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Perceived Self-Disclosure and Counseling Seeking Behaviors among University Students in Kenya

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This study investigated the relationship between perceived self-disclosure and counseling seeking behavior among undergraduates in the public universities in Kenya. A sample size of 1511 students was obtained using both stratified random and simple random sampling techniques. The *Self-Disclosure Questionnaire* and *Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory* (ISCI) were used to collect data. The internal validity of the questionnaires was tested using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy (KMO Index), while reliability was ensured by using Cronbach's alpha. All the subscales indicated that the instruments had adequate reliability. Regression analysis was used to analyze data. The findings indicate that the Regression model was statistically significant, though accounting for a fairly small variability 3.2% (R^2=.032) in students' counseling seeking behavior among public university. The study recommends that university counselors should be trained on the effective use of self-disclosure as a technique in counseling practice.

Key words: *Self-Disclosure, Counseling Seeking Behavior, University Students, Kenya*

Counselor Self-Disclosure (CSD) is gaining empirical attention amidst theoretical discourse and ethical debate, particularly with influence on therapeutic relationship between therapists and clients in various contexts. Counselor self-disclosure (CSD) is a verbal revelation of personal information made by the counselor to the client during the counseling or therapy (Cashwell, et al. 2003). Self-disclosure is an attempt to let authenticity enter into social relationships, and it is often

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linked with both mental health and self-concept development (Tubbs & Moss, 2006). Thus, self-disclosure happens when we reveal any information about ourselves that others are unlikely to discover from other sources. The mode and extent of self-disclosure can make a lasting impression on others to our benefit or to our detriment (Trenholm & Jensen, 1996). Counselor disclosure has potential benefits to the therapy relationship between the client and the counselor. Sue and Sue (2008) argued that counselor disclosure is useful in building strong therapeutic alliances between counselors and clients who are members of culturally diverse populations. Blackwell (2017) reiterated that counselor self-disclosure helps to establish strong therapeutic alliances and breaks down barriers that may exist between the counselees and their therapists (counselors). Self-disclosure is helpful because it leads to trust that develops the relationship and enhances the therapeutic relationship (Steinberg, 2007). On the other hand, self-disclosure may cause rejection because too much disclosure might be viewed as insecurity (Steinberg, 2007).

There are four main types of self-disclosures namely, deliberate, unavoidable, accidental and client initiated self-disclosures. Deliberate self-disclosure refers to a therapist's intentional, verbal or non-verbal disclosure of personal information to the client during counseling (Zur, 2007). Deliberate self-disclosure can be self-revealing and self-involving, which involves counselors' personal reactions to clients and to occurrences that take place during counseling sessions (Knox, et al., 2007). Unavoidable self-disclosure is out of the counselor's control (Campbell & Gordon, 2003). It includes an extremely wide range of possibilities such as non-verbal cues, counselor gender, age, physique, manner of dressing, hairstyle, use of make-up, jewelry, facial hair, wedding or engagement rings and any form of disability (Zur, 2007). Accidental self-disclosure occurs when there are incidental encounters outside the office, spontaneous verbal or non-verbal reactions such as anger or being teary during a therapy session (Knox, et al. 2007). Finally, the client's deliberate actions are potential sources that can reveal personal information about the counselor. Zur and Donnor, (2009) pointed out that clients can initiate inquiries about their counselor by conducting a web search.

University students face numerous challenges. Studies from developed countries indicate that academic and financial difficulties are major stressors among university students (Arthur, 2004). Moreover, more recent literature also focuses on social/interpersonal relationships and life after university. Kamara (2007) and Seif (2011) reported that students from universities in Tanzania are faced with many stressors, including academic, financial, career planning, relationship and

accommodation. Tanga and Maphosa (2018) found that students at universities in South Africa face a myriad of academic challenges, due to poor socio-economic backgrounds and the low level of education. In Kenya, undergraduate students are mainly faced with academic, accommodation and socio-economic issues which become the main sources of their psychosocial stressors. Yakaboski, and Birnbaum (2013) argued that students in Kenyan universities experience four major challenges: increasing costs of attendance, the resulting impact on student behaviors and actions, lack of training and senior leadership, and regular campus closures. However, Farber (2006) observed that most of the students rely on intimate friends and relatives to get help and do not use available university counseling services. Thus, many students tend to prioritize academics over social and personal concerns (Yan & Berliner, 2011). Therefore, the present study investigated the relationship between perceived self-disclosure and counseling seeking behavior among undergraduates in the public universities in Kenya.

The study is informed by Social Comparison Theory. According to Festinger (1954), individuals are driven by a desire for self-evaluation, a motivation to establish that one's opinions are correct and to know precisely what one is capable of doing.

First, it is hypothesized that perceived counselor deliberate self-disclosure will enhance counseling seeking behaviors among Kenyan students. Previous studies on counselor disclosure and counseling relationships exists. For example, a meta-analysis conducted by Henretty, et al. (2014) found that clients who had counselors that self-disclosed rated themselves as more likely to disclose and rated their counselors more favorably. Similarly, Solomon and Barber (2018) showed that stronger patient-reported alliance levels were found for patients who perceived political similarity, reported implicit therapist political disclosure and for those who found in-session political discussions helpful. Gari, et al. (2010) reported that disclosure is helpful to HIV positive mothers in seeking treatment. A qualitative study by Kircanski, (2014) indicated that therapist self-disclosure was useful in treating traumatized clients during counseling.

Secondly, it is hypothesized that perceived counselor unavoidable self-disclosure enhances counseling seeking behaviors among clients. For example, a qualitative study by Audet and Everall (2010) reported that unavoidable therapist disclosure assisted in establishing a more egalitarian relationship through dynamics perceived as 'more balanced' and through the therapist's 'humanness'. In a qualitative meta-analysis, Hill, et al. (2018) indicated that unavoidable therapist self-disclosure was associated more often with improved mental health functioning, overall helpfulness, and enhanced therapy relationships. Similarly, Henretty and

Levitt (2010) concluded that unavoidable self-disclosure made clients trust the therapeutic relationship and they opened up more.

Thirdly, it is hypothesized that perceived counselor's accidental self-disclosure enhances counseling seeking behaviors among clients. A study by Stacie (2008) reported a positive correlation between the relevance of the self-disclosures and their counseling outcomes. Thus, clients who felt that their counselors accidentally self-disclosed an appropriate amount had stronger real relationships and better outcomes than clients who felt that their counselors did not disclose enough. In a quantitative study, LaPorte et al. (2010) found a majority of the participants agreed that therapist accidental self-disclosure of a shared catastrophic experience was helpful, but that a shared experience is not reason enough to disclose. Wasil, et al. (2019) indicated that accidental self-disclosures may increase recovery motivation in patients with eating disorder. Finlay's (2019) study suggests that therapist accidental self-disclosure offered with the aim of raising the client's self-awareness occurs more frequently in humanistic-integrative practice.

Finally, it is also hypothesized that perceived client initiated self-disclosure enhances counseling seeking behaviors among clients. Dessie, et al. (2019) systematic review found a statistically significant positive effect of client initiated disclosure status on the adherence to treatment. Finally, Hege, (2017) study reported a strong correlation was detected for positive reinforcement and client initiated self-disclosure of the participants and moderate correlations were discovered for client initiated self-disclosure and summarizing, alliance bolstering and empathetic utterance.

From the reviewed literature, it is evident that, the role of the counselors is key if there is to be a notable improvement in the use of counseling services. The results of most previous studies indicate that self-disclosure is useful in enhancing the client-therapist relationship. However, some studies have been experimental in nature while other studies were correlational. In Kenya the literature indicates that, while other factors for the underutilization of counseling services by the undergraduate students have been studied (Tung, 2011), it is evident that counselor self-disclosure has not yet received much attention. It is against this background that the study sought to understand the relationship between perceived self-disclosure and counseling seeking behavior among the undergraduates in public universities in Kenya.

METHOD

Research Design

A correlational survey research design was used to assess the relationship between variables in a single group of subjects. The design is

also helpful in prediction in instances where two variables are correlated (Ary et al. 2014). The design was applicable in the present study because it helped to assess the extent of relationships between perceived self-disclosure and counseling seeking behaviors among undergraduate students in public universities.

Participants

The accessible population for this study consisted of 28,048 full time undergraduate students in three public universities in the Lake Region of Kenya. A sample size of 1511 undergraduate students was obtained using Yamane's (1967) formula for calculating sample size. The Yamane formula is appropriate for large populations, assuming a normal distribution with 95% confidence level, and was considered appropriate for determining an appropriate sample size. Stratified random sampling was first used to categorize students into their years of study and then simple random sampling was used to select students from each of the study years across each university.

Thus, the sample size of 1511 students comprised 380(25.15%) first year students, 376(24.88%) second year students, 377(24.95%) third year students and 378(25.02%) fourth year students. The mean age of the sampled students was 21.8 years with a standard deviation of 2.6. A majority of 141 (40.1%) of the sampled students were in the age group of 20-21 years, 91(25.9%) were 22-23 years old, 67(19.0%) were older than 23 years and the rest were students whose ages were below 20 years. The maximum age established was 34, while minimum age recorded was 17 years, indicating that there was a fair representation of traditional college age students in the study, implying that generalization of the study findings to Kenyan college students is feasible. Males made up 217(61.8%) of the total, implying that the majority of students in public universities in the Lake region of Kenya are males. All participants were black Africans of Kenyan origin.

Measures

The *Self-Disclosure Questionnaire* (SDQ), a nine-page assessment tool developed by Simone (1994), was used to collect data on perceived self-disclosures. The SDQ has sub-sections, Client Initiated Self Disclosure, Counselor Deliberate Self Disclosure, Counselor Accidental Self Disclosure and Counselor Unavoidable Self Disclosure. The instrument uses a 5-point Likert scale, Strongly Agree (SA) = 5, Agree (A) = 4, Undecided (U) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 (Simone, et al. 1998). An example of an item in the SDQ is "*The counselor intentionally communicates private information about the self during counseling sessions that help the clients.*" High scores

indicate a person who is high in self-disclosure, while low scores indicate an individual with low self-disclosure. The reliability for multi-item opinion items were computed separately for all the sub-scales in the questionnaires and the Cronbach's alpha for the four sub-scales were .700, .703, .764 and .723. The internal validity of the SDQ was ascertained using the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO index) and indices reported for the four sub-scales were .697, .632, .812 and .708, which are all significant.

The *Intentions to Seek Counseling Inventory* (ISCI) was used to measure the students' intentions to seek counseling based on their perceptions of the counselor from each of the counselor disclosures (Cash, et al. 1978). The ISCI is a 17-item, 96 multidimensional item questionnaire assessing an individual's intentions to seek counseling for problems that are common in a university population, including relationship difficulties, depression and personal worries. The response for each item was on a 5 point Likert-scale of Strongly Agree (SA) = 5, Agree (A) = 4, Undecided (U) = 3, Disagree (D) = 2 and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1. An example of an item in the ISCI is "*I seek counseling services when I experience relationship difficulties.*" High scores indicate a person who has high counseling seeking behaviors when they face challenges at university, while low scores indicate an individual with low counselling seeking behaviours. The Cronbach's alpha ISCI is reported to be .731. The internal validity of the ISCI was ascertained using the Kaiser-Meyer-Oklin (KMO index) and an index of 0.621 is reported.

Procedure

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the National Council of Science and Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) in Kenya. The researchers then made a formal request for permission to the respective universities to collect data for the study. With this permission, the researchers proceeded to make contacts with lecturers and student leaders for assistance in administering the student questionnaires for data collection. The selected students assembled in a hall after which the purpose of the study was explained to them. The students were assured of anonymity, confidentiality and had the right to withdraw from the study if they wished. The students were then given consent forms to sign after which they were given the questionnaires to fill. It took about 45 minutes to fill in questionnaires after which the completed questionnaires were collected by the researchers.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data obtained from the closed ended items in the questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics namely, means, frequency counts and percentages and inferential statistics in form of simple linear regression analysis. Items on the questionnaires were scored on a 5 point Likert scale as follows: Strongly Agree (SA) = 5 points, Agree (A) = 4 points, Undecided (U) = 3 points, Disagree (D) = 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) = 1 point. The purpose of the midpoint (Undecided) in the Likert Scale was to avoid forcing respondents into expressing agreement or disagreement when they may lack a clear opinion (Johns, 2005). Regression analysis is a technique used in statistics for investigating and modeling the relationship between variables (Montgomery, Peck, & Vinning, 2012).

In the present study, regression analysis was used to display how well perceived counselor disclosure is able to predict counseling seeking behaviors. Both simple linear and multiple regression analyses were employed.

RESULTS

The study investigated the relationship between perceived self-disclosures and counseling seeking behavior among undergraduate students in the public universities in Kenya. To estimate the levels of self-disclosure and counseling seeking behavior, a coefficient of determination was computed. This was done using linear regression analysis and the results were as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Model Summary on Linear Regression Analysis of Perceived Self-Disclosures and Perceived Counseling Seeking Behavior

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square
Deliberate Self-Disclosure	.140a	.020	.017
Unavoidable Self-Disclosure	.146a	.021	.019
Accidental self-disclosure	.102a	.010	.008
Client Initiated Self-Disclosure	.109a	.012	.009

The linear regression results in Table 1 indicate that the perception of a counselor‘s deliberate self-disclosure accounted for 2.0%, of the variation in overall counseling seeking behavior among the university students. The model shows that counselor unavoidable self-disclosure accounted for 2.1% of the variation in overall counseling seeking behavior among the university students. The model shows that counselor

accidental self-disclosure only accounted for 1.0% of the variation in overall counseling seeking behavior among the university students. The model also shows that client initiated self-disclosure accounted for 1.2% of the variation in overall counseling seeking behavior among the university students. The results of the linear regression analysis indicate that each of the four aspects of the perceived self-disclosures explained a low proportion (variance) of the perceived counseling seeking behavior.

Multiple Regression Analysis of Counselors' Self-Disclosure on Counseling Seeking Behavior

Multiple regression analysis, where all the four aspects of perceived counselor self-disclosure were factored in the model helped to investigate how well the set of independent variables were able to predict the level of counseling seeking behavior and the relative contribution of each of the variables that make up the model. Each aspect of perceived counselor self-disclosure was evaluated in terms of its predictive power, over and above that offered by all the others. In addition, it enabled the researchers to know how much unique variance, in the dependent variable, each of the independent variables explained.

First, the study sought to estimate the level of influence of counselor self-disclosure on counseling seeking behavior, a coefficient of determination was computed. This was done using regression analysis and the results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Overall Regression Analysis Model summary: Counselor's Self-Disclosure on Counseling Seeking Behavior

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of Estimate
1	.178[a]	.032	.021	.5226

a. Predictors: (Constant), Counselor Unavoidable Self-Disclosure, Client Initiated Self-Disclosure, Counselor Deliberate Self-Disclosure, Counselor Accidental Self-Disclosure b. Dependent Variable: Counseling Seeking Behavior

In Table 2, it is evident that the perceived self-disclosure accounted for 3.2% of the variation in perceived counseling seeking behavior among the university students. The effect size of self-disclosure on counseling seeking behaviors was small but still significant.

DISCUSSION

The study investigated the relationship between perceived counselor self-disclosure and perceived counseling seeking behavior among undergraduates in the public universities of the Lake region in Kenya. The results indicated that all four of the types of perceived counselor self-disclosure predicted a tendency to seek counseling among the university students. However, all four predictors were only weakly related to the perceived tendency to seek counseling. Presumably, many other variables in addition to the ones considered in the analysis are related to the dependent variable. Therefore, it can be concluded that perceived self-disclosure is weakly related to counseling seeking behaviors, but there are other factors which need investigation as well. This finding agrees with Henretty, et al. (2014) that clients who had counselors that self-disclosed rated themselves as more likely to disclose and rated their counselors more favorably. Similarly, Barrett and Berman (2011) indicated that clients who were paired with therapists who were instructed to heighten their use of self-disclosure reported lower levels of symptoms distress. Hill, et al. (2018) indicated that therapist self-disclosure was associated more often with improved mental health functioning, overall helpfulness, and enhanced therapy relationships. Henretty and Levitt (2010) concluded that self-disclosure helped clients trust the therapeutic relationship and they opened up more. Pinto-Coelho, et al. (2016) reported that overall disclosure occurrence was positively related to client-rated working alliance.

The study also ascertained little difference among all four of the types of perceived self-disclosure. Further, the combination of these four types resulted in very little improvement in predictive power.

For clinical practice, we recommend that student counselors at universities should be trained on the effective use of self-disclosure as a technique in counseling practice. However, they should also be taught that self-disclosure should be kept to a minimum as suggested by our literature review, and that the success of counseling depends on many other variables as well. Another limitation is that the results do not explain causality of counseling seeking behaviors but it only explains the direction and strength of the relationships. Future studies could investigate personality traits, therapy techniques, client attitudes towards counseling and their influence on counseling seeking behaviors. Further qualitative investigations with a grounded theory design might yield findings which clarify the therapists and clients' experiences on self-disclosure in a therapeutic relationship.

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