Original Article

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Education Section

Students' Satisfaction about the Performance of Advisor Professors

FAHIMEH MOGHADAM[1], SOMAYEH BAGHERI[2]

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Advice and guidance by counselors during the course will help students to overcome problems, achieve educational goals and succeed.

Aim: The present study was to evaluate the student's opinion about educational guidance and counseling in School of Health of Zabol University of Medical Sciences.

Materials and Methods: In this cross-sectional descriptive and analytical research, viewpoints of 242 students were collected by a questionnaire. In this questionnaire, the first section contained demographic characteristics of students and advisor. The second section encompassed of 25 items, score using a five-choice format. The statistical tests such as independent t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Tukey's test are used to compare the findings.

Results: The highest mean scores were allocated to the evaluation of academic status and fluctuations in grades of students by the advisor, signing and controlling the unit selection form and other forms, announcing the counseling hours, evaluating the requests for permanent transfer, or transfer as guest, or medical certificates by academic advisor and knowledge of the advisor about the fields of study of students, respectively. Mean of perspective of students towards the performance of advisor was 3.91. Significant relationship between student perspectives and variables of gender, marital status and place of residence ($p<0.05$) was found. However, no significant association was found between the last academic degree and gender of advisor and perspective of students ($p<0.05$).

Conclusion: The perspective of students toward the performance of the advisor was moderate. Therefore, improvement of the counseling services by equipping the consultant professors with sufficient knowledge through training courses and workshops is possible.

Keywords: Advisor, Educational Counselling, Iran, Knowledge, Opinion

INTRODUCTION

Despite various definitions, counseling can be regarded as a purposeful relationship, which is formed with the participation of counseling recipients and counselors based on the needs of clients. In this relationship, the counseling recipient is guided by professional abilities of counselor according to the needs of the client [1]. In all the definitions of counseling, there are several common elements; one that aims to counsel people in choosing ways to do it; second, the concept of learning and the third is the development of personality [2]. Educational institutions historically have used advising as a primary means to increase retention, and many researchers have supported the link between academic advising and student retention [3]. In general, students come from various environments (city or village) to a more open environment in universities. Moral deviations might be observed in students due to being present in a politically, culturally and socially different environment. Simultaneous presence of male and female students in the educational environment, being away from family, living in university dormitories or in unfamiliar houses, educational restrictions of universities, young and ambitious thoughts and many other threats [4]. With regard to these problems, the necessity of consultation is of great importance. Counseling is comprised of all moral activities in which the counselor tries to help the person to perform activities to solve his/her problems [5]. The main mission of universities is training expert workforce required by the community. Advisor guide was confirmed and initiated by the high council of medical planning in 2003. According to this plan, advisors must have complete knowledge about regulations, environment and culture of university and the society. So, they are able to guide students as wise and reliable person in their curriculum, continuing education and accepting the responsibilities of future jobs [6]. An advisor is often a faculty member, who provides advising and counseling services as an important professional responsibility [7]. These individuals constantly evaluate the educational progress of students to provide the necessary opportunities for more their progress [8]. Among the factors that influence graduate students' academic development and learning experiences, such as collegiality and curriculum, research has consistently shown that advising is one of the most significant variables associated with academic success [9]. According to the literature, any person with counseling responsibility must have specific characteristics, such as self-knowledge, valid education, self-confidence, being available at all times, accountability, capability of empathy, and other skills (e.g., communication, counseling and time-management skills [10]. The students expect the advisor to be a coordinator, to have sufficient knowledge and information about the curriculum, educational issues, and personal, medical and counseling services [11]. It is clear that lack of advising or improper counseling not only cannot lead to achieving educational goals and disrupts the professional skills of learners [12], but also causes dissatisfaction, insecurity, weakness and more stress during the education period [13]. In this respect, a research in University of America demonstrated that determining clear goals by advisors could lead to effective counseling [14] and. Advisors identified personal satisfaction as a benefit and time demands as a cost of advising [15]. Student counseling and supervision play an important role to overcome learning problems and to achieve educational goals [16]. Therefore, given the importance of role of advising and counseling in achieving educational goals by students, it is necessary that in addition to assigning an advising role to professors of universities, the satisfaction level of students toward the performance of these advisors be evaluated. With this background in mind, this study aimed to determine the students' satisfaction with educational counseling of advisors of Zabol University of Medical Sciences, Zabol, Iran.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This cross-sectional descriptive and analytical research was conducted in school of health of Zabol University of Medical Sciences during the first semester of the academic year of October 2017-February 2018. Study population included all students of school of health in all relevant fields (e.g., nutrition sciences, health services management, as well as environmental and occupational health). First year and Guest students were eliminated from the study as they might have required more time to get acquainted to the advisor. In total, 242 students were selected through census. Moreover, a two-section questionnaire was exploited to evaluate the perspective of students towards the performance of advisors. In this questionnaire, the first section contained demographic characteristics of students (e.g., age, gender, marital status, place of residence, academic semester and field of study) and questions on the gender, educationl degree of advisor and number of referral students to the advisor.

The second section encompassed of 25 items, score using a five-choice format (always=1, often=2, sometimes=3, rarely=4 and never=5). The total score of the questionnaire was within the range of 25-125. In this regard, score within the range of 0-33 was interpreted as poor performance of advisors, whereas scores of 33-66 and >66 were recognized as moderate and good performance of advisors, respectively. Validity of the questionnaire was confirmed through review of regulations of the ministry and opinions of professors and experts of this field. At first, the questionnaires were distributed among 20 students to perform a pilot so that the reliability of the questionnaire could be confirmed. After that, reliability of the questionnaire was estimated at the Cronbach's alpha of 0.89. Questionnaires were provided for students by the education office of the school, which were returned after completion.

STATISTICAL ANALYSIS

Analysis of the data (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation) was performed in SPSS version 20 using independent t-test, one-way analysis of variance, Tukey's test and Pearson's correlation coefficient. In addition, P-value of 0.05 was considered statistically significant.

RESULTS

In terms of education, all of the participants were BSc students. In addition, the majority of students (73.6%) were single and local (59.5%). Most of the students were in the second, fourth and eight semesters. The majority of students had referred to the advisor of the school one-three times [Table/Fig-1]. The frequency and mean of questions related to the perspective of students towards the performance of the advisor are shown in [Table/Fig-2]. In this regard, the highest mean scores (from 5) were allocated to the evaluation of academic status and fluctuations in grades of students by the advisor (4.89), signing and controlling the unit selection form and other forms (4.75) and announcing the counseling hours (4.7), respectively.

On the other hand, the lowest scores were assigned to receiving counseling outside the schedule of the advisor for unexpected problems (2.59), forming group sessions to familiarize students with the duties of the advisor in planning related to educational affairs (2.85) and informing the family of students about their problems (2.9), respectively. Mean and standard deviation of perspective of students toward the performance of advisor was 3.91±0.8. According to the results, 28.9% of students reported the performance of academic advisor to be poor, whereas 43.8% and 27.3% considered it to be at a moderate and good level.

Results of independent t-test demonstrated a significant relationship between student perspectives and variables of gender, marital status and place of residence ($p<0.05$). In this regard, mean perspective of female, married and non-local students toward the performance of the advisor was higher, compared to other participants. However, no significant association was found between the last academic degree and gender of advisor and perspective of students ($p<0.05$).

On the other hand, a significant association was found by the one-way ANOVA between the perspective of students and the number of referrals to advisor and academic semester of students. After Tukey's test, it was demonstrated that students in the fourth and fifth semesters and those referring to the advisor more than three times had a better perspective toward the performance of the advisor, compared to other groups ($p<0.05$). Nevertheless, no significant different was observed between students of different fields of study regarding perspective toward the performance of advisor ($p>0.05$) [Table/Fig-3].

Moreover, a positive and significant relationship ($r= 0.348$, $p<0.05$) was observed between the age of students and their perspective, in a way that students at higher ages were more satisfied with the performance of the advisor.

DISCUSSION

According to the results of the current research, satisfaction level of students about the performance of the advisor had a moderate upward trend, where a higher level of satisfaction was interpreted as more performances of the advisor. One of the methods used by these advisors is informing students about the advisable grounds and increasing the knowledge of students about this issue, which is in congruence with the results of a study conducted in schools of universities of America. However, various opinions were expressed on the knowledge of these individuals about the general program and policies of the faculty [17]. In addition, the performance score of advisors in Alborz University of Medical Sciences was moderate from the perspective of students [18]. In one study conducted by Asadollahi Pourandokht A et al., the viewpoints of advisors about the current desirable situation of academic counseling were examined. It is also reported that the advisors believed that their awareness of their responsibilities is at a moderate level [19]. These findings are

Variables		Frequency	Percent
Student gender	Female	152	62.8
	Male	90	37.2
Field of study	Environmental Health Engineering	78	32.3
	Occupational Health Engineering	55	22.7
	Nutrition	32	13.2
	Public Health	32	13.2
	Health Economics and Management	45	18.6
Marital status	Single	178	73.6
	Married	64	26.4
Place of residence	Dormitory	144	59.5
	Non-Dormitory	98	40.5
Advisor degree	Masters	14	77.8
	Doctoral	4	22.2
Gender advisor	Female	11	61.1
	Male	7	38.9
Semester	2	50	20.7
	3	29	12
	4	46	19
	5	32	13.2
	6	29	12
	7	25	10.3
	8	31	12.8
Referral to advisor	Without a visit	74	30.6
	Between one-three times	105	43.4
	More than three times	63	26

[Table/Fig-1]: Demographic specifications.

Questions	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Mean	standard deviation
Announcing the schedule of advisor	200	21	13	6	2	4.7	0.51
Presence of advisor during the announced period	162	17	4	56	3	4.15	0.67
Regular performing of the counseling program	104	23	11	48	56	3.3	1.07
Talking with students about education regulations	169	28	4	13	28	4.23	0.61
Signing and controlling the credit selection form and other forms	206	24	4	5	3	4.75	0.49
Introducing students to relevant units to eliminate their needs	187	9	12	7	27	4.33	0.53
Counseling of the advisor with other specialists about the problems of students	100	38	26	33	45	3.47	0.78
Evaluating the educational status and changes in the grade of students by advisor	221	18	1	2	0	4.89	0.15
Lack of knowledge and referral for acquiring the necessary information from the education department	71	92	68	8	3	3.9	0.75
Motivating students to eliminate barriers to their educational progress	155	21	22	6	38	4.03	0.89
Knowledge about education regulations and referring students to the education department for more information	168	10	17	28	19	4.16	0.84
Providing counseling services outside the announced schedule due to unexpected problems	49	36	25	31	101	2.59	1.29
Advising students about personal problems (non-educational issues)	67	44	59	62	10	3.4	1.03
Evaluating the educational status of students at the end of each semester	198	2	11	27	4	4.5	0.6
Providing the necessary explanations about occupational areas and continue of education by the advisor	133	20	13	49	27	3.75	0.88
Providing information required in review methods	74	66	69	12	21	3.66	0.97
Presence of advisor on the registration and unit add or drop days	183	20	9	10	20	4.39	0.53
Assessing the requests related to student exchange or transfer to another university as guest and medical licenses by advisor	187	24	16	8	7	4.55	0.42
Knowledge of advisor about the field of study of students	179	37	6	13	7	4.52	0.59
Proper location and time of counseling by the advisor	89	120	3	15	15	4.04	0.71
Holding group sessions to familiarize students with the duties of the advisor related to educational affairs	63	28	30	53	68	2.85	1.19
Preparing students for accepting responsibilities	92	45	17	38	50	3.37	1.07
Informing the family of students about their problems	54	30	56	43	59	2.9	1.11
Review of academic failure	74	59	63	25	21	3.58	0.98
Review of educational progress	96	33	28	14	71	3.28	1.16

[Table/Fig-2]: Frequency, mean and standard deviation of questions related to the perspective of students toward the performance of the advisor professor.

variable		Frequency	Mean	Standard deviation	p-value
Student gender	Female	152	4.1	0.74	0.018
	Male	90	3.72	0.86	
Field of study	Environmental Health Engineering	78	3.91	0.82	0.273
	Occupational Health Engineering	55	3.87	0.89	
	Nutrition	32	3.92	0.92	
	Public Health	32	3.95	0.8	
	Health Economics and Management	45	4.01	0.9	
Marital status	Single	178	3.99	0.75	0.000
	married	64	3.86	0.85	
Place of residence	Dormitory	144	3.8	1.06	0.026
	Non-Dormitory	98	4.23	0.83	
Semester	2	50	3.7	0.61	0.039
	3	29	3.73	0.64	
	4	46	4.17	0.93	
	5	32	4.2	0.98	
	6	29	3.95	0.52	
	7	25	3.88	0.63	
	8	31	3.9	0.5	
Referral to advisor	Without a visit	74	3.77	0.66	0.002
	Between one-three times	105	3.9	0.63	
	More than three times	63	4.27	0.71	

[Table/Fig-3]: Comparison of the mean score of the professor's performance in terms of the demographic data of the students studied.

inconsistent with [20,21] the findings of a foreign study that also reported that the students do not get enough satisfaction from providing advice and guidance to teachers [22]. In this research, only 30.7% of students had never referred to the advisor, which could be indicative of trust of students in the advisor for expressing their problems and complete knowledge of the advisor about his responsibilities. However, in Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, only 24.1% of students believed that their advisor was able to help in their educational and personal problems. In addition, about half of the advisors reported a significantly low referral rate among students [23]. The students' reasons for lack of belief in advisors were assessed in a study and the findings showed that the students believed that they were able to solve their problems better than the advisors [24,25]. In this research, the most important causes of dissatisfaction of students with the performance of the advisor were lack of ability of scheduling a session with the advisor outside his announced time on campus about unexpected problems, lack of forming group sessions to provide information about the duties of the advisor to students regarding educational affairs, lack of informing the family of students about their problems, lack of review of educational progress and lack of holding regular counseling programs. In other studies, neglect and lack of spending the sufficient time with students, ineffective advising and counseling and lack of follow-up by advisors to solve the problems of students were reported as the main causes of dissatisfaction of students [20]. According to the subjects, the most desirable criteria for measuring the performance of advisor were evaluation of academic status and changes in the grade of students, signing and controlling the unit selection form and other forms, announcing the schedule of the advisor, assessing the requests for permanent transfer of

students or exchange of students as guests and medical licenses, and knowledge of advisor about the fields of study of students. In other studies, presence of advisor in the school and being available at all times were regarded as the most important factors in this regard, followed by constant and proper interactions with students and having updated scientific and educational information, which could define a good advisor [18,26]. Low academic achievement and educational failure are yet considered as the most usual reason for students' drop out. Performing supportive interventions seem essential for these students [27].

Several studies have reported that providing advice to students has an important effect on obtaining a positive self-concept [28,29], increasing the social skills, and educational progress in students [30]. The highest performance score was allocated to signing and controlling the unit selection form and other forms, presence of advisor in his office during the announced time, and talking with students about educational regulations. On the other hand, the lowest scores were assigned to review of educational failure, motivation of students in elimination of their educational weaknesses and review of academic progress of students [21]. In addition, non-local students reported better performance of advisor, compared to the local participants, which was mainly due to being away from family and more need for intellectual advising in these individuals, which is in line with [21]. According to the results, female students were more satisfied with the performance of advisor, which is in congruence with the results obtained by Shakournia [31].

Educational advising and counseling was provided at a higher level for PhD students, compared to BSc and MSc students. This lack of consistency between the results might be due to different study populations of the two studies [32].

Given the significant impact of counseling on increased social skills and academic progress of students, elimination of barriers to solving the problems of these individuals could improve their educational capabilities.

CONCLUSION

Therefore, it is recommended that advisors be equipped with sufficient knowledge through holding educational courses and workshops, which can improve the ability and knowledge of these individuals about their field of work. In addition, application of this technique leads to decreased referrals of students to advisor. Furthermore, it is suggested that financial and spiritual facilities be provided for better provision of services by advisors, which improves their role and facilitates achieving their goals.

LIMITATION

In the present study, advisors could not be selected by students, which is a regulation in the studied university and the majority of other universities of Iran. Therefore, gender of the advisor was not considered as a variable due to selection limitation.

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PARTICULARS OF CONTRIBUTORS:
1. Faculty, Department of Environmental Health Engineering, Faculty of Health, Zabol University of Medical Sciences, Zabol, Iran; Zabol Medicinal Plants Research Center, Zabol University of Medical Sciences, Zabol, Iran.
2. Faculty, Department of Public Health, Faculty of Health, Zabol University of Medical Sciences, Zabol, Iran; Zabol Medicinal Plants Research Center, Zabol University of Medical Sciences, Zabol, Iran.

NAME, ADDRESS, E-MAIL ID OF THE CORRESPONDING AUTHOR:
Dr. Somayeh Bagheri,
Faculty, Department of Public Health, Faculty of Health, Zabol University of Medical Sciences, Zabol, Iran.
E-mail: somayeh.bagheri29@gmail.com

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