

ABSTRACT

High school dropout rates have consistently been the highest for families of low income. Studies have indicated that counselor support can be effective in improving academic achievement. The purpose of this study was to examine the effect of counselor support on academic achievement among students who are living in poverty. This study was a secondary analysis that utilized data from the High School Longitudinal Study, 2009-2013. The current study included 5,558 participants. Data was collected through computerized Student Questionnaires which included items regarding if participants had received academic, career, and/or emotional counseling. Results of chi-square tests indicated that counselor support in the form of emotional counseling had a significant relationship on academic achievement, while academic and career counseling did not. This study has implications for policy changes regarding funding for mental health services in schools.

INTRODUCTION

Significance of Study

- Students who are raised in poverty are much less likely than their peers to pass high school
- Consequences of failing to attain a high school diploma
 - Individual Level: employment disadvantages, higher rates of teen pregnancy, higher rates of crime and incarceration, etc.
 - Societal Level: increased welfare usage, increased crime rates, reduced economic activity, *economic cost of \$240,000 per high school dropout*, etc.

Purpose of Research

- To better understand if adolescents who are raised in poverty are more likely to succeed as students when they receive academic, career, and/or emotional support from counselors at their school

Research Question

- What is the effect of counselor support on academic achievement among high school students who are living in poverty?

Hypothesis

- Receiving counselor support is significantly associated with academic achievement

LITERATURE REVIEW

Existing Literature

- Poverty is one of the strongest predictors of poor school achievement (Garrett-Peters, Mokrova, Vernon-Feagans, Willoughby, & Pan, 2016)
- Students from low income families can see academic improvements when counselors play an active role in bridging the gap between teacher and student (Amatea & West-Olatunji, 2007)
- School counseling has led to positive outcomes like reduction of student fights, suspensions, drug use, and absenteeism as well as higher student SAT scores, college entrance rates, and English proficiency rates (Lapan, Gysbers, Bragg, & Pierce, 2012; Parzych, Donohue, Gaesser, & Chiu, 2019; Reback, 2010; Wilkerson, Perusse, and Hughes 2013)

Gaps and Limitations

- No articles could be found that looked at the effects of counselor support on graduation rates among students of low-income
- Most literature looks at the impact of teachers on students, not counselors
- Majority of the literature available is outdated

Therefore, this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge as it will bring forth new findings on the direct impact of counselor support on graduation rates, place the focus only on counselor support and not teacher support, and collect more recent data on the outcomes of counselor support.

MATERIALS & METHOD

Research Design and Data Collection Procedures

- Secondary analysis of data from the High School Longitudinal Study, 2009-2013 (ICPSR 36423)
- Cohort and longitudinal with five collection points
- Data collected in the form of computerized Student Questionnaires
- Data collected from schools across the United States

Sample and Sampling Method

- Recruitment occurred through 1,889 schools
- Stratified random sampling utilized
- Sample size: 5,558 (sample subsection created by using poverty indicator selection criteria) **please refer to Table 1*

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics: Study Variables

| Variables | f | % |
|--|------|------|
| Teenager Has High School Credential | | |
| No | 703 | 15.7 |
| Yes | 3789 | 68.2 |
| Type of High School Credential Received | | |
| High school diploma | 3572 | 64.3 |
| GED or other high school equivalency | 180 | 3.2 |
| Certificate of attendance | 29 | 0.5 |
| Academic Counseling | | |
| None | 3983 | 74.6 |
| Low | 449 | 8.4 |
| Moderate | 321 | 6.0 |
| High | 589 | 11.0 |
| Career Counseling | | |
| None | 4157 | 77.9 |
| Low | 584 | 10.9 |
| High | 593 | 11.1 |
| Emotional Counseling | | |
| Not Received | 4744 | 89.7 |
| Received | 544 | 10.3 |

Table 1

Sample Characteristics (N=5,558)

| Characteristic | f | % |
|---|--------|--------|
| Gender | | |
| Male | 2776 | 49.9 |
| Female | 2782 | 50.1 |
| Ethnicity | | |
| Amer. Indian/Alaska Native, non-Hispanic | 63 | 1.1 |
| Asian, non-Hispanic | 382 | 6.9 |
| Black/African-American, non-Hispanic | 826 | 14.9 |
| Hispanic, no race specified | 104 | 1.9 |
| Hispanic, race specified | 1393 | 25.1 |
| More than one race, non-Hispanic | 507 | 9.1 |
| Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, non-Hispanic | 35 | 0.6 |
| White, non-Hispanic | 2247 | 40.4 |
| Primary Language | | |
| First language is English only | 4037 | 72.6 |
| First language is non-English language only | 934 | 16.8 |
| First language is English and non-English equally | 471 | 8.5 |
| First Parent's Highest Level of Education | | |
| Less than high school | 1110 | 20.0 |
| High school diploma or GED | 3052 | 54.9 |
| Associate's degree | 746 | 13.4 |
| Bachelor's degree | 493 | 8.9 |
| Master's degree | 124 | 2.2 |
| Ph.D./M.D./Law/other high level professional degree | 33 | 0.6 |
| Second Parent's Highest Level of Education | | |
| Less than high school | 965 | 17.4 |
| High school diploma or GED | 1828 | 32.9 |
| Associate's degree | 324 | 5.8 |
| Bachelor's degree | 257 | 4.6 |
| Master's degree | 67 | 1.2 |
| Ph.D./M.D./Law/other high level professional degree | 31 | 0.6 |
| Age in years | M=18.6 | SD=0.7 |

Measures **please refer to Table 2*

Dependent Variable

- Academic Achievement=the completion of high school
 - 2-items used to measure:
 - High school credential received
 - Type of high school credential

Independent Variable

- Counselor Support=the academic, career, and emotional counseling provided to a student by a school counselor
 - 6-items used to determine the degree of counselor support

RESULTS

Chi-square Tests

- No significant relationship between academic counseling and high school credential ($\chi^2(3) = 7.70, p = .053$)
- No significant relationship between academic counseling and high school credential type ($\chi^2(6) = 5.29, p = .51$)
- No significant relationship between career counseling and high school credential ($\chi^2(2) = 0.52, p = .77$)
- No significant relationship between career counseling and high school credential type ($\chi^2(4) = 0.68, p = .95$)
- A **significant association** was found between high school credential category and emotional counseling ($\chi^2(1) = 5.92, p = .02$), while a Phi statistic suggested a weak relationship (-0.04) **please refer to Figure 1*
- A **significant association** was found between high school credential type category and emotional counseling ($\chi^2(2) = 6.81, p < .05$), while a Cramer's V statistic suggested a weak relationship (0.04) **please refer to Table 3*

Figure 1 summarizes these results.

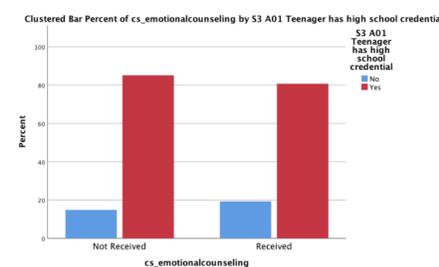


Figure 1. Differences in attaining a high school credential among participants who received emotional counseling and those who did not.

Table 3

Comparison of High School Credential Type and Emotional Counseling Services Received

| Emotional Counseling | Type of High School Credential % (f) | | |
|----------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------|
| | High School Diploma | GED or Other High School Equivalency | Certificate of Attendance |
| Not Received | 94.8 (3107) | 4.5 (149) | 0.7 (22) |
| Received | 91.4 (320) | 7.4 (26) | 1.1 (4) |

DISCUSSION

Major Findings

- Consistent with literature a relationship exists between academic achievement and emotional counseling
- Inconsistent with literature, less participants attained a high school credential who had received emotional counseling than those who did not
 - Why? It is possible that participants may not have received an *adequate* amount of emotional counseling to work through emotional barriers impacting school performance
- Among those who received emotional counseling and a high school credential, more participants had a GED/other high school equivalency or a certificate of attendance than those who did not receive emotional counseling
 - Why? It could be that the results of the counseling led to making an alternative academic plan for the participant, allowing for graduation to be more attainable amidst emotional struggles

Strengths

- Diversity of participants **please refer to Table 1*
- Diversity of schools (private, public, and charter across the U.S.)
- Chi-square test allowed for comparison of multiple groups

Limitations

- High attrition rate between collection points
- Vastly different sizes in groups (small number of participants received counseling) **please refer to Table 2*
- Small number of items utilized to measure independent and dependent variable

Implications and Recommendations

- Indicates the value of school-based mental health services for students of low-income
- Suggests that emotional counseling is more influential than academic and career counseling
- Exemplifies the need for having mental health professionals on school staff
- Policies need to move toward *requiring* schools to hire a certain number of mental health professionals
- Policies need to provide more funding to schools that are allocated strictly for the salaries of mental health professionals

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