school counsellors' experiences collaborating with teachers and administrators</i>	India	yes	school counsellor	qual./interview of school counsellors	A4 B4 C2 D1 D2 E2 H3 I1 I2 J	Sadana, A., & Kumar, A. (2021). Exploring novice Indian school counsellors' experiences collaborating with teachers and administrators. <i>Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools</i> , 1-15.
85	2021	Zainudin, Z. N., Hassan, S. A., Ahmad, N. A., Yusop, Y. M., Othman, W. N. W., & Alias, B. S.	<i>A Comparison of a Client's Satisfaction between Online and Face-to-face Counselling in a School Setting</i>	Malaysia	no	school counsellor	survey of students	A4 C2 D1 I1 I2	Zainudin, Z. N., Hassan, S. A., Ahmad, N. A., Yusop, Y. M., Othman, W. N. W., & Alias, B. S. (2021). A Comparison of a Client's Satisfaction between Online and Face-to-face Counselling in a School Setting. <i>Pertanika Journal of Social Sciences &</i>

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Humanities, 29, 135-153.

86	2022	Awalya, A., Nusantara, B. A., Khiyarusoleh, U., Lestari, I., & Gumelar, F. A.	The School Support to the Implementation of Counseling Services during COVID-19 Pandemic at Public Vocational Schools in Semarang City.	Indonesia	no	counsellor teachers	survey of counselor teachers	A4	Awalya, A., Nusantara, B. A., Khiyarusoleh, U., Lestari, I., & Gumelar, F. A. (2022). The School Support to the Implementation of Counseling Services during COVID-19 Pandemic at Public Vocational Schools in Semarang City. <i>Jurnal Bimbingan Konseling, 11(4), 281-286.</i>
87	2022	Bali-Mahomed, N. J., Ku-Johari, K. S., Mahmud, M. I., Amat, S., & Saadon, S.	Psychological Well-Being of School Counsellors Model	Malaysia	no	school counsellor	survey of school counsellors	A4	Bali-Mahomed, N. J., Ku-Johari, K. S., Mahmud, M. I., Amat, S., & Saadon, S. (2022). Psychological Well-Being of School Counsellors Model. <i>European Journal of Educational Research, 11(2), 621-638.</i>

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88	2022	Dizon, M. A. A. D., & Chavez, M. L. L.	Circumstances to Contribution: A Phenomenological Study on School Counseling Site Supervision in the Philippines	Philippines	yes	school counsellor	qual./interview of school counsellors	B4	Dizon, M. A. A. D., & Chavez, M. L. L. (2022). Circumstances to Contribution: A Phenomenological Study on School Counseling Site Supervision in the Philippines. <i>Philippine Social Science Journal</i> , 5(2), 105-117.
89	2022	Hafiz, M., & Chong, W. H.	An elicitation study to identify students' salient beliefs towards school counselling	Singapore	yes	school counsellor	qual./interview of students	D2 I1 I2 I3	Hafiz, M., & Chong, W. H. (2022). An elicitation study to identify students' salient beliefs towards school counselling. <i>Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools</i> , 1-15.
90	2022	Harrison, M. G.	The professional identity of school counsellors in East and Southeast Asia	multiple or comparison	yes	school counsellor	description	C1 D1 E1 E2 H1 J	Harrison, M. G. (2022). The professional identity of school counsellors in East and Southeast Asia. <i>Counselling and Psychotherapy</i>

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Research, 22(3), 543-547.

91	2022	Harrison, M. G., Wai, F., & Cheung, J. K.	The experiences of school counsellors in Hong Kong: implications for policy innovation	Hong Kong	yes	school counsellor	mixed methods analysis of school counsellors	A1 A2 A4 B2 B4 C1 C2 D1 D2 E1 E2 F6 F9 F10 H3 I1 I3	Harrison, M. G., Wai, F., & Cheung, J. K. (2022). The experiences of school counsellors in Hong Kong: implications for policy innovation. <i>British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 50(6), 847-864.</i>
92	2022	Jayawardena, H. K. H., & Gamage, G. P.	Exploring challenges in mental health service provisions for school-going adolescents in Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	yes	school counsellor	qual./interview of school counsellors	A4 C2 D1 E1 E2 I1 I2 I3	Jayawardena, H. K. H., & Gamage, G. P. (2022). Exploring challenges in mental health service provisions for school-going adolescents in Sri Lanka. <i>School Psychology International, 43(1), 18-37.</i>

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93	2022	Jo, H., Kim, N., & Yoon, E.	Introducing Korean adolescent counselling systems: implications for future directions	South Korea	yes	school counsellor	description	D1 D2	Jo, H., Kim, N., & Yoon, E. (2022). Introducing Korean adolescent counselling systems: implications for future directions. <i>Counselling and Psychotherapy Research, 22</i> (1), 74-82.
94	2022	Lee, P. S., & Sung, Y. H.	Using a Delphi technique to build a competency framework for full-time counselling teachers in Taiwan	Taiwan	yes	teacher counsellor	qual./interview of experts	A4 D2 E1 E2	Lee, P. S., & Sung, Y. H. (2022). Using a Delphi technique to build a competency framework for full-time counselling teachers in Taiwan. <i>British Journal of Guidance & Counselling, 50</i> (6), 818-833.
95	2022	Nam, B., Kim, J. Y., Bright, C. L., & Jang, D.	Exposure to family violence, peer attachment, and adolescent-to-parent violence	South Korea	yes	school counsellor	survey of students	F9	Nam, B., Kim, J. Y., Bright, C. L., & Jang, D. (2022). Exposure to family violence, peer attachment, and adolescent-to-parent violence. <i>Journal of Interpersonal</i>

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Violence, 37(7-8), NP4718-NP4739.

96	2022	Pedroso, J. E., Siason, A., Ortizo-Roces, C., & Basbas, J	Implementation of guidance and counseling services during the COVID-19 Pandemic.	Philippines	yes	school guidance and vocation	qual./interview of school counsellors	A4 C2	Pedroso, J. E., Siason, A., Ortizo-Roces, C., & Basbas, J. (2022). Implementation of guidance and counseling services during the COVID-19 Pandemic. <i>ISSRA Journal of Education, Linguistics and Literature, 2(1), 1-12.</i>
97	2022	Saputra, A., & Fauzi, M.	Management of Counselling Services and Digitalization of Early Detection Mental Health Disorders Reducing High Risk in Education.	Indonesia	no	school counsellor	survey of students	I1	Saputra, A., & Fauzi, M. (2022, December). Management of Counselling Services and Digitalization of Early Detection Mental Health Disorders Reducing High Risk in Education. In 4th Asia Pacific Management Research Conference (APMRC 2022) (pp.

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 250-258). Atlantis Press.

98	2022	Setiowati, A., & Nuryanto, I. L.	Identification of Guidance and Counseling Service Needs for Elementary School.	Indonesia	yes	school guidance and vocation	survey of teachers	D2	Setiowati, A., & Nuryanto, I. L. (2022, April). Identification of Guidance and Counseling Service Needs for Elementary School. In International Seminar on Innovative and Creative Guidance and Counseling Service (ICGCS 2021) (pp. 42-45). Atlantis Press.
99	2022	Udayakumari, L. H. P.	Need for Guidance and Counseling Training for Teachers in Sri Lanka: A Study Based on the B.Ed. Undergraduates at the University of Vocational Technology	Sri Lanka	no	teacher counsellor	survey of teachers	A4 D2	Udayakumari, L. H. P. (2022) Need for Guidance and Counseling Training for Teachers in Sri Lanka: A Study Based on the B. Ed. Undergraduates at the University of Vocational Technology.

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100	2023	Choudhury, T., & Choudhury, R.	Digital experiences of children and adolescents in India: New challenges for school counsellors.	India	yes	school counsellor	survey of school counsellors	A1 A4 D1 D2 F2 F9 H1 J	Choudhury, T., & Choudhury, R. (2023). Digital experiences of children and adolescents in India: New challenges for school counsellors. <i>Psychology in the Schools, 60</i> (4), 1094-1106.
101	2023	Granello, D. H., & Gunawan, N.	Strengthening the Identity of the Counselling Profession in Indonesia.	Indonesia	no	school counsellor	description	A4 D1 D2 F3 F9 G J	Granello, D. H., & Gunawan, N. (2023). Strengthening the Identity of the Counselling Profession in Indonesia. <i>International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 45</i> , 1-17.
102	2023	Harrison, M. G.	School Counselling in Hong Kong: a Profession in Need of an Identity	Hong Kong	yes	school counsellor	description	A1 A2 A4 B4 C1 D1 D2 E1 E2 F5 F6 F9 H1 H3 I1 I2	Harrison, M. G. (2023). School Counselling in Hong Kong: a Profession in Need of an Identity. <i>International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling, 45</i> (1), 138-154.

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103	2023	Harrison, M. G., King, R. B., & Hocson, S. M. G.	The roles of school counsellors in the Philippines: Challenges and opportunities	Philippines	yes	school counsellor	qual./interview school counsellors	C2 D1 D2 E2 F9 F10 I1 I2 I3 J	Harrison, M. G., King, R. B., & Hocson, S. M. G. (2023). The roles of school counsellors in the Philippines: Challenges and opportunities. <i>Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools</i> , 1-14.
104	2023	Hong, S., Lee, T., Ko, H., Kang, J., Jang, G. E., & Lee, S. M.	Novice school counselors' countertransference management on emotional exhaustion: The role of daily emotional processes	South Korea	yes	school counsellor	survey of school counsellors	A4 B4 D1 D2 E2	Hong, S., Lee, T., Ko, H., Kang, J., Jang, G. E., & Lee, S. M. (2023). Novice school counselors' countertransference management on emotional exhaustion: The role of daily emotional processes. <i>Journal of Counseling & Development</i> . 101, 334-345.
105	2023	Lestari, E.	Factors Causing Mis Functional Teacher Guidance Counseling in Schools	Indonesia	no	school guidance and vocation	review	D1 D2 E2	Lestari, E. (2023). Factors Causing Mis Functional Teacher Guidance Counseling in Schools. <i>Edumaspul: Jurnal</i>

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Pendidikan, 7(1), 167-173.

106	2023	Luz, M. K. V.	The Challenge of Accessibility and Inaccessibility of Guidance and Counseling Services in Schools based on Recent Studies: Improving Accessibility	Philippines	no	school guidance and vocation	review	F9 I1 I2 I3	Luz, M. K. V. (2023). The Challenge of Accessibility and Inaccessibility of Guidance and Counseling Services in Schools based on Recent Studies: Improving Accessibility. <i>European Journal of Education and Pedagogy</i> , 4(2), 168-171.
107	2023	Rizkana, N. A., Sulaeman, S. F., Buamana, V. L., & Herdi, H.	Students' Perceptions and Satisfaction Analysis Towards Online Guidance and Counseling Services During Covid-19 Pandemic.	Indonesia	no	school guidance and vocation	survey of students	A4	Rizkana, N. A., Sulaeman, S. F., Buamana, V. L., & Herdi, H. (2023). Students' Perceptions and Satisfaction Analysis Towards Online Guidance and Counseling Services During Covid-19 Pandemic. <i>Jurnal</i>

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									<i>Pendidikan: Teori, Penelitian, dan Pengembangan</i> , 8(4), 232-237.
108	2023	Sitinjak, C., & Canu, Z.	The Importance of Guidance and Counseling In Effective School Learning.	Indonesia	no	school guidance and vocation	qual./interview	G	Sitinjak, C., & Canu, Z. (2023). The Importance of Guidance and Counseling In Effective School Learning. <i>Jurnal Ilmiah Global Education</i> , 4(1), 12-19.
109	2023	Yi, H. J., Shin, Y. J., Min, Y., Jeong, J., Jung, J., & Kang, Y.	Perception and Experience of Sexual and Gender Minority Korean Youth in School Counseling.	South Korea	no	school counsellor	qual./interview of former students	A4 B4 D1 D2 F5 F9 J	Yi, H. J., Shin, Y. J., Min, Y., Jeong, J., Jung, J., & Kang, Y. (2023). Perception and Experience of Sexual and Gender Minority Korean Youth in School Counseling. <i>International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling</i> , 45(2), 189-209.

Appendix B: Study II

Larran, J., & Hein, S. (2024). *A survey study of Bhutanese school guidance counselors' roles, responsibilities, challenges, and resources* [Unpublished manuscript]. Department of Education and Psychology, Division Elementary Education, Freie Universität Berlin

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A survey study of Bhutanese school guidance counselors' roles, responsibilities, challenges,
and resources

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [SH], upon request.

Ethics Statement

In accordance with the journal Psychology in the School's policy and ethical obligations as a researcher, all authors report no financial, institutional, or other competing interests that may affect the research reported in the enclosed paper. This study was approved by the ethics committee of the Department of Psychology and Education, Free University of Berlin, supported by the Bhutanese Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) and performed in accordance with the ethical standards as laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the start of the study procedure.

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Abstract

This study explores the young profession of school guidance counseling in Bhutan. It investigated Bhutanese school guidance counselors' demographic characteristics, activities, roles, and responsibilities. The characteristics were assessed using quantitative survey measures, including the International Survey of School Counseling Activities (ISSCA). We further investigated their self-reported challenges and resources using open-ended questions analyzed using content analysis and the analysis of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT). Finally, we examined differences between the views of school guidance counselors in Bhutan and those of Bhutanese school stakeholders (school teachers and principals). Responses were obtained from 162 (90.5%) of the 179 school guidance counselors currently active in Bhutan, 49 school teachers, and 16 school principals. The ISSCA results revealed that Bhutanese school guidance counselors, on average, rated the appropriateness of school guidance counseling activities higher compared to their school principal and school teacher colleagues but rated the activities of dealing with discipline cases and taking on administrative duties lower. The SWOT analysis further shed light on their challenges and resources, including the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic. The discussion of results, interpreted using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) suggests that Bhutan's school guidance counseling profession needs more clearly defined roles, more time to establish itself, more initiatives to overcome stigma towards counseling, more material resources such as a counseling room and that schools make sure there is sufficient time and opportunities for students to see the school guidance counselor.

Keywords: school counseling, student mental health, Bhutan, COVID-19, ecological systems theory, survey

Practitioner Points

1. In Bhutan, school guidance counseling services require nationwide advocacy and awareness initiatives to overcome the stigma associated with counseling and mental health.

2. Bhutanese school guidance counselors' roles and responsibilities should be more clearly defined, and counselors should be provided with material resources, such as a counseling room and continuous professional development opportunities to carry out their work more efficiently.

3. School guidance counselors everywhere should advocate for research investigating their challenges and resources so these may be better understood and acted upon.

Introduction and Background

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a Buddhist country in the Himalayas with a population of just over 782,455 (The World Bank, 2022). Long secluded from the global stage, the Kingdom quickly opened up to the rest of the world in the 1990s, then joined the United Nations and allowed TV, radio, and internet into the country (Ura, 2015; Wangchhuk, 2008). Its traditional, monastic education system also underwent a reform in 1961, during which “Western-styled,” (Schuelka & Maxwell, 2016, p. 39) free, universal education with English as the language of instruction was introduced (Wangchhuk, 2008). Today, the mandatory Bhutanese school system consists of seven years of primary school starting at six years of age, followed by six years of secondary school. This then culminates in national end-of-school exams, namely the Bhutan Certificate of Secondary Education (BCSE), after which students can enter tertiary education such as a technical college, vocational college, or university (Schuelka & Maxwell, 2016). According to the most recent data from the Annual Education Statistics from 2023, 526 schools were registered in Bhutan, with 168,092 enrolled students representing over 20% of Bhutan’s population. In addition, according to the Bhutan Living Standard Survey of 2022, 30.3% of the population lived in an urban area and 69.7% in a rural area (National Statistics Bureau, 2022). Moreover, to facilitate school access for all children in the mountainous Himalayan country, many students who live in very remote, rural regions attend boarding schools (Lester et al., 2020; Ministry of Education, 2022; Schuelka & Maxwell, 2016).

The recent modernization of the Kingdom has confronted its citizens with sudden economic, political, and social changes, which significantly affect children and youth (Gross National Happiness Commission GNHC, 2017; Wangchhuk, 2008). A rapidly changing family structure from the traditional joint family to the nuclear family system (Phuntsho,

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2017), academic pressure (Pelden, 2016), bullying in schools (UNICEF Bhutan, 2016), and youth unemployment (Harrison, 2021; Lester et al., 2020; Norbu, 2021) are some of the challenges that Bhutanese children and youth face. Furthermore, rises in school dropout rates (Rapten, 2014), anxiety and depression (Ministry of Health, 2019), substance use (Lorelle & Guth, 2013), and suicidal behavior among school students (Chaudhuri et al., 2021; Dema et al., 2019; Pelden, 2016) have been observed. For instance, the 2016 WHO Global School-based Student Health Survey of 7,576 Bhutanese secondary school students aged 13 to 17 years old from 50 schools further found that 28.3% of males and 5.3% of female respondents had used cannabis one or more times in their lifetime and 33.4% of male students and 16.1% of female students reported that they currently drank alcohol. These rates are concerning as they are considerably higher than in Bangladesh, India, Indonesia, the Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand (Ministry of Health, 2017). For comparison, these rates are much higher than in Nepal, where 5% of male and 2.5% of female students reported ever using cannabis, and 6.7% of male and 3.6% of female students reported current use of alcohol despite more effortless access to substances (Ministry of Health, 2017). These issues were likely further exacerbated by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting strict, nationwide lockdowns (Tamang & Dorji, 2021). While there is currently little research on the psychological impact of these measures, the National COVID Mental Health Team's helplines reported receiving a majority of its calls from adolescents over issues such as anxiety, depression, and substance use during lockdowns (Namgyel & Milbert, 2021). Furthermore, the mental health sector in Bhutan is relatively new, with the first psychiatrist introduced in 1998 and the first psychiatric ward established in 2003 (Calabrese & Dorji, 2014). Today, there are still few practicing mental health professionals in the Kingdom (Nirola et al., 2015; Sacra, 2017).

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In response to these concerns, the Kingdom of Bhutan established the professions of clinical counseling, substance abuse counseling, and school counseling, henceforth referred to as school guidance counseling, as that is the official title of school counselors in Bhutan. In 2011, the first 12 full-time school guidance counselors – school teachers trained in counseling – assumed their positions (Dem & Busch, 2018; Lester, 2015). In 2018, 119 full-time school guidance counselors worked nationwide with new graduates entering the workforce yearly (personal communication with N. Gyeltshen of the Ministry of Education (MoE) 01.01.2021).

School Guidance Counseling Research in Bhutan

There are only a few studies available specifically on school guidance counseling in Bhutan. The only qualitative study available by Dem and Busch (2018) highlights the challenges reported by four first-generation Bhutanese school guidance counselors. These include skepticism and a need for more support from school stakeholders, including teachers and principals. According to the four respondents, their colleagues view school guidance counseling services as mere advice giving or a disciplinary measure while having high expectations about counseling, such as providing immediate solutions to students' issues and expecting school guidance counselors to take on teaching or administrative roles. However, research suggests that the support of teachers and principals is essential for implementing school counseling (Reiner et al., 2009; Ruiz et al., 2018). A second challenge revealed by the study is burnout due to role confusion, high workload, insufficient preparation, and lack of support mechanisms such as adequate supervision. Finally, the school guidance counselors also mentioned students refusing to go to the school guidance counselor because of a lack of trust or stigma towards school guidance counseling, such as the belief that counseling is only for students with problems. All of the above were reported by school guidance counselors to

negatively impact their work performance and make them feel isolated (Dem & Busch, 2018). In addition, in an interview study of school teachers by Jamtsho (2017), four teachers with school guidance training reported that their school colleagues did not support them or understand the preventive value of school guidance counseling services and saw school guidance counseling as a form of discipline. More efforts are needed to further investigate the school guidance counseling profession, such as the challenges and resources of school guidance counselors, including their school guidance counseling roles and responsibilities, a field gaining international attention.

School Counseling Roles and Responsibilities

The school counseling profession started over 100 years ago and is now present worldwide in nearly 90 countries (Harris, 2013). There is still much debate about school counselors' specific roles and responsibilities. Adding to this complexity, global school counseling research indicates that their roles and responsibilities are rapidly changing and evolving (Bain, 2012; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Because of growing interest in school counseling research on the global stage, the International Society for Policy Research and Evaluation in School-Based Counseling (ISPRES) developed the International Survey of School Counselor's Activities (ISSCA) (Carey et al., 2020) to guide international school counseling research. The ISSCA consists of 42 school counseling activities, which respondents rate on appropriateness (1 = "very inappropriate" to 4 = "very appropriate") and whether these activities are implemented or not ("yes" or "no").

When carrying out the ISSCA, it is possible to use this measure to group its items into specific underlying dimensions after data collection. For instance, in a study by Fan and colleagues (2019) with 390 school counselors in the United States, factor analysis of school guidance counselors' ratings of the appropriateness of these 42 activities revealed that these

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could be grouped under six dimensions, namely “Leadership Program Management and Evaluation,” “Indirect Services With Parents and Teachers,” “Individual and Group Counseling with Students,” “Prevention Work,” “College and Career Counseling with Students,” and “Administrator Role.”

However, in a subsequent study by Carey and colleagues (2020) that compared the ISSCA data of 2913 school counselors from 10 countries (China, Costa Rica, Kenya, India, Malta, Nigeria, South Korea, Turkey, USA, and Venezuela), factor analysis revealed that the activities could be grouped into five dimensions. Similar to the model with six dimensions, these included “Counseling Services” (regrouping the dimensions “Indirect Services With Parents and Teachers” and “Individual and Group Counseling with Students” of the Fan and colleagues (2019) study), “Prevention Programs” (corresponding to “Prevention Work”), “Educational and Career Planning” (corresponding to “College and Career Counseling”), “Advocacy and Systemic Improvement” (corresponding to some items under “Leadership Program Management and Evaluation”) and again the dimension “Administrator Role” (unchanged).

Little is currently known about Bhutanese school guidance counselor’s roles and responsibilities. Shortly after implementing its first school guidance counselors under the guidance of practitioners and counseling professionals from the United States (Lorelle & Guth, 2013), the MoE published a Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010), which is partially influenced by the national school counseling guidelines of the United States, namely the then available version of the American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (ASCA, 2003) today currently in its fourth edition (ASCA, 2019a). This model provides definitions, principles, roles, practices, and tasks specific to school counselors, in contrast to other school staff, and a code of ethics.

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According to it, a school counselor is a member of the school team who helps students with their “personal, social, academic, and career development” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 4) through different means, such as individual and group counseling, and school-based interventions, such as anti-bullying programs. The specific role of the school counselor is to collaborate with other school stakeholders to “develop, implement and review student support programs and provide services and support to schools in the areas of student wellbeing, behavior management, mental health, disability, student learning and motivation, and emergency management and child protection” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 14). Specific tasks defined by the Bhutanese framework include “Program Development and Evaluation,” “Counseling and Consultation,” “Student Appraisal,” “Academic Advice and Career Education,” “Referrals and Follow-up,” and “Professional Responsibilities and Development.” However, to our knowledge, no systematic and generalizable research has looked into Bhutanese school guidance counselors’ roles and responsibilities. Thus, the present study sought to address the above-seen research gaps. Namely, it sought to investigate Bhutanese school guidance counselor’s work, including their perceived challenges and resources and their roles and responsibilities.

Theoretical Framework

Because of the inherent interdependence of multi-level factors affecting school guidance counseling (as is evident from Bhutan’s counseling framework), this investigation was guided by Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (EST) (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).

Bronfenbrenner’s EST is a model that perceives humans as entities developing within a dynamic ecological context (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). The individual human is at the center, embedded in the microsystem or immediate environment; the Mesosystem is the interaction between the microsystems; the exosystem describes events and situations that

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affect the individual and are beyond their control; the macrosystem includes factors at the broadest levels of society, such as culture and social norms (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Later versions of the model also include a time factor, or chronosystem, viewed as an essential additional component influencing how people and environments change over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1995). Guided by Bronfenbrenner's EST, the aim was to sort the obtained data, namely specific challenges and resources, into the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem for a structured and logical presentation of the study results.

The Present Study

While the first Bhutanese school guidance counselors were implemented over 10 years ago, little information is currently available about them. That is why the present study investigated Bhutanese school guidance counselors' demographic information, daily activities, roles, and responsibilities, which were assessed using the ISSCA, and their perceived challenges and resources, which were assessed using open-ended questions. To investigate potential role confusion, their views on roles and responsibilities were compared to those of school stakeholders, namely, school teachers and school principals.

This study sought to answer the following overarching question: What are the demographics, daily activities, roles and responsibilities, and challenges and resources perceived by Bhutanese school guidance counselors and their colleagues according to a large-scale survey? This was broken down into five research questions, and two corresponding hypotheses were formulated where available literature allowed. First, what is the demographic profile of Bhutanese school guidance counselors (e.g., gender, age, location, training experience, student age, and school level), and what are their typical daily activities (research question 1, RQ1)? Second, which roles and responsibilities do school guidance

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counselors engage in, and which ones do they perceive as appropriate as assessed by the ISSCA (RQ2)? Based on the Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010) and ISSCA research in other countries, it was hypothesized that Bhutanese school guidance counselors' ratings of the appropriateness of administrative activities would be significantly lower than ratings on all other dimensions (H1). Third, do ISSCA scores significantly differ according to gender, age, type of school, region (rural or urban), and years of counseling experience (RQ3)? As such differences have not been systematically investigated in previous research using the ISSCA, no specific differences were predicted. Fourth, what are school stakeholders' (school teachers and principals) views of appropriate school guidance counselor roles and responsibilities, and how do these views compare to those of school guidance counselors (RQ4)? In the study by Dem and Busch (2018), it was reported that school stakeholders view counseling services as a disciplinary measure or a form of advice-giving that offers immediate solutions to students' issues while also viewing school guidance counselors as available staff who can take on teaching or administrative roles in case of absences.

Moreover, research on school stakeholders' views of school counseling in the USA found that they often believe school counselors should engage in administrative activities such as record-keeping (Reiner et al., 2009) or other non-counseling activities such as exam coordination (Blake, 2020). As such, it was hypothesized that, compared to school guidance counselors, school stakeholders would rate the ISSCA activities related to administrative tasks as more appropriate (H2). Finally, what are school guidance counselors' perceived resources and challenges, including how they experienced the COVID-19 pandemic (RQ5)?

Past research on school counseling identified and addressed the issue of role confusion in multiple countries (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Langston & Van Gordon, 2023), isolation of

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school counselors within the school setting in the United States (Vera & Heineke, 2024), lack of understanding from the school principal about the school counselor role in the Philippines (Harrison et al., 2023), role conflict and negative perceptions of counseling in Ghana (Panford-Quainoo et al., 2024), stigma towards mental health in Sri Lanka (Jayawardena & Gamage, 2022) and the counseling profession being new and needing time to establish itself in Hong Kong (Harrison & Kee, 2024). However, no hypothesis was formulated for this question because of the scarcity of research investigating school guidance counselors' perceived challenges and resources in Bhutan, including their views of the COVID-19 pandemic. For this last question, school guidance counselors' responses to the survey's open-ended questions were analyzed using content analysis and a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) analysis (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001).

Methods

Participants

The target group was all school guidance counselors registered in Bhutan and the teachers and principals they work with. Of the 179 school guidance counselors registered in the Kingdom at the time of data collection, 162 ($n = 85$ male, 52.5%; $n = 77$ female, 47.5%) participated in the survey. This indicates a response rate of 89.94%. In addition, data were obtained from 65 school stakeholders, including 49 school teachers and 16 school principals, who work in a school alongside a school guidance counselor. For the school guidance counselors, responses were received from all 20 of Bhutan's administrative regions, also called Dzongkhas. The largest groups came from Mongar (10%), Thimphu (10%), Chukkha (8.8%), and Trashigang (8.8%) Dzongkhas. There was an almost equal distribution concerning the types of schools they work in, with 85 (52.6%) counselors working in a boarding school and 74 (45.7%) working in a day school. They were also asked about which

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region of the country (for example, rural or urban) their school is located in. However, data on cross-country regions was obtained from only 99 (61.5%) counselors due to a technical error. Of those who responded, 11 (11.1%) reported living in an urban area, such as a city center; 27 (27.2%) reported living in a suburban area, such as just outside a city center; 21 (21.6%) reported living in a rural area, and one person (1.2%) reported living in a very rural area. Additional demographic characteristics concerning the first research question are described in the results section alongside a table (Table 1).

Measures

Because the administrative language in Bhutan, including in schools and governmental institutions, is English, the online survey was administered in English and included 19 questions about demographics and daily activities, 44 questions about roles and responsibilities, and 14 questions about perceived challenges and resources. School guidance counselors received the complete questionnaire, while teachers and principals received an adapted, abbreviated version, which will be described in the following section. The complete list of questions used for both surveys can be found in Appendix 1 and 2.

Demographics and Daily Activities

All participants were asked four questions about their gender, location, school type (regular day school or boarding school), and school levels they work with. In addition, school guidance counselors, but not school stakeholders, were asked using a mix of 14 multiple choice and open-ended questions about their school's region (rural or urban), their age, years of experience, school size, the ages of the students they work with, how far away they live from their school, how they assess and track student's well-being, how many students they counsel per week on average, around what percentage of time they spent on average a week counseling, the types of concerns students come to them for, which institutions they studied

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at, what school guidance counselor training they received and whether they had ever worked in a previous profession such as teaching.

Roles and Responsibilities

Roles and responsibilities were assessed using the ISSCA (Carey et al., 2020), which consists of 42 school counseling activities that respondents rate on a Likert scale of appropriateness (1 = “very inappropriate” to 4 = “very appropriate”) and on a dichotomous scale of whether these activities are implemented or not (“yes” or “no”). Item examples include “The School Counselor engages children and adolescents in group counseling in order to support their mental health” and “The School Counselor determines the appropriate disciplinary sanctions for students who have misbehaved.” Previous studies reporting on the internal consistency of the ISSCA found Cronbach’s alpha coefficient ranging from $\alpha = 0.62$ to 0.92 for Likert format items and ranging from $\alpha = .65$ to 0.79 for dichotomous format items (Fan et al., 2019). For the present study, the ISSCA was administered to school guidance counselors. An adapted version was administered to school stakeholders, and the questions were rephrased to align with the participants’ roles in the school system. The response option “I don’t know” was added. For example, the question “Do you do this activity in your present position?” (yes/no) was changed to “Does the school guidance counselor do this activity in their present position?” (yes/no/I don’t know). Past research that administered the ISSCA to school counselors in different countries and carried out factor analysis revealed that the items can be categorized into five (Carey et al., 2020) or six dimensions (Fan et al., 2019). For the present study, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) revealed that the model with six dimensions fit the data best; hence, the ISSCA model with six dimensions (Fan et al. (2019) was used for further analysis. More detailed information about the CFA can be found in Appendix 3.

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Challenges and Resources

Perceived challenges and resources were assessed using a mix of 14 rating scales and open-ended questions. School guidance counselors were asked the following questions:

1. Do they have contact with other school guidance counselors?
2. Do they find this contact useful?
3. Do they receive supervision?
4. Do they find this supervision useful?
5. What are the five most important activities and practices for their work?
6. Do they have sufficient time
7. Do they have adequate space to carry out their work?
8. Do students have enough time to come to them for counseling?

In addition, they were asked about the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on school guidance counseling services: (9) how their work and (10) personal life had been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, (11) which areas of their lives had been affected, and (12) how their work had changed because of the pandemic. Finally, they were asked to indicate (13) which positive changes they believe they had achieved through their work, and (14) were invited to share anything else that was not mentioned yet but which they perceived as important.

Survey Development

Development of the survey items was based on Bhutan's School Guidance Counseling Framework (Ministry of Education, 2010), the curriculum of the Bachelor's in Clinical Counseling of the Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan (Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan, 2016), and school guidance counseling studies on their perceived challenges in Bhutan and other countries (Chan et al., 2015; Dem & Busch,

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2018; Harrison, 2021; Low, 2015; van Schalkwyk, 2013; Venkatesan & Shyam, 2015).

Survey items were piloted with three school guidance counselors, two school teachers, and one school principal. This was to ensure that the question items were relevant to the Bhutanese context, easy to understand by respondents, not too long to overwhelm or discourage respondents, that all important topics had been covered, and to ensure respondents felt they could give honest answers. During the piloting, participants reported they felt the questions were understandable and relevant, that they felt confident they could give honest answers, and that the online format was easy to use. They also highlighted the critical role of consultation, wherein school guidance counselors consult with school staff, parents, other school guidance counselors, or outside agencies like addiction counselors to seek advice. As a result, this important topic was added to the survey.

Procedure

The sampling approach used for this study was total population sampling (i.e., the purposive sampling of all individuals working as school guidance counselors in Bhutan). Based on a contact list of all school guidance counselors in Bhutan, kindly provided by the MoE, all 179 Bhutanese school guidance counselors were invited to participate by e-mail, which contained a link to the online survey. The data was collected between December 2021 and March 2022. Next, a list of school stakeholders' contact details was prepared by identifying the e-mail addresses of the schools where the school guidance counselors worked. Teachers and principals were contacted by e-mail between February and March 2022 to participate in the online survey. For all participants, the survey took between 30 and 45 minutes to complete. As an incentive for participation in the online survey, all participants could win one of 25 books on student mental health or prepaid mobile data. The study was approved by the ethics committee of the Department of Education and Psychology at the

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Free University of Berlin and by the MoE in Thimphu, Bhutan. Consent was obtained from all 20 Dzongkha Educational Officers (DEOs) and by each school's principal. Participation in the study was voluntary and anonymous; all participants gave informed consent before participating in the online survey.

Data Analysis

All data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, SPSS (Version 24). A 0.05 significance level was adopted for each test, and Bonferroni adjustments were used to control for the Type I error rate (Field, 2013). Before analysis, all data sets were checked for normal distribution, outliers or extreme values, and the extent and pattern of missing values. To answer RQ2, paired samples *t*-tests were computed to compare school guidance counselors' ratings on the six dimensions of the ISSCA. To answer RQ3, a one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted to examine whether scores on the ISSCA dimensions significantly differed according to gender, age, type of school, region (rural or urban), and years of experience. To answer RQ4, paired samples *t*-tests were computed to analyze school stakeholders' ratings on the six ISSCA dimensions. Independent samples *t*-tests were carried out for each ISSCA dimension between both groups to compare Bhutanese school guidance counselors' ratings on the ISSCA dimensions to those of school stakeholders.

Content analysis was used to analyze responses to the open-ended questions. Content analysis is a method of analyzing written, verbal, or visual data involving a detailed and systematic examination of a particular body of materials to identify patterns, themes, or biases (Leedy & Ormrod, 2001). Per the content analysis steps proposed by Leedy and Ormrod (2001), first, the challenges and resources perceived by school guidance counselors were determined. The data was analyzed by the first author, who scrutinized the data for

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instances of each characteristic using MAXQDA, a software program for qualitative data analysis. Once characteristics were determined, responses were then categorized according to these characteristics. Next, a SWOT analysis was performed to condense the data on school guidance counselors' perceived challenges and resources into interpretable and logically organized themes. A SWOT analysis is a visual tool that can be used to design an organization's strategic plan and to identify issues and paths for change and improvement (Phadermrod et al., 2019). The SWOT analysis results can provide a comprehensive picture of school guidance counseling services concerning the specific context in which they are implemented, such as a specific country or school, and directions for progress (Phadermrod et al., 2019).

Results

Preliminary Analysis

Both for the school guidance counselor and school stakeholder data relevant to the hypotheses, analyses found that any missing data were missing at random (all Little's test of Missing Completely at Random $p > 0.05$), and no extreme values (outliers) were detected. Tests of homogeneity of variance revealed that not all data were normally distributed. However, because these tests can be significant with samples of $n > 30$ even when the scores are only slightly different from a normal distribution, and Q-Q plots did not reveal substantial deviations from normality, it was assumed that data were normally distributed (Field, 2013).

Demographic Profile of Bhutanese School Guidance Counselors and Their Daily Activities

In response to RQ1, the school guidance counselor's demographic profile and daily activities were summarized. On average, school guidance counselors were between 25 and 30

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years old, had 1-3 years of experience working as a school guidance counselor, worked in a school with 500-1000 students, mainly worked with students in secondary school rather than primary school, and lived less than 30 minutes away from the school. When asked how many students they counsel in a week, 61 (37.7%) counselors reported counseling 1-5 students per week, which takes, on average, 49% of their time. The issues for which the students seek counseling in order of importance are social and emotional, academic, health, and career planning issues. When asked about record-keeping, most school guidance counselors ($n = 73$; 45%) reported using the Career Education and Counseling Division (CECD) website of the MoE to make notes on students' well-being. Beyond individual, 1-on-1 counseling, all school guidance counselors ($n = 162$; 100%) reported being actively engaged in their school guidance counseling network, namely, maintaining regular contact and seeking advice from each other. Most ($n = 86$; 53%) also reported receiving supervision when they met in person or online with one of the four senior counselors at the CECD to discuss challenging cases. Data on school guidance counselor demographics and daily activities are presented in Table 1.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

When asked to indicate in a comment box “what institutions have you studied at,” almost all school guidance counselors ($n = 149$; 87%) reported holding the Post Graduate Diploma in Contemplative Counseling and Psychology from the Samtse College of Education, meaning that they are a National Certified Counselor (NCC) as recognized by the Bhutan Board for Certified Counselors (BBCC), the only accrediting counseling body in Bhutan established in 2013. All ($n = 162$; 100%) reported having completed undergraduate studies in Bhutan, and

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some ($n = 24$; 14.8%) completed their degree abroad, mainly in India. Further, when asked to indicate in a comment box what training programs they had attended, all ($n = 162$; 100%) reported currently participating or having previously participated in several training courses and workshops, but mostly the “Mental Health Facilitators Training” (MHFT) from the BBCC, the “Psychosocial Support Services” (PSS) training by UNICEF, and “Suicide Prevention Training” from the Ministry of Health of Bhutan. When asked to indicate in a comment box what specific counseling approaches they abide by, most reported Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Solution Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), and Person-Centered Therapy (PCT). As part of these training programs, they also reported working with Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) such as UNICEF, with national agencies such as “Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women” (RENEW), and in collaboration with rehabilitation centers for substance use cases.

Bhutanese School Guidance Counselor and School Stakeholder Responses on the ISSCA

Of the 162 school guidance counselors who participated in the survey, 156 (96.3%) completed the ISSCA. These 156 school guidance counselors rated the 42 activities of the ISSCA, on average, as either “appropriate” or “very appropriate” ($M = 3.52$; $SD = 0.8$) and mainly reported “yes” (81.6%) when asked if they implemented these activities.

School guidance counselor mean ratings of all six ISSCA dimensions are presented in Table 2. Five of the six ISSCA dimensions were rated, on average, as “appropriate” to “very appropriate,” except for the dimension “Administrator Role,” which was rated “very inappropriate.” “Prevention Work” ($M = 3.72$; $SD = 0.47$) was rated highest of the six dimensions of counselors’ activities followed by “Individual and Group Counseling with Students” ($M = 3.70$; $SD = 0.40$), “College and Career Counseling with Students” ($M = 3.63$;

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$SD = 0.47$), “Leadership Program Management and Evaluation” ($M = 3.56$; $S = 0.45$) and “Indirect Services with Parents and Teachers” ($M = 3.38$; $SD = 0.43$), while “Administrator Role” was ranked the least appropriate ($M = 2.00$; $SD = 0.77$).

In response to RQ2 and supporting H1, t -test results showed that school guidance counselors rated the appropriateness of the “Administrator Role,” on average, significantly lower compared to the other five dimensions: “Leadership Program Management and Evaluation,” $t(149) = 21.56$; $p < .001$; $d = 0.89$; “Indirect Services with Parents and Teachers,” $t(150) = 19.75$; $p < .001$; $d = 0.86$; “Individual and Group Counseling with Students,” $t(153) = 24.57$; $p < .001$; $d = 0.85$; “Prevention Work,” $t(151) = 23.55$; $p < .001$; $d = 0.90$; and “College and Career Counseling with Students,” $t(153) = 23.29$; $p < .001$; $d = 0.86$.

Further, in response to RQ3, ANOVAs showed that school guidance counselors’ ratings on the six ISSCA dimensions did not significantly differ according to gender, age, school type, region, and experience.

Of the 65 school stakeholders who participated in the survey, 61 (93.9%) had complete ISSCA data. Of these 61, 46 (75%) were school teachers and 15 (25%) were school principals. These 61 school stakeholders rated the 42 activities of the ISSCA, on average, as either “appropriate” or “very appropriate” ($M = 3.19$; $SD = 0.62$). Teachers and principals mainly reported “yes” (54.9%) when asked if school guidance counselors implemented these activities, while 14.9% responded “no” and 12.9% responded “I don’t know.” School stakeholders’ mean ratings of all six ISSCA dimensions are presented in Table 2. Similar to school guidance counselors, school stakeholders, on average, rated the dimension “Individual and Group Counseling with Students” ($M = 3.28$; $SD = 0.61$) the highest of the six dimensions followed by “Prevention Work” ($M = 3.23$; $SD = 0.74$), “Leadership Program

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Management and Evaluation” ($M = 3.18$; $SD = 0.69$), “College and Career Counseling with Students” ($M = 3.16$; $SD = 0.66$), and “Indirect Services with Parents and Teachers” ($M = 3.05$; $SD = 0.66$), whereas “Administrator Role” was ranked the least appropriate ($M = 2.61$; $SD = 0.71$).

Compared to school guidance counselors, school stakeholders, on average, rated five of the six ISSCA dimensions as significantly less appropriate: “Leadership Program Management and Evaluation,” $t(204) = 4.61$; $p < 0.001$; $d = 0.53$; “Indirect Services with Parents and Teachers,” $t(205) = 3.43$; $p < .001$; $d = 0.50$; “Individual and Group Counseling with Students,” $t(211) = 5.21$; $p < .001$; $d = 0.46$; “Prevention Work,” $t(209) = 4.95$; $p < .001$; $d = 0.56$ and “College and Career Counseling with Students”, $t(208) = 5.69$; $p < .001$; $d = 0.53$. However, in response to RQ4 and as was hypothesized (H2), school stakeholders rated the appropriateness of the dimension “Administrator Role” significantly higher than school guidance counselors did: $t(208) = -5.06$; $p < .001$; $d = 0.75$.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Content and SWOT Analysis of Open-ended Questions on Bhutanese School Guidance Counselors’ Perceived Challenges and Resources

In response to RQ5, content analysis of open-ended questions and organization of resulting themes using a SWOT analysis further revealed strengths (positive internal factors), weaknesses (negative internal factors), opportunities (positive external factors), and threats (negative external factors) relevant to the school guidance counseling profession in Bhutan. The themes uncovered by the analysis of school guidance counselors’ responses are presented

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in the SWOT matrix below (Table 3) in order of frequency with which each theme was mentioned.

[INSERT TABLE 3 HERE]

Strengths (positive internal factors)

The first most often mentioned strength is the school-based programs school guidance counselors implement ($n = 52$; 3%), such as the “Peer Helpers” program, where students are trained to help with the needs of other students. Second is the consultation that school guidance counselors engage with parents and school staff to solve issues such as complicated student cases that may be beyond the scope of their work ($n = 43$; 26.5%). Third is the abundance of training courses and workshops they participate in to gain skills, such as Mental Health Facilitators Training (MHFT) ($n = 14$; 8.6%). Fourth is needs assessment and situational analysis for strengths and vulnerabilities. This is an activity school guidance counselors engage in using questionnaires to find out what students’ needs are relevant (personal communication with N. Gyeltshen of the MoE, 23.09.2022) ($n = 12$; 7.4%). This activity helps them determine their course of action and necessary activities or prevention programs for their school. Fifth is school guidance counseling being increasingly more accepted within the school, with students more often voluntarily going to see the school guidance counselor rather than being referred, but also more teachers and parents referring children ($n = 9$; 5.6 %). The sixth and last strength is the possibility for school guidance counselors to learn new skills due to the COVID-19 pandemic, such as using technology to conduct online counseling ($n = 5$; 3.1%).

Weaknesses (negative internal factors)

The first and most often mentioned weakness is slow acceptance and poor understanding of school guidance counseling by relevant stakeholders, including students, parents, and school colleagues ($n = 14$; 8.6%). This is due, for instance, to school guidance counseling being a very new and possibly insufficiently understood profession in Bhutan. School stakeholders, for example, still expect immediate results from school guidance counselors for students' issues. The second is role confusion and work overload, with school guidance counselors being asked to do non-counseling tasks such as teacher duties or work beyond regular hours ($n = 11$; 6.8%). Third is the lack of resources, such as an adequate counseling space, and office materials, such as a computer with internet access, relevant books, or cabinets to store confidential information ($n = 10$; 6.2%). Fourth are structural and organizational questions, such as whether students should be allowed to see the school guidance counselor during school lessons or only during breaks ($n = 9$; 5.6%). The fifth and last weakness pertains to school policies such as confidentiality, which requires school guidance counselors to share specific student issues with parents and the school principal ($n = 8$; 5%).

Opportunities (positive external factors)

The first most often mentioned opportunity is the school guidance counseling network ($n = 21$; 13%). All school guidance counselors report being in contact with each other, such as through social media platforms, which is very important for exchanging experiences and ideas, learning from each other, and emotionally supporting each other. Second is consultation with external actors such as mental health staff (mostly addiction counselors, clinical counselors, or one of the few psychiatrists in the country) ($n = 16$; 9.9%). Consultation with these external actors is also perceived as a platform for exchanging

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knowledge, sharing experiences, and emotional support. Third is support from the CECD, such as through workshop programs or supervision ($n = 15$; 9.3%). The fourth and last opportunity is the increased recognition of the importance of mental health in the wider Bhutanese society and of the necessity to help students through counseling services in part due to the COVID-19 pandemic ($n = 5$; 5.6%).

Threats (negative external factors)

The first most often mentioned threat is stigma around mental health and counseling, which was mentioned repeatedly by a majority of school guidance counselors and cited as one of the main reasons why students do not seek help from the school guidance counselor ($n = 64$; 39.5%). Second is the increasingly complex issues that students face ($n = 14$; 8.6%). School guidance counselors reported the need for more training courses and workshops to gain expertise on complex, multifaceted issues such as substance use. Third is the role of corporal punishment in Bhutanese schools. Namely, school guidance counselors reported that they were told by school stakeholders, namely their school colleagues, that corporal punishment is more effective than counseling in dealing with students' issues, whereas counseling instead "spoils" students ($n = 6$; 3.7%). Fourth is the issue of moving counseling to an online format because of the COVID-19 pandemic despite often insufficient technological resources ($n = 5$; 5.6%), such as a lack of hardware or internet connectivity, or online counseling being reported as less effective than face-to-face counseling. The fifth and final threat is increased workload because of COVID-19 protocols, partly due to extending counseling duties to the rest of the community, such as quarantine facilities, and the increased need for counseling during lockdowns with students facing hardship ($n = 4$; 2.5%).

Discussion

Using an online survey, the present study obtained detailed information on school guidance counseling from over 90% of school guidance counselors in Bhutan, including their colleagues. As such, it provides a first, comprehensive glimpse into this young profession. The most salient findings of this analysis highlight (1) the importance of addressing the potential of role confusion; (2) that school guidance counseling services are still relatively new and need time to be accepted; (3) the prevalent role of stigma towards mental health and counseling services; (4) the important role of various resources such as training programs; and (5) contact with other school guidance counselors, with the government and with outside services such as clinical counselors and carrying out consultation parents and school staff. The main research question will be answered in the following sections: What are the demographics, daily activities, roles and responsibilities, and challenges and resources perceived by Bhutanese school guidance counselors and their colleagues?

Bhutanese School Guidance Counselor's Demographic Information, Daily Activities, Roles and Responsibilities

The survey results revealed information about the demographic characteristics of school guidance counselors and their daily activities, which underlined the vast range of responsibilities they shoulder daily. These findings are in line with the specific responsibilities defined in the "School and Guidance Counseling Framework" (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 21), namely "Program Development and Evaluation," "Counseling and Consultation," "Student Appraisal," "Academic Advice and Career Education," "Referrals and Follow-up," and "Professional Responsibilities and Development." Furthermore, these findings are similar to research conducted in neighboring countries recently implementing school guidance counseling services, such as Singapore and Japan. In Singapore, the

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activities of school counselors, as defined by the Ministry of Education, include providing counseling services to at-risk students, engaging in consultation with school stakeholders and parents, and training school stakeholders and staff on counseling practices. They also participate in training courses to develop their skills and receive regular supervision to discuss complicated cases provided by the Ministry of Education (Tan & Chou, 2018). In Japan, the activities of school counselors, whose roles are defined by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology (MEXT), similarly include assessment of student's needs and problem areas, counseling of students, and conducting consultations with parents and school staff (Sueki, 2016).

Moreover, the findings revealed that school guidance counselors in Bhutan perceived most roles and responsibilities (as indexed by the ISSCA items) as appropriate apart from the activities under the dimension "Administrator Role," which consists of two items: "The school guidance counselor determines the appropriate disciplinary sanctions for students who have misbehaved" and "The school guidance counselor assumes the administrative role of the principal in their absence."

Overall, school guidance counselors rated all dimensions as more appropriate than school stakeholders, apart from the "Administrator Role" dimension. This is perhaps due partly to school guidance counselors being more familiar with the Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010) and, therefore, more confident in their appropriate tasks. This assumption is supported by the findings from the ISSCA data, which show that, on average, almost 13% of school stakeholders do not know whether school guidance counselors implement specific school guidance counseling activities.

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These results corroborate research by Dem and Busch (2018) and Jamtsho (2017) on issues faced by school guidance counselors in which it was found that the role of school guidance counselors needs to be more clearly defined and communicated to school stakeholders so that school guidance counseling is not merely seen as only dealing with discipline cases or taking on administrative roles. These results are also comparable to research on school stakeholder perspectives of school counseling in neighboring India, where it was found that school management expected school counselors to be involved in administrative tasks such as liaisons between counselors, school staff, and parents (Venkatesan & Shyam, 2015). The present findings suggest that the school guidance counselor's role should be more clearly defined and communicated to school stakeholders in Bhutan. How this can be done, along with other specific, recommended actions, will be explained further in the following sections, especially under the section "Implications."

Bhutanese School Guidance Counselor's Perceived Challenges and Resources

Content analysis of open-ended questions and organization of results using a SWOT analysis revealed several substantial challenges and resources. These findings can be understood in light of Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), namely the interaction between school guidance counselors and the proximal school environment they exist in, including students and school staff, but also other more distal members of the community, including other school guidance counselors, mental health staff such as clinical counselors, the government, and society at large. In addition, as school guidance counseling is relatively new in Bhutan and still establishing itself within the Bhutanese educational system, the chronosystem or time factor plays an essential role in shaping the counseling profession. As such (Bronfenbrenner, 1995), specific challenges and resources in all systems were identified in line with Bronfenbrenner's EST. It is recommended that none of these challenges and

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resources be considered in isolation but instead as existing within school guidance counselors' ecological environment from their immediate microsystem to the peripheral macrosystem, and all should be considered interacting with each other. A visualization of these challenges and resources guided by Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995) is depicted in Figure 1.

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

Of note, the COVID-19 pandemic, an influential but uncontrollable event at the exosystem level, could not be classified as solely a challenge or a resource, so it does not appear in the figure. According to the results of this study, while moving everything online made counseling less efficient, increased the work burden of school guidance counselors, and erected barriers, especially for children who did not have resources for online counseling, school guidance counselors, nevertheless, gained valuable technical skills as a result. In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the prevalence and significance of mental health issues, which brought attention to school guidance counseling among other community members beyond the school. The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the importance of preparing school guidance counseling services for crises and encouraging flexibility to allow school guidance counselors to turn such crises into opportunities.

The results of the SWOT analysis are further consistent with the results of the studies by Dem and Busch (2018) and Jamtsho (2017), including that school guidance counseling is poorly understood by school stakeholders, such as that school guidance counseling is merely seen as advice giving and as a service that provides immediate results, and is being hindered

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by stigma around mental health. Consistent with the study by Dem and Busch (2018), the SWOT analysis also revealed the need for more training and the problem of role confusion experienced by school guidance counselors, although not the issue of insufficient supervision. The SWOT analysis further sheds light on additional barriers, such as insufficient material supplies, increasingly complex mental health issues faced by students, the role of the COVID-19 pandemic, and important resources that need to be considered, such as support from the CECD.

These results are comparable to those from school counseling research in nearby countries that recently implemented counselors in their schools (Carey et al., 2017). For instance, a SWOT analysis of school counseling services in South Korea by Yu and colleagues (2014) also found barriers related to stakeholder misunderstanding and role confusion. Their study further revealed other important positive factors, such as laws and regulations around school counseling as well as important negative factors such as having to compete with similar professions including career counselors and social workers. This analysis implied that school counselors lack a professional identity, as it is a new profession, and their role needs to be more clearly defined. The SWOT analysis results are comparable to an in-depth interview study of 11 school counselors in Singapore by Kok (2013). Results shed light on school counselors' struggle working in a multi-faceted role with many approaches, such as 1-on-1 counseling, group counseling, or working with parents and various actors such as academic staff. From these in-depth, qualitative data, the author concluded that there is a need for a collaborative systemic model of school counseling that defines the school counselor's role and collaboration with other actors, such as academic staff, so that school counselors can effectively help students with their issues.

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Finally, the SWOT analysis revealed notable challenges and resources perceived by school guidance counselors and additional information on their roles and tasks not included in the ISSCA, namely, “maintaining a contact network with other school guidance counselors in the country” and “taking part in training programs and workshops to advance skills.” Both could perhaps be considered for future versions of the ISSCA.

Implications

Four main implications can be drawn from these survey results. First, future research should also consider using in-depth interview methods to supplement the information obtained by the present survey study, such as to understand why Bhutanese school guidance counselors’ ratings on the ISSCA dimensions differed from those of school guidance counselors in other countries. Research with school stakeholders should also be repeated in a few years with larger samples, as past research has found that teachers’ and administrators’ perceptions of school guidance counselors affect school guidance counselors’ work efficacy (Jackson et al., 2002; Kok & Low, 2017). Moreover, school guidance counseling services in Bhutan are still very new, meaning that the profession needs more time to establish itself and should be reinvestigated in the future. As such, similar studies should be repeated once school guidance counseling has had more time to establish itself within Bhutanese schools.

Second, the school guidance counselor’s role must be more clearly defined and disseminated. Consistent with the results of the ISSCA in the present study, the Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010) should be updated in order to reflect roles suitable to the current Bhutanese school context and to warn against assigning non-counseling activities such as dealing with discipline cases and taking over administrative duties. This updated framework should also be communicated efficiently among school stakeholders to clarify these roles.

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Third, more research is needed to understand the pervasive role of stigma towards counseling and mental health, which was reported to be an essential topic. The results of this study can inform the necessary actions required to counteract the threat of stigma, such as advocacy activities by school counselors themselves or nationwide destigmatization initiatives that the government should organize. Such initiatives could encourage help-seeking among Bhutanese children and youth.

Fourth, school guidance counselors expressed in the survey their need for more resources such as (1) an adequate counseling room with (2) a computer with adequate internet access to be able to stay connected with students and their families or to find necessary information such as about school programs, and (3) office materials such as a printer or lockable cabinet in order to manage necessary paperwork and ensure confidentiality policies. Based on the survey data, more resources should be invested to provide more training in order for school guidance counselors to be able to support Bhutanese students concerning their mental health issues. This way, they would also have the resources and skills to deal with future crises in the post-COVID era.

Fifth, structural changes are needed within the school to provide more opportunities for students to see the school guidance counselor. Students could, for instance, be permitted to see the school guidance counselor during class if they do not intentionally try to skip classes.

All of the above have implications for policy, including allocating more resources to school guidance counselors, such as providing an adequate counseling space and office supplies, and restructuring the school to allow students more time to see the school guidance counselor. Should policy changes be enacted per this study's implications, their consequences should be monitored through regular surveying of school guidance counselors so that the effects of these changes can be explored and understood.

Strengths and Limitations

An essential strength of this study is the vastness of the survey questions, which covered many topics relevant to the multifaceted and complex nature of school guidance counseling in Bhutan. Part of the vast array of questions was the ISSCA, the first international scale of school counselors' roles and responsibilities, which allowed for comparison with the views of school stakeholders. In addition, the mix of different research methods and analyses, the fact that data were obtained from 90.5% of school guidance counselors, and the insight from 65 of their non-counselor school colleagues allowed for a broad and detailed snapshot of school guidance counseling in Bhutan.

Although the present study is the first of its kind, several limitations remain. First, the ISSCA is a valuable tool for investigating Bhutanese school guidance counselors' views of appropriate counseling activities, precisely reproducing five of the six dimensions identified by Fan and colleagues (Fan et al., 2019). However, the "Administrator Role" dimension was not sufficiently reliable to yield robust findings. Additional research in Bhutan is needed to pinpoint specific administrative activities that school guidance counselors may engage in. Second, the online survey format does not provide in-depth insight into school guidance counseling in Bhutan, such as the vital role of culture, as might have been obtained with interviews. Third, data collection was limited to school guidance counselors and their non-counselor school colleagues. It would have been worthwhile to survey parents and students to understand how they perceive school guidance counseling services. Fourth, content analysis of open-ended questions was conducted by the study's first author. Having a second rater to corroborate the findings would have been beneficial. Fifth, while the primary investigator strove to be as objective as possible and not impose their Western values and ideas, the cultural validity of the study could not be completely guaranteed. Finally, although English is

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the language of instruction in Bhutanese schools, the survey could have been translated into another language that respondents might have felt more comfortable with, such as one of Bhutan's 19 languages and local dialects.

Conclusions

The present study provides comprehensive insights into school guidance counseling services in Bhutan. The differences in perceptions of the appropriateness of school guidance counseling activities between school guidance counselors and school teachers and principals underscore the issues of role confusion. Results also revealed the problem of stigma around mental health acting as a significant barrier to help-seeking, the important role of various resources such as training programs, contact with other school guidance counselors, with the government and with outside services such as clinical counselors, the need for schools to make sure there is sufficient time and opportunities for students to see the school guidance counselor and need for material resources such as a counseling room. Finally, the results revealed the role of the COVID-19 pandemic as both a curse and a blessing for the school guidance counseling profession. As such, future research is warranted, especially once school guidance counseling has had more time to establish itself in Bhutan. In the meantime, some requirements should be addressed, including more clarity and communication around the school guidance counselor's role and more material resources to implement school guidance counseling services more efficiently.

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Tables**Table 1**

Summary of demographic information and daily activities of Bhutanese school guidance counselors

Sample Characteristics	<i>n</i>	%
Gender		
Female	77	47.5
Male	85	52.5
Location		
Bumthang	3	1.9
Chhukha	14	8.6
Dagana	6	3.7
Gasa	0	0.0
Haa	4	2.5
Lhuntse	7	4.3
Mongar	16	9.9
Paro	12	7.4
Pemagatsel	8	4.9
Punakha	7	4.3
Samtse	12	7.4
Samdrupjongkhar	11	6.9
Sarpang	10	6.2
Thimphu	17	10.5

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Trashigang	14	8.6
Trashiyagtse	6	3.7
Tsirang	4	2.5
Trongsa	3	1.9
Wangduephodrang	5	3.1
Zhemgang	2	1.2
<hr/>		
School type		
Day school	74	45.7
Boarding school	85	52.3
<hr/>		
Region		
Urban area	11	6.8
Suburban area	27	16.7
Rural area	21	13
Very rural area	1	0.6
No response (tech. error)	63	39.0
<hr/>		
Age		
< 25 years old	8	4.9
25 – 30 years old	78	48.1
31 – 35 years old	36	22.2
36 – 40 years old	27	16.7
41 – 45 years old	4	2.5
46 – 50 years old	3	1.9
> 51 years old	0	0.0
<hr/>		
Work experience		

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< 1 year	23	14.2
1 – 3 years	44	27.2
3 – 5 years	32	19.8
5 – 7 years	10	18.5
> 7 years	32	19.8
<hr/>		
School size		
< 250 students	8	4.9
250 – 500 students	55	34.0
500 – 1000 students	78	48.1
> 1000 students	20	12.3
<hr/>		
School level		
Primary school	3	1.9
Lower secondary school	40	24.7
Middle secondary school	70	43.2
Higher secondary school	62	38.3
<hr/>		
Where they live relative to the school		
Live in the school	16	9.9
Live < 30 mins. away	132	81.5
Live > 30 mins. away	11	6.8
<hr/>		
How they assess and report students' well-being		
Website of the CECD	73	60.8
Notes in a journal	72	60.0
Using specific scales	63	52.5
Using table/spreadsheet	31	25.8

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Don't keep records/notes	27	22.2
<hr/>		
How many students do they counsel per week on average		
1 – 5 students	61	37.7
6 – 10 students	39	24.1
11 – 15 students	10	16.2
16 – 50 students	7	4.3
51 – 100 students	1	0.6
> 100 students	0	0.0
<hr/>		
Types of concerns students come to the school guidance counselor for		
Academic	114	70.4
Personal/social	118	72.8
Career	97	59.9
Health	104	64.2
Other	24	14.8
<hr/>		
Whether they have contact with other school guidance counselors in other schools		
Yes	162	100.0
No	0	0.0
<hr/>		
Whether they receive supervision		
Yes	86	53.1
No	76	46.9
<hr/>		

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Table 2*Bhutanese school guidance counselor and school stakeholder scores on the six ISSCA dimensions (Fan et al., 2019)*

	1. Leadership Program Management and Evaluation		2. Indirect Services with Parents and Teachers		3. Individual and Group Counseling With Students		4. Prevention Work		5. College and Career Counseling With Students		6. Administrator Role	
<i>Number of items</i>	13		8		10		5		4		2	
	SC	SS	SC	SS	SC	SS	SC	SS	SC	SS	SC	SS
<i>n</i>	150	56	151	56	156	61	154	61	154	56	154	56
<i>M</i>	3.56	3.18	3.38	3.05	3.70	3.28	3.72	2.23	3.63	3.16	2.00	2.61
<i>SD</i>	0.45	0.69	0.43	0.66	0.40	0.61	0.47	0.74	0.47	0.66	0.77	0.71
α	0.93	1.00	0.82	0.98	0.92	1.00	0.92	1.00	0.81	0.95	0.40	0.86
<i>t</i>	4.61		3.43		5.21		4.95		5.69		-5.06	
<i>p</i>	< 0.001		< 0.001		< 0.001		< 0.001		< 0.001		< 0.001	
<i>d</i>	0.53		0.50		0.46		0.56		0.53		0.75	

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Notes. SC = School counselors. SS = School stakeholders (i.e., school teachers and principals). Response options for the six ISSCA dimensions were: 1 = Very Inappropriate; 2 = Inappropriate; 3 = Appropriate; 4 = Very Appropriate. α = Cronbach's coefficient Alpha. t = t -value of independent samples t -test comparing the means of SC and SS on each of the six ISSCA dimensions. p = significance value. d = Cohen's d effect size of the independent samples t -test.

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Table 3

SWOT matrix of results from the analysis of open-ended survey questions including number and percentage of participants who mentioned them

	Positive	Negative
Internal	Strengths	Weaknesses
Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abundance of school programs ($n = 52$; 32.1%) • Consultation with parents and school staff ($n = 43$; 26.5%). • Abundance of training courses and workshops ($n = 14$; 8.6%) • Risk & needs assessment mapping ($n = 12$; 7.4%) • Increasing acceptance of school counseling ($n = 9$; 5.6 %) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School counseling services not (or only slowly being) accepted/understood ($n = 14$; 8.6%) • Role confusion and work overload as a result of low acceptance/understanding ($n = 11$; 6.8%) • Insufficient resources ($n = 10$; 6.2%) • Unclear school organization ($n = 9$; 5.6%) • Problematic school policies ($n = 8$; 5%)

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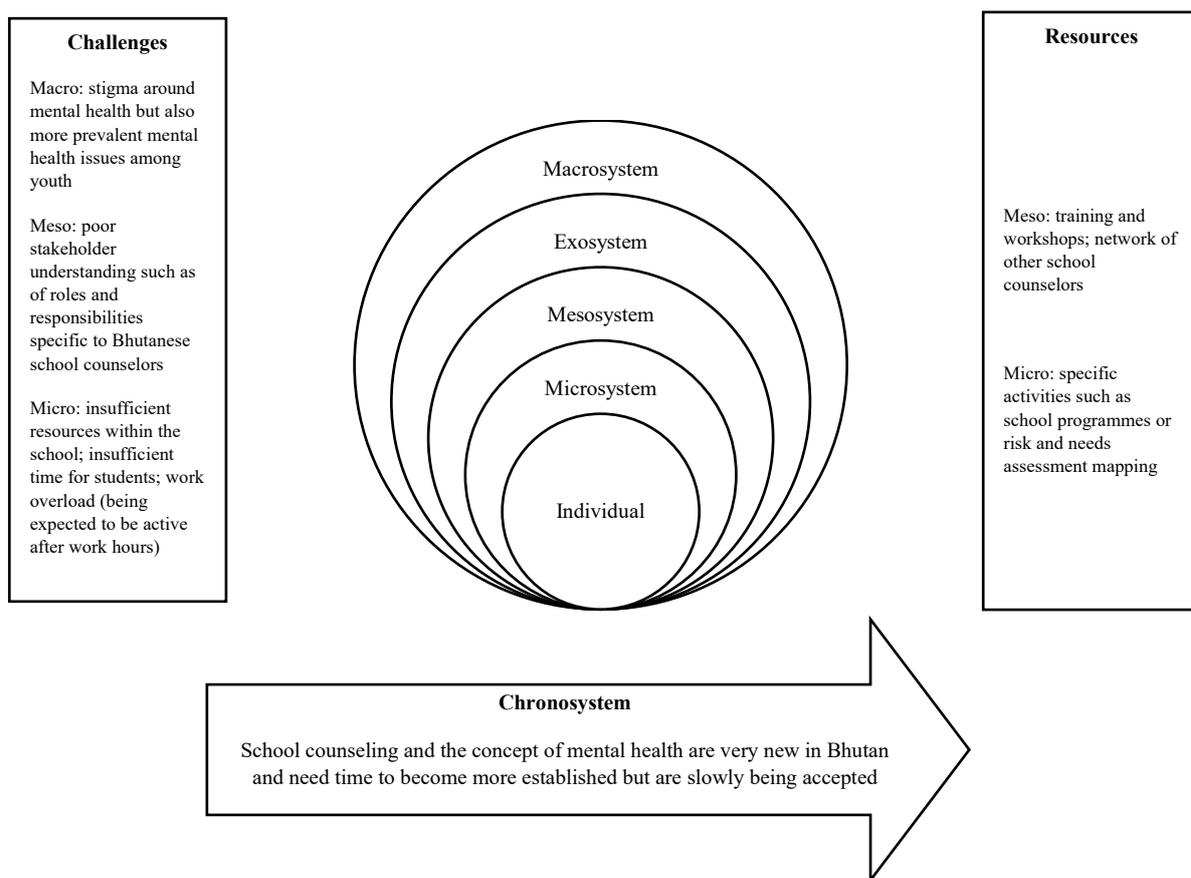
-
- Skill development as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic ($n = 5$; 3.1%)

External Factors	Opportunities	Threats
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contact with other school counselors ($n = 21$; 13%) • Consultation with outside services ($n = 16$; 9.9%) • Government support from the CECD ($n = 15$; 9.3%) • Increased recognition of the importance of mental health and of counseling services in the wider community because of the COVID-19 pandemic ($n = 5$; 5.6%) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma towards mental health and counseling services ($n = 64$; 39.5%) • Increasingly complex mental health issues among students ($n = 14$; 8.6%) • Role of corporal punishment in Bhutanese culture ($n = 6$; 3.7%) • Insufficient resources to deal with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic ($n = 5$; 5.6%) • Increased work-load because of the COVID-19 pandemic ($n = 4$; 2.5%)

Figures

Figure 1

Bhutanese school counselors' perceived challenges and resources analyzed and organized in line with Bronfenbrenner's EST (Bronfenbrenner, 1995).



Appendices (Study II)**Appendix 1***School Guidance Counselor Survey*

1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION AND DAILY ACTIVITIES

Please TICK the most appropriate choice.

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other: (comment box: open-ended response)

School Dzongkha location:

- Bumthang
- Chhukha
- Dagana
- Gasa
- Haa
- Lhuntse
- Mongar
- Paro
- Pemagatsel
- Punakha
- Samtse
- Samdrupjongkhar
- Sarpang
- Thimphu
- Trashigang
- Trashiyagtse
- Tsirang
- Trongsa
- Wangduephodrang
- Zhemgang

What type of school is your current school:

- Day School

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- Boarding School
- Government school
- Private school
- Other: (comment box: open-ended response)

What region is your school situated in:

- Urban area
- Suburban area
- Rural area
- Very remote area

How old are you:

- Less than 25 Years
- 25 – 30 Years
- 31 – 35 Years
- 36 – 40 Years
- 40-50 Years
- 50 Years and above

How long have you worked as a school counselor (not just in your current school):

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- 3-5 years
- 5-7 years
- 7+ years

How long have you worked in your current school:

- 1 – 2 Years
- 2 – 5 Years
- 5 – 10 Years

What size is your current school:

- Less than 250 students
- 251–500 students
- 501–1,000 students
- Over 1,000 students

What are the ages of the students whom you are currently working with: (Check all that apply.)

- 5
- 6
- 7

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- 8
- 9
- 10
- 11
- 12
- 13
- 14
- 15
- 16
- 17
- 18
- 19
- 20
- 21
- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25

At which levels are you currently working: (Check all that apply.)

- Primary School
- Lower Secondary School
- Middle Secondary School
- Higher Secondary School
- Other: (comment box: open-ended response)

Do you live in the school:

- Yes
- No, I live nearby (less than 30 minutes away) with my family
- No, I live nearby (less than 30 minutes away) away from my family
- No, I live quite far from the school (more than 30 minutes away) with my family
- No, I live quite far from the school (more than 30 minutes away) and away from my family
- Other: (comment box: open-ended response)

How do you assess and keep record of student's well-being:

- website of the CECD
- notes in a journal
- using specific scales such as the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL)
- using table/spreadsheet
- don't make records or take notes

How many students do you counsel in a week, individually or in a group setting?

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- 1-5
- 6-10
- 11-15
- 16-50
- 51-100
- 100+

Around what percentage of time do you spend counseling students 1on1 on average in a week: (Rate 0% to 100%)

What types of concerns do students come to you for support: (Check all that apply)

- Academic (such as grades, problems with school teachers)
- Personal/social (such as anxiety, depression, bullying)
- Career (such as career guidance questions)
- Health (such as addiction, eating disorders)
- Other: (comment box: open-ended response)

Which institutions have you studied at:

- (comment box: open-ended response)

What school counselor training/certification do you have:

- (comment box: open-ended response)

Please list any previous professions:

- (comment box: open-ended response)

Have you also been trained as and/or worked as a school teacher:

- Yes
- No

2. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES

Sample items of the International Survey of School Counselor's Activities (ISSCA) (Carey et al., 2020). The full survey can be requested from the survey's authors.

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SCHOOL COUNSELOR ACTIVITIES						
Please respond to each item based on your opinion on the appropriateness of each activity for the role of a school guidance counselor in Bhutan.						
#	ACTIVITIES	Very Inappropriate 1	Inappropriate 2	Appropriate 3	Very Appropriate 4	Do you do this activity in your present position. YES/NO
1	The School Counselor engages children and adolescents in one-on-one counselling in order to support their mental health (e.g., dealing with anxiety, depression, suicidal ideations, and/or addiction)					
2	The School Counselor engages children and adolescents in one-on-one counselling in order to facilitate their academic development (e.g., developing self-motivation; engagement with school)					
3	The School Counselor engages children and adolescents in one-on-one counselling in order to facilitate their career development (e.g., dealing with career indecision)					

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Please add any other activities you feel are **appropriate**, that have not been included in the survey

- (comment box: open-ended response)

Please add any other activities you feel are **inappropriate**, that have not been included in the survey

- (comment box: open-ended response)

3. CHALLENGES AND RESOURCES

Please TICK the most appropriate choice.

Do you have contact with other school guidance counselors in other schools?

- Yes
- No

Do you find this contact useful?

- Yes because: (comment box: open-ended response)
- No because: (comment box: open-ended response)

Do you receive supervision?

- Yes
- No

Are you happy with how much supervision you receive?

- Yes because: (comment box: open-ended response)
- No because: (comment box: open-ended response)

What are 5 most important distinct practices, behaviors, and/or strategies you use to support student well-being? Please list up to five in order of importance for your daily work:

- 1: (comment box: open-ended response)
- 2: (comment box: open-ended response)
- 3: (comment box: open-ended response)
- 4: (comment box: open-ended response)
- 5: (comment box: open-ended response)

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Do you have adequate space within your school (such as a specific room) where you can carry out your role as a school guidance counselor? (comment box: open-ended response)

Do you feel you have enough time for your role as a school guidance counselor? (comment box: open-ended response)

Do you think the students have enough time to come to you for counseling? (comment box: open-ended response)

To what extent have you been personally affected by the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic? (1= not affected, 10 = very affected)

What areas of your life have been impacted the most by the COVID-19 pandemic? (Check all that apply)

- School/work life
- Family/partner/home life
- Friends/social life
- Spiritual life
- Community life
- Other: (comment box: open-ended response)

To what extent has your work as a school guidance counselor been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic? (1= not affected, 10 = very affected)

If you wish, please feel free to specify how your work as a school guidance counselor has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic: (comment box: open-ended response)

If you wish, please indicate what positive changes you believe you as a school guidance counselor have brought to your school environment: (comment box: open-ended response)

Surveys like this one can leave the participant wanting to share more information with the researcher. If you wish, please feel free to share any thoughts or concerns that have been present as you have taken the survey: (comment box: open-ended response)

Appendix 2*School Stakeholder Survey*

1. DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Please TICK the most appropriate choice.

I am a:

- School teacher
- School principal
- Other school staff: (comment box: open-ended response)

I have been trained/worked as a school guidance counselor:

- Yes
- No

Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Other: (comment box: open-ended response)

School Dzongkha location:

- Bumthang
- Chhukha
- Dagana
- Gasa
- Haa
- Lhuntse
- Mongar
- Paro
- Pemagatsel
- Punakha
- Samtse
- Samdrupjongkhar
- Sarpang
- Thimphu
- Trashigang
- Trashiyagtse
- Tsirang

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- Trongsa
- Wangduephodrang
- Zhemgang

What type of school is your current school:

- Day School
- Boarding School
- Government school
- Private school
- Other: (comment box: open-ended response)

At which levels are you currently working with: (Check all that apply.)

- Primary School
- Lower Secondary School
- Middle Secondary School
- Higher Secondary School
- Other: (comment box: open-ended response)

My school has a full-time school guidance counselor:

- Yes
- No

SURVEY STUDY OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN BHUTAN

2. ROLES & RESPONSIBILITIES:

Sample items of the International Survey of School Counselor's Activities (ISSCA) (Carey et al., 2020). The full survey can be requested from the survey's authors.

SCHOOL COUNSELOR ACTIVITIES

Please respond to each item based on your opinion on the appropriateness of each activity for the role of a school guidance counselor in Bhutan.

#	ACTIVITIES	Very Inappropriate 1	Inappropriate 2	Appropriate 3	Very Appropriate 4	Does the school counselor do this activity in your school? YES/NO/ X (I don't now)
1	The School Counselor engages children and adolescents in one-on-one counselling in order to support their mental health (e.g., dealing with anxiety, depression, suicidal ideations, and/or addiction)					
2	The School Counselor engages children and adolescents in one-on-one counselling in order to facilitate their academic development (e.g., developing self-motivation; engagement with school)					
3	The School Counselor engages children and adolescents in one-on-one counselling in order to facilitate their career development (e.g., dealing with career indecision)					

SURVEY STUDY OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN BHUTAN

Please add any other activities you feel are **appropriate**, that have not been included in the survey

- (comment box: open-ended response)

Please add any other activities you feel are **inappropriate**, that have not been included in the survey

- (comment box: open-ended response)

Appendix 3

CFA analysis of the ISSCA

Past research using the ISSCA established that the items can be categorized into either five dimensions (Carey et al., 2020) or six dimensions (Fan et al., 2019). For the present study, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was run to examine unidimensionality of a model with the five dimensions or with the six dimensions. The model with six dimensions revealed acceptable fit indices according to recommendations by Brown (2015): SRMR estimates ranged between 0.01 and 0.09, RMSEA between 0.03 and 0.10, CFI between 0.99 and 1.00 and finally TLI between 0.91 and 1.00. Further, the reliability (Cronbach's α) for each of the six dimensions ranged from $\alpha = 0.81$ to 0.93 on five of the six dimensions ("Leadership Program Management and Evaluation", "Indirect Services With Parents and Teachers", "Individual and Group Counseling With Students", "Prevention Work" and "College and Career Counseling With Students") but with $\alpha = 0.40$ for "Administrator Role", which has two items: "The school guidance counselor determines the appropriate disciplinary sanctions for students who have misbehaved" and "The school guidance counselor assumes the administrative role of the principal in their absence". Both can be considered inappropriate school guidance counseling activities in Bhutan following research by Jamtsho (2017) and Dem and Busch (2018). On the other hand, a CFA model with five dimensions (Carey et al., 2020) revealed unacceptable fit indices according to recommendations by Brown (2015). As such, for the purpose of this study, the ISSCA model with six dimensions by Fan et al. (2019) was used for further analysis.

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Appendix C: Study III

Larran, J., & Hein, S. (2024). *A “growing noble profession”, a “magician”, or an “emotional trash can”: an interview study of Bhutanese school guidance counselors’ perceived challenges and resources* [Unpublished manuscript]. Department of Education and Psychology, Division Elementary Education, Freie Universität Berlin.

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“Like an emotional trash can”: an interview study of Bhutanese school guidance
counselors’ perceived challenges and resources

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Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, [SH], upon request.

Ethics Statement

In accordance with the International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling's policy and ethical obligations as a researcher, all authors report no financial, institutional, or other competing interests that may affect the research reported in the enclosed paper. This study was approved by the ethics committee of the Department of Psychology and Education, Free University of Berlin, supported by the Bhutanese Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD) and performed in accordance with the ethical standards as laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki. Informed consent was obtained from all participants at the start of the study procedure.

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Abstract

School counselors are responsible for students' mental health and their increasingly complex issues. However, little is known about school counseling services in the Kingdom of Bhutan. This study conducted 28 semi-structured interviews with school guidance counselors, 19 online and nine in-person, to investigate their perceived challenges and resources. The data were analyzed using a phenomenological approach to inquiry and thematic analysis proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). The identified challenges and resources were grouped for further analysis according to Martin et al. (2015)'s model of 11 factors influencing school counseling. The most often mentioned challenges were insufficient resources to cope with rising mental health needs and cultural barriers to the implementation of school guidance counseling, such as stigma and the role of corporal punishment. The most often mentioned resources were the importance of material resources, such as having a separate counseling room within the school, and the importance of support from external professionals, such as clinical counselors. In sum, the results revealed the need for (1) more resources to cope with the mental health needs of students, such as additional training, (2) more organization to systemize stakeholder collaboration and to clarify the school guidance counselors' roles, (3) more awareness in the general population about school guidance counseling, including overcoming stigma towards mental health, and (4) more time for this profession to establish itself in the Kingdom.

Keywords: school counseling, school-based mental health, Bhutan, interviews, thematic analysis

Introduction

The Kingdom of Bhutan is a mountainous, Buddhist country in the Himalayas with a population of just over 754,000 (United Nations, 2019). The school guidance counseling profession was introduced in Bhutan in 2010, and around 200 school guidance counselors serve over 500 schools across the Kingdom today (Ministry of Education and Skills Development, 2023). According to the Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan, a school counselor is “a professional member of an educational team in primary, middle, and high schools who assists students in their personal, social, academic, and career development through a range of services including individual counseling, group counseling, and specialized classroom teaching” (Ministry of Education, 2010, p. 14). However, as very little information is available about the factors that affect the work of Bhutanese school guidance counselor, this study will investigate their perceived challenges and resources using interview methods.

Research on school counseling services has highlighted factors that challenge or support school counselors worldwide. These include how school counseling is organized, such as around a specific school counseling framework or program (Foss-Kelly et al., 2021; Goodman-Scott et al., 2022), how school counseling is directed, such as through specific policies (Camilleri-Zahra, 2021), or how school counseling is affected by cultural factors, such as the role of spirituality (Cobb, 2021; Stevens & Ritten, 2022). Investigating these factors has long been considered essential as they can influence school counselors’ job satisfaction, such as job strain and turnover intentions, according to research from the United States (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021; Mullen et al., 2020; Mullen et al., 2017). Reported challenges specific to school counselors include role confusion (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021; Kim & Lambie, 2018), namely, the uncertainty resulting from dealing with tasks unrelated to school counseling (Blake, 2020), a lack of stakeholder support (Carey et al., 2017), and a lack of supervision (Bledsoe et al., 2019; Duncan et al., 2014), namely, the act by a professional in a

given field who has more experience and knowledge than another professional working with them (Dollarhide & Miller, 2006). What little research exists from East and Southeast Asia suggests similar factors affecting school counselor's work which can result in burnout such as role ambiguity and lack of stakeholder support in Korea (Cho & Kim, 2024) and role conflict in Malaysia (Chua et al., 2018). Understanding these factors, including challenges and resources, is vital as school counselors are prone to burnout (Fye et al., 2020; Mullen et al., 2017), the experience of a physical, behavioral, and emotional state of exhaustion due to their work conditions (Freudenberger, 1974; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Maslach & Leiter, 2017). Burnout not only affects school counselors but can spill over to the entire school and, in turn, impact students' mental health if school counselors are unable to attend to students' needs (Holman & Grubbs, 2018; Maslach & Leiter, 2017). Burnout can also increase the likelihood of school counselors quitting (Kim & Lambie, 2018; Mullen & Gutierrez, 2016). That is why it is important to investigate factors leading to burnout in depth in the school counseling profession, such as using qualitative research methods, so as to inform schools and allow for the implementation of evidence-based, school counseling policies.

Qualitative studies, such as those employing interview methods, can provide an in-depth and nuanced understanding of potential factors that challenge or support school counselors. This is evidenced in international research such as on perceptions of supervision experiences in an interview study of seven school counselors in the United States (Gillen et al., 2024), on self-care practices in an interview study of 15 school counselors in Turkey (Şimşir Gökçalp, 2022), or on perceived preparedness and efficacy in an interview study of 12 school counselors in Australia (Quigley & Hyde, 2023). In East and Southeast Asian countries, where school counseling has a relatively short history (Larran & Hein, 2024), interview studies have revealed, for instance, the need for a more systematic, collaborative model for working with other school staff, as was found in an interview study of 11 school counselors in Malaysia (Kok, 2013). Similar studies have found evidence for the need for role clarity,

including a common understanding and shared expectations of the role of the school counselor, such as clear definitions of confidentiality, as was found in an interview study of nine school counselors in Singapore (Lim & Wong, 2018), and the issue of having to tackle stigma around mental health, namely, negative views of mental health issues which sets affected persons apart from others (Byrne, 2000), as was found in an interview study of four school counselors in Sri Lanka (Jayawardena & Gamage, 2022). However, because few studies are available from Bhutan, where school counseling was recently implemented, the present study addressed this research gap.

School Guidance Counseling in Bhutan

Secluded from the world stage until the 1990s (Wangchhuk, 2008), the Kingdom of Bhutan underwent rapid modernization, believed to have had negative consequences for children and youth (Dema et al., 2019; Lester et al., 2020; Norbu, 2021; Phuntsho, 2017; World Health Organization, 2022). In response to these concerns, the Kingdom of Bhutan established the professions of clinical counseling, substance use counseling, and school guidance counseling (Dem & Busch, 2018). Today, Bhutanese school guidance counselors must reckon with numerous challenges threatening the mental health of children and youth, including bullying (UNICEF Bhutan, 2016), changing family structures (Phuntsho, 2017), high youth unemployment (Harrison, 2021; Lester et al., 2020; Norbu, 2021), and rises in cases of substance use (Lorelle & Guth, 2013) and suicidal behaviors (Dema et al., 2019; The World Bank, 2024; World Health Organization, 2017, 2022). To date, though, little information is available about the factors that affect school guidance counselors' work, including perceived challenges and resources. The first large-scale, online survey study of Bhutanese school guidance counseling carried out in 2022 (reference withheld for anonymous peer review) reached 161 of the 174 school guidance counselors active at the time, investigating their demographic characteristics, daily activities, roles, and responsibilities and perceived challenges and resources. Results revealed the need for more clearly defined roles

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and responsibilities, the need for material resources, such as a counseling room, and the problem of stigma around mental health acting as a significant barrier to help-seeking because of traditional health beliefs according to which mental illnesses are caused by black magic, evil spirits or a curse and the need for schools to make sure there is sufficient time and opportunities for students to see the school guidance counselor. In addition, results revealed the role of the COVID-19 pandemic as both a curse and a blessing for the school guidance counseling profession. While moving counseling online in a country with sometimes insufficient infrastructure was a challenge, the pandemic also highlighted the importance of mental health and the need for counseling services during times of crisis, which elevated the role of school guidance counselors in the wider community. However, few qualitative studies have sought to investigate school guidance counseling services in Bhutan.

To our knowledge, only two interview studies have been carried out with Bhutanese school guidance counselors. In their narrative interview study with four first-generation Bhutanese school guidance counselors, Dem and Busch (2018) provided a first account of the challenges they face. These include role confusion, high workload, insufficient preparation, a lack of support mechanisms, such as adequate supervision, and the resulting threat of burnout. They further mentioned skepticism and a lack of support from school stakeholders, including school teachers and school principals, who view school guidance counseling services as mere advice giving or disciplinary measures through corporal punishment while simultaneously having high expectations about counseling, such as that it provides immediate solutions to students' issues. In an interview study by Jamtsho (2017) with eight teachers, four of whom were teachers with school guidance counseling training, on their experiences with well-being leadership roles, they reported that their school colleagues did not support them or understand the preventive value of school guidance counseling services and merely saw school guidance counseling as a disciplinary measure.

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In sum, what little information exists suggests that Bhutanese school guidance counselors face several challenges that need further investigation. Interview data from a large, representative sample of school guidance counselors could provide a thorough understanding of their different perceived challenges and the resources that support them.

Martin et al. (2015)'s Model of 11 Factors Influencing School Counseling Services

School counseling is now implemented worldwide but is executed differently across different countries (Carey et al., 2017). To facilitate comparison, Martin et al. (2015) developed a model of factors related to the development and practice of school counseling. To this end, they analyzed literature from 25 countries and created a model of 11 factors that influence school counseling. These factors are (1) "Cultural Factors," (2) "National Needs," (3) "Larger Societal Movements," (4) "Models of School Counseling," (5) "Laws and Educational Policy," (6) "Characteristics of the Public Education System," (7) "The Counseling Profession," (8) "Research and Evaluation," (9) "Related Professions," (10) "Community Organizations or NGO Coalitions," and (11) "Local Stakeholder Perceptions." In one ethnographic study of five school counselors in Barbados (Griffin, 2019), themes that emerged from the analysis aligned with all 11 factors of the model. Furthermore, the results helped provide a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by school counselors in Barbados, such as on the issue of stigma around mental health and help-seeking, and informed policy and practice (Griffin, 2019).

Study Aims

The first school guidance counselors assumed their positions over ten years ago in schools across Bhutan. However, how school guidance counselors experience their work, including their perceived challenges and resources, remains underexplored. Thus, building on the results of a survey study of school counselors (reference withheld for anonymous peer review), this study sought to answer the question: what are the most important challenges and resources perceived by Bhutanese school guidance counselors according to interview

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methods? To answer this question, semi-structured interviews were carried out with Bhutanese school counselors, and the resulting data were analyzed using Martin et al. (2015)'s model of 11 factors influencing school counseling. The resulting data was expected to inform school guidance counseling policy in Bhutan and international research on school counseling.

Method

Design

To allow for a nuanced understanding of Bhutanese school guidance counselors' challenges and resources from their perspective, the present study used qualitative research methods, namely semi-structured interviews (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Qualitative research refers to the collection and analysis of nonnumerical data and is especially appropriate for investigating underexplored research subjects (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Ponterotto, 2010). This approach is an ideal method to analyze the relatively new school counseling profession in Bhutan, which has attracted little research attention. The focus of qualitative research in this study is on Bhutanese school guidance counselors' perceptions and experiences of school guidance counseling. Interview methods are especially suitable for studies that describe human experiences of a phenomenon (Morris et al., 2021), such as the experiences of psychotherapists and counselors (McLeod, 2000). Using these methods, participants can voice their own opinions and thoughts, allowing unanticipated ideas to emerge (Creswell & Creswell, 2017).

Sample

Twenty-eight Bhutanese school guidance counselors were interviewed for this study. This sample comprised 15 female and 13 male school guidance counselors, 19 of whom were from day schools and nine from boarding schools across the country, therefore constituting a representative sample. It was important to obtain various views of challenges pertaining to

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gender, location, and school type. Their level of experience ranged from one year to ten years. Of these 28, 19 were interviewed online, and nine were interviewed in person. Criteria for participation in the study was being a certified school guidance counselor in Bhutan registered at the Division for Youth and Sports (DYS) of the Ministry of Education and Skills Development (MoESD). Demographic information about the sample can be found in Table 1 and a map of the locations of participants across Bhutan can be found in Figure 1.

[INSERT TABLE 1 HERE]

[INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE]

The provisional goal for this study was to interview at least 26 school guidance counselors. Similar international studies investigating school counseling using interview methods on samples of 12 to 15 school counselors have obtained valuable data (Kok & Low, 2017; Reupert et al., 2022; Şimşir Gökalp, 2022). Sample size recommendations for interview-based qualitative studies vary between six (Morse, 1995) and 25 (Creswell & Creswell, 2017) participants to reach saturation, understood as the point at which a data set is considered complete, as indicated by data replication or redundancy (Marshall et al., 2013). That is why the final sample of 28 participants was deemed sufficient.

Materials

An individual, semi-structured interview format was used for data collection. All interview questions were asked in the same order while allowing for a more open discussion than is possible with structured interviews. The interview was guided by an interview protocol designed according to recommendations by Creswell and Creswell (2017). The interview questions were prepared considering the cultural context of Bhutanese school guidance counseling. Since the profession is emerging in Bhutan, the questions were designed to be

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exploratory. The interview questions were further prepared according to a literature review on school counseling, per the research question, and Martin et al.'s (2015) model of 11 factors influencing school counseling. The resulting interview protocol consisted of 11 open-ended questions, including how adequately participants felt their training prepared them for their role as a school guidance counselor, how they perceive the collaborative work with students, school staff, and parents, what barriers stop them from engaging in their role as a school guidance counselor, what resources support them and what resources are lacking, how school guidance counseling services fit or do not fit in Bhutanese culture and how they were affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition, those with over five years of experience were also asked whether they felt the profession had changed over time and how it might further change in the next five years. Finally, all participants were asked at the end of the interview if there was anything else they would like to add that was not mentioned yet. The interview protocol for this study can be found in the Appendices.

Procedure

This study was approved by the ethics committee of the Department of Education and Psychology at the Freie Universität Berlin, supported by the MoESD, and performed according to the ethical standards laid down in the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki. Active or passive consent was sought from relevant school authorities, including the Dzongkha Education Officer of each of Bhutan's 20 regions, or "Dzongkhas," and the school principal of the counselor's school. Before the interviews, the DYS reviewed the interview protocol to ensure that the questions were appropriate and understandable, and then the protocol was piloted with one school guidance counselor. Both approved the interview protocol and confirmed that the questions were appropriate and understandable, including their order and the way they were formulated. As a result, no changes were subsequently made to the interview protocol.

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The interviews took place in August and September 2022. Purposive sampling was used to recruit participants, and all school guidance counselors were contacted by email to request their participation. School guidance counselors who agreed to participate in the interview received an e-mail with date, time, and location suggestions, either online or in person, to conduct the interview. In responding to school guidance counselors who agreed to be interviewed, we purposely aimed to invite an equal number of male and female school guidance counselors working in an equal number of day schools and boardings in urban and rural locations to avoid any bias in the results, for example, to prevent that mostly male school guidance counselors in urban day schools are interviewed so that the results are primarily generalizable only to this specific group. Once the meeting was determined, participants were asked to be interviewed in a quiet setting free of disturbances and to allow for about one hour of uninterrupted time.

All participants were sent a copy of the consent form, which indicated informed consent, including that the interview would be recorded, an understanding of confidentiality, and an understanding of the role of the primary investigator (PI) [initials withheld], before their interview and were asked to sign it either before or after the interview. Participants were further informed of the voluntary nature of the study, that they could refuse to answer specific questions if they did not want to, and were allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were not sent a copy of the interview questions before the interview to guarantee consistency in the interview procedure, namely that none of the school guidance counselors knew of the questions before participating in the interview. Just before beginning the interview, participants were reminded again that they would be recorded and that the PI would take notes during the interview (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). It was anticipated that the interviews would last no longer than one hour but, in the end, ranged between 00:37 minutes and 1:36:00 hours ($M = 00:53$ minutes), depending on the participant's expertise and willingness to share their experiences. At the end of the interview, each participant was gifted

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with a book on school-based mental health. All interviews were audio-recorded using the recording and audio editing software Audacity, then later transcribed using the transcription software Trint.

Analysis

This study was grounded in hermeneutic phenomenology as outlined by Moustakas (1994). This method focuses on a population's shared experience of a phenomenon, here, the school guidance counseling profession in Bhutan, to reach the "universal essence" (Creswell & Poth, 2016, p. 76) of the experience of the phenomenon under investigation. This approach to inquiry was chosen because it is suited for investigating the experience of a phenomenon shared by several individuals (Polkinghorne, 1989).

Because of the open-ended nature of the research question, thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to analyze the interviews. Thematic analysis is a method used to identify themes in qualitative data, namely similar responses, which form a pattern and capture meaning that is relevant to the research question consistently and systematically. In keeping with this paradigm, the PI's roles and their lived experiences were acknowledged as playing an active role in the presentation and interpretation of data. The researcher must distance themselves from these experiences, called bracketing, when analyzing and describing it (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), which is why the PI endeavored wherever possible to bracket their own experiences of the phenomenon, to let the data speak for itself, namely, allowing for the different perspectives of the participants to be compared and contrasted, and for expected and unexpected yet relevant inferences to be uncovered (Nowell et al., 2017). After transcription of the interviews, the PI carried out the six phases of thematic analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) on the resulting data namely (1) taking time to get to know the data well, during which the PI immersed themselves in the data, reviewing and rereading the interviews to become familiar with the data, making notes where necessary and actively looking for meanings and patterns relevant to the present study's

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research question, (2) identifying codes, during which initial codes were created, making sure to be inclusive and using broad initial definitions for these codes, (3) finding themes, during which the identified codes were organized into overarching themes, (4) reviewing the themes, during which the themes were reviewed for coherence and correctness and to make sure they are distinct from each other, (5) labeling the themes, during which definitions were developed for each theme, and (6) creating the report, during which the themes were reported in narrative form, with interview extract examples in quotations to provide rich textual description.

Coding is the process of designating or categorizing text from qualitative data to help interpret the data and uncover themes (Gibbs, 2007). Both a deductive and inductive approach were used to code the interviews. The Martin et al. (2015) model of 11 factors influencing school counseling was used to guide the coding of the data using a deductive approach, where the data is analyzed according to theoretical or analytical interest. The themes uncovered by the coding process were categorized under one of the 11 factors of the model. In addition, to ensure that participants' statements were fully captured and appreciated, the analysis also employed an inductive approach, where the data is analyzed without trying to integrate it into a pre-existing theoretical framework or any other previous assumptions. As such, themes not anticipated by Martin et al.'s (2015) model that different participants repeatedly mentioned were noted and formed into specific themes, which were then categorized under one of the 11 factors of the model until data saturation had been reached. Both approaches were used to uncover as many themes as possible from the interviews, namely, as many important challenges and resources as possible. Using deductive and inductive approaches, it was possible to uncover themes which might have been overlooked. One example of this is the role of corporal punishment in Bhutanese schools, which was categorized under 1) "Cultural Factors." The qualitative analysis software program MAXQDA was used to analyze the interviews, namely, to code all interviews, distinguish patterns among codes, and draw

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conclusions about the coded excerpts, such as commonalities between the excerpts that suggest specific themes. This allowed for a list of themes to be developed, including the number of times each study mentioned each theme and an easy-to-access repertoire of the excerpts relevant to each theme, resulting in a code book. A trained research assistant (RA) independently coded five (18%) interviews to assess coding reliability. They were trained by learning the code book and reading three interviews that were already coded, practicing coding another three interviews independently, going over the results with the PI, and then coding five interviews independently. Comparison with the coding of the five interviews by the PI revealed an inter-rater reliability of 71.1% with 122 disagreements. All disagreements were analyzed by the PI, which revealed that 27 (22.1 %) were coding errors in which the RA assigned the wrong code, 67 (54.9 %) were codes that the PI had assigned to the interviews but not the RA because of the PI's experience with school guidance counseling in Bhutan (for instance the PI knew that the government wing responsible for school guidance counseling was sometimes referred to as "the division", "the ministry" or "our supervisors") and 27 (22.1 %) were codes which the RA had assigned but not the PI. The PI and RA discussed these results and agreed that the former two categories of disagreement could be corrected. In contrast, the latter category was due to different perspectives around the themes, codes, and definitions. In the end, an inter-rater reliability of 85.9% was achieved, which was deemed satisfactory, and the remaining disagreements were further discussed and resolved in that each disagreement was discussed in depth until a consensus was reached and a final decision was made. It was concluded that the coding procedure and codebook were effective, broad, and sufficient. Finally, the RA did not find or suggest additional codes or themes the PI might have overlooked.

Research Positionality Statement

The PI for this specific study identifies as a white, cisgender female of European descent (British and French nationality). They were born in France, grew up bilingual

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(French/English) in an atheist household, and have lived in Germany since 2012. They had two years of experience working in schools as an educator and in a care home for youth as a psychologist. They had, over the last four years, investigated the Kingdom of Bhutan and the school guidance counseling profession through regular communications, staying updated on mental health research in Bhutan, regularly reading all Bhutanese news outlets, studying the history of Bhutan, and visiting the Kingdom twice to conduct field research.

Because of initial contact with academics in Bhutan and because of their interest in school-based mental health, they enquired about what services were available in Bhutanese schools and came across the recently implemented school guidance counseling profession. Because of the lack of research investigating school guidance counseling in Bhutan, they resolved to investigate this profession further and came into contact with members of the MoESD who agreed to help them pursue this endeavor.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness defines specific criteria of qualitative research, such as credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Nowell et al., 2017). For the present study, two Euro-Western researchers from a Euro-Western university setting sought to carry out an investigation in a non-Euro-Western, non-university setting. Such circumstances, further underlined by the PI's positionality statement above, have direct implications for this study's trustworthiness, which need to be considered. These considerations pertain specifically to decolonizing methods. Decolonizing methods seek to decolonize and indigenize Euro-Western research methodologies to avoid academic imperialism. This is achieved by centering participants' concerns and worldviews so that their assumptions and perspectives are heard (Chilisa, 2019) and by actively involving participants in the research process so the research results are relevant to their needs (Stoltz et al., 2022). The term "Indigenous" is understood here as persons native to a place whose cultural heritage differs from traditions that are associated with Euro-Western societies but who have not necessarily been subjugated

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to colonialization at some point in history (Chilisa & Malunga, 2012). For the present study, decolonizing methods were employed where possible for the PI to be aware of the influence of their own biases and assumptions, including self-interests and motivations, from developing the research paradigm to disseminating results (Mbah & Bailey, 2022). This was to avoid potential power imbalances by giving participants an equal position in the research process while guaranteeing trustworthiness.

To achieve this, interview methods were used to ensure participants could be coresearchers in the investigation by providing room to articulate their views and experiences. Moreover, reflexive journaling, maintaining an audit trail, assuring reciprocity and respect for self-determination, and active listening were also employed. The PI used regular, reflexive journaling, namely writing down notes whenever possible about the phenomena under investigation in a reflexivity journal to reveal, for instance, Western-centric biases and assumptions (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). The PI also maintained an audit trail including timelines, informed consent, participant demographic questionnaires, interview protocols, transcriptions, memos kept during the coding process in MAXQDA, notes documenting changes in themes, and regularly updating the reflexivity journal (Creswell & Creswell, 2017; Nowell et al., 2017). The PI addressed reciprocity and respect for self-determination by attempting to co-create the research design using the piloting described above (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Finally, during the interview process, active listening, namely intensely listening to and respecting participants' voices and interpretations of life events (Sciarra, 1999), was employed by the PI, who also regularly summarized and reflected on key points raised by participants to check that meaning was interpreted appropriately.

Results

Guided by Martin et al.'s (2015) model of 11 factors influencing school counseling, the analysis of interviews with 28 Bhutanese school guidance counselors revealed 15 themes that were deemed specific enough and exhaustive enough to be final. The most often mentioned

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themes were insufficient resources to cope with rising mental health needs, such as training and workshops (100%), the importance of material resources, such as a counseling room with a computer (28; 100%), the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and lock-down measures on school counseling, such as having to move counseling online fast (96.4%), and cultural barriers to implementation of school guidance counseling, such as stigma and the role of corporal punishment (92.9%).

All themes are presented in Table 2, along with the number of interviews in which these were mentioned. Each theme is expressed either as a challenge (i.e., “challenge of” or “need for”), in that it is perceived as a barrier to school guidance counselors carrying out their work that needs to be improved or changed somehow, or as a resource (i.e., “importance of”), in that it is already existing and perceived as an essential factor which supports school guidance counselors in their work and which should be nurtured.

[INSERT TABLE 2 HERE]

Themes were found to correspond to all factors of the Martin et al. (2015) model of 11 factors influencing school counseling except for “Models of School Counseling,” “Research and Evaluation,” and “Community Organizations or NGO Coalitions.”

This categorization is visualized in Figure 2.

[INSERT FIGURE 2 HERE]

As such, this analysis revealed the following challenges and resources, which are presented in order of how often they were mentioned under each of Martin et al.'s (2015) model of 11 factors influencing school counseling, along with direct quote examples from the

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interviews. Each participant is designated with a random number ranging from 1 to 28. The quotes have slightly different grammar from British or American English due to English being used as a secondary language in schools, government, and other administrative institutions. Rather than 'correcting' these quotes, they were kept intact to honor representation and participant's voice.

Challenges

The most often mentioned challenges were found for the factors “National Needs” (100%), “Larger Societal Movements” (96.4%), “Cultural Factors” (92.9%), “Local Stakeholder Perceptions” (85.7%), “Laws and Educational Policy” (71.4%), and “Characteristics of the Public Education System” (46.4%).

“National needs”

All 28 (100%) school guidance counselors interviewed for this study mentioned the lack of resources to cope with youth mental health needs perceived to be rising (46.4%), such as increases in cases of drug use (35.7%): *“I think every year we are seeing diverse issues. Issues are increasing in terms of as I said, [...] for example substance use disorder was one of the common issues in school”*. (Participant 25)

Such resources perceived as lacking include the need for more specific, up-to-date training (78.6%), with their current training being largely perceived as insufficient to address complex student mental health needs (89.2%): *“The training module that got us is not enough for us particularly to deal with the substance use issues and mental health and well-being of children. Because whenever we deal with students who are undergoing tremendous stress and disorder, any kind of mental issues, sometimes we feel that we are not competent enough to deal with such issues because the training we have undergone, we feel that it's not adequate enough.”* (Participant 3)

These findings are consistent with research from other countries, most notably in the United States (Goodman-Scott, 2015) and Australia ,where interviewed school psychologists

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similarly reported feeling unprepared for their job (Quigley & Hyde, 2023), and in East and Southeast Asian countries, especially in India, Malaysia and Indonesia (Larran & Hein, 2024).

Participants also mentioned the lack of awareness about school guidance counseling among school stakeholders and the wider community (64.3%), the lack of supervision (32.1%), and the need for having one female and one male school guidance counselor in each school (25%): *“A female and a male would be fair for students like for example, especially teen boys when they have issue they are very hesitant over the very fact that I am a female counselor they can’t really open up to me.”* (Participant 16)

Only the finding about lack of supervision was consistent with other research, mainly from the United States (Bardhoshi et al., 2019; Bledsoe et al., 2019; Duncan et al., 2014; Fye et al., 2020; Randick et al., 2018) but also in East and Southeast Asia (Larran & Hein, 2024).

“Larger Societal Movements”

Almost all participants mentioned at least once the challenge of the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and lock-down measures (96.4%), which is consistent with a survey study of Bhutanese school guidance counselors (reference withheld for anonymous peer review) and with international research (Akgül & Atalan Ergin, 2022; Behl et al., 2024; Berger et al., 2023; Greenidge et al., 2023; Reupert et al., 2022). This includes the issue of having to switch to online counseling fast (57,1%), sometimes with insufficient infrastructure (21.4%), and new counselors who graduated during the lockdown not being able to gain valuable in-school experience necessary for their work, instead having to move straight into online counseling (25%): *“Then the lockdown happened and then I was like, it really affected me professionally because I did not have hands-on practice to take clients, directly we had to take online sessions with the students.”* (Participant 9)

“Cultural Factors”

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Most school guidance counselors also mentioned the challenge of school guidance counseling not being adapted to the local context and culture (92.9%) because, for instance, of stigma towards mental health (53.6%), the traditional role of corporal punishment in schools (53.6%), and school stakeholders not understanding the importance of confidentiality (32.1%): *“There are kids who want to reach out. These are staff who want to reach out, who want to talk about their issues, who want to be heard, and they want to discuss things with the counselor. But because of the stigma, they hold themselves back and this is what, and because of this, they cannot seek help when they need it.”* (Participant 17)

“Sometimes they have a rigid mindset that our counseling won't help students. And they are in the belief of the old mindset, where it works through corporal punishment and all. So in that case is sometimes I get feedback from my friends and other teachers saying that -your counseling won't work-”. (Participant 6)

The role of stigma is in line with mental health research in Bhutan (Calabrese & Dorji, 2014; Pelzang, 2012; UNICEF Bhutan, 2021), with East and Southeast Asian countries (Larran & Hein, 2024) and international research attesting to the role of stigma as a barrier to help-seeking (Bowers et al., 2013; Radez et al., 2021). In contrast, little research is available about the role of corporal punishment as a barrier to school counseling services.

“Local Stakeholder Perceptions”

Most school guidance counselors also mentioned the challenge of misconceptions about school guidance counseling (85.7%), which is in line with international research (Low, 2015; Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2022), for instance, being told that counselors don't do any work (46.4%) or that school guidance counselors are meant to provide immediate solutions to complex problems (46.4%): *“All or some have misconception that counselors do not have much work compared to the teachers. And since counseling is taking place in a private room*

or in a closed or in a very safe room, many people do not know the work that we are doing”.

(Participant 12)

“As soon as they referred the child to the counseling, they want to see the immediate changes on the students where it takes some time. So, they don't understand that they think that as soon as the child is sent to the counseling, they want that child to come back as a perfect individual”. (Participant 23)

Participants also mentioned the need for more time for school guidance counseling to establish itself in schools and be accepted (64.3%), which was not reflected in other literature:

“So people have started to accept that when you are not feeling well, especially when you're not feeling good here, it's ok to go to talk to someone, just like when you're having headache or stomachache, how you visit a doctor the same way. So now they have they have accepted that.” (Participant 16)

Also mentioned often was the challenge of poor communication and collaboration with stakeholders (64.3%), which is also consistent with international research, for instance, in Norway (Singstad et al., 2024): *“Teachers, sometimes they do not always, but then sometimes they really go against the decision we make and the programs we do in school”.* (Participant 9)

“Laws and Educational Policy”

An often-mentioned challenge was the need for clearer school guidance counseling roles and responsibilities (71.4%), which is consistent with research from East and Southeast Asia (Larran & Hein, 2024) and with research from the United States, Barbados and Czech Republic (Bardhoshi & Um, 2021; Burnham et al., 2024; Fye et al., 2020; Griffin & Bryan, 2024; Kim & Lambie, 2018; Müllerová & Šmahaj, 2023): *“There's no clear, clarity of the roles and responsibilities of the school guidance counselor, because sometimes school*

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guidance counselors are given the roles and responsibilities which directly come in conflict with their profession, like counselors are given those responsibilities of a teacher.”

(Participant 5)

“Characteristics of the Public Education System”

Finally, participants also mentioned challenges related to the public education system (46.4%), such as that students need to have more time to see the school guidance counselor (46.4%) and the need for a more systematic organization such as a clear referral system (42.9%) which could not be compared with findings from other research: *“we don't have separate timing to take sessions. What we do is we take sessions during recess, during the break, which is just 10 minutes break, we try to adjust the time in that 10 minutes and we take sessions during lunch, And the third time that we have is after the school. After the school where they are eager to go home. Right. Because they are exhausted from the whole of being in the school.”* (Participant 7)

Resources

The most often mentioned resources were found for the factors “The Counseling Profession” (100%) and for “Related Professions” (57.1%), neither of which could be corroborated by findings from other school counseling studies.

„The Counseling Profession”

All 28 school guidance counselors mentioned the importance of material resources (100%), specifically the need for more of these (78.6%), including a separate counseling room within the school (57.1%), a printer (39.3%), counseling books (35.7%) or a computer (32.1%): *“To have a session we need a separate room. We cannot go everywhere and take a session. Luckily, I'm given a room here in this school.”* (Participant 7)

Most school guidance counselors also mentioned the importance of activities other than individual, one-on-one counseling which are helpful for their work (85.7%), such as carrying

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out orientation and awareness programs about school guidance counseling, namely roles, tasks, and aims of school guidance counseling services, with teachers, students, and parents (71.4%), carrying out parenting education programs on topics such as parenting styles and children's digital media use (42.9%) and taking part in other training workshops such as about substance use (35.7%): *“So after having conducted some orientation program on counseling, awareness program to the student, parents and teachers, yes, some of this misconception has been cleared. And now, most of the teachers and school principals, they are more supportive of the counseling.”* (Participant 12)

Beyond the help of material resources and other specific activities, most school guidance counselors also mentioned the importance of support from the government (75%), from other school guidance counselors (46.4%), and the school principal (42.9%): *“ [the government] really ensures that none of the counselors experience professional burnout. So time to time they make a point to check on us how we are doing, not just professionally but personally also. So we have a place to share our feelings when we are not well.”* (Participant 16)

„Related Professions”

Finally, school guidance counselors also mentioned the importance of support from external institutions (57.1%) such as clinical counselors (39.3%), hospitals, and other medical centers (35.1%) and psychiatrists (28.6%) of which there are currently three in the Kingdom: *“Whenever we feel beyond our own capacity, we refer them to clinical counselor in hospital. And with regard to substance use and substance abuses, if it is a, you know, chronic user, then we send them to a (location withheld) regional referral hospital where we have a drop-in center as well as there is a team where they assess the addiction level of the client.”* (Participant 19)

Discussion

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Semi-structured interviews with 28 Bhutanese school guidance counselors revealed different perspectives on school guidance counseling services in Bhutan. These range from being described as a “growing noble profession” (Participant 12), school guidance counselors being perceived as a “magician” expected to instantly solve student’s complex issues (Participant 19), or feeling like the “emotional trash can” of the school (Participant 11), namely, the person children come to do “dump” their confidential problems and emotions on so that they must bear the burden of carrying around with them “emotional bins.”

More importantly, specific challenges and resources, some expected and some not, were revealed by the analysis guided by Martin et al.'s (2015) model of 11 factors influencing school counseling. Challenges and resources were found for the factors “Cultural Factors,” “The Counseling Profession,” “Laws and Educational Policy,” and “Characteristics of the Public Education System”. Challenges only were found for the factors “National Needs,” “Larger Societal Movements,” and “Local Stakeholder Perceptions”. Resources only were found for the factor “Related Professions.” No challenges or resources were found for the factors “Models of School Counseling,” “Research and Evaluation,” “Community Organizations or NGO Coalitions.” Reasons for this could be that there is already a model of school counseling available in Bhutan, namely the Guidance and Counseling Framework for Schools in Bhutan (Ministry of Education, 2010), albeit not explicitly mentioned in any of the interviews, such that school counselors do not perceive a need for a model or specific changes to the existing one. Moreover, there is no information available about research and evaluation currently being undertaken specifically for school guidance counseling in Bhutan, which was also found in the study of school counseling services in Barbados also using Martin et al.'s (2015) model (Griffin, 2019). This may be due to school guidance counseling services in Bhutan being very new, so there has been insufficient time for initiatives to implement research and evaluation measures. Finally, “Community Organizations or NGO Coalitions” was also not mentioned by Bhutanese school guidance counselors, perhaps because they

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currently don't play a significant role supporting school guidance counseling services such as was also found in an interview study of nine school counselors in Singapore (Lim & Wong, 2018).

These results are comparable to research results from nearby countries, such as from an interview study of 11 school counselors in Singapore (Kok, 2013), which similarly revealed the need for a more systematic, collaborative model for working with school stakeholders, from an interview study of nine school counselors in Singapore (Lim & Wong, 2018) which similar revealed the need for role clarity, and from an interview study of four school counselors in Sri Lanka (Jayawardena & Gamage, 2022) which also revealed the issue of stigma towards mental health issues.

These results are depicted in Figure 3 below.

[INSERT FIGURE 3 HERE]

These results suggest that, specifically in Bhutan, the school guidance counseling profession needs (1) more resources, (2) more organization, (3) more awareness, and (4) more time. Bhutanese school guidance counselors need (1) more resources to cope with complex mental health needs across schools and regions, including more up-to-date training and material resources. They need (2) more organization to make school guidance counselor roles more specific and clear, to systemize stakeholder collaboration and referral systems, and to allow more time for students to go to the counselor. They also need (3) more awareness in schools and the broader society about school guidance counseling, including clearing misconceptions about the profession and overcoming stigma towards mental health. Finally, the school guidance counseling profession in Bhutan also needs (4) more time to allow for this profession to establish itself as an essential actor in schools in Bhutan.

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The results of this investigation are consistent with previous research and provide new and unique contributions. These results corroborate a survey study carried out with 162 school guidance counselors on their daily activities, perceived roles and responsibilities, and challenges and resources (reference withheld for anonymous peer review), namely that school guidance counselors need more role clarity so that they are not being made to take on administrative duties, that they are impeded by lack of stakeholder communication and support, by a lack of supervision and by stigma around counseling and mental health. The findings of the present study also support the survey results, namely, the critical role of material resources, such as having a counseling room and a computer, the ambiguous role of the COVID-19 pandemic, which was both a significant barrier to school guidance counseling and a blessing as it initiated government initiatives to raise awareness about mental health and counseling, and the vital role of time, more specifically that the profession needs more time to establish itself. The results of this interview study supplement the survey study and highlight, beyond material resources, the important role of the support provided by the school principal, support from the government and other school guidance counselors.

The findings of the present study are also in line with Dem and Busch's (2018) study of four school guidance counselors in which they reported skepticism from their colleagues, role confusion, insufficient preparation, insufficient supervision, and stigma about counseling as important challenges. The present study adds to this research by also revealing the importance of orientation and awareness programs to reduce stigma, the importance of collaboration with stakeholders within the school and external institutions such as clinical counselors, the need specifically not just for more school guidance counselors but specifically for one female and one male school guidance counselors in each school.

School counseling research from other countries further supports these findings, such as on the benefits of supervision. For instance, a pre-post supervision intervention study of 24

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school counselors in the United States reported significantly better self-efficacy after the intervention than a control group of 69 school counselors (Tang, 2020).

Implications

First of all, the results of this study imply that Martin et al.'s (2015) model of 11 factors influencing school counseling is a valuable model for investigating school counseling services using interview methods. No new factors were created to accommodate other themes relevant to the research questions that might have emerged from the data, demonstrating the model's exhaustiveness.

The results of this study further have various implications for policymakers seeking to improve school guidance counseling services in Bhutan. To address specific challenges hindering school counselors and possibly contributing to burnout, policymakers could start by addressing the four needs revealed by the present study. To address (1) the need for more resources, Bhutanese school guidance counselors' initial training should be updated to ensure it is relevant to the current needs of students, such as by including more training on substance use depending on the specific needs of individual schools. They should also be provided with adequate material resources, such as a counseling room and a computer with internet access. Policymakers should also consider implementing one female and one male school guidance counselor in each school, or more, depending again on the specific needs of that school. To address (2) the need for more organization, school guidance counselors' specific roles must be more clearly defined and communicated to other school staff. A referral system should be established so that school guidance counselors can efficiently collaborate with external institutions to make referrals. Within schools, school policies should allow students more time to go to the school guidance counselor for counseling, for example, by allowing students to go to the school guidance counselor during class. To address (3) the need for more orientation and awareness programs in schools and more awareness about mental health, country-wide advocacy, and awareness initiatives to counteract stigma towards counseling and mental

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health issues. Finally, to address (4) the need for more time to overcome challenges, patience is warranted. Namely, more time needs to pass to allow school guidance counseling services to become more established in schools in Bhutan, and school guidance counselors should not be expected to facilitate immediate, drastic changes. In sum, school counseling policy in Bhutan should seek to update the school counseling training to reflect contemporary, on-the-ground issues faced by students, should clarify school counselor roles and referral processes, and should mandate that each school have one female and one male school guidance counselor, that all school guidance counselors have adequate material resources to carry out their work, that more awareness and orientation measures be carried out in schools and that students have enough time to see the school counselor.

Strengths and Limitations

A notable strength of this study is its sizeable and representative sample. The PI conducted interviews with 28 guidance school counselors, which exceeded the provisional goal of 26 school guidance counselors of different genders, backgrounds, and different levels of expertise. Moreover, the interview protocol consisted of questions covering a wide array of themes relevant to school guidance counseling which allowed, in turn, for a wide array of challenges and resources to be uncovered.

However, this study also presents several limitations. First, the closed setting of the Kingdom of Bhutan posed a challenge for qualitative investigation. Because of strict administrative laws, obtaining a visa to travel to Bhutan is challenging and expensive, even for a short stay of two weeks, for which a personal, government invitation is required. Additionally, in reaction to the COVID-19 pandemic, the government enforced the closure of all borders, rendering a trip to Bhutan virtually impossible for most of 2020, 2021, and 2022. That is why spending prolonged time in the field, which is desirable for qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2017), was impossible for this study. Second, while having a non-Bhutanese national carry out this research has potential advantages, such as providing an

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unbiased eye into the profession, this study was likely also impacted by cultural differences, such as the language barrier. Although English is the language of instruction in Bhutanese schools, carrying out the interviews in English means valuable information might have been missed, perhaps because of misunderstandings or because participants were less comfortable expressing how they felt in a language that wasn't their mother tongue. Indeed, there are around 19 languages recorded across Bhutan, each with different dialects (Tshering, 2020). Future studies should consider interviewing in the language of choice of the participants to ensure they are comfortable expressing themselves. Furthermore, although the PI made every effort to consider their positionality, participants may nevertheless have been biased in their responses because of the interviewer not being a Bhutanese national, which is why future studies may also want to consider having a researcher native to Bhutan carry out and analyze the interviews. Finally, as this study only focused on school guidance counselors, the discussion may not represent the whole community. Future research should investigate the perspectives and views of other stakeholders such as schoolteachers, school principals, students, and parents.

Future Directions

In the future, interview studies should be repeated with school guidance counselors in Bhutan in a few years to assess how these challenges and resources have evolved and why or how they may have changed because of changes to the school guidance counseling system, which address the four needs revealed by this study. Moreover, similar research applying Martin et al.'s (2015) model of 11 factors influencing school counseling should be repeated in Bhutan in a few years and carried out in other countries to allow for country comparison of challenges and resources of school counselors worldwide. Such research could help to elucidate why the factors "Models of School Counseling," "Research and Evaluation," and "Community Organizations or NGO Coalitions" were not or hardly mentioned in the

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interviews. Furthermore, such research could help to advance the global research field of school counseling.

Conclusions

Using interviews carried out with 28 school guidance counselors in Bhutan, the present study revealed that the most critical challenges were insufficient resources to cope with rising mental health needs, such as lack of training, and cultural barriers to implementation of school guidance counseling, such as stigma and the role of corporal punishment. The most important resources were material resources, such as having a counseling room in the school, and the importance of support from external professionals, such as clinical counselors. It was found that the profession in Bhutan needs more resources, organization, awareness, and time to establish itself. It will be important to address these needs to buttress this nascent profession destined to play an ever-important role in the Kingdom of Bhutan, but one at increased risk of burnout.

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Tables**Table 1***Summary of demographic data of Bhutanese school guidance counselors (n = 28)*

	<i>n</i>	%
Interview Participation		
Format		
in-person	9	32.1
online	19	67.9
Gender		
female	15	53.6
male	13	46.4
School Type		
day school	19	67.9
boarding school	9	32.1
School Level		
primary school	1	3.6
lower secondary school	4	14.3
middle secondary school	10	35.7
higher secondary school	6	21.4
central school	7	25.0
Work Experience (<i>M</i> = 5 years)		
1 year	2	7.1
2 years	1	2.6
3 years	10	35.7

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4 years	0	0.0
5 years	4	14.3
6 years	0	0.0
7 years	4	14.3
8 years	2	7.1
9 years	2	7.1
10 years	1	2.6

Table 2

Themes revealed by the interviews and categorized according to Martin et al. (2015)'s model of factors. n = number of interviews in which the respective theme was mentioned.

Factor	n	%	Theme	n	%
Cultural Factors	26	92.9	Challenge of school counseling not being adapted to the local context and culture	26	92.9
			Importance of similarities of school counseling with the local context and culture	23	82.1
National Needs	28	100	Need for more resources to cope with youth mental health needs	28	100
			Challenge of differences of needs across the country	21	75

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Larger Societal Movements	27	96.4	Challenge of the effects on the COVID-19 pandemic and lock-down measures on school counseling	27	96.4
Models of School Counseling	0	0	none	0	0
Laws and Educational Policy	24	85.7	Need for more clear school counseling roles and responsibilities	20	71.4
			Need for more systematic organization such as a clear referral system	12	42.9
Characteristics of the Public Education System	13	46.4	Need for students to have more time to see the school counselor	13	46.4
The Counseling Profession	28	100	Importance of activities other than individual counseling	24	85.7
			Importance of material resources	28	100
			Importance of human resources such as school principal support	25	89.3
			Need for more time for school counseling to establish itself in schools and be accepted	24	85.7
Research and Evaluation	0	0	none	0	0
Related Professions	16	57.1	Importance of support from external institutions	16	57.1

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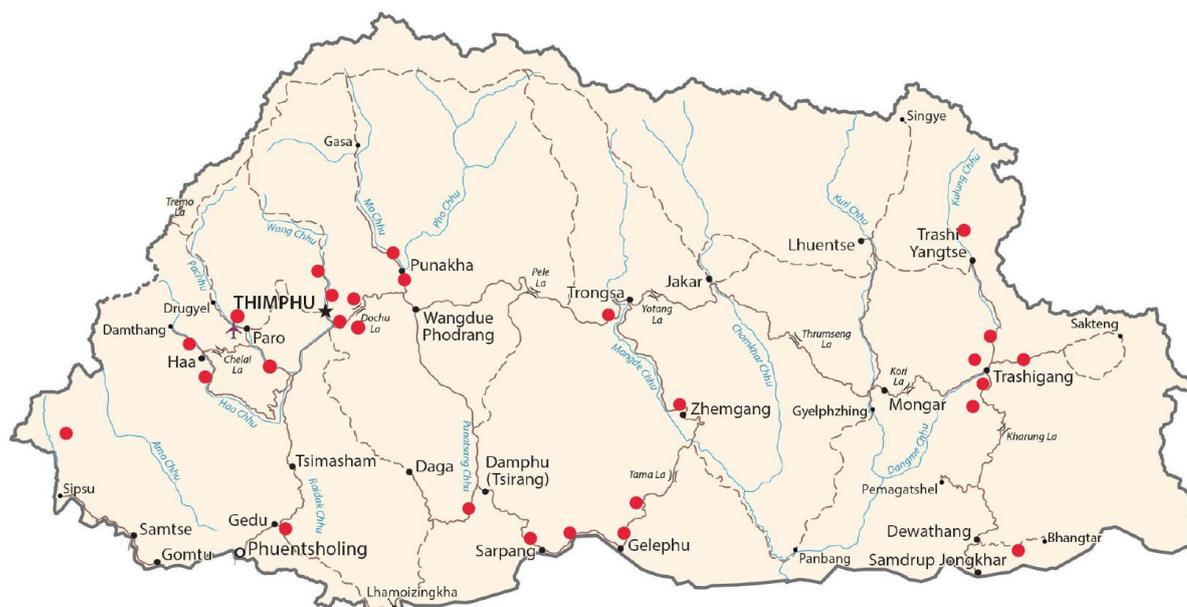
Community	0	0	none	0	0
Organizations or NGO					
Coalitions					
Local Stakeholder	27	96.4	Challenge of misconceptions about	24	85.7
Perceptions			school counseling		
			Challenge of problems in	18	64.3
			communication/collaboration with		
			stakeholders		

Figures

Figure 1

Map of the distribution of school guidance counselors who participated in the interview

(GISGeography, 2023)



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Figure 2

Categorization of themes mentioned in the interviews according to each factor of the Martin et al. (2015) model of 11 factors into Challenges (in bold) or Resources (in italic)

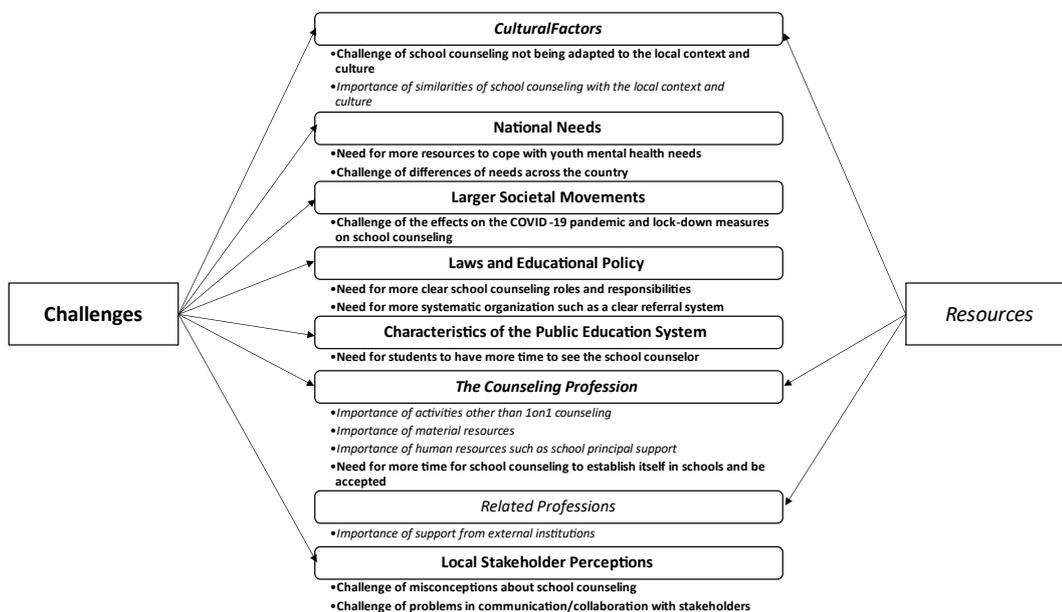
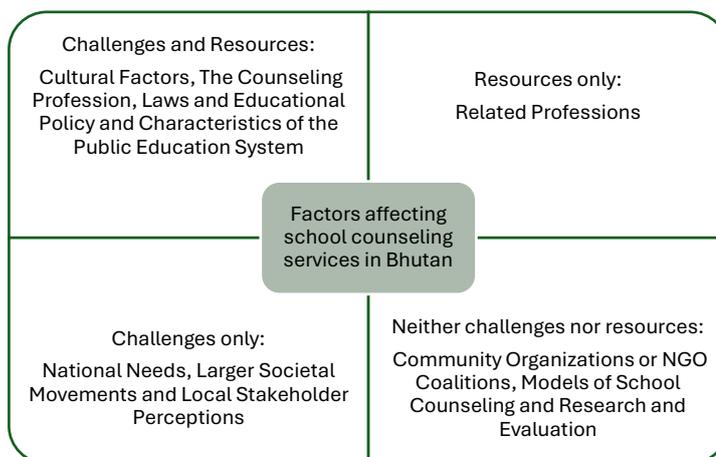


Figure 3

Martin et al.'s (2015) model of 11 factors organized as challenges and/or resources according to interview results



Appendices (Study III)

Appendix 1: School Counselor Interview Protocol

[GREETING/START]

Hi, my name is Julie Larran and I am a doctoral student at Free University of Berlin in Germany under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Sascha Hein. Thank you first of all for taking part in the on-line survey and for taking this time to talk with me today. First, I will remind you about the study I am conducting and my aims, hopes and intentions for this interview:

The purpose of the study is to explore school counseling in Bhutan including work conditions of practicing school counselors. I have already asked you many questions in the on-line survey. The goal of this interview is for me to hear and understand your thoughts, feelings, experiences and anything else that might have been missed by the on-line survey. I will use a prepared set of questions. You are free to decline to answer any question I ask and I welcome all of your input even if it does not seem directly related to the questions.

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be asked to tell me about your experiences as a school counsellor. I would like to know about what has helped you develop your skills, what problems you face and what you believe you need in order to offer optimal school counseling services.

Do you have any questions?

Do you agree to participate in this interview?

- Yes
- No

If yes, then I would like to go over our consent form with you. This is a very important step in research. Without it, I would not be allowed to continue with this interview.

[CONSENT FORM]

Shall we begin our interview and may I start the recording?

- Yes
- No

A. INTRODUCTION

First, I will ask you some questions about yourself in order to start reflecting on your role as a school counselor before we start with the interview questions:

[ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS]

Why or how did you decide you wanted to become a school counselor?

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Thank you for that! Now, we can start with the interview questions. For these next questions, please focus on your experience school counseling BEFORE the pandemic. I will be asking you questions about the pandemic near the end of the interview. Thank you!

1. My first question would be: what does school counseling mean to you?
 - What isn't school counseling?

B. TRAINING/PREPERATION

Thank you! Next, I am curious to hear your story about your own experiences as a school counselor. I would like you to recall the events that have shaped your experiences, before the pandemic.

2. How adequately do you feel the training you received prepared you for your job as a school counselor?
 - What was the most valuable/important part of the training you have received as a school counselor?
 - Do you think you need additional training to improve your work as a school counselor?
 - If yes, what type of training?

C. COLLABORTIVE WORK WITH STUDENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS

I would now like to ask a few questions about the work you do with students, school staff and parents.

3. First, I would like to ask you to think about the problems students in your school face. According to your experience working with student's problems, which problems do you feel you are able to help with, which do you think you cannot help with?
 - And why?
4. Thank you. Next, I would like you to think about how your role as a school counselor is understood from the outside. From your perspective, how well do you think your role as a school counselor is understood?
 - Think of students, parents, school principal, schoolteachers, administration, community

D. BARRIERS/PROBLEMS

5. What barriers stop you from fully engaging in your school counseling role?
 - What problems do you perceive?
 - What are the challenges of helping students with their problems?
6. How do you think these barriers such as (*name barriers mentioned*) should be overcome?
7. What else do you think needs to change in school counselling in schools in Bhutan for you to fully engage in your school counseling role?
 - If you were in-charge, for instance in your school, how would you plan and execute school counseling differently?

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E. RESOURCES

You mentioned before (****resource****) as a helpful resource. I would now like to ask questions about other resources that are helpful for your work.

8. What resources or other types of support are particularly important for you?
 - Within your school, outside your school
 - Who do you go to for advice?
 - E.g.: consultation with a specific person, spiritual figures, online resources (TED talks), outside agencies, individual competencies, specific counselling framework/theory
9. What resources are you currently lacking that you wish you had?
 - Within your school?
 - Outside your school?

F. CULTURE

Thank you! I would now like to ask you a few questions about how school counselling fits with Bhutanese culture.

[ICE BREAKER QUESTIONS]

- What is the word for “school counselor” in Dzongkha or other language native to Bhutan?
 - Are there any other native words that describe the school counselor that don’t exist in English?
10. What aspects, if any, of school counseling do you believe are especially helpful in Bhutan? Specific ideas, theories, practices? What aspects, if any, of school counseling do you believe are problematic in Bhutan? E.g., not accepted or difficult to implement?

G. COVID

I would now like to ask a few questions about your experiences with the COVID-19 pandemic. You may remember answering a couple of questions about it in the on-line survey. I would now like to take the opportunity to understand a little more about how you have been affected by it as it continues to be an important topic at the moment.

11. How have you professionally, in your work as a school counselor, been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic?
 - Has it changed your school counselor role somehow?

H. EXTRA INDIVIDUALIZED QUESTIONS

- Have you worked as a school counselor for more than 5 years? If yes, how has the profession changed over time in your opinion, if at all?
 - How do you think school counseling will change or evolve in the next 10

INTERVIEW STUDY OF SCHOOL COUNSELORS IN BHUTAN

years?

- Have you always worked in the same school? If no, what differences are there between schools?

I. CLOSING QUESTIONS

Before we finish, is there anything else you would like to mention about being a school counselor, which we haven't talked about but which is important to you?

If you have any questions for me, please ask them!

[THANK YOU NOTE]

Thank you very much for your participation in this project. I genuinely appreciate your willingness to share your perspective and experience! As a recap, I will be transcribing this audio-recording and uploading it to a software program on a password protected computer under your chosen pseudonym. If you would like, I will send you a copy of this transcription so that you can verify for accuracy prior to my analysis. No personal identifiable information will be uploaded to this software, only your responses to my interview questions.

Again, thank you for your participation today. Please feel free to contact me, or any of the people indicated on the study information sheet, if you should have any additional questions or should decide to withdraw your participation from this study.

[DEBRIEFING STATEMENT]

In case any of the questions asked today in this interview were distressing and you would like to talk to someone, or if you have any specific questions about the interview today, you may contact me at my e-mail address julie.larran@fu-berlin.de and we can arrange a meeting on Google Meets if you wish. If you are not comfortable talking to me about your distress but wish to talk to someone about it, I would like to ask you to please refer to your supervisor or other person you trust.

[INCENTIVE]

As promised here is a copy of the book "The Art of Being a School Counselor: Leading with Confidence, Compassion & Authenticity" (2021) by Nancy L. Regas.

Thank you very much again! I wish you a pleasant day and hope to be in touch again soon!

[END OF MEETING]

Appendix D: Invitation Email to Participate in the Online Survey Study

Dear [recipient's name],

My name is Julie Larran and I am a doctoral student at Free University of Berlin in Germany under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Sascha Hein. You are receiving this e-mail because you currently work in a Bhutanese school with a school counselor. With this e-mail, I would like to invite you to participate in my study investigating the work conditions of Bhutanese school counselors as such information is not readily available yet (at least outside of Bhutan) but could be valuable in understanding as well as improving Bhutanese school counseling services. For this study, school counselors, school teachers and school principals such as yourself will be invited to participate in an on line survey.

All input would be extremely valuable and would greatly help to inform school counseling services in Bhutan!

Should you agree to participate in the study, I would be very grateful if you could click on the following link.

PLEASE CLICK HERE TO PARTICIPATE

Participation should take no longer than 30 minutes.

In addition, as a thank you for your participation, there will be a chance to win one of 30 physical copies of the following book:

“Student Mental Health: A Guide For Teachers, School and District Leaders, School Psychologists and Nurses, Social Workers, Counselors, and Parents” (2019)

by William Dikel

Please let me know if you have any questions about participation or about the study in general. You may reply to this e-mail directly or find out more about the study at www.bhutanberlin.com and contact us directly on there.

Participation is completely voluntary. Your decision to not participate in the study or even to withdraw later will not affect your relationship with the school you work in, with your supervisor, with the Ministry of Education of Bhutan or with the Free University of Berlin, Germany.

Please also let me know by replying to this e-mail if you would rather receive a printed, paper copy of the questionnaire. I would be happy to send you one by post/mail.

This study has been approved by the Ministry of Education, Bhutan, by the Department of Education and Psychology Ethics Committee of the Free University of Berlin, Germany, by your Dzongkha Education Officer and by your school principal.

I would be ever so grateful to have you participate in this survey and collaborate with me for this study!

With gratitude,

Julie Larran M.S.c

julie.larran@fu-berlin.de www.bhutanberlin.com

Appendix E: Consent Form for Participation in the Online Survey Study

Dear Sir/Madam,

In pursuit of my PhD studies at the Free University of Berlin, Germany, I am undertaking a study on school counseling in the Kingdom of Bhutan.

As part of my research, I am attempting to reach **all** school counselors in Bhutan with the following **online-survey**. If you yourself are a school counselor working in Bhutan, I would remain obliged if you could kindly complete the survey items **with utmost integrity and honesty**.

The survey should take no more than **30 minutes** to complete. Please find a quiet location to complete the survey, ideally alone and away from distractions. At the end, you will be able to enter a **raffle** for the chance to win one of 30 **books** about student mental health or one of 30 **data plans** as a thank you for your participation. We will also share the study results with you once the project is complete in order to see what can be improved about the school counseling profession in Bhutan.

The **CONFIDENTIALITY** of your responses will be highly maintained.

Online Consent for Participants: please read through the following statements and click the "next" button if you agree in order to start the survey. Thank you!

I understand that:

- The information collected in this study is **confidential** (secret) and **anonymous**, no identifying information will be shared
- Papers and documents will be **stored under lock and key** and all digitalized data will be stored using **protected servers** belonging to the Free University of Berlin
- I understand that my responses on the survey will be considered together with the responses of all other participants **as a whole group** rather than individually so that no input can be specifically related back to me
- I understand that the information I provide will **not be communicated to my school**, be it school principal or any other colleague
- The results of this study will be used for **conference presentations and journal publications** and reports to relevant stakeholders in Bhutan and to inform national policy
- This study has been **approved by the Ministry of Education** of Bhutan and the Ethics Committee of the Department of Education and Psychology of the Free University of Berlin, Germany
- My participation in the study is **completely voluntary**. I can refuse to participate or withdraw from the study later even after agreeing to participate. To do so, I just need to close the window of the online survey. **Neither the school I work in, nor my supervisor, nor the Ministry of Education of Bhutan will know whether I participated in the study or not.**
- My decision to not participate in the study or even to withdraw later **will not bear any negative consequences** and **will not affect my relationship with the school I work in**, with my supervisor, with the Ministry of Education of Bhutan or with the Free University of Berlin, Germany

- Participant's safety and well-being are important throughout the study; while there is minimal risk, questions asked in the online survey **may elicit difficult memories**
- If I am distressed at any time during the survey then **I can discontinue the survey at any time** and I can also contact the primary investigator Julie at julie.larran@fu-berlin.de

I agree:

- to participate in this study
- that research data gathered for the study may be published but my identity will be unidentifiable

Finally, I confirm that I am over 18 years of age

By clicking the "Next" button below, I confirm that I have read and understood the above and am agreeing to participate in this study.

Appendix F: Invitation Email to Participate in the Interview Study

Dear [recipient's name],

I hope that you are well!

My name is Julie Larran and I am a doctoral student at Free University of Berlin in Germany under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Sascha Hein.

You are receiving this e-mail because you are a school counselor in a school in Bhutan who has participated in an online survey for the study I am conducting and agreed to be contacted about an interview. I am currently attempting to interview around 26 school counselors in-person or online.

First I would like to thank you for participating thus far in my study, I am very grateful for your input! With this e-mail, I would like to ask if you would still be interested in carrying out the interview online. The interview will last no longer than 45 minutes, will be audio recorded and transcribed, but will remain strictly confidential. I will be asking questions about training, needs, resources and challenges such as “What resources are particularly important to you in your work as a school counselor?”. In addition, as a thank you for your participation, you will be gifted with a physical copy of the following book: “The Art of Being a School Counselor” (2021) by Nancy L. Regas, which I will attempt to send to you by post (I will be in Bhutan from 07.09.2022 to 24.09.2022 so I will send it to you from within Bhutan).

All input would be extremely valuable and would greatly help to inform school counseling services in Bhutan.

Please let me know by replying directly to this e-mail if you would still be interested in taking part in the interview and, if yes, when (date or time of your preference) you would be available to carry out the on line interview.

Participation in the interview is completely voluntary. We have contacted your school principal who has been informed about the research. Nevertheless, your decision to not participate in the interview will not affect your relationship with the school you work in, with your supervisor, with the Ministry of Education of Bhutan or with the Free University of Berlin, Germany.

I would be ever so grateful to hear back from you! Please also feel free to reach out any time by e-mail should you have any further questions.

With gratitude,

Julie Larran M.S.c

julie.larran@fu-berlin.de www.bhutanberlin.com

Appendix G: Consent Form for Participation in the Interview Study



Julie Larran M.S.c
 Department of Education and Psychology
 Free University of Berlin
 Schwendenerstr. 33
 14195 Berlin
 Germany

julie.larran@fu-berlin.de

Consent Form

Dear [participant's name],

I hope this letter finds you in the best of health. You received this Informed Consent Form because you are a school counsellor in a school in Bhutan and have recently taken part in an on line survey at the invitation of the Free University of Berlin and are about to participate in an in-person interview.

My name is Julie Larran and I am currently a doctoral student at Free University of Berlin in Germany under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Sascha Hein. I am inviting you to participate in my study investigating the work conditions of Bhutanese school counselors as such information is not readily available yet (at least outside of Bhutan) but could be valuable in understanding as well as improving Bhutanese school counseling services. You are being invited to participate because we believe that your experiences with counselling can contribute to our larger understanding of how people in Bhutan experience counseling.

With this letter, I would like to invite you to take part in an interview.

The interview will be audio recorded to ensure I do not miss any information vital to this study. The audio will be transcribed and made anonymous after the interview to ensure that your participation will remain entirely anonymous. The interview should take no more than 45 minutes of your time to complete. I am attempting to reach around 26 school counselors to carry out the interview.

I have provided additional information about the study below. I would be grateful if you could please read through the following sections informing you about the purpose of the study. This is an important step in research. Without it, I would not be allowed to continue further with the study at your school. The purposes of this Consent Form are to give you

information that may affect your decision whether YES or NO you wish to participate in this interview, and to record the consent of those who say YES.

If you are happy with the information provided and would like to participate, please sign your name at the end of this Consent Form.

With gratitude,

Julie Larran M.S.c

julie.larran@fu-berlin.de

www.bhutanberlin.com

This Consent Form has two parts:

- I. Information Sheet (to share information about the study with you)**
- II. Certificate of Consent (for signatures if you choose to participate)**

Part I: Information Sheet

Title of the Study

School counseling in Bhutan: a mixed methods analysis of the work conditions of Bhutanese school counselors

Primary Investigator

Julie Larran, FB Erziehungswissenschaft und Psychologie, Sonderpädagogik, AB emotionale und soziale Entwicklung, Schwendenerstraße 33, 14195 Berlin, Germany
julie.larran@fu-berlin.de

Faculty Advisor

Prof. Dr. Sascha Hein, FB Erziehungswissenschaft und Psychologie, Sonderpädagogik, AB emotionale und soziale Entwicklung, Schwendenerstraße 33, 14195 Berlin, Germany
sascha.hein@fu-berlin.de

I. Purpose of this Research Project

The purpose of the study is to investigate the work conditions of school counselors in Bhutan. This profession is just over ten years old but very little is known about it so far. That is why, the following study will investigate the work conditions of school counselors using surveys and interviews of school counselors but also school teachers, school principals and students.

II. Procedures

This part of the study will involve completing a 45-minute-long interview **on line**. You were asked by e-mail to choose the time of your choice. This research will involve you participating in an interview with me, which will really be more like a conversation. At any point during the conversation if you get uncomfortable or you would prefer not to continue, that is fine, we will stop the interview.

III. Risks

Participant's safety and well-being are important throughout the study. While there is minimal risk, questions asked in this interview today may elicit difficult memories. The primary investigator, Julie Larran, will conduct a debriefing at the end of the interview to make sure you have not been emotionally affected. If you do experience any risk or you are

in need of immediate assistance as a result of completing this study, please contact Julie Larran (julie.larran@-berlin.de) or your supervisor.

IV. Benefits

Once the study is complete, the information gathered may have implications for policies regarding school counseling and future training both for active school counselors and school counselors-in-training.

V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality

The information collected in this study will be confidential (secret) and no identifying information will be shared. The primary investigator, Julie Larran, will ensure to keep your identity confidential and that any other information that you tell Julie is private. You and Julie have agreed on a setting for the interview. You will have the opportunity to choose a pseudonym. Julie will audio record the interview and take notes but will remove all identifying information from the interview transcript, store the recording in an encrypted, secure, and password-protected server of the Free University of Berlin, and permanently delete the audio files and transcripts at the conclusion of the study. In addition, she will give you the opportunity to review the report before the study is complete and request changes to material that is about you. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications and may be quoted and published using a pseudonym of your choice. Only you and Julie will know what your pseudonym is and will safeguard this information. Please keep in mind that after completion of the interview, should you decide to withdraw from the study entirely, it will be important to provide the pseudonym in order for me to delete your interview data. All interview data will be considered together with the data of all other participants as a whole group rather than individually so that no input can be specifically related back to an individual participant. Moreover, no interview data will be communicated to the school, be it school teacher, school principal or any other colleague.

VI. Compensation

As a thank you for your participation, you will be gifted with a physical copy of the following book: “The Art of Being a School Counselor: Leading with Confidence, Compassion & Authenticity” (2021) by Nancy L. Regas, at the end of the interview. This book will be sent to you by post.

VII. Freedom to Withdraw

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without consequences. You can omit any questions you do not feel comfortable answering without penalty or punishment. Even if you agree now and sign this consent form, you are free to withdraw from the study at any time. Your decision not to participate will neither bear any negative consequences nor affect your relationship with the school you work at, with your supervisor, with the Ministry of

Education of Bhutan or with the Free University of Berlin or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled.

VIII. Authorization

This study has been approved by the Ministry of Education, Bhutan, as well as the Department of Education and Psychology Ethics Committee of the Free University of Berlin, Germany.

IX. Contacting the Researchers

If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Julie, or the faculty involved with the study, whom are identified at the beginning of this form:

Julie Larran: Julie.Larran@fu-berlin.de

Prof. Dr. Sascha Hein: Sascha.Hein@fu-berlin.de

Our study website: www.bhutanberlin.com

Part II: Certificate of Consent

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this study. All of my questions have been answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent to participate in this study:

Yes No

I agree to the interview being audio-recorded and transcribed:

Yes No

I would like to receive a copy of the audio and transcription of the interview:

Yes No

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature:

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

Printed Name: _____

Date: _____

Signature:

Selbstständigkeitserklärung

Hiermit erkläre ich,

- die vorliegende Dissertation selbstständig verfasst und ohne unerlaubte Hilfe angefertigt habe.
- dass ich die Stellen der Arbeit, die dem Wortlaut oder dem Sinn nach anderen Werken (dazu zählen auch Internetquellen und KI-basierte Tools) entnommen sind, unter Angabe der Quelle kenntlich gemacht habe.
- Alle Hilfsmittel, die verwendet wurden, habe ich angegeben. Die Dissertation ist in keinem früheren Promotionsverfahren angenommen oder abgelehnt worden.

Berlin, 14.10.2024

Julie Larran