Investigation of Counseling Services at Universities: Perceived Students' Needs

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Abstract
The purpose of conducting this study was to identify the counselling needs of students at higher educational institutions regarding the types of assistance students need from counselors. Students were asked to complete a needs assessment survey to determine the needs, thought to be of most importance. The needs assessment survey was divided into seven categories including; career counseling, social adjustment needs, academic counseling needs, psychological issues (fears & complexes), issues with teachers, self-identity related issues (self-esteem, self-actualization), health issues, peer effect. Conveniently selected 1056 students from four public and private sector universities of Lahore participated in this survey. Pairwise comparisons, using the Mann-Whitney U test were used. Students had the view that most of the time difficult tasks made them uncomfortable and tough circumstances shook their confidence. Findings of study showed that there was a difference in counselling preferences of undergraduate students. The students of 2nd semester were more concerned about getting information about their career. Undergraduate students of 1st semester needed guidance and counselling related to their health issues. Students of social sciences needed more guidance for their health issues and they were more concerned about the negative effects of their peer company. Findings of this study can be used by universities counselors and administrators to plan guidance and counseling programs to meet the needs of students.
Keywords**:** Counselling Needs, Undergraduate University Students, Basic Sciences, Social sciences.

Introduction

University experience, particularly for undergraduate students, is one of the transitional phases in the life of a student, in which individuals meet with new academic, social and personal challenges. Students experience independence during their university life in so many ways, as there are no assemblies, no uniforms and no need to bring their textbooks on daily basis. Becoming a university student is an exhilarating opportunity in the life of an individual, as it contributes for expansion of knowledge and development of self-identity and help to achieve personal growth (Giovazolias et al., 2008). During this time of adolescence and early adulthood students are faced with several developmental challenges; including independence, setting up their own social networks, understanding of rules and requirements of university, setting a career path, and emotional crises in constructing tender

relationships, academic crises due to change of study patterns. Arnett (2000) denotes this period using the term "emerging adulthood", that is a distinct period demographically, personally, and in terms of identity explorations.

Starting university life is a phase of an individual life in which students have more independence, which may raise the issues of individual's adjustment. Such changes may also be threatening for students' emotional well-being e.g. emotional upheaval and psychological distress (Malikiosi-Loizos, 2008; Roberts & Zelenyanski, 2002). Career issues and academic problems, and financial difficulties are found foremost reasons of stress, which may affect mental health and personal well-being of students (Monk, 2004; Andrews & Wilding, 2004; Grant 2002; Roberts & Zelenyanski, 2002). Norms and values of university compels students to equip themselves for these values. The stress of this adjustment with university environment affects the academic progress of students. This initial period of transition at the beginning of university life is usually considered stressful (Anderson, 2009). It is hypothesized that early period of university life is considered important area that should be researched. Educationists often find it explore the needs of thoseearly entrants (McInnis, 2001). The first year of university life is critical to develop social relations.This process of socialization is important for academic excellence in higher education (Grant, 2002). University policies and practices should cater to the adjustment needs of students.

It is not possible that university students do not face obstacles. However, it is important for students to learn how to tackle them. These challenging situations can harm students' academic success and personality development. This harm can badly affect the personality of students. It may affect their self-efficacy and may result in academic failure. Hence universities need to put conscious efforts to develop balance between academic challenges and demand. A proper support system should be there to help students to counter these challenges (Ryan & Twibell, 2000; McInnis, 2001). Social adjustment plays a vital role in developing the psychologically balanced personality of students. Well-adjusted students can achieve good academic result (Grayson, 2003). The counselling needs of students at university differ with regards to gender, semester,and subject of study. For example, females described the needs counselling to cater their issues ofsensitivity and self-control (Guneri et al., 2003). Alternatively, male students are more concernedfor their own family issues (Guneri, 2006). Research indicates that students who had enrolled in first semester experiencedmore concerns to academic, family issues (Güneri et al., 2003), health problems and social issues(Aluede et al., 2006).

Statistics of educational institutions show that there were 186 universities in Pakistan in the year of 2017-18, with 56.9 thousand teachers, in the country, with a total enrolment of 1.6 million. This enrolment was 7.7 percent higher than previous years (Government of Pakistan, 2022). This increasing number of students at universities of the country provoke the need to explore their counselling essentials. Counselling centers have been established in Pakistani universities under the guidance of Higher Education Commission (HEC). In order to cater this big number of students these centers are responsible to provide individual and group guidance to students. But these centers are not actively providing counselling to all students. Universities lack enough financial resources necessary to run efficient counselling programs. These centers are not working properly in universities involved in this study; there is one counsellor for one department, counsellor student ratio is one counselor for 300 to 700 students. Furthermore, these are not professional counselors, they are existing faculty members who are working as teachers and counsellors simultaneously. Usually, students are not

aware of the existence of counselling services within their department or university. Surveys or researches are not frequently published to identify students counselling needs in Pakistani context.

Considering the importance of counselling needs of students, universities all over the world offer counselling programs to cater the counselling needs of their students. Findings of different research studies suggested that counselling services within the universities can help students to cope with their academic demands and find suitable career and help to adjust with their social relations (Guneri et al., 2003, Nicholas, 2002). Grant (2002), suggested that the assessment of students counselling needs should be made on regular basis. Nicholas (2002) suggested that exploring students counselling needs is helpful to identify students concerns and serving students who avoid to take individual help, guiding counsellor or policy makers to develop programs for students, helping counsellors to get trainings for relevant needs. Counseling centers at campuses have helped students struggling with emotional, psychological, and academic difficulties (Kounenou & Koutra, 2008; Grant, 2002).

Objectives of the Study

The focus of this research endeavor was to explore the counselling needs of university students. More specifically, this exploratory study aimed to:

1. Assess the counseling needs of undergraduate students of (1st & 2nd semester) at university level.
2. Examine the difference in counselling needs of university students (I^{st} & 2nd semester). on basis of subjects i.e. basic sciences and social science.
3. Explore the difference in counselling needs on the basis of gender and semester (I^{st} & 2nd semester).

Research Question

1. What are the counseling needs of undergraduate students of (1st & 2nd semester) at university level?

Hypotheses of Study

H1: There is a significant difference in counselling needs of I^{st} & 2nd semester universitystudents.
H2: There is a significant difference in counselling needs of university students (I^{st} & 2nd semester) based on subjects i.e., basic sciences and social sciences.

Significance of the Study

Rapid social and technological changes in today's world are changing the needs of students. There is a need to identify the current needs of students in Pakistan so that effective counselling programs can be developed for them. The findings of study may be helpful to develop effective counselling programs for first-year undergraduate students. As counselling and guidance centers have been established in Pakistani university campuses in the past few years, in this context it is

hoped that the findings of the current study may be helpful addition in the existing literature on the counselling needs of students and have useful effects for professionals working with this age group.

Literature Review

University life has great appeal for students after their higher secondary school or college in Pakistan. Attending the rigidly structured environment of schools or colleges, they usually find it difficult to fit themselves for independent learning in the environment of university. A study conducted at the University of Ioannina (Turkey) showed symptoms of depression and anxiety among female university students (Navrides et al., 1990). This study was repeated ten years later and the results indicated even higher indisposition in terms of anxiety, depression and stress (Papadioti & Damigos, 2008). Such increasing problems with students' mental health have been reported by many international researchers (e.g., Benton et.al., 2003; Farrell, 2008; Erdu- Baker et al., 2006; Gallagher, 2009, 2010, 2011,2013; Kitzrow, 2003; Soet & Sevig, 2006; Trela,2008). Problems of university teachers including mental health problems indicated the need for student counselling interventions at university level.

Research conducted by Nicholas (2002) concluded that university students are facing high levels of stress in their early years at university. It is suggested in this research that adequate understanding of students needs is required for their better academic progress. Students are facing the issues of adjustment and lacking social support in the university environment (Gallagher, 2009; Grant (2002). Social adjustment is multifaceted and a complex concept. Learning adjustment is a continuous process (Soet & Sevig, 2006). Massachusetts Department of Higher Education (2008) suggests detecting mental health issues at early stages for better control and cure of these problems (O'Neill,et.al, 2008).

Students of the new millennium have diverse needs (Hodges, 2001; Howe & Strauss, 2000). These students are growing up in a technologically advanced and more global world. Theyhave social media relationships through texting, skype, instagram, facebook and may lack the interpersonal skills needed to form personal relationships on campus (Howe & Strauss, 2000; Elam, Stratton, & Gibson, 2007). University students (male & female) need career counseling for the selection of a suitable career (Khezran, 2004). College students (males compared to females) need help to assess their abilities for various occupations. This may be due to the lesser representation of female in the workplace in developing countries context (Malik, & Kiran, 2012). A study conducted by Khezran (2004) suggested that a comprehensive program of counseling has become imperative due to several reasons including the individual differences, and changes in educational and industrial sector of the country, large number of women enrollments in higher education institutions, education corresponding to vocation, and rapid increase in population.

Methodology of Study

Descriptive survey research design was used for this study. Descriptive research describes a phenomenon or subjects and generalizes by covering a larger group where a sample is taken (Amedahe, 2003). In lines with the requirements of descriptive research design data were collected through aquestionnaire from students of various universities to determine their counselling needs.

Development of Tool

A questionnaire was developed to identify the counselling needs of students. By reviewing the literature following sub constructs were identified: career counseling, social adjustment needs, academic counseling needs, psychological issues (fears & complexes), issues with teachers, self-identity related issues (self-esteem, self-actualization), health issues, peer effect. Statementsrelated to each aspect were added in the questionnaire. Responses were taken on five point Likertscale i.e. Most of the time, Some- Time, Often Seldom, Never. The reliability of scale was tested and the value of Cronbach Alpha was .75.

Table 1

Number of Statements Related to Each Sub-Construct of Counseling Needs

Sr. No.	Sub-Constructs	Number of Statements
1	Career Counseling	4
2	Social Adjustment Needs	7
3	Academic Counseling Needs	5
4	Psychological Issues (Fears & Complexes)	7+3=10
5	Issues With Teachers	3
6	Self-Identity Related Issues (Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization)	7+5=12
7	Health Issues	4
8	Peer Effect.	2
	Total	47

Sample of Study

This study was conducted to identify the counselling needs of undergraduate students studying at university. Four universities (two public sector & two private sector) from Lahore city were selected conveniently for this study. It was decided to take opinion of 1100 students. Two hundred and seventy-five students were selected randomly (from each university) studying in undergraduate level at various programs of social and basic sciences i.e. physics, chemistry, math, technology, business administration, psychology, education etc. from 1st and 2nd semester.

Analysis and Findings

Data were collected from the university students; questionnaire was distributed by personal visits of researchers. A total of 1100 questionnaires were distributed and 1056 were returned. In this survey study researchers used the Mann-Whitney U test to identify the counselling needs of university students based on semester and program. The Mann–Whitney U Test is a nonparametric test and is reliable to compare the two independent samples. To apply the Mann-Whitney U test, number of assumptions must be met; firstly, measure the dependent variable at continuous or ordinal level; secondly the independent variables should consist of two variables; the use of test can be good when two variables are not distributed normally (McKnight & Najab, 2010; MacFarland et al., 2016). The data in this study has two independent variables semester and programme. There were 10 dependent variables i.e. 1) career counseling, 2) social adjustment needs, 3) academic counseling needs, 4) psychological issues (fears & complexes), 5) issues with teachers, 6) self-identity related issues (self-esteem, self-actualization), 7) health issues, 8) peer

effect. The data was arranged before applying the Mann Whitney u test. All the assumptions of the test were met. SPSS was used to find the outcomes of the Mann Whitney u test.

Table 2

Assessing the Counseling Needs of Undergraduate Students of 1st & 2nd Semester

Counselling Needs	N	Mean	S.D
Career Counselling	1056	2.71	0.72
Social Adjustment	1056	2.80	0.61
Academic Counselling	1056	2.74	0.77
Self-identity related Issues	1056	2.68	0.61
Psychological Issues	1056	2.74	0.89
Issues with Teachers	1056	2.79	1.02
Health Issues	1056	2.80	0.79
Peer Effect	1056	2.88	1.04

Table 2 shows the descriptive analysis. Mean values show that mostly responses are near to agree options. According to the above table mean value of some of these Counselling needs are slightly different from each other, For instance, for "peer effect" M=2.88, for "health issues" M=2.80, for "social adjustment", M=2.80, it shows the highest mean values accordingly. On the other side for "Academic counselling", "self-identity related issues", "psychological issues", "issues with teachers", "career counselling" needs, mean values are, 2.74,2.68,2.74,2.79, 2.71 respectively, which shows the preferences in counselling needs. Highest value of mean describes the need of counselling is more comparatively.

H1: There is a significant difference in counseling needs of Ist & 2nd semester university students.

Table 3(a)

Mann-Whitney U for Group Academic Programs Semester Groups (Ranks)

Particulars	Semester	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Career Counseling	Ist semester	517	543.03	280747.50
	2nd semester	539	514.56	277348.50
Social Adjustment	Ist semester	517	532.59	275346.50
	2nd semester	539	524.58	282749.50
Academic Counseling	Ist semester	517	532.47	275284.50
	2nd semester	539	524.70	282811.50
Self-Identity Related Issues (Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization)	Ist semester	517	554.05	286446.00
	2nd semester	539	503.99	271650.00

Table 3(b)

Mann-Whitney U for group Academic Programs (test Statistics)

Test Statistics				
	Career Counseling	Social Adjustment	Academic Counseling	Self-Identity Related Issues (Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization)
Mann-Whitney U	131818.5	137219.5	137281.5	126120.0
Wilcoxon W	277348.500	282749.500	282811.500	271650.000
Z	-1.526	-.427	-.415	-2.674
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.0127	0.036	0.046	.008

a. Grouping Variable: Semester

To find out the difference between semester 1 and semester 2 for preferences of counseling needs was tested using Mann-Whitney-U-test. For the "Career Counseling" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Semester 1 (Mean Rank=543.03, N=517, and Semester 2 (Mean Rank=514.56, N=539, U=1318 z=_-1.5, p≤0.05. For the "Social Adjustment" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Semester 1 (Mean Rank=532.59, N=517, and Semester 2 (Mean Rank=524.58, N=539, U=137219 z=_-0.4, p≤0.05. For the "Academic Counseling" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Semester 1 (Mean Rank=532.59, N=517, and Semester 2 (Mean Rank=524.58, N=539, U=137281 z=_-0.4, p≤0.05. For the "Self-Identity Related Issues (Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization)" The test revealed significant differences in preferences of using counseling needs Semester 1 (Mean Rank=554.05, N=517, and Semester 2 (Mean Rank=503.99, N=539, U=126120 z=_-2.6, p≤0.05.

Table 3(c)

Mann-Whitney U for Group Academic Programs Semester Groups (Ranks)

Ranks				
Particulars	Semester	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Issues with Teachers	I[st] semester	517	544.79	281138.50
	2nd semester	539	513.84	276957.50
Health Issues	I[st] semester	517	551.05	284893.50
	2nd semester	539	506.87	273202.50
Peer Effect	I[st] semester	517	528.72	274900.50
	2nd semester	539	528.28	283195.50
Psychological Issues (fears & complexes)	I[st] semester	517	508.35	262819.00
	2nd semester	539	547.82	295277.00

Table 3(d)

Mann-Whitney U for Group Academic Programs (test Statistics)

	Issues with Teachers	Health Issues	Peer Effect	Psychological Issues (fears & complexes)
Mann-Whitney U	131427.5	127672.5	137665.5	128916.0
Wilcoxon W	276957.500	273202.500	283195.500	262819.000
Z	-1.606	-2.366	-.340	-2.105
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.0108	0.018	0.734	0.035

To evaluate the difference between semester 1 and semester 2 for preferences of counseling needs was tested using Mann-Whitney-U-test. For the "Issues with Teachers" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Semester 1 (Mean Rank=543.79, N=517, and Semester 2 (Mean Rank=513.84, N=539, U=131427 z=_-1.6, p≤0.05. For the "Health Issues" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Semester 1 (Mean Rank=551.05, N=517, and Semester 2 (Mean Rank=506.87, N=539, U=127672 z=_-2.36, p≤0.05. For the "Peer Effect" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Semester 1 (Mean Rank=528.72, N=517, and Semester 2 (Mean Rank=528.28, N=539, U=137665 z=_-0.34, p≤0.05. For the "Psychological Issues (fears & complexes)" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Semester 1 (Mean Rank=508.35, N=517, and Semester 2 (Mean Rank=547.82, N=539, U=128916 z=_-2.1, p≤0.05.

H2: There is a significant difference in counselling needs of university students (Ist & 2nd semester) on the basis of subjects i.e. basic sciences and social science.

Table 4(a)

Mann-Whitney U for Group Academic Program (basics sciences and social sciences)

Ranks				
Particulars	Program	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Career Counselling	Social Sciences	414	559.28	231541.50
	Basic Sciences	642	508.65	326554.50
Social Adjustment	Social Sciences	414	537.43	222497.00
	Basic Sciences	642	522.74	335599.00
Academic Counselling	Social Sciences	414	524.30	336597.50
	Basic Sciences	642	535.02	221498.50
Self-Identity Related Issues (Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization)	Social Sciences	414	497.90	238441.00
	Basic Sciences	642	575.94	319655.00

Table 4(b)

Mann-Whitney U for Group Academic Programs Program (basics sciences and social sciences)

				Self-Identity Related Issues (Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization)
Test Statistics[a]				
	Career Counselling	Social Adjustment	Academic Counselling	
Mann-Whitney U	120151.500	129196.000	130194.500	113252.000
Wilcoxon W	326554.500	335599.000	336597.500	319655.000
Z	-2.650	-.766	-.560	-4.070
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.008	.004	.005	.000

(Note:a. Grouping Variable: Program)

To evaluate the difference between Social sciences group and basics sciences Group for preferences of counseling needs was tested using Mann-Whitney-U-test. For the "Career Counseling" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Social sciences group (Mean Rank=559.28, N=414, and Basic Sciences (Mean Rank=508.56, N=642, U=12015 $z=\_-2.6$, $p\leq0.05$. For the "Social Adjustment" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Social sciences (Mean Rank=537.43, N=414, and Basic Sciences (Mean Rank=522.74, N=642, U=129196 $z=\_-0.7$, $p\leq0.05$. For the "Academic Counseling" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Social sciences (Mean Rank=524.30 N=414, and Basic Sciences (Mean Rank=535.02, N=642, U=13019 $z=\_-0.5$, $p\leq0.05$. For the "Self-Identity Related Issues (Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization)" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Social sciences (Mean Rank=497.90, N=414, and Basic Sciences (Mean Rank=575.95 N=642, U=113252 $z=\_-4.07$, $p\leq0.05$.

Table 4(c)

Mann-Whitney U for Group Academic Program (basics sciences and social sciences)

Particulars	Program	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Ranks				
Issues with Teachers	Social Sciences	414	510.49	230362.50
	Basic Sciences	642	556.43	327733.50
Health Issues	Social Sciences	414	559.69	231711.00
	Basic Sciences	642	508.39	326385.00
Peer Effects	Social Sciences	414	524.89	217302.50
	Basic Sciences	642	530.83	340793.50
Psychological Issues (fears & complexes)	Social Sciences	414	480.19	198800.50
	Basic Sciences	642	559.65	359295.50

Table 4(d)

Mann-Whitney U for Group Academic Programs Program (basics sciences and social sciences)

Test Statistics[a]

	Issues with Teachers	Health Issues	Peer Effect	Psychological Issues (fears & complexes)
Mann-Whitney U	121330.500	119982.000	131397.500	112895.500
Wilcoxon W	327733.500	326385.000	217302.500	198800.500
Z	-2.406	-2.683	-.312	-4.138
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.016	.007	.007	.000

To evaluate the difference between Social sciences group and Basics sciences Group for preferences of counseling needs was tested using Mann-Whitney-U-test. For the "Issues with Teachers" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Social sciences group (Mean Rank=510.49, N=414, and Basic Sciences (Mean Rank=556.43, N=642, U=121330 z=_-2.4, p≤0.05. For the "Health Issues" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Social sciences (Mean Rank=559.69, N=414, and Basic Sciences (Mean Rank=508.30, N=642, U=119982 z=_-2.68, p≤0.05. For the "Peer Effect" The test revealed significant difference in preferences of using counseling needs Social sciences (Mean Rank=524.89, N=414, and Basic Sciences (Mean Rank=530.83, N=642, U=131397 z=_-0.31, p≤0.05. For the "Psychological Issues (fears & complexes)" The test revealed significantdifference in preferences of using counseling needs Social sciences (Mean Rank=480.19, N=414,and Basic Sciences (Mean Rank=559.65, N=642, U=112895 z=_-4.0, p≤0.05.

Conclusion

Descriptive analysis of counselling needs shows that students need counselling to cope with negative peer effects and to solve their health and social adjustment issues. Students also show their preferences for academic counselling, self-identity related issues, psychological issues, issues with teachers, and the need for career counselling. Students feel uncertain and worried about the availability of jobs in their future. There is an anxiety among students about the worth of their degree. However, they are a little satisfied that they are getting enough skills to showcase their talent in their subject or relevant field. Social adjustment needs students to have an opinion that they feel confusion about values, morals, and/or beliefs. Students have adjustment issues with people who are from different religions and cultures and sometimes they observe less tolerance and patience. They often have issues to work in group of students. Excessive nonacademic computer usage and the issue of time management for study interferes with academic performance. Explaining the self-identity related issues students admitted that they seldom sacrifice their favorite things for others and admit their mistakes in front of others. Students have the view that most of the time difficult tasks and tough circumstances make them. They seldomtry to find greater meaning in life and have less ability to tolerate others.

These results are in accordance with the relevant study (Efthimiou et al., 2001) based on a sample of 1,184 students from three Greek universities, which found that students self-reported similar psychological difficulties. Findings of this study shows that there is a difference in counselling preferences of undergraduate students. The students of 2nd semester is more concerned about getting information about their career. So, they preferred career counseling more as compare to 1st semester needs. Guidance related to social adjustment and academic counseling counselling is needed more by 1st semester students. Students of 1st semester are more concerned about their self-identity issues i.e. self-esteem, self-actualization and also need guidance to adjust them with teachers' pace and behavior. Undergraduate students of 1st semester needs guidance and counselling related to their health issues. Flisher et al. (2002) stated that first-year students were more likely to experience psychological difficulties and receive counselling services than the more senior students. Hyun et al. (2006) found that counselling for mental health needs were significantly more demanded as compare to other variables, as the number of semesters spent at university. This may be due to the transition period from the family environment to more independent living (Malikiosi-Loizos 2008). The challenges of this transitional period include emotional upheaval and psychological distress (Grant 2002). Students of 1st and 2nd semester equally adopted bad habits (smoking, cheating, class bunking) from peers and they need counselling to cope with the negative effect of their peer company. Students of 2nd semester need more guidance to resolve their psychological issues as compared to 1st semester students.

There is a difference in guidance and counselling needs of university students of 1st and 2nd semester based on subjects. Students of social sciences group are more focused about taking guidance for their career preferences. The students of social sciences have social adjustment issues and they need guidance and counselling for these issues more than the students of basic sciences. Academic counselling is a matter of preference for students of basic sciences as compared to the students of social sciences. Students of basic sciences are more conscious to get counselling about self-identity related issues (Self-Esteem, Self-Actualization) and their issues with teachers. Students of social sciences needed more guidance for their health issues and they are more effected by the negative effects of their peer company.

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