



LIVED EXPERIENCES OF GUIDANCE ADVOCATE IN HANDLING COUNSELING AND REFERRAL SYSTEM DURING PANDEMIC IN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

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DOI: 10.47760/cognizance.2023.v03i06.010

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this descriptive-qualitative research was to determine the lived experiences of guidance advocate in handling counseling and referral system during pandemic in public elementary schools. The following were the four primary phenomenological research questions which guided the study: 1. What are the lived experiences of guidance advocates during pandemic in terms of Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Social? 2. How do the guidance advocates implement the counseling and referral system in their schools? 3. What are the challenges encountered by the guidance advocates in implementing the counseling and referral system during pandemic? 4. How do you resolve the challenges that you have encountered in implementing counselling and referral system? The results during actual semi-structured interview were given thorough analysis to properly identify responses taken from the co-researchers as regards the identified four major themes: Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Social. In terms of the Physical aspect, relative experiences of the participants are stress, overload of works, miscommunication of information, and delivering of information and services through calls was very hard. In terms of the Mental aspect, common lived experiences by the participants during the pandemic are anxiety, pressured by the deadlines of the reports which need to be accomplished, and slight depression. In terms of the Emotional aspect, majority of the participants' expressed feelings of uncertainty, anxiety, stress, fear, and sadness which became a hindrance to their ability to perform their functions as guidance advocates. In terms of Socialization, the participants reported boredom of staying at home because socialization was strictly prohibited and the social activities which were prepared for the learners could not be delivered.

Keywords: Guidance advocate, wellness, mental health, pandemic

Introduction

The role of the guidance office in this time, plays a vital role in helping maintain the mental well-being of the client. Because of the increasing mental issues facing by learners, the Philippine Department of Education released a memorandum DM-OUIC-2021-359 which is the “Counseling and Referral System for Learners” that addresses the mental health concerns of the students. With this memorandum both elementary and secondary school nationwide implement this guidelines in response to the increasing need to address the mental health concerns of the students.

Republic Act 9258 is an act to be known as the “Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004”, in which the state recognizes the important role of guidance and counselors in nation-building and promotes the sustained development of reservoir of guidance and counselors whose competence have been determined by honest and credible licensure examinations. This act was made to professionalize the practice of guidance and counseling in the Philippines. According to the Republic Act 9258 section 27 “No person shall (a) engage in the practice of guidance and counseling without a valid Certificate of Registration and the valid Professional Identification Card or a special permit; (b) make representations to the public or to third person as a licensed Guidance Counselor during the time that the licensed has been revoked or suspended, and, (c) allow anybody to use his/her license as guidance counselor to enable such unqualified individual to engage in the practice of guidance and counseling.” With that statement it explains the significance of selecting a professional counselor for the values formation and academic behavior of the students.

Background of the study

Guidance and counseling in public elementary schools is very important nowadays due to many stressors brought by the pandemic. It plays a vital role in keeping the students mental state good and functional. But with the lack of registered guidance counselors, the assigned guidance advocate of every school is tasked to implement the guidance and counseling referral system under the DepEd guidelines for guidance and counseling referral system for S.Y 2021-2022 which aims to give DepEd schools the mechanism to address the needs of learners on their mental health. Guidance advocates are not registered professionals who can give counseling for the students, they are teachers who extends their services by guiding the students to cope with their stressors and misbehaviors by means of life coaching.

Lack of registered guidance counselor’s forces schools to keep unlicensed ones. The law stated in the Republic Act 9258 Section 27 that “No person shall (a) engage in the practice of guidance and counseling without a valid Certificate of Registration and the valid Professional Identification Card or a special permit” but with the lack of registered guidance counselors the DepEd are forced to go against the law. The Department of Education requires public and private elementary and high school to have one guidance counselor for every 500 students. The Philippines, however, only has 3, 220 registered guidance counselors as of July 2017 and almost 1,096 active counselors as of May 2020. Nowadays, the need of a guidance counselors especially

at this time of pandemic is a must, to help our students to address the surge of mental health issues due to the new normal in educational system.

In the absence of licensed guidance counselors, school administrators appoint teachers to fill the role of a guidance counselor, often known as a "guidance teacher, teacher counselor, or designate counselor". For guidance programs to succeed, instructors and counselors must collaborate. Research, however, points in a different direction. Due to the fact that trainees are expected to implement the program in their individual schools, the function of guidance and counseling in teacher training is crucial. The teacher's capacity as a counselor is constrained. They provide the following services, but not counseling or psychological testing, which are distinct from those provided by a trained guidance counselor (Mendijar & Manamtan, 2020). They also provide informational, consultative, placement, and referral services.

The role of guidance counselor has evolved with each passing decade. The focus of guidance counselors was initially the provision of academic placement, assessment, and vocational guidance to students. Nowadays, the status of Guidance and Counseling in the Philippines has dramatically changed within the last two decades. The importance of and the need for guidance and counseling have become more and more evident in the Philippine educational landscape because of the changing needs and the psychological, social, physical and spiritual milieu of the Filipino people (Bustos, 2016). Further, It is a known fact that in the Philippines, guidance counselors are not only overloaded with students, as the standard ratio of 1:500 is not followed, but are mostly overloaded with responsibilities other than guidance work (Fabella & Ignacio, 2018).

It is critical to understand the challenges that guidance counselors confront as they continue to perform their duties during this pandemic, since school counselors are under pressure to go above and above to assist students. In order to regain their strength while they carry on with their jobs, they also need to take care of their mental health. In this study, the question, "How are guidance and counseling services implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic?" is sought after. The results of this study can also help with the creation and use of fresh concepts, initiatives, and tactics to improve the school's current guidance and counseling program (Pedrosa, et al, 2022).

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on a phenomenon Experiential Model Theory by Kolb (1974) who contends that information that can be used as a foundation for contemplation comes from tangible experience. We absorb the knowledge from these reflections and create abstract conceptions. subsequently, using these ideas, we create fresh hypotheses about the universe, which we subsequently put to the test. By putting our theories to the test, we learn new things from experience and return to the process's beginning. But experience is not always necessary to start the process. Instead, depending on the circumstance, each person must decide which learning style will be most effective.

Kolb's experiential learning theory is a way of learning from experience that involves a cycle of four stages: concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and

active experimentation. The theory also suggests that different learning styles are associated with different stages of the cycle. The theory is based on the idea that learning is a holistic process that incorporates cognition, emotion, and environment.

Research Questions

This research aimed to describe how guidance advocates handled the counseling and referral system for learners in time of COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, the study sought answers to the following research questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of guidance advocates during pandemic in terms of:
 - 1.1 Physical
 - 1.2 Mental
 - 1.3 Emotional
 - 1.4 Social aspects?
2. How do the guidance advocates implement the counseling and referral system in their schools?
3. What are the difficulties encountered by the guidance advocates in implementing the counseling and referral system during pandemic?
4. How do the guidance advocates resolve the difficulties that they encountered in implementing counseling and referral system?
5. Based on the result of the study, what recommendations can be made?

METHODOLOGY

This study focused on how guidance advocates implement the counseling and referral system in public elementary schools in Antipolo City. This study also aimed to raise awareness that guidance and counseling is very important in establishing the student's values and academic performance in this time of pandemic. The possible limitation of this study could be limited to the selected school guidance advocates in public elementary schools. Therefore, the results may not be generalized to all school guidance counselors and advocates.

Qualitative research was utilized by this study. It is a type of social science research that collects and works with non-numerical data and that seeks to interpret meaning from these data that would aid in the understanding of social life through the study of targeted populations.

The selection of this research methodology was based on the nature of the research being addressed - the researchers' personal experiences, and the intended beneficiaries for the study. The researchers of this study applied and utilized the descriptive qualitative method. It was conducted using interview. Descriptive research involves asking and answering specific questions, analyzing data, and interpreting findings. In evaluating a problem, the approach to use will depend on the questions answered in a study.

Research Locale

In this study, the researchers gathered data from the lived experiences of guidance advocates in the public elementary schools in District I-B, Division of Antipolo City. Selected public elementary school guidance advocates in Antipolo City were the main respondents of this

study. The selected public elementary schools were the Bagong Nayon I Elementary School, Bagong Nayon II, Elementary School, Bagong Nayon IV Elementary School, Sta. Cruz Elementary School, Mambungan I Elementary School, Mayamot Elementary School, Dela Paz Elementary School and San Isidro Elementary School.

Sample Design and Techniques

The population of the study consists of guidance advocates with a minimum of 3-4 years work experience as guidance advocate of their schools before and during pandemic, who have been implementing counseling and referral system to elementary students during pandemic. The purpose of this study was to analyze and illuminate the guidance advocates lived experiences in handling counseling and referral system during pandemic, eight (8) participants will be interviewed to explore the experiences and what these may have on their professional roles. These individuals who were selected to be part of the study were carefully chosen based on the criteria that the study is looking for. They are purposely willing to describe their experiences related to the phenomenon. Demographic data, together with the informed consent were secured prior the interview.

Participants of the Study

The participants of the study were DepEd public elementary teachers and assigned as guidance advocate by their school. These teachers were guidance advocates before and during pandemic with at least 3-4 years of work experience as guidance advocate. The guidance advocates attended the counseling and referral system orientation S.Y 2021-2022.

The researchers used complete enumeration in choosing the respondents to obtain the research population. The sampling technique that was going to use is a purposive sampling wherein there are certain criteria that must be met to be considered as one of the respondents.

The study focused eight (8) public school teachers who were designated for more than three years as guidance advocate of their schools. The teacher must be a guidance advocate before and during pandemic. The researchers conducted the interview using the researchers-made interview guide to bring together the necessary information from the participants. The researchers also protected the confidentiality of the information gathered.

Participant 1 is a forty-one-year-old female teacher from public elementary school with a earned master's units, she is also teaching a Grade 6 students and working as a guidance advocate for almost three years.

Participant 2 is a sixty-one-year-old female teacher from public elementary school with earned master's units, she is also teaching a Grade 4 students and working as a guidance advocate for almost nineteen years.

Participant 3 is a fifty-one-year-old female teacher from public elementary school with earned master's units, she is also teaching a Grade 1 students and working as a guidance advocate for almost seven years.

Participant 4 is a thirty-three-year-old female teacher from public elementary school with a master's degree and she is also teaching Grade 6 students and working as a guidance advocate for almost six years.

Participant 5 is a thirty-four-year-old female teacher from public elementary school, she is also teaching Grade 4 students and working as a guidance advocate for almost four years.

Participant 6 is a twenty-six-years-old female teacher from public elementary school with earned master’s units, she is also teaching Grade 6 students and working as a guidance advocate for almost five years.

Participant 7 is a thirty-eight-year-old female teacher from public elementary school with master’s degree, she is also teaching Grade 1 students and working as a guidance advocate for almost four years.

Participant 8 is a thirty-four-year-old female teacher from public elementary school with earned master’s units, she is also teaching kindergarten students and working as a guidance advocate for almost six years.

Table 2: Demographic Profile of the Participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Grade Level Taught	Highest Educational Attainment	Number of Years as Guidance Advocate
1	41	Female	Grade 6	earned master’s units	3 years
2	61	Female	Grade 4	earned master’s units	19 years
3	51	Female	Grade 1	earned master’s units	7 years
4	33	Female	Grade 6	Master’s Degree	6 years
5	34	Female	Grade 4	Bachelor’s Degree	4 years
6	26	Female	Grade 6	earned master’s units	5 years
7	38	Female	Grade 1	Master’s Degree	4 years
8	34	Female	Kindergarten	earned master’s units	6 years

Instruments

In order to gather adequate and reliable data, a set of interview questions created by the researchers and approved by an expert on qualitative research was developed. They then conducted an interview using the researchers-made interview guide to bring together the necessary information from the participants. The interview guide is divided into two different parts. The first part is composed of the demographic profile of the respondents such as their age, gender, highest educational attainment, years in teaching and as guidance advocate, and the second part is the interview proper wherein a set of questions were asked to the respondent.

The protocol below was part of a carefully designed research project that includes the following sections:

- Semi-structured interview
- Guide for the report (outline, format based on a qualitative research)
- In-person Interviews
- Researcher Observations
- Demographic Sheet
- Researcher: It is important to note that in qualitative research the researcher is the primary instrument (Patton, 2003).

Data Gathering

In collecting the data, the researchers sought the approval of the DepEd-Division Office of Antipolo City and the school heads of the selected public elementary schools through a request letter from the researchers, signed by the FEU Roosevelt Dean and the assigned thesis adviser. A letter of consent was provided by the researchers to gather information through the use of interview. Rest assured that the information gathered from the respondents were handled with confidentiality and in accordance with the data privacy act of 2012.

The sets of data were gathered to organize, analyze, and interpret in accordance with the order of the specific research problem. The researcher gathered the information from the selected public elementary school guidance advocate. Using a researchers-made interview guide question. The researchers conducted interviews to gather the necessary data needed for the study. Upon gathering, the researchers organized and prepared the data by transcribing the interviews. After gathering the data, the researchers then made an interpretation of the results of the study.

Data Analysis

According to Giorgi (1997), the descriptive phenomenological approach in psychology employs a five-step data processing process based on some phenomenological philosophical ideas. Every action has a related philosophical idea that supported its goal and essence. As a result, data analysis was completed after the interviews were converted to transcripts, and the paper was then examined for any psychological implications.

RESULTS

The following are the findings obtained from the analysis of the interviews conducted. Moreover, discussed in this chapter are the distinct experiences physically, mentally, emotionally and socially of informants as guidance advocate in Antipolo City, the characteristics, the duties and responsibilities of a guidance advocate. Results were then discussed and research questions were answered based on the themes identified from the data analysis.

Research Question #1: What are your lived experiences as guidance advocate during the pandemic in terms of:**1.1 Physical**

THEME: PROVIDED SERVICES

Sub-Theme:**Means of Delivery****Effects on Health****Work from Home Set up Difficulty**

The guidance services offered by the guidance advocate underwent significant alteration as a result of the pandemic. Due to the limitations, guidance advocates typically came up with strategies for coping with the problems by responding to students concerns online without endangering their medical safety.

Means of Delivery

Because of the limitations imposed by the pandemic, many works were done remotely. Students study at home using a modular setup with the assistance of their parents or guardians as their teacher at home. Guidance advocates were forced to find new, inventive, and effective ways to carry out their duties as a result of the shift to online guidance and referral services. By coping, the guidance advocates were able to continue doing their jobs effectively despite the pandemic.

Effects on Health

The change from face-to-face to online services has an impact on the health of guidance advocates, which in turn affects how well they do their jobs. Stress about the paperwork and worry about becoming sick are the main factors affecting their health. However, as a result of these encounters, they now have a better understanding of what students are going through during this pandemic.

Work from Home Set up Difficulty

The counselor and the client must work together to provide counseling. The ability to be physically present while providing this advisory service is valued by counselors. The goal of counseling is to assist students in developing into fully functional adults through a one-on-one relationship with a professionally qualified/registered guidance counselor. In a private setting, it is typically conducted face to face. But at this odd time, guidance counselors must conduct online counseling sessions, connect with students in a secure setting, or make use of a tele counseling platform. Some of them may find this difficult, especially given that virtual counseling sessions call for privacy. According to Pedroso *et al.* (2022) some counselors may still require training in this area.

		<p>Fear of Getting Infected</p> <p>Stressful</p>	<p>of pupils, parents and my co-teachers who suffered from the same sickness.</p> <p>Participant 4- There were fears and worries that I may be infected with Covid-19. But then, I was so grateful that I was not infected.</p> <p>Participant 5- It gave me a lot of stress because of the paper works, pressure in works, boredom and weak body.</p>
	Work from Home Set up Difficulty	<p>Performing duty from WFH set up</p> <p>Miscommunication</p> <p>Attending seminars and trainings</p>	<p>Participant 6- It was really hard for me to perform my duty because of the WFH set up.</p> <p>Participant 7- I really did not really perform well my duties because of miscommunication of information which turned things into confusion.</p> <p>Participant 8- I really cannot focus because there were many seminars and trainings that I needed to attend to and there were also other school concerns that I also needed to address.</p>

Research Question #1: What are your lived experiences as guidance advocate during the pandemic in terms of:

1.2 Mental

THEME: MENTAL STATE

**Sub-Theme:
Mental Well-being**

Mental State

It is critical to understand the challenges that guidance advocates confront as they continue to perform their duties during this pandemic, since school guidance advocates are under pressure to go above and above to assist students. With the participants experiences, in order to regain their strength while they carry on with their jobs, they also need to take care of their mental health. The COVID 19 caused significant modifications in our guidance services, particularly for our guidance advocates who serve as the main body responsible for their implementation. Because of the shortage of guidance counselors the job was handed to the guidance advocates but since they are not registered counselors they can only perform life coaching. The anxiety of having COVID 19 and providing the finest services they can for the students have put them through mental strain.

THEME	SUB-THEMES	CODES	STATEMENTS
Mental State	Mental Well-being	Workload fatigue	<p>Participant 3- I suffered from over fatigue during the pandemic because of the new schemes in delivering workloads.</p> <p>Participant 8- Too tiring because there were a lot of things that I need to accomplish and submit.</p> <p>Participant 2- I suffered from slight depression especially when my sister and my father died due to Covid-19. During those times, I was really problematic, however, I was able to recover my strength through considering the power of prayers and also through the help and encouragements of my other family members to</p>
		Depression	

physically but also with the use of different applications or social media platforms. With this social media platform and other applications help the guidance advocate socialize with their students and provide the necessary assistance they needed.

THEME	SUB-THEMES	CODES	STATEMENTS
Social interaction	Means to Socialized	<p>Socializing physically is not possible</p> <p>Bonding with family while performing duty</p> <p>Socializing with students via online platforms</p> <p>Development of student's social skills</p> <p>Concern to others</p>	<p>Participant 2- Socializing with friends physically or in person is no longer possible.</p> <p>Participant 3- I maintained social contact and considered social withdrawal.</p> <p>Participant 4- I still managed myself to bond with my family while performing my duties and responsibilities as guidance advocate of our school.</p> <p>Participant 5- It gets me a chance to spend more time with my family. Because I am working from home.</p> <p>Participant 8- Socialization during the pandemic was strictly prohibited. However, I was able to perform my works as a guidance advocate through the use of the online platforms. I really managed myself to look for vital social activities that could help the learners learn and develop their social skills.</p> <p>Participant 1- Being able to talk about the importance of the development of learners' social aspect was an achievement on my part because I was able to impart knowledge on how to develop and strengthen more their</p>

			<p>social abilities.</p> <p>Participant 7- As usual, it disrupted various aspects of life most especially the activities that I was supposed to implement to develop the social aspects of the learners. I got so disappointed.</p> <p>Participant 6- As guidance advocates, it was really to see who were really suffering during the pandemic. It made me fall into tears because I even saw my neighbors who had nothing to eat. So, what I did is to share them with foods.”</p>
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Research Question #2. How do the guidance advocates implement the counseling and referral system in their schools?

THEME: SERVICES OFFERED

**Sub-Theme:
Applied Services**

With the shortage of guidance counselor in the public elementary schools, guidance advocates are task to perform their duties in helping to maintain the student’s well-being by means of guiding or life coaching. Guidance advocates served as the bridge between the client and the guidance counselor.

Applied Services

Even in a pandemic, maintaining the student’s mental health and functionality depends heavily on the cooperation of parents, teachers, students, and guidance advocates. It is crucial for guidance advocates to be aware of the rules and regulations when providing referral services in order to provide their students with the best care possible. From the participants experiences it shows that they implements the counseling and referral based on the guidelines provided to them with adjustments due to the challenge of COVID 19 pandemic. In the absence of a guidance counselor, it is the responsibility of the guidance advocate to administer the counseling and referral system. Since they are unable to provide counseling, it is their responsibility to recommend clients to the mental health experts where the referral system takes place.

THEME	SUB-THEMES	CODES	STATEMENTS
Services Offered	Applied Services	<p>Referring learners to nearest RGC in the area</p> <p>Conducted online services</p> <p>Addressed student's concern</p>	<p>Participant 2- For pupils who need counselling, I referred them to the RGC of Mayamot National High School.</p> <p>Participant 3- Since I am only a guidance designate, I am not allowed to have counselling. What I did is to refer the clients to our Certified Guidance Advocate in the Division Office.</p> <p>Participant 4- Conducting online “kamustahan”, I was really helped to know better the clients’ status.</p> <p>Participant 1- Counselling and referral services were available for all learners either online or tele-counselling during the pandemic.</p> <p>Participant 6- If there are times that we need to implement counselling we are talking to the learner one-on-one and then, if sometimes especially when they are involved in fighting, we called their parents, talk to them together with the principal and a Faculty Member.</p>

		<p>Reviewing the policies and guidelines</p>	<p>Participant 7-Since I'm in Primary Grade, there's nothing such problem that I can use the referral one. If there's a not so serious case that's the time, I'm with the adviser/s to help solve the certain issue/s. In fact, there's nothing so difficult road to go through, just help one another, because we're in the same place, we're one big family (peer support) in our school.</p> <p>Participant 8- As a guidance advocate, I implemented counselling and referral system in our school by reviewing the policies and guidelines given by the Department of Education on how counselling and referral system work. And of course, I ensure that my colleagues are well-informed.”</p> <p>Participant 5- Identify the concern of the learners. Then, Student is referred to SC/concern is identified on referral form(s). (Student Self-Referral Form, Parent/Guardian Referral Form, Faculty/Staff Referral Form, Information about Counseling, Informed</p>
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		<p>Consent Form). Once a concern is identified, the SC uses objective and subjective data to assess the situation and determine the level and type of intervention to be taken on the student’s behalf.</p> <p>Possible Interventions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SC In-School Interventions 2. SC Referral to In-School Resource(s) 3. SC Referral to Community Resource(s)* (Consent for Release of Information Form) <p>Interventions are implemented and the student’s progress is monitored. The student’s response to the intervention will be reassessed and the intervention plan modified as needed.</p> <p>To follow up with the referring individual, the SC maintains contact with the referring individual. Throughout this process the SC observes the guidelines of confidentiality as well as family privacy as mandated by the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Consult local school board policies regarding student confidentiality (ethical)</p>
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			and family privacy (legal) as well as procedures to follow for a referral to a community agency.
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Research Question #3. What are the difficulties encountered by the guidance advocates in implementing the counseling and referral system during pandemic?

THEME: IMPLEMENTATION DIFFICULTIES

Sub-Theme:

Encountered Challenges

The development of counseling and referral systems, particularly in public elementary schools, is quite challenging due to the pandemic. The lack of resources became a hindrance to the guidance advocates to provide the guidance services to the students who need them.

Encountered Challenges

As the only way to connect with the students, having a poor internet connection can be a great challenge for every guidance advocate in performing their services effectively. Due to this, it is also hard for them to monitor the students very now and then. Also, the effort to give the most excellent service to the pupils in need is at danger due to the lack of collaboration from students and parents. In addition, it is imperative to have adequate guidance advocates available to fulfill this responsibility due to the enormous number of pupils enrolled in public elementary schools.

THEME	SUB-THEMES	CODES	STATEMENTS
Implementation Difficulties	Encountered Challenges	<p>Difficulty in communication</p> <p>Lack of learner and parent's participation</p>	<p>Participant 1- I really struggled in performing my duties and responsibilities as a guidance advocate more specifically in communicating various information to the learners.</p> <p>Participation 2- If the client has no wifi or internet connection. Also, if the parents refused to participate.</p>

			<p>Participant 5- In my 4 years serving as a guidance advocate, I have encountered a lot of problems including lack of guidance advocate to handle learners with issues.</p> <p>Participant 7- Being a social and emotional educator/ coach, how could you handle such problem, how could you help them, the parents', and pupils with such little knowledge and trainings in handling mental health issues.</p>
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Research Question #4. How do the guidance advocates resolve the difficulties that have encountered in implementing counseling and referral system?

THEME: OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES

**Sub-Theme:
Resolving Strategies**

Resolving Strategies

The involvement of stakeholders is crucial for the effective implementation of guidance services since it defines the programs and services' success for various clients. Advocates go an extra mile just to deliver the best services in addressing their students' issues just like what the one participant said they are providing load for the internet to keep in touch with their students. The difficulties posed by the pandemic forced the advocates to use their innovative, creativity, and resources when putting counseling and referral services into place.

		<p>Provided online services</p>	<p>Participant 7- With the help of the series of webinars regarding issues and concerns on counselling during the pandemic situation.</p> <p>Participant 6- We usually refer them to the Brgy. if they are not really participating specially those who are involved in fighting.”</p> <p>Participant 2- By providing them load for internet and by encouraging the parents to cooperate.</p> <p>Participant 8- Kamustahan during the pandemic contributed a lot specifically in tracing the learners who really need assistance in mental health aspect.</p>
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Research Question #5: Based on the result of the study, what recommendations can be made?

Based on the results of this study a training program could be formulated. A Contingency Preparedness Program for Guidance Advocate in Case of Pandemic can be crafted. This training program's goal is to give guidance advocates the knowledge and skills they need to successfully implement the counseling and referral system in accordance with the Department of Education's pandemic preparedness guidelines. Without a guidance counselor, a guidance advocate must

implement the counseling and referral system with limitations. Since they are unable to provide counseling, they must refer clients to the mental health experts who can, and this is how the referral system works. Since we cannot predict how or when a scenario similar to a pandemic will arise again, this program can be used as a foundation for ongoing development of guidance advocate skills and abilities in providing guidance services in public elementary schools.

DISCUSSION

This study used the descriptive qualitative method of research to describe how the guidance advocates handles the counseling and referral system during the new normal. The participants in this study shared the distinct occurrences / experiences of guidance advocates in the selected schools in District I-B. Through interview and other forms of communicating to the respondents of this study, the researchers gained clear, wide, and specific knowledge as regards the experiences of guidance advocates in their respective schools.

Summary of Findings

1. Based on the four aspects: Physical, Mental, Emotional and Social, the findings on the physical aspect of the guidance advocate are they find it difficult to perform their duties physically due to the limitations imposed by the pandemic also the participants became concerned to their physical health because of the fear of being infected by the COVID 19. On their mental aspect, as a guidance advocate, they are expected to be mentally stable but because of the fear of being infected by COVID 19 the advocates became distracted and unfocused in performing their jobs in delivering the referral services. Furthermore, on their emotional aspect, while performing their duty, the guidance advocates express their feelings of sadness, fear and anxiety towards the unexpected circumstances brought by the pandemic. Lastly, on social aspect, it becomes one of the contributing problem that the guidance advocates experienced. With this limitations, it forces the advocates to be more innovative by carrying out their duties through online platforms. But since advocates are working remotely, they also have the opportunity to spend time with their families while working.
2. Guidance advocates applied the counseling and referral system in accordance with the instructions given to them, making adaptations for the COVID 19 pandemic challenge. The guidance advocate is in charge of managing the counseling and referral system in the absence of a guidance counselor. It is their duty to refer students to the mental health professionals where the referral system takes place because they are unable to offer counseling.
3. Findings show an inadequate internet connection makes it difficult for the guidance advocates to provide their services successfully because it is the only means to contact with the students. As a result, it is challenging for them to periodically check on the students. Additionally, the lack of cooperation from parents and students jeopardizes the endeavor to provide the best services to the students in need.

4. Based on the findings, when putting referral services in place, the pandemic's challenges require the advocates to be resourceful and innovative by adapting modern technology to carry out their task effectively.
5. Based on the result of the study a training program may be crafted. This training program's objective would be to equip guidance advocates with the knowledge and skills they need to efficiently implement the counseling and referral system in the event of a pandemic.

Conclusions

Based on the data, the researchers arrived at the following conclusions.

1. This study shows how the pandemic significantly altered each of the four areas in the life of guidance advocate. This made them adjust and adapt to the new experiences presented to them.
2. The implementation of counseling and referral system in public elementary schools follows the guidelines and policies made by the Department of Education with modifications made to account for the difficulties brought on by the pandemic.
3. Due to the internet problems and the students' lack of collaboration, the experiences of guidance advocates in bringing referral services made their task more challenging.
4. The difficulties and experiences that they encountered gave them the opportunity to discover and adapt varied techniques and strategies in dealing with students who needs their help.
5. Considering those experiences and challenges, a training program can be formulated to enable guidance advocates to accomplish their tasks and to deliver their assigned services.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions that were drawn from the results of the study, the following are hereby recommended:

1. A guidance advocate's experiences can act as a guide for enhancing their wellbeing on a personal and professional level by participating in courses and seminars that could increase their understanding of how to handle such circumstances.
2. Other guidance advocates may use the results of this study as benchmark to enhance the provision of referral services implementation in their respective schools.
3. The difficulties that the guidance advocates faced could serve as a basis for them to come up with fresh solutions and create possibilities for themselves to improve their services, particularly in terms of putting a counseling and referral system in place in public elementary schools.
4. The lived experiences of guidance advocates may be used as significant instruments to further improve or strengthen their skills in addressing issues and concerns of their students through guidance referral services.
5. School administrators should conduct and develop more trainings that enhances the skills and abilities of the guidance advocate.
6. Future researchers may conduct similar studies on the lived experiences of guidance advocates considering other factors.

Ethical Considerations

The researchers declare that they strictly adhered to the ethics of research. Informed consent was obtained, freedom to withdraw at any time from the study was made known to the participants, their identities were anonymized, the participants were not exposed to any physical, psychological or social harm and the results were used for research purposes only. The researchers further ensured steps to prevent bias in their interpretation of the data. Lastly, there was no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study.

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