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Audience Analysis

Parents and school counselors are the sources to whom contemporary students can reach out when confronting problems in terms of sociality (school bullying or peer-victimization), mental health (depression, alcoholism, drug abuse and self-mutilation) and academic (time management and study skills) aspects. This research aims at articulating the effectiveness of parental involvement and school consoling respectively, thereby making the knowledge home to both sides of the helpers, such as “what kinds of helps they are capable of offering?”, “what actions should they prompt or avoid in face with different problems?” and “how can they help to achieve a better and positive consulting outcome?” By rising up those questions, my research provides a ground for the readers to get a general knowledge about student counseling and its strategies specifically for sociality, mental health and academic problems. This research is primarily designed for college students whose majors are psychology, sociology and education. Additionally, helpers like parents and school counselors or social psychologists are also my significant audience since my research can serve as a guideline for them; illuminating different roles they should play when consulting with problematic students and how these differences in roles made on a case to case basis can lead to better outcomes. Moreover, I expect powerful departments such as school counseling department, school administration or parental community can read my study and then take some actions, thus make changes in their counseling policies so as to profit students who turn to them with problems that I analyze in the study. Last but not the least, students with problems in sociality (school bullying or peer-victimization), mental health (depression, alcoholism, drug abuse and self-mutilation) and academic (time management and study

skills) may also learn from my research. Technically, they are the ultimate beneficiaries for my research. If they know the helping schemes beforehand, they will not act in a surprised and unprepared manner in the process, which will definitely make for a more favorable consulting outcome. The population of my audience ranges in age from approximately 17 for students to about 70 for experts, parents and administrators. All readers should at least know the concept of student counseling and those have access to it or are capable of improving it are strongly recommended. Gender and religion don't impact my choice of audiences. Since the research is based on the current background of America, the conclusion may not apply to conditions in other nations.

Collaborate Parental Involvement and School Counseling to Help Problematic Students

Youth suicide is one of the major public problems in this decade. Official statistics have suggested that in 2007, this issue has made one of the tenth leading causes of death in U.S., accounting for 34,598 life-taking cases. In other words, 11.3 out of 100,000 young populations committed suicide in that year and the condition even shows an exacerbating tendency (NIMH). Although youth suicide is a tough problem, it's still preventable only if we take certain effective actions before the condition becomes uncontrollable. Before that, it is necessary for us to know the factors that lead young people to adopt this self-destructing action - suicide. And this demanding job requires the candidates who are not only accessible for young people but also trustworthy to take the responsibility. Given those requirements, parents and school counselors, without a doubt, are the most qualified individuals. Generally speaking, it is quite interesting to find that those two kinds of helpers have a multitude of differences in terms of relationship (with students), scholarship (counseling relevance) and social influence. And the argument about which of them is more favorable to solve student's problems has been sprung up for a long time with large amount of studies and surveys involved, but they fail to reach a unanimous conclusion even till today while the youth suicide is continuing getting worse by time. I believe it is time to see the issue from a macro level, presenting and analyzing different advantages for sides of the people from two types of backgrounds in a comprehensive and earnest way. So in my research, I argue for the collaboration between them, – specifically, parents and school counselors. To support it, my research shows that a joint working mood between parents and school counselors is better for either the helpers or students. On a case by case basis, parents and school counselors have different roles to play in relation to different problems confronting the contemporary students. Commonly, there are three types of problems comprising sociality, mental health and academic aspects.

The concept we all familiar with is that suicide is an extreme act of self-destruction that often committed out of despair or ascribed to underlying mental disorder (Nock 1-17). Why do young students suffer from despair and mental disorder? The problems may probably attribute to the increasing pressures

loaded on them everyday associated with sociality, mental health and academic events. By sociality, I refer to a specific problem - bullying or peer-victimization, a longstanding issue that invariably harasses contemporary students and meanwhile, appeals wide concerns from the public. The empirical evidence demonstrates that “a bully can turn something like going to the bus stop or recess into a nightmare for students” which can “leave deep emotional scars that last for life”; and in extreme situations, it can “culminate in violent threats, property damage or someone getting seriously hurt” (“Helping Kids Deal with Bullies”). A recently example is about Tyler Clementi, a University freshman jumped to his death, subsequent with three other student deaths just in a few days. This case, sensational enough to draw public concerns, meanwhile reveals the severe aftermath of peer-victimization (Bond 12). Also, a nationwide survey comes out with a statistic that approximately 20 per cent of students ranging from elementary school to high school reported to encounter more than one bullying every month and a recent statistic admits that half of all incidents go unreported (Bullying). In view of this, rescuing victimized students from harms and preventing terrible consequences are the pressing matters that need actions from helpful individuals forthwith. Additionally, facts that a spate of mental health problems comprising depression, alcoholism, drug abuse and self-mutilation are directly related to suicide incidents cannot be underestimated. The result gained from a seven-year survey which monitored boys and girls ranging in age from 12 to 17 shows that “34 youngsters in the group who suffered from major depression had attempted suicide or devised a suicide plan.” And a government data also confirms that 17 percent of the youths at risk of killing themselves should blame alcohol or drug abuse (Worsnop 369-392). How about academic pressure that contemporary students commonly bear? I have to admit that bare solid evident we have so far can strongly vindicate its contributions to youth suicide; nevertheless numerous studies have affirmed that failing academically can lead to extreme mood swings for students, which can engender high odds of mental health problems (Koch 593-616). Account for this indirect connection, it is reasonable to include academic problems into my study of the risk factors that lead to student suicide.

Challenged by these three major problems that either directly or indirectly contributes to the increasingly exacerbated issue - youth suicide, both parents and school counselors can actually take effective actions to make changes. Both of them are significant nonetheless different because they differ in relationship (with students), scholarship (counseling relevance) and social influence. And their jobs or roles assigned based on different problems are correspondingly different. For one thing, parents who have intimate relationships with students can pay close attentions to their children and take the responsibility to solve problems. Given that, they are able to practice jobs like detecting, comforting, instructing, involving and intervening when problems occur. On contrast, school counselors are someone who separate from students' lives but be on their side as a helpful source. Since they are professional in consultation and reconciliation, and they have access to similar cases, they have the advantage to work with teachers and principals to create a healthy learning environment for students. In addition to that, they can also offer effective guidelines for parents or act directly as instructors to consult with students.

More specifically, when dealing with sociality problem like school bullying or peer-victimization, parents can provide immense helps to students throughout the whole issue. At the very beginning, they are the people who can detect early when their children encounter bullying in school. The odds are good that students who begin enduring bullying often act differently than before. They may probably exhibit unusual signs, for example, some cases show that they may seem anxious, "moodier or more easily upset than usual", or "not eating, sleeping well"; or in other cases, they may start "avoiding certain situations, like taking the bus to school" ("Helping Kids Deal with Bullies"). These subtle warning signs are noticeable for careful parents. Once they emerge, parents can be alarmed of the chance of a bully and thus take timely actions. Detecting the problem as early as possible is always helpful to diminish adverse impacts and prevent terrible aftermaths, which is definitely parents' exclusive privilege. In comparison, for school counselors, it can be difficult for the outsiders to be informed of what is happening unless the bullied students want them to be involved and turn to them voluntarily.

In addition to detecting bullying, what actions should parent take to prevent it before it takes place and solve it when it is happening are also worth studying. There is no denying that parents who live together with students - their children can have a multitude of interactions with them whilst school counselors cannot. Therefore, by consuming time and efforts, parents are capable of closely being involved in students' lives and as a result, playing an active role. Contrarily, school counselors, having to help numerous demanding "customers" everyday, may not be able to concentrate so much on one individual and involve so intimately as their counterparts – parents do. The "a multitude of interactions" that parents have with their kid can be manifestly embodied by actions like communicating, advising, inquiring (about their social life), lecturing (problem-solving skills); plenty of empirical evidence vindicates those methods to help the bullied.

More specifically, during communication, opening up the issue is the first challenge confronting parents. Chances are that bullying is the last thing that bullied students want to tell adults about. It is not unusual to find that they "feel embarrassed and ashamed that it is happening", or they are "scared that if the bully finds out that they told, it will get worse" ("Helping Kids Deal with Bullies"). Given the situation, school counselors can hardly stand a chance to perform consultancy since victims don't search help actively; while parents, who spend much time with their children every day, can at least find opportunities to bring the issue up. What's important about opening up the conversation is that students, whether being bullied or having seen it happening to someone else, often harbor misconceptions about bullying which hinder them from resolving the problem actively and timely. All they should have done is confessing the problem, whatever to parents or to school counselors. However, parents as the ones students have intimate relationships with, are usually the priority to talk to comparing to school counselors, who are perfect strangers with profound knowledge of counseling though.

When students feel free to talk about bullying, parents can discuss the problem and brainstorm ways they can do to deal with specific situations. Acting as successfully supportive parents, however is never an easy job. Instead of taking over the control and try to rescue the bullied adversity, parents should

nevertheless instruct their children how to manage problems on their own. By doing so, parents can help the victims acquire “an important skill-set” so the weak ones can behave more confidently and skillfully facing with a bully when their powerful parents are unavailable. Besides offering solutions, parents should also give lectures to their children about the true value of bullying; that is, “bullying is a direct result of the bully’s behavior, and it is never the victim’s fault.” To achieve it, parents can praise the children for “being brave enough to talk about the problem.” (“How to Stop School Bullying: What Every Parent Needs to Know”.) This action can effectively spare children’s apprehension to search help. Also, it can break the problem down, making for a timely resolution.

Involvement in children’s lives doesn’t merely mean advising and lecturing. Parents also have the ability to act as trustworthy people who have the authority to make changes for the students, which explains why parents are more advantageous than school counselors to resolve bully issues with students. Studies have proved that parental instructions can facilitate students developing friendships (“How to Stop School Bullying: What Every Parent Needs to Know”). There is no denying that having a strong set of friends can serve as strong medicine against bullies. To achieve it, parents can help kids meet other kids by making payment for them to join clubs or sports programs; or they can arrange activities to bolster their children up both physically and spiritually, such as gym classes or self-defense classes like karate (“Helping Kids Deal with Bullies”).

In view of these, it is manifest that parents hold an incomparably essential position to help bullied students with bullying issues. What about the educational institutes and the bully’s parents? Quite a few of studies display that commonly “institutes are more responsive with parental intervention”, so parents can also conduct negotiation and reconciliation in bullying issues with flying colors (Kennedy 16-25). For example, if bullying occurs, parents can alert the teacher or the principal of what is happening and ask for a joint cooperation to devise a scheme and “address the problem” (“How to Stop School Bullying: What Every Parent Needs to Know”). Conversely, schools are reported to behave more actively to parents’ feedbacks than either counselors’ or children’s. Besides, parents are the ones having more rights as well as

responsibilities then school counselors to “approach the bully's parents” and the school principals, and ask for a settlement (“Helping Kids Deal with Bullies”). Especially for less responsive parents (of bullies) or less genuine educational institutes, “they reward the very behavior they may wish to discourage after a serious parental intervene” (Kennedy 16-25).

To briefly sum up, parents are proved to be effective to not only take care of bullied students but also deal with relevant people or institutes. Give that, what should school counselor do in bullying issue? For someone possessing professional knowledge, it is often the case that his or her facility shines to investigate, analyze and scheme. So the major job assigned to experienced school counselors is working with educational institutes - schools to enable a healthy studying environment for students. As essential as parents in the issue, school counselors are the only people who are capable of doing the job. Specifically, there are no doubts that school counselors are familiar to solve sociality problems like bullying with professional knowledge. What backing up their professionalism are the authorized trainings they received and the long years of working experience they have. In 2008, a survey conducted by two important official counseling departments ASCA and NASP studied about working years among approximately 200 randomly selected counselors. The results indicated that more than 70 per cent of participants have five and more years of working experience (Hee-sook and et al 303-18). Years of working experience in one school enables them to deal with numerous similar issues. Through the process, their professionalism enables them to find the particular factors that lead to the specific type of bullying problems in that school. In this way, they can meet with the school teachers and principals and provide profound opinions or suggestions, like what changes the administrator should make to help eliminate the bullying problems in the school for good. Furthermore, considering that school counselors have resolved many similar cases about bullying, it is also beneficial for the bullied students to directly turn to them and talk about the issue. One study shows that they can provide effective anti-bullying methods comprising “school-wide positive behavior support, modifying space and schedule, and immediate responses to bullying incidents” (Sherer and Amanda 217-29). No one can deny the fact that having a skillful counselor standing behind can render the problem being

solved faster. Likely, parents can profit from receiving guidelines from school counselors before they counseling with their children, thereby avoiding lame strategies and potential risks. In this respect, school counselors technically act as partners to both educational institutes and parents when they only offer effective suggestions about bullying issues; also, they can play an instructor's role when they directly provide instructions the bullied student. Apart from that, going beyond simply enduring pressures from sociality problems like bullying, students living in this day and age, actually confront mental health and academic problems as well.

By mental health problem, I refer to symptoms including depression, alcoholism, drug abuse and self-mutilation, which can lead to "negative life outcomes" for students and in worse situations, cause life-threatening behaviors like suicide. Given the situation, I recommend that students who exhibit those symptoms should better turn to school counselors for professional therapies because professional knowledge is necessary to deal with those complex problems. That is to say, school counselors should actively work with students with mental health problems, varying from their main partnership in sociality issues. Many cases show that students having mental health problems often feel frustrated about life, but "counselors can be very helpful in reducing those feelings by acknowledging the difficulties they face and working collaboratively with them." During counseling, "specific tools and strategies" have to be taken so as to "attain goals in counseling, overcome barriers to treatment, and quell the negative life outcomes" (Tucker, Dixon 309-322). Other reasons for suggesting students to counsel with professional individuals include that school counselors enable a complete resolution for complicated problems. Apart from that, they can see the essence of the problems without being distracted by the superficial while laymen like parents cannot. Moreover, professional individuals are well informed of the potential post-problems; therefore, after being instructed by experienced school counselors, students can spare the apprehension of unpreparedly getting into the same trouble again.

Although school counselors are proved to be professional and effective to cope with mental health problems, what parents can achieve however cannot be underestimated. Before discussing measure, the

causes - risk factors that may lead to mental health problems should be first illuminated. On one hand, quite a few studies refer mental health troubles to sociality problems like peer-victimization. At the same, they approve the significance of parental supports in students' social life (Stadler, and et al 371-386). Through positive parental supports, student can live with a healthy social life, thus avoiding mental health problems in the first place. Not only can parental involvement help protect students from mental health problems in an indirect manner, on the other hand, it is intrinsically, closely and directly related to mental problems or it can actually cause the problems. Studies show us that "low levels of parental care, high parental control and frequent peer victimization are each significantly and independently associated with relatively poor mental health" (Rigby, P.T., and G 801-812). In other words, the scarcity of parental involvement is comparably destructive to students with sociality problems such as peer victimization. To support it, a study presented that sexual minorities who "report lower levels of family connectedness" or parental involvement "have worse health-related outcomes." Problems that relate to the "lower levels of parental support" are the higher odds of "suicidal thoughts and depressive symptomatology" as well as the higher chances of "recent drug use and heavy drinking". Hence, "parental support remains an important correlate of mental health problems for students" (Needham, and Erika 1189-1198). In this respect, parents should really spend more time caring their children, entailing a high level of parental support so as to help the demanding ones stay clear of mental health diseases and sequential harms.

Last but not the least, academic problems are parts of what school counselors specialize. It is common to see school counselors working closely with students to help manage their time, design schedules and impart study skills. Sometimes, they even come into classrooms and give lectures to students about school resources and learning habits. The information they provide is rather instrumental to help students prevent failing exams and allow them to achieve academic progress. Besides students, parents can also profit from being educated by school counselors. Studies suggest that school counselors are capable of improving "parents' capacities to engage parents effectively in children's education" (Walker, Susan, and Kathleen 27-41). Also, they can "improve the number of parents who remain knowledgeable partners in

their children's education across the grades” so as to facilitate the process of parental involvement. In this respect, school counselors actually serve as a bridge between students and their parents, which is proved to successfully “reduce the number of students with serious academic and behavioral problems” (Epstein, Frances 1-14). Hence, school counselors are helpers in terms of academic aspect while both students and parents are beneficiaries. As for parents, they should actively be involved too. A study shows that active parental involvement like monitoring and disciplines allow academic progress for students since it can, for instance, contribute to “the increase of time spend on homework” (Fehrmann, Timothy, and Thomas 330-337). Therefore, parents stand a dispensable position in student’s academic life as school counselors do. Account for all types of academic helps to enhance learning and enable achievements, I argue for the collaboration between both sides of helpers in regardless of their status.

In conclusion, parents and school counselors can provide different positive helps for contemporary students who face with problems coming from sociality, mental health and academic aspects. For one thing, family support, close attention and empirical instructions that parents can provide renders them effective to take care of students, offer comforts, solutions and eliminate obstacles; while profound scholarship and experience fit school counselors in partnership so they can help with institutes to enable a healthy environment or improve parental involvement by offering useful recommendations. Conversely, parents can also intervene with problematic institutes with helps from school counselors, and the latter is experienced to deal with complex problems such as mental diseases. In view of this, parents and school counselors both play comparatively significant role in students’ lives in different parts. Hence, the collaboration of parental involvement and professional counseling can cope with sociality (school bullying or peer-victimization), mental health (depression, alcoholism, drug abuse and self-mutilation) and academic (time management and study skills) problems for students in a comprehensive manner. Given the status quo, those three problems majorly contribute to the aggravated situation of youth suicide. I want to put forward an appeal of supporting and strengthening the collaboration between parents and school counselors for the sake of the suffering and demeaning students.

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