School Psychologist Needs as Mental Health Consultants

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Introduction

One in four children and adolescents are faced with mental health issues (Feeney-Kettler, Hemmeter, Kaiser, Kettler & Kratochwill, 2010). Despite the high prevalence of mental health difficulties in youth, it is estimated that only about 36% receive the mental health services that they need (Bains & Diallo, 2016). If left untreated, these difficulties may have a negative impact on the child’s development and learning and lead to potential school-related problems such as absenteeism, discipline problems, retention, poor grades, school dropout, and juvenile delinquency (Perfect & Morris, 2011). School psychologists desire to expand their role from conducting assessments to providing more mental health consultation; yet have been unable to assume this role to the extent they wish (Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Curtis, Grier, & Hunley, 2003).

This study examines school psychologists’ perceptions of factors that influence their ability to function effectively as mental health consultants. Participants were asked to identify factors that impact their ability to provide mental health consultation in the schools; thus, allowing themes to develop about what school psychologists need to improve consultation when working with teachers of students with mental health issues. This information will be useful to both novice and experienced practitioners.

Methodology

A random sample selection procedure of school psychologists, commenced during August and September 2016, involved stratification by U. S. region, followed by school district identification via state Department of Education websites. Email addresses for school psychologists were obtained from the randomly selected district websites. Emails requesting completion of an anonymous electronic questionnaire regarding mental health consultation within the schools were sent out to these randomly selected school psychologists in September, 2016.

Sample

This study included 178 school psychologists. The majority of participants, or 84%, were female. Eighty-eight percent of the respondents were White, 4% were Hispanic or Latino, 3% were African American, 2% declared other race, and 2% preferred not to disclose their race. Thirty-three percent of the respondents were between 25-34 years old. Thirty percent of the participants were between 35-44 years old. Forty-five to fifty-four year olds represented 19% of the participants. Fifteen percent were between 55-64 years old and 3% were between 65-74 years old. Eighteen percent of the respondents were from an urban district, 38% were from a suburban district, and 45% were from a rural district.

Results

School psychologists were asked to identify factors that limit their ability to provide mental health services. Figure 1 indicates the percentage of each specified factor. The majority of school psychologists, or approximately 64%, indicated limited time was the most prevalent barrier to providing mental health services. 11% of respondents reported limited resources was their biggest barrier. Need for additional training was reported by 10% of respondents. Eight percent of respondents experienced barriers due to lack of support from administration. Limited finances created a barrier for 7% of respondents. Twenty-seven percent of the participants reported their building(s) have extremely inadequate funding for services. Furthermore, only 1% of school psychologists reported their building(s) have extremely adequate funding for mental health services required to meet the needs of the identified students.

Even though it is reported that mental health services are provided less than 10% of the time, the most frequent mental health services are depicted in figure 3. The most common reported consultation services included individual counseling (124 respondents) and group counseling (110 respondents). Some less common reported mental health services included behavior intervention plans, staff training, tiered interventions, and peer buddies.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to identify factors that impact school psychologists’ ability to provide mental health consultation in the schools. Analysis of the data allowed themes to develop about what school psychologists need to improve consultation when working with teachers of students with mental health issues. Results indicated that limited time was the most prevalent barrier to providing mental health services. Approximately 44% of respondents reported spending less than 10% of their week providing consultation services. This study concluded that school psychologists would be able to provide more mental health consultation within the schools with more allotted time. This study found the need for further research in regards to how school psychologists will make more time in their day in order to provide more mental health services. Future research may also include parent involvement within and outside the school to best fit the mental health needs of the students.

Limitations

Limitations to this study may be related to the homogeneity of the participants, and may be more representative of the opinion of females, the majority of the respondents. Moreover, the study involved a relatively small sample size, and disproportionate representation of school psychologists in the United States because the survey was only made available to randomly selected school psychologists with public school email addresses.

References


