

Relationship among Students' Personality, Gender, and Attitude towards Counseling Service and Utilization of School Guidance and Counseling Services

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Abstract

This study aimed to investigate the relationship among students' personality dimensions, gender, attitude towards counseling services, and utilization of school counseling services. A mixed research approach with an emphasis on quantitative methods was employed, and a total of 368 participants were selected using multi-stage cluster sampling. The instruments adopted from the literature were piloted, and their reliability was processed through Cronbach's alpha. However, the items measuring the neuroticism dimension appeared to have unacceptable reliability, so the investigation was limited to four of the Big Five personality dimensions. The results revealed that, except for agreeableness, a significant positive relationship was found among the different personality types and attitudes towards the utilization of school guidance and counseling services. Multiple linear regression revealed that the effect of all students' personality dimensions on their attitude was statistically significant ($F(4, 363) = 7.538, p < 0.05$). The R^2 indicated that only 7.7 percent of the variance in attitude could be predicted by extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness dimensions. Results of the logistic regression revealed that students' attitudes and gender were significant predictors of the utilization of school counseling services. Moreover, gender was found to be a moderator of the relationships among personality, attitude, and utilization of school guidance and counseling services. In conclusion, personality, gender, and attitude towards school counseling are related to students' individual attributes and behaviors. Thus, the researcher recommends that schools should work on developing a positive attitude among students towards counseling.

Keywords: *Agreeableness, Attitude, Counseling service, Gender, neuroticism, Personality dimensions*

Introduction

Any educational institution has the responsibility of producing physically strong, mentally alert, emotionally stable, culturally sound, and socially efficient personnel (Dienye, 2011). Giving due emphasis to all these, schools are functioning as areas where nationally accepted and approved curricula, strategies, and proclamations are put into practice.

Healthy functioning of educational institutions though doesn't guarantee, is vital for learners' multi-dimensional development. Besides, learners' active engagement in all school tasks is crucial for the attainment of the national and local objectives for which they are intended. Learner's active involvement is affected by both internal and external factors to the learner's well-being (Fredrich, 2011). External factors can be related to school environment, teacher's approach, educational policy, peer interaction, availability of facilities such as laboratories, and school counseling services. Whereas, internal factors include students' personality, motivation, self-efficacy, attitude, etc. Though these factors differ in intensity and type, they determine an individual's degree of achieving and personal intonations. Moreover, Lapan, Gybers, and Sun (1997) have also pointed out that high-quality counseling can prevent students from turning to violence, drug, or alcohol abuse, as well as improve grades and reduce classroom disruptions.

Krumboltz and Kolpin (2002) stated that, unlike in the past time, today's school counselors tend to intercede prior to any incidents and to become more proactive in developing and enacting school-wide prevention plans. Nevertheless, utilization of this service is not uniform across all students depending on different factors such as variation in dimensions of personality (Sauder, n.d.), sex, and their attitude towards the services (Regina, 2011). Birhane, Birhane, and Fantahun (2005) have pointed out that adolescents' negative attitude toward the service providers was found to be the main reason behind their failure to utilize the service. The study by Berhane et al. (2005) further pointed out that adolescents failed to properly utilize reproductive health services because of fear of being seen by parents or other people and embarrassment, signifying low scorers in openness and introverted personality. Moreover, the study by Berhane et al. (2005) further revealed that clients' failure to utilize the counseling services was due to a lack of trust in the professionals in keeping confidentiality which in fact shows low agreeableness.

Besides, personality, attitude, and gender have roles in determining individuals' inclination towards getting or seeking help from others (Regina, 2011). Help-seeking behavior may be affected by clients' problems. Every human being encounters various problems in his/her life span. These problems may range from simple to complex; they may be short-lived or prolonged; they may be solved by a person or they may need others' help. Among the problems, psychological maladjustment and behavioral disorders, though they vary in degree from one to others, can be found in any nation irrespective of their economic status (Daune & Srebalus, 1996).

Human beings pass through various stages of development across their life cycle from infancy to old age. Among these stages, the high school years are particularly full of uncertainty and turmoil. Stress, depression, and suicide are serious problems for many teenagers in high school. Thus, adults need to be familiar with the biological and personality factors that predispose a young person to depression (Garnfinkel, Hoberman, Parsons & Walker, 1986). However, the ability to cope with the challenges of adolescence differs from individual to individual.

The problems of psychological maladjustment and behavioral disorders can be modified through the effective application of psychotherapeutic and counseling techniques. Pitzer and Walker, as cited in Walker (2005), have suggested practical coping skills such as communication skills and problem-solving skills for psychologically maladjusted school children. Nevertheless, schools' mere provision of counseling services does not guarantee students' behavioral readjustment if the services are not properly utilized. Abebe and Mitike (2009) have indicated that only 41% of school youth were aware of the existence of confidential HIV testing services in Butajira. Moreover, there was evidence by Issaakidis & Carter, cited in Sauder (n.d), indicating that less than one-third of people who could potentially benefit from counseling services received such treatments. Among the reasons behind improper utilization of school counseling services in the world and local basis, students' personality dimensions, their gender, and their attitude toward counseling were treated in this study. Thus, in this study attempt was made to answer the following research questions:

- Is there a significant relationship among students' personality, gender, and attitude towards counseling services and their utilization of school guidance and counseling services?
- Does students' personality significantly affect their attitude towards school guidance and counseling services?
- Do students' personality, gender, and attitude have a significant effect on their utilization of school guidance and counseling services?
- Does a student's gender moderate the relationship among personality, attitude and utilization of school guidance and counseling services?

As mentioned, this study aimed to investigate the relationship among students' personality, gender, and attitude towards counseling services and utilization of school guidance and counseling services. Specifically, the study aimed at:

- Investigating whether there is a significant correlation among students' personality, gender, and attitude towards counseling service and their utilization of school guidance and counseling services.
- Identifying whether students' personality affects their attitude towards counseling services.
- Investigating whether student's personality, gender, and attitude have a significant effect on their utilization of school guidance and counseling services.

- Examining whether students' gender moderates the relationship among personality, attitude, and utilization of school guidance and counseling services.

Research Methodology

Research design

The research employed mixed research design to investigate the relationships among students' personality, gender, attitude towards counseling, and the utilization of school counseling services.

Population, sample, and sampling techniques

The target population of this study comprised students of three public secondary schools in Bahir Dar town, Ethiopia. Among five public secondary schools in the town, three, namely Tana Haik, Fasilo, and Bahir Dar Preparatory School were purposively selected because these schools offered counseling services to students. At the time of the study, the three schools had 7278 students (3801 males and 3477 females). Multi-stage cluster sampling was applied to obtain representative samples from different sections. To minimize potential problems related to questionnaire administration, one grade from each school was randomly selected using simple random sampling. Subsequently, 2-4 sections were chosen using the lottery method to achieve the required proportion of participants.

The sample size was determined using the formula developed by Cochran cited in Israel (2009) as follows.

$$no = \frac{Z^2pq}{e^2}$$

Where,

- no = sample size
- Z= abscissa of normal curve that cuts off an area at tails (found in statistical tables)
- e = desired level of precision
- p = estimated proportion of an attribute that is present in the population
- q = 1-p

In this research, the desired confidence level was 95%; the precision was 5%; the assumed level of variability was 0.5, and the table value of Z is 1.96, yielding the total sample size 385 as:

$$no = \frac{(1.96)^2(0.5)(0.5)}{(0.05)^2} = \underline{385}$$

The following table shows the population and the selected sample.

Table 1 : *Target population and Sample Size*

School	Population				Samples						
	Grades	M	F	T	% share	Grade	M		F		T
								.in	Selected	.in	Selected
						% school		% school			
FSS	9 th	696	653	1349	31.95	9 th	50.1	62	49.81	62	124
	10 th	471	505	976							
THSS	9 th	579	618	1197	42.02	11 th	51.1	82	48.88	79	161
	10 th	376	359	735							
	11 th	361	310	671							
	12 th	247	208	455							
BDPS	11 th	545	475	1020	26.03	12 th	56.5	57	43.49	43	100
	12 th	526	349	875							
Total		3801			100		20				
			3477	7278			52	1	48	184	385

Source: Record offices of Tana Haik SS, Fasilo SS, and Bahir Dar Preparatory school, 2012

THSS = Tana Haik Secondary school, FSS = Fasilo Secondary school, BDPS = Bahir Dar Preparatory School; M= Males F= Females T= Total

Data collection instruments

All data for this study were collected through a questionnaire. To assess students' personalities, the researcher adapted John and Srivastava's (1999) Big Five Inventory (BFI)—a 44 Likert scale measuring five different dimensions of personality. After computing the reliability using Cronbach alpha on pilot data, 19 items with low reliability were rejected, resulting in a total Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 for the personality scale.

The study used 11 Likert scale items, modified versions of 29 items developed by Grant (n.d), to measure students' attitudes towards counseling services. The utilization of school counseling services was measured by 14 dichotomously scored items. The reliability of the attitude scale was computed using Cronbach's alpha, while the reliability of the utilization scale was computed using the split-half method. The total reliability for the attitude and utilization scales appeared to be 0.73 and 0.62, respectively. Additionally, the researcher sought to understand the reasons behind students' utilization or lack of utilization of school guidance and counseling services. Students were asked to respond 'yes' or 'no' to the closed-

ended question, (example, do you usually visit school guidance and counseling services or utilize the service?). Those who responded 'no' were then asked to state their reasons for abstaining.

Methods of data analysis

To examine whether there was a significant correlation among students' personality, gender, and attitude towards counseling services and their utilization of school guidance and counseling services, the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used. Besides, an independent sample t-test was employed to investigate whether students' gender moderates the relationship among personality, attitude, and utilization of school guidance and counseling services. Logistic regression was used to determine if students' personality affects their attitude towards counseling services. To ascertain whether students' personality, gender, and attitude towards counseling services influence the utilization of school guidance and counseling services, multiple regression analysis was conducted. Data regarding the reasons behind students' failure to utilize school guidance and counseling services, which were gathered through open-ended questions, were analyzed qualitatively.

Results

Relationship among personality, gender, attitude towards counseling services and utilization

Table 2: *Relationship among personality, gender, attitude towards counseling services and utilization*

Variable	Mean	SD	Correlation coefficients							
			Gender	UTN	OPS	CNS	EXVN	AGS	ATT	
Gender	-	-	1.00							
UTN	-	-	.126*	1.00						
OPS	26.1250	3.92722	.108*	.166**	1.00					
CNS	28.9918	3.70616	.151**	.200**	.406**	1.00				
EXVN	15.7663	2.59737	.059	.113*	.339**	.438**	1.00			
AGS	27.8886	3.69639	.116*	.073	.317**	.346**	.368**	1.00		
ATT	45.7908	10.91918	.042	.192**	.092	.261**	.111*	.168**	1.00	

*correlation is significant at 0.05 level (2-tailed)

** correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed),

UTN- students' utilization of school counseling service

ATT- students' attitude towards counseling

OPS- openness

N = 368

EXVN- extraversion

CNS- conscientiousness

AGS- agreeableness

The Pearson product correlation has revealed that there was statistically significant positive relationship between students' gender and utilization of school counseling services ($r = 0.126, p < 0.05$), openness ($r=0.108, p<0.05$), conscientiousness ($r =0.151, p < 0.01$) and agreeableness ($r = 0.116, p < 0.05$), while all personality dimensions (except agreeableness) were significantly and positively related to utilization of school counseling services ($p < 0.05$).

Students' attitudes towards counseling were also significantly and positively related to utilization and all personality dimensions (except openness). However, the result has pointed out that there was no statistically significant relationship among gender with extraversion and attitude, utilization with agreeableness as well as openness with attitude.

The effect of students' personality on their attitude towards counseling

Table 3: *Multiple linear regressions on the effect of students' personality on their attitude towards counseling*

Variables	Un standardized Coefficients		Standardized Beta	t	Sig	Multiple regression
	B	Stand.Error				
(Constant)	20.113	5.457	-	3.686*	.000	$R^2 = 0.077$
openness	-.094	.159	-.034	-.592	.554	
Conscientiousness	.738	.176	.251	4.195*	.000	$R^2_{Adj.} = 0.067$
Extraversion	-.102	.247	-.024	-.412	.680	
Agreeableness	.299	.167 [□]	.101	1.794	.074	F=7.538

* = $p < 0.05$

As stated in Table 3, the multiple linear regression depicted that extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and conscientiousness collectively and significantly affect students' attitudes towards counseling services ($F_{4, 363}=7.538, p < 0.05$). The R square was ($R^2 = 0.077$), which indicates that 7.7% of the variation in students' attitudes towards guidance and counseling services can be explained by the combined impact of openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness.

The effect of students' personality dimensions, gender, and attitude on the utilization of school counseling services

Table 4: *Logistic regressions on the effect of students' personality dimensions, gender, and attitude on utilization of school counseling services*

Variables	B	S.E.	Wald	Df	Odds Ratio
Openness	.064	.035	3.354	1	1.066
conscientiousness	.077	.041	3.568	1	1.080
Extraversion	.026	.054	.237	1	1.027
Agreeableness	-.028	.037	.554	1	.973
Attitude	.035	.012	8.597	1	1.036*
Sex	.479	.244	3.857	1	1.615*
Constant	-6.891	1.416	23.668	1	.001

* $P < 0.05$ $X^2 = 31.904$, $df = 6$, $N = 368$, $Cox \& Snell R^2 = 0.083$, $Nagelkerke R^2 = 0.119$

The result of logistic regression pointed out that when all personality variables, gender, and attitude were considered together, they significantly predicted students' utilization of school counseling services ($X^2 = 31.904$, $df = 6$, $N = 368$, $p < 0.05$). The model explained between 8.3% (Cox & Snell R Square) and 11.9% (Nagelkerke R Square) of the variance in the utilization of school guidance and counseling services, and classified 71.7% of the cases correctly.

The odds ratios of estimating correctly on who would utilize school guidance and counseling services improved by 3.6% if one knows attitude and by 61.5% if one knows the student's gender. However, the prediction would not be improved significantly with knowledge of any personality dimension. As depicted in Table 4, with the exception of attitude (OR= 1.036, $p < 0.05$), and sex (OR= 1.615, $p < 0.05$), all variables entered did not significantly predict students' utilization of counseling services.

The data gathered through open-ended items confirmed that the effect of personality and attitude on the utilization of school guidance and counseling services is paramount. Some of the students' responses reflected unfavorable attitudes towards the counseling professionals and the profession itself. For instance, they reflected:

- "I don't utilize it because the service deliverers there are no better than those of student advisors" (male student).
- "I lack awareness about the services offered and the issues addressed by the professionals. Additionally, I have heard that the counselors do not approach client students in a friendly manner" (female student).
- "I don't think that the usual advice given at the center can help me. It is the same with the advice I get at home" (male student).

- *“I know that even if I go there, I can't get any more things besides advice, and I also assume that advice can't solve my distress. That is why I don't utilize it.” (female student)*

The role of gender in the relationship among students' personality, attitude and utilization of counseling services

Binary logistic regression conducted for males has revealed that between 14.7 % (Cox & Snell R²) and 22.2% (Nagelkerke R²) of the variance in utilization of school guidance and counseling services, and classified 78.3% of the cases correctly while for females, it explained between 9.7% (Cox & Snell R²) and 13.4% (Nagelkerke R²) of the variance in utilization of school guidance and counseling services, and classified of the cases correctly. In females, an extraversion with (OR=1.200) was found to be a strong, significant, and positive predictor of utilization of school counseling services among other personality dimensions. Thus, it can be inferred that a student's gender moderates the relationship between his/her personality, attitude, and utilization of school counseling services.

Discussions

As per the findings, students' gender was significantly and positively related to the utilization of school counseling services. This goes in line with that of Turkum (2004) and Regina (2011) whose findings indicated a significant interrelationship between gender and utilization of school counseling services.

The result has revealed that with the exception of agreeableness, all personality dimensions are significantly and positively related to students' utilization of school counseling services. According to Costa and McCrae's categorization cited in Stephen and Sutton (1996), the more the reserved, sober, retiring, quiet (low scorers in extraversion), down-to-earth, narrow interests, un-artistic (low scorers in openness) and aimless, unreliable, lazy, careless, lax, negligent, weak-willed (low scorers in conscientiousness) the less he/she utilizes school guidance and counseling services. Again, this is partially evidenced by previous investigations. Because extravert students are enthusiastic, active, and have confident characters, and for the fact that they are energetic and outgoing, they want to find much information, which in case, forces them to contact teachers, supervisors, and friends as information sources (Heinsröm, 2003). These valuable information sources might have directed them to contact school counselors in every experience of distress. Perhaps this is the reason why extraversion is positively related to the utilization of school counseling services. The resulting relationship between conscientiousness and utilization is also replicated in the findings of Greenidge (2007) and Regina (2011). Nevertheless, in this study, agreeableness did not relate to the utilization of counseling services. This seems to contradict the findings by Cepeda-Benito & Short (1998) & KeUy and Achter (1995) whose results had shown that openness is related to a positive attitude and utilization of counseling services (cited in Regina, 2011). This result may be due to students' decision to

utilize/not utilize school counseling services; it is mostly predicted by their gender and attitude towards it. Thus, being agreeable or not had no role to play as vital either positively or negatively.

In this study, attitude is positively and significantly related to the utilization of school counseling services. This implies that students with positive attitudes towards counseling services tend to utilize counseling services more frequently than those with negative attitudes, and the opposite is true. This replicates earlier findings by Greenidge (2007) whose study indicated that clients' seeking professional counseling is directly and significantly related to their attitude towards help.

Generally, the result revealed that statistically significant and positive interrelationship existed between students' gender and utilization of school counseling services, gender and all dimensions of personality except extraversion as well as personality dimensions (except openness) and attitude, personality dimensions (except agreeableness) with utilization of school counseling services, and finally attitude towards counseling and utilization of school counseling services.

The cumulative effect of all personality dimensions on students' attitudes towards school counseling services was statistically significant. Similarly, Costa & McCrae, cited in Stephen and Sutton (1996), have found out that the more the student is aimless, unreliable, lazy, careless, lax, negligent, weak-willed, and hedonistic, more the negative attitude he/she has towards counseling services and vice versa. Studies on conscientiousness and attitude towards counseling have given mixed results. The higher the score in conscientiousness, the more favorable the attitude towards counseling (Seyoum, 2011), while the findings by Sauder (n.d) revealed that no relationship existed between the two.

However, in this study, conscientiousness was found to be positively and significantly related to students' attitudes towards counseling by solely taking a lion's share in determining their attitude. This was perhaps due to the high scorers in the conscientiousness dimension being somewhat bright, hard-working, and better-achieving students (Burger, 1997). Thus, they were in a position to easily recognize new ideas, judge phenomena from perspectives of their significance to their life and exert effort to achieve those phenomena, and accommodate those ideas that appeared positive by their judgment. Besides conscientiousness, other personality dimensions failed to significantly affect students' attitudes towards counseling.

In this study students' personality, gender, and attitude towards counseling services significantly predict their utilization of school counseling services. However, from all the predictors entered, there were students' gender and attitude towards school guidance and counseling that significantly weighed in predicting utilization of school guidance and counseling services.

This partly replicates the findings of Eyo, Joshua, and Esuong (2010) where students' attitudes towards counseling determined utilization. Though all personality dimensions did not significantly affect students' utilization of school counseling services, openness and extraversion positively affect the utilization of counseling services.

It has been found from this study that students' gender moderates the relationship among personality, attitude, and utilization of school counseling services. Previously, it was reported that naturally girls are better in interpersonal relationships and self-disclosure than boys (Eyo, Joshua & Esuong, 2010), and men seek help for emotional problems less frequently than women (cited in Zawawi, 2011).

Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the above findings, the researcher concludes that having students' personality test scores, identifying their gender, and the intensity of their attitude towards counseling help to describe the degree of utilizing the counseling services. Students' attitude and gender can significantly predict their utilization of school counseling services. Furthermore, working against negative attitudes in favor of positive attitudes for all students in general and male students in particular maximizes students' utilization of school counseling services.

In light of this, the following recommendations are suggested to maximize students' utilization of school counseling services:

- Schools should organize, strengthen, and use school co-curricular activities such as school mini-media clubs to create awareness about the purposes and functions of school guidance and counseling services, thereby developing positive attitudes towards counseling.
- Using the regular parent-teacher meeting as an opportunity to announce the purposes and functions of school guidance and counseling services, schools have to inform students' parents to motivate children to use school counseling services as a first option for getting advice.
- Schools have to work towards improving the standards of the counseling room in order to minimize and eradicate the possible associations of counseling service centers with over crowdedness, untidiness, and messiness (uncleanliness) by students.
- Schools have to work in cooperation with zonal and woreda education offices to assign counselors for each school. Assigning two counselors, one male and one female in each school may help all students get the services.
- Teachers and school administrative bodies have to work towards enhancing students' positive attitudes towards counseling. Operant and classical conditioning, which were suggested as the main means of developing attitude by Kenrick, Neuburg, and Cialdini (2007), if properly applied, can increase the number of clients and minimize client attrition before sessions end. This can be achieved by praising students who visit the center and providing them with posters and short pamphlets about the counseling services available.

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