

## Chapter 21

# INVESTIGATING THE CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ATTITUDES TOWARDS SCHOOL COUNSELLING PRACTICES IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

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### ABSTRACT

This research study examines the existing cultural, social, and psychological attitudes towards school counselling and school counsellors in schools located in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Saudi Arabia). The research study used a mixed methods design with qualitative data consisting of semi-structured interviews of school counsellors, and quantitative data consisting of questionnaires completed by a sample of head teachers and school counsellors working in secondary schools based in the city of Afif in Saudi Arabia. It was found that: (1) school counsellors faced a number of difficulties preventing them from effectively carrying out school counselling duties, including negative perspectives of school counsellors by head teachers, teachers, parents, students, and even school counsellors themselves; (2) there was a lack of understanding regarding the role of school counsellors, as well as a distinct lack of cooperation from teachers and parents influenced by Saudi cultural traditions; and (3) school counsellors were unqualified, given insufficient training, or were given work beyond their expected roles. The research study proposes theories why cultural, social, and psychological attitudes towards school counselling in Saudi Arabia are hindering progress in developing the field of school counselling in general. It attempts to differentiate and understand cultural, social, and psychological attitudes of teachers, head teachers, parents, and school counsellors to school counselling.

*Keywords:* school counselling, childhood disorders, parenting, social support, social and national culture.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

According to Mcleod (2013), counselling is an activity that emerged during the twentieth century and which reflects the pressures and values of modern-day life. Counselling is therefore something that has only recently developed and is still undergoing change, and it may also be developing in different ways and at different speeds in various countries. In terms of the counselling role itself, Mcleod (2013, p.3) notes that:

“A counsellor is someone who does his or her best to listen to you and work with you to find the best ways to understand and resolve your problem. Counsellors do not diagnose or label people, but instead do their best work within whatever framework of understanding makes sense for each client.”

In practice this framework of understanding may also differ according to the particular context, which a counsellor is working in. For instance, counselling at work may be different to counselling undertaken in schools. In fact, Bor, Ebner-Landy, Gill, and Brace (2002) observe that the school is actually a much more recent setting for the provision of psychological treatment of young people in the United Kingdom. They note that up until about ten years ago, most mental health problems in schools were referred to specialists outside the school setting, and that there are a number of reasons for this change in attitudes towards school counselling (Bor et al., 2002). In practice these have been shown to include:

- increasing challenges for school children, such as abuse, bullying, competitiveness, family crises, homophobia, peer pressure, racism, sibling rivalry, scholastic underachievement, social exclusion, and substance misuse;

- a growing shortage of specialist educationalist psychologists;
- an increasing awareness of the role that that schools play in identifying, managing, and preventing health problems in schools;
- early identification of psychological problems can help to prevent major and more permanent behavioral problems in children;
- counseling as a profession is now better managed and regulated; and
- schools are considered a primary context for nurturing and supporting development (educational, moral, social) in children (Bor et al., 2002).

Counselling within schools can therefore be seen as something that has developed because of the increased range of mental health, behavioral, and psychosocial concerns and issues that have developed in modern-day schools. These include new issues that have arisen mainly because of modern social developments and activities such as substance abuse, physical and sexual abuse, and gang violence. But it also includes more “traditional” problems such as school attendance and delinquency problems, emotional and development problems, and problems with new relationships. But modern social developments and activities (e.g. single parent families, families on income support, full time working parents) have also sometimes made it difficult for parents or legal guardians to provide the full range of personal emotional and social support that young children and adolescents need. Consequently there has been a rise in the use of counsellors within the school setting in order to provide additional emotional and social support to students that may need it. Indeed according to Williams, (1973, p.2), the school counsellor is supposed to be

“(…) the specialist on the school staff who is uniquely qualified to help students work out increasingly complex problems of vocational choice, help them plan and carry through meaningful and suitable educational programmes, and help them classify more satisfactory solutions to personal-social problems which may be having an adverse effect upon their lives.”

Therefore in practice counselling in schools can actually assist parents in helping their children by showing students where they can receive specialized help, and by providing consultation with parents (Hitchner & Hitchner, 1996). School counselling can also assist teachers by helping them to understand their students and by helping them to deal with them in suitable and appropriate ways according to their abilities, and any behavioral or mental health problems (King, 1999). This increased use of school counsellors (school counsellors) in schools has resulted in a range of benefits. Firstly, past research has demonstrated that different types of psychotherapies (e.g. behavioral, psychodynamic, person-centred) are effective and beneficial to clients (Smith, Glass, and Miller, 1980). Secondly, counselling as a form of psychotherapy within schools has been shown to be effective as it:

- helps to improve the overall attendance, attainment, and behaviour of students (Pybis, Hill, Cooper, & Cromarty, 2012; British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP], 2013b);
- is effective for bullied students (McElearney, Adamson, Shevlin, & Bunting, 2013);
- positively impacts students' learning and studying habits (Rupani, Haughey, & Cooper, 2012);
- reduces different types of psychological distress in young people (McArthur, Cooper, and Berdondini, 2012); and
- is a prevalent form of psychological therapy for young people (around 70,000-90,000 sought counselling) (BACP, 2013a).

## 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

In light of these proven practices in schools in developed countries across the world, the development of a strong and robust school counselling framework for a developing country like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Saudi Arabia) holds many attractions. The British

Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) has defined school counselling in the UK as “a professional activity delivered by qualified practitioners in schools. Counsellors offer troubled and/or distressed children and young people an opportunity to talk about their difficulties, within a relationship of agreed confidentiality” (Cooper, 2013, p. 3). Teenagers are at the most critical stage in their lives where they are in need of direction both in their personal and academic lives. They need qualified and skilled people to guide them in their behaviour and the direction they are going and also to help them discover their abilities. In practice it is therefore necessary to determine if the role of the school counsellor is effective and that counsellors are given sufficient financial, social, and educational support they need, and are not impeded by problems that may unfairly affect the overall quality of school counseling services provided to students. The Saudi Ministry of Education as has defined school counseling in Saudi Arabia as:

“(…) the reactive process set up between a counsellor and a student through which the counsellor gives help to the student to understand himself and recognize his capabilities and potentialities and to give him an enlightened approach to his problem and how to encounter him. He also helps him to enhance his responsive behaviour and to prove self-conformity with the community.” (The Ministry of Education, 1995).

There would therefore seem to be some similarities in the underlying objectives of school counselling in some developed countries in the West, and school counselling in some developing countries in the Middle East. But in practice there are also specific differences in Saudi culture compared to Western school counselling methods, and there may also be financial and social barriers that may affect schools in developing countries like Saudi Arabia. For example in Saudi Arabia there is religious oversight within schools undertaken by the Saudi Ministry of Education. Counselling in Saudi Arabia is also carried out according to official guidelines, which identify four main areas for counselling in schools. These include religious and moral counselling; educational counselling; vocational counselling; and preventive counselling (The Ministry of Education, 1995). Islamic (Shari’ah) law also requires separate male and female schooling (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991). There are also specific problems that have previously been noted in relation to school counselling in Saudi Arabia, including the lack of clearly defined roles, the lack of administrative support, and the lack of a professional identity and status of school counsellors (Al-Ghamdi, 1999). A potential for ambiguity and role conflict in school counselors’ roles has also been noted owing to differences among school principals regarding the role of the SC in the school setting (Alghamdi & Riddick, 2011).

### **3. RESEARCH AIM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

The overall aim of the research study was to investigate and explore the challenges and problems encountered by school counsellors in secondary schools located in Afif, a city in the Najd region of Saudi Arabia. The research study adopted the following research questions.

- What problems are encountered by school counsellors in Afif secondary schools for boys?
- What problems are encountered by the school counsellor in relation to the Saudi Ministry of Education?
- What problems are encountered by the school counsellor in relation to school teachers and head teachers?
- What problems are encountered by the school counsellor in relation to their role?
- What problems are encountered by the school counsellor in relation to the parents and the students?

Overall, the research aimed to explore the roles of the school counsellors, as well as school counselling from the point of view of head teachers, teachers, parents, students, the Saudi Ministry of Education, and the school counsellors themselves. In particular the research sought to examine the different cultural, social, and psychological attitudes to school counselling that could be identified and differentiated within the context of school counselling. This was

undertaken in order to investigate the extent of the impact that different cultural, social, and psychological attitudes had on school counselling in Saudi schools, as well as their relative influence within the school setting.

#### 4. RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design adopted by the research study can be described as a flexible, exploratory, descriptive study using a mixed methods methodology. The rationale behind this research design is the dearth of information and literature on school counselling in Saudi Arabia. This in turn has led to a lack of current existing knowledge regarding the operating framework for school counselling in Saudi schools. It can be argued that this situation therefore favours a flexible, as opposed to a fixed or theory driven, research design. In addition, the lack of available research also lends itself less to the testing of pre-existing hypotheses through confirmatory research, and more to the generation of post-research hypotheses through exploratory research (Nebeker, n.d.). Nebeker (n.d.) has also proposed that descriptive studies are usually the best methods that can be used for collecting information that will demonstrate relationships, and describe the world as it exists. Bickman and Rog (2008) add that the overall purpose of descriptive research is to provide an overall 'picture' of a phenomenon as it occurs naturally, instead of studying its effects.

#### 5. RESEARCH METHODS

The research method used was mixed methods. Creswell (2013, p. 217) notes that mixed methods collects and analyses both qualitative (*open-ended*) and quantitative (*closed-ended*) data. Data collection and analysis procedures such as sampling are conducted rigorously, and the two data forms are integrated together in the research design (Creswell, 2013). Both types of qualitative and quantitative data obtained were used to complement any proposed findings or themes. The research study adopted mixed methods to avoid the limitations of a single method and to take advantage of a combination of methods. Thus, both questionnaires and interviews were adopted as the data collection instruments for both quantitative and qualitative data. Data collected from the questionnaires should give a wider overview of the counsellor's problems and data collected from the interview provided an in-depth understanding of why they were facing problems.

The research spanned 2008–2009 and used a total population of 44 head teachers and school counsellors (Figure 1) who were based in secondary schools for boys in Afif (participants).

Figure 1. The population of the research study.

Participant	Number	Percentage
Head teachers	21	47.7%
Counsellors	23	52.3%
<b>Total</b>	44	100%

For the questionnaire the sample consisted of 12 head teachers and 18 school counsellors who were chosen randomly from the schools in the study area. The questionnaire was distributed to the sample and Figure 2 presents the distribution and percentage of the participants in the sample.

Figure 2. The research study sample.

Participant	Number	Percentage (%) from the sample	Percentage from the population
Head teachers	12	40	57.1%
School counsellors	18	60	78.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>68.2%</b>

### 5.1. Qualitative research data

The researcher undertook semi-structured interviews with five participants located within various Afif secondary schools. The interviews were used to gather qualitative data from five school counsellors at various secondary schools, in Afif city in Saudi Arabia. In regard to their qualifications, all the interviewed school counsellors had bachelor degrees in various subjects, such as art, religion, psychology, sciences and sociology. Only one of them had a psychological counselling and guidance diploma. Therefore, it is apparent that four out of the five counsellors in the sample had no background in counselling or had little training in the field of counselling. In regard to age and experience, the interviewees' age ranged between 29–45 years old. Four of the counsellors had between 5–8 years of experience as teachers, and additionally between 9–14 years as counsellors. The interviewees were chosen because of their various backgrounds and levels of experience in counselling. Reliability of the research questions was increased by individuals experienced in the field of education, reviewing and pre-testing the questions in order to avoid ambiguity and ensure clarity. The participants were asked questions including the following:

- To what extent do you think that all student counsellors in Afif schools are properly qualified and receive adequate training to do their task?
- How does the head teacher perceive the student counsellor's role?
- What support does the counsellor receive from all the people and officers he deals with?
- What are the significant challenges and problems that student counsellors face in schools?
- What ideas do you suggest to improve the student counsellor's role?
- Do you perform any work not related to the student counsellor's role?

The qualitative data analysis process adopted six steps as proposed by Creswell (2013). For the first step, the data was organised by transcribing it from the interviews. Once the interviews were in for the second step, the researcher gained a general understanding of the meaning of the interviewees' responses by intently listening to each interview. The third step was the coding of the information. The data was then grouped into four categories each of which was allocated a different name and colour. In the fourth step the coded data was used to derive an in-depth meaning from the responses. For the fifth step the data was classified according to the dimensions. The obtained data was compiled into a tabular format with calculated figures. The sixth and final step was the interpretation of the information, and deriving meaning from data by again listening carefully and intently to the interviews.

### 5.2. Quantitative research data

Figure 3. Closed-questionnaire format.

Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
No.	In your opinion, please circle the appropriate response					
1	The Ministry of Education appreciates the role of the student counsellor.	5	4	3	2	1

A research questionnaire was designed and piloted, and was then distributed to a random sample of 12 HTs and 18 SCs. It covered a range of potential challenges and problems encountered by SCs from the point of view of the HTs and the SCs.

The 22-item questionnaire was designed to employ a five-point scale (*always, often, sometimes, rarely, never*) as responses to the various issues, which were represented as statements (Figure 3). The 22 statements (Figure 4) were divided over four dimensions relating to the problems that student counsellors encounter (Figure 5).

Figure 4. Twenty-two item questionnaire format.

Statements		Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
No.	In your opinion,					
1	The Ministry of Education appreciates the role of the student counsellor.	5	4	3	2	1
2	Unqualified counsellors are employed to work in schools.	5	4	3	2	1
3	There is support from the Ministry of Education for counselling programmes and counsellors.	5	4	3	2	1
4	There are training courses for counsellors.	5	4	3	2	1
5	There is a shortfall in the number of school counsellors compared to the number of students who needs counselling.	5	4	3	2	1
6	Head teachers have a good understanding of the role of the counsellor in schools.	5	4	3	2	1
7	Head teachers offer good support to school counsellors.	5	4	3	2	1
8	The school counsellor is asked to do extra work not related to his main counselling role.	5	4	3	2	1
9	Teachers understand the role of the school counsellor.	5	4	3	2	1
10	Teachers co-operate with the school counsellors.	5	4	3	2	1
11	The counsellors lack awareness and knowledge about his own job in the school.	5	4	3	2	1
12	There is a lack of practical preparation for the counsellor to carry out his work.	5	4	3	2	1
13	There are suitable places for the school counsellor to meet students/clients.	5	4	3	2	1
14	There are suitable places for the school counsellor to keep his records.	5	4	3	2	1
15	The amount of record keeping carried out by the school counsellor is unnecessary.	5	4	3	2	1
16	The Ministry of Education offers encouragement to school counsellors.	5	4	3	2	1
17	There is a lack of continuous coordination between the counsellor and the school administration.	5	4	3	2	1
18	The students understand the role of the counsellor.	5	4	3	2	1
19	The students co-operate with the school counsellor.	5	4	3	2	1
20	Parents are aware of the role of the school counsellor.	5	4	3	2	1
21	The parents co-operate with the school counsellors.	5	4	3	2	1
22	It is difficult for the counsellor and parents to communicate.	5	4	3	2	1



Figure 5. Distribution of statements across the four dimensions.

No.	Dimension	No. of Items
1	The problems encountered by the school counsellors in relation to the Saudi Ministry of Education	8
2	The problems encountered by the school counsellors in relation to the school administration and the teachers	6
3	The problems encountered by the school counsellors in relation to the school counsellors themselves	3
4	The problems encountered by the school counsellors in relation to the students and parents	5
<b>Total</b>		<b>22</b>

From the above-mentioned four dimensions the research items were developed. The following procedures were conducted in order to design each statement of the study. Firstly, questionnaire statements were adapted from previous studies that were found in the literature. Secondly, questionnaire statements were developed from the researcher's point of view as an experienced Saudi school counsellor. The items were framed in a way that clearly reflected each variable, and they were made understandable in order to avoid any repetition and confusion. The questionnaire was pre-tested by interviewing six postgraduate students and requesting that they indicate any unclear wording or ambiguity. Also, three experienced students from the University of Nottingham were requested to review the questionnaire and to present their opinions and suggestions in relation to the validity of the content; whether it was appropriate for the objectives of the study; and the clarity and appropriateness of the language. The research questionnaire was then distributed to a random sample of 12 head teachers and 18 school counsellors. It covered a range of potential challenges and problems encountered by school counsellors from the point of view of the head teachers and the school counsellors. Reliability of the questionnaire instrument was tested using SPSS and measured by the split half (0.845). It should be noted that the reliability of the questionnaire should not be less than (0.70). Internal validity was tested using SPSS and measured using Pearson's correlation coefficients. Figure 6 show that the internal validity of the questionnaire was sufficiently high, which would indicate that there was correlation between items of the study and its dimensions.

Figure 6. Closed-questionnaire measurements.

Variable	Items	Reliability	Validity (Pearson's <i>r</i> )
The problems related to the Ministry of Education	8	0.801	0.640
The problems related to the school administration and the teachers	6	0.792	0.701
The problems related to the counsellors themselves	3	0.824	0.720
The problems related to the students and the parents	5	0.783	0.681
Total / Reliability for the whole instrument	22	0.815	0.700

## 6. RESEARCH FINDINGS

In order to answer questions about problems that school counsellors encountered, arithmetic means, standard deviation and percentages were calculated for all statements in each dimension of such problems encountered. Then, the mean average was calculated for each dimension. After the data was collected, the quantified responses were coded into a ranking scale from 1 (*never*) meaning the respondents completely disagree with the statement, to 5 (*always*) meaning the respondents completely agreed with the statement. The responses on the scale numbered 2, 3, and 4 represent the responses *rarely*, *sometimes* and *often*, respectively. The data was then analysed using the statistical package SPSS. Each statement was statistically analysed individually to discover the respondents' opinion about each aspect. Statistical analysis of the responses was carried out for each of the following four dimensions (Figure 7).

Figure 7. Statements listed within each variable.

Variable	Statements
The problems encountered by the school counsellors in relation to the Saudi Ministry of Education	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 13, 15, 16
The problems encountered by the school counsellors in relation to the school administration and the teachers	6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 14
The problems encountered by the school counsellors in relation to the school counsellors themselves	11, 12, 17
The problems encountered by the school counsellors in relation to the students and parents	18, 19, 20, 21, 22
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>

Mean values and percentages were calculated for all responses to each statement within each dimension. For the purpose of data analysis and interpretation of the results, the researcher adopted the specific criteria as a representation of the level of agreement with the statements set out in Figure 8.

Figure 8. Distribution of statements across the four dimensions.

Measurement (%)	Grade	Explanation
67% or above	High	Where the grade 'high' represents a high agreement from the respondents with the statement (or group of statements) under investigation, the middle and low grades represent middle and low agreements to the related statements, respectively.
62% – 67%	Middle (high)	
57% – 61%	Middle (medium)	
51% – 56%	Middle (low)	
40% – 50%	Low	
39% and below	Significantly Low	

### 6.1. Problems related to the Saudi Ministry of Education

From the results in Figure 9 it can be observed that the statements with the highest percentage were Statement numbers (5), (2) and (16). Statement number (5) was in the first position with a mean of 3.41, a percentage of 68. This statement states: “There is a shortfall in the number of the student counsellors compared to the number of students who need counselling”. Statement number (2) was in second position, with a mean of 3.30, a percentage of 66.2, it states that: “Unqualified counsellors are employed to work in schools.” Statement number (16) was in third position, with a mean of 3.21, a percentage of 64.2. It states: “The Ministry of Education offers encouragement to school counsellors.” However, the three statements with the lowest percentage were statement numbers (15), (1) and (4). Statement number (15) was in the sixth position with a mean of 2.85, a percentage of 57. It states: “The amount of record keeping carried out by the school counsellor is unnecessary.” In the seventh position was statement number (1) with a mean of 2.74, a percentage of 54.8. It states: “The Ministry of Education values the role of the counsellor.” Statement number (4) was in the eighth position, with a mean of 1.77, a percentage of 35.4. It states: “There are training courses for school counsellors.”

Figure 9. Quantitative results for Dimension 1 statements.

Statement number	Descending order of the statements according to mean	Mean	Percentage	Standard Deviation	Grade
5	There is a shortfall in the number of school counsellors compared to the number of students who need counselling.	3.41	68	0.901	High
2	Unqualified counsellors are employed to work in schools.	3.30	66.2	0.712	Middle (high)
16	The M.o.E. offers encouragement to school counsellors.	3.21	64.2	0.912	Middle (high)



Figure 10. Quantitative results for Dimension 1 statements (cont.).

13	There are suitable place for the school counsellor to meet students/clients.	3.20	64	0.873	Middle (high)
3	There is support from the Ministry of Education for counselling programmes and counsellors.	3.10	62	0.910	Middle (high)
15	The amount of record keeping carried out by the school counsellor is unnecessary.	2.85	57	0.681	Middle (medium)
1	The Ministry of Education values the role of the counsellor.	2.74	54.8	1.101	Middle (low)
4	There are training course for school counsellor	1.77	35.4	0.821	Low (sign)
<b>Mean Average</b>		<b>2.94</b>	<b>58.95</b>	<b>0.865</b>	<b>Middle (medium)</b>

### 6.2. Problems related to the administration and the school teachers

The means for the statements of the dimension ranged between 2.09–2.81, a percentage of between 41.8–56.2. The mean average for the phrases of this dimension was 2.52, a percentage of (50.5). According to the criterion, the grade for the responses was “Middle (low)” for this dimension. The results show that there are a variety of different responses from the sample of individuals of the study in relation to the statements of this dimension according to the criterion adopted by the researcher. From the results in Figure 11 it can be observed that the two statements with the highest percentage were statement numbers (7) and (6). Statement number (7) was in the first position with a mean of 2.81, a percentage of 56.2, it states: “Head teacher's offer good support to school counsellors”. Statement number (6) was in second position, with a mean of 2.80, a percentage of 56, it states: “Head teachers have a good understanding of the role of the counsellor in schools.” Statement number (9) was in fifth position with a mean of 2.11, a percentage of 42.2, it states that: “Teachers understand the role of the school counsellors.” Statement number (10) was in sixth position, with a mean as low as 2.09, a percentage of 41.8, it states that: “Teachers co-operate with the school counsellor.”

Figure 11. Quantitative results for dimension 2 statements.

Statement number	Descending order of the statements according to mean	Mean	Percent	Standard Deviation	Grade
7	Head teachers offer good support to school counsellors.	2.81	56.2	0.882	Middle (medium)
6	Head teachers have a good understanding of the role of the counsellor in schools.	2.80	56	1.100	Middle (low)
8	The school counsellor is asked to do extra work not related to his main counselling role.	2.74	54.8	0.912	Middle (low)
14	There are suitable places for the school counsellors to keep his records.	2.60	52	1.080	Middle (low)
9	Teachers understand the role of the school counsellor.	2.11	42.2	0.742	Low
10	Teachers co-operates with the school counsellor.	2.09	41.8	0.870	Low
<b>Mean average</b>		<b>2.52</b>	<b>50.5</b>	<b>0.931</b>	<b>Middle (low)</b>

### 6.3. Problems relating to the school counsellors

The means of the statements for this dimension range between 1.92–2.70, a percentage of between 38.4–54. The mean average for the statements of this dimension was 2.35, a percentage of 46.93. According to the criterion, the grade for this dimension was 'low'. The results show clear differences in the responses from the sample regarding the statements of this dimension. From Figure 11, the statement with the highest percentage was number (12) with a mean of 2.70, a percentage of 54, it states: “There is a lack of practical preparation for the counsellor to carry out his work.” The statement with the lowest percentage was number (17)

with a mean of 1.92, a percentage of 38.4, it states: “There is a lack of continuous coordination between the counsellor and the school administration.”

Figure 12. Quantitative results for dimension 3 statements.

Statement number	Descending order of the statements according to mean	Mean	Percent	Standard Deviation	Grade
12	There is a lack of practical preparation for the counsellor to carry out his work	2.70	54	0.700	Middle (low)
11	The school counsellor lacks awareness of knowledge about his own job in the school.	2.42	48.4	0.682	Low
17	There is a lack of continuous coordination between the counsellor and the school administration	1.92	38.4	0.712	Low (significant)
<b>Mean average</b>		<b>2.35</b>	<b>46.93</b>	<b>0.698</b>	<b>Low</b>

#### 6.4. Problems relating to the students and the parents

The means of the responses for this dimension the range was between 2.10 - 2.78, a percentage range between 42–55.6. The mean average for this dimension was 2.52, a percentage of 50.52. According to the criterion, the grade was 'middle (low)' for this dimension. Again there are clearly differences in the responses from the sample regarding the statements of this dimension. The results show that the statement with the highest percentage was number (22) with a mean of 2.78, a percentage of 55.6, which states: “It is difficult for counsellors and parents to communicate.” This was followed by statement (19) with a mean of 2.65, a percentage of 53, which states: “Students co-operate with the school counsellors.” At the other end of the scale was statement (18) with a mean of 2.50, a percentage of 50, it states: “The students understand the role of the counsellor.” Also statement (21) with a mean of 2.10, a percentage of 42, it states: “The parents co-operate with the counsellor.”

Figure 13. Quantitative results for dimension 4 statements

Statement number	Descending order of the statements according to mean	Mean	Percent	Standard Deviation	Grade
22	It is difficult for counsellors and parents to communicate.	2.78	55.6	1.100	Middle (low)
19	Students co- operate with the school counsellor	2.65	53	0.801	Middle (low)
20	Parents are aware of the role of the school counsellor	2.60	52	0.793	Middle (low)
18	The students understand the role of the school counsellor.	2.50	50.0	0.895	Low
21	The parents co-operate with the counsellor.	2.10	42	0.810	Low
<b>Mean average</b>		<b>2.52</b>	<b>50.52</b>	<b>0.879</b>	<b>Middle (low)</b>

## 7. DISCUSSION

The quantitative and qualitative research findings taken together demonstrated a broad range of factors and attitudes that were either hindering or preventing effective counselling in Afif schools. These were differentiated according to the general type of attitude that they reflected towards school counselling.

### 7.1. Cultural attitudes towards school counselling

Overall cultural attitudes towards school counselling and school counsellors tended to be negative. There seemed to be a lack of trust between students and counsellors and there was evidence that students viewed discussing problems with counsellors as a sign of weakness. In practice this may be because of a closed culture and society in Saudi Arabia, where close knit

tribal and familial bonds mean private matters stay private, i.e. Saudi Arabia is a dominant patriarchal and collectivist society, with a high level of uncertainty avoidance, and conservatism. In practice it is difficult to differentiate between cultural attitudes and psychological attitudes of students and parents. This may be because many students were open to counselling but parents disapproved, perhaps because they wanted to keep what they see as private matters private, or they are reluctant to discuss private matters with persons who are not close family members. For instance, Interviewee C5 noted the reluctance of parents to involve school counsellors: “We only see parents when their sons have a problem or are in trouble”, and Interviewee C4 tried to explain this attitude: “(...) because of the culture and society in Saudi Arabia it is common for parents to be uncomfortable with the involvement of the counsellor in their son's life because they are considered private for the family”. This may also reflect different cultural attitudes towards counselling in the Saudi culture. Whereas counselling is a well-established practice and profession in open and developed Western countries, it may be less widely accepted in less developed and arguably more closed Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia. Another potential explanation was offered by Interviewee C1, who stated that one of the main problems school counsellors faced was “the ignorance of parents about the job we do for their sons”. Interviewee C1 indicated that it might be a cultural phenomenon because parents did not seem to enquire about the behaviour of their children in schools, and there was a lack of regular meetings held. The problem was made worse by other cultural attitudes reflected by a lack of co-operation from other teachers, with Interviewee C1 stating that: “We try to work collaboratively with our colleagues [teachers] to solve the students’ troubles. Unfortunately, in most of the cases the teachers are not cooperative with us, because they think that it’s our duty to solve all the behavioural troubles of the students, which makes life difficult for us in school”.

### **7.2. Social attitudes towards school counselling**

Whilst there seemed to be some evidence highlighting positive social attitudes towards school counsellors from the students, overall social attitudes towards school counsellors also tended to be negative. There was evidence that head teachers and other teachers severely misunderstood the role of school counsellors, or did not view them as “professional”, potentially because they viewed them as unqualified, lacking sufficient training, or because they believed the job to be easy. For example, Interviewee C1 stated “teachers think that the counsellor has an easy job with a comfortable office”, and Interviewee C2 stated “the teachers consider that the role of the counsellors is to simply give out punishments, if the student misbehaves or neglects their homework, they are referred to the counsellor by the teacher”. There was also evidence showing a general lack of social and financial support from the Saudi Ministry of Education, and from the schools in terms of sufficient or adequate training. For example Interviewee C1 stated “if we had more training then we would be more able to overcome the problems that we encounter”. Interviewee C4 noted that his job would be much easier with an increased budget which would allow him to purchase tools that he needed as well as providing additional counselling programs for students. Additionally Interviewee C1 noted that counselling courses were too short and did not provide suitable materials reflecting real life student problems. This may actually significantly affect the competence of school counsellors in practice, as well as their own approach to counselling in schools. For example, Interviewee C1 stated: “What can you expect me to do when you know that my background is art, I have never attended any counselling training courses, or even read about the topic until I worked in this position, I am very much in need of training for this role, otherwise my position is meaningless”.

### **7.3. Psychological attitudes towards school counselling**

The psychological attitudes of other teachers towards school counsellors seemed to generally reflect a lack of overall professional respect. It would seem to be the case that parents may also have been reluctant to involve school counsellors in what they saw as their personal affairs, to accept the input or viewpoints of school counsellors in 'private' student matters, or to co-operate in general. Given the general attitudes towards school counsellors it may be that parents of students see school counsellors as strangers and there is a lack of trust between them.

Alternatively, it may be that there are strong cultural barriers that must be first overcome in order to subsequently develop a closer relationship with parents and students, i.e. closed tribal bonds or close knit familial ties. This, together with other factors (e.g. limited budgets, lack of training, understaffing), may have significantly contributed to school counsellors feeling isolated and de-motivated. For instance Interviewee C3 stated “There are those counsellors who are not motivated which can be detrimental to their performance as student counsellors”. School counsellors also felt they were given work beyond their expected roles and found little administrative support from the schools to help with administrative workloads. It is noted that Interviewee C3 stated “there is difficulty in the job because there are too many students to deal with in the school”. These types of developments are unsettling from a 'psychoeducational' viewpoint. For example, Smith, Jones, and Simpson (2010, p. 147) have stated that most clinicians would agree that patients with any chronic disorder should, as part of their routine care, “be given accurate information about their diagnosis, treatment and prognosis and about how they can help themselves to stay well”. They also note that in broad terms this type of information is what is considered to be “psychoeducation” (Smith et al., 2010, p. 147). Therefore providing accurate information about an individual's condition or behaviour is supposed to be beneficial in the overall treatment of that individual. But in some Saudi schools there would seem to be a type of “negative” workspace, where other teachers and some head teachers view school counsellors as unqualified or lacking training. In addition to this, parents do not trust or co-operate with school counsellors, and school counsellors themselves feel de-motivated. These types of circumstances mean that school counsellors are not provided with an effective opportunity to provide students with sufficient information about their condition, behaviour, or situation, and therefore traditional psychoeducational approaches to school counselling in these Saudi schools are therefore likely to fail.

## 8. CONCLUSION

There is a considerable amount of quantitative and qualitative research that has investigated the roles, impacts, and perceptions of school counsellors in Western countries (Harris, 2013). This type of research has often demonstrated the benefits of school counselling and school counsellors, as well as positive attitudes of students and teachers towards school counselling and its conceptualisation. Yet there has been very little similar research undertaken in developing countries in the Middle East, especially in countries with arguably more traditional or closed cultures such as Saudi Arabia. There are potentially many reasons why this is so, including, for example, the more conservative and closed culture in Saudi Arabia, close-knit familial ties, and the high power-distance relationships inherent in a predominantly tribal culture. The research study aimed to develop this area further by investigating this area in greater depth. The research study showed that school counsellors in secondary schools in Afif faced numerous difficulties, which potentially obstructed their work, as well as psychoeducational approaches to school counselling. These were investigated and differentiated into key themes relating to cultural, social, and psychological attitudes, including cultural (*negative views of school counsellors, lack of trust, acceptance and cooperation from teachers and parents*), social (*lack of understanding of school counsellors' role, unqualified school counsellors*), and psychological (*understaffed, burdened and de-motivated counsellors*) attitudes. It can be concluded that all these cultural, social, and psychological attitudes are to some extent potentially hindering progress in the development of successful school counselling initiatives and programmes in boys secondary schools located in Saudi Arabia.

## 9. RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

There are a number of limitations that exist in the research that will be identified here. The *first* limitation relates to the small sample size. The sample size was limited and may not be fully representative of school counselling perspectives in all Saudi schools or universities,

thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings. The *second* limitation is that the research was cross-sectional in nature, and focused on counselling perspectives at a single point in time. It would be interesting to undertake further studies which were longitudinal in nature, and which might help to provide a deeper insight into cultural, social, and psychological attitudes towards school counselling. The *third* limitation is that owing to Saudi culture and traditions, there is gender separation throughout society, meaning that males and females attend separate schools. Consequently, the research study was limited to male perspectives of school counselling, and future research into cultural, social, and psychological attitudes towards school counselling might alternatively seek to investigate whether female perspectives differed to existing male perspectives. The research findings also demonstrate that there would currently seem to be a lack of effective school counselling practices in some Saudi schools. Therefore future research might seek to investigate ways of improving the practices of school counsellors and school counselling in Saudi schools.

## 10. IMPLICATIONS FOR SAUDI SCHOOL COUNSELLING PRACTICES

The research findings would seem to indicate that there are significant problems that school counsellors currently face in Saudi schools. Many research studies relating to school counselling theory and practice tend to concentrate on the effects that school counselling practices have on children and adolescents, and how they impact their behaviour. They tend to assume that school counsellors are well-equipped and resourced, and sufficiently trained in school counselling skills. But the research showed that in developing countries such as Saudi Arabia, school counselling theory and practice is still in a stage of early development, and there needs to be a greater emphasis on improving the quality of school counselling theory and practice and its application in Saudi Arabia. One of the main difficulties is that it would seem to be the case that school counsellors as well as school counselling practices are marginalised in Saudi Arabia. Until they are integrated into the mainstream educational framework, it is likely to continue to be the case that the quality of school counselling practices in Saudi schools will suffer, and Saudi school counsellors may feel demoralised.

The research findings would also seem to indicate that there is much that could potentially be done to improve school counselling practices and service delivery in schools. Minimum levels of qualifications for school counsellors might be set, with qualifications relating to areas such as sociology, psychology, or education. Saudi national school counselling qualifications and training could be developed. A Saudi national school counselling organisation or body could be set up to promote school counselling practices and standards throughout Saudi Arabia. School counselling standard guidelines for school counselling practices in Saudi schools could be developed. Saudi head teachers might look at providing more opportunities for school counsellors to give open and honest feedback and criticism of existing school counselling practices. Saudi head teachers could strive to develop new school initiatives to improve existing negative perceptions of school counsellors by other teachers or school workers. These could all potentially help to improve the mutual trust and respect that is needed by Saudi school counsellors in schools in order for them to be able to provide high quality school counselling services to those students that really need them.

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