



Strategic Planning in Education: Preventing Suicide through Peer Counseling and Mental Health Detection

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Article History:

Received 2024-12-04

Revised 2025-02-28

Accepted 2025-03-09

Keywords:

Peer Counselling, Mental Health Decision, Educational Leadership

Abstract

Mental health issues among adolescents and students have become a critical concern worldwide, with suicide being the second leading cause of death among individuals aged 15-29 years. Despite the crucial role of educational institutions in promoting mental well-being, many schools lack the necessary resources to identify and address mental health problems effectively. Peer counselling has emerged as an effective strategy for suicide prevention by leveraging peer support to provide emotional assistance and guidance. This study evaluates the effectiveness of peer counselling programs in detecting mental health issues among students and their impact on suicide prevention and student well-being in Indonesian schools. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates qualitative and quantitative data collected through surveys, interviews, and observations in several secondary schools. The findings suggest that peer counselling fosters a supportive environment, encouraging students to share their concerns with peers rather than adults. However, challenges such as confidentiality concerns, emotional burdens on peer counsellors, and inadequate institutional support hinder the program's effectiveness. Additionally, the study highlights the role of school leadership in designing and implementing early mental health detection policies. Schools with proactive leadership, regular teacher training, and structured detection tools demonstrate more effective mental health initiatives. The study emphasizes the need for strategic planning, continuous training, and professional supervision to enhance peer counselling programs. Integrating technology, reducing mental health stigma, and ensuring leadership commitment are essential to sustaining these initiatives. The research provides insights for policymakers and educators to develop more structured, comprehensive, and sustainable mental health strategies in educational institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health has become a critical global issue, especially among adolescents and students, as this age group is particularly vulnerable to mental health challenges. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), suicide is the second leading cause of death among individuals aged 15-29 years, highlighting the urgent need for preventive measures (Bachmann, 2018). This alarming situation is worsened by a general lack of awareness regarding mental health, both within families and educational institutions. Schools and universities, as environments for character formation and intellectual growth, play a vital role in early identification and prevention of mental health issues (Hernández-Torrano et al., 2020). However, many educational institutions lack the necessary infrastructure, trained staff, and resources to effectively detect and address mental health problems in students. As a result, mental health issues often go unnoticed until they escalate to critical situations, such as suicide, underscoring the importance of proactive intervention strategies within these institutions.

Peer counselling is an effective approach to preventing suicide among students by utilizing the natural connections and trust built between peers (Angelina et al., 2022). This program allows students to offer emotional support and guidance to each other, particularly those who are experiencing psychological stress or feeling isolated. Research indicates that students often find it easier to open up to their peers rather than to adults such as teachers or counsellors, due to the perceived understanding and shared experiences within their age group (Akbar et al., 2022). Furthermore, peer counsellors can serve as a crucial link, directing students to professional mental health services if their issues require more specialized intervention. However, for peer



counselling to be successful, it is essential that the students selected as peer counsellors receive proper training in active listening, empathy, and identifying warning signs of mental health struggles (Cowie et al., 2017). Without adequate supervision and clear guidelines, the program may inadvertently cause harm or create additional stress for both the peer counsellors and those seeking help. Therefore, effective planning, continuous monitoring, and professional support are necessary to ensure the program's sustainability and positive impact on student mental health.

In addition to peer counselling, early detection of mental health issues is a crucial step in preventing suicide (Arango et al., 2018). Many students experiencing problems such as depression, anxiety, or other disorders are unaware that they need help. By conducting mental health screenings regularly, educational institutions can identify students at risk of mental health problems (Hoover & Bostic, 2021). Early detection allows schools to take appropriate actions before conditions worsen. Technology can also be leveraged to support this process, such as through applications or digital-based surveys. However, the success of early detection largely depends on the openness of students and the readiness of institutions to follow up on screening results.

Educational institutions must develop a comprehensive strategic plan to effectively integrate peer counselling and mental health detection programs into their systems. This planning should involve a collaborative approach, engaging key stakeholders such as teachers, counsellors, parents, and students to ensure that the program meets the needs of the entire school community. Training peer counsellors is a critical step, ensuring that they are equipped with the necessary skills to provide support and detect early signs of mental health issues (Salmiati et al., 2018). In addition, providing valid and reliable tools for mental health detection, such as screening questionnaires or digital platforms, is essential for accurately identifying students at risk (Hoover & Bostic, 2021). Establishing clear follow-up mechanisms is also vital, enabling timely intervention and appropriate referral to professional mental health services. Furthermore, the support of institutional leaders and the establishment of strong educational policies are crucial for ensuring that the program receives sustained attention and resources. Without proper planning and leadership, these programs risk becoming short-term initiatives that fail to achieve lasting changes in the mental health outcomes of students.

It is undeniable that stigma surrounding mental health issues remains a major obstacle in implementing these programs. Many students are reluctant to seek help for fear of being perceived as weak or different by their peers. This stigma often stems from a lack of understanding about mental health within schools and the broader community. Therefore, efforts to improve mental health literacy must be part of the suicide prevention strategy. Educational campaigns involving the entire school community can help reduce this stigma. By fostering a supportive environment, students will feel more comfortable sharing problems and seeking help.

Strategic planning in suicide prevention must comprehensively consider the role of technology in supporting mental health efforts (Turner et al., 2021). Technology offers innovative tools to enhance access to mental health services, such as online counselling applications and AI-powered chatbots designed to identify early symptoms of mental health issues. These tools can provide immediate support, especially for students who may feel hesitant to seek face-to-face counselling. Additionally, social media can serve as an influential platform for spreading awareness about mental health, promoting positive discussions, and reducing stigma. Interactive campaigns, digital storytelling, and community forums can empower students to prioritize their mental well-being. However, the integration of technology into mental health strategies also poses challenges, including ensuring data privacy and preventing the misuse of sensitive information. Educational institutions must adopt robust security measures and ethical guidelines to protect user data and build trust among students.

This study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of peer counselling programs in detecting mental health issues among students and assess their impact on suicide prevention and the improvement of student well-being in schools. Additionally, this research seeks to identify the role of educational leadership in designing strategic policies that support early detection of mental health issues, while formulating relevant and effective strategies for implementing peer counselling programs in the context of Indonesian education.

METHODS

Research Design and Approach

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive analysis of the effectiveness of peer counselling programs in detecting mental health issues among students. This approach enables the research to explore the nuanced dynamics of peer counselling through qualitative insights while simultaneously validating findings with quantitative evidence. By combining these methodologies, the study seeks to bridge the gap between subjective experiences and measurable outcomes, ensuring a balanced and robust understanding of the program's impact. The research design follows an exploratory-sequential model, starting with qualitative data collection to gain contextual understanding and develop tailored quantitative instruments. This design allows for a deeper exploration of the phenomenon and ensures that the subsequent quantitative analysis is rooted in real-world contexts.

The study is conducted across several secondary educational institutions in Indonesia that have implemented peer counselling programs as part of their mental health policies. These institutions are selected to provide a diverse representation of the implementation of such programs, considering variations in resources, cultural contexts, and institutional support. The qualitative phase focuses on capturing the perspectives of students, peer counsellors, teachers, and school administrators regarding the program's effectiveness and challenges. This phase informs the development of a quantitative survey that measures specific variables such as the program's ability to detect mental health issues, its impact on student well-being, and satisfaction levels. The integration of these methods aims to generate actionable insights that can inform policy development and enhance the design and implementation of peer counselling initiatives in schools.

Data Collecting Method

Data is collected through various methods, including surveys, in-depth interviews, and participant observation. The survey is designed to measure the effectiveness of peer counselling programs in detecting mental health issues, students' satisfaction with the program, and its impact on their well-being. In-depth interviews are conducted to explore the perspectives of students, teachers, and school leaders regarding the role of leadership in supporting early detection of mental health issues and implementing strategic policies. Observations are carried out to directly examine the implementation of peer counselling programs, including student interactions and the mentoring mechanisms applied.

Data Analysis Method

Thematic analysis is employed to uncover patterns and themes from the qualitative data collected through interviews and observations. This method involves systematically coding the data to identify recurring ideas, behaviors, and perspectives related to the effectiveness and challenges of peer counselling programs. The process begins with familiarization, where researchers immerse themselves in the data by reviewing transcripts and field notes. Following this, initial codes are generated to capture significant elements of the data that align with the research objectives. These codes are then grouped into broader categories, allowing the identification of themes that reflect commonalities or key differences in the participants' experiences. This approach ensures that the analysis remains grounded in the data while addressing the research questions.

Once the themes are identified, they are reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and relevance to the research objectives. Themes such as "peer trust and support," "barriers to seeking help," and "leadership in mental health initiatives" may emerge, providing insights into the dynamics of peer counselling and its impact on mental health awareness and intervention. Thematic analysis also allows for the integration of diverse perspectives, highlighting variations in experiences among students, teachers, and school leaders. By interpreting these themes in the context of existing literature and theoretical frameworks, researchers can draw meaningful conclusions and formulate actionable recommendations to improve the implementation of peer counselling programs and early mental health detection strategies in educational settings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Effectiveness of Peer Counselling Programs

This section is According to the findings of the interviews, the majority of students regard peer counselling as a program that teaches their peers how to listen to and support one another emotionally. They see this initiative as a successful means of fostering a more accepting and encouraging atmosphere where children can express themselves without worrying about being judged. Due to a sense of equality, similar experiences, and emotional intimacy, several students stated that they felt more at ease speaking with their peers than with instructors or licensed counsellors. They believe that their classmates are more equipped to comprehend the difficulties they encounter, especially those involving social and intellectual demands.

In addition to helping struggling students, the peer counselling program benefits the peer counsellors themselves. Many peer counsellors believe that their empathy and sensitivity to their friends' circumstances have increased. A pupil said, "I've become more understanding of friends who I thought were just quiet, but it turns out they have big problems at home." Nonetheless, a number of peer counsellors expressed that handling their peers' problems emotionally taxed them, underscoring the need for further assistance, such professional counsellor supervision sessions.

Nevertheless, even though the program was well received, several students expressed worries about their peers' capacity to keep information private and give wise counsel. They were concerned that if the information they supplied was not handled appropriately, it may be revealed or used improperly. These issues draw attention to the necessity of providing peer counsellors with more thorough training that covers topics like active listening, protecting privacy, and being aware of the boundaries of their position. In order to guarantee that peer counsellors carry out their responsibilities in a safe and efficient manner, professional counsellor supervision is also required.

The Role of Education Leadership in Designing Early Detection Policies for Mental Health

According to student interviews, school leadership is crucial to the effective execution of mental health initiatives, particularly the early identification of psychological problems. The majority of students stated that one important element in creating a culture that values mental health is the support of school leaders. An climate that is more inclusive and responsive is produced by principals who actively implement mental health initiatives and offer assistance to educators, counsellors, and students. A pupil said, "When the teacher shows concern for mental health, we feel safer discussing our problems." This demonstrates how innovative leadership may change the way schools think about mental health concerns.

Students also pointed out that school administrators' direction is crucial for teacher preparation that supports early detection measures. According to several pupils, their professors were specially trained to see the early warning symptoms of stress or sadness in their students. Students at other schools, however, claimed that their professors did not know enough about mental health concerns. This variety highlights how important school leaders are in giving teachers access to resources and training opportunities. Early detection measures sometimes remain only formality in the absence of aggressive leadership.

Students also underlined the value of candid communication that is supported by school administrators. They believed that administrators who converse with students on a daily basis offer a secure environment in which they may freely express their experiences. A pupil said, "We have monthly discussions with the counselling teacher, and it makes us feel more connected." In addition to helping identify any mental health problems, these measures improve the rapport between students and the school's leadership. This illustrates how inclusive leadership may provide efficient lines of communication.

Table 1 compares students' perceptions from several schools regarding the role of school principals in mental health policies. The table demonstrates that the role of school principals in driving early detection policies is crucial in determining the effectiveness of program implementation. Schools with strong leadership

show better results in identifying students' mental health issues. Therefore, strengthening the role of educational leadership should be a priority to ensure the sustainability and success of these policies.

Table 1. Comparison of Students' Perceptions of School Principals' Roles in Mental Health Policies

| Leadership Aspect | School A | School B |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Teacher Training | Regularly conducted every semester | Sporadic |
| Principal Involvement | Actively involved in every mental health program | Only engaged during the initial launch |
| Open Communication | Regular dialogue sessions with students | No direct communication mechanism |
| Availability of Detection Tools | Comprehensive tools and surveys provided | Very limited |

Strategies for Relevant and Effective Peer Counselling Programs in Indonesia

Peer counselling programs' effectiveness is greatly impacted by implementation tactics that are adapted to local circumstances, according to observations made in a number of Indonesian secondary schools. The significance of choosing peer counsellors with sympathetic dispositions and the capacity to uphold confidentiality is one important factor. Some schools have strict selection procedures that involve both instructors and pupils, guaranteeing that only those with excellent interpersonal skills are selected. A key component of the program's efficacy is ensuring that children in need feel at ease talking to peer counsellors, which is made possible by this method.

The significance of ongoing training for peer counsellors is another tactic that has been seen. Regular training sessions are offered by schools that have successfully adopted such programs to improve peer counsellors' abilities in emotional support, active listening, and spotting mental health problems early on. It was also observed that professional counsellors frequently participate in these training sessions, offering case simulations and assistance. This method reduces the possibility of peer counsellors offering their peers improper advice while increasing their confidence in carrying out their responsibilities.

Another important element is incorporating peer counselling services into the school's culture. Some schools have made counselling areas welcoming and easily accessible, which makes it simpler for kids to ask for assistance. Students are more likely to participate in the program in schools that emphasize this element, according to observations. Students are encouraged to use peer counselling services without feeling stigmatized or afraid when they are in supportive surroundings, such as school-wide campaigns and banners raising awareness of mental health issues.

Despite the positive potential of peer counselling programs, observations have revealed several significant challenges in their implementation, particularly due to insufficient support from school administration and limited resources. In some cases, these programs are run without adequate supervision, leaving peer counsellors to handle situations beyond their capacity or training. Without proper oversight, peer counsellors may struggle with managing more complex mental health issues, which can result in emotional stress for both the counsellors and the students they are assisting. This situation undermines the overall effectiveness of the program and can lead to burnout among peer counsellors, ultimately affecting the quality of support provided to students.

To address these challenges, it is essential for schools to provide sufficient resources and structured support for peer counselling programs. Professional counsellors should be assigned as mentors to guide and supervise peer counsellors, ensuring they have the necessary training and emotional support to deal with sensitive issues. Additionally, schools should allocate a dedicated budget to fund ongoing training sessions and professional development activities for both peer counsellors and school staff. Stronger backing from school leadership is also crucial to ensure the sustainability of these programs. By prioritizing these factors, schools can create a more supportive and effective peer counselling environment that is better equipped to address students' mental health needs in the long term.

CONCLUSION

Peer counselling programs among students have been widely discussed in the literature as an effective approach to reduce mental health problems, especially among adolescents. Peer counselling leverages the emotional relationships that are formed between students to provide more open and non-judgmental support. Research by (Oktaviani et al., 2020) shows that students are more likely to talk to their peers about personal issues compared to adults like teachers or professional counsellors. This provides an advantage in creating a more comfortable space for students to express their feelings, which is often a barrier to detecting mental health issues. However, the effectiveness of this program heavily relies on the quality of training provided to the peer counsellors. Without adequate training, peer counsellors may fail to identify the early signs of mental health problems or provide truly helpful advice.

Educational leadership plays a critical role in designing early detection policies for mental health issues in schools. Strong leadership ensures that these policies are not only present on paper but are also consistently and effectively implemented. Research by (Bulu et al., 2021) shows that schools led by principals who are proactive about student mental health tend to have better programs for detecting mental health issues early. This is related to policies that support training for teachers and school staff to recognize early signs of mental health disorders, as well as providing spaces for students to openly talk about their problems. Moreover, leadership roles also involve allocating sufficient budgets to support mental health-related programs. Without adequate support from school leadership, early detection policies will be limited to sporadic initiatives that are ineffective.

Last, peer counselling program's implementation strategy in Indonesia must consider the unique social and cultural conditions, such as the importance of the values of mutual cooperation and solidarity among students. Therefore, training for peer counsellors should be tailored to the local cultural context, prioritizing empathy, and developing good communication skills to listen and provide emotional support. In addition, the integration of technology is an important step to improve the accessibility and effectiveness of the program, especially in areas with limited resources. The use of applications or online platforms can facilitate training and monitoring of peer counsellors, as well as allow students to easily and safely access mental health support. Implementing strategies that consider local contexts and leverage technology can help optimize the success of the peer counselling program in Indonesia

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