

Counseling and Vocational Counseling in Secondary Education for Socially Vulnerable Groups

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Abstract: The diverse composition of the society confronts individuals from socially vulnerable groups with multitude problems. Counseling and career counseling has an assisting role in helping those people, aiming to overcome any obstacles. It is considered necessary that the theoretical models and counseling techniques reflect a multicultural awareness, which will help to understand the position and way of thinking of the counselors. The research is conducted through a questionnaire in order to investigate whether people of different age, educational level and economic status are familiar with counseling and vocational counseling and whether the latter can contribute to the prevention and treatment of social exclusion phenomena in certain areas in their daily life (school, work, etc.). Their contribution is decisive and their effectiveness reaches optimal levels with the assist of both teachers and parents. A fact that is also confirmed by the belief in the necessity of restoring the class of school career orientation, in secondary education, understanding the social transformations and the new social needs that arise, always in combination with labor market trends and multicultural factors.

Keywords: multicultural counseling, multicultural vocational counseling, vocational counseling for socially vulnerable groups

1. Introduction

The frequent waves of immigration, the constant economic crises, the people’s interaction from different cultural backgrounds either on a personal or professional level, the recognition of the social dimension of gender, beyond the biological one, the opportunities for people with mental or physical disabilities, the social support of single-parent families and many other factors have laid the foundations for the gradual limitation of the marginalization of socially vulnerable groups (Athanasiadou, 2020).

The role of counseling and career counseling is considered catalytic as it helps these people to recognize the source of the problems, the research of solutions and to be equally activate in society, at all levels. In order to achieve this, mental health and career counseling professionals are requested to have the knowledge and skills to recognize the needs of these groups and through a

constructive relationship to achieve their inclusion and/or integration (Kouyoumtzis, 2016).

In this research, an attempt will be made to complement the already existing findings regarding the use of counseling and career counseling as means of dealing with the difficulties faced by socially vulnerable groups. In particular, the results will be analyzed regarding how counseling/career counseling is considered effective in solving the problems of socially vulnerable groups and whether the latter helps their inclusion or integration. In the context of the Greek school, it will be studied whether counseling supports dealing with racism or bullying, as well as the efficiency of the cooperation among teachers, parents and counselors in supporting children from socially vulnerable groups. It concludes with the latest findings related to vocational counseling and to what extent it would help people from socially vulnerable groups to showcase their skills and be admitted into a job, based on their skills.

2. Multicultural consulting

The theories, for the appropriate approach to the counseling process, must be enriched according to the new characteristics as well, as the new problems arising from the multiculturalism of societies. Societies have become more complex and counseling could not fail to adapt to the new conditions. Initially, a distinction was made between cultural and multicultural counseling, with the first approaching groups that belong to the culturally dominant group, but share some characteristics of a subgroup (eg PWD, LGBTI+, etc.) (Kleftaras, 2009). Multicultural counseling, on the other hand, concerned, and still concerns, individuals who did not belong to the culturally dominant group and had different cultural characteristics (i.e. immigrants, refugees, etc.) (Kleftaras, 2009). As the above separation seems to have caused several problems, the term multicultural counseling prevailed. The question immediately which arises is when a counselor is considered multiculturally adequate to work effectively with an individual from a culturally different group?

It may be that in Greece, multicultural competence still remains at a theoretical level, but already in the USA the American Association for Counseling and Development has laid the foundations to concretize the characteristics of multicultural competences. The committee that was created proceeded with guidelines for all counselors involved with people from different cultural environments (Guidelines for Providers of Psychological Services to Ethnic and Culturally Diverse Population, American Psychological Association, 1991). The key characteristics were collected and Sue and Sue (1990) concluded that multicultural counselors must first be sensitive and aware of their own attitudes and beliefs towards these individuals. In a second degree, they should recognize and respect the perception that the consultees have, which is influenced or guided by their own cultural context. Finally, of great importance are the strategies with which they will intervene in the counseling process and which should obviously be multiculturally appropriate.

Extending the above theory, these three characteristics are directly connected to the three axes below, which give a more detailed picture of the prerequisites of multicultural competence:

i. The counselor's cultural empathy begins with limiting any bias toward the cultural characteristics of the person seeking counseling. Any differences in the way of perceiving each situation are automatically annihilated. A necessary condition is for the counselor to be able to assess the problem "through the eyes" of the counselee. How will he achieve this? Ridley and Udipi (2002) suggest that this can be achieved through a "culturally sensitive understanding" of the different cultural experiences of the client and himself as well as the client's "culturally sensitive response" to the data of the dominant culture. And while all of the above may seem complicated, from a positive psychology perspective, more differences are legitimately perceived as more material to process.

ii. Knowledge, for the counselor (but also for anyone), is the means to minimize any possible prejudice or negative attitude towards people from different cultural backgrounds. By studying and understanding in depth their own cultural characteristics and comparing them with those of the counselee, they are able to evaluate the behavior of the latter without racist attitudes and behaviors. The counselor has knowledge of all the social difficulties they face every day as well as the institutional obstacles that make it difficult to use various services, let alone mental health services. Of course, in addition to the knowledge of external issues, it is also important for the counselor to be aware of possible conflict scenarios of cultural values between the counselor and the counselee. In the event that the consultant is unable to respond to such a situation, seeking assist from another professional appeals necessary.

iii. All the above theoretical framework finds application in the consultant's skills in practice. The counseling methods in order to be used must be appropriate according to the cultural values of the counselee. This means that some intervention methods might need to be modified based on the cultural differences that appears. At this point, the means used by the counselor are of utmost importance, such as psychometric tests or questionnaires, for which he/she should be sure that these are also sufficient for the culturally diverse client, and not only will they not offend him/her but it will also be suitable for producing reliable results. During the first counseling session, all of the above must be made clear by the counselor, through the corresponding information about the goals of the counseling process and the limits in matters of cultural values and sensitive issues.

Multicultural competence can now be measured through questionnaires and scales that have been developed and it is useful to give a brief overview. The Cross-Cultural Therapy Inventory-Revised (CCCI-R, La Fromboise, Coleman & Hernandez, 1991), the Multi-Cultural Knowledge and Awareness Scale (MCKAS, Ponteretto et al. 2002), the Multicultural Awareness Knowledge and Skills Survey - Clinician Edition - Revised, MAKSS-CE-R, Kim et al. 2003) and finally the Multicultural Therapy Inventory (MCI, Sadowsky et al. 1994)) not only measure intercultural competence but are additionally positively correlated with intercultural inadequacy combined with

dissatisfaction with the counseling process (Chang & Berk, 2009).

3. Multicultural career counseling

Everything starts with the theoretical background that the consultant must have, so that he/she is able to choose the appropriate theory, based on the needs arising from the client. Over the years, a large reservoir of theories and techniques has been created adapted to different contexts (gender, sexual orientation, country of origin, etc.) and which extend to all stages of human life.

At a later stage, the choice of individual or group counseling also requires the corresponding skills from the counselor, with the main points being the recognition of different cultural beliefs, which shape the final decisions of the counselees; the continuous development of his skills so that he can meet the needs of more and more multicultural groups and finally stay informed about people from different demographic groups and their characteristics. These differences are what make each person unique, so they need to be respected and accepted in order to create a mutual, trusting relationship during the counseling process.

In addition to the qualitative variables, the quantitative assessments are tools that contribute to highlighting the interests and motivations of the consultees. A necessary condition is that the consultant has the skills to correctly analyze and interpret the results of the psychometric tools. Alternatively, professional counseling can be launched with wrong interventions and end up in ineffective career decisions. Career counselors often like to show off their ability to interpret results with excessive detail, but information that can be confusing rather than meaningful (Nathan & Hill, 2006).

One of the most important skills is the management of information sources. Initially, the consultant must evaluate the information he finds and the way in which he will transmit it to the client. Is the source valid and freely accessible? Is it only accessible electronically? Does the consultee have the technological means to retrieve the information? The above key questions not only need an answer but also an adjustment, depending on the particularities of each case. The ultimate aim is to provide personalized assistance in learning the methods of searching for source information as well as in some cases even learning to use new technologies.

The particularities of each counselee constitute the main axis for the management, promotion and evaluation of each counseling process. This implies that the research, the "contract" that will be concluded and the guidelines that will be given by the consultant should be adapted to the cultural background and the respective needs of each individual. By extension, continuous development of the consultant's skills appears as necessary. This can be achieved through feedback from whether or not the needs are met by the population groups being served. In this case, it may be necessary for the counselor to work with another professional to ensure a multiculturally sensitive

environment.

How a career counselor shall know if he/she meets all the aforementioned criteria can only be achieved in one way and that is by supervision. A supervisor is able to observe and assess the counselor's biases, limits, and generally weak points. And while in Greece until now there was no circular mandating the presence of a supervisor as mandatory, the new system that came into force in February 2022 imposes the supervision and assurance of the quality of the services provided by level career counselors A' (Decision No. 13173/K6). After all, there is no legal framework to determine the limits up to which the consultant can act.

4. Research methodology

The data was collected from 117 questionnaires from general population, in Crete and Athens, all of which were answered correctly. All were accepted and all constitute the final sample. The "convenience sampling" which was used, is a random sampling technique, as it is quick, simple and suitable for situations where there is no time and resources to create a large sample (Galanis, 2017).

Regarding the population from the entire sample, in terms of gender, the majority were women with 81 participations, while 36 men responded to the questionnaire. We had no response from the "Other gender" and "I do not wish to state my gender" groups. The age ranges were based on career counseling stages of lifelong development. More specifically, 18-29: early adulthood, 30-50: middle adulthood, where the individual reaches the peak of family goals and professional careers, 51-65: late adulthood, where the individual focuses on specific goals and finally 65 and beyond, upon retirement. In detail, the diagram below shows how many people of each gender and age group participated in this research and what percentage corresponds to the total sample (in parentheses).

Age \ Gender	Female	Male
18-29	17(14,52%)	12(10,25%)
30-50	60 (51,28%)	19(16,24%)
51-65	4 (3,4%)	4 (3,4%)
65 -	0 (0%)	1(0,9%)
Total = 117	81(69,2%)	36(30,8%)

Diagram 1. Participants by gender and age category

After the collection of demographic information that took part as an introductory part of the questionnaire, the participants are asked to answer whether they consider the role of Counseling and Career Counseling in Socially Vulnerable Groups (SVG) to be catalytic. From the very first question we see the relatively positive response as 50 (42.7%) believe that the role of Counseling/Career Counseling for the effective solution of the problems of SVG is quite helpful. 43 (36.8%) consider it very helpful, as do another 18 (15.4%) very much, in contrast to a small group of 5 people (4.3%) who believe little or not at all in this role as considers one person (0.8%).

The responses to whether Counseling helps the inclusion or integration of SVG more easily in society move in a similar direction. Here too, 55 people (47%) believe it helps quite a bit, 36 people (31%) a lot and 20 people (17.1%) very much. Again in 5 people (4.3%) and one (0.8%) are those who believe that helps a little and not at all, respectively.

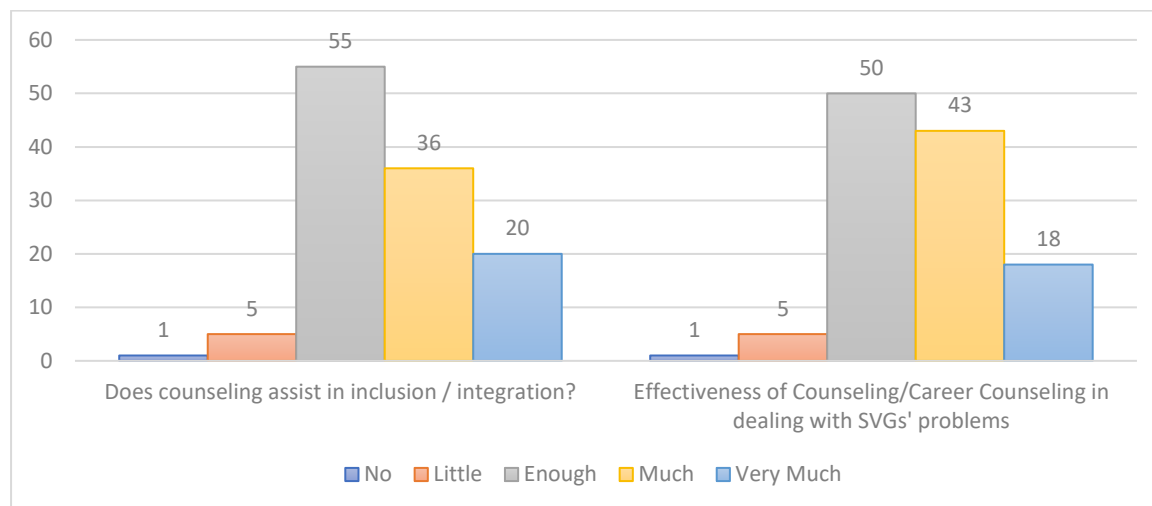


Diagram 2. Do you think that Counseling and/or Career Counseling would assist people from Socially Vulnerable Groups to more effectively solve the social problems they face? & Do you think that Counseling helps people from Socially Vulnerable Groups to join or integrate more easily into society?

37.6% (44 people) consider that the introduction of Counseling within the school environment would greatly help people from Socially Vulnerable Groups to effectively manage incidents of racism or bullying from an early age. This percentage is followed by 30% (35 people) who agree to a certain extent and 27.4% (32 people) who agree very much. For little or nothing the rates remain exactly as low as the previous question.

For the majority, the collaboration of a counselor and teacher, within a school environment, would contribute much, as 45.3% (53) support, very much according to 25.6% (30), enough for 22.2% (26), little for 5.1% (6) and not at all for 1.7% (2). Equally faster is the effectiveness of the cooperation among the counselor, the teacher and the parent. With 43.6% (51) being much in favor

of this, 32.5% (38) agreeing very much, 20.5% (24) enough and only 3.4% (4) agreeing little. For the teacher and the consultant, the collaboration is easy as they are in the same school and in constant communication. The question is how can a communication be achieved with the parents, who are absent from school incidents.

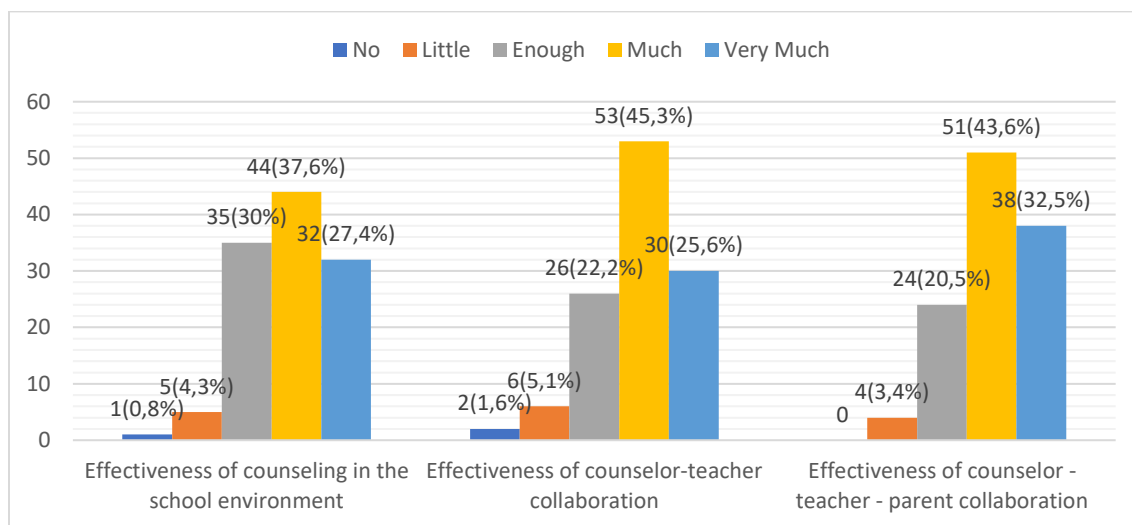


Diagram 3. Do you think that the introduction of Counseling within the school environment would help people from Socially Vulnerable Groups to effectively manage incidents of racism or bullying from an early age? & Supposingly Counseling is part of the school framework. Would the cooperation of Counselors and Teachers contribute to the faster observation and treatment of racism and bullying phenomena within the school environment? & Do you think the tripartite Counselors-Educators-Parents would be more effective in supporting children belonging to Socially Vulnerable Groups?

If the School Vocational Orientation (Scholikos Eppagelmatikos Prosanatolismos- SEP) course were to return and would be conducted by a teacher without expertise in vocational counseling, 51.3% (60) believe that it would be able to respond little to the needs of children from SVG, as well as the orientation it would be little effective. 30% (35) are even more strict, since they do not consider this to be the case at all, while 14.5% (17) believe that skills would be enough and 4.3% (5) who believe that much the same. Finally, following the contribution of career counseling, 46% (58) believe that this contribution can highlight the skills of people from SVG and get them accepted in a vocational position commensurate to their skills. 34.2% (40) believe the same to a great extent and 13.7 (16) to a very great extent, while 2.6% (3) are more pessimistic, believing little in such a contribution. The multicultural competence of the counselor is an extremely necessary condition both in being able to perceive the problems, the needs and the skills of the counsees given their cultural backgrounds.

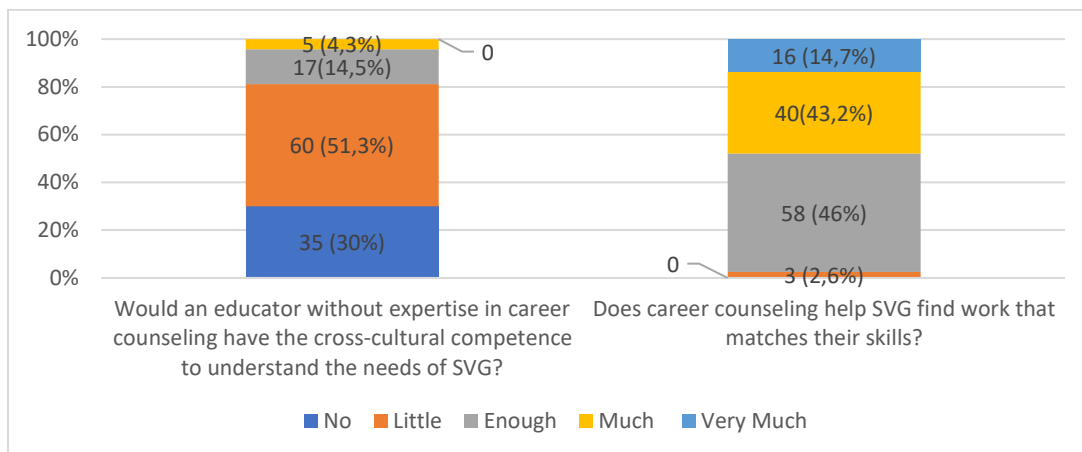


Diagram 4. *If the School Vocational Guidance (Scholikos Eppagelmatikos Prosanatolismos- SEP) course were to return and be conducted by a teacher without expertise in vocational guidance, how do you think it would have the intercultural competence to perceive the needs and effectively guide students from Socially Vulnerable Groups? & Do you think that Vocational Counseling would help people from Socially Vulnerable Groups to showcase their skills and get accepted into a job commensurate with their skills?*

5. Conclusions

Regarding the application of Counseling and Professional Counseling in SVG, it is believed that it can contribute to the effective treatment of the problems encountered by these groups. To the same extent, they seem to agree that it also contributes to the inclusion or integration of SVG into society. Everyday obstacles make it difficult for these people to focus on deeper pursuits of their skills, as they quickly search for a solution to any problems. There are not a few times when society itself ignores their skills, with the threat of their expiry. A guidance could benefit the counselee to perceive the situation spherical and without the social pressures he/she may receive.

As for incidents of racism and school bullying, the role of counseling not only seems to be catalytic, but also in collaboration with teachers and parents seems to be the most appropriate method of dealing with the problem. Gradually, Greek society overcomes the spectrum of "what people will say" and devotes itself more to the essential treatment of social problems. Already in several schools there is a daily communication through notebooks that exchange information about events in the classroom, opinions on corrections and advice between teachers and parents. The assistance of the counselor can be methodically aimed at solving some problems in the already existing teacher-parent cooperation, mainly at the emotional and socio-cognitive level of the students.

In the same context, if the School Vocational Orientation (Scholikos Eppagelmatikos Prosanatolismos- SEP) course were to return to secondary education, most of them would demand that it would have been implemented by staff who is multiculturally competent, who would be able

to understand the needs of students from SVG. After all, it has been proposed for career guidance counselors to take on the subject of school counseling within the school environment. In this way, the counselor would be able to elicit more information about the psycho-social background of the students that will help in professional counseling, as such, while at the same time playing a catalytic role in potential dysfunctions within the school.

With these points we continue to research and constantly look for the best possible ways to face the challenges that arise in counseling and career counseling with the increasing mobility nowadays and the social needs that arise.

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