

# **Students' Perception Of The Counselors' Empathy And Its Influence On Utilization Of Counseling Services Among Students In Public Secondary Schools In Nairobi County, Kenya**

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## **Abstract**

*Counseling in secondary schools is crucial because it helps students reach their full potential. Despite its clear benefits, students at public secondary schools rarely make use of counseling services. While researchers have explored many causes of low utilization of counseling services the influence of students' perception of the counselors' empathy on utilization of counseling services among students has not been adequately addressed. Therefore, this study sought to determine the influence of students' perception of the counselors' empathy on utilization of counseling services among students in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. The study was founded on the Carl Rogers, Person-centered/Client-centered theory. A descriptive study design was used to guide the study. The target population of the study was 49,707 students in public secondary schools in Nairobi County. The study involved the 413 students and 10 school counselors from 10 public secondary schools located in Nairobi County. Both probability and non-probability sampling methods were utilized in the study. The ten public secondary schools with functional counseling departments were selected using the proportionate sampling technique, which represented the 87 public secondary schools in the county. The stratified sampling technique was then employed to create strata based on the year of study, including forms two, three, and four students, from the selected sub-populations. Participants were selected from the identified strata in the selected schools using simple random sampling. Data was collected through questionnaires. To test the hypothesis, linear regression was employed. The results of the research showed that majority of the students (61.4%) had a positive perception of counselors' empathy, 27.6% had a moderate perception, and 11.0% had a negative perception of counselors' empathy. The level of student's perception of the counselor's empathy mean score was 37.15 (SD = 10.849), indicating that on average, the students had a positive perception of the counselor's empathy. This, therefore, means that the students are more likely to utilize counseling services if they had a positive perception on counsellor's empathy.*

**Keywords;** *perception, empathy and utilization of counseling services.*

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## **I. Introduction**

The demand for counseling services has been steadily rising over the years due to the rise of psychological issues in society. This has necessitated the need for counseling programs in schools to provide psychological and pedagogical support which purposes to help learners fulfill their developmental capabilities and create conditions for active and full involvement in their school life and social environment (Hariko, 2018). Despite this, students' utilization of counseling services is wanting. Various global studies have highlighted the reasons for the underutilization of counseling services among students. Learners are more likely to utilize counseling services when they have a positive relationship with their counselor. This relationship can be built on the counselor's ability to be empathic. A student's perception of counselors' core empathy is essential to seeking help. If students negatively perceived the counseling experience, they were more likely not to go for counseling. (Badu, 2011).

### **Students' perception of counselors' empathy and its influence on utilization of counseling services**

Past researches have explored the influence of students' perception of counselor's empathy on utilization of counseling services. Okopi and Amini (2018) looked into how counseling expectations affected students' perceptions of obtaining psychological assistance in Nigeria. According to the study, students' expectations for counseling were most significantly influenced by counselor competency. The study concluded that the counselor's

competence, empathy, and attitude in counseling plays a crucial role in students' counseling expectations and experiences.

Obiunu and Rachael (2018) examined how public secondary school pupils in Delta State felt about counselors' personalities. Using a descriptive survey approach, the study discovered that students had an unfavorable opinion of counselors' personality attributes. Counselors should demonstrate professional traits like empathy, friendliness, unconditional positive respect, love, patience, and sincerity toward pupils, as well as be welcoming of every client. Hariko (2018) examined student attitudes towards seeking counseling services; The role of self-stigma, attitudes towards counseling, and perceptions of counselor attributes, this study examined the factors influencing students' attitudes toward seeking counseling services. The findings revealed that a positive perception of counselor attributes, including empathy, was associated with a greater likelihood of utilizing counseling services.

### **Objective of the study**

The study was guided by the following objective;

1. To determine the influence of students' perception of the counselors' empathy on utilization of counseling services among students in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya.

### **The hypothesis of the study**

**H<sub>0</sub>1:** Students' perception of counselor's empathy has no statistically significant influence on utilization of counseling services among students in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya.

## **II. Methodology**

The study was conducted among 49,707 students in public secondary schools in Nairobi County. Ten public secondary schools with functional counseling departments were selected using the proportionate sampling technique, which represented the 87 public secondary schools in the county. A sample size of 413 was arrived at using the Yamane formula. Stratified sampling technique was employed to create strata based on the year of study, including forms two, three, and four students, from the selected sub-populations. Participants were selected from the identified strata in the selected schools using simple random sampling. Data was collected through questionnaires. The study adopted a descriptive research design. To test the hypothesis, linear regression was employed. Data analysis was aided by SPSS Version 23.

## **III. Results and Discussions**

### **Students' perception of the counselor's empathy**

Students were asked to rate their counselor's empathy using a 5-point Likert scale, from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree), and their responses were averaged (Strongly agree). Higher scores indicated that more people saw the counselor favorably in terms of their ability to empathize. The lower the score, the less empathetic the counselor was seen to be, the higher the score, the more empathetic the counselor was seen to be. Afterwards, the total was categorized into three distinct groups. Table 1.0 below provides a summary of the findings.

**Table 1.0**  
**Student's Perception of Counselor's Empathy**

<b>Perception</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Negative Perception	41	11.0		0	50	37.15 10.849
Moderate Perception	102	27.6				
Positive Perception	227	61.4				
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>				

Results in table 1.0 indicate that majority of the students (61.4%) had a positive perception of counselors' empathy, 27.6% had a moderate perception, and 11.0% had a negative perception of counselors' empathy. The level of student's perception of the counselor's empathy mean score was 37.15 (SD = 10.849), indicating that on average, the students had a positive perception of the counselor's empathy.

### **Utilization of counseling services among students in public secondary schools in Nairobi County.**

The students were given a list of fifteen statements and asked to rate how frequently they sought counseling on each issue using a 5-point Likert scale in order to determine their use of counseling services (0-Never, 1-Once, 2-Twice, Thrice-3, -4-More than thrice). The measure was further turned into levels to examine the extent to which the students used counseling services. The findings are summarized in table 2.0 below.

**Table 2.0**  
**Level of Counseling Services Utilization**

Utilization of counseling services	Frequency	Percentage	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Deviation
Low Utilization	302	81.6		0	51	10.45
Moderate Utilization	58	15.7				
High Utilization	10	2.7				
<b>Total</b>	<b>370</b>	<b>100.0</b>				

Table 2.0 highlights that the vast majority of students (81.6%) used counseling services rarely. Only 2.7% of participants reported using counseling services frequently, compared to 15.7% who utilized counseling services moderately. On average there is reportedly low utilization of counseling services as indicated by the mean score of 10.45 (SD = 11.499) for this variable.

**Influence of Student's Perception of Counselors' Empathy on Utilization of Counseling Services**

The objective was to determine the influence of students' perception of counselors' empathy on utilization of counseling services in public secondary schools in Nairobi County. Linear regression was used to test the hypothesis that student's perception of the counselor's empathy has no statistically significant influence on the utilization of counseling services. The findings are summarized in table 3.0 below.

**Table 3.0**  
**Influence of Student's Perception of Counselors' Empathy on Utilization of Counseling Services**  
**Regression Coefficient<sup>a</sup>**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 (Constant)	4.266	2.112		2.020	.044	.113	8.418
Empathy	.167	.055	.157	3.053	.002	.059	.059

a. Dependent Variable: Utilization of counseling

Table 3.0 shows that the number of times students sought therapy was positively correlated with their judgments of the counselor's empathy (=0.167, p0.002). This implies that students who have a positive perception of the counselors' empathy are more likely to seek for counseling services.

Following this finding the null hypothesis was rejected in favor of the alternative hypothesis, thus, there is statistically significant relationship between students' perceptions of the counselor's empathy and the use of counseling services in public secondary schools in Nairobi County, Kenya. This research agrees with past researches that have emphasized the importance of empathy in the counseling relationship. Some of these research include, Shi, Liu, and Leuwerke (2014) who examined how students felt about two secondary schools in Beijing, China's counselors at the schools. The study discovered that students who had previously sought counseling had considerably better opinions of their counselors than those who had never sought counseling. They appreciated the counselor's friendly nature, approachability, empathy, promptness in responding to student issues, confidentiality, availability, and competence. In another study, Okopi and Amini (2018) looked into how counseling expectations affected students' perceptions of obtaining psychological counseling in Nigeria. The study concluded that the counselor's competence, empathy, and attitude in counseling played a crucial role in students' counseling expectations and experiences. These findings concur with the present study findings and imply that that positive perception of the counselor's empathy increases the utilization of counseling services. It is therefore very important for counselors in secondary schools to show empathy to the students to enhance the utilization of counseling services.

**IV. Conclusion**

The study concluded that students' perception of counselors' empathy influences the utilization of counseling services among students in public secondary students in Nairobi County. These is in line with the Client-centered/Person-centered Theory which argues that the counseling process is all about the client and that the counselor must treat their client with dignity by showing empathy.

**V. Recommendations**

The findings of this study indicated that positive perception of the counselors' empathy increases the utilization of counseling services. To ensure empathy among school counselors, schools can provide comprehensive training and professional development opportunities for counselors to enhance their empathy

skills. This training should focus on understanding and recognizing emotions, active listening, non-judgmental communication, and fostering a supportive and empathic school environment. School counselors are encouraged to continually adjust their assumptions and understandings attending to the student's experience to facilitate awareness of emerging feelings and perspectives. School counselors should receive training on cultural sensitivity and awareness to understand and respect the diverse backgrounds and experiences of students. This training will help them avoid biases and stereotypes and promote inclusivity and empathy towards all students. School counselors are also encouraged to attend peer supervision sessions to help them process their emotions, gain insight from others and develop strategies to enhance their empathy skills. This practices will lead to positive perception of the counselor's empathy thus significantly increasing student's utilization of counseling services.

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