STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL COUNSELLING IN SINGAPORE: A MIXED METHOD STUDY

A Thesis submitted by

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ABSTRACT

Using a combination of questionnaires and interviews, this research compared stakeholders' perspectives regarding school counselling in Singapore schools. Teachers, school and community-based counsellors' perceptions in relation to a number of aspects of school counselling were first elicited then compared. Similarities and differences between the stakeholders' views were examined in light of concerns surrounding the current and future development of mental health care for children and young people in Singapore.

Areas of agreement, clarity as well as differences among stakeholders involved in school counselling were revealed. There was agreement among stakeholders in terms of the need for the extension of counselling service into the school context. However, evidence of marked differences was noted, particularly among perceptions on whether school counselling service should provide family counselling and the level of confidentiality upheld in the school setting.

Another related finding was that the stakeholders' role played a part in shaping the frame in which they view school counselling process. For example, teachers' need to gain more information from school counsellors was traced back to their intention to use that information to better carry out their roles as teachers. While counsellors and teachers differ in some aspects, there was also differences between school counsellors and community-based counsellors' in others. In addition, the school counselling situation was also noted to be far from consistent across different schools and communities.

These findings were further discussed in the practice context in Singapore as well as compared to overseas studies. Practical interventions were designed as well as future research were recommended in light of the findings.

Thesis certification page

This Thesis is entirely the work of Low Poi Kee Frederick except where otherwise acknowledged. The work is original and has not previously been submitted for any other award, except where acknowledged.

Principal Supervisor: Dr Luke Van Der Laan

Associate Supervisor: Dr Geoff McNulty

Student and supervisors' signatures of endorsement are held at the University.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 ABOUT THE STUDY

This multi-phase study aims to extend our knowledge of stakeholders' perception of school counselling in Singapore and in so doing, contribute to the global debate in the same area. The range of perceptions themselves, then the consequences of this range of perceptions as evidenced in practice are significant considerations in striving for a holistic and seamless counselling service for children and young person in schools and in the community, not only in Singapore but potentially in other cities in the region and those that share similar characteristics with Singapore.

This first chapter provides the background, the impetus, the overarching research question and the general flow of this study. Chapter two introduces the education landscape and the counselling sector before discussing the growing needs for counselling in Singapore schools. The latter part of the chapter engages the reader with a review of global literature in the area of stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling. These include those from teachers, school counsellors, school administrators, parents and students. Chapter three discusses the chosen methodology for this study - Mixed Method. The current study is one with two phases. Phase one, which is the qualitative phase of the study is the focus of chapter four. The chapter introduces the semi-structured interviews, the analysis and published work associated with this phase of the study. Chapter five presents the results, findings and discussions of Phase two - the quantitative phase of the study. Chapter six brings together the findings of both phases of the study to answer the overarching research question and associated discussions. The chapter also shared how the knowledge generated in this study is being applied to the practice environment as well as other suggested applications. The final chapter offers a summary of the findings, a discussion of the limitations of the study and a short reflection of the researcher.

Phase one of this study consists of a series of qualitative research (Low, 2014; 2015a, & 2015b) that explored the perceptions of teachers, school and community-based counsellors of school counselling. These studies were conducted by the researcher as a PhD project that thematically addresses an

overarching research question of how key stakeholder-professionals (teachers, school & community-based counsellors) view the developing school counselling service in Singapore.

Amongst other things, the research found that the gap in understanding of community-based counsellors' perceptions of school counselling was significantly lacking compared to published knowledge of other stakeholders' perceptions. In Singapore, community-based counsellors refer to counselling practitioners who work with children and families in the community. They may be working in family service centres, youth service centres or counselling centres.

In an effort to better understand this gap that was revealed after the analysis of the findings from the initial qualitative research and to conclude addressing the overarching research question, a quantitative survey conducted with community-based counsellors was conceived and carried out. This is phase two of the study. This last piece in the series of research seeks to contextualise the previous research in order to address the gap in the literature. It further seeks to synthesise the insights gained from earlier qualitative research with a quantitative survey while triangulating the extent to which these insights apply to the larger population of community-based counsellors in Singapore. The findings corroborated that of phase one's qualitative study which shed light on how counsellors outside the school context view school counselling, which is important in creating seamless delivery of social and mental health care services for children and the young inside and outside schools (Shaw, 2003).

The focus on community-based counsellors in phase two was partly due to the researcher's realisation that the literature on perceptions of this group of stakeholders was lacking. Separately, the researcher recognised that school counsellors are a part of a larger community of mental health professionals that includes psychologists, community workers, counsellors and social workers. External networks of peers and allied professionals provide an important, readily available support network for school counsellors (Bunce & Willower, 2001; and McMahon & Patton, 2001). The recent publication by Low (2015b) asserts that it is essential to understand these stakeholders' perceptions in order to integrate counselling services in schools and in the community in order

to optimise outcomes and respond to an increasingly dynamic and uncertain environment.

School counselling services often collaborate with voluntary welfare organisations which provide practical help to families in the neighbourhood. In Singapore, school counsellors often work closely with family service centres and other agencies. These agencies' perception of school counselling is important; as close collaboration is essential for integrated service delivery. Shaw (2003) provides an account of the emphasis in the United Kingdom, on 'seamless' delivery of children's services through partnerships among schools, voluntary organisations, businesses and parents.

Many studies have examined students', school counsellors', teachers' and education administrators' perceptions of school counselling services (Murgatroyd, 1977; Sianna, Drapera, & Cosford, 1982; Maluwa-Banda, 1998; Bunce & Willower, 2001; Paisley & McMahon, 2001; Tatar, 2001; Clark & Amatea, 2004; Dwyer & McNaughton, 2004; Polat & Jenkins, 2005; Brinson & Saeed, 2006; Fox & Butler, 2007; Chan & Quinn, 2009; Quinn & Chan, 2009; Alghamdi & Riddick, 2011; Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012; and Chen & Kok, 2015). Adding to the list was the researcher's work in phase one of the current study which explored teachers', school counsellors and community-based counsellors' perceptions. Unfortunately, there has been little research on community-based counsellors' perception of school counselling services and none at all in Singapore or Asia more generally. In order to narrow the gap in the literature which would, in turn, strengthen the underpinning of the findings of phase one, phase two of the current study devoted undivided attention to further understand community-based counsellors' perceptions.

1.2 PRACTITIONER-RESEARCHER

As a counsellor, the researcher is a practitioner familiar with the counselling scene as well as the education sector in Singapore. Professional practice helped him bridge textbook knowledge with clinical experience. It also seemed to have led him a full circle as a practice-based problem brought him back to books and further into research work. The researcher's training and background laid the foundation for the current study.

The idea for the study was conceived during a period of major change in the education and counselling scene in Singapore. In the mid-2000s, the Singapore government introduced a nationwide school-based counselling programme for all mainstream schools. In 3 years from 2005, the Ministry of Education (MOE) aimed to and was quite successful in equipping the primary and secondary schools and junior colleges with at least a counsellor each. Before this initiative, it was unusual to have full-time counsellors in schools. Often schools engaged a part-time counsellor or social worker from community services and some had none at all. The only exceptions were the special education schools which were funded by the government and operated by non-governmental organizations. The researcher, himself was leading a team of counselling practitioners in delivering services for a group of special education schools in Singapore at that time.

It was during this period; he was faced with the practice-based problem of differing perceptions of counselling in the school setting. He recalled one such incident where a teacher requested him to perform a task which was typically carried out by a teaching staff. She furthered her case by sharing how the counsellor in her son's school was noted to have acceded to similar requests. She was evidently upset when her request was denied. Long after she had left the researcher's office, the researcher continued to wonder what was on the mind of the school counsellor whom the teacher had quoted. This ignited a strong desire to explore and understand more of this phenomenon of stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling.

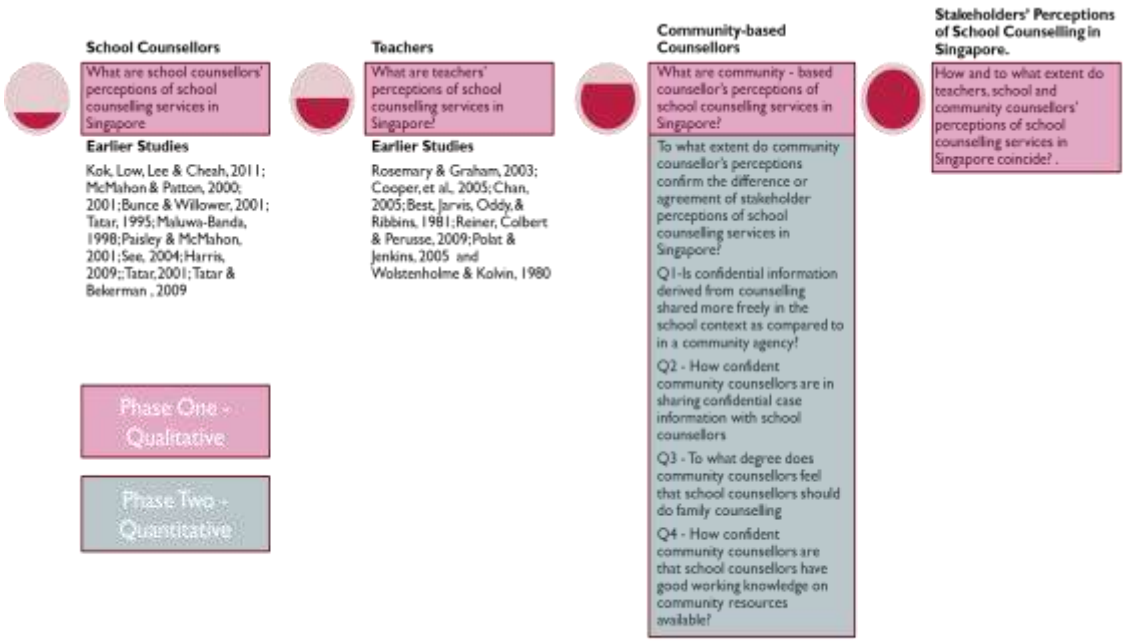
Considering his professional background and experience in school counselling, the researcher was unable to consider himself as an observer from the outside looking into the scene in Singapore. Quite the opposite, he got more involved as his research interest drew him closer to other stakeholders in this area. For example, he served as a key lecturer for one of the Masters programmes in guidance and counselling in Singapore. In the same year, he took over as chair of a subcommittee at the Singapore Association for Counselling.

The researcher's positioning in the fields of both the community and the school counselling scene was crucial to the current study. Naturally, he was offered many opportunities to listen to stories from school and community

counsellors. Among these interesting tales were real thoughts, experiences and sometimes emotions on the school counselling processes and the people involved. Taking a constructivist approach in the study was in line with the researcher and where he was in relation to the field. He was in a position suitable to examine the meanings his fellow colleagues create and hold about the work of counselling in schools. While he could hardly claim that he is a "Native" in school counselling as he has never been in the position of a full-time school counsellor in mainstream schools, it is also not incorrect to think that this study contained some elements or strengths of an insider research. These include his pre-understanding or knowledge of the field. The researcher's position with 'one foot in' seemed to allow him to benefit from the value of insider research while keeping a relative distance as an outsider would (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). The researcher's involvement in the professional arena has informed the explorative and reflective nature of the research design.

1.3 RESEARCH CONCEPT

Figure 1.1 Study Concept



Source: Developed for this study

Figure 1.1 conceptualises the study design and connects phase one and phase two of the study. Phase one consists the qualitative work conducted in researcher's early stages of his doctoral journey while phase two consists the

quantitative portion of the study which was conceived after the initial analysis of the findings from phase one. Both Phase one and two were conceived and carried out to answer the overarching research question.

The overarching research question forms the top level of the framework which guides both phase one and phase two of this study. Comparing stakeholders' perceptions about school counselling is the core question to be answered in this thesis.

Phase one is the qualitative phase of the study which consisted of interviews with teachers, school and community-based counsellors and a further comparison of their perceptions. This was duly completed through prior doctoral qualitative work guided by the overarching research question. It is during these studies that the researcher found that numerous studies share similar findings of teachers and school counsellors' perceptions, however, research related to community-based counsellor's perceptions remained scarce.

As such phase two of the study is quantitative in nature and consists of a questionnaire survey of a broader base of community-based counsellors. It sought to a) combine the qualitative insights, and b) seek responses from a broader sample of community-based counsellors to integrate, triangulate and generalise the findings.

Collectively, the knowledge generated in both phase one and two support the overarching purpose at the top level of the framework, to gain deeper and broader insights on how stakeholders see the growing school counselling service in Singapore.

1.4. BACKGROUND & LITERATURE SUMMARY

A brief discussion of key literature surrounding the research subject is included here to provide readers with an introduction to the empirical and academic interest in school counselling, globally as well as locally. This section also provides a context in which both phase one and phase two of the study were conducted. This backdrop includes some recent development in the education, social services and counselling scene in Singapore.

Singapore implemented a nationwide programme to increase counselling services across its educational institutions in 2005. The Ministry of

Education (MOE) deployed at least one full-time counsellor in each school by the year 2008. Prior to this development, schools generally engaged their own part-time or full-time counsellors with varying qualifications and experiences. The Ministry of Education had for the first time, invested heavily and directly into a sustainable school counselling service at a nationwide level.

Consequently, an international review noted that Singapore was one of thirty-nine out of eighty-two countries where the provision of counselling in schools was mandatory (Harris, 2014). As a full-fledged government-backed programme, continual evaluation is expected to examine the outcome of the programme. Stakeholders' perceptions could be viewed alongside needs analysis and outcome evaluations, to offer a holistic and a circumspect review of the impact of counselling services in schools.

A key reason for examining this area is the complexity and strength of influence that stakeholders such as teachers, school administrators, parents, community-based counsellors as well as school counsellors, have on the actual process of counselling in schools and its outcomes (Low, 2009; Graham, Desmond & Zinsser, 2011; and Zalaquett & Chatters, 2012). Considering the developments in Singapore, it was anticipated that theory building in the Singapore context might be a useful addition to the international discourse and knowledge of school counselling.

It is important to describe the characteristics of the presenting problems and emotional challenges faced by children and young people in Singapore. This helps to gain a deeper understanding of the higher demand for counselling services in schools. Issues found to be affecting Singapore schools include bullying, academic stress and behavioural problems (Ang & Huan, 2006; Tan, Tan & Appadoo, 2007; Khong, 2007; Ling, 2007; Koh & Tan, 2008; Woo, et al, 2007; and Khalik, 2008). These were not unlike the issues in many other developed cities around the world (Rickwood, Deane, Wilson, & Ciarrochi, 2005; Ang, Klassen, Chong, Huan, Wong, Yeo, & Krawchuk, 2009; Ansary, Elias, Greene, & Green, 2015; Liu, 2015; and Volk, Farrell, Franklin, Mularczyk, & Provenzano, 2016).

1.4.1 Children & Youth Issues and School Counselling

In a Singapore research, Tan, Tan and Appadoo (2007) reported that close to 25% of secondary school students were bullied in schools. About one in five among primary school students also reported being bullied (Koh & Tan, 2008). The former study also reported that students found sharing about the issue of bullying with a counsellor or social worker was helpful.

In another study by Woo et al (2007), the prevalence rates of emotional and behavioural problems among children in Singapore were noted to be comparable to the West but children in Singapore reported higher rates of internalising problems.

The suicide rate among children and the young was noted to have dropped over the period from 2001 to 2007 (Khalik, 2008). However, it seems to have risen in recent years from 2010 to 2015, with the only exception in 2014 (Samaritans of Singapore, 2016). This calls for a deeper understanding of how school counselling and other psycho-emotional services mitigate the effects of mental health and stress among our young.

A study focused on youths who had dropped out of schools in Singapore, found that students reported finding counselling helpful and perceived counsellors as having the ability to understand them (Wong, 2006). In a study conducted in England on students' and staff's view of emotional health support in schools, it was noted that an on-site counsellor was considered as a source of support. The study also reported that on-site counselling support was regarded positively by staff and students in schools (Kidger, Donovan, Biddle, Campbell & Gunnell, 2009). Collectively, local studies seem to support international findings which suggest that counselling is an appropriate service for children and young people during their schooling years.

McGinnis (2008) suggested there were three key reasons for having counsellors in British schools. She highlighted the steady increase in the percentage of young people experiencing emotional difficulties in schools in recent years as one, while another was that schools find troubled young people not performing well academically. Finally, she also indicated that teachers and others who worked with children had noted that more individualised and focused help would be useful for troubled young people in schools. These

reasons were not only visible in the United Kingdom but in Singapore as well, as discussed in earlier paragraphs.

Schools and the Ministry of Education were also sensitised to the influence that mental and emotional difficulties have on academic performance and hence placed greater attention to these concerns in schools. Responding to an incident of teen suicide, the acting Minister of Education Mr Ng Chee Meng reassured parliamentarians that teachers are equipped to help students in psychological and mental health issues while school counsellors are further equipped to carry out suicide risk assessment (Chong, 2016). Apart from sharing the same three reasons suggested by McGinnis (2008), political pressure and public demands also motivated the providing of greater access to counselling service for children and the young in Singapore. This increased demand and supply of counselling service in schools naturally raised academic and clinical interest in this area.

Having rooted the entire study within Singapore's setting and context, the following section expands on the interests this study has on stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling. The subsequent sections include separate discussions on literature on school, community-based counsellors and teachers' perceptions. These include a summary of findings published by the researcher with regards to respective stakeholder groups.

1.4.2 Stakeholders Perceptions of School Counselling

The importance of stakeholder groups and their perceptions were increasingly recognised in the field of school counselling (Maluwa-Banda, 1998; Reiner, Colbert & Perusse, 2009). Some recent studies collected and compared the perceptions of two or more groups of stakeholders (Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner and Skelton, 2006; Partin, 1990; Kirchner & Setchfield, 2005; Tatar & Bekerman, 2009; and Hamilton-Roberts, 2012).

In a local study, Woo et al (2007) did a comparison between teachers, children and parents' reporting on children's emotional and behavioural problems. It found that teachers and parents appeared to differ in their views of the problems among children in Singapore, therefore it was not difficult to imagine that their views, as well as other stakeholders' views on mental health services such as school counselling, may also differ. Clearly, there was an

urgent need to explore, understand and compare stakeholder's perceptions of counselling in the Singaporean context.

To this end, the researcher's earlier study in phase one titled "Stakeholders' Perceptions of School Counselling in Singapore" (Low, 2015b) asked the question: What are the key areas of different perspectives among teachers, school and community-based counsellors? Two areas emerged from the study. First, the stakeholders observed and expected differing levels of confidentiality for information obtained during counselling. This presented a barrier to cooperation between the stakeholders. Second, stakeholders, while keen to ensure students' families were served appropriately, held different ideas of how that could happen. Details of this study are discussed in Chapter Four – Results & Discussion (Qualitative Analysis). The published paper for this individual study is also included as Appendix D at the end of this thesis.

Stakeholders' perceptions across different practice context, is increasingly attracting the attention of academic research interests, the practitioner-research approach is well placed to further knowledge in this area. This is predictably so as practitioners constantly encounter this social phenomenon and are naturally curious as to what and how similar or different perceptions are among stakeholders.

1.4.3 Teachers' Perceptions of School Counselling

Teachers' perceptions often influence the understanding of students, parents and principals in the formal educational context (Clark & Amatea, 2004). The study of teachers' perceptions of counselling and related services in schools had been undertaken in many forms in other countries (Wolstenholme & Kolvin, 1980; Vulliamy & Webb, 2003; Cooper, et al., 2005; and Khansa, 2015).

Best, Jarvis, Oddy, and Ribbins (1981) discovered that teachers preferred counsellors who were familiar with the school and the education system. More recently, Cooper et al. (2005) found that a majority of the teachers in Scotland they studied held positive attitudes towards school counselling. However, it also found some concerns; such as teachers' misconception that counselling was merely advice giving. Harris (2009) reported that misconception of the counselling process among teachers (when they occur)

create a number of difficulties in referrals, classroom-based interventions or simply professional interaction between the teacher and the counsellor.

Separately, Hui (2002) and Chan (2005) examined teachers' perceptions of counselling and guidance in Hong Kong schools. The latter found that teachers involved in guidance work took a more humanistic view as compared to those who were not so involved. It also suggested that teachers might differ among themselves in their perception of school counselling according to their role in the school.

In the United States of America, Reiner, Colbert and Perusse (2009) found that teachers did not fully agree with what American School Counselling Association (ASCA) defined as appropriate activities school counsellors should engage in. This seemed to suggest that fundamental differences exist between the counselling and teaching professions' perspectives to guidance and counselling work in schools. They also demonstrated that stakeholders' perceptions are helpful in determining the positioning of the service, which is critical for integrating counselling and guidance work in schools.

A prior study conducted in phase one by the researcher focussed on teachers' perceptions and was titled "School counselling in Singapore: teachers' thoughts and perceptions" (Low, 2015a). Through semi-structured interviews, the researcher attempted to answer two research questions: 1) How are teachers responding to the inclusion of counselling service in schools? and 2) What are the values teachers see counselling adds in the school context.

The findings suggested teachers' overall positiveness about counselling service in Singapore schools. Further, it found that teachers view the counselling service as a helpful addition because (1) it extended more individual attention to students; (2) it offered a potential source for teachers to learn more about students through a different perspective; and (3) school counsellors could work with parents and families, especially in situations where referral to external resources is needed. The findings of this research suggest that teachers in Singapore share some similarities with their overseas counterparts in perceptions of counselling in schools. Details of this study are discussed in Chapter Four – Results & Discussion (Qualitative Analysis). The published paper for this study is also included as Appendix B at the end of this thesis.

1.4.4 School Counsellors on School Counselling

Fulton (1973) examined and compared school counsellors' perceptions and discussed the agreement and differences. More recent interests include an Australian study that reported on school counsellors' viewpoint on the use of online counselling in the school context (Glasheen & Campbell, 2009) and a study in Malaysia revealed areas for improvement in the school counselling programme, particularly in the area of whole school approach (Kok, Low, Lee & Cheah, 2012).

School counsellors were generally reporting concerns over the need for clinical supervision and support (McMahon & Patton, 2000; 2001; Bunce & Willower, 2001; and Pattison et al, 2009). Apart from defining the roles or tasks, which are perceived by school counsellors, it is also important to examine whether counsellors are actually carrying them out. See (2004) shared some interesting findings in her study in Malaysia which reported that the tasks that accorded relative importance were not performed as frequently as they were supposed to. This demonstrated the importance of examining not only the processes and outcome of the services but also the professionals' perceptions.

A research paper prepared by the researcher at the end of phase one which is currently under consideration for publication titled "Counselling in Singapore Schools: through the eyes of School Counsellors", asked the question: ''What were the key ambiguities school counsellors faced in the beginning years of the school counselling service in Singapore?" The reported results found that school counsellors reported ambivalence in three key areas, namely 1) the sharing of information about students with other stakeholders, 2) counselling work with families and parents and 3) school counsellors' working relationships with school leaders. The findings were consistent with and in some cases support findings of overseas studies. Details of this study are discussed in Chapter Four – Results & Discussion (Qualitative Analysis). The paper which is currently under consideration for publication, which informs this study is also included as Appendix A at the end of this thesis.

1.4.5 Community-based counsellors' perceptions

As highlighted in studies by Bunce and Willower (2001), McMahon and Patton (2001) and Low (2009), external networks of peers and other allied

professionals are key systems that school counsellors naturally approach and rely on for support.

While working with other mental health workers external to schools, counsellors may face issues pertaining to the definition of their professional roles and the management of their professional boundaries. According to Maguire (1975), other mental health professionals had expressed concerns about school counsellors providing therapeutic help to 'disturbed' children in the United Kingdom.

Singapore may be a developed country but the reality is that full-time school counsellors and the school counselling programme are relatively new to many community-based counsellors, social workers as well as psychologists and psychiatrists. Lau (2009) suggested that the research topics on the subject of school counselling from the 1960s to 1990s would be most suitable for application in present-day Singapore, taking into consideration the current stage of development of school counselling locally. While some of the research topics may be relevant, other areas such as stakeholder's perceptions are increasingly more salient as cross-sector collaboration is becoming a norm.

Counselling practice operating within schools has to be responsive to changes not only limited to within the schools but also in society at large and the communities and regions in which they operate. These changes influence the nature of presenting problems, clients (students and parents), as well as support networks, thus posing significant challenges to school counsellors. Indeed, from time to time, school counsellors may be required to interact beyond the school with other sub-systems such as the legal and healthcare systems (James & DeVaney,1995; Low, 2009; and Lambie, Leva, Mullen & Hayes, 2010).

The perceptions of and opinions community-based counsellors about school counselling practice and process is of interest to anyone concerned about integrating this service not only in schools but also in the communities. Unfortunately, research focussing on the perceptions of community-based counsellors on school counselling are rare. Overseas studies were relatively dated and the context was less similar to that of modern Singapore. As such, it is asserted that this over-arching study and component published research

findings make an important contribution to the future seamless delivery of counselling services in Singapore.

The earlier study in phase one published by the researcher titled "Looking in from the outside: community-based counsellors' opinions and attitudes to school counselling in Singapore" (Low, 2014) asked two questions: 1) How are counsellors in the community responding to the developments in school counselling? and 2) What are the key concerns counsellors in the community have on the emerging school counselling service? Community-based counsellors were found to be supportive of the initiative but concerned about how the service was implemented, especially in relation to professional and ethical standards and maintenance of confidentiality standards. Community-based counsellors felt that their counterparts in schools lacked knowledge about community resources and that family work seemed beyond their capability and capacity. Details of this study are discussed in Chapter Four – Results & Discussion (Qualitative Analysis). The published paper for this study is also included as Appendix C at the end of this thesis.

These findings from phase one – qualitative studies laid the foundation for further questions to be asked, especially in the area of comparing stakeholders' perceptions and to further explain or develop collaborative relationships between stakeholders. Beyond this, there is a lack of meaningful research of community-based counsellors' perceptions. Indeed, when compared to the findings reported in associated studies conducted by the researcher on teachers' or school counsellors' perceptions, the researcher found little other studies to triangulate the findings related to community-based counsellors' perceptions. This necessitated a broader integrated study adopting quantitative methods in order to further understand, validate and triangulate findings related community-based counsellors' perceptions of school counselling.

1.5 PHASE TWO: QUANTITATIVE STUDY

While analysing the data of previous qualitative studies conducted by the researcher in phase one, it was increasingly clear how different community-based counsellors' perceptions were from those of other stakeholders and how little was known about this area worldwide, much less in Singapore and the

region. Furthermore, contributing studies focusing on teachers, school counsellors and school administrators' isolated perceptions are widely available as discussed in earlier sections in this thesis yet lack a holistic view on how the stakeholders' perceptions interact in practice.

The perceptions either facilitate or hinder professional understanding and practice issues confirm this for good or ill. Practices based on perception and assumption then either integrate at a wider professional level or not, being seamless or not, and the evident gaps are the consequences of actions based originally on the quality of perception.

This sets the foundation for phase two to focus on integrating previous insights published by the researcher into a broader study thus uncovering more about the effect of community-based counsellors' perceptions. Affirming this impetus was the finding of the growing debate and discussion of greater integration or alignment of school and community services for children, both overseas and in Singapore (Evans & Carter 1997; Shaw, 2003; De Jong & Griffiths, 2008; Gerrard, 2008; Chong et al., 2013; Kok, 2013; and Luk-Fong, 2013).

A key premise of the study is that having a holistic understanding of the dynamics between counselling professionals in schools and outside of schools involved in caring for the young, is critical to the successful implementation of the school counselling service. A more representative view of community-based counsellors' perception of school counselling as juxtaposed to the perceptions of school counsellors and teachers, is needed in order to achieve streamlining cross-setting integration of psychosocial services for children and the young.

In order to do so, an overarching research question that focuses on multiple stakeholder perceptions of school counselling was developed to guide this study.

1.5.1 Overarching Research Question:

The study is informed by the following overarching question: *How and to what extent do stakeholder perceptions of school counselling services in Singapore coincide*?

In order to answer the overarching research question, numerous sub-questions have been developed. The quantitative phase (phase two) of the study focused on sub-question number five below and its own sub-questions.

1. What are school counsellors' perceptions of school counselling services in Singapore
2. What are teachers' perceptions of school counselling services in Singapore?
3. What are community counsellor's perceptions of school counselling services in Singapore?
4. How and to what extent do teachers, school and community-based counsellors' perceptions of school counselling services differ or agree?
5. To what extent are the findings on community-based counsellor's perceptions of school counselling shared among community-based counsellors? This question was conceived as a result of the findings from the interviews conducted with community-based counsellors in phase one of the study. During the phase, the need to confirm these findings with a larger base of community-based counsellors became apparent. Hence this question and the sub-questions below were conceived and guided phase two of the study:

- Is confidential information derived from counselling shared more freely in the school context as compared to in a community agency?
- How confident community-based counsellors are in sharing confidential case information with school counsellors?
- To what degree do community-based counsellors feel that school counsellors should do family counselling?
- How confident are community-based counsellors that school counsellors have good working knowledge on community resources available?

1.5.2 Methods and Respondents

The purpose of the entire study (phase one and phase two) using the exploratory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2011) was to first qualitatively explore with a small sample and then determine if the qualitative findings generalize to a larger sample. The first phase of the study was a qualitative exploration of various stakeholder groups' perceptions in

which interview data were collected from teachers, school and community-based counsellors inside and outside schools in Singapore (Low, 2014; 2015a, & 2015b).

From this initial exploration, the qualitative findings were used to develop quantitative measures that were administered to a larger group of respondents, in particular, the community-based counsellors. This group of stakeholders was chosen as there was little relevant literature on their perceptions while those of teachers and school counsellors were readily available. Hence in the quantitative phase, survey data was collected from community-based counsellors working in family service centres and counselling centres. The purpose of this survey was to understand whether the differences and similarities in perceptions found during the qualitative phase are widely held among the wider community of community-based counsellors. A quantitative method was identified as a suitable method to achieve this aim.

An online survey questionnaire was deployed in this second phase of the study. Likert scale questions relevant to the research questions were presented in the questionnaire. A pilot of the questionnaire was administered prior to the deployment of the full survey. In this study, the term 'community-based counsellor' is used to refer specifically to a counselling practitioner working in a Family Service Centre (FSC) or comparable agencies which are expected to work closely with counsellors in schools.

1.6 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

In the face of repeated calls for greater emphasis on school-community collaboration in children and youth services, the perceptions of community-based counsellors on school counselling cannot afford further neglect. Indeed, the study on stakeholders' perceptions as a whole needs greater attention. To this end, the quantitative study (Phase two) combined with prior qualitative research (Phase one) generated a coherent body of knowledge to further understand the perceptions of stakeholders' perceptions on school counselling in Singapore by answering an overarching research question which guided both phases of the sequential mixed methods study.

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CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

This Chapter presents the literature surrounding the research subject of stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling. The chapter further discusses the growing need for counselling for children and the youth as well as the commonly identified issues reported in Singapore. The International and local literature on stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling is reviewed after.

2.1 SINGAPORE'S EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

A short overview of the schooling system and other features will provide readers who may be unfamiliar with the local education landscape, a contextual background to understand the study better. Singapore is a small island-state. It is by itself a city and a Nation. The Ministry of Education (MOE) is a major Ministry in the Singapore government and is also a major employer. The education system is an important one in the Singaporean context. Strategic directions of the Nation often cascade down to the system and influences school activities. Some examples include the promotion of multiculturalism, academic focused curriculum, lifelong learning etc. Hence to understand the recent injection of funds and resources to develop a Nation-wide school-based counselling programme, the educational landscape and context may be helpful for readers outside Singapore.

In discussing the schooling provision in Singapore, Gopinathan (2001) described economic instrumentalism as a cornerstone of education and noted that economic competitiveness was the major 'national project'. This provides a very accurate description of the relationship between education and national strategies and success. It almost seemed like keeping pace with the industrialization of the country, the Ministry of Education crafted policies and worked the system to produce the talents needed in the workforce. While many developing and developed countries carry out similar strategies, a significant difference Singapore seemed to display was the centralization process in education. It is generally agreed that officials in the Ministry are powerful and influential in determining the policies for the nation.

This arrangement was largely accepted by schools and the public as it integrates the national interests with an already well established national schooling system (Gopinathan, 2001). While some effort was seen in recent

years to reduce the Ministry's grip on schools' operations and policies, the Singapore system can hardly be described as decentralized.

2.1.1 Overview on Schools

The MOE oversees most of the schools and institutions in Singapore. According to the Education Statistics Digest (2016), published by the MOE, there were a total of 366 schools in Singapore in 2015. There were 182 primary schools, 154 secondary schools, 16 mixed level schools and 14 pre-university colleges and institutes in the country. These schools and institutions are either fully or partially managed by the MOE. Considering that each school was provided with at least one counsellor each, the MOE would have recruited and deployed several hundreds of counsellors to meet the demand.

The Singapore government invests heavily in education every year. Over 12.1 billion Singapore dollars were set-aside for the MOE for the financial year of 2015. For comparison, in the same budget, over 9.3 billion was approved for the Ministry of Health and over 2.1 billion was assigned to the Ministry of Social and Family Development. The Ministry of Defence, which continued to be allocated the largest budget, was appropriate over 13.1 billion Singapore dollars (Ministry of Finance, 2016). More than 15% of the 2016 National budget was allocated to the Ministry of Education. Singapore typically spends around 3% of its GDP on education annually from 2010 to 2016, which is similar to its spending on national defence (Budget 2016, MOF).

2.1.2 Primary and Secondary Education

Primary education in Singapore includes six years of schooling, made compulsory by law in 2003 with the Compulsory Education Act passed by the Parliament of Singapore. The six years of compulsory education are intended to build the foundation of the students' ability in the English language, Mother Tongue and Mathematics.

Secondary education consists of 4 to 5 years of formal studies. There are 3 streams at this level of education, namely Express, Normal Academic and Normal Technical. The Express stream is a four-year programme while Normal Academic and Normal Technical are five-year and four-year programmes respectively. Students are channelled into the programmes according to their performance in the Primary School Leaving Examinations (PSLE).

Express stream normally covers two language subjects, namely English and Mother Tongue. An advanced variation of the Express stream called Special programme offers students to read Mother Tongue at a higher level. Other subjects covered in the Express programme include Humanities, the Arts, Mathematics and Sciences. Typically, students undertake the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education Ordinary Level (GCE 'O' level) examination for 7 or 8 subjects at the end of their secondary education.

The normal academic stream is a five-year programme, which for the first four years, prepares students for the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education Normal Level (GCE 'N' Level) examination in 6 to 8 subjects. These include English language, Mother Tongue, Mathematics, combined Sciences and Humanities. Typically, students who successfully completed their GCE 'N' Level examination may proceed for their fifth year in secondary education and undertake the GCE 'O' Level examination.

The normal Technical stream is also a four-year programme that prepares students for the GCE 'N' Level examination. This programme focuses on preparing students to pursue post-secondary education at the Institute of Technical Education (ITE). The subjects included in this programme are the English language, basic Mother Tongue, Computer Applications, Elements of Business Skills among others. Generally, students apply to study at the Institute of Technical Education after completing their GCE 'N' Level examination in this stream.

Most government and government-aided schools offer all three streams. While the students are channelled into the programmes based on their PSLE results, it is possible for students to change programmes according to their performance in the secondary school years. Apart from academic and technical subjects, a range of Co-Curricular Activities (CCA) is also offered in both primary and secondary schools. These generally include sports and games, uniform groups, performing arts and club and societies.

Overall, the education system in Singapore is relatively well developed despite its short history. A key feature of the landscape is the level of involvement and the extent of investment the government places on the education sector. A national education curriculum is also a key feature of the system as well as the centralised teacher training provision.

In summary, the centralisation of the education system, curriculum structure and school management demonstrated the political will of the government's involvement in education. In addition, it also provided the background for readers to appreciate the highly academic focused culture in Singapore schools and the link between national economic success and education policies. The landscape is an important factor in the study of school counselling and stakeholders' perception of the service.

2.2 THE COUNSELLING SECTOR

Counselling as a service has developed over the years since the country gained its independence. The concept of talk therapy or counselling was introduced largely as a western idea, with the early beginning of the service traced back to Christian-based organisations in the colonial as well as post-independence years. It is essential to understand the development of counselling as a practice, as a service and as a course of study in the local context. It was also the history that enlightens one on the close relationship between counselling and the social service sector. It is important to note that counselling service in schools, at its very early stages of a formal practice, was provided on a part-time or contract basis by community-based social service agencies. Therefore, a short history of the development of counselling in Singapore, discussion of its developmental phases, which interacted with the growth of counselling practice in schools is presented here.

Years before independence, many voluntary welfare organisations already existed in Singapore. They were residential homes, schools and centres for the less fortunate, often managed by missionaries or neighbourhood-based volunteers. In 1958, a number of these organisations came together and formed the Singapore Council for Social Services (SCSS). The SCSS is the predecessor of today's National Council of Social Service (NCSS), a statutory board vested with the responsibility of facilitating the provision of social services. From 1966, the Churches Counselling Centre was started. This Centre was registered as a society and renamed as Counselling and Care Centre, as it is still known today (National Council of Social Service, 2008). Counselling and Care Centre is among the pioneers, if not the first formal counselling centre in Singapore. Throughout the years, the Centre also became

a major provider of clinical training and supervision for practitioners in social services, mental health care services, private practitioners and school counsellors.

To see the development of counselling as a field of study and practice in context, one would need to take note of other developments in the social service sector since the 1970s. In 1971 the Community Probation Service was established to allow the courts to place young offenders on probation instead of incarceration. Another key development was the founding of the Students Care Service in 1976. A former school principal and some volunteers led this student-centred service. Students Care Service was among the first to focus on students as a key clientele group (National Council of Social Service, 2008). Currently, the Student Care Service is providing counselling, psychological and learning support services through its three centres across Singapore. Between 1976 and 1978, the Ang Mo Kio Family Service Centre was established. It was along this model that the rest of the current Family Service Centres sited all over the island were developed (National Council of Social Service, 2008). The 41 Family Service Centres are the main counselling service providers in the community today.

The social service sector has in many ways contributed to the development of school-based counselling services. Prior to the inclusion of full-time school counsellors in primary and secondary schools, social workers and counsellors from Family Service Centres have provided ad hoc and/or part-time on-site counselling service in schools. These activities are better known as school social work. As early as 2004, the Community Chest, the fundraising arm of the National Council of Social Service, was funding up to seven school social work programmes, which offered counselling and casework as key services.

As stated in other parts of this paper, social service agencies have been actively involved in preventive and remedial services in schools. A standardised programme among others is the Step-Up Programme. The Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (MCYS) (currently the MSF) initiated it in 2004 as a pilot programme to bring social work services into schools. It was intended to help build socio-emotional resilience in students. Individual schools would work with selected social service agencies in

developing tailor-made programmes, which suit their needs most (Ministry of Community Development, Youth & Sports, 2009). Clearly, children and adolescents' socio-emotional needs are key concerns of the MOE as well as the Ministry of Social and Family Development (MSF).

2.2.1 The Counselling Sector – Present Day

In the larger context, counselling is presently provided as a regular service in a number of settings which include hospitals, counselling centres, family service centres (FSC), social service agencies and welfare homes in Singapore. The various institutes of higher learning, as well as the courts, have their own counselling service too. Many social service agencies either are government-funded or receive government grants to operate. Hence it may be helpful to view these service providers as rendering 'public' services as far as the income source is concerned. Their services are generally within the reach of anyone in the target group. For example, patients can access counselling services at subsidised rates in hospitals, any university student can access counselling at little or no cost in universities. Furthermore, the 41 family service centres in Singapore have assigned service boundaries to ensure every citizen and permanent resident has easy access to social and counselling services.

Private practitioners are also available in Singapore. Many provide services to expatriates residing in Singapore and some practitioners are expatriates too. Another group of private providers are human resource consulting firms, which provide psychological and counselling services as part of their employee assistance programme. The counselling services provided across these sectors are largely unregulated and differ in quality, clinical orientation and cost. Communication between the private and 'public' sectors in counselling is also considered rare. However, social services, healthcare services and rehabilitation services generally interact and network at appropriate levels. School counselling service has begun to join these conversations as well.

2.2.2 The Counselling Practitioners

The providers of counselling services across Singapore are often psychologists, counsellors, social workers and youth workers. Hence when one is referred to as a counselling practitioner and maybe even as a counsellor, he

or she may be in one of the preceding professions instead. It is also significant to recognise that school counsellors often work with other counsellors, youth workers, social workers and psychologists. Further, these professions are growing in numbers in recent years. Each is seeking pathways towards regulation and standardising of their practice. Considering the close working relationship between these professions and school counsellors, developments in their regulation or standard of practice may have an impact on the growing sub-profession of school counsellors and the school counselling service. The following paragraphs are devoted to understanding these practitioners in Singapore.

Psychologists are often employed in hospitals, namely, the Institute for Mental Health (Singapore) as well as other hospitals with psychiatric wards. Psychologists are also found in the prison service and special education settings. Some psychologists are in private practice. Many psychologists are heavily involved in test administration and screening while some provide counselling and psychotherapy. As the practice of psychology is not legally regulated at the moment, the training of psychologists differs. The Singapore Psychological Society, however, operates a voluntary register of psychologists. As a result of non-mandatory regulation, some psychologists without postgraduate training are practising independently and/or without proper supervision. However, the Allied Health Professions Act was passed in 2011 which included clinical psychologists within its purview may lead to mandatory regulation in the near future.

Counsellors in Singapore face a similar situation. Without mandatory regulation, the Singapore Association for Counselling operates its own voluntary register of counsellors. Many counsellors work alongside other mental health professionals in hospitals, prison service, family service centres and other social service agencies. It is not uncommon to find practising counsellors with little more than a first degree in psychology, human services or social work.

Social workers are the main force in social services in Singapore. They are found in settings such as nursing homes, youth centres, family service centres as well as special education schools and the probation service. Medical social workers are also an important function in public hospitals here. Most

social workers are trained via an established degree programme at the National University of Singapore or the Singapore University of Social Sciences (formerly SIM University). Apart from counselling, social workers also perform outreach, community work and other social work-related activities.

In 2009, a new Social Work Accreditation and Advisory Board was formed under the purview of the Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports (now MSF). The board regulates professionals in the social service sector. Currently, it accredits two broad categories of professionals, namely social workers and social service practitioners. The latter are professionals who have trained in disciplines apart from social work but have been actively engaged in social work practice for a substantial period of time. These are individuals who are likely to be trained in counselling, psychology or other social sciences at degree or higher level.

Singapore is gaining momentum in improving work conditions, recognition as well as education and training opportunities for the mental health professionals introduced above. Many professional development and certification courses are available in different clinical orientations to equip clinicians with counselling skills and psychotherapy expertise. These may be certificate or diploma level courses which lead to certification in certain therapy, such as reality therapy and solution-focused therapy etc. In recent years, private education providers have also actively brought in relevant counselling, psychology and social work degree and postgraduate courses to help more people to enter these professions. The level of formal academic training in counselling was reported to have increased in a study by Mathews (2010).

Mandatory or government-linked registration is also seen to be making progress in these three professions. As discussed earlier in this section, an accreditation system was introduced in April 2009 for the social work profession. The accreditation system is currently not mandatory (Singapore Association of Social Workers, 2010). Psychologists could also see more regulation as the Allied Health Professions Act 2011 is gradually implemented in the coming years. The Singapore Association of Counselling is also making provision for representatives of various government Ministries on its recently established Register of Counsellors Board (Singapore Association of Counselling, 2015).

School counsellors rarely work alone and are supported by key service partners as highlighted above. Apart from teaching staff in the school, counsellors often need to work with colleagues from the community, healthcare and legal settings. Therefore, connecting with and more importantly being accepted among the professional communities is essential for school counsellors. In addition, the overall growing call for closer regulation, standardisation of service in the psychosocial and mental healthcare sector influences the practice of counselling in schools as well as the perceptions of its stakeholders.

2.3 GROWING NEED FOR COUNSELLING IN SCHOOLS

As the island-state develops, parents, as well as educators, are better informed of the psychological and emotional needs of the young. Hence, counselling services are becoming a common offering in Singapore schools. The MOE recognised the trend of increasing demand for psycho-emotional care in the school context and has attempted to provide more support for teachers. One initiative was the introduction of full-time counsellors based in schools (Ministry of Education, 2004a).

As a fast-growing service, school counselling in Singapore had seen stable development since 1999 when the MOE implemented a three-tier system in providing counselling support for all schools from primary to the junior college level. The system involves firstly a preliminary intervention by teachers, secondly counselling offered by trained teacher-counsellors and lastly, referral to school counsellors (for schools which engaged part/full-time practitioners) or external agencies such as Family Service Centres, MOE's Guidance Branch, the Institute of Mental Health's Child Guidance Clinic or other specialised service providers (Ministry of Education, 2004a).

In reference to the earlier discussion on the school social work programmes, some schools have engaged community-based agencies such as family service centres or the Students Care Service, to provide part-time school-based counselling services as well as other programmes. These agencies often work within this three-tier system.

This system had been in place prior to the recent implementation of full-time school counselling service. This service had staffed every school, junior

college and institute with a professional counsellor on a full-time basis. It was made known in 2006 that all secondary schools will have a resident trained counsellor providing counselling services by 2007 (Ministry of Education, 2006).

The development of the counselling service was driven by the demand at the school level. According to a parliamentary reply by then Acting Education Minister Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam on 5 Jan 2004 (Ministry of Education, 2004b), it was reported that there was a general increase in the demand for counselling in schools. Overall, 3.1% of the student population received counselling in 2001 while in 2003, the figure had risen to 3.3%, registering an increase of more than 6%. The number of counselling cases in primary schools remained constant for the period under review, while in secondary schools and junior colleges / pre-university institutes the caseload had increased from 4.9% to 5% and 1.6% to 3% respectively. It was also noted that the MOE started collecting data on counselling since 2001. Current counselling needs in school data were not readily available after the implementation of the full-time school counselling service. Nevertheless, it is likely that the trend of increasing demand had kept up with the increase in total population and heightened awareness on psychological health among parents and teachers.

Common behavioural and mental health issues affecting children and youths in schools include bullying, school refusal, running away behaviours, academic stress among others. The demand for more guidance and counselling service for the young was evident and the deployment of counselling service in schools was a part of the government’s strategy to address the demand. To meet the demand for counselling in schools, the MOE took the driving seat in this area and formulated plans to recruit, train, deploy and manage counsellors in all their schools from 2005. The Ministry of Education (MOE) aimed and was relatively successful in deploying at least one full-time counsellor in each school by 2008.

2.4 CHILDREN & YOUTH ISSUES AND SCHOOL COUNSELLING

According to research undertaken by ChildLine in the United Kingdom in 2003, (cited in Sullivan, 2006), children in the UK indicated that confidential counselling service was a good source of help and support for issues relating to bullying. Similar findings also surfaced in a local study in Singapore. Tan, Tan and Appadoo (2007) of the Singapore Children's Society reported that close to 25% of secondary school students were bullied in schools. Indeed, bullying in schools has become a growing problem in Singapore. The study also reported that 61.7% of students who were bullied had sought help by informing schoolmates. However, only 55.7% of those who did felt it made the situation better. In the same study, 39.8% sought help by informing their teachers and 66.1% of them felt that it improved the situation. Interestingly, 10.2% of the students who were bullied informed a counsellor or a social worker and 84.6% of those students reported feeling that it made the situation better. This study and the one conducted in the United Kingdom seem to suggest a role for school counsellor in helping children with the school bullying issue.

Bullying is not the only issue facing children and young people. Singapore had also seen a sustained increase in the number of children and adolescents seeking psychiatric treatment (Elliott, Chua & Thomas, 2002). It is difficult to know if this increase had resulted from an increase in mental health problems or if it came as a result of higher awareness and better availability of help. It remained unclear but experts seemed to agree that multiple sources of stress should be considered (Zaccheus, 2017)

In another study by Woo et al (2007), the prevalence rates of emotional and behavioural problems among children in Singapore according to the Child Behaviour Checklist (CBCL) were noted to be comparable to the West. Nevertheless, it was also found that children in Singapore reported higher rates of internalising problems as compared to externalising problems, which was similar to findings in other parts of Asia and Africa (Woo et al., 2007). This study appeared to show that the mental health prevalence in Singaporean children was quite unique when compared to the West as well as to other Asian populations.

The suicide rate among children and the young was noted to have dropped over the period from 2001 to 2007 (Khalik, 2008). Some mental health professionals had attributed the decrease to greater awareness amongst teachers and parents of children's emotional health while others noted that teachers and school counsellors were better equipped and informed about child mental health after the Ministry of Health and Ministry of Education invested more in this area (Khalik, 2008). However, the suicide rate among children and the young has risen in recent years from 2010 to 2015, with the only exception in 2014 (Samaritans of Singapore, 2016). This calls for a deeper understanding of how school counselling and other psycho-emotional services mitigate the effects of mental health and stress among our young.

On the other hand, Khong (2007) reported that the problem of youths running away was becoming a major one in Singapore. It quoted police sources that indicated about 600 cases of youth runaways per year were reported between 1999 and 2002. The author investigated the trend of youths' runaway-from–home behaviour and highlighted the importance of the role that schools play in young people's well-being. It also noted that parental expectation had an impact on performance (academic) anxiety among youths. Khong also suggested that more could be done by key adults at home as well as in schools to help youths cope with education and life challenges. It was highlighted that home-school partnerships could be improved with teachers taking on a more pro-active role in engaging youths in schools (Khong, 2007). As one may speculate, school counselling too has a role in working with youth who are at risk of runaway behaviour. Although not clearly indicated, the author had suggested counselling and guidance as one of the key preventive measures in managing the issue of youth runaways.

In another study, which focused on youths who had dropped out of schools in Singapore, interesting findings were revealed. The study collected and analysed 352 returns of self-administered questionnaires from secondary two students and a total of 54 out-of-school youths participated in its focus groups. One relevant finding of this study was that students reported finding counselling helpful and perceived counsellors as having the ability to understand them (Wong, 2006). In a recent study conducted in England on students' and staff's view of emotional health support in schools, it was noted

that on-site counsellor was considered as a source of support. The study also reported that on-site counselling support was regarded positively by staff and students in schools (Kidger, Donovan, Biddle, Campbell & Gunnell, 2009). Collectively, local studies seem to support overseas studies which suggested counselling as an appropriate service for children and young people during their schooling years.

In her book, *Safeguarding Children & Schools*, McGinnis (2008) suggested there were three key reasons for having counsellors in British schools. These include the increasing number of young people facing emotional problems and troubled students tend to perform poorly in academic work and that more individualised and focused help seemed welcome and appreciated by teachers and others in schools. These reasons were not only visible in the United Kingdom but in Singapore as well.

One could also sense the interests among parliamentarians in children and young persons' mental health in recent years. For example, in mid-2007, a Member of Parliament, Dr Lim Wee Kiak enquired on the measures that schools had in place to manage early psychosis in their population. The parliamentary reply from the then Minister of Education Mr Tharman Shanmugaratnam had included the role full-time school counsellors play in attending to the mental health concerns in students (Ministry of Education, 2007). It indicated that full-time school counsellors were provided with specialised and relevant training to recognise students with psychosis and to engage them and their parents (Ministry of Education, 2008). The trend in child mental health in recent years was likely to have quickened policy-makers' pace in incorporating mental health services, in the form of counselling, in schools. Mental health concerns in children and youths appeared to be given more attention by schools and the Ministry in the past decade.

Singapore had seen a steady increase in awareness or actual occurrence of mental health concerns in children (or a mixture of both). Schools and the Ministry of Education were also sensitised to the influence that mental and emotional difficulties have on academic performance and hence placed greater attention to these concerns in schools. Research studies conducted locally had also appealed for more provision of individualised counselling services for children and youths in schools. Apart from sharing the same three

reasons suggested by McGinnis (2008), political pressure and public demands also motivated the providence of greater access to counselling service for children and the young in Singapore.

This increased demand and supply of counselling service in schools naturally raised academic and clinical interest in this area. The current study is one such effort attempting to better understand and contribute to the future of the developing counselling service in Singapore schools and to the practice of counselling in schools more generally.

Having positioned the current study within the Singapore setting and context, the following section expands on the interests this study has on stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling. Through reviewing studies from other parts of the world, the focus of the study was informed in the process.

2.5 STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS AND SCHOOL COUNSELLING

The current job description seems to suggest that the school counsellor is expected to work with the school management in planning and implementing the counselling system in the school, provide direct counselling to students and consultations to teaching staff and parents as well as training teachers and parents on counselling-related issues. In addition, the school counsellor is also expected to devise and deliver specialised group guidance programmes for at-risk students who need help in social and emotional development (Ministry of Education, n.d.).

The role and function of counselling in schools seemed to incorporate the scope of direct clinical work, whole school programme development and implementation as well as training for others. While the description seemed to give an idea of an all-rounder, one could imagine about the juggling act needed to fulfil each element as well as the overall load of the counsellor involved. Also, the description does not represent a clear and consistent function of counselling across the schools as it left much space for imagination and for some flexibility and creativity of the persons involved. In this section, a review of relevant studies focused on the perceptions of the stakeholders on various aspects of school counselling, beginning with the role of a school counsellor.

Paisley and McMahon (2001) in their very detailed review and projection of school counselling in the United States of America, reported concerns about

school counsellors' role ambiguity amongst other challenges observed. In a study examining school counselling in Malawi during its infancy years, 20 school counsellors were surveyed and interviewed. In the study, Maluwa-Banda (1998) found role clarity to be a challenge in school counselling and guidance service in Malawi. Maluwa-Banda further suggested that the role of a school counsellor should be clarified for stakeholders including administrators and students. Role ambiguity appears to be widely reported phenomena and it generally suggests that stakeholders in the school counselling process have a differing perception of the role of school counsellors.

Turning to Scotland, Cooper, Hough and Loynd (2005) developed and conducted two independent questionnaire survey studies, the first with 71 respondents and the other with 33 respondents, on teachers' perception of counselling in schools. The researchers found that teachers had a positive view of school counselling. However, Cooper and colleagues noted that the teachers seemed to view counselling as giving advice, which suggested that the understanding of the work of school counsellors, although appreciated, was poorly understood. The questionnaire consisted of both quantitative and qualitative elements. Unfortunately, this study did not include a further qualitative follow up such as an in-depth interview, which might have surfaced more details of the misconceptions about counselling that were found. The problem of teachers, school administrators and school counsellors having different perceptions of the purpose and the process of counselling is naturally a potential barrier to an integrated guidance and counselling service. Indeed, the link between stakeholders' perceptions and the integration of counselling service in schools was one of the key impetuses for this study.

Similar lessons could be learnt from older studies as well. Murgatroyd (1977) noted that counsellors who were seemingly more administrative in their roles were considered less approachable by students, suggesting an important link between student's perception and the willingness of students to approach counselling service in schools. Maguire (1975) noted that other mental health professionals had concerns about the role of school counsellors in providing therapeutic services to 'disturbed' children. Maguire discussed the growing need for services for 'disturbed' children in the United Kingdom in the 1970s. The article highlighted that psychologists and psychiatrists were concerned that

school counsellors were undertaking the care of ‘disturbed’ children, which they were not trained for. While the author suggested that some of these concerns might have been due to some role defensiveness, the article also argued that for school counsellors to work with ‘disturbed’ children, they must be provided with the relevant training to do so. The providers of such training should also remove the notion that school counsellors only work with ‘normal’ children and that their work was preventive in nature. The perceptions of other mental health providers in the community and other settings appeared to influence their confidence in the work of school counsellors. These studies and opinions held in the 1970s when the United Kingdom school counselling service was about 10 years old, might still be of interest to those keen to understand school counselling today, particularly in Singapore where the school counselling service is in its first decade of development.

Apart from stakeholders’ perceptions, counsellors’ own perception of their role and their clientele is equally important. For example, Tartar (2001) in his questionnaire survey with 199 school counsellors and interviews with 41 school counsellors in Israel noted that counsellors tended to describe ‘types of teenagers’ in school as “drive-oriented, intellectually-oriented, group-oriented, community-oriented and isolated”. Counsellors’ perceptions of their clients naturally influence their work in one way or another. In another study conducted in Israel, an open-ended questionnaire was used to solicit the perceptions of 38 school counsellors and 38 teachers on adolescent and their problems. Similarities and differences between teachers and counsellors’ perception of student problems and methods of handling them were noted and discussed (Tatar & Bekerman, 2009). More studies like these comparing stakeholders’ perceptions would add value to the current understanding of youth issues and counselling. In a local study, Lau (2009) also discussed the roles of stakeholders such as teachers, school administrators, parents and school counsellors in managing students’ attitudes and willingness to access counselling service in schools. She reminded school counsellors that acceptance of counselling does not come with the passage of time and they have to be pro-active in engaging and helping students to overcome negative attitudes about counselling.

In another local study, Woo et al (2007) did a comparison between teachers, children and parents' reporting on children's emotional and behavioural problems. It found that parents were more aware of their children's emotional difficulties while teachers might be more likely to notice behavioural problems. Stakeholders such as teachers and parents appeared to differ in their views of the problems among children in Singapore, therefore it was not difficult to imagine that their views, as well as other stakeholders' views on mental health services such as school counselling, may also differ.

As discussed, in many parts of the world, efforts were not spared in gaining a clearer understanding of stakeholders' perspectives of school counselling. These interests evidently showed that stakeholders' perceptions were important ingredients in exploring and meeting the needs of the child and adolescent mental health in schools. The current study positioned itself to join others in filling the gaps of knowledge by exploring the perceptions of three main groups of stakeholders in school counselling, which were usually investigated separately.

2.5.1 School Counsellors

Interest in school counsellors' perceptions has a long history. Fulton (1973) had examined and compared school counsellors' perceptions and discussed the agreement and differences. It was a relatively small survey study conducted with 16 respondents. Nevertheless, it demonstrated the value of investigating school counsellors' perceptions and opinions of their job scope, work environment and the difficulties encountered among other things.

Research examining school counsellors' perceptions continued to remain a key interest of present-day scholars. A Malaysian study using questionnaire survey and interviews were conducted in the state of Perak. A total of 83 schools participated in the survey and 12 school counsellors were also interviewed. The study revealed areas for improvement in the school counselling programme, particularly in the area of whole school approach (Kok, Low, Lee & Cheah, 2011).

While investigating about school counsellors' subculture in the United States, Bunce and Willower (2001) revealed that school counsellors also reported the sporadic nature of professional contacts and the lack of

supervision in their study undertaken there. As school counsellors were often working independently in a school, physical distance posed a considerable challenge to having regular supervision and discussion of work-related difficulties with other colleagues. Therefore, school counsellors may be left poorly supported and 'isolated' from their peers or a supervisor. The same study, which was conducted with a purposeful sample of 25 participants through in-depth interviews, also revealed that the same problem extended to the lack of opportunities for on-going professional development (Bunce & Willower, 2001).

In Wales, Pattison et al (2009) conducted a comprehensive review of the school counselling service as commissioned by the Welsh Assembly Government. The study consisted of an in-depth literature review, a quantitative questionnaire survey which involved primary and secondary schools as well as the local education authorities, and interviews with a range of stakeholders including students, parents and teachers. One of the good practices that they recommended for implementation was for school counsellors to have access to appropriate clinical supervision and relevant continuing professional development. Regrettably, the sample groups did not include school leaders or administrators who could have contributed valuable input to enrich the data and consequently the findings. The inclusion of the local education authorities was encouraging but their input might have been limited as they were not involved in the qualitative stage of the study. Nevertheless, this was one of the few comprehensive studies which considered multiple stakeholder groups (individuals and organisations) and their perceptions. Examining the perspectives of multiple stakeholders is a core interest of the current study.

School counsellors' own perception of their needs, the resources available to them and the positioning of counselling in schools are important areas that deserve further exploration. Issues relating to personal well-being and professional development of school counsellors are important matters of concern for practitioners as well as other stakeholders. These issues may lead to a loss of professional identity as suggested by Bunce and Willower (2001). In which case, the quality of counselling services and the well-being of students may also be impacted. As a developing programme, there is room as well as time for improvement.

Role clarity, or more accurately the lack of it, was often cited as a key difficulty faced by school counsellors across the breadth of the review undertaken. The role of a school counsellor could be precisely defined in some schools yet could remain vague and open in others. Defining ‘what’ and ‘how’ a counsellor contributes to the overall function of the school is an essential challenge (Tatar, 1995; Maluwa-Banda, 1998; Bunce & Willower, 2001; Paisley & McMahon, 2001). Although views and opinions are expected to differ to some degree, a certain amount of role clarity among various stakeholders will help the integration of counselling service in schools.

Apart from defining the roles or tasks, which are perceived by school counsellors, it is also important to examine whether counsellors are actually carrying them out. See (2004) shared some interesting findings in her study of Malaysian school counselling services. The study examined the school counsellors’ perception of the roles and tasks they performed. It was reported that tasks that they accorded relative importance to, were not performed as frequently as they were supposed to. This demonstrated the importance of examining perceptions, not only the processes and outcome of school counselling.

Bunce and Willower (2001) also highlighted the need to understand the relationships between teachers, counsellors and administrators in the school context. The same research discussed some implications including counsellors’ relationship with their teaching colleagues and the distance kept between them due to the lack of understanding of the counselling role and process.

A qualitative study in the United Kingdom, examining the status of counselling’s integration in schools, conducted in-depth interviews with 6 school counsellors and found that the power relationship between the school counsellor and the school administrator could be relatively influential in the counsellors’ sense of agency and their well-being (Harris, 2009). This further emphasised the need to expand our understanding of not only the counsellors’ perception of relationships between school professionals but those held by other stakeholders as well. The findings from this qualitative study encouraged more study in this area to expand our understanding of the school counsellors’ perspectives.

On the clinical front, professional counsellors typically adopt theoretical approaches they are most comfortable with and skilled in for their practice. School counsellors' perception of preferred clinical approaches is an interesting area of concern. Antonouris's study in Britain (1976) highlighted that school counsellors strongly supported the Rogerian and eclectic approaches and were less likely to use psychoanalytic and behavioural approaches. Such choices were likely to be influenced by school counsellors' perception of the characteristics and needs of the clientele groups in schools. Platts and Williamson (2000), on the other hand, highlighted the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) in school-based counselling. It was argued that the theoretical underpinnings of CBT and its structured nature harmonised with the culture of schools. School counsellors' input on the issues as asserted above would interest many with a stake in school counselling.

Additionally, counsellors' perceptions of the clientele groups that they work with in schools were also found to influence their practice. According to Tatar (2001), school counsellors seemed to describe five key types of teenagers, namely drive-oriented, intellectual-oriented, group-oriented, community-oriented and isolated. These perceptions of the adolescents they work with could affect their expectations and the focus of their work with them. It is also worth noting that the needs of the young are constantly changing, so are school counsellors' perceptions of them as individuals. In the same vein, school counsellors' perception of persons with disabilities is another area, which had attracted some research interest. One study, which was conducted in the United Kingdom, used a focus group format to solicit the views of 25 counsellors and trainee counsellors. The study advocated raising awareness of disabilities in counsellor training programmes (Parkinson, 2006). Hence, school counsellors' perceptions of presenting problems, their clientele groups as well as the overall practice environment may influence their choice of theoretical and therapeutic approach.

The idea of comparing school counsellors' views and perceptions with their colleagues in schools was mooted in various earlier studies. For example, Tatar and Bekerman (2009) conducted a study in Israeli senior high schools to examine teachers and school counsellors' attribution of students' problems. They noted that teachers and school counsellors' perceptions differed to some

degree. Teachers were noted to be more likely than counsellors to attribute students' problems to 'school and wider context'. Nevertheless, both teachers and school counsellors seemed more likely to concur on the means for dealing with students' problems. To this end, counsellors' perceptions of the clientele groups and their characteristics were best viewed alongside other stakeholders' perceptions. This would suggest implications for collaboration between teachers and counsellors in schools.

Also, Harris (2009) found in her study conducted in the United Kingdom that school counsellors experienced tension and dilemmas while working in schools. These included some misconceptions of counselling and the role of counsellors. Some felt an expectation for school counsellors to 'fix' the child that they were referred with. It was likely that the differing perceptions in presenting problems discussed above could have contributed to these difficulties and tensions between teachers and counsellors.

These findings gathered the perceptions of school counsellors on the position, functions and even level of acceptance of counselling in schools from a practitioners' angle. Informed by the studies discussed, the current study had strived to find the voice of the school counsellors in Singapore and to understand their perspectives and views of various clinical and contextual issues in counselling practice in schools. Views of other stakeholders were important for comparison to enhance our understanding of the overall programme and development as discussed in preceding paragraphs. The current study also considered two other groups of stakeholders, namely teachers and community counsellors. The following sections will elaborate on a literature review of the current and past studies conducted in examining the perceptions of these two groups.

2.5.2 Community-based Counsellors

As illustrated in the earlier paragraphs, school counsellors are a part of a larger professional community of mental health practitioners that includes psychologists, community workers, counsellors and social workers. In Singapore, school counsellors often work closely with the Child Guidance Clinic of the Institute of Mental Health, the Guidance Branch of the MOE and the Child Protection Unit at the MSF. As highlighted in studies by Bunce and Willower

(2001) as well as McMahon and Patton (2001), external networks of peers and other allied professionals are key systems that school counsellors naturally approach and rely on for support. It is therefore not surprising that these stakeholders' perceptions are of high importance to school counsellors and the counselling service in schools.

While working with other mental health workers beyond the schools, counsellors may face issues pertaining to the definition of their professional roles and the management of their professional boundaries. According to Maguire (1975), other mental health professionals had expressed concerns about school counsellors providing therapeutic help to 'disturbed' children in the United Kingdom. It was reasoned that a lack of proper training reduced the confidence that other professionals had of school counsellors to provide therapeutic services for this group of children. Although the training of school counsellors had improved markedly over past decades, this negative perception may still affect some states or countries where school counselling services are in the early stages of operation. Singapore may be a developed country but the reality is that full-time school counsellors and the school counselling programme are relatively new to many community counsellors, social workers as well as psychologists and psychiatrists. Lau (2009) went to the extent to describe Singapore's current state of affairs in school counselling as comparable to that of the United States of America some 20 years ago. She suggested that the research topics on the subject of school counselling from the 1960s to 1990s in the United States of America would be most suitable for application in present-day Singapore. While this study rejects the notion of reverting to old models, it centralised its interest in stakeholders' including community counsellors' perception about school counselling as it is essential to the development of a more holistic overview of the counselling service in schools today.

Counselling practice operating within schools has to be responsive to changes not only limited to within the schools but also in society at large and the communities and regions in which they operate. These changes influence the nature of presenting problems, clients (students and parents), as well as support networks, thus posing significant challenges to school counsellors (Low, 2009). As a densely populated city-state, schools are often well

positioned in the neighbourhoods. Schools in Singapore are usually surrounded by residential housing estates. School counselling programme often works in tandem with the grassroots or voluntary welfare organizations as they could often provide practical help to families in the neighbourhoods. Perceptions of counsellors in these agencies are important, as close collaboration is essential for seamless service delivery on both ends. Shaw (2003) in her detailed research initiated by the National Children's Bureau on the Department of Education and Skills' School Plus Team Pilot project in the United Kingdom described the emphasis on seamless delivery of services for children through partnerships between schools, voluntary organisations, business and parents.

Indeed, from time to time, school counsellors may be required to interact beyond the school with other sub-systems such as the legal and healthcare systems (Low, 2009). This is especially so when students or clients are involved in crimes, possessed 'at risk' behaviours or required mental health assistance. As illustrated, school counselling interacts with many systems and professionals outside the school. Their perceptions and opinions about the school counselling practice and process are of interest to anyone concerned about integrating this service not only in schools but also in the communities. Many studies have examined students', school counsellors', teachers' and education administrators' perceptions of school counselling services (Tatar,1995, Maluwa-Banda,1998; Bunce & Willower, 2001; Paisley & McMahon, 2001; Clark & Amatea, 2004; Fox & Butler, 2007; Jenkins & Polat, 2006; Quinn & Chan, 2009; and Alghamdi & Riddick, 2011). Unfortunately, few local research focuses on the perceptions of community counsellors on school counselling. Overseas research was relatively dated and the context was less similar to that of modern Singapore. The current study included this important group of stakeholder in the hope to take a small step in filling this knowledge gap both locally and globally.

2.5.3 Teachers

One of the most important groups of stakeholder in the school counselling process is the teacher. Their perceptions of school counselling and school counsellors are of considerable importance. Teachers' perceptions were often influential to students, parents and principals (Clark & Amatea, 2004). School

counsellors often gained access to clients through referrals made by teachers, so their attitudes towards counselling in schools should not be underestimated. The study of teachers' perceptions of counselling and related services in schools had been undertaken in many forms in other countries, especially in the West (Wolstenholme & Kolvin, 1980; Rosemary & Graham, 2003; and Cooper, et al., 2005). They had highlighted the importance of teachers' acceptance of counselling or support services in the school context.

According to Polat and Jenkins' (2005) study in England and Wales, the local education authorities differed in the qualification requirements for school counsellors they employed as well as the service evaluation methods used in the schools. Accordingly, the data gathered from their study indicated differing perceptions of counselling among the education professionals concerned. Similarly, Alghamdi and Riddick (2011) found in their study in Saudi Arabia that principals differed among themselves in their view of the role of counsellors in schools.

Elsewhere in Hong Kong, Chan (2005) found in his sample that teachers involved in guidance work took a more humanistic view as compared to those who were not so involved. The study also noted that teachers believed that a healthy personality (of the counsellor) was a major factor in delivering good quality counselling. Apart from qualifications of school counsellors, it appeared that the personal qualities of the professional concerned were also considered in teachers' perception of school counselling. It also suggested that teachers might differ among themselves in their perception of school counselling according to their role in the school. This is an interesting area to note in the current study as Singapore and Hong Kong share some similarities in their education systems.

In another effort to explore teachers' attitudes, Best, Jarvis, Oddy, and Ribbins (1981) indicated that teachers preferred counsellors who were familiar with the school and the education system. They also highlighted the significance of teachers' level of acceptance of counsellors in schools. Furthermore, Cooper et al. (2005) found that a majority of the teachers in Scotland they studied held positive attitudes towards school counselling, while a small minority did not. In the same study, some concerns also surfaced, such as teachers' conception that counselling was merely advice giving and their

anxiety that counselling might not be able to integrate into the overall guidance arrangement in schools.

In a national study carried out in the United States of American on teachers' perceptions of the professional school counsellor's role, Reiner, Colbert and Perusse (2009) found that teachers agreed with most (13 out of 16) of the appropriate counselling responsibilities as defined by the American School Counselling Association (ASCA). Interestingly, the respondents also indicated agreement only to 5 out of 12 inappropriate activities to be engaged by school counsellors as defined by ASCA. This appeared to show that teachers' perceptions of the role and tasks of a school counsellor might differ from those laid down by a professional school counselling association. This seemed to suggest that fundamental differences exist between the counselling and teaching professions' perspectives to guidance and counselling work in schools.

Teachers' perception of the outcome of school-based counselling is equally important. For example, in the United Kingdom, teachers across four studies as noted by Cooper (2009) seemed to have rated school-based counselling positively. In the same article, qualitative data from seven studies also seemed to suggest the five factors why teachers found school-based counselling helpful. These included the neutrality of the counsellor, confidentiality, easier access to counselling services, the expertise of the counsellor and the time he or she could spare to attend to an individual student as compared to any pastoral care teacher (Cooper, 2009). Four areas for improvement were also highlighted in the study. They were greater availability, greater awareness of the service, better communication between counsellor and pastoral care staff, and greater range of activities that a school counsellor should be involved in (Cooper, 2009). The findings helped illustrate that teachers' perceptions of the outcome, demand and the helpfulness of school counselling in the United Kingdom were relatively positive. Such studies helped to demonstrate the relevance of counselling services in schools through the perceptions of the key stakeholders. Hence stakeholders' perceptions are helpful in determining the positioning of the service, which is critical for integrating counselling and guidance work in schools.

Examining the perceptions of the stakeholders including teachers is a challenge as it is clear that many sub-areas of interest exist. Studies often concerned themselves with specific areas such as outcome, process or conception of counselling or a combination of these areas. For the purpose of this study, the focus remained largely on the perceptions of school counselling.

Teachers, being the largest group of professionals in schools, are important actors in shaping the guidance and counselling landscape in their institutions. Their acceptance of school-based counselling is critical for the development of a sustainable counselling service that is beneficial to the students. School counsellors sometimes face challenges in managing teachers' perceptions and expectations in order to establish a balanced and collaborative relationship with them. At times, misconceptions of the counselling process among teachers create a number of difficulties in referrals, classroom-based interventions or simply professional interaction between the teacher and the counsellor (Harris, 2009).

As discussed above, teachers' perceptions of a wide range of school-related issues, including school counselling, had been well-researched and continue to attract academic interest. However, the examination of teacher's perception of school counselling locally was absent. The inclusion of teachers in the current study enabled the study to be relevant and connect with others locally as well as overseas. This study aimed to gain deeper insights into teachers' perceptions on a number of key areas which would be viewed alongside other stakeholders. This is unique as no similar study has been conducted locally before.

As established in this section, stakeholders such as teachers, school and community counsellors' perceptions of the role, positioning and the scope of counselling in schools are diverse. While relationship issues between counsellors and teachers as well as the outcome and expectations of others on counselling in schools were well established, one may also speculate those stakeholders' perceptions influence referral trends, collaborations and information exchange in the school counselling process. These factors, therefore, were positioned to govern the integration of counselling service in schools, especially so in the early stages of development such as the case in Singapore.

2.6 STAKEHOLDERS NOT INCLUDED IN THE CURRENT STUDY

There are many stakeholders in the school counselling process. They include school administrators, principals, education policymakers and teacher-educators, parents, amongst others. Their perceptions were also considered but not eventually included to ensure that the focus remained in a clinical context, consisting of people who work closely with the students in the school counselling process. This section briefly illustrates the background for the decision to exclude three key groups of stakeholders from this study. They are students, parents and school administrators.

2.6.1 Students

Students are the main service users. Many types of research had been conducted to examine the perceptions of this important group. Some of these studies looked into the perceptions and their causes while others examined the impact of these perceptions among students.

Students' perceptions shape their expectations of the school counselling service in many ways. Back in 1977, Murgatroyd shared his findings that students considered school counsellors to be less approachable if they were seen in more administrative and management roles. Siann, Drapera and Cosford (1982) also found that students who perceived guidance staff as more approachable increased their tendency to seek help when in need. These studies suggested a close linkage between students' perception of the role of the school counsellor and that of their willingness to see a school counsellor. More recently, Fox and Butler (2007) also found that among other things, familiarity with the school counsellor was essential to encourage students to use school counselling services. Hence students' perception of the school counsellor is undeniably important in encouraging the use of counselling services.

Quinn and Chan (2009) reported in their research on students' preferences on school counselling in the UK that students generally preferred a counsellor to be in their schools as opposed to outside the school. A clear preference for female counsellors was also noted in the study, especially for female students. This quantitative study surveyed 589 students from 4 schools in Northern Ireland was an attempt to replicate Cooper's 2006 study in

Scotland. In that study, Cooper (2006) found similar responses from his sample schools. Chan and Quinn (2009) conducted another study examining students' preference on ethnic background and gender of school counsellors. Although these studies were localised and relatively limited by geographical regions, they suggested that students' perceptions and preferences in school counselling attracted a good amount of meaningful research interest in the UK.

Elsewhere in Australia, Glasheen and Campbell (2009) reported in their study that students' perceptions of counselling prevented male students from seeking help at the school counselling service. As a recommended measure, they suggested the use of the Internet in the form of online counselling to reach out to these students.

Clearly, students' perception of the school counselling process, the attributes of the counsellors, the ethnic or even gender of the counsellors could influence their willingness to seek help. It is therefore essential for school administrators, teachers and counsellor to effectively manage students' perceptions in order to encourage them to use counselling services.

The importance of the perceptions and opinions of students cannot be understated. Nevertheless, as noted in the studies discussed above, it would be wise to study students' perception in a research project dedicated to this sample group alone as it entails largely different sub-areas of interest and it would also require separate data gathering tools such as a different questionnaire from those used for teachers and counsellors. For example, in Cooper (2006), Quinn and Chan (2009) and Lau (2009) a tailored questionnaire was developed or modified for the purpose of collecting data from students. Moreover, access could be naturally more difficult in the Singapore system. Singapore as discussed in Chapter 2, organised its schools in a more centralised manner. Accessing students in the schools would require direct approval by the Ministry of Education, which would have been difficult, for an investigator independent from both the Ministry and the National Institute of Education.

Fortunately, such a study was conducted recently in Singapore. The study examined the attitudes toward school counselling amongst 578 students in 6 secondary schools, using a specially modified questionnaire survey. The study found that the sources of students' view on school counselling could be

categorised as internal and external. Internal sources refer to attitudes or personal beliefs that derive from within the person while external sources are issues such as concerns for others' perceptions or views (Lau, 2009). The author also found that students' external sources of attitudes toward school counselling were more positive than those of the internal sources. This would suggest that students hold some negative beliefs about the school counselling process.

One particular concern as reported in the study was that of confidentiality. It appeared that students were not convinced of the level of confidentiality upheld in the school counselling service. The data suggested that if school counselling service had been deployed in a school for a longer duration, students' attitudes towards counselling were likely to be more negative. It appeared that students had a relatively poor attitude towards the full-time school counselling programme (Lau, 2009). This was an insightful study as it had fulfilled a large part of current study's researcher's curiosity with regard to the views of the students in the Singapore context, at this current stage of implementation of the school counselling programme. It is important to consider the lack of qualitative component and the relatively limited reach of this important study. Nevertheless, this study is a constant point of reference for the current research.

2.6.2 Parents

Parents form another important group when considering the school counselling process. In recent years, parents seemed to be more active, more vocal and maybe even demanding in their expectations of the school services. These can be observed in newspaper articles, letters to newspapers as well as parliamentary debates.

As we examine the perceptions of parents, it is advisable to consider some contextual elements. Of special importance are some key developments in the changing profile of parents and students we see in schools. As observed in recent years, Singapore has received its fair share of new migrants, particularly from China, India, Europe and America. As Singapore develops itself into a regional hub for finance, education, healthcare etc, there has been an ongoing call to embrace migrants from all over the world. These migrants

come as families and sometimes clusters of families to Singapore. Not surprisingly, many become students in local schools and their parents, therefore, contributed to shaping the overall profile of parents. The increased mobility among parents was noted as an impact of globalization to the counselling field in the discussion of globalization and counselling (Lorelle, Byrd & Crockett, 2012).

Naturally, such changes in student and consequently parental population impact school processes and services. As observed in the United States, the increasingly diverse student population was one of the challenges faced by school counsellors (Paisley & McMahon, 2001). They encouraged better cross-cultural preparation to help school counsellors in meeting the needs of the students in their schools. With more people moving within and between countries, school counsellors need to be more culturally sensitive and be skilled in managing cross cultural barriers in working with students and families. Lairio and Nissila (2002), in their study conducted in Finland, suggested that language barriers, as well as cultural differences, might pose major challenges for school counsellors. Pottinger and Brown (2008) further highlighted the need for children who moved with their parents as well as those who remained behind in their home country. They further recommended a framework for school counsellors working with this special population. Singapore shares many of the characteristics of the changing parental and children's profiles in schools and could surely borrow a leaf from the above efforts and understand its changing faces of the parents in its schools.

However, little research was done to examine overall parental perceptions of counselling in schools here. Although the current study did not extend to reach this important group of stakeholders, areas concerning school counsellors' work with parents were included. Nevertheless, there remains a great potential in conducting a separate study examining the parents' perceptions of school counselling in relation to home-school partnership in the future.

2.6.3 School Leaders, Administrators & Principals

Last but not least, it is also worthwhile to consider the perceptions of school leaders, administrators and principals. Their perceptions generated some

academic interests overseas. In an effort to gather and compare school counsellors, counsellors-in-training and principals' perception of the role of the school counsellor in rural schools in United States, Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Midle, Leitner and Skelton (2006) found that the three groups of respondents had different perceptions of how much time school counsellors spent as well as how much time they ought to spend on a number of school counselling duties.

In an earlier quantitative study examining principals and school counsellors' perceptions on the ideal distribution of time, the results from 210 and 207 returns received from school counsellors and principals respectively had appeared congruent. It reported that both school counsellors and principals like to see the amount of time spent on actual counselling to increase (Partin, 1990). Both studies encouraged future research in the area of stakeholders' current perceptions and ideals about school counselling. This significant group of stakeholders' perceptions should be considered alongside those of policy-makers and possibly even counsellors and teacher educators.

The research design and the experience in soliciting data and findings consolidated during the current study might be useful for extending a similar research to include the perceptions of the above groups of stakeholders in the future.

2.7 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

This chapter serves as an important backdrop for the study. It has provided a clear display of the financial might of the Ministry as well as the resources it can call upon to support its programmes, including school counselling. Learning about the organisational structure and operating system, which the schools are managed and supervised under, had helped to put school counselling in the context. The positions or state of the system often influenced individuals' perspectives.

School counselling in Singapore cannot be studied without understanding the roots of counselling in this small island-state. The social services had employed professional and clinical counselling many years before it was widely available in schools. School counselling's roots could also be traced to the close collaboration between schools and social service providers

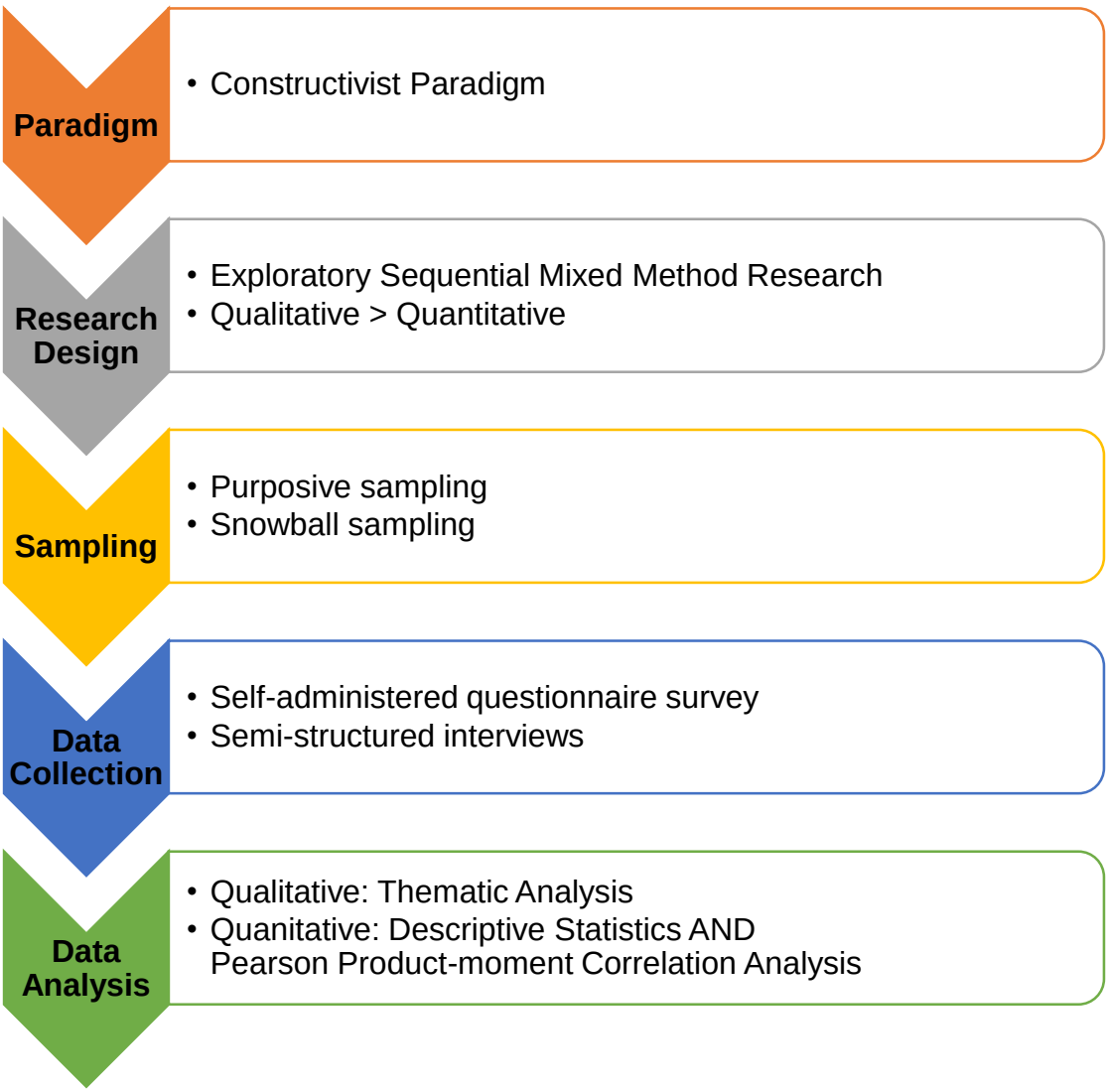
in the community for many years. It is indeed helpful to see how this relationship had started and is continuing to flourish even as the Education sector has taken more ownership over school-based counselling. This study also examines the perception of community-based counsellors on school counselling service alongside those of teachers and school counsellors. In doing so, the findings may contribute to the reshape or rejuvenate of the nature of the partnership between schools and community agencies.

A brief discussion on the perceptions of those stakeholders which were not included in this study added to extend reader's understanding of the overall context for the current study which focuses on the key professionals involved in the counselling processes in schools.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the philosophical underpinning, research approach and methods adopted in this study. This first section of the chapter introduced the philosophical underpinning of the approach and methods adopted. This is followed by the discussion of methods used in prior research in the area of school counselling. A further illustration of how the mixed method research was fit-for-purpose for the current study was also included. Finally, the chapter introduced briefly the sampling, data collection and treatment aspects of the study. Figure 3.1 illustrates this study's research approach and methods.

Figure 3.1 Research Approach & Methods



As there were other studies conducted internationally with findings suggesting some common concerns in school counselling (Maluwa-Banda, 1998; Bunce & Willower, 2001; Hewitt & Wheeler, 2004; and Cooper, et al.,

2005), an inductive approach was deployed in this study to examine if these concerns were observed in Singapore too. Nevertheless, as Bryman (2004) had discussed, the inductive and deductive nature of a study is hardly a clearly delineated affair.

When considering the emic and etic discussions in modern day psychology (Helfrich, 1999), the entire study (phase one & two) could not be fitted neatly in either. The study originates from an emic position as it strived to better understand the Singapore-specific school counselling situation but it also extended towards the etic realm by engaging in comparison with the school counselling conditions and perceptions elsewhere in hope to confirm any observation that may be universal. As the study explored a global social phenomenon namely, school counselling and used a range of studies as a foundation and also as a point for comparison, the focus was primarily on understanding the social experience from the perspectives of the actors in this area in Singapore. Hence in the most fundamental sense, emic orientation and relevant approaches were preferred.

Accordingly, the study was guided by Social Constructivism. Constructivism is defined in Bryman (2004, p. 17) as “an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meanings are continually being accomplished by social actors. It implies that social phenomenon and categories are not only produced through social interaction but that they are in a constant state of revision”.

As Heraclitus (540 BC - 480 BC) described it, ‘you could not step twice into the same river; for other waters are ever flowing on to you’. Appreciating the continually evolving nature of the field that the current study is engaged in, was an important factor in its choice of methods and it set the philosophical foundations for the study. Kincheloe (2003, p. 49) further explained that “in contrast to rationalism, constructivism maintains that human thought cannot be meaningfully separated from human feeling and action. Knowledge, constructivists assert, is constrained by the structure and function of the mind and can thus be known only indirectly. The knower and known are Siamese twins connected at the point of perception”. Similarly, the constructivist paradigm, as Denzin and Lincoln (2008) have described, “assumes a relativist ontology (there are multiple realities), a subjectivist epistemology (knower and

respondent co-create understandings), and a naturalistic (in the natural world) set of methodological procedures" (p. 32). Accepting these insightful interpretations of constructivism, the researcher sought to design, carry out and interpret the study taking into consideration the dynamic nature of the process of co-creating of meanings between actors in the ever-changing school counselling context.

The belief that the actors construct social realities and that these realities are inseparable from human feelings and thoughts is significant in this study not simply because it draws from a constructivism paradigm. One would find it hard to disagree that this is also a core belief in most counselling approaches. Therefore, the researcher finds constructivism especially fitting in examining the perceptions of school counselling. The stakeholders including teachers and counsellors were the social actors and their human feelings and thoughts are invaluable for developing a deeper understanding of counselling in schools.

Being mindful of the influence the researcher may have brought about in this study, especially when one considers the almost insider position of the researcher (as discussed in Chapter one), it is important to consider his ontological orientation and its impact on the methods adopted. The researcher was however relieved to note that it is not unusual for the researcher's ontological inclination to guide the research design. For example, researchers who are more inclined towards quantitative methods reject the idea of post-modernism. Ruscio (2006) in *Critical thinking in Psychology* described post-modernism as 'faulty logic'. On the other hand, Kincheloe (2003) believed strongly that teaching and other school activities were highly dynamic and complex in nature, making them difficult for reductionistic investigation and measure. This is increasingly apparent in this era of rapid change. He encouraged qualitative inquiry for teachers and others researching in education. More generally in the realm of social research, Bryman (2004) also agreed that the formulation of research questions and the manner in which research is carried out is often influenced by the ontological assumptions of the researcher.

In the current study, the researcher's belief in relativist ontology led the research to examine the realities of the different stakeholders, and the research methods incorporated the act of co-creating meanings or understandings

between the participants and the researcher through interviews in phase one of the study. The following sections further illustrate the research design.

3.1 MIXED METHODS RESEARCH DESIGN

The current study, as an educational and social research endeavour, meant that it had to be engaged in the active debate of the quantitative-qualitative divide. It is indeed a global debate which is not strictly influenced only by education and social scientists but governmental and other political forces as well (Luttrell, 2005; and Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). While neither a qualitative nor quantitative approach only, could fully describe the current study, the overall composite or profile of this research's foundation could be considered as largely qualitative. A key impetus to align with a qualitative perspective and methodology was the ecological or external validity that it provides which is invaluable for this study. The strength in external validity is well established and well argued (Howe, 2004). It also serves the exploratory nature of the enquiry.

However, it was simply not complete to describe the current research in the light of qualitative lens as it incorporated an important element of quantitative research to conclude the response to the research question for this study. This resulted in the methodologically more correct label of 'mixed method research'. Interestingly, this definition was a key piece of the debate of the qualitative-quantitative divide in education and social research. Many had claimed that mixed method research is simply an annexing of qualitative work by quantitative driven research and further noted the disregarding of the unique strengths and functions of the qualitative methodologies (Howe, 2004; Luttrell, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln 2008; and Hesse-Biber, 2010). To better appreciate the quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research in the context of the current study, a short review of the research methods deployed in school counselling related studies was conducted and presented in the following paragraphs.

3.1.1 Review of research methods in similar studies

Studies on perceptions and opinions are not new in social research. In the area of counselling and education, many studies have examined the perceptions of teachers, counsellors, parents and students (Maluwa-Banda, 1998; Paisley & McMahon, 2001; Tartar, 2001; Cooper et al, 2005; and Flitton & Buckroyd,

2005). Quantitative methods such as the use of questionnaire surveys or validated instruments were well engaged by researchers in education, counselling and psychology (Wolstenholme & Kolvin, 1980; Partin, 1993; Brinson & Saeed Al-amri, 2005; Cooper et al, 2005; Lazovsky & Shimoni, 2006; and Lau 2009).

On the other hand, the value of qualitative research methods was also affirmed by social scientists (Rustin, 2001; and Kincheloe, 2003). Qualitative inquiry in school counselling often takes the form of interviews (Bunce & Willower, 2001; Jordans, Keen, Pradhan & Tol, 2007; Leuwerke & Shi, 2010; and Van Schalkwyk & Sit, 2013).

Yet some researchers adopted the mixed method option (Maluwa-Banda, 1998; Hui, 2002; and Flitton & Buckroyd, 2005). An example of such a study was Maluwa-Banda's (1998) exploratory research examining school counselling in Malawi by deploying a semi-structured questionnaire survey, which was followed up with oral interviews with 20 school counsellors. In Hong Kong, a study explored teachers' view on whole school approach to guidance by engaging 30 teachers in individual interviews and surveying over 800 teachers (Hui, 2002). In Flitton and Buckroyd's (2005) study, which examined the perception of teachers, teaching assistants and counsellors, the effort to engage both quantitative and qualitative methods saw the deployment of a validated instrument as well as semi-structured interviews during the study.

In doing so, the researchers harnessed the strength of qualitative approach in being flexible to reach highly valued sample groups and increased validity of their findings while tapping on the strength of quantitative approach in being able to generalise the findings to some degree. In addition, the use of mixed method research also enabled the researchers to triangulate their data to better interpret and explained their findings.

3.1.2 Mixed methods design and Constructivist approach

While mixed method research is often associated with the pragmatism paradigm (Gray, 2013), mixed method or even quantitative approach are at times, deployed within a constructivist paradigm. Mackenzie & Knipe (2006) explained this clearly:

> "The constructivist researcher is most likely to rely on qualitative data collection methods and analysis or a combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed methods). Quantitative data may be utilised in a way, which supports or expands upon qualitative data and effectively deepens the description."

Indeed, a the quantitative method was adopted in phase two of this study as a means to thickens the description and to determine the extent of the findings uncovered by qualitative methods in phase one. The current study harnessed mixed method approach's key function in triangulating findings from phase one (qualitative data) with those from phase two (quantitative data). This process deepens the insights uncovered and broaden the context surrounding these insights. The mixed method approach also strengthens the validity of the findings of this study.

3.2. MIXED METHODS AND THE CURRENT STUDY

The mixed method was adopted and for the purposes of the study is defined as:

> "….the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts or language into a single study." (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, pg. 17).

Collins, Onwuegbuzie, and Sutton (2006) suggested that mixed method consists of thirteen different steps. The following section examines the first three steps, namely (a) the mixed goal of the study, (b) the formulation of the mixed research objectives and (c) the rationale for the study.

The current research project is both an exploratory study and a cross-sectional study as it examined the views of different groups of stakeholders in the school counselling process. The research goal is three-fold; (a) to map the historical development of school counselling in Singapore; (b) to compare stakeholders' views of the current and ideal situation; and (c) to contribute to the global knowledge base and debate in the area of school counselling. According to the five standard research objectives proposed by Collins, et al. (2006), the current study included two of the five, they were namely (a)

Exploration and (b) Description. This study explored the role, functions, processes and ideals of school counselling through the eyes of its stakeholders. At the same time, it described the differing views that various stakeholders could hold of the situation, as a result of their understanding of the policies and involvement in the system. Hence the goals and objectives of the current study are clearly “mixed” in nature.

3.2.1 Adopting an Exploratory Sequential Mixed Methods design

The overall study addresses stakeholders’ perceptions of school counselling. The purpose of this exploratory sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Clark, 2011) was to first qualitatively explore with a small sample and then determine if the qualitative findings triangulate and generalize to a larger sample. The first phase of the study was a qualitative exploration of various stakeholder groups’ perceptions in which interview data were collected from teachers, school and community-based counsellors inside and outside schools in Singapore (Low, 2014; 2015a, and 2015b). As alluded to earlier, qualitative methods such as interviews yield more conceptualised data and were used in other similar studies (Bunce & Willower, 2001; Jordans, et al., 2007; and Leuwerke & Shi, 2010).

Thematic analysis was deployed in the treatment of the interview data collected in the current study. Treatment of the qualitative data resembled closely to that recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). The important principle of ‘reaching saturation’ was adopted in guiding the collection and the analysis of data. The researcher was attentive in detecting the saturation of themes within each of the stakeholder groups. Having qualitative interviews with a good number of participants from each group of stakeholders offered this project the depth that might otherwise be overlooked. Flitton and Buckroyd (2006) deployed semi-structured interviews in their study of person-centred therapies for children with learning disabilities in the United Kingdom with the intention to encourage narrative materials in mind. Bryman (2004) also noted that qualitative interviews would give the researcher (or the interviewer) flexibility to probe while allowing interviewees room to express their points of view and in return, such exchanges would reap rich and detailed data. Similarly, semi-structured interviews were used in this study to take into account the rich

data surrounding the area of school counselling. In this vein, the researcher recognised that the use of a qualitative approach focused on the study of particularities. Consequently, this method alone could limit the generalisability of the findings of this study.

From this initial exploration, the qualitative findings were used to develop quantitative measures that were administered to a larger group of respondents who were community-based counsellors in phase two. In this quantitative phase, survey data was collected from community-based counsellors working in family service centres and counselling centres. The purpose of this survey was to understand whether the differences and similarities in perceptions found during the qualitative phase are widely held among community-based counsellors.

3.2.2 Survey and Analysis

The survey used a specially designed questionnaire for community-based counsellors. This was to solicit opinions and perceptions of the school counselling service and determine what aspects, if any, correlate. As discussed earlier, the questionnaire survey was used in many related studies (Wolstenholme & Kolvin, 1980; Partin, 1993; Brinson & Saeed Al-amri, 2005; Cooper, et al., 2005; Lazovsky & Shimoni, 2006; Lau, 2009; and Smith & Ng,2009).

The current study's self-administered survey included Likert Scale questions and was delivered online. A pilot of the questionnaire was administered prior to the deployment of the full survey. Relevant adjustments were made resulting from the pilot survey which facilitated a smoother data collection process during the full survey.

Throughout this study, the term 'community-based counsellor' is used to refer specifically to a counselling practitioner working in a Family Service Centre (FSC) or comparable agencies which are expected to work closely with counsellors in schools. The sample size was 90 counselling practitioners. They were reached through informal contacts. As per snowball sampling or chain-sampling method (Penrod, Preston, Cain, & Starks, 2003), respondents were encouraged to link the researcher to other potential respondents. This reflects a purposive sampling strategy undertaken to reach the respondents.

Descriptive statistics were generated to provide an overview of data collected. The data were analysed using Pearson Product-moment Correlation Analysis to uncover any underlying relationship among the community-based counsellors' perceptions and in determining the reliability of the measurement instrument.

3.3 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

The use of semi-structured interviews combined with surveys was an attempt to achieve both depth and breadth in data collection. The mixed method was adopted to harness the qualities of the two methods and offer a holistic picture of the stakeholders’ perceptions. Adopting both approaches also enhanced the validity and reliability of the findings. The following chapters describe in detail both the qualitative and quantitative phases of the research study.

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CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS)

This chapter reports on the findings derived from phase one of the study. Nineteen (19) semi-structured interviews were conducted and data collected were examined in their respective stakeholder groups prior to comparing across the groups. This resulted in three distinct parts in phase one of the study, one devoted to examine and report on each stakeholder group interviewed, namely Teachers, School and Community-based counsellors. In addition, a consolidated view was created by comparing the stakeholders' perceptions across groups.

Consequently, the researcher produced four separate journal papers addressing each of these areas. Three of which were duly published in 2014 and 2015, one is currently under review. The following paragraphs will briefly report and discuss the participants' profile and analysis method deployed in the studies. Further, in the chapter, a brief summary aligned to the respective research questions will be presented for each study and the corresponding journal papers

4.1 PHASE ONE: SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

Thematic analysis was deployed to draw meanings from the data generated in the interviews with stakeholders. Thematic analysis was an important tool to access the meanings and real-world experiences of the interview participants who were the real 'experts' of the school counselling situation in Singapore. The data collected was given adequate respect and consideration by the use of the thematic analysis. The researcher's involvement contributed to the meaning-making during the interview process. Qualitative interviews acknowledge the presence and involvement of the researcher in the whole research process, which is also considered interactive in nature (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). This was in line with the constructivist underpinning of this study. The steps taken in examination of the qualitative data followed closely to those suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Table 4.1 **Number of Participants & Mean Years in service**	**Number of Participants**	**Mean Number of Years in service**
Teachers	6	7.3 Years
School Counsellors	7	1.1 Years
Community-based Counsellors	6	8.4 Years
Total	19	5.4 Years

4.1.1 Participants

Teachers, School Counsellors and Community-based counsellors formed the participants for the interviews. The stakeholder group, which had been in their roles for the longest in terms of Mean years, was the community-based counsellors. As shown in Table 4.1, their Mean years of being in service were 8.4 years, followed closely by the teachers with a Mean of 7.3 years in their role. Not surprisingly as the school counselling service is relatively new, school counsellors interviewed were all between 1 to 2 years old in their job. The Mean length of service for all the participants was 5.4 years while the median was 6 years.

Table 4.2 **Interview Participants' Gender Distribution**	**Total**	**Male**	**Female**
Teachers	6	2	4
School Counsellors	7	1	6
Community-based Counsellors	6	1	5
Total	19	4	15

Table 4.3 Interview Participants' Age groups	**Total**	**20 – 29**	**30 – 39**	**40 – 49**	**50 – 59**	**60 <**
Teachers	6	0	5	1	0	0
School Counsellors	7	0	5	1	1	0
Community-based Counsellors	6	1	3	2	0	0
Total	19	1	13	4	1	0

Table 4.2 and 4.3 displayed the gender distribution across the groups. Four (21%) of the total participants were males while 15 (79%) were females. The distribution of ages was as follows 1 (5%) were 20 – 29 years old, 13 (68%) were 30 – 39 years old, 4 (21%) were 40 – 49 years old, 1 (5%) were 50 – 59, while none was 60 years and above. Consequently, the majority or 17 (90%) of the participants were between 30 – 49 years old.

4.1.2 Interview Protocol

An interview protocol was followed outlining the key area of the study which includes a) Sharing information and confidentiality in the school context, b) Working with families, c) school counsellors' knowledge of community resources. The following lines of enquiry were followed for each group of stakeholders:

Table 4.4 Interview Protocol		
School Counsellors	Teachers	Community-based Counsellors
1) School counsellors work with students' families, type and depth of the work involved.	1) Teachers' view of school counsellors' work with students' families.	1) Community-based counsellors views on school counsellors work with families.

2) School counsellors' perceptions and practice on confidentiality and sharing information in their practice	2) Teachers' view on information sharing with school counsellors.	2) Community-based counsellors view about confidentiality and information sharing in schools.
3) School counsellors' relationship with teachers and school leaders.	3) Teachers' views on and acceptance of counselling service in the school context.	3) Concerns on any aspects of the development of school counselling in Singapore.
		4) Community-based counsellors perceptions on school counsellors' knowledge of community resources available.

4.2 LISTENING-IN TO SCHOOL COUNSELLORS' VIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven (7) school counsellors who were serving in a mix of both primary and secondary schools. The school counsellors interviewed each presented a different micro situation they were engaged in while highlighting some common themes of concerns in their practice. This portion of the study was written up and presented in a journal paper titled "Counselling in Singapore Schools: through the eyes of School Counsellors" and was submitted to an international journal. The paper is currently under review and consideration at the time of submission of this thesis. This section provides a brief summary of the findings in line with the research question: What are school counsellors perceptions of school counselling in Singapore?

School counsellors interviewed generally expressed robust views on some areas of discussion. These are 1) Working with students' families, 2) Relationship with teachers and school leaders and 3) Confidentiality and sharing information. Key findings and discussion on these areas are presented in table 4.5 and the following paragraphs. Readers may find the associated paper as Appendix A at the end of this thesis for more details as well as for extracts of interview transcripts.

Table 4.5 Themes from interviews with school counsellors

Theme One	Theme Two	Theme Three
School counsellors generally held the perception that they do not do family work/therapy.	Counsellors working in schools are clearly aware of the importance of their working relationships with stakeholders in the school context. While they appeared to be building good relationships with teachers, there seemed to be a high level of anxiety with regards to their perceptions of relationships with school leaders.	School counsellors found meaningful ways in the balancing act of sharing information with stakeholders and keeping with their ethical requirement as mental healthcare professional.

4.2.1 Working with Students' Families

School counsellors generally held the perception that they do not do family work/therapy. Most of the participants shared their positions referring to limitation by authority and/or resources. School counsellors seemed to have the similar impression that their job scope did not include counselling parents and families. However, they placed great importance on families and parents when it concerned improving children's lives.

Counsellors who have worked in social services where working with families as the 'rule of thumb', seemed to demonstrate more ambivalence. It appeared that school counsellors struggled with whether or not to extend their work with students' families and what form should their work take if they do work with them, family therapy or some parenting education etc. Although to some it was clearly spelt out that their work should focus on the student, many saw the logic that their clinical interventions could be a family-based one or at least obtaining family support in their interventions, which was consistent with observations and recommendations of recent local studies and those from the region (Chong, et al, 2013; Kok, 2013; and Luk-Fong, 2013).

4.2.2 Concerns about relationships with Teachers and School Leadership

School counsellors interviewed were aware of the importance of their relationships with teachers and principals. They readily shared about their current relationship with teachers as well as the school leaders. The working relationship with teachers was discussed at some length. It seemed that school counsellors saw the working relationship with teachers in a relatively positive light.

It appeared that school counsellors were having warmer relationships with teachers than with the school leadership. School management's view of counselling seemed to affect how school counsellors see their own work performance and their positioning in schools. As much as school counsellors felt that their relationships with teachers were generally positive, relationships with school management seem more complicated. One possible reason is the presence of a line of reporting between the counsellors and the school leadership. Another was the close connection between the management's

perception of counselling and the power they have in influencing the climate and environment for counselling in schools.

Counsellors working in schools seemed to be clearly aware of the importance of their working relationships with stakeholders in the school context. While they appeared to be working well in building relationships with teachers, there seemed to be a high level of anxiety with regards to their perceptions of relationships with school leaders. Relationships could be seen as the foundation for collaborative work between stakeholders.

4.2.3 Sharing of Information and Confidentiality

Counsellors in schools were well aware of the confidential nature of the information they managed in their work. Many verbalized a clear understanding of the need for upholding a high level of confidentiality but some reported difficulties in doing so in a school environment. School counsellors also seemed to be aware of the teachers' keenness to know more about the students and school counsellors' feedback about them after counselling sessions.

School counsellors appeared to face pressure from management and teachers to share information at one end while having to ensure they practice ethically at the same time. One could sense that experienced practitioners recognised the difference in the understanding of the need for confidentiality in different settings but others may have felt misunderstood and struggled with maintaining a balance. Many adopted creative methods in managing this matter. Some school counsellors preferred to seek students' consent at an early stage of the counselling relationship. Others managed the information they share as well as with whom they share the information as a part of their effort to protect their students.

Yet another reported that combining both methods, managing information flow and seeking consent from students when appropriate was helpful too. Further, in some cases, it appeared that the school counsellors had secured an understanding with the school management on the need for them to uphold confidentiality.

Overall, school counsellors found meaningful ways in this balancing act of sharing information with stakeholders and keeping with their ethical requirement. Although the current situation appeared at best, ambivalent for the stakeholders and themselves, school counsellors felt that the current situation was manageable and comfortable.

School counsellors interviewed were generous with their views and thoughts. As the researcher listened repeatedly to the recordings of the interviews and reflected on their sharing, he had the sense that the school counselling situation in Singapore was going through a dynamic and evolving time as anticipated earlier.

4.2.4 Summary

In response to the research question, school counsellors were observed to be adapting to the school setting and the various aspects of their work. They were seen to be striving to establish a working relationship with school leaders while mindful of the line of reporting between them. The data also suggests that school counsellors were trying to balance the need to share information with colleagues in the school context and the need to maintain reasonable confidentiality for the students they work with. In addition, school counsellors often have to make a conscious choice on how much they could attend to students' parents and families. Collectively, the findings revealed that the school counsellors as new members of the school system were constantly in a balancing act as they were finding their suitable positions in the schools. This is however variable among schools possibly due to school leaders' perception and attitude toward their role and function.

4.3 TEACHERS' VOICE

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six (6) teachers who were teaching in a mix of both primary and secondary schools. This portion of the study was written up and presented as a paper titled “School counselling in Singapore: teachers’ thoughts and perceptions” and was submitted and published in the Asia Pacific Journal of Counselling and Psychotherapy in 2015. This section provides a brief summary of the findings in line with the research question: What are teachers’ perceptions of school counselling in Singapore?

Teachers interviewed generally expressed clear views on some areas. These are 1) Positive view on counselling service, 2) Appreciate more information from counsellors, 3) Expect counsellors to work with families. Key findings and discussion on these areas are presented in table 4.6 and the following paragraphs. Readers may find the corresponding paper as Appendix B at the end of this thesis for more details as well as for extracts of interview transcripts.

Table 4.6 Themes from interviews with school counsellors

Theme One	**Theme Two**	**Theme Three**
Teachers generally held the view that counselling had earned its place in school due to changing times. Many cited social problems and societal changes as the main driver for the demand for more services and support such as counselling.	Teachers expressed their desire and interest to gain feedback from the counsellors and to have them share information with them more freely.	The participants in the current study seemed to have the expectation that school counsellors should work with parents to some extent. However, most teachers did not voice an expectation that the school counsellors should provide counselling for parents or families.

4.3.1 Positive view on counselling service

Teachers generally held the view that counselling had earned its place in school due to changing times. Many cited social problems and societal changes as the main driver for the demand for more services and support such as counselling. They viewed and expected counsellors to fill different gaps such as allotting individual attention to students, being a point of reference for consultation on behavioural and mental health issues and coordinating or accessing external social services. They related to the researcher how the counsellors had helped them to perform their roles better.

This was an interesting observation as teachers were clearly able to link the counsellors' work with theirs. It also suggested that teachers welcome the inclusion of counsellors in the school setting and affirmed their relevance. Furthermore, teachers seemed to feel that school counsellors made their jobs easier, namely in the areas of pastoral care or one-to-one guidance 'counselling' with students. While positive, it is important to note that participants who agreed to be interviewed may be teachers who were already more inclined to engage in counselling and pastoral care work.

Overall, the teachers had the opinion that professional counselling plays a key role in schools and viewed counsellors as their partners in service. In addition, teachers are important observers of the social developments in any given community or state and, even more importantly, in their schools. Their awareness and their ability to link social problems and societal changes, which are ultimately reflected in the education system, to support the demand for more counselling services in schools were intriguing.

4.3.2 Appreciate more information from Counsellors

Another sub-theme generated from the interviews was that teachers were expressing their desire and interest to gain feedback from the counsellors and to have them share information with them more freely. All the teachers interviewed found this to be an important aspect of their relationship with school counsellors. They valued information sharing as support to help them work with their students. Some also addressed the issue of confidentiality between counsellor and student. More importantly, the teachers' desire to increase their knowledge seemed to be driven by their passion to be able to work with the

students, by complementing the work of the counsellor outside of the counselling room. This seemed to be a reflection of teachers' commitment to work closely with school counsellors.

On the other hand, this is an interesting finding as this strong desire to gain more information from school counsellors, in regard to the cases with which they were involved, suggests that there is indeed a great need for school counsellors to share information. In addition, it suggests that school counsellors need to do more to educate stakeholders about confidentiality and their work. The debate on the interaction and dynamics between teachers and school counsellors over the sharing of information and confidentiality issues is an ongoing one.

The findings support further research, especially in exploring the views of both teachers and school counsellors as relating to the need for disclosure, and the impact that this demand will have on the working relationship of both professionals. It also highlights the potential for both counsellors and teachers to develop a greater understanding of each other's work in order to pave the way for closer collaboration.

4.3.3 Expect counsellors to work with parents and families

The work of the school counsellor normally includes relations with families and parents. This area is often explored to better understand the particular situation in different countries (Ghaith, Banat, Hamad & Albadareen, 2012; and Luk-Fong, 2013). Generally, the participants in the current study seemed to have the expectation that school counsellors should work with parents to some extent. However, most teachers did not voice an expectation that the school counsellors should provide counselling for parents or families. Teachers generally felt that school counsellors worked with parents in relation to cases where parental support was necessary for collaboration with the school, to help students to maximize the benefits gained from the teaching and learning resources available.

The participants had common perceptions and expectations about the newly implemented school counselling service. Many of these expectations and perceptions were developed through their interaction and their experience with the counselling process, or through working with counsellors in their schools.

From the data obtained, it was determined that teachers hold positive attitudes towards the counselling service implemented. It is also apparent that teachers and counsellors benefit from collaboration in their work and in their relationships with students and their families. There was also evidence to support the idea that the teachers' desire for information from counsellors had fostered the development of the students involved.

4.3.4 Summary

The sub-themes of this study support the overarching theme that the school counselling service is welcomed by teachers and that they were adjusting to fostering a working relationship with the counsellors in their schools. In regard to the finding in previous studies (Loynd et al., 2005; Webb & Vulliamy, 2003; Wolstenholme & Kolvin, 1980) that teachers' acceptance of counselling was found to be important. Considering the small sample involved in this study, more periodic 'climate sensing' or 'sampling' of teachers' experience, may be helpful to extend our understanding as the situation evolves.

4.4 COMMUNITY COUNSELLORS SHARE THEIR VIEWS

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six (6) community-based counsellors who were based in family service centres. This portion of the study was written up and presented as a paper titled “Looking in from the outside: community counsellors’ opinions and attitudes to school counselling in Singapore” and was submitted and published in Pastoral Care in Education in 2014. This section provides a brief summary of the findings in line with the research question: What are community-based counsellors’ perceptions of school counselling in Singapore?

Community-based counsellors interviewed expressed interesting views on some areas. These are 1) School counsellors were not doing 'family work', 2) Concerns about confidentiality in schools, 3) School counsellors lacked knowledge of community resources and 4) Concern on the transition from educators to counsellors. Key findings and discussion on these areas are presented in table 4.7 and the following paragraphs. Readers may find the corresponding paper as Appendix C at the end of this thesis for more details as well as for extracts of interview transcripts.

Table 4.7 Themes from interviews with community counsellors

Theme One	Theme Two	Theme Three	Theme Four
Community-based counsellors had mixed views on whether school counsellors should extend their work to include family therapy.	Community-based counsellors felt that confidentiality should have been more strictly maintained by school counsellors	Cmmunity-based counsellors hoped school counsellors would know more community programmes which serve youths and children.	Community-based counsellors were open to the idea of former educators becoming school counsellors but felt that they needed help to manage the transition between roles.

4.4.1 School counsellors were not doing 'family work'

Almost all the community-based counsellors considered that current school practice on working with families was inadequate. Nevertheless, they seemed to understand that school counsellors' work might be restricted by service boundaries, as well as time and resources; which would prevent them from extending their work to encompass families. There appeared to be an ongoing debate about whether schools provide a good environment for family counselling. Factors to consider in this debate include parents' familiarity with the school, whether the school is seen as a neutral place, the availability of school counsellors after office hours, school counsellors' skills and their training in family counselling.

Overall, whilst community-based counsellors empathised with the workload their counterparts in schools faced, and understood that they were bound by the restrictions of their role, they had mixed views on whether school counsellors should extend their work to include family therapy. This finding corroborates local observers' views on school-based family interventions in Singapore (Chong et al., 2013). An obvious solution would be to strengthen organisational links and increase collaboration between school counselling services and FSCs; this proposal is consistent with the model proposed in another study that interviewed Singapore school counsellors (Kok, 2013). It is also consistent with Shaw's (2003) recommendations for 'seamless' delivery of children's services in the United Kingdom.

4.4.2 Concerns about confidentiality in schools

Community-based counsellors had strong views on this issue. During the interviews, some shared experiences in which they had reduced their confidence in school counsellors' and teachers' respect for confidentiality. Extracts from interviews describing incidents in which the community-based counsellors felt that confidentiality should have been more strictly maintained by school counsellors are included in the corresponding paper as Appendix C.

These and other similar accounts suggested that community-based counsellors have had negative experiences when they have shared confidential information with school counsellors. Bad experiences often involved school counsellors sharing or forwarding information to teachers or using the

information without prior consultation with the community-based counsellors. They expected school counsellors to maintain a higher standard of confidentiality. The interviews also revealed that community-based counsellors' confidence in their counterparts in schools was affected by these experiences. Nevertheless, community-based counsellors recognised the importance of sharing information with school counsellors.

The need for a common understanding of the standard of confidentiality on the part of counsellors in school and community settings who worked together was evident from the interviews. The findings are consistent with an earlier suggestion (Maguire, 1975) that it will take time and positive experiences for practitioners outside the school setting to develop confidence in school counsellors' competence and commitment to professional ethical standards. Considering the importance of close collaboration between school and community-based counsellors for 'family work' that was suggested above, there is an urgent need for a dialogue between these two groups of practitioners to agree on common working practices, including standards for confidentiality and information exchange.

4.4.3 School counsellors lacked knowledge of community resources

Community-based counsellors expected school counsellors to know about local community resources and to be able to refer clients or students appropriately. Community-based counsellors in Family Service Centres (FSCs) were often on the receiving end of referrals made by school counsellors and were consulted by school counsellors about the availability of resources outside the school. These are the closest community resource most school counsellors have at their disposal. However, almost all the community-based counsellors interviewed shared the view that school counsellors did not know enough about the community resources beyond the schools. Some brought the issue further to suggest that school counsellors sometimes misguided students and their parents in their search for further social care and services outside of the school.

When asked what resources school counsellors should familiarise themselves with, counsellors in the community typically mentioned government ministries such as the MSF and the Ministry of Health. Closer collaboration between school and community-based counsellors is clearly essential—as

earlier sections have also made clear—as Singapore works towards seamless delivery of social care for children and young adults.

It appeared that some community-based counsellors hoped school counsellors would know more about agencies as well as their programme offerings, especially those within their immediate community and those which serve youths and children.

4.4.4 Concerns about the transition from educator to counsellor

One other view, which seemed to be common to the community-based counsellors in this sample, was a concern about teachers or principals who became counsellors. Community-based counsellors were open to the idea of former educators becoming school counsellors but felt that they needed help to manage the transition between roles. Some community-based counsellors described encounters with school counsellors who were former teachers or principals which had left them wondering if the school counsellor were acting according to his or her previous role.

Community-based counsellors had the impression—sometimes they described specific experiences which had created this impression—that school counsellors who had previously been teachers or principals tended to carry the same style and methods of working with students through into their work as a counsellor. Some community-based counsellors balanced their comments on ex-educator school counsellors by referring to the benefits of having previous experience of working in the school setting. They indicated that ex-teachers or principals know the system well which can be an asset in helping students. Their former positions also gave them leverage when offering feedback to school leaders.

4.4.5 Summary

Some scepticism on this nation-wide project in implementing counselling in all schools were also present in community-based counsellors' narrative. One can sense that community-based counsellors seemed to put themselves in a position which allowed them to 'evaluate' the school counselling service, almost like a 'senior' commenting on how a 'junior' in performing. In addition, the community counsellors interviewed understood the rationale for having ex-teachers and ex-principals as school counsellors but they voiced the desire that

these individuals be properly assisted in their role transition so that they would be able to use their previous experience in a more productive manner in their new role, rather than being hampered by it.

4.5 BRINGING THE STAKEHOLDERS' VIEWS TOGETHER

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nineteen (19) stakeholders (teachers, school and community-based counsellors). Phase one of the study was written up and presented as a journal paper titled "Stakeholders' Perceptions of School Counselling in Singapore". It was submitted and published in the Journal of Psychologists and Counsellors in Schools in 2015. This section provides a brief summary of the findings in line with the research question: How and to what extent do teachers, school and community-based counsellors' perceptions of school counselling differ or agree?

Stakeholders interviewed generally share two areas in which they have intense views. These are 1) Working with families, 2) Sharing information & Confidentiality. Key findings and discussion on these areas are presented in the following paragraphs. Readers may find the corresponding paper as Appendix D at the end of this thesis for more details as well as for extracts of interview transcripts.

4.5.1 Working with Families

Teachers, school and community-based counsellors worked with families and parents with children who attend school. On many occasions, they worked together both within and outside the school setting. From the interviews, the researcher sensed that school counsellors generally think that they do not do family work. Most referred to how their positions were limited by authority and/or resources. It was hardly surprising that school counsellors referred closely to their work scope or guidelines as the school counselling service was relatively new and most of the school counsellors had been in their role for less than 2 years.

Among the school counsellors, some were more ambivalent in this area, especially those who had worked with families in other settings. School counsellors seemed to be struggling with whether or not to extend their work with students' families and what form the work should take if they do work with them — family counselling or just parent education. Although to some it was clearly spelt out that their work should focus on the student — the individual — many saw the logic that their clinical interventions could be a family-based one, or at least have the family support in the interventions.

While the school counsellors grasped the multiple possibilities presented to them by the different cases they saw in schools, community-based counsellors considered the current situation in relation to family work to be lacking or at best, limited. Nevertheless, they seemed to understand that school counsellors may be bound by their work scope as well as the time and resources available to them.

There was an ongoing debate on whether the school is a good setting for family work. Considerations such as counselling hours, school counsellors' training, school not being a neutral setting, and so on, were also raised in the conversations. Overall, community-based counsellors, on one hand, seemed to empathise with the workload of their counterparts in schools and understand that they were governed by their job scope, but on the other hand, they had mixed views on whether school counsellors should extend their work further to the point of doing family counselling. One of the community-based counsellors suggested a better referral system between schools and FSCs as a possible solution. This seemed to be in line with local and overseas studies and recommendations in this area (Shaw, 2003; Chong et al., 2013; and Kok, 2013).

While many teachers work with students' parents themselves, they seemed to have little idea about how school counsellors work with students' parents and families. Generally, teachers seemed to have some expectations that school counsellors work with parents on some aspects. However, most did not voice any expectation that school counsellors counsel the parents or families. They generally felt that school counsellors worked with parents pertaining to schooling issues so that students could better access teaching and learning activities.

Teachers' understanding of school counsellors' work with parents and families revolves around the child, and typically concerns behavioural issues that disrupt learning in the classroom. It adds to the sense that the teachers and counsellors were only beginning to learn more about each other's roles, especially concerning students' families.

The interviews added some clarity to how teachers, school and community-based counsellors view school counsellors' work with parents and families. Teachers hold common expectations for school counsellors to be engaged with parents appropriately, and especially working with them in

tandem on students' educational goals. Community-based counsellors, on the other hand, expressed keen interest in school counsellors providing some family counselling in schools, but cautioned on the resources and time constraints within the current school counselling service, as well as questioned the appropriateness of placing family therapy in the school setting. Still, school counsellors constantly struggled with whether and how they should engage the parents and families, almost on a case-by-case basis. Some go the distance by providing counselling for selected families while others remain at the level of information exchange or discussion of the school's concerns, which seemed to match teachers' expectations.

The three stakeholder groups, however, appeared to agree that a family's needs have to be kept in clear view when working with students. The timely referral to external family counselling services such as family service centres was highly valued by teachers and community-based counsellors, as well as school counsellors. School counsellors, perhaps unintentionally, have placed themselves in a place where they will continue to have to use good judgment in determining how families' needs can be met, either in or outside the school.

4.5.2 Sharing Information and Confidentiality

The data suggest that teachers' and community-based counsellors' ideas of sharing information differed greatly, while school counsellors were in a somewhat uncomfortable middle position. They appeared to balance the need for sharing more information to remain a member of the school setting and to keep their professional identity intact through compliance with confidentiality norms in the counselling fraternity.

Counsellors in schools, as with their counterparts in other settings, were well aware of the confidential information they managed in their work. Many verbalised a clear understanding of upholding a high level of confidentiality, but some reported difficulties in doing so in a school environment. They also seemed to be aware of the teachers' eagerness to know more about the students they worked with and their interest in school counsellors' feedback.

School counsellors appeared to face pressures from management and teachers to share information while having to ensure that they do not become

unethical at the same time. This dilemma is widely reported in more developed, school-based counselling services in the United States and Israel (Isaacs & Stone, 2001; and Lazovsky, 2010). Many in Singapore adopted practical methods for managing this on a daily basis. For example, some school counsellors preferred to seek students' consent at an early stage of the counselling relationship. This appeared to work for students in secondary schools.

Other counsellors managed the information being shared, as well as with whom they share the information. In yet other cases, it appeared that the school counsellors had secured some understanding from the school management on the need for them to uphold confidentiality. Most school counsellors found meaningful ways in this balancing act of sharing information with stakeholders and keeping with their professional ethics.

Although the current situation appeared at best ambivalent for the stakeholders and themselves, school counsellors felt that the current situation was manageable and comfortable. Earlier research both in Singapore and overseas seemed to suggest that students' perceptions of whether counselling was confidential influences their confidence and willingness to access the service available in school (Fox & Butler, 2007; and Lau, 2009). This supports the concerns the school counsellors have.

On the other hand, teachers were clearly expressing their desire and interest to hear more feedback from counsellors or to have them share information about their work with their students. All the teachers interviewed found this an important aspect of their relationship with school counsellors. They valued the information shared as resources to help them better work with their students. Almost every interview consisted of clear messages that the information they get or hope to get from school counsellors are those helpful for them to better understand and work with their students.

This strong desire to know more from school counsellors on the cases they attend to may explain the strong sense that school counsellors feel about having to share information. It may also be a contributing factor to the difficulties school counsellors face in keeping confidentiality in the school setting. While some teachers agreed on the need to maintain confidentiality, some thought that counselling in schools was not the same as elsewhere. Teachers generally

agreed that there was no need to know the information exchanged between the counsellor and the students in detail, but most felt the need to know key information that might influence how they work with a student. It is important to note that the teachers' desire to know more seemed to be driven by their passion to work better with the students and to complement the work of the counsellor outside the counselling room. They were content with the need-to-know basis and restrained themselves from asking more than the main gist of the story.

The interaction and dynamics between school counsellors and other stakeholders, including the topic of sharing of information and confidentiality, is an interesting area that has received attention in the research literature (Isaacs & Stone, 2001; Jenkins & Polat 2006; and Low, 2009). Community-based counsellors also had strong views on this matter. During the interviews, some shared experiences that led them to have less confidence in teachers as well as school counsellors in keeping with confidentiality.

It appeared that community-based counsellors have had some less-than-desirable experiences sharing confidential information with school counsellors who further shared with teachers. It appeared that community-based counsellors expect school counsellors to uphold confidentiality but their confidence was reduced by some of their encounters with school counsellors and teachers. However, community-based counsellors also recognised the importance of sharing information with other stakeholders such as key teachers working with the child.

All three groups of stakeholders recognised the importance of sharing information while working together or separately to better teach, care, support or help a student and his/her family. School counsellors, community-based counsellors and some teachers also recognised the need to keep confidentiality in the process. Nevertheless, due to the different roles they play, each group seemed to have differing levels of confidentiality in mind and separate concerns that directly impact their work. Teachers were concerned about whether they were getting all the relevant information for them to understand their students better. School counsellors were concerned about what information they have obtained in counselling sessions they should share, how it should be shared and with whom they should share it, while community-based counsellors were

concerned about how the information they provided to school counsellors was shared with teachers and how the information was being used.

This is a complex situation as the stakeholders were all keenly involved with the best of intentions to better provide support to the client/student. The findings seem to suggest that stakeholders might be lacking in their understanding of each other's needs and roles in information management within the school counselling service loop. This supports the anecdotal observations reported by Yeo and Lee (2014) in their recent report on the situation of school counselling in Singapore. The findings identifying these needs added to the accumulating knowledge that may lead to more clarity about this area among the stakeholders in the future. In addition, it is important to read these findings along with those from research on students' and parents' perspectives on this matter as they are important stakeholders to the school counselling process as well (Collins & Knowles, 1995; Fox & Butler, 2007; and Lau, 2009).

The themes discussed suggest that the stakeholders' views have a role in the integration of counselling services in school and the community. Their views represent their thoughts, feelings and experiences of those working with the growing service in Singapore. The need to establish a common understanding between teachers, school and community-based counsellors on confidentiality and information exchange is clearly an urgent one. It lays the important foundation for the stakeholders to work together to deliver better care to students and their families.

The extensive discussions about the need for, and the concerns on how to work with families further support the prospects for more dialogue and collaboration between stakeholders to develop a comfortable tripartite working relationship. As suggested in earlier studies, the quality of working relationships among stakeholders is an important aspect of an effective school counselling service (Cromarty & Richards, 2009; and Harris, 2009). Chong et al. (2013) and Kok (2013) also recommended closer collaborative working relationships between stakeholders.

Teachers, school and community-based counsellors in the current situation are working towards better care and support for students and families but in a relatively independent manner. The future presents possibilities for

teachers, school and community-based counsellors to close the gaps between each other and coordinate interventions for students and families. The establishment of a common understanding of how these stakeholders could work to engage families and to exchange information undoubtedly forms the foundation for the working relationship to evolve and mature as the school counselling services grow.

A case management approach used in Australia (De Jong & Griffiths, 2008) may be useful. Perhaps an urban school-based family counselling model, as illustrated by Evans and Carter (1997), or more specifically, the Community-sited: Agency model of school-based family counselling as described by Gerrard (2008) may be an option to consider. A better referral system between schools and community-based agencies such as Family Service Centres may be a possible solution as well. While integrated or seamless working models have been established or are being established elsewhere, Singapore seems to be evolving towards a suitable model for itself, which will become more evident in the near future.

4.6 TOWARDS PHASE TWO: QUANTITATIVE SURVEY

As the researcher analysed the qualitative data, it became increasingly clear how different community-based counsellors' perceptions were from those of other stakeholders. More particularly, the researcher realised how little was known about this area worldwide, much less in Singapore and the region. In contrast, separate studies focusing on teachers, school counsellors and school administrators' perceptions are widely available which allowed the researcher to compare his findings. This gave rise to the need to have a broader-based data to compare and/or support the qualitative findings on community-based counsellors’ perceptions in phase one.

A more representative view of community-based counsellors' perception of school counselling as juxtaposed to the perceptions of school counsellors and teachers, is needed in order to achieve streamlining cross-setting integration of psychosocial services for children and the young. It will, in turn, better answer the overarching research question: How and to what extent do stakeholder perception of school counselling services in Singapore coincide?

This impetus was further supported by the findings of the growing debate and discussion of greater integration or alignment of school and community services for children, both overseas and in Singapore (Evans & Carter 1997; Shaw, 2003; De Jong & Griffiths, 2008; Gerrard, 2008; Chong et al., 2013; Kok, 2013; and Luk-Fong, 2013). The next Chapter reports on Phase Two of the study.

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CHAPTER 5: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION (QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS)

To obtain a more representative view of community-based counsellors, a quantitative survey was conceived. The following are the research question and sub-questions specified for this follow-up study: To what extent are the findings on community counsellor's perceptions of school counselling shared among community-based counsellors? The sub-questions were:

- Is confidential information derived from counselling shared more freely in the school context as compared to in a community agency?
- How confident are community-based counsellors in sharing confidential case information with school counsellors?
- To what degree do community-based counsellors feel that school counsellors should do family counselling?
- How confident are community-based counsellors that school counsellors have good working knowledge of community resources available?

The questionnaire survey with 14 items including demographics was conducted from December 2016 to January 2017. Through snowball sampling, ninety (90) community-based counsellors responded to the survey. The researcher estimates that there were about 700 community-based counsellors in the forty (41) family service centres across Singapore, a further fifty (50) based in 5 community-based counselling centres and about fifty (50) based in other service providers such as youth services. These potential respondents were reached via several key contact persons in the field as well as through snowball sampling.

5.1.1 Data Coding

Data gathered was automatically coded for processing. As Likert Scales were used throughout the survey questionnaire, responses were coded in numbers such as "1,2,3" according to responses selected from left to right of the questionnaire. For example, question one (Do school counsellors work with students' families?), the leftmost selection 'Not at all' was coded as "1", the second leftmost selection 'Rarely' was coded "2", the selection in the middle of the scale 'Sometimes' was coded "3", the second rightmost response 'Most of the time' was coded "4" and the rightmost response was given the code of "5".

Only demographic questions varied in the number of selection as categorical data from three to six selections and were also coded automatically.

5.1.2 Respondents

Table 4.1 provides an overview of the demographic information of the survey respondents. Ninety (90) community-based counsellors responded to the questionnaire survey (n = 90). 74.4% of the respondents were female and 60% of all the respondents have postgraduate training. 58.9% were working in family service centres, a further 4.4% and 17.8% were working in community counselling centres or youth services respectively. In terms of experience working within a school setting, 58.9% reported that they never had the experience. 31.1% reported that they had some exposure as counselling staff sent into schools for a short period of time as part of school social work type engagement.

66.7% reported that they worked with school counsellors once a month, a further 7.8% and 6.7% indicated once a fortnight and once a week respectively. M = 1.8 (once a fortnight) Mdn = 1 (once a month) and SD = 1.3. Of the respondents, 55.2%, 22.2% and 15.6% have been involved in community-based counselling work for 1-5 years, 6-10 years and 11-15 years respectively. M = 1.7 (6-10 years) Mdn = 1 (1-5 years) and SD = 1.0.

Table 5.1

Respondents' Demographics

Gender		number	Percentage
	M	21	23.33%
	F	67	74.44%
Highest Educational Level			
	Diploma	1	1.11%
	Degree	30	33.33%
	Postgrad	54	60.00%
	Others	5	5.56%
Type of community services			
	Family Service	53	58.89%
	Counselling Centre	4	4.44%
	Youth Centre/Service	16	17.78%
	Others	17	18.89%
Prior involvement in school counselling			
	Full-Time School Counsellor	5	5.56%
	Part-Time School Counsellor	3	3.33%
	Full-Time School Social Worker / Counsellor (Special School)	0	0.00%
	Part-Time School Social Worker / Counsellor (Special School)	1	1.11%
	Provided Social Work / Counselling in schools as an external vendor	28	31.11%
	Never performed counselling in school setting before	53	58.89%

5.2 RESULTS: DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 5.2

Descriptive Statistics N=90							
	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	All the time	M	SD
Q1 Do school counsellors work with students' families?	2(2.22)	25(27.78)	51(56.67)	11(12.22)	1(1.11)	2.82	0.71
Q2 Do school counsellors provide counselling for students' families?	35(38.89)	36(40.00)	17(18.89)	1(1.11)	1(1.11)	1.86	0.84
	No	Probably Not	Not Sure	Maybe	Yes	M	SD
Q3. Do you think school counsellors should offer family counselling?	10(11.11)	6(6.67)	4(4.44)	26(28.89)	44(48.89)	3.89	1.35
	Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Most of the time	All the time	M	SD
Q4. In the school setting, information gathered during counselling is treated with strict confidence.	3(3.33)	12(13.33)	34(37.78)	27(30.00)	14(15.56)	3.41	1.02
	No	Probably Not	Not Sure	Maybe	Yes	M	SD
Q5. Do you think a different standard of confidentiality should apply to counselling work.	37(41.11)	12(13.33)	6(6.67)	18(20.00)	17(18.89)	2.62	1.62
	Not at all	A little	Somewhat	Mostly	Extremely	M	SD
Q6. Do you feel confident in sharing confidential information about student / families?	4(4.44)	18(20.00)	34(37.78)	27(30.00)	7(7.78)	3.17	0.99
Q7. Do school counsellors have a good knowledge of community resources available?	9(10.00)	21(23.33)	41(45.56)	17(18.89)	2(2.22)	2.8	0.94
	Monthly	Fortnightly	Weekly	Every other day	Everyday	M	SD
Q9 How often do you work with the	60(66.67)	7(7.78)	6(6.67)	11(12.22)	6(6.67)	1.81	1.35

Table 5.2 reports the descriptive statistics of the responses to the survey. Of the community-based counsellors surveyed, 56.7% were of the view that school counsellors work with students' families some of the time. A further 27.8% felt that that rarely happens. M = 2.8 (sometimes) and SD = 0.71. On whether school counsellors provided counselling for students' families, 40% indicated that they felt that it rarely takes place and a further 38.9% went further to indicate they felt school counsellors never provide counselling for students' families. M = 1.8 (rarely) and SD = 0.84. When asked if school counsellors should provide family counselling, 48.9% indicated clear affirmation, 28.9% accepted the possibility. 11.1% clearly indicated disagreement. M = 4 (maybe) and SD = 1.3.

On the topic of confidentiality of information in schools, 37.8% of the respondents felt that strict confidentiality was observed only some of the times. However, 30% and a further 15.6% felt that it was observed 'most of the time' and 'all the time' respectively. M = 3.4 (sometimes) and SD = 1.0. When asked if a different standard of confidentiality should be applied in schools, 41.1% was against the idea while 18.9% was for it. M = 2.6 (not sure) and SD = 1.6.

37.8% of the community-based counsellor respondents reported that they are somewhat confident in sharing confidential information with school counsellors in the course of work. 30% reported that they are mostly confident and a further 7.8% was extremely confident. However, 20% was only a little confident and 4% report to be not confident to do so. M = 3.2 (somewhat) and SD = 1.0.

45.6% of the respondent felt that school counsellors have some knowledge of community resources, a further 18.9% felt they have good knowledge while 23.3% felt they have little and 10% felt that school counsellor lack knowledge in this area. M = 2.8 (some) and SD = 0.9.

5.3 RESULTS: CORRELATION ANALYSIS

Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between the responses to the questions. The Bootstrapping procedure (95% Confidence Interval) was also carried out for the dataset. With reference to the results in table 5.3, the following was observed.

Table 5.3

Correlation Matrix

	Q1	**Q2**	**Q3**	**Q4**	**Q5**	**Q6**	**Q7**	**Q9**	**Q10**	**Q11**	**Q12**	**Q13**
Q1	1	.462	-.063	.056	.048	.219	.400	.181	.11	.021	-.075	.362
Q2	.462	1	.096	-.035	-.049	.165	.333	0	-.068	-.108	-.111	.103
Q3	-.063	.096	1	.13	.022	.265	.032	-.292	-.241	.155	.006	-.101
Q4	.056	-.035	.13	1	-.021	.570	.240	-.207	-.347	-.028	-.111	-.034
Q5	.048	-.049	.022	-.021	1	-.009	-.087	.009	-.084	.103	-.144	.061
Q6	.219*	.165	.265	.570	-.009	1	.364	-.065	-.149	.078	-.106	.115
Q7	.400	.333	.032	.240	-.087	.364	1	-.025	-.099	-.098	.114	.332
Q9	.181	0	-.292	-.207	.009	-.065	-.025	1	.168	.181	.068	.232
Q10	.11	-.068	-.241	-.347	-.084	-.149	-.099	.168	1	.08	.325	.127
Q11	.021	-.108	.155	-.028	.103	.078	-.098	.181	.08	1	-.029	-.032
Q12	-.075	-.111	.006	-.111	-.144	-.106	.114	.068	.325	-.029	1	.078
Q13	.362	.103	-.101	-.034	.061	.115	.332	.232	.127	-.032	.078	1
Q14	.037	.003	.085	.189	.009	.14	-.058	-.053	-.153	.274	-.204	-.221

Positive statistically significant (CI: 0.99) correlations were observed between the responses to Q1 (Do school counsellors work with students' families) and responses to three other questions:

- Q2 (Do school counsellors provide counselling for students' families), [r = 0.462, n = 90, p = .001].
- Q7 (Do school counsellors have a good knowledge of community resources), [r = 0.400, n = 90, p = .001].
- Q13 (Type of Community Services you are working in), [r = 0.362, n = 90, p = .001].

Positive statistically significant (CI: 0.99) correlations were observed between the responses to Q2 (Do school counsellors provide counselling for students' families) and responses to two other questions:

- Q1 (Do school counsellors work with students' families), [r = 0.462, n = 90, p = .001].
- Q7 (Do school counsellors have a good knowledge of community resources), [r = 0.333, n = 90, p = .001].

A positive statistically significant (CI: 0.99) correlation was observed between the responses to Q4 (In the school setting, information gathered during counselling is treated with strict confidence) and Q6 (Do you feel confident in sharing confidential information about student / families with a school counsellor when needed?), [r = 0.570, n = 90, p = .001].

A negative statistically significant (CI: 0.99) correlation was also observed between the responses to Q4 (In the school setting, information gathered during counselling is treated with strict confidence) and Q10 (How long have you been involved in counselling work in the community/family sector?), [r = -0.347, n = 90, p = .001]. No correlation was observed between the responses to Q5 and all other questions.

Positive statistically significant (CI: 0.95* or 0.99**) correlations were observed between the responses to Q6 (Do you feel confident in sharing confidential information about student/families with a school counsellor) and responses to three other questions:

- Q4** (In the school setting, information gathered during counselling is treated with strict confidence), [r = 0.570, n = 90, p = .001].
- Q7** (Do school counsellors have a good knowledge of community resources), [r = 0.364, n = 90, p = .001].

Positive statistically significant (CI: 0.95* or 0.99**) correlations were observed between the responses to Q7 (Do school counsellors have a good knowledge of community resources) and responses to four other questions:

- Q1* (Do school counsellors work with students' families), [r = 0.400, n = 90, p = .005].
- Q2** (Do school counsellors provide counselling for students' families), [r = 0.333, n = 90, p = .001].
- Q6** (Do you feel confident in sharing confidential information about student / families with a school counsellor when needed?), [r = 0.364, n = 90, p = .001].
- Q13** (Type of Community Services you are working in), [r = 0.332, n = 90, p = .001].

A positive statistically significant (CI: 0.99) correlation was observed between the responses to Q10 (How long have you been involved in counselling work in the community / family sector?) and Q12 (Your highest education level attained in counselling / social work / psychology or related field), [r = 0.325, n = 90, p = .001].

A negative statistically significant (CI: 0.99) correlation was observed between the responses to Q10 (How long have you been involved in counselling work in the community/family sector?) and Q4 (In the school setting, information gathered during counselling is treated with strict confidence), [r = -0.347, n = 90, p = .001].

A positive statistically significant (CI: 0.99) correlation was observed between the responses to Q12 (Your highest education level attained in counselling / social work / psychology or related field) and Q10 (How long have you been involved in counselling work in the community / family sector?), [r = 0.325, n = 90, p = .001].

Positive statistically significant (CI: 0.95* or 0.99**) correlations were observed between the responses to Q13 (Type of Community Services you are working in) and responses to three other questions:

- Q1** (Do school counsellors work with students' families), [r = 0.362, n = 90, p = .001].
- Q7** (Do school counsellors have a good knowledge of community resources), [r = 0.332, n = 90, p = .001].

5.4 DISCUSSION

The respondents' profiles were that the respondents were mostly community-based counsellors working in family service centres, with postgraduate education, have a reasonable amount of experience in the field and work regularly with the school counselling service. The following section presents and discusses the highlights of the findings with reference to the research questions of the questionnaire survey study.

5.4.1 Confidential information derived from counselling is shared more freely in the school context as compared to in a community agency? AND How confident community counsellors are in sharing confidential case information with school counsellors?

About 16% of the community-based counsellors surveyed felt that strict confidentiality was rarely or never observed in schools. A further one third only observed that in schools some of the time. However, it is noteworthy that over 45% of the respondents felt that strict confidentiality was observed either most or all the time in schools. It appears that community-based counsellors seem divided on their observations of the current situation. This could be the result of inconsistent confidentiality practice in different schools that in turn varied the experiences community-based counsellors had with the school counselling service with regards to confidentiality and information sharing. This further influenced community-based counsellors' perceptions in this regard.

In relation, community-based counsellors with a majority of 41.1% clearly objecting to the idea of a different standard of confidentiality should be applied in schools, but 18.9% were for it. When it comes to sharing confidential information, 37.8% reported to be somewhat confident and a further 30%

mostly confident. Nevertheless, about 24% were only a little confident or not confident to do so. It appears that community-based counsellors as a whole were not extremely confident in sharing information with their counterparts in schools.

Not unexpectedly, strong positive correlation was also found in community-based counsellors' responses to whether they felt strict confidentiality was observed in school and whether they felt confident in sharing information with school counsellors. This finding suggests that there was a close relationship between how community-based counsellors view the level of confidentiality held in the school context and how confident they feel in sharing information with their counterparts there. Sharing and exchange of relevant information being a key in school-community partnership among counsellors, the current lack of confidence to share information is indeed a concern for all stakeholders involved. This warrants further research as well as practical interventions within schools or in the community to facilitate greater confidence in sharing of information among stakeholders.

A noteworthy observation was that negative correlation was established between how much community-based counsellor felt information was treated with strict confidentiality and how long they have been involved in counselling work in the community or family service sector. One possible explanation for this observation could be that more experienced community-based counsellors could have been in the sector longer and have had experience with school counselling at its very early stage of implementation during which confidentiality may not be highly valued in the school context then. In addition, community-based counsellors who have been longer in the field may hold higher expectations in terms of confidentiality in their peers, in both the community and inside schools. As highlighted in the preceding sub-section, the uneven spread of perceptions is more notable in this area. Consequently, the case of further research into nature, quality, frequency and other factors relating to community-based counsellors' interaction with school counsellors seem to be building itself.

5.4.2 To what degree do community-based counsellors feel that school counsellors should do family counselling?

It appeared that community-based counsellors felt that school counsellors only work with students' families some of the time and that family counselling was rarely offered. They were also positive that family counselling could be provided by counsellors in schools. Almost 78% of the respondents supported the idea. This represents community-based counsellors' expectations for school counsellors to also cover some aspects of family counselling in their work with students' families. The current state of affairs seemed not ideal as far as community-based counsellors are concerned.

Moderate positive correlation was registered between whether community-based counsellors see school counsellors work with students' families and whether they provide family counselling. This further suggests that community-based counsellors see family counselling as one of the main services school counsellors could and should provide when working with parents.

The clear indication of community-based counsellors' agreement that family counselling should be provided in school and that vast majority actually supported the idea suggests further exploration in this area is needed. When read together with findings from phase one of the study (qualitative phase), one can conclude that school-based family counselling is considered much needed by counsellors who are based in the community at the time of the study.

Some reasons for such keen demand may be found in phase one of the research. Community-based counsellors felt that school is the natural environment to work with families as many parents are already engaged with school personnel in education or behavioural matters. Hence family counselling seemed to be a natural extension from community-based counsellors' point of view. Further, family members may feel less stigmatised to visit a school as compared to visiting a counselling or family service centre. Family service centres are often associated with families with problems or having financial issues.

However, from the earlier interviews, some barriers were also reported as community-based counsellors considered family counselling in schools. These include school's operating hours and whether the school can be a

‘neutral place’ for family counselling. These may have held some community-based counsellors back when asked if they agreed that family counselling should be provided in schools.

Findings in this area from phase two of the study provided evidence supporting the findings in phase one which noted the desire and ambivalence among community-based counsellors on whether school counsellors provided and whether they should provide family counselling. Phase two’s finding not only found that this sentiment enjoys relatively broad support but that it was spread unevenly among community-based counsellors.

The negative correlation found between community-based counsellors’ frequency of working with school counselling service and whether they feel school counsellors should provide family counselling suggests that community-based counsellors’ encounters with the school counselling service influenced their perceptions. The manner in which these encounters influence perceptions seem to be a worthwhile and fertile area for future research.

5.4.3 How confident are community-based counsellors that school counsellors have good working knowledge on community resources available?

A similar trend was also observed in how community-based counsellors evaluated school counsellors’ knowledge of community resources. Almost half (45.6%) felt school counsellors only have some knowledge, a further 18.9% felt that they have good knowledge. However, about one in three (33.3%) felt that they have little to no knowledge. The mixed responses could be attributed to the differing experiences community-based counsellors had with different school counsellors. This is particularly plausible as some school counsellors have worked in community settings before while some have not. Those who had may have brought with them relatively good knowledge of community resources as compared to those without. Further, one can also speculate that community-based counsellors’ expectations on school counsellors’ knowledge of community resources also differ one from another.

However, the trend that about one in three community-based counsellors surveyed felt that school counsellors lack knowledge on community resources is worrying. Indeed, this supported the findings in earlier qualitative

interviews that highlighted community-based counsellors' desire for school counsellors to know more about community resources and services. It is important to reiterate that those interviewed specifically hoped school counsellors to have a deeper understanding of the relevant children and youth programmes that were available in their immediate community or neighbourhood. This further supports the idea of seamless school-community partnership.

5.5 CHAPTER CONCLUSION

Overall, it seems that community-based counsellors felt that their counterparts in schools could offer more family counselling and while already having some knowledge, could become more familiar with community resources. In addition, community-based counsellors were somewhat but not fully confident in sharing confidential information with school counsellors.

These findings validated those of the earlier qualitative study which community-based counsellors were found concerned about maintenance of confidentiality standards in schools and felt that their counterparts in schools lacked knowledge about community resources. In addition, the survey study also supports the observation of the earlier qualitative study that community-based counsellors hoped school counsellors could be providing family counselling.

A notable addition from phase two of the study to the growing knowledge of community-based counsellors' perceptions is that their views on the three key areas (Family counselling, Confidentiality and knowledge of community resources) were unevenly spread among themselves. There were also signs that suggest this unevenness may be associated with differences among community-based counsellors' experience with the school counselling service i.e. positive vs negative, frequency etc. Consequently, these findings gave rise to the possibility of a future research studying the links between these key factors and perceptions among community-based counsellors. Further, a similar survey study should be conducted for their counterparts in the school setting for their opinions to be measured and compared with those reported here.

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CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION AND WORK-BASED PROJECT

Phase two completes the entire study by confirming the key findings of phase one (the qualitative phase) with a larger base of community-based counsellors. This, in turn, supported and further validated the findings in phase one which compared the perceptions of the three groups of stakeholders, namely Teachers, School Counsellors and Community-based Counsellors. This chapter brings together the findings of all the studies conducted within this project to answer the overarching research question. Later in the chapter, an applied product is included to illustrate the researcher's effort in applying the knowledge generated in this project towards integrating care for children and young people in Singapore.

6.1 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTION

The overarching research question of this project was: How and to what extent do stakeholders' perception of school counselling services in Singapore coincide? The series of studies presented in this thesis managed to shed some light.

Teachers, school and community-based counsellors differ markedly in two key areas: 1) information sharing & confidentiality on information gathered in counselling and 2) amount & type of work school counsellors engage students' families in. Interestingly, some similarities were also observed between the stakeholders' perceptions, especially when one considers the alignments noted between two stakeholder groups linked by either the setting they work in or the profession they belonged to, namely: teachers and school counsellors (work in schools) and school and community-based counsellors (counselling practitioners). Further, the stakeholders seem to share a few similar or common macro themes such as families are important stakeholders and they need to be engaged appropriately by the school counselling service. Another example was how stakeholders' agreed on the need to share information to better care for the students, inside and outside schools.

6.1.1 Confidentiality and Information Sharing

All three groups of stakeholders recognised the importance of sharing information while working together to better teach, care, or counsel a student.

School counsellors, community-based counsellors and some teachers also recognised the need to keep confidentiality. Nevertheless, due to the different roles they play, each group seemed to have differing levels of confidentiality in mind and concerns that directly impact their work.

Teachers were concerned about whether they were getting all the relevant information for them to understand their students better. School counsellors were concerned about what information they have obtained in counselling sessions that they should share, how it should be shared and with whom they should share it. Community counsellors were concerned about how the information they provided to school counsellors was shared with teachers and how the information was being used. In addition, findings from phase two of the study established a strong correlation between how community-based counsellors evaluate this area and their confidence in sharing clinical information with their counterparts in schools.

This is a complex situation as the stakeholders were all keenly involved with the best of intentions to better provide support to the client/student. The findings seem to suggest that stakeholders might be lacking in their understanding of each other's needs and roles in information management within the school counselling service. This finding supports the observations of a recent report on the situation of school counselling in Singapore that indicated school counsellors faced challenges in managing the expectations of stakeholders they worked with such as teachers, parents etc. (Yeo & Lee, 2014). This finding also highlights a major concern and barrier to collaboration between stakeholders in the delivery for children, young person and their families.

Sharing and exchanging of relevant information between stakeholders, especially between school and community-based counsellors is a fundamental piece in initiating and sustaining partnership and collaboration. Apart from the verbalised ideas and statements, the researcher cannot help but observe the existence of an uneasy relationship between school and community-based counsellors. Community-based counsellors appeared to be a ready critique of the school counselling service. At some point, the researcher sensed that community-based counsellors presented themselves to 'know the ropes' and were keeping 'a watchful eye' on the development of school counselling. It

seemed that the seemingly more established ‘branch’ or ‘speciality’ of community-based counsellors, who used to provide counselling in schools not too long ago were carefully observing the developing new ‘branch’ or ‘speciality’ of school-based counselling.

It is interesting to also report that the profiles of community-based counsellors and school counsellors were also quite different. The former consisted of professionals who were more likely to be social workers or received some social work training while the latter tend to either be former educators or mid-career changers with counselling training obtained through adult-education. Though not established, these differences may be influencing the perceptions of the stakeholders amongst other factors.

The need to establish a common understanding between teachers, school and community counsellors on confidentiality and information exchange is clearly an urgent one. It lays the important foundation for the stakeholders to work together to deliver better care to students and their families.

6.1.2 Working with families

Working with families appears to be another central consideration between teachers, school and community-based counsellors. They are much aligned with the notion that school counsellors should work with students' families and that family counselling could be provided. However, they were ambivalent as to whether it should be provided in the schools.

Teachers hold common expectations for school counsellors to be engaged with parents appropriately, and especially working with them in tandem on students’ educational goals. Community-based counsellors, on the other hand, expressed a keen interest in school counsellors to provide some family counselling. However, they were concerned about the resources and time constraints within the current school counselling service, as well as questioned the appropriateness of placing family therapy in the school setting. Yet, school counsellors constantly struggled with whether and how they should engage the parents and families, almost on a case-by-case basis. Some go the distance by providing counselling for some families while others remain working at the level of information exchange or discussion of the school’s concerns, which seemed to match teachers’ expectations.

The contention appeared to be less on ‘working with families’ but more on ‘providing counselling for families’. Counsellors from inside and outside schools held different views as to whether family counselling should be provided within school walls. Community-based counsellors, in particular, were undecided if family counselling in schools was practical and indeed practicable. While not clearly observed, the researcher wondered whether this has been a practice dilemma for those inside and outside schools. And whether this dilemma was a new one, created by the newly drawn ‘borders’ that puts counsellors from both sides in awkward positions. They could have found themselves looking at their own new ‘frontiers’ facing the new boundaries of ‘school counselling’ and ‘community-based counselling’ that was created fairly recently.

As introduced in earlier chapters, social service agencies from the community had been providing school-based counselling in the years prior to the implementation of the nation-wide school counselling programme. During that time, the distinction between providing family counselling in schools or in the community could be fairly unclear as one would imagine. Indeed, the differing perceptions may be an artificial one created by the insertion of the new school-based counselling programme in recent years. Nevertheless, the differences in perceptions should be taken seriously and addressed in the march towards seamless service delivery.

The three stakeholder groups, however, appeared to agree that a family’s needs have to be kept in clear view when working with students. Timely referral to external family counselling services such as family service centres was highly valued by teachers and community-based counsellors, as well as school counsellors.

Joining overseas research (Cromarty & Richards, 2009; Harris, 2009), the current study supported that the quality of working relationships among stakeholders is an important aspect of an effective school counselling service. Chong et al. (2013) and Kok (2013) also recommended closer collaborative working relationships between stakeholders. Teachers, school and community counsellors in the current situation are working towards better care and support for students and families but in a relatively independent manner. The future presents possibilities for teachers, school and community counsellors to close

the gaps between each other and coordinate interventions for students and families.

The establishment of a common understanding of how these stakeholders could work to engage families certainly forms the foundation for the working relationship to advance and mature as the school counselling service develops. The discussions about the need for, and the concerns on how to work with families further support the outlook for more dialogue and cooperation between stakeholders to develop a comfortable tripartite working relationship.

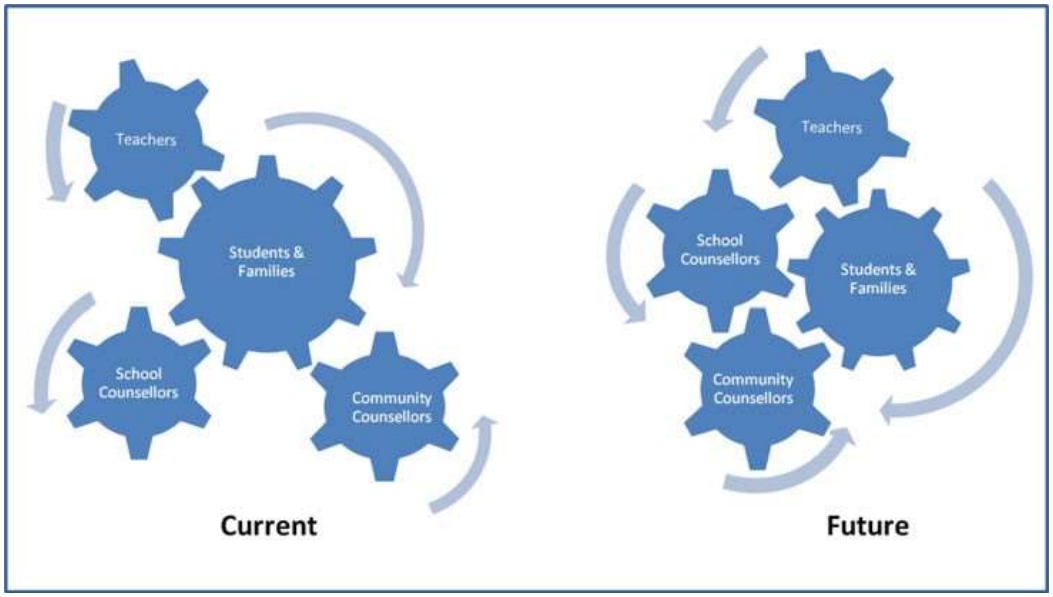
The current study points to the urgency to examine and evolves a model of school-community partnership which involve family counselling provision either in or outside schools is becoming clearly evident. Similar conclusions were derived by other researchers and observers as well (Chong et al., 2013 & Kok, 2013).

An approach similar to the school-based case management used in Australia (De Jong & Griffiths, 2008) could be considered. This framework champions multiple stakeholders and service providers' involvement and collaboration within and outside the school to help students with higher needs. Separately, the urban school-based family counselling model, as illustrated by Evans and Carter (1997) presents an interesting option as well. This particular school-based family counselling model's primary aim was the coordination of the involvement of families and community, especially through its focus on understanding and harnessing on resources available in school-family-community linkages. Further, Gerrard (2008) described that there were at least six types of school-based family counselling models available or practised, among them, a community-sited school-based family counselling model such as the agency-based model of school-based family counselling may be another option to consider in Singapore.

Locally, an improved referral and collaborative working system between schools and community-based agencies such as FSCs may be a possible solution and may have already been practised in some cases. Evidently, Singapore has started on its own journey in discovering and developing a suitable system or professional culture in facilitating more seamless delivering of services and support for higher needs students inside and outside schools.

Figure 6.1 below attempted to illustrate this journey by depicting the current situation based on the observations discussed and the potential future situation as the landscape evolves.

Figure 6.1 Stakeholders' working system



The findings identifying these needs add to the accumulating knowledge that may lead to more clarity about this area among the stakeholders in the future. In addition, it is important to read these findings along with those from research on students' and parents' perspectives on this matter as they are important stakeholders to the school counselling process as well (Collins & Knowles, 1995; Fox & Butler, 2007; Lau 2009).

The findings discussed in this study suggest that the stakeholders' views have a role in the integration of counselling services in school and the community. Their views represented their thoughts, feelings and experiences of those working with the growing service in Singapore.

6.1.3 Changing perceptions

As noted in phase two of the study, community-based counsellors' perceptions may have been influenced by the different experiences they had with school counsellors. This observation is crucial as the researcher reflected upon how stakeholders' perceptions can be further guided in such a way that would promote closer and stronger collaborations between them. By extension, one

may suggest that positive contacts and experiences between stakeholders enable them to form, change and evolve their perceptions of each other's professional work, responsibilities and capabilities. These, in turn, impacts their likelihood of working together and the success of such partnership and collaborations.

In relation, the data gathered in this study also provided indicative signs that perceptions could be changing over time. It may be reflecting the dynamic nature of the subject under study in which the sentiments evolve quickly during this early stage of development of establishing school-based counselling in Singaporean schools. This continual evolving of perceptions reflects not just the fluidity of the subject under study but also reinforce the notion that interventions can shape the perceptions in ways that promote school-community collaboration.

In sum, clearly more exchanges between the stakeholders are needed for a process of 'norming' to take place in the near future, to facilitate better integration and collaboration within the school and between school and the community. To this end, the next section demonstrated how this knowledge contributes to the development of a practical application in the form of a workshop aimed at reducing barriers and facilitating alliance among stakeholders.

6.2 APPLYING KNOWLEDGE TO PRACTICE

As illustrated and incorporated in this thesis, the study conducted led to some academic output, namely articles published in relevant academic journals. During phase one, the researcher had also presented on the challenges of school counselling at an international symposium on school-based family counselling.

Nonetheless, the studies were based on real practice-based concerns with very real implications in the practice environment. Therefore, the application of the findings to clinical practice and/or community partnership is something close to the researcher's heart. To this end, he used the findings generated in this study and applied them to further real-world practice in the area of school counselling and school-community partnership.

A workshop targeted at key stakeholders with content aiming at facilitating, fostering and working towards seamless service delivery for children and the young have been developed. This workshop is named ‘Counselling without borders: School-Community Partnership’ is designed to be conducted in schools or within the community, involving teachers, school and community-based counsellors, community service leaders etc.

6.2.1 School-Community Partnership Workshop

This workshop is designed to bring various stakeholders in counselling, social and mental health service for children and the young in schools and communities together. The three key elements of the workshop are: 1) a sharing by the researcher highlighting the key findings of his study (in context and reference to others around the world) and the implications in practice, 2) facilitated small group discussions reflecting on attitudes and perceptions of counselling in schools and 3) a networking lunch to foster closer relationships between stakeholders. A specially designed participant’s workbook accompanying this workshop which includes key presentation slides is included at the end of this thesis as Appendix F. A sample programme looks like this:

Table 6.1 Sample Workshop programme

Time	Activity	Description
1030-1045	Arrival of participants	Participants to complete a simple survey on perceptions of counselling in schools which are included in their training folders. This folder includes notes, slides and relevant readings.
1045-1100	Welcome & Introduction	Facilitator brief about the structure of the workshop & include a short video clip in school-community partnership (example: SBH School & Community-Based Counseling Services - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MwUJL8K6n-8)
1100-1230	Small Group Discussion	Participants to transfer their answers to the earlier survey (from their materials folder onto a large poster using whiteboard marker). The poster will

		be used as the basis for a small group discussion. Facilitator encourages stakeholders to vocalize different views and rationales for those views. The intent of the discussion is to help stakeholders reflect upon their views and an opportunity to share their reasoning behind their thoughts. At the same time, it allows stakeholders to hear views and reasoning of others.
1230-1330	Networking Luncheon	Lunch where stakeholders could talk and get to know each other better.
1330-1410	Sharing	Facilitator to deliver a sharing on school-community partnerships, incorporating the findings of this study and others around the world. Facilitator to highlight key barriers, potential pitfalls as well as concerns from different stakeholder groups in the sharing. Key attitudes, views and thoughts shared in the small group discussion will be drawn upon to further contextualize the sharing for the group.
1410-1430	Panel Discussion	Facilitator to open the floor for Q & A cum discussion. The process is to further build community/group consensus on challenges as well potential in building seamless collaborations between stakeholders in the area of counselling, mental health and social services for children and young persons in schools and in the community.

The small group (8-12 pax) discussion will help participants share their perceptions on the key areas of concerns surfaced by the study, namely 1) confidentiality & information exchange in schools, 2) working/counselling with families and 3) school counsellors' knowledge of community resources. Participants complete a paper survey contained in their training folders with Likert scale questions similar to that used in phase two of this study. These are

reproduced in a laminated large poster format inclusive of the Likert scale. Participants are to transfer their responses to the survey into the poster where their responses can be collated and view as a group. This provides a visualisation of the convergence as well as divergent of views in the group across different areas. This exercise also anonymises the responses and provided greater 'safety' for open discussion and sharing.

With reference to the completed scales and through free sharing encouraged and moderated by the facilitator, participants get to air their views in a safe and open environment. The intention of facilitating such sharing is to help stakeholders acknowledge differences in perceptions, understand the context and contributories of some perceptions, celebrate common perceptions in some areas, and encourage the beginning of meaningful discussions in addressing any misconceptions among them.

The facilitator will close the session by indicating that such discussions are sowing the seeds for more exchanges, thereby co-creating more aligned perceptions. The luncheon that follows also provide for further discussions in a more informal setting.

The short sharing by the facilitator is designed to provide an empirical basis for the focus of the workshop. It should provide participants with most up-to-date literature backed argument on school-community partnerships as well as the challenges of the processes, locally and overseas. This is also in line with the increasingly popular call for evidence-informed practice in both education and in the counselling fields. Making it easier for participants to return to their community agencies, schools and other stakeholder organisations to advocate for the reduction of barriers in building closer collaborative relationships between school and community counselling services.

Through professional contacts with schools (clusters of schools) and/or community agencies, the researcher (with the help of another trainer) aims to reach out and conduct three to five workshops (with about 16-24 participants each) in the next two years. This may be provided as a community service incurring minimum cost to the stakeholders to encourage participation. The researcher hopes the efforts will create a ground-up effect in changing how stakeholders work together, towards a more seamless delivery of counselling services for children and the young.

6.2.2 Other possible applications

Another possible application of knowledge generated from these studies in the medium term would be a specially designed and standardised climate survey. This could be deployed periodically (such as every few years in interval) to collect and compare stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling. These regular sensing of the ground could potentially track the development of stakeholders' alignment in perceptions which could in turn influence stakeholders' efforts in delivering seamless services across settings. In addition, it could provide a comparison between local regions to identify areas which require external interventions such as further runs of the Networking Lunch Workshop suggested earlier or external consulting services to help schools and community agencies improve integration and school-community partnerships.

Finally, such a national climate survey may be necessary as practitioners on the ground (schools and the community) may change, the tradition of close collaboration may be established but lost over time. The survey results would alert policymakers, training providers and consultants as well as school and social service leaders if external interventions are needed at a regional or national level. Interventions may include a renewing or redesigning of different collaborative models in time to come.

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CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The mixed method approach and the multi-phase process developed a series of studies connected by an overarching research purpose and research question. Consequently, the researcher came to the conclusion that stakeholders' perceptions were a ‘bag of hits and misses’ in terms of agreement and differences. The key areas of concerns which were consistently flagged with difference among teachers, school and community-based counsellors are confidentiality in the school context, working and counselling with students' families and to some extent, school counsellors' knowledge of community resources. However, this outcome was not unexpected as they were similar to overseas studies. This chapter aims to summarise the contributions of the research project. Also included in this chapter is the researcher's short reflection on the journey.

7.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Table 7.1 Summary of Findings
Overarching Question
How and to what extent do stakeholder perceptions of school counselling services in Singapore coincide?
Teachers, school and community-based counsellors agreed that families are important stakeholders and they need to be engaged appropriately by the school counselling service. However, they differed markedly in their perception of the amount and type of work school counsellors should engage students' families in. Similarly, the stakeholders agreed on the need to share information to better care for the students, inside and outside schools but they held different views on the how information should be shared among stakeholders and the level of confidentiality accorded to information gathered through counselling.
Sub-Questions
1) What are school counsellors’ perceptions of school counselling services in Singapore
School counsellors were found to hold the perception that they do not do family work/therapy. However, many saw the logic to involve or gain support

from families in their clinical interventions. School counsellors also perceived school management's view of counselling and the presence of a line of reporting between the counsellors and the school leadership as influential on the relationship between the two. School counsellors understand the need for upholding a high level of confidentiality but some reported difficulties in doing so in a school environment. School counsellors struggle between the need to provide management and teachers with more information and the need to practice ethically at the same time.
2) What are teachers' perceptions of school counselling services in Singapore?
Teachers generally welcome the inclusion of counsellors in the school setting. However, they expressed their desire and interest to gain feedback from the counsellors and to have them share information with them more freely. This seemed to be driven by their passion to be able to work with the students, by complementing the work of the counsellor. Teachers also expect school counsellors to work with parents in relation to cases where parental support was necessary to help students to maximize the benefits gained from the teaching and learning activities.
3) What are community counsellor's perceptions of school counselling services in Singapore?
Community-based counsellors felt that current school practice on working with families was inadequate but they empathised with the workload their counterparts in schools faced and understood that they were bound by the restrictions of their role. Hence community-based counsellors reported mixed views on whether school counsellors should extend their work to include family therapy. Community-based counsellors have had bad experiences that led them to reduced their confidence in school counsellors' and teachers' respect for confidentiality. They expected school counsellors to maintain a higher standard of confidentiality. Nevertheless, community-based counsellors recognised the importance of sharing information with school counsellors. Community-based counsellors seemed to share the view that school counsellors did not know enough about the community resources beyond the schools. Some community-based counsellors hoped school

counsellors to know more about community agencies as well as their programme offerings, especially those within their immediate community and those which serve youths and children.
4) How and to what extent do teachers, school and community-based counsellors' perceptions of school counselling services differ or agree?
The three stakeholders differed markedly in their views of how school counselling service works with students' families. Teachers hold the expectations for school counsellors to be engaged with parents appropriately, and especially working with them in tandem on students' educational goals. Community-based counsellors, on the other hand, felt school counsellors should provide some family counselling. School counsellors struggled with whether and how they should engage the parents and families on a case-by-case basis. Some go the distance by providing counselling for selected families while others remain at the level of information exchange or discussion of the school's concerns, which seemed to match teachers' expectations. The three stakeholder groups, however, appeared to agree that a family's needs have to be kept in clear view when working with students. Teachers' and community-based counsellors' ideas of sharing of information differed greatly, while school counsellors were in a somewhat uncomfortable middle position. They appeared to be balancing the need for sharing more information so as to remain a member of the school setting and to keep their professional identity intact through compliance with confidentiality norms in the counselling fraternity.
5) To what extent are the findings on community-based counsellor's perceptions of school counselling shared among community-based counsellors?
Overall, it seems that community-based counsellors felt that their counterparts in schools could offer family counselling in schools and while already having some knowledge, could become more familiar with community resources. In addition, community-based counsellors were somewhat but not fully confident in sharing confidential information with school counsellors.

5a) Is confidential information derived from counselling shared more freely in the school context as compared to in a community agency?	Community-based counsellors seemed to split in the middle with about half observing strict confidentiality was practised in schools most or all the time while another half noted that strict confidentiality was never, rarely observed or only observed some of the time. This could be the result of inconsistent confidentiality practice in different schools that in turn varied the experiences community-based counsellors had with the school counselling service.
5b) How confident are community-based counsellors in sharing confidential case information with school counsellors?	37.8% reported to be somewhat confident and a further 30% mostly confident. Nevertheless, about 24% were only a little confident or not confident to do so. It appears that community-based counsellors as a whole were not extremely confident in sharing information with their counterparts in schools.
5c) To what degree do community-based counsellors feel that school counsellors should do family counselling?	Community-based counsellors were of the view that school counsellors should provide family counselling. Almost 78% of the respondents supported the idea. Clearly, community-based counsellors expect school counsellors to cover some aspects of family counselling in their work with students' families.
5d) How confident are community-based counsellors that school counsellors have good working knowledge of community resources available?	About two in three community-based counsellors felt school counsellors have some or good knowledge of community resources. However, about one in three (33.3%) felt that they have little to no knowledge. The mixed responses could be attributed to the differing experiences community-based counsellors had with different school counsellors.

The findings of this study brought some key issues and concerns to the fore for stakeholders of school counselling. Areas of agreement, clarity as well as differences among stakeholders involved in school counselling were revealed. Most notably were the differences in expectations among stakeholders about observing confidentiality of information and the division among them on their views of the role counselling play for students' families in schools. Some of these differences were found to be rooted deep in the education and counselling profession and imposed practical difficulties in real school counselling situations. Teachers and counsellors have much to learn about each other and to work closely to find a comfortable and effective relationship in order for counselling to work well in schools. The responsibility clearly is not just for the teachers and counsellors but on other stakeholders such as principals and policymakers too. The further ripple effect would reach teacher- and counsellor-educator in time to come should change take place in these two important areas.

Clarity and agreement that school counselling is much needed was indeed an encouraging find which was also in line with research conducted overseas (Cooper et al., 2005). This finding, though not new in the field of school counselling, contributes to the increasing recognition of the value counselling adds to schooling lives of children and adolescents. The strength of this finding of the current study resides in the concurrence of multiple stakeholders and not simply that of the teachers or counsellors alone. This finding should propel future research in this area to include other stakeholders such as principals, parents, other mental health practitioners etc.

7.2 CONTRIBUTION TO EMPIRICAL EFFORTS

First and foremost, this research adds to the global debate in school counselling, a fast-growing area of study and practice. This addition is significant as it added the much needed Asian literature in education and counselling which is building up swiftly in recent years.

The studies brought a uniquely Singaporean perspective and experience to the table. To this end, the researcher is working on publishing the findings from phase two of the project. Adding to the three published papers and one under review, the research would have contributed a total of five published

articles to global literature. While a drop in the ocean, the researcher hopes they enlarge the global knowledge in counselling and education in some way.

Apart from the origin of the studies, the nature of the studies should also be noted for its unique contribution. As highlighted in the earlier part of this thesis, there is a need and indeed greater interest in collecting and comparing perceptions of school counselling from multiple stakeholders. Indeed, the deployment of the mixed method approach added the much need ‘cohesion’ to the line of enquiry. The current project joins others and helped grow the global knowledge in this respect.

The individual publications on perceptions of school counsellors and teachers no doubt added an Asian voice and more generally provides an update when compared to similar prior studies conducted elsewhere. More importantly, the qualitative study in phase one and the quantitative survey in phase two examining community-based counsellors' perceptions added particular value to the current global debate as similar research on this group of stakeholders is relatively rare. The researcher intends to focus to grow knowledge in this particular subject, locally and in the region. He is also keen to explore further research in this area to compare community-based counselling practitioners' perceptions across countries and regions in the future.

7.3 CONTRIBUTION TO PRACTICE

The comparison of perceptions of teachers, school and community-based counsellors highlighted key areas of differences and the urgent need to address these gaps. The findings shed lights on key perception issues for not only teachers, counsellors but school, community leaders, policy-makers, teacher and counsellor educators to reflect on and consider.

The researcher has taken it forward by designing and promoting a workshop for stakeholders to engage, explore, learn and possibly create a sustainable working relationship in an effort towards encouraging seamless social and mental health care services for children and young people in schools and in the community.

The study surfaced key concerns among the teachers, school and community-based counsellors as they experienced the inclusion of counselling

as a key service in schools. These findings may be useful for school and community leaders as well as teacher and counsellor educators in improving their support for teachers, school and community-based counsellors.

7.4 LIMITATIONS

Like other research projects, the current study has limiting factors in conceptualization, data collection, analysis and interpretations. These are examined in some detail in the following paragraphs.

7.4.1 Limitation - Conceptualisation

The idea for this project had its origin in the practice environment. The research questions surfaced in the clinical context. The researcher was primarily a counselling practitioner working in a school setting at that time. Naturally, the original conceptualization of the research problem was from a clinical viewpoint. While efforts were not spared to infuse psychological, counselling and educational research perspectives, the current study and its findings may be unwittingly slanted towards a counselling perspective. The researcher reflected upon the methods, observations, instruments, data and analysis. It was not difficult to imagine that a teacher, educationist or an education policy researcher could have constructed the study from a different standpoint and perspective.

Indeed, studies from those angles must be exciting and enriching to the growing sector of school counselling. The researcher looks forward to such efforts as he recognized the multi-disciplinary nature of social, mental health and counselling services for children and young persons.

The conceptualization of the current study was also influenced by environmental factors surrounding school counselling at that time. As discussed in earlier chapters, school counselling was taking an important turn when the idea for this study was conceived. Singapore was in its process to implement a nationwide school counselling programme which was unprecedented. A large group of counsellors was recruited, trained and deployed to hundreds of schools. During this time, the definition of counselling, the role of counsellors and requirement changed a couple of times. One example representative of this climate of change was the renaming of the formal name of ‘school counsellors’ as ‘Allied Educators (Counselling)'.

Indeed, the conceptualization of the research questions for this study happened during this period of exciting implementation of counselling services in schools. This challenges the current study as it might have been carried out at a time when the ground was inadvertently confused about counselling service in schools. On the other hand, the study might be considered timely as it managed to capture the confusion as it happens.

Nevertheless, it is important to consider that perceptions change over time and the findings of this study are useful to understand the state of affairs at the early stage of school counselling in Singapore. To generalize the findings beyond would not be a wise thing to do.

7.4.2 Limitation – Data Collection

The main limitation in the data collection process was in sampling. While the reasons for adopting a non-random sampling were clearly explained, the non-random samples simply prevented the findings to be generalized to the population. Some questions remained in the researcher's mind on the influence of the samples gathered.

Firstly, the participants might have been drawn from a group which was more inclined to counselling in schools in the first place. There were barriers preventing the careful tracking of non-participation which would otherwise be meaningful to report. Although efforts were taken to be inclusive in gathering the samples such as ensuring multiple recruitment sources for participants, it would be over simplistic to claim that the sample groups were representative of their population. Furthermore, it is important to consider that the sample size was relatively small for both phase one and two of the study. The findings, however, showed some elements of diversity as observed in the demographics of the participants.

As the researcher progressed into the fifth and sixth interviews with each stakeholder group, reoccurring themes became evident suggesting themes saturation. For both community counsellor and teacher groups, the researcher ceased collection of data at the sixth interview while he stopped with the seventh interview for school counsellors. Theme saturation was also confirmed at coding and theming stages.

A key limitation of the questionnaire survey was the lack of internal reliability of the questions posed. On hindsight, it would be worthwhile to incorporate a few questions which focus on the same areas to establish greater reliability. Nevertheless, this weakness was mitigated to some degree by the integration of the qualitative phase of the study – the semi-structured interviews.

7.4.3 Limitation – Analysis

A key lacking in the treatment of the qualitative data was the absence of a second coder for the materials processed. While having the researcher who conducted the interviews to process the data has the clear advantage of knowing the context, non-verbal behaviours and other context-rich data included, a secondary coder would have been most helpful in enhancing the validity of the process and to pick up themes which might have been neglected. A second coder would also have provided the researcher with a resource to confirm or deny his own interpretation and analysis of the data. Such a process may have affected the final analysis and thus the conclusion drawn upon from the data gathered. Unfortunately, a second coder was not available in this study. This was a key limitation of the qualitative data analysis.

7.5 FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study supports the impetus for future research in some key areas. Stakeholders' perceptions gathered in this study encourage further research in the area of school-based family counselling. In particular, case study research or action research focusing on actual attempts in delivering school-based family counselling or enhanced school-community partnership in the delivery of family counselling in Asian cities like Singapore will add much needed practice-relevant knowledge which is relatively absent in this part of the world at the time of this study.

Perception of confidentiality level in schools and the relationship to the actual confidence community-based counsellors have in sharing information with the school counselling service is another area which future research can shed more light on. While correlation was established in the current study, a wider sample of community-based counsellors, social workers, youth workers and mental health professionals may provide more insights.

In addition, more research on school counselling involving multiple stakeholders such as students, parents, school administrators etc. will enrich the current debate. More research from Asia, in particular, Southeast Asia in the area of school counselling, school-community partnership amongst other areas will also be useful as the region invest more in social, counselling and mental health services for children and young persons.

The current study gave rise to a few specific questions that the researcher feels require further research. Firstly, more data could be collected by extending the survey to more community counsellors. An exploratory factor analysis could then to be conducted to consider whether a clustering of factors emerged that reflected the themes emerging from the qualitative analysis. It could further validate the questions and provide a Cronbach Alpha reliability statistic that warrants further development of the instrument. Additionally, a survey study similar to that conducted with community counsellors should be conducted for school counsellors for their opinions to be measured and compared accordingly for a fuller picture.

The current study uncovered or confirmed the perceptions of teachers, school and community-based counsellors. However, it was not designed to and

as a consequence was not able to explain the stakeholders' perceptions in a deeper manner. Some factors were noted to correlate with perceptions, in particular, community-based counsellors' perceptions. Hence future studies may deepen the understanding of these factors, including positive/negative experiences and frequency of working with school counsellors. In the same vein, future research may strive to explain how does the length of service influences community-based counsellors' perceptions of school counselling, a finding of the current study.

7.6 REFLECTION OF THE JOURNEY: BECOMING A PRACTITIONER-SCIENTIST

The researcher is a practitioner at heart. He is a mid-career professional in the social service sector in Singapore. He is often associated with the practice of counselling, psychology and more remotely social work. Upon reflecting on the process of conducting and writing up the research included in this thesis, the researcher discovered the intrapersonal growth he experienced in the past decade. He noted how he became interested, involved, inspired and invested in research work.

7.6.1 Becoming Interested

While being interested in research work come naturally for some people, it was not the case for the researcher. He realised that his interest in a given practice-based problem or phenomenon was the real interest that eventually led his interest in research to grow gradually. This was what later became the impetus for the work carried out. On the hindsight, the researcher acknowledged the initial motivation was primarily driven by the frustration caused by the persistent practice-based problem which refused to go away. He joined many others who discover their interest in research through the initial interest or curiosity on a practice-based or real-world problem.

Another important realisation the researcher came to is the 'developmental stage' that he was in when he first considered postgraduate research work. Uncovering parts of the journey made him realised that being at a more matured stage of his career as a practitioner was crucial for nudging him towards research. He theorised that at some point of a practitioner's career, one would need to reflect upon his or her successes or failures or indeed both

and one of the ways of coming to terms with those reflections is to ‘develop’ a ‘question’ which research or practice-based research will be suited to answer.

The researcher recognised his past training and experience was both an asset and a burden. He views his background as an asset as it opened doors to resources and people at the core of the research area and allowed him to have intimate knowledge of what he was researching on. The familiarity of current affairs as well as historical developments in the field being studied lend credibility and offered safety to research respondents, in particular during face-to-face interviews. Being a practising professional in the field also added richness to the way the study was conducted and to data analysis.

The burden of these knowledge and past experiences were the influences they had in his interaction and interpretation of the data generated in this study. For example, he was elated to find some themes and was disappointed others did not surface as anticipated. This he recognised is the primary characteristic of practitioner-driven research.

7.6.2 Becoming Involved

The researcher initially conducted a simple ‘desk-top research’, similar to that of a systematic literature review. He began searching, reading and gradually making sense of literature surrounding the ‘question’ that has been bothering him at that time. One thing leads to another; he used the newly gathered information to write up a postgraduate research proposal which was accepted by a university.

Having the library and journal database of a large university at his disposal, the researcher continued with his literature review without really knowing that was what he was doing. Indeed, he ended up doing much more than that.

In his zeal to gather and make sense of the international literature on the subject matter, the researcher developed a framework to categorise or cluster the information gathered. Gradually, the researcher realised that the categories were more useful than being labels, he discovered that the relationships between the categories (which he later renamed domains) were as interesting, if not more interesting than the categories themselves. Soon he developed a

framework that he theorised is helpful in examining difficulties in counselling practice in schools and would aid practitioners to develop ‘solutions’ through viewing the ‘problems’ using the framework. While this piece of work was not directly linked to the current study, the processes and the literature examined during that period contributed significantly towards the conceptualisation of the overarching question of the current study.

7.6.3 Being Inspired

With only the view to write up his literature review and proposing the framework into a paper so as to solicit feedback on academic writing and presentation, the researcher was surprised when the editor of an international journal in counselling suggested that there was potential for publication. With much help from the editor and unnamed reviewers, the researcher finally had his paper with his proposed framework published. It was a tangible outcome of his review of difficulties reported in counselling practice in schools, globally. The researcher’s maiden publication is included as Appendix E at the end of this thesis.

Being outside the academia, it took the researcher quite some time to realise the value of his achievement. Gradually he made sense of the small contribution he made through his literature review and theorising work. Shortly after the paper was published, the researcher received responses from a range of people including a few postgraduate students and a professor working in the same area. Further, the paper became his ticket to an international symposium where he shared about the framework. These were all invaluable lessons he gained on academic work. He learnt to communicate with other doctoral students, senior academic and others on ideas, topics, writings and reflections. These were integral parts of his doctoral education which were equally enlightening as his fieldwork and writing. It reaffirmed his perception that a doctoral journey is one about personal growth, not just an intellectual exercise. Citations of the paper gradually pick up, eventually making it to the 80th percentile in citations among the articles of the journal.

The journey he is reflecting upon spans over a decade, the researcher expectedly has his fair share of downs and disappointing moments. These include multiple times he was informed that his work was not up to standard for

publication and require further work. Something he has learnt as part and parcel of the academic world.

7.6.4 Becoming Invested

At the time of the completion of this thesis, the researcher is pleased to report that he is now ‘invested’ in school counselling research and has even broadened his interests to explore the relationship between counselling and other contexts it operates in. This, he felt is how invested he has become in not just practice but research as well in an area of professional practice that he enjoys very much. He sees the journey as enriching, transformational and more importantly as an on-going one. The researcher is no longer just a consumer of research but a contributor to research as well.

7.7 CONCLUSION - FINAL WORD

The study reported in this thesis brought together a collection of experiences of many (including the researcher) who were and some are still actively involved in the provision of care and counselling for children and the young person inside and outside schools. The analysis offered in this thesis captures the human thoughts, feelings and experiences of the integration of counselling service in Singapore schools at the time when the service was introduced and fast developing. Reflection of these recorded experiences and the analysis provided guidance on how stakeholders’ perceptions can be better understood, managed and harnessed as Singapore takes the next lap in school counselling. With that in mind, the conclusion of this thesis actually sets the foundation for the start of a specialised school-community partnership training workshop for stakeholders to discover, build and extend collaboration to further seamless service delivery for children and young persons across schools and communities.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Title: Counselling in Singapore Schools: through the eyes of School Counsellors

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Abstract

Efforts to employ and deploy counsellors to all public schools in Singapore have been carried out since 2005. Five years into the implementation of this nation-wide school counselling programme, the current study was conducted to gain insights from school counsellors at the ground level. Method: Cross-sectional qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with seven school counsellors. Findings: The participants' perceptions and views revealed ambivalence in three key areas, namely 1) the sharing of information about students with other stakeholders, 2) counselling work with families and parents and 3) school counsellors' working relationships with school leaders. These were explored and discussed in this paper.

Keywords: School Counselling, Perceptions, Asia, Singapore,

Counselling in Singapore Schools: through the eyes of School Counsellors

School counselling services in Asia is increasing at a rapid rate. Many countries are now investing, or are being called to invest more in the psychosocial care of children at all levels within the school system (Leuwerke & Shi, 2010; Chong, Lee, Tan, Wong, & Yeo, 2013; Low, Kok, & Lee, 2013). The situation in Singapore is no exception.

Research concluded that behaviours such as bullying, running away from home and disruptive behaviour disorders were among some of the key issues affecting the student population in Singapore (Ooi et al., 2013; Tan, Tan & Appadoo, 2007; Elliott, Chua & Thomas, 2002; Khong, 2007). Having observed an increase in the demand for counselling in schools, Singapore had committed itself in 2004, to the recruiting, training and deploying of counselling professionals in all schools, under the management of the state (Ministry of Education, 2004). Most school counsellors appointed have postgraduate training in counselling, those without were given six-months formal counsellor education through the Diploma in School Counselling conducted by the National Institute of Education (Ministry of Education, 2009).

By 2006, 86% of secondary schools already had a full-time counsellor deployed and the progress made for deployment at primary schools and other institutions were reported to be on track (Ministry of Education, 2006). It is not surprising to see that secondary schools received some priority as they had reported higher usage of counselling service which was evidenced by early data collected by MOE (Ministry of Education, 2004). In 2008, Singapore entered a new phase in school counselling, as the State successfully provided each public school with at least one full-time counselling practitioner (Ministry of Education,

2008). Consequently, Singapore was noted in an international review of eighty-two countries as one of the thirty-nine where school counselling was mandated (Harris, 2013).

Students have had access to counselling services within the public school system, prior to Ministry of Education's mandate, however, these services were provided on a part-time basis by social service agencies, outside of the school.

As such, counselling is not entirely new to students and their families. However, the placement of a full-time counsellor in schools is a new venture. With counsellors stationed permanently in schools, it is not hard to imagine that they would have more opportunities to develop a deeper understanding of the school context, in relation to their work. Understanding their perceptions is arguably an essential step in developing strategies to effectively integrate counselling within schools as well as their communities.

School counsellors' perceptions

Interest in school counsellors' perceptions has a long history. Fulton (1973) had examined and compared school counsellors' perceptions and discussed the agreements and differences in a relatively small survey study. Research examining school counsellors' perceptions remain a key interest of present day scholars.

While some focused on role clarity and associate tasks that school counsellors engage in (Tatar, 1995; Maluwa-Banda, 1998; Bunce & Willower, 2001; Paisley & McMahon, 2001), others examined whether counsellors are actually carrying out the tasks (See, 2004). These studies informed the wider community that role clarity was a precious commodity in school counselling

from the American continent to Africa and Asia. This affirmed the importance of furthering our understanding of school counsellors' perceptions of their own role among other things.

School counsellors' perception of how school counselling fit into schools was another area attracting keen interests. Bunce and Willower (2001) reported that the distance kept between school counsellors and teachers was partly due to the formers' perception of common room politics and stereotypes of counsellors held by teachers. Across the Atlantic, Harris (2009) examined the status of counselling's integration in schools in United Kingdom. She found that the power relationship between school counsellors and the school administrators could be influential in the counsellors' sense of agency and their well-being. More recently and closer to Singapore, Malaysian school counsellors reported that they yearned for a more integrated whole school approach to involve teachers, school administrators, parents and others on students' social and emotional development (Kok, Low, Lee & Cheah, 2012). This further emphasised the need to expand our understanding of counsellors' perception of relationships between them and their colleagues in schools.

The findings from the studies discussed in preceding paragraphs provided invaluable information about school counsellors' own perceptions of their position and functions in schools. Joining other local studies on school counselling (Kok, 2013; Yip 2013), the current study strived to further our understanding of school counsellors' perception of various clinical and contextual issues in Singapore schools.

Overview of the study

The current study was part of a larger exploratory study, which examined multiple stakeholders' (school counsellors, teachers, counsellors in the community) perceptions of school counselling in Singapore. The qualitative study conducted compared stakeholders' perception was reported in another paper (references removed for blind review). The fact that there were shared themes among the interviews within each stakeholder group, opened up opportunities to conduct idiographic case studies of the school counsellors', teachers and community counsellors' perceptions independently. The findings on teachers' and community counsellors' perceptions were reported elsewhere (references removed for blind review). The current paper reports on the seven interviews were conducted with school counsellors.

Methods, Procedures and Analysis

Qualitative inquiries into the role of school counsellors often take the form of interviews, (Bunce & Willower, 2001; Jordans, Keen, Pradhan & Tol, 2007; Leuwerke, & Shi, 2010). This method of investigation arguably yields more conceptual data and acknowledges the presence and involvement of the researcher in the research process (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). The author used semi-structured interviews in order to allow him to develop a keen understanding of school counsellors' perspectives based on their experiences.

Participants

Principles of purposive sampling was adhered to when inviting school counsellors to participated. The basic inclusion criteria was having served at least a year as a counsellor in a public school and the experience should be reasonably recent. The chain referral sampling method (Penrod, Preston, Cain

& Starks, 2003) was adopted for the current study which was in line with the sampling strategy of the main study. The sampling process was also similar to those adopted by other research that interviewed school counsellors in Singapore (e.g. Kok, 2013; Yip 2013).

All seven counsellors were from different schools. Six of the participants were active in service at the point of the interview. One of the participants has moved into counselling in a closely related setting. She was included in this study as her experience as a school counsellor was relatively recent (within a year). The counsellors interviewed were from seven government-funded schools (three primary and four secondary) across Singapore. The current study did not distinguish between primary and secondary level schools as the school counselling programme was implemented simultaneously at both levels. In addition, the focus of the current study was to explore general school counsellors' perspectives on counselling in the local public school context. Most of the interviewees had responded to the invitation to participate in the interviews that were sent to them directly or through a colleague.

The participants reported to have spent 1 to 2 years in the role as a school counsellor. As the school counselling programme was in its fifth year of progressive implementation and was in its third year after all schools were staffed with a counsellor each, it was accepted that participants would have had only a few years of experience in their role. It was important to note that three of the participants had practiced counselling in another setting prior to becoming school counsellors. Nevertheless, it was possible that the participants' relatively short experience of the school counselling service may

have influenced their decision to participate, and by extension possibly affected their responses in the interviews. This will be revisited in the limitation section.

Six of the participants were female. Five participants were between 30 and 39 years old and one participant each belongs to the 40-49 and 50-59 age group. All the interviews were between thirty minutes to one hour in length, and were recorded with participants' written and verbal consent.

Interview Schedule & Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were guided by predetermined discussion areas. These areas were generated from the initial sensing of the ground and reviewing of relevant literature. The seven areas include 1) Presenting issues which lead to referral to counsellors, 2) School counsellors' awareness and understanding of community resources, 3) School counsellors' role in school programmes, 4) School counsellors' work with students' families, 5) The positioning of counselling within schools, 6) School counsellors' understanding of the school context and 7) Confidentiality of information shared in counselling sessions.

Thematic analysis was conducted to draw meanings from the data generated. Thematic analysis is an important tool to access the meanings and real world experiences of the interview participants. Patterns which emerged from conversations during the interviews were at times developed into sub-themes. During the course of interviewing, the researcher also used some of these emerging patterns to establish the subsequent questions in the interviews.

The steps taken in the analysis of the qualitative data were similar to those suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher listened to each

audio recording and reviewed the associated notes taken during the respective interviews. This initial exercise allowed the researcher to have a general idea of each interview and at the same time develop a list of major discussions and themes for each individual recording, through repeatedly replaying each interview. While identifying the themes in the participants' perceptions, attention was given to identifying any patterns in what each participant had to say, these themes and the associated time frames of the recordings, were mapped on a spreadsheet to gain a holistic view of the interview data. All significant discussions were transcribed and mapped to the spreadsheet. In the third exercise, the researcher listened to all interview recordings in their entirety in order to compare the recorded data with the early themes on the spreadsheet. This led to the final stage of coding, in which the researcher examined the themes, which were present across all the interviews. Each overlapping theme was given additional attention, and was identified through repeatedly listening to the relevant recordings; comparing the respective transcribed excerpts and reviewing the researchers field notes. This process was repeated and the themes were clustered to form the main themes.

Findings & Discussions

The school counsellors interviewed each presented a different micro situation they were engaged in while highlighting some common themes of concerns in their practice. They expressed intense views along a few main themes. These include 1) concerns about relationship with teachers and school leadership, 2) balancing confidentiality and sharing information in the school context, and 3) whether or not they should be working with students' families. Each of these

will be discussed in the following sections. Minimum editing was carried out in the excerpts to preserve the participants' voice (Corden& Sainsbury, 2006).

Concerns about relationships with Teachers and School leadership

School counsellors interviewed were aware of the importance of their relationships with teachers and principals. They readily shared about their current relationship with teachers as well as the school leaders. The working relationship with teachers was discussed at some length. It seemed that school counsellors saw the working relationship with teachers in quite positive light.

> *The relationship with teachers is great. The teachers are very supportive. That will be one of the pull factors to continue doing what I am doing. And when they asked you questions, they do not jump to conclusion. Probably working with the management is something else. There could be a lot in things where you know, they are just being nice because you are there but they would really prefer not to have you there. In fact if it wasn't MOE's prerequisite to have one school counsellor each in schools, then I do not think I will be here. (SC2)*

A counsellor in a primary school, in the preceding excerpt, compared her relationships with the two key stakeholders in the school context. Another counsellor in a secondary school reflected similar sentiments:

> *Relationships (with teachers are) pretty okay, we also update on cases that we work; how the students are fairing, and they (teachers) also let us know how their behaviour (is) in class, whether there are any other issues we need to look out for. I think that's quite good. Well you know, the thing about schools is that*

they have this work review thing. (During) this work review they will ask what you plan (for) next year. Hmmm…. when I first came, the person I was reporting to, was telling me that counselling is like your 'bread and butter' so you are suppose to do it already, so you are not doing more than what you are (expected to be) doing. So you are supposed to think (of) what you want to do to add value to what you (are) doing. (SC3)

A school counsellor with slightly more experience in her school (more than two years), expressed the importance she placed on the relationship with principals in the excerpt below:

....because not every counsellor really gets the support, the full support of the principal. That's why I say I am fortunate enough that I have good communication with my principal (and) that he supports me. He may or may not agree with everything I do, but I think we have quite a good understanding. And that helps a lot, that helps a lot (repeat). When I recommend the programmes to bring in, he gave me the support (readily).

(SC5)

It appeared that school counsellors were having warmer relationships with teachers than with school leadership. School management's view of counselling seemed to affect how school counsellors see their own work performance and their positioning in schools. As much as school counsellors felt that their relationships with teachers were generally positive, relationships with school management seem more complicated. One possible reason is the presence of a line of reporting between the counsellors and the school

leadership. Another was the close connection between the management's perception of counselling and the power they have in influencing the climate and environment for counselling in schools.

Counsellors working in schools seemed to be clearly aware of the importance of their working relationships with stakeholders in the school context. While they appeared to be working well in building relationships with teachers, there seemed to be a high level of anxiety with regards to their perceptions of relation with school leaders. Relationships could be seen as the foundation for collaborative work between stakeholders. School counsellors' sharing about their relationship forms a useful backdrop to understand the other two themes discussed in the following sections.

Sharing of Information and Confidentiality

Counsellors in schools were well aware of the confidential nature of the information they managed in their work. Many verbalized clear understanding of the need in upholding a high level of confidentiality but some reported difficulties in doing so in a school environment. School counsellors also seemed to be aware of the teachers' keenness to know more about the students and school counsellors' feedback about them after counselling sessions. Two school counsellors, one from a primary and another a secondary school reflected on the struggles they faced.

> *They do (ask) but I don't tell them. I phased it (in) such a way that will not prompt them to ask more…….my RO (reporting officer) basically told me that "it's good that you want to keep*

confidentiality of your pupils but this is a school so we need to know everything." And I have to surrender my case notes... (SC2)

I find that it's very difficult to be 100% confidential in a school. Yeah, maybe because we are serving different agendas, it's very hard to keep (to) the 100% confidentiality. We are a team, we are not like… and it's not just a counselling team. In a school, (there are) different agendas, it's very hard to maintain 100% confidentiality although we try very hard to maintain a high level of confidentiality. (SC4)

Another counsellor interviewed compared the different practice-climates in relation to confidentiality between a hospital and a school. Her views were illuminating as she was an experienced counselling practitioner who had practiced in both settings.

When we are working in the hospital; all of us have our own professional ethics. Confidentiality is very important and we can get sued, you know? ...But in the school, they are not bound by all these things and counsellors are the only ones interested in confidentiality. So it will probably be a very foreign topic for teachers and principals. They will tell you that (when it comes to) confidentiality, "there is no need for that" or they will say, "you must trust us".

(SC6)

School counsellors appeared to face pressure from management and teachers to share information at one end while having to ensure they practice

ethically at the same time. The excerpts above gave a sense that experienced practitioners recognised the difference in the understanding of the need for confidentiality in different settings but others may have felt misunderstood and struggled in maintaining a balance. Many adopted creative methods in managing this matter. Some school counsellors preferred to seek students' consent at an early stage of the counselling relationship. Two counsellors practicing in secondary schools who have had a few years of experience working in another setting reported that this worked well for their students:

> *That's why before the start of any sessions I make it very clear to them that at any point, (sometimes) more or less that it has to be written down, it is the rule that I have to tell, you know, the principal or anything that got to do with the police or court or during the course, case file will (be) given to all disciplinarians. You know, so even if it happens at some point that I have to tell the teachers, they already know that just some information, I have to share with the teachers because I am counselling them.*
>
> *(SC7)*
>
> *I am not the case owner of the student even though I counsel them, so (for) the student, that (is) not an individual confidentiality, so here we maintain a group confidentiality. So I will tell the students that "you know I may", in fact, "I would feedback to the teacher about certain things that we talked about... ah...if you don't want me say certain things, I won't. But you know, what we talked about, I would like to share it with your form teacher". So we maintain a group confidentiality.*

(SC1)

Others managed the information they share as well as with whom they share the information as a part of their effort to protect their students. Two primary schools counsellors reported that they used clinical judgement in deciding what information to share and what not:

> *So I will share with the teacher, but when I share with the teacher, the most I share with the teacher, maybe I will say "ohh… single parent, parents work long hours, not much time (with the students)" something like that, no more...Yeah, because I have to up keep my code of ethics and I think as a counsellor, I have to let the kids trust me, otherwise it's going to be very difficult and I uphold my confidentiality, after all (in) long run, I think teachers trust me (SC5)*

> *Very difficult to answer… really it's your call, you are attending to a case and you know (what to say), you have done this work for quite some time, so just through experience I guess. You know what to say and what not to say. (SC7)*

Another counsellor reported that combing both methods, managing information flow and seeking consent from students when appropriate was helpful too. Further in some cases, it appeared that the school counsellors had secured an understanding with the school management on the need for them to uphold confidentiality. This excerpt demonstrates this:

> *I think in general, (it's) on a required basis. When they (teachers) want to know, they just want to know the gist of, I think that's fine and I do tell my student I need to share, just the gist, not even summarized, a broad idea..... (SC4)*

As illustrated in these excerpts, school counsellors found meaningful ways in this balancing act of sharing information with stakeholders and keeping with their ethical requirement. Although the current situation appeared at best, ambivalent for the stakeholders and themselves, school counsellors felt that the current situation was manageable and comfortable. A representative response:

> *I think it's just fine, because I don't think I should share more, you know because, if I share more, where do (I) draw the line? Okay, then the students will not tell me anything anymore because it gets open up and tell everybody everything. And I don't think it's right. So at this moment, I think it's okay.*
>
> *(SC5)*

Working with Students' Families

School counsellors generally held the perception that they do not do family work / therapy. Most of the participants shared their positions referring to limitation by authority and / or resources:

> *But then again, you know, it doesn't fall into the job scope of school counsellor. Because working with family is a very long process, ...and also the school setting does not (cater) for that kind of therapy work. You know… (SC1)*

I don't usually counsel the parents.... so you kind of have to do like a quick assessment, you know, ...you think (assume) that the parents' relationships are okay and there is not any real need for them to work through their (issues), you know, parenting techniques or whatever. So really you just discharge advice that you tell them, "okay you need to do this, this, this for your child". And most of the time, they are quite happy to comply.

(SC2)

Yeah, yeah….The job scope is quite clear that we should only counsel students. Not to be involved in family therapy. (SC4)

School counsellors seemed to have the similar impression that their job scope did not include counselling parents and families. However, they placed great importance on families and parents when it concerned improving children's lives. Two school counsellors reflected on this:

Yeah, because I think that's important, because the child spend majority of (their) time at home with their parents, and if it is really a social issue that is preventing the child from maximizing his potential, then we have to look at the social issues.(SC1)

I feel if we only do our work with the clients (students), sometimes it's not so effective. We need to get the parents to be involved and, to be supportive as well. So when the parents understand what their children are going through, they will find ways, because some parents also feel that they are very helpless or they really

don't know what to do and (that's) where we can come in to work with them. (SC4)

Counsellors who have worked in social services where working with families is the 'rule of thumb', seemed to demonstrate more ambivalence. Excerpts from interviews with two of them demonstrated this:

Yeah, I mean when (I was) working in the social service, I worked with parents, counsel parents. I also used to run parenting talks, parenting workshop. But here… basically (it's) meeting the parents, telling them how the child performed, how (for) them finding out how the child need support from their home. Sometimes, you know, I do from time to time, do parenting counselling..... (but) I am very clear about my role, who my clients are and what I am there to do... (SC1)

That's why its selectively! We don't provide family therapy or marital therapy but....if they come with very urgent request, what will happen to the child? (comes to mind). It doesn't make sense to send them away, because they might get lost in the system, so we just provide as (a) transition (service). (SC6)

It appeared that school counsellors struggled with whether or not to extend their work with students' families and what form should their work take if they do work with them, family therapy or some parenting education etc. Although to some it was clearly spelled out that their work should focus on the student, many saw the logic that their clinical interventions could be a family-based one or at least obtaining family support in their interventions, which was

consistent with observations and recommendations of recent local studies and those from the region (Chong, et al, 2013; Kok, 2013; Luk-Fong, 2013).

Conclusion

The current study seemed to show that school counsellors were adapting to the school setting and the various aspects of their work. They were seen to be striving to establish a working relationship with school leaders while mindful of the line of reporting between them. The data also suggests that school counsellors were trying to balance the need to share information with colleagues in the school context and the need to maintain reasonable confidentiality for the students they work with. In addition, school counsellors often have to make a conscious choice on how much they could attend to students' parents and families. Collectively, the findings revealed that the school counsellors as new members of the school system were constantly in a balancing act as they were finding their suitable positions in the schools.

Stakeholders including school leaders and counsellors may focus on developing clarity and consensus on matters concerning working with families, confidentiality and exchange of information as well as working relationships as the school counselling service matures. While these findings are not representative of a cross section of Singapore, it has added a channel to hear school counsellors' experience of the implementation of the nationwide counselling service in schools. Finally, this paper adds to the global understanding of impacts of the ever-changing social-cultural environment surrounding child development in this part of the world.

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APPENDIX B

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School counselling in Singapore: teachers' thoughts and perceptions

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School counselling is a growing service in Singapore. Having implemented counselling services in all the public schools for over half a decade, it was timely to examine how teachers looked at counselling in school setting. Interviews with teachers suggested their overall positiveness about counselling service in Singapore schools. Teachers view the counselling service as a helpful addition because (1) it extended more individual attention to students; (2) it offered a potential source for teachers to learn more about students through a different perspective; and (3) school counsellors could work with parents and families, especially in situations where referral to external resources is needed. These observations are discussed in this paper.

Keywords: school counselling; teachers' perceptions; Singapore

The influence of sociocultural factors on child development is well established in the classic works of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and Super and Harkness (1986). As more evidence points to the key relationship between psychology and sociocultural elements, more indigenous psychology studies are needed to extend our understanding of human development in context (Hwang, 2005). Hendrick (1997) illustrated how the changes in the United Kingdom's education landscape over the years influenced child development in that country. Indeed, examining changes in school environments and their effects on stakeholders could help further our understanding of children and their lives. The current study explored one such change: the inclusion of counselling services in schools, and teachers' thoughts and feelings during implementation.

School counselling services in Asia are increasing at a rapid rate. As such, many countries are now investing, or are being called to invest, more in the psychosocial care of both children and young adults at all levels within the school system (Chong, Lee, Tan, Wong & Yeo, 2013; Leuwerke & Shi, 2010; Low, Kok & Lee, 2013; Van Schalkwyk & D'Amato, 2013; Van Schalkwyk & Sit, 2013). The situation in the Southeast Asian country of Singapore is no exception, and as a small island nation with little natural resources, education and the development of its human resources has always been a priority of the government (Gopinathan, 2001).

While psychological counselling in schools is nothing new to Singapore, major developments have taken place within the past decade. Local research concluded that behaviours such as bullying and running away from home were among some of the key issues affecting the student population in Singapore (Elliott, Chua & Thomas, 2002; Khong, 2007; Tan, Tan & Appadoo, 2007). Having observed a general increase in the demand for counselling in schools, the government of Singapore had committed itself in 2004 to recruiting, training and deployment of counselling professionals in all schools,

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under the management of the state (Ministry of Education, 2004). In 2008, this mandate was fulfilled and Singapore entered a new phase, as the Ministry of Education provided each public school with at least one full-time counselling practitioner (Ministry of Education, 2006). Consequently, Singapore was noted in an international review of 82 countries as one of the 39 countries where school counselling was state funded

(Harris, 2013).

Students had access to counselling services within the public school system prior to the Ministry of Education's mandate, but these services were provided on a part-time basis by social service agencies, outside the school. Even though some schools had sourced the funding needed to employ their own counselling professionals for full-time counselling services, many had counsellors stationed in their schools for only a few days each week.

While counselling is not an unfamiliar subject to teachers, they are now expected to work in conjunction with school counsellors. With counsellors stationed permanently in schools, it is not hard to imagine that stakeholders such as teachers developed a deeper impression of them and their work. Understanding the perception of teachers as it relates to the increased number of available counsellors within the school system is arguably an essential step in developing strategies to effectively integrate counselling within schools. With these considerations in mind, the primary aim of this study is to provide qualitative data on teachers' perceptions of counselling in Singapore schools during this critical period of wide-scale implementation.

Teachers' perceptions

The following studies demonstrate that teachers' and education professionals' perceptions of school counselling are diverse and their impact is far-reaching. Many studies have been conducted in countries (e.g. Singapore) where school counselling is state funded. According to Polat and Jenkins (2005), the local education authorities in England and Wales differed in both the qualification

requirements for school counsellors that they employed and the service evaluation methods used in schools. The data gathered from their study also indicated differing perceptions as to the role of counsellors as determined by other education professionals involved. These differing perceptions were intriguing and deserve closer examination. Similarly, Alghamdi and Riddick (2011) found in their study in Saudi Arabia that principals differed among themselves in their view of the role of counsellors in schools.

Clark and Amatea (2004) reported that teachers' perceptions of the role of school counsellors are of considerable importance as these influence the perception of students, parents and principals. More importantly, school counsellors often gain access to clients through referrals made by teachers; therefore, the attitude of the teacher towards counselling can have several implications. Some studies have highlighted the importance of teachers' acceptance of counselling or support services in the school context (Loynd, Cooper & Hough, 2005; Webb & Vulliamy, 2003; Wolstenholme & Kolvin, 1980).

In an early effort to explore teachers' attitudes, Best, Jarvis, Oddy and Ribbins (1981) found that teachers preferred counsellors who were familiar with the school and the education system. They also highlighted the importance of the teachers' level of acceptance of counsellors in schools. In a more recent study, Loynd et al. (2005) found that the majority of the teachers they interviewed in Scotland had positive attitudes towards school counselling, most valuing counsellors for the expertise they brought to schools. Both studies also highlighted the importance of acceptance of the integration process of counselling in schools.

In Hong Kong, Chan (2005) found that teachers involved in guidance counselling took a more humanistic view of guidance work when compared with those who were not so involved. This is important as it suggests that teachers might differ among themselves in their perceptions, depending on their roles in the school. The study also highlighted that teachers believed that a healthy personality is a major factor in delivering good-quality counselling. This suggests that teachers consider personal qualities when viewing the school counselling service and the school counsellor.

A national study in the United States by Reiner, Colbert and Pérusse (2009), on teachers' perceptions of the professional school counsellor's role, found that teachers agreed with most (13/16) of the appropriate counselling responsibilities as defined by the American School Counselling Association (ASCA). Interestingly, the respondents also indicated an agreement to only 5 out of 12 inappropriate activities to be engaged by school counsellors as defined by ASCA. This highlights the fact that teachers' perceptions of the role and tasks of a school counsellor might differ from those laid down by a professional school counselling association, suggesting that fundamental differences exist between the counselling and teaching professions' perspectives on guidance and counselling in schools.

Teachers' acceptance of counselling for students is critical to the development of a sustainable counselling programme in schools. Counsellors

sometimes face challenges in managing teachers' perceptions and expectations, in order to establish a balanced and collaborative relationship with them. This was highlighted as a challenge in the internal domain in school counselling (Low, 2009). At times, misconceptions about the counselling process among teachers created a number of difficulties in referrals, classroom-based interventions or simply professional interaction between teacher and counsellor (Harris, 2009).

There is an urgent need to explore, understand and compare the stakeholders' perceptions of the role of counselling in schools. Exploring views of the teachers, who arguably are the largest group among the stakeholders, should be considered a priority. Whether there are fundamental differences in their perspectives, or a matter of practical preference, the view of teachers on counselling in schools cannot be ignored. As discussed, several studies carried out around the world have sought to examine the perception of counselling in schools. However, little research has been carried out in this area in Singapore. Additional research would therefore bring clarity to the issues that influence teachers' perception of school counsellors and school counselling in Singapore.

Overview of the current study

The current study was originally part of a larger mixed-method, exploratory study that examined multiple stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling in Singapore. All participants in the current study also completed a questionnaire which formed the quantitative aspect of the main study. The fact that there were shared themes among the interviews with the teachers in the study afforded an opportunity to conduct an idiographic case study of teachers' perceptions of school counselling in Singapore. Smith, Jarman and Osborn (1999) claim that the ideographic case study approach is suitable for examining shared themes from a single case study to as many as 10 cases. In the current study, six interviews were conducted with teachers and the data collected were analysed. The purpose of this case study research was to explore teachers' perception of counselling as a service in schools in particular, to learn teachers' lived experience of the inclusion of counselling in schools during the early stages of implementation. The main exploratory question of the current study, as clearly in the title of this paper, is 'What do teachers think of school counselling?'

Methods, procedures and analysis

Qualitative inquiries into the role of school counsellors often take the form of interviews (Bunce & Willower, 2001; Jordans, Keen, Pradhan &Tol, 2007; Leuwerke & Shi, 2010). This method of investigation arguably yields more conceptualized data than any other method. Furthermore, a qualitative interview acknowledges the presence and involvement of the researcher in the research process (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). The researcher used semi-structured interviews in order to allow him to develop a keen understanding of teachers' perceptions and lived experiences.

This study contained some elements of an insider research, which included the researcher's knowledge of the field through being a counselling practitioner who works around, and at times, within the school system. The researcher's experience in the field was beneficial in scoping the study as he was able to obtain vital information to which an outsider would not have had access (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007).

Participants

The chain referral sampling method (Penrod, Preston, Cain & Starks, 2003) was adopted for the current study. Of the six teachers who were interviewed, all but two were still teaching. The two teachers who were inactive had considerable work experience (5–8 years) as teachers in the Singapore school system and were also teaching at the time the counselling programme was implemented. The teachers interviewed were from five government-funded schools (three primary and two secondary) across Singapore. The current study did not distinguish between primary- and secondary-level schools as the school counselling programme was implemented simultaneously at both levels. In addition to this, the focus of the current study was to explore teachers' general perceptions on counselling in the local public school setting. A comparison between teachers' perceptions at different academic levels may be an area of consideration for future research. The participants reported to have spent a mean of 7.3 years as teachers. Approximately 60% of all teachers in Singapore schools have been in the service for 9 years or fewer (Ministry of Education, 2013). Four of the six participants were female and all participants were between 30 and 49 years of age.

The school counselling programme was in its fifth year when the current study was carried out. The researcher invited teachers to interviews based on their roles and their willingness to participate. Some participants referred the researcher to another person who was willing to participate in the study. All interviews were 30–60 minutes in length and were recorded with participants' written and verbal consent.

Interview schedules and analysis

The semi-structured interviews were guided by seven predetermined discussion areas. These were generated from the initial sensing of the ground, relevant literature reviews and were supported by the findings of the questionnaire that was issued in the main study. These areas were, however, also related directly to the purpose of the current study, which is to explore the experiences of teachers in Singapore as related to the inclusion of counselling services in the schools in which they worked. The seven areas were (1) presenting issues which led to counselling referrals; (2) the school counsellors' understanding of community resources; (3) the counsellors' role in school programmes; (4) the relationship between school counsellors and parents or families; (5) school counselling's positioning in schools; (6) the desire for school

counsellors to know the school context; and (7) confidentiality issues concerning information gathered during counselling sessions.

Data collected from the interviews were examined using thematic analysis to draw meanings from them. Thematic analysis is an important tool in accessing the meanings and real-world experiences of interview participants. Patterns emerging from conversations during the interviews would sometimes be developed into sub-themes. During the course of interviewing, the researcher also used the emerging patterns to establish the subsequent interview questions.

The steps taken in the examination of the qualitative data were similar to those suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher listened to each audio recording of the interviews with each participant and reviewed the associated notes taken during the respective interviews. This initial exercise allowed the researcher to gain a general idea of each interview and at the same time develop a list of major discussions and themes for each individual recording, through repeatedly replaying each interview. While identifying themes in the experiences of participants, attention was paid to identifying any patterns in what each participant had to say, and these themes and the associated time frames of the recordings were mapped on a spreadsheet to gain a holistic view of the interview data. All significant discussions were transcribed and mapped to the spreadsheet. A full transcription of one of the interviews was used as a template for this purpose. In the third exercise, the researcher listened to all interview recordings in their entirety in order to compare the recorded data to the earlier themes on the spreadsheet. This led to the final stage of coding, in which the researcher examined the themes that were present across all interviews. Each overlapping theme was given additional attention and was identified through repeatedly listening to the relevant recordings, comparing the respective transcribed extracts and reviewing the researcher's field notes. This process was repeated, and the themes were clustered to form the sub-themes and finally the overarching theme.

Findings and discussion

From the data analysis, the overarching theme that emerged was that teachers welcomed the presence of counsellors in schools and were actively adjusting to working with them. This was supported by the sub-themes, which were more specific and related mostly to how teachers perceived and worked with school counsellors. One of the sub-themes was that teachers generally saw the inclusion of a counselling service in schools as helping them in their work. Another theme was the teachers' desire for school counsellors to share information with them so that they were able to work in collaboration with each other. Also expressed were the teachers' expectations of school counsellors to work with parents and families. These are presented below with relevant extracts, which are representatives of the sub-themes identified. Minimum

editing was carried out in the extracts to preserve the participants' voices (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006).

Counselling in schools helps students and teachers

Teachers generally saw the need for a counselling service in schools. They viewed and expected counsellors to fill different gaps such as allotting individual attention to students, being a point of reference for consultation on behavioural and mental health issues and coordinating or accessing external social services. They related to the researcher how the counsellors had helped them to perform their roles better. This was an interesting observation as teachers were clearly able to link the counsellors' work with theirs. It also suggested that teachers welcome the inclusion of counsellors in the school setting and affirmed their relevance. Furthermore, teachers seemed to feel that school counsellors made their jobs easier, namely in the areas of pastoral care or one-to-one guidance 'counselling' with students. While positive, it is important to note that participants who agreed to be interviewed may be teachers who were already more inclined to engage in counselling and pastoral care work. The extracts below are from three of the participants and highlight how teachers view counselling as a complementary function to teaching.

> I think the real help that they give to us, teachers, is to off-load the counselling part for us so that we can concentrate on the teaching part … I mean as much as we want to say that we are teachers and also counsellors, but the truth is that we don't have so much time. So when a pupil displays some destructive behaviours in class, then the counsellor helps by getting the boy out, for some time out or some fixed schedule during the week to talk to him. So during the one-hour or so, the teacher gets the respite, [and] to teach without the disruption. (T1)
>
> They come in from a different angle from teachers. If teachers can do the job [counselling], then we would have done it long ago. But because the child sees the counsellor very differently from what happen in my classroom, so they will divulge different things, behave differently, so what the counsellors can get through to the child, the teacher can't [cannot]. (T2)
>
> Without the school counsellor and with the school counsellor, what is the different? … the difference is I can at least get the child to speak to someone. Before the school counsellor, like who else can this child turn to beside me. So with the school counsellor, at least we know that, if all my colleagues cannot handle, at least this child can go [to the counsellor]. (T4)

In the first extract, the teacher felt that school counsellors were indeed helpful to him as they were able to attend to individual students, which was a time-consuming task that he was unable to do himself. The second extract demonstrated teachers' appreciation of the expertise and skills the counsellors brought to schools, which were different from theirs. The last of the preceding extracts was from an interview with the least experienced among the six participants, having been a teacher for only five years. This participant stated that teachers may see counsellors as a source of 'backup' or support when they

are faced with students with specific issues. Overall, the teachers had the opinion that professional counselling plays a key role in schools and viewed counsellors as their partners in service.

Two participants made a comparison between the current situation and the time where there were no counselling professionals in their schools. Below are short extracts of their views.

> Okay, I come from a generation where in our times, there is no such thing as counselling, we did fine and now why suddenly, everybody needs counselling? So we done fine previously, [but then came] the power of suggestion, I suggest you need counselling, suddenly I need counselling. If there is no mention of counselling, I [would] do just fine, so personally, that's my take. (T3)
>
> I think kids nowadays they need to be guided a lot. Somehow a lot more than ten years ago … In my short span of ten years of working, as a teacher, I have already seen the changes, more so for those teachers who have been teaching thirty, forty years. They can tell you straight away there is a vast difference in the quality of pupils who come through their hands and the kind of problems that they faced and that we face nowadays in school, we don't see a lot of them ten, twenty years ago. (T1)

While the first of the preceding extracts suggested that the need for counselling in schools was 'created' over the years, the second considered that it was the changing times and the changing profile of the students that facilitated the increase in the need for this service. These intriguing reflections came from the two most experienced teachers among the participants, who had 8 and 10 years of experience, respectively. This, however, lends credence to the fact that understanding and appreciation of the need for a counselling service in schools vary among the teachers. In addition, teachers are important observers of the social developments in any given community or state and, even more importantly, in their schools. Their awareness and their ability to link social problems and societal changes, which are ultimately reflected in the education system, to support the demand for more counselling services in schools were intriguing.

Teachers appreciate more information from counsellors to enable them to better work with students

Another sub-theme generated from the interviews was that teachers were expressing their desire and interest to gain feedback from the counsellors, and to have them share information with them more freely. All the teachers interviewed found this to be an important aspect of their relationship with school counsellors. They valued information sharing as support to help them work with their students. Some also addressed the issue of confidentiality between counsellor and student. Below are some extracts of the exchanges during the interviews.

> At least she [the school counsellor] understands a bit and she tells me. [So] I know how to deal with this kid [better] because [I understand] his background, of course I keep it confidential. But at least I know what is frustrating him, what works for him and sometimes a bit [about] what he was thinking. So she is, in a way, like a middle person. (T2)
>
> She (the school counsellor) shares with me what she discovered or unearthed from her sessions. Between us, teacher and counsellor, I think the confidentiality part should be, I mean, they should not say that what was discussed during the session they will not let the teacher know … But I think it is useful for the counsellors to let the teachers know. For example, we teachers may not be aware of something, it could be our own fault that why the child is [behaving] like that. Or sometimes, some issues they have with their families at home and they are not comfortable telling us but because they have told the counsellors and the counsellors have told us, then we are more aware. So I find [that] between teachers and counsellors, there should be that cooperation to tell each other as much as possible, because underlying all these is the intention to help the child. (T1)

In the extracts above, teachers expressed their desire for the counsellors to openly share their findings on the students with which they had worked. Nevertheless, it is important to note that the participants who volunteered to be part of the current study may have been those teachers who were more inclined to work closely with counsellors. More importantly, the teachers' desire to increase their knowledge seemed to be driven by their passion to be able to work with the students, by complementing the work of the counsellor outside of the counselling room. This is a reflection of why teachers are so strongly motivated to work closely with school counsellors.

On the other hand, this is an interesting finding as this strong desire to gain more knowledge from school counsellors, in regard to the cases with which they were involved, suggests that there is indeed a great need for school counsellors to share information. In addition, it suggests that school counsellors need to do more to educate stakeholders about confidentiality and their work. The debate on the interaction and dynamics between teachers and school counsellors over the sharing of information and confidentiality issues is an ongoing one. The findings support further research, especially in exploring the views of both teachers and school counsellors as relating to the need for disclosure, and the impact that this demand will have on the working relationship of both professionals. It also highlights the potential for both counsellors and teachers to develop a greater understanding of each other's work in order to pave the way for closer collaboration.

Teachers expect counsellors to work with parents and families in situations where referrals have been made or liaison with external agencies is needed

The work of the school counsellor normally includes relations with families and parents. This area is often explored to better understand the particular situation in different countries (Ghaith, Banat, Hamad & Albadareen, 2012; Luk-Fong,

2013). Generally, the participants in the current study seemed to have the expectation that school counsellors should work with parents to some extent. However, most teachers did not voice an expectation that the school counsellors should provide counselling for parents or families. Teachers generally felt that school counsellors worked with parents in relation to cases where parental support was necessary in collaboration with the school, to help students to maximize the benefits gained from the teaching and learning resources available. The first extract below demonstrates the participant's view of the school counsellors' work with families, in assessing and referring them to the relevant agencies which could meet the families' needs; this could be financial assistance, or providing an outlet in which the emotional needs of the adults in the families could be supported. The second extract discusses the school counsellor's role in interacting with the parents in cases where there were behavioural issues and concerns and which needed the involvement of family, parents or external agencies for a successful resolution.

> Another thing I would think FTSC [full-time school counsellor] works very well is dealing with children with some family needs. Because even when I do have experience working with FTSC so closely, I wouldn't know what are the other connections … Because I know they [the counsellors] have a lot of contacts [that] I would not know … (T5)
>
> Based on my understanding and my observations, the school counsellors work with parents only when the cases were handed to them. And if they [school counsellors] were to take over the case, they would usually work with the parents, especially if these students also require the help of external agencies. (T6)

During the interviews, both teachers whose extracts precede this paragraph reported that they were working very closely with their respective counsellors in their schools. The extracts suggest that the teachers' understanding of school counsellors' work with parents and families revolved around the child. Typically, teachers hold common expectations for school counsellors to be engaged with parents appropriately and expect them to work in tandem with the parents to fulfil the educational goals of the students.

The participants had common perceptions and expectations about the newly implemented school counselling service. Many of these expectations and perceptions were developed through their interaction and their experience with the counselling process, or through working with counsellors in their schools. From the data obtained, it was determined that teachers hold positive attitudes towards the counselling service implemented. It is also apparent that teachers and counsellors benefit from collaboration in their work and in their relationships with students and their families. There was also evidence to support the idea that the teachers' desire for information from counsellors had fostered the development of the students involved. The sub-themes of this study support the overarching theme that the school counselling service is welcomed among teachers and that they were adjusting to fostering a working relationship with the counsellors in their schools. In regard to the finding in previous studies

(Loynd et al., 2005; Webb & Vulliamy, 2003; Wolstenholme & Kolvin, 1980) that teachers' acceptance of counselling was found to be important, periodic 'climate sensing' or 'sampling' of teachers' experience, such as this study, may be helpful to extend our understanding as the situation evolves.

Limitations

The current study was conducted in a bid to explore teacher's perceptions of school counselling through interviews. The small sample, however, restricted a full discussion on the key issues raised. In addition, as this study was part of a larger project, the interview schedule was predetermined and was focused on only a few areas. While the semistructured nature of the interviews was helpful in facilitating broader discussions, a customized instrument would have been able to uncover additional information. Another limitation of the current study was the lack of relevant local literature on school counselling in Singapore. The scope of the study therefore relied heavily on research conducted overseas. More local literature may have shaped the study differently.

Conclusion

The data obtained from the qualitative study conducted showed that, in general, teachers viewed the wide-scale implementation of school counselling within the school system in Singapore as a useful addition. Having said that, it is important to note that many schools already had some form of counselling service implemented prior to the nationwide programme, which could be seen as an extension of earlier offerings. The findings also revealed that the teachers had a desire for an unrestricted exchange of information between themselves and counsellors, giving additional insight into measures that could be implemented to foster a seamless working relationship.

Schools may focus on fostering collaborations between teachers and school counsellors as the service moves 'inward' after this initial 'landing'. While these findings are not representative of a cross-section of Singapore, they provide a platform for the perceptions of teachers as they relate to the newly implemented counselling service in schools. The findings and suggestions are able to further inform policy-makers, teachers, counsellors and other stakeholders by providing them with additional data in regard to improving the relationship between teachers and school counsellors, who are the key stakeholders in ensuring the continued sustenance of the school counselling programme in Singapore. Finally, this paper adds to the global understanding of impacts of the ever-changing sociocultural environment surrounding child development.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes on contributor

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APPENDIX C

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Looking in from the outside: community counsellors' opinions and attitudes to school counselling in Singapore

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Over the last decade, the movement towards the permanent presence of counsellors within schools has gathered pace in Singapore. As counsellors were introduced into more schools, there were opportunities for their community-based counterparts such as social workers, youth workers and other counselling practitioners to work with them. Through semi-structured interviews, this study explored the experiences and perceptions of counselling practitioners in community-based agencies, specifically Family Service Centres, on school counselling. Community counsellors were found to be supportive of the initiative but concerned about how the service was implemented, especially in relation to professional and ethical standards and maintenance of confidentiality standards. Community counsellors felt that their counterparts in schools lacked knowledge about community resources and that family work seemed beyond their capability, they also thought that former teachers or principals perhaps needed more help with the transition to a counselling role. These findings are discussed and it is recommended that community counsellors could be more involved in developing the new school counselling services.

Keywords: school; counselling; perceptions; social work; community

The influence of sociocultural factors on child development was established in the classic studies of Bronfenbrenner (1979), and Super and Harkness (1986). Evidence for the importance of the relationship between psychological and sociocultural factors is accumulating, and further research is needed to improve our understanding of human development in different sociocultural contexts (Hwang, 2005). Hendrick's (1997) study of how changes in the UK's education system influenced child development in that country showed how investigating changes in school environments and their effects on stakeholders can help to improve our understanding of child development. This paper describes qualitative research on community counsellors' attitudes and opinions of counselling practice in Singapore schools.

Many Asian countries—including the southeast Asian country of Singapore—are already investing or face calls to invest more, in the psychosocial care of children and young adults in the school system (Chong, Lee, Tan, Wong, & Yeo, 2013; Leuwerke & Shi, 2010; Low, Kok, & Lee, 2013; Van Schalkwyk & D'Amato, 2013; Van Schalkwyk & Sit, 2013).

Although provision of psychological counselling in schools is nothing new in Singapore, there have been important developments over the past decade. Having

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observed a general increase in the demand for counselling in schools, in 2004, the Singaporean government committed itself to recruiting and training sufficient counsellors to provide a counselling service in every state school (Ministry of Education, 2004). By 2008, the Ministry of Education provided each school with at least one full-time counselling practitioner (Ministry of Education, 2006). An international review noted that Singapore was one of thirty-nine out of eighty-two countries where provision of counselling in schools was mandatory (Harris, 2013).

Prior to the universal provision, students in the state school system did have access to counselling services, but these services were typically provided on a part-time basis, by social service agencies outside the school. Although some schools had sufficient funding to provide a full-time counselling service, in many schools, counsellors were only available for a few days each week.

Given that before implementation of the nation-wide school-based counselling programme, counselling services for schools were provided by community-based social service agencies, it is unsurprising that community counsellors remained a key stakeholder in both school-based and community-based student care services. Understanding how community counsellors view the increase in the availability of counsellors within the school system is arguably an essential step in developing strategies to integrate counselling in school setting. The primary aim of this study therefore was to collect qualitative data on community counsellors' attitudes and opinions of counselling practice in Singapore's schools, during the critical period when universal in-school services were being introduced.

Community counsellors' perceptions

School counsellors are a part of a larger community of mental health professionals that includes psychologists, community workers, counsellors and social workers. External networks of peers and allied professionals provide an important, readily available support network for school counsellors (Bunce & Willower, 2001; McMahon & Patton, 2001). These stakeholders' perceptions are important to school counsellors.

Maguire (1975) reported that in the UK, other mental health professionals lacked confidence in the ability of school counsellors to provide therapeutic help to ‘disturbed’ children; they felt that a lack of proper training reduced school counsellors’ ability to provide therapeutic services for this group of children. Although the training of school counsellors has improved markedly over past decades, this negative perception may still affect some states or countries where school counselling services are in their infancy. Singapore may be a developed country, but the reality is that full-time school counsellors and the widespread provision of school counselling services are relatively new to many community counsellors, social workers, psychologists and psychiatrists. Lau (2009) went so far as to describe the current state of school counselling services in Singapore as comparable to that in the USA 20 years ago. Lau suggested research issues in Western practice between 1960s and 1990s were likely to be applicable to present day Singapore. Understanding community counsellors’ perception of school counselling services is essential to a more holistic view of the service.

Schools in Singapore are usually surrounded by residential housing estates. School counselling services often collaborate with grassroots and voluntary welfare organisations which provide practical help to families in the neighbourhood. School counsellors often work closely with Family Service Centres (FSCs) and other social service agencies. These agencies’ perception of counsellors is important, as close collaboration is essential for joined-up service delivery. Shaw (2003) provides an account of the emphasis in the UK, on ‘seamless’ delivery of children’s services through partnerships among schools, voluntary organisations, businesses and parents.

In this study, the term ‘community counsellor’ is used to refer specifically to a counselling practitioner working in a FSC. These centres are mostly government-funded and are part of a national framework for provision of social services in the community. There were 37 FSCs when this research was conducted. Social workers and counsellors in FSCs are expected to work closely with counsellors in schools whilst respecting service boundaries.

Many studies have examined students’, school counsellors’, teachers’ and education administrators’ perceptions of school counselling services (Alghamdi & Riddick, 2011; Bunce & Willower, 2001; Clark & Amatea, 2004; Fox & Butler, 2007; Maluwa-Banda, 1998; Paisley & McMahon, 2001; Polat & Jenkins, 2005; Quinn & Chan, 2009; Tatar, 1995). Unfortunately, there has been little research on community counsellors’ perception of school counselling services and none at all in Singapore or Asia more generally. This study aimed to address this gap in the literature.

Overview of the current study

This study was part of a larger mixed method, exploratory study, which examined multiple stakeholders’ perceptions of school counselling services in Singapore. All the participants in this study also completed a questionnaire which provided quantitative data for the larger study. Because interviews with

the community counsellors in the study revealed common themes, the author was able to conduct an idiographic case study of their perceptions of school counselling services in Singapore. Smith, Jarman and Osborn (1999) stated that the ideographic case study is suitable for exploring common themes with up to ten cases.

This study analysed data from six interviews with community counsellors based in FSCs. The purpose of this case study research was to gain insight into community counsellors' experience of working with school counsellors during the early stages of implementation of the universal school-based counselling programme.

Methods, procedures and analysis

Qualitative research on the role of school counsellors has often taken the form of interviews (Bunce & Willower, 2001; Jordans, Keen, Pradhan, &Tol, 2007; Leuwerke& Shi, 2010). A qualitative interview acknowledges the presence and involvement of the researcher in the research process (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). In this study, the researcher used a semi-structured interview protocol in order to develop a keen understanding of participants' attitudes, opinions and practical experiences.

This study was to some extent an 'insider research' as it drew on the researcher's knowledge as a counselling practitioner working with and sometimes within the school counselling service. This professional background was beneficial; it enabled the researcher to obtain vital information that would not have been accessible to an outsider (Brannick&Coghlan, 2007).

Participants

This study used the chain referral sampling method (Penrod, Preston, Cain, & Starks, 2003). The researcher was working at a FSC in the central-western region of Singapore, a position which provided insider knowledge of the working relationship between FSCs and schools. The six community counsellors interviewed were mostly experienced social workers and counsellors working in four FSCs located in eastern Singapore. Although the geographical focus on the eastern region was not intentional, the researcher appreciated it for two reasons: (1) As the participants worked in a different region from the researcher, they were less likely to feel pressure to give socially or professionally desirable responses and (2) the voices from a concentrated area improves reliability of the data. Participants had responded to invitations included with the questionnaire survey. They reported a mean of 8.4 years experience as a counselling practitioner in the community and had recent (within the past year) experience of working with school counsellors. Five out of the 6 participants were women and all participants were between 30 and 49 years old.

Interview protocol and analysis

The semi-structured interviews protocol set out areas for discussion including referrals, the role and status of counsellors in schools, confidentiality, working with families etc. These were generated from an initial understanding of the issues of interest and a review of relevant literature; the findings from the survey conducted as part of the larger study confirmed their suitability.

Interview data were examined using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is an important tool for uncovering the meanings and real-world experiences of interview participants. Patterns emerged from conversations during the interviews which could sometime be developed into themes. During interviews, the researcher also used emerging patterns to determine subsequent questions.

The procedure used to explore the qualitative data was similar to that suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initially, the researcher listened to audio recordings of all the interviews and reviewed the notes taken during the interviews. This allowed the researcher to gain an overview of each interview; through repeatedly replaying interviews a list of major discussion themes was developed for each interview. In identifying themes in participants' experiences, particular attention was paid to identifying any patterns in what participants had to say; these themes and the associated time frames were mapped on a spreadsheet to provide an overview of the interview data. All significant discussions were transcribed and mapped to the spreadsheet. A full transcription of one of the interviews was used as a template for this purpose. In the third stage of the analysis, the researcher listened to all interview recordings in their entirety in order to compare the recorded data with the themes recorded on the spreadsheet. Following this the researcher examined themes common to all the interviews; these themes were accorded additional attention. Common themes were identified through (1) listening repeatedly to the recordings, (2) reviewing and comparing the transcribed extracts with the researcher's field notes. This process was repeated and the themes were clustered into groups; finally an over-arching theme was identified.

Results and discussion

The key themes revealed by the data included (1) a perception that school counsellors were not doing 'family work', (2) concerns about confidentiality in the school context, (3) a perception that school counsellors lacked knowledge of community resources and (4) concerns about role conflict when school counsellors were former teachers or principals. These themes were consistent with the over-arching theme that emerged from the interviews, that community counsellors were supportive of the school counselling programme, whilst having concerns about implementation. The themes are discussed in detail and illustrated with relevant extracts in the next section.

Perceptions that school counsellors were not doing 'family work'

Almost all the community counsellors considered that current school practice on working with families was inadequate. Nevertheless, they seemed to understand that school counsellors' work might be restricted by service boundaries, as well as time and resources; which would prevent them from extending their work to encompass families. The first two extracts quoted below are from interviews with practitioners with over eight years of professional experience who were working closely with schools at the time of the interview. These practitioners felt strongly that school counsellors faced a dilemma, trying to find a balance between the need for 'family work' and the constraints they faced:

> I find it a bit strange, that it will be a great [idea] because school is the focal point for parents and I think, on the one hand, there is not enough FTSC [full-time school counsellor], [but] on the other hand, if you already have this target group there [in school] and you have already built something [rapport] up with the child, and [wouldn't] you also want to work with the family? It will be a great opportunity to work with the family! (CC1)

> If they are [going] to do family therapy, the workload will be very overwhelming. And I also understand the constraints, because they work office hours, it is quite hard for them to fix appointments with parents who also have to work, so in that sense, they face a lot of limitations. Of course if you asked me,' would it be better if they do family therapy?' I would say yes, it would be better because … they would have a more intimate picture of what's happening in the family, they would know the students more intimately … not just hearing from the students' point of view … (CC5)

> I am not sure whether they have the time to engage [with] the parents because a lot of [the] time, during their working hours, the parents are [also] working … Another reason [for school counsellors not doing family work] is [that] we are not sure how many of them are really trained to do anything that is more than the school issues …. In family work, in order to have a more effective counselling session, the setting is important and building rapport is important. I am not sure how parents see school counsellors, they might be seeing them [as another authority], just like the CPO [child protection officer], it's not easy for
> CPOs to build rapport with parents. (CC6)

This last extract reflects the views of a senior practitioner who has been working with children, young adults and schools for over 11 years. It illustrates her considered perspective on the relationship between school counselling and family work. There appeared to be an ongoing debate about whether schools provide a good environment for family counselling. Factors to consider in this debate include parents' familiarity with the school, whether the school is seen as a neutral place, the availability of school counsellors after office hours, school counsellors' skills and their training in family counselling. Overall, whilst community counsellors empathised with the workload their counterparts in

schools faced, and understood that they were bound by the restrictions of their role, they had mixed views on whether school counsellors should extend their work to include family therapy.

This finding corroborates local observers' views on school-based family interventions in Singapore (Chong et al., 2013). An obvious solution would be to strengthen organisational links and increase collaboration between school counselling services and FSCs; this proposal is consistent with the model proposed in another study that interviewed Singapore school counsellors (Kok, 2013). It is also consistent with Shaw's (2003) recommendations for 'seamless' delivery of children's services in the UK.

Concerns about confidentiality in schools

Community counsellors had strong views on this issue. During the interviews, some shared experiences in which they had reduced their confidence in school counsellors' and teachers' respect for confidentiality. Below are extracts from three interviews which describe incidents in which the community counsellors felt that confidentiality should have been more strictly maintained by school counsellors.

> My sense is that [information] can be exchanged, but how [is] the information being used? … Okay, my recent experience is that I emailed the school counsellor … [I asked to] talk to the teacher or the school counsellor [about a student], so she mass-emailed all this student's teachers and the part-time counsellor. And the form teacher replied me … I briefly explained my concerns, you know, and described some behavioural issues … I actually just wanted to speak to them and understand how he was in school. But what they did was, they went and used my information to question the child …. (CC3)

> I think there should be an understanding that whatever we share is confidential, I mean we are professionals, so we should both maintain confidentiality. But I don't really trust school counsellors … Because there have been instances where they have spoken to the teachers, and the teachers will ask the child, so it's not very nice. (CC6)

> I think some school counsellors don't respect confidentiality, because before, I attended a workshop, and this counsellor shared with us, this so and so, my school got this so and so, the parents are like … All the confidential information was shared in public - not the general public - within the group. (CC5)

These and other similar accounts suggested that community counsellors have had negative experiences when they have shared confidential information with school counsellors. Bad experiences often involved school counsellors sharing or forwarding information to teachers or using the information without prior consultation with the community counsellors. Community counsellors expected school counsellors to maintain a higher standard of confidentiality. The

interviews also revealed that community counsellors' confidence in their counterparts in schools was affected by these experiences. Nevertheless, community counsellors recognised the importance of sharing information with school counsellors.

The need for a common understanding of the standard of confidentiality on the part of counsellors in school and community settings who worked together was evident from the interviews; the second extract illustrates this particularly effectively. The findings are consistent with an earlier suggestion (Maguire, 1975) that it will take time and positive experiences for practitioners outside the school setting to develop confidence in school counsellors' competence and commitment to professional ethical standards. Considering the importance of close collaboration between school and community counsellors for 'family work' that was suggested above, there is an urgent need for a dialogue between these two groups of practitioners to agree on common working practices, including standards for confidentiality and information exchange.

School counsellors lacked knowledge of community resources

Community counsellors expected school counsellors to know about local community resources and to be able to refer clients or students appropriately. Community counsellors in FSCs were often on the receiving end of referrals made by school counsellors and were consulted by school counsellors about the availability of resources outside the school. Almost all the community counsellors interviewed shared the view that school counsellors did not know enough about wider community resources. Some suggested that school counsellors sometimes misinformed students and parents about the availability of social care services outside the school. The extracts illustrate community counsellors' concerns about these issues:

> I used to work with some school counsellors, who were teachers and became school counsellors, they seemed to have the wrong idea about some things. For example, I knew this school counsellor who told the children 'you have to go to boys' home … or a girls' home [state institutions for young offenders]'. That's the only 'home' she knows, whereas there are [other] children's homes. (CC3)

> I don't think they are very well informed, for example they often won't know much about where to apply for a PPO [Personal Protection Order], where you apply for food rations. They know about FSCs, yes, they know about MCYS [Ministry of Community Development, Youth and Sports, now the Ministry of Social and Family Development; MSF]. Yes, they know about child protection. But other than that, not really … Even the school counsellor I spoke to recently, they didn't know [where] the nearest step-up programme [a support programme for students] was … (CC4)

> My personal sense is that they do not know much about community resources, unless they used to be social workers working in the community

> setting and then they switched over. If not, because right now there is hmmm … a big increase in school counsellors, and these school counsellors do not have community working experience, so many of them, they do not know what community resources are available to them. This is my personal experience from speaking and working with some school counsellors. (CC5)

The extracts above are taken from the interviews with three participants between 8 and 11 years of community experience and reflect their current opinion of school counsellors' knowledge of community resources. More importantly, they also illustrate a belief that school counsellors should know more. When asked what resources school counsellors should familiarise themselves with, counsellors in the community typically mentioned government ministries such as the MSF and the Ministry of Health. An interesting comment was made by the least-experienced participant, who had only 2.5 years experience in the community, it illustrates community counsellors' opinion that school counsellors should be much better informed about relevant resources:

> Step-up programme, [they] should know [about that]. I think community resources that they should know would be, for example, drop out youth, hmm … [the] drop out youth programme, or youth at risk [programme], not just step-up but other agencies that might provide that service. Yeah …or … for example, maybe like our programme [an agency-specific programme], that kind of support programme hmmm … maybe reading support for their children … (CC2)

She stated bluntly that she felt that school counsellors, besides being familiar with the programmes of the main government ministries, should learn more about other agencies and their services, particularly local services and services for children and families. Closer collaboration between school and community counsellors is clearly essential—as earlier sections have also made clear—as Singapore works towards seamless delivery of social care for children and young adults.

Concerns about the transition from educators to school counsellor

One other view, which seemed to be common to the community counsellors in this sample, was a concern about teachers or principals who became counsellors. Community counsellors were open to the idea of former educators becoming school counsellors but felt that they needed help to manage the transition between roles. Some community counsellors described encounters with school counsellors who were former teachers or principals which had left them wondering if the school counsellor were acting according to his or her previous role. The extracts below illustrate the interesting discussions of this topic in the interviews:

> I have experience of retired principals who became school counsellors … They do a lot of like, telling the person what to do … I am not really sure that [what] they are doing is counselling. What are they doing is more like telling [saying] what should be done. And … in a way also telling the

> community worker what to, how to manage the case. [Interviewer: A bit directive?] Yes, very directive. That's for a particular one, the other one [school counsellor] I felt it's … I wonder if she is actually counselling. What she is doing, is training the child to do the oral presentation … So I am not sure … but I must admit that there are also counsellors who do counselling, who really do counselling and casework with the students. (CC3)

> Counselling is different from teaching, I have no objection to ex-teachers or principals becoming school counsellors but … I guess [they] have to let go of their past first. Because the nature of the job is very, very different. You teach, I mean in our local system, you teach, you are in a position of authority, you are imparting knowledge to the students, you are on a higher position. In counselling, if you do that, the students would just come for a session and they wouldn't come back … one good thing is they [ex-teachers] know the school system, they know the MOE system, so it's easier for them to give feedback to the schools or the counselling team … The thing I am worried about its …. would they be too engaged in their past roles and carry that through to their counselling role? (CC5)

> Yes, the way they [ex-teachers/principals] talk to the parents, the way they talk to the children, I mean, the child. I do see a difference, if those really from …, those who are not ex-educators talks in a mellower way, they are better able to build a rapport. Of course I am not saying 100% of them are like that. But I do see some like that. And those ex-educators, they tend to be a little bit top-down. Because they are so used to being an educator, to teaching, so their rapport building, they might be a little bit weak in that … Especially if you work with parents. If you [are] always top-down with parents, especially if the family is already a dysfunctional family - are you going to expect the parents to accept the top-down way of talking? It's a bit challenging. But then if you are able to talk in a more empathetic way and connect with the parents, that would make the situation better, it might be more helpful. (CC6)

As highlighted in these relatively long extracts, community counsellors had the impression—sometimes they described specific experiences which had created this impression—that school counsellors who had previously been teachers or principals tended to carry the same style and methods of working with students through into their work as a counsellor. Some community counsellors balanced their comments on ex-educator school counsellors by referring to the benefits of having previous experience of working in the school setting. They indicated that ex-teachers or principals know the system well which can be an asset in helping students. Their former positions also gave them leverage when offering feedback to school leaders. Overall, the community counsellors interviewed understood the rationale for having ex-teachers and ex-principals as school counsellors but they voiced the desire that these individuals be properly assisted in their role transition so that they would be able to use their previous experience in a more productive manner in their new role, rather than being hampered by it.

Limitations

The current study explored community counsellors' perceptions of school counselling through interviews. The small sample however restricted the scope of discussion on the key issues raised. The relatively homogeneous profile of the participants, whilst strengthen the reliability of the data, limited their generalisablity. A sample which included participants with more or fewer years of counselling experience might have produced different findings; it is therefore suggested that future research in this area should attempt to engage a more diverse group of community counsellors with greater variability in length of service, e.g. 2–20 years.

Because this study was a part of a larger project, the interview protocol was predetermined and was focused on areas of interest to a range of stakeholders. Although the semi-structured nature of the interviews facilitated broader discussion, a schedule adapted for community counsellors would probably have uncovered additional information. The lack of relevant Asian literature on school counselling was a further limitation. International research on community-based counsellors' perspectives on school-based counselling is also lacking. Access to additional relevant Asian and international literature might have resulted in a slightly different study design.

Conclusion

On first reading, the community counsellors' narratives seemed negative in tone and content. However, when the interviews are considered together, one can sense the desire of community counsellors, who were working or wanting to work with their counterparts in schools, to improve therapeutic services for young people and their families. Nevertheless, concerns about professional and ethical standards loomed large for the community counsellors. A closer working relationship between school and community counsellors is clearly needed. Close collaborations between school- and community based counselling services should be encouraged, promoted and recognised by community and school leaders.

Community counsellors' opinions, backed up by accounts of specific experiences, demonstrated their interest in the development of school-based counselling services. The supportive stance of community counsellors should be harnessed by school counsellors and school and community leaders to help the younger branch of counselling grow and flourish.

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APPENDIX D

Stakeholders' Perceptions of School Counselling in Singapore

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This article reports on a qualitative study that set out to understand stakeholders' perception of the school counselling service in Singapore. Using semistructured interviews, this study explored the perceptions of three main stakeholder groups, namely teachers and counsellors working within the schools and those working in the communities. Altogether, 19 interviews were conducted. Two key theme areas were uncovered. First, the stakeholders observed and expected differing levels of confidentiality for information obtained during counselling. This presented a barrier for cooperation between the stakeholders. Second, stakeholders, while keen to ensure students' families were served appropriately, held different ideas of how that could happen. No clear model of collaboration seemed to exist at the time of the study. Implications for practice were discussed.

Keywords: stakeholders, perceptions, school, counselling

The influences that social-cultural factors have on child development have been well established (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Super & Harkness, 1986). Hendrick (1997) also illustrated how the changes in the education landscape over the years in the United Kingdom influenced child development. Examining changes in school environments and stakeholders' perceptions about them could help further our understanding of children and their developmental years. This article reports on a qualitative study exploring three key stakeholder groups' perceptions about counselling in Singapore schools as the country implements counselling as a key service in schools.

School-based counselling service is rapidly increasing around the world. In Asia, many countries are now investing, or are being called to invest more in the psychosocial wellbeing of both children and young adults at all levels within the school system (Chong, Lee, Tan, Wong, & Yeo, 2013; Leuwerke& Shi, 2010; Low, Kok, & Lee, 2013; Van Schalkwyk& Sit, 2013; Van Schalkwyk& D'Amato 2013). Singapore is no exception. Research has concluded that behaviours such as bullying, running away from home and disruptive behaviour disorders were among some of the key issues affecting the student population in Singapore (Elliott, Chua,

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& Thomas, 2002; Khong, 2007; Ooi et al., 2013; Tan, Tan, & Appadoo, 2007). Propelled by the increase in the demand for counselling in schools, the Ministry of Education mandated each public school to have at least one full-time counselling practitioner by 2008 (Ministry of Education, 2004). This led Singapore to be among the 39 countries of 82 reviewed where school counselling was state funded (Harris, 2013).

Students have had access to counselling services within the public school system prior to the Ministry of Education's mandate; however, these services were provided on a part-time basis by social service agencies from outside of the school. Only a minority of schools had the funds and engaged full-time counsellors on campus. As such, counselling is not entirely new in Singapore schools. However, with a full-time counsellor stationed permanently in schools, it is not hard to imagine that they, as well as teachers and counsellors in the community, would have more opportunities to work together and develop independent views of the school counselling service. Understanding their perceptions is arguably an essential step in developing strategies to effectively integrate counselling within schools. With these considerations in mind, the primary aim of this study was to provide qualitative data on stakeholders' perceptions of counselling in Singapore schools during this critical period of widescale implementation.

Stakeholders' Perceptions

Studies focusing on a single group of stakeholders, such as teachers, counsellors, students, parents, school administrators, have been widely carried out in many parts of the world, mainly in Western countries. Over the years, there has been much research on students' perceptions (Chan & Quinn, 2009; Fox & Butler, 2007; Glasheen & Campbell, 2009; Lau, 2009; Murgatroyd, 1977; Quinn & Chan, 2009; Siann, Draper &Cosford, 1982). These often focused on students' preferences regarding how counselling should be delivered and by whom.

There has also been much research that focuses on teachers' perceptions of school counselling across the globe (Aluede & Egbochuku, 2009; Alghamdi & Riddick, 2011; Chan, 2005; Hue, 2008; Reiner, Colbert & Perusse, 2009). Some studies have highlighted the importance of teachers' acceptance of counselling or support services in the school context (Cooper, Hough, & Loynd, 2005; Vulliamy & Webb, 2003; Wolstenholme & Kolvin, 1980). Similarly, interest in school counsellors' perceptions also has a long tradition. Fulton (1973) examined and compared school counsellors' perceptions and discussed the agreements and differences in a relatively small survey study. A steady stream

of studies focusing on school counsellors' views followed (Bunce & Willower, 2001; Harris, 2009; Kok, Low, Lee, &Cheah, 2012; Maluwa-Banda, 1998; Paisley & McMahon, 2001; Tatar, 1995).

Generally, fewer studies have focused on other stakeholders. Polat and Jenkins (2005) examined the local education authorities in England and Wales, and much earlier, Maguire (1975) noted that other mental health professionals had concerns about the role of school counsellors in providing therapeutic services. While there is much interest in learning about teachers', school counsellors', and students' perceptions about school counselling, a gap remains in our insights of other stakeholders, such as community counsellors who worked in the communities where schools are situated (Low, 2014). The current study included this group of stakeholders to add richness to the current available data on stakeholders' perceptions on school counselling.

While focused on a single stakeholder group, a few of the studies discussed in the preceding paragraphs and others were mindful of and recognised the importance of other stakeholder groups (Maluwa-Banda, 1998; See, 2004; Reiner et al., 2009). Some recent studies that took the steps to collect and compare perceptions of two or more groups of stakeholders found their efforts were well rewarded.

In an effort to gather and compare school counsellors, counsellors-in-training, and principals' perceptions of the role of school counsellor in rural schools in the United States, Monteiro-Leitner, Asner-Self, Milde, Leitner, and Skelton (2006) found that the three groups of respondents had different perceptions of how much time school counsellors spent as well as how much time they ought to spend on a number of school counselling duties. Partin (1993), as well as Kirchner and Setchfield (2005), also compared school counsellors' and principals' perceptions on counselling and related areas. In separate studies in Israel and South Wales, Tatar and Bekerman (2009) and Hamilton-Roberts (2012) respectively explored and discussed both teachers' and school counsellors' perceptions. In the latter, they discovered differences between teachers' and counsellors' perceptions of student problems and methods of handling them.

Clearly, there is an urgent need to explore, understand and compare stakeholder's perceptions of counselling. There are many stakeholders in Singapore schools. They include school administrators, principals, education policy-makers, teacher-educators, and parents, among others. The focus of the current study was kept within a professional context, consisting of people who work closely with the students in the school counselling process. These stakeholders, namely, teachers, school and community counsellors, often work together in helping students and their families; their paths often cross intentionally or otherwise, hence gaining a deeper understanding that how they view and feel about counselling in school is essential. The current study was part of a larger mixed method, exploratory study that examined multiple stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling in Singapore. The findings of

the quantitative component of the larger study suggested that the stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling were a mix of 'hits and misses'. While clarity among the stakeholders in some aspects was uncovered, they differed markedly in others. The findings, which provided the impetus of the current study, will be reported in a separate publication in due course.

Methods, Procedures and Analysis

All the participants in the current study completed a questionnaire, which formed the quantitative aspect of the main study. This article reports on the qualitative component of the study. Nineteen interviews were conducted with teachers, school and community counsellors, and the data collected was analysed. The purpose of this case study research was to gain insights from participants' lived experiences of the inclusion of counselling in schools during the early stages of implementation.

Qualitative inquiries into the role of school counsellors often take the form of interviews (Bunce & Willower, 2001; Jordans, Keen, Pradhan, & Tol, 2007; Leuwerke & Shi, 2010). This method of investigation arguably yields more conceptual data and acknowledges the presence and involvement of the researcher in the research process (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). The researcher used semistructured interviews in order to allow him to develop a keen understanding of stakeholders' perspectives and lived experiences.

This study contained some elements of insider research, which included the researcher's knowledge of the field as a counselling practitioner who works around and at times within the school system. The researcher's experience in the field is beneficial for the scope of the study as he was able to obtain vital information that an outsider would not have access to (Brannick & Coghlan, 2007). The knowledge on how school counsellors were organised, supervised and supported was useful in scoping the current study, in arranging interviews, and in interpretation of the data.

Participants

The chain referral sampling method was adopted for the current study (Penrod, Preston, Cain, & Starks, 2003). Altogether, 19 participants from 12 schools and four Family Service Centres (FSC) took part in this study. Seven school counsellors, six teachers and six community counsellors were interviewed over a 6-month period. All participants have had recent experience either as a school counsellor or have worked with one within the past year. The school counsellors interviewed were working (or have worked) in seven government-funded schools (three primary and four secondary schools) across Singapore, and the community counsellors were from four FSCs. The teachers interviewed were working in five schools (three primary and two secondary schools). None of the teachers or school counsellors who participated in this study were working in the same school. The current study did not distinguish between primary and secondary level schools as the school counselling program was implemented

simultaneously at both levels. In addition, the focus of the current study was to explore general perspectives on counselling in the local public school context. Most of the interviewees had responded to the invitation to participate in the interviews that were sent to them directly. A few of the participants referred the researcher to another person who was willing to participate in the study. They reported to have spent a mean of 5.4 years in their respective roles. Community counsellors were in their role longest, at a mean of 8.4 years, followed by teachers reporting 7.3 years and school counsellors 1.1. It was not surprising that school counsellors were relatively low in terms of mean years in service as the school counselling program was only in its fifth year of progressive implementation, and was in its third year after all schools were staffed with a counsellor each. Four (21%) of the total participants were males while 15 (79%) were females. The distribution of ages was as follows: one (5%) was 20–29 years old; 13 (68%) were 30–39 years old; four (21%) were 40–49 years old; one (5%) was 50–59; while none was 60 years and above. Consequently, the majority, or seventeen (90%), of the participants were between 30–49 years old. All the interviews were between 30 minutes to 1 hour in length, and were recorded with participants' written and verbal consent.

Interview Schedule and Analysis

The semi-structured interviews were guided by predetermined discussion areas, including presenting issues leading to referrals, the role of counselling and positioning in schools, confidentiality, and working with families. These were generated from the initial sensing of the ground and relevant literature reviews, and were supported by the findings of the questionnaire that was issued in the main study. These areas were, however, also related directly to the purpose of the current study.

Data collected from the interviews was examined using thematic analysis to draw meaning from the data generated. Patterns that emerged from conversations during the interviews were at times developed into subthemes. During the course of interviewing, the researcher also used the emerging patterns to establish the subsequent questions in the interviews.

The steps taken in the examination of the qualitative data were similar to those suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006). The researcher listened to each audio recording of the interviews of each participant and reviewed the associated notes taken during the respective interviews. This initial exercise allowed the researcher to have a general idea of each interview and at the same time develop a list of major discussions and themes for each individual recording, through repeatedly replaying each interview. While identifying the themes in the experiences of the participants, attention was given to identifying any patterns in what each participant had to say. These themes and the associated time frames of the recordings were mapped onto a spreadsheet to gain a holistic view of the interview data. All significant discussions were transcribed and mapped onto the spreadsheet. A full transcription of one of the interviews for each stakeholders group, was used as a template for this purpose. In the third exercise, the researcher listened to all interview recordings

in their entirety in order to compare the recorded data with the early themes on the spreadsheet. This led to the final stage of coding, in which the researcher examined the themes that were present across all the interviews. Each overlapping theme was given additional attention, and was identified through repeatedly listening to the relevant recordings, comparing the respective transcribed extracts, and reviewing the researcher's field notes. This process was repeated and the themes were clustered to form the main themes.

Findings and Discussion

Two key themes of significant differences were discovered. Teachers, school and community counsellors held relatively different views on how school counsellors should be working with students' families, as well as how freely information should be exchanged and the level of confidentiality between professionals in schools. Using relevant extracts from the interviews, these are discussed in the following sections. Minimum editing was carried out in the extracts to preserve the participants' voice (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006).

Working with Families

Teachers, school and community counsellors worked with families and parents with children who attend school. On many occasions, they worked together both within and outside the school settings. From the interviews, the researcher sensed that school counsellors generally think that they do not do family work. Most referred to how their positions were limited by authority and/or resources. It was hardly surprising that school counsellors referred closely to their work scope or guidelines as the school counselling service was relatively new and most of the school counsellors had been in their role for less than 2 years:

> *But then again, you know, it doesn't fall into the job scope of school counsellor. Because working with family is a very long process . . . and also the school setting does not [cater] for that kind of therapy work. (SC1)*

> *Yeah, yeah . . . The job scope is quite clear that we should only counsel students. Not to be involved in family therapy. (SC4)*

They had the impression that the job scope did not include counselling parents and families. However, it was clear that they placed great importance on families and parents when it concerns improving a child's life. The extract below demonstrates the view about the need to work on family issues:

> *. . . I think that [working with families] is important, because the child spend majority of [his/her] time at home with their parents, and if it is really a social issue that is preventing the child from maximising his potential, then we have to look at the social issues, that [could be] financial, parental, the marriage . . . . family relations, that kind of things. (SC1)*

Among the school counsellors, some were more ambivalent in this area, especially those who had worked with families in other settings. The following

are interview extracts from two participants who have had experience working in social services prior to becoming school counsellors:

> *When [I was] working in the social service, I worked with parents, counsel parents. I also used to run parenting talks, parenting workshop. But here . . . basically meeting the parents, telling them how the child performed . . . (SC1)*

> *That's why it's selectively! We don't provide family therapy or marital therapy. But if they come with [a] very urgent request, [I would think:] what will happen to the child?. . . It doesn't make sense to send them away, because they might get lost in the system, so we just provide [family counselling] as [a] transition. (SC6)*

School counsellors seemed to be struggling with whether or not to extend their work with students' families and what form the work should take if they do work with them — family therapy or just parent education. Although to some it was clearly spelled out that their work should focus on the student — the individual — many saw the logic that their clinical interventions could be a family-based one, or at least have the family support in the interventions.

While the school counsellors grasped the multiple possibilities presented to them by the different cases they saw in schools, community counsellors considered the current situation in relation to family work to be lacking or at best, limited. Nevertheless, they seemed to understand that school counsellors may be bound by their work scope as well as the time and resources available to them. Below is an extract from the conversations with community counsellors:

> *From my understanding, school counsellors only work with the students. If they felt that perhaps the student would benefit from family therapy, they would have to refer to us [FSC]. Because on their side, they don't deal with family therapy that much. Probably, they would have some sessions with the parents to find out more on the background of the student but they would not do family therapy. . . . If they are [going] to do family therapy, the workload will be very overwhelming. And also I understand their constraints, because they work office hours, it is quite hard for them to fix appointments with the parents who also have to work, so in that sense, they face a lot of limitations. Of course if you asked me 'Would it be better if they do family therapy?' I would say yes, it would be better because . . . they would have a more intimate picture of what's happening in the family, they would know the students more intimately . . . (CC5)*

There was an ongoing debate on whether school is a good setting for family work. Considerations such as counselling hours, school counsellors' training, school not being a neutral setting, and so on, were also raised in the conversations. Overall, community counsellors, on one hand, seemed to empathise with the workload of their counterparts in schools and understand that they were governed by their job scope, but on the other hand, they had

mixed views on whether school counsellors should extend their work further to the point of doing family therapy. One of the community counsellors suggested a better referral system between schools and FSCs as a possible solution. This seemed to be in line with local and overseas studies and recommendations in this area (Chong et al., 2013; Kok, 2013; Shaw, 2003).

While many teachers work with students' parents themselves, they seemed to have little idea about how school counsellors work with students' parents and families. Generally, teachers seemed to have some expectations that school counsellors work with parents on some aspects. However, most did not voice any expectation that school counsellors counsel the parents or families. They generally felt that school counsellors worked with parents pertaining to schooling issues so that students could better access teaching and learning activities. The first extract below demonstrates the view of a teacher who has been teaching for over a decade. He observed that school counsellors work with families to assess and refer them to relevant agencies that could meet the families' other needs, such as financial help or emotional needs of adults in the families. The second extract discusses the school counsellors' role in relation to the parents in cases of behavioural issues. This was offered by a teacher who has been heavily involved in working with the counsellors on such cases:

> *Another thing I would think FTSC [full-time school counsellor] works very well is dealing with children with some family needs. Because even when I do have experience working with FTSC so closely, I wouldn't not know what are the other connections . . . Because I know they [counsellors] have a lot of contacts [that] I would not know . . . (T5)*

> *And if they [school counsellors] were to take over the case [referring to behavioural and disciplinary issues], they would usually work with the parents, especially if these students also require the help of external agencies. Because the majority of these cases would also involve the discipline committee, so the counsellors are like the other face of the school. (T6)*

Teachers' understanding of school counsellors' work with parents and families revolves around the child, and typically concerns behavioural issues that disrupt learning in the classroom. It adds to the sense that the teachers and counsellors were only beginning to learn more about each other's roles, especially concerning students' families.

The interviews added some clarity to how teachers, school and community counsellors view school counsellors' work with parents and families. Teachers hold common expectations for school counsellors to be engaged with parents appropriately, and especially working with them in tandem on students' educational goals. Community counsellors, on the other hand, expressed keen interest in school counsellors providing some family counselling in schools, but cautioned on the resources and time constraints within the current school counselling service, as well as questioned the appropriateness of placing family

therapy in the school setting. Still, school counsellors constantly struggled with whether and how they should engage the parents and families, almost on a case-by-case basis. Some go the distance by providing counselling for selected families while others remain at the level of information exchange or discussion of the school's concerns, which seemed to match teachers' expectations. The three stakeholder groups, however, appeared to agree that a family's needs have to be kept in clear view when working with students. The timely referral to external family counselling services such as family service centres was highly valued by teachers and community counsellors, as well as school counsellors. School counsellors, perhaps unintentionally, have placed themselves in a place where they will continue to have to use good judgment in determining how families' needs can be met, either in or outside the school.

Sharing Information and Confidentiality

The data suggests that teachers' and community counsellors' ideas of sharing of information differed greatly, while school counsellors were in a somewhat uncomfortable middle position. They appeared to balance the need for sharing more information to remain a member of the school setting and to keep their professional identity intact through compliance with confidentiality norms in the counselling fraternity.

Counsellors in schools, as with their counterparts in other settings, were well aware of the confidential information they managed in their work. Many verbalised a clear understanding of upholding a high level of confidentiality, but some reported difficulties in doing so in a school environment. They also seemed to be aware of the teachers' eagerness to know more about the students they worked with and their interest in school counsellors' feedback:

> *Ok, I [will] put it this way, when we are working in the hospital, all of us have our own professional ethics. Confidentiality is very important as we can get sued, you know? And there are other ethical issues. But in a school, they [teachers and principals] are not bound by all these things and counsellors are the only ones interested in confidentiality. So, it will probably be a very foreign topic for teachers and principals. They will tell you that confidentiality, 'There is no need' for that, or they will [say], 'You must trust us'. (SC6)*

School counsellors appeared to face pressures from management and teachers to share information while having to ensure that they do not become unethical at the same time. This dilemma is widely reported in more developed, school-based counselling services in the United States and Israel (Isaacs & Stone, 2001; Lazovsky, 2010). Many in Singapore adopted creative methods for managing this on a daily basis. Some school counsellors preferred to seek students' consent at an early stage of the counselling relationship. This appeared to work for students in secondary schools:

> *You know, the previous counsellor in the school, she kept everything very confidential. So, the teachers felt [that it's] useless [to ask] because she said everything is confidential. She couldn't share anything about the child. So, I thought about how I wanted to do it. I am not the case owner of the student even though I counsel them, so [when it comes to sharing information about] the student, [it is] not an individual confidentiality, so here we maintain group confidentiality. So I will tell the students that, 'You know I may feedback to the teacher about certain things that we talked about . . . If you don't want me say certain things, I won't.' So we maintain a group-confidentiality. (SC1)*

Some counsellors managed the information being shared, as well as with whom they share the information. In some cases it appeared that the school counsellors had secured some understanding from the school management on the need for them to uphold confidentiality. As illustrated in the following extracts, school counsellors found meaningful ways in this balancing act of sharing information with stakeholders and keeping with their professional ethics:

> *In a way I am quite fortunate because I have an understanding with my principal. So if I don't share with him, he will not force me. Because I told him [about] confidentiality. So I will share with the teacher, but when I share with the teacher, the most I share with the teacher, maybe I will say, 'Oh . . . single parent . . . parents work long hours, not much time (with the student)', something like that, no more . . . because I have to keep up my code of ethics and I think as a counsellor, I have to let the kids trust me, otherwise it's going to be very difficult. I uphold my confidentiality, [in the] long run, I think teachers [will] trust me. (SC5)*

> *Thankfully, the school leaders are quite understanding, they don't really probe a lot. I think in general, [it's] on a required basis. When they want to know, they just want to know the gist of, I think that's fine and I do tell my student [that] I need to share, just the gist, not even summarised, [just] a broad idea. . . (SC4)*

> *It is your [school counsellor's] call, you are attending to a case and you know, you have done this work for quite some time, so just through experience I guess. You know what to say and what not to say. (SC7)*

Although the current situation appeared at best ambivalent for the stakeholders and themselves, school counsellors felt that the current situation was manageable and comfortable. Earlier research both in Singapore and overseas seemed to suggest that students' perceptions of whether counselling was confidential influences their confidence and willingness to access the service available in school (Fox & Butler, 2007; Lau, 2009). This supports the concerns the school counsellors have. The following extract reflects one counsellor's thoughts along this line:

> *I think it's just fine, because I don't think I should share more, you know because, if I share more, then where do [I] draw the line? Okay, then the students will not tell me anything anymore because it gets opened up and tell everybody everything. And I don't think it's right. So at this moment, I think it's okay. (SC5)*

On the other hand, teachers were clearly expressing their desire and interest to hear more feedback from counsellors, or to have them share information about their work with teachers. All the teachers interviewed found this an important aspect of their relationship with school counsellors. They valued the information shared as resources to help them better work with their students. Almost every interview consisted of clear messages that the information they get or hope to get from school counsellors are those helpful for them to better understand and work with their students. Some also addressed the issue of confidentiality. Following are some extracts of such exchanges during the interviews:

> *I think she [the school counsellor] is helpful in a sense that, for me to speak to the boy to get to know all these things, it doesn't help. So for her, at least she understands a bit and she tells me. [So] I know how to deal with this kid [better] because [I understand] his background, of course I keep it confidential. But at least I know what is frustrating him, what sort of [strategies] work for him and sometimes a bit [about] what he is thinking. So she [school counsellor] is in a way, like a middle person. (T2)*

> *Between us, teachers and counsellors, I think the confidentiality part should be, I mean, they should not say that what we discuss during the session they will not let the teacher know. But . . . I think it is useful for the counsellors to let the teachers know . . . So I find [that] between teachers and counsellors, there should be that cooperation to tell each other as much as possible, because underlying all these is the intention to help the child. (T1)*

This strong desire to know more from school counsellors on the cases they attend to may explain the strong sense that school counsellors feel about having to share information. It may also be a contributing factor to the difficulties school counsellors face in keeping confidentiality in the school setting. While some teachers agreed to maintain confidentiality, some thought that counselling in schools was not the same as elsewhere. Teachers generally agreed that there was no need to know the information exchanged between the counsellor and the students in detail, but most felt the need to know key information that might influence how they work with a student. It is important to note that the teachers' desire to know more seemed to be driven by their passion to work better with the students and to complement the work of the counsellor outside the counselling room. They were content with the need-to-know basis and restrained themselves from asking more than the main gist of the story.

The interaction and dynamics between school counsellors and other stakeholders, including the topic of sharing of information and confidentiality, is an interesting area that has received attention in research literature (Isaacs & Stone, 2001; Jenkins & Polat, 2006; Low, 2009). Community counsellors also had strong views on this matter. During the interviews, some shared experiences that led them to have less confidence in teachers as well as school counsellors in keeping with confidentiality. Following are some extracts demonstrating this:

> *I think that there should be a [shared] understanding that whatever we share [it] is professional, I mean we are professionals, so we should maintain confidentiality. But I don't really trust school counsellors . . . because there were instances where they have spoken to the teachers, and the teachers will ask the child, so it's not very nice. (CC6)*

> *I think some school counsellors are not abiding to confidentiality. . . . And also, sometimes I spoke to some school counsellors, they revealed a lot of information that they are not supposed to reveal. (CC5)*

It appeared that community counsellors have had some less-than-desirable experiences sharing confidential information with school counsellors who further shared with teachers. It appeared that community counsellors expect school counsellors to uphold confidentiality but their confidence was hit by some of their encounters with school counsellors and teachers. However, community counsellors also recognised the importance of sharing information with other stakeholders such as key teachers working with the child.

Discussion

All three groups of stakeholders recognised the importance of sharing information while working together or separately to better teach, care, support or help a student and his/her family. School counsellors, community counsellors and some teachers also recognised the need to keep confidentiality in the process. Nevertheless, due to the different roles they play, each group seemed to have differing levels of confidentiality in mind and separate concerns that directly impact their work. Teachers were concerned about whether they were getting all the relevant information for them to understand their students better. School counsellors were concerned about what information they have obtained in counselling sessions they should share, how it should be shared and with whom they should share it, while community counsellors were concerned about how the information they provided to school counsellors was shared with teachers and how the information was being used.

This concurred with the findings of the quantitative components of the larger study, which suggested an association between professional roles and perceptions among the stakeholders. This is a complex situation as the stakeholders were all keenly involved with the best of intentions to better provide support to the client/student. The findings seem to suggest that

stakeholders might be lacking in their understanding of each other's needs and roles in information management within the school counselling service loop. This supports the anecdotal observations reported by Yeo and Lee (2014) in their recent report on the situation of school counselling in Singapore. The findings identifying these needs add to the accumulating knowledge that may lead to more clarity about this area among the stakeholders in the future. In addition, it is important to read these findings along with those from research on students' and parents' perspectives on this matter as

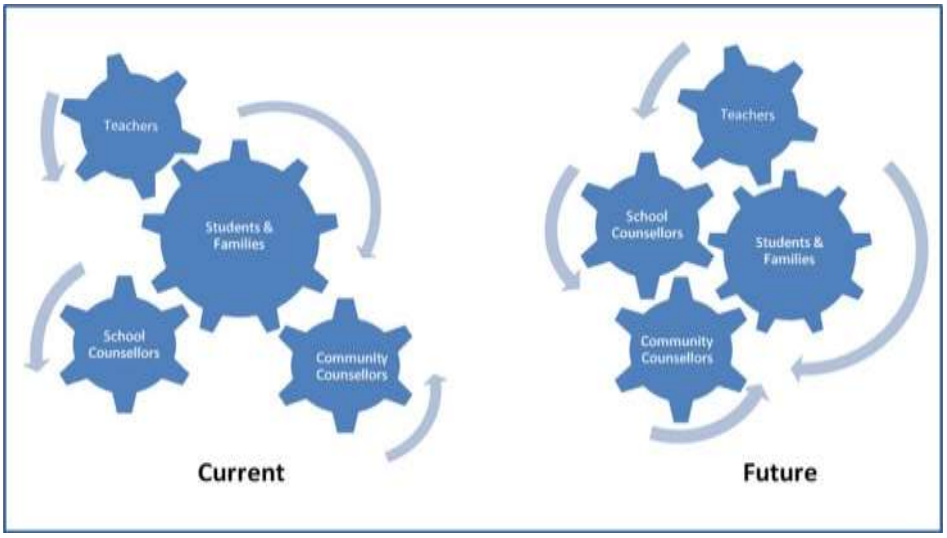

FIGURE1
(Colouronline)Stakeholders'workingsystem.

they are important stakeholders to the school counselling process as well (Collins & Knowles, 1995; Fox & Butler, 2007; Lau 2009).

The themes discussed in this article suggest that the stakeholders' views have a role in the integration of counselling services in school and the community. Their views represent their thoughts, feelings and experiences of those working with the growing service in Singapore. The need to establish a common understanding between teachers, school and community counsellors on confidentiality and information exchange is clearly an urgent one. It lays the important foundation for the stakeholders to work together to deliver better care to students and their families. The extensive discussions about the need for, and the concerns on how to work with families further support the prospects for more dialogue and collaboration between stakeholders to develop a comfortable tripartite working relationship. As suggested in earlier studies, the quality of working relationships among stakeholders is an important aspect of an effective school counselling service (Cromarty & Richards, 2009; Harris, 2009). Chong et al. (2013) and Kok (2013) also recommended closer collaborative working relationships between stakeholders.

The current study supports this view and proposes a graphical illustration of how stakeholders' working relationships in particular could evolve in the near

future (Figure 1). Teachers, school and community counsellors in the current situation are working towards better care and support for students and families but in a relatively independent manner. The future presents possibilities for teachers, school and community counsellors to close the gaps between each other and coordinate interventions for students and families. Figure 1 depicts a generic integrated working system for the future which, depending on the situation, any stakeholder within the system could use to influence and lead others in their joint effort for the child/student and their family. The establishment of a common understanding on how these stakeholders could work to engage families, and to exchange information undoubtedly forms the foundation for the working relationship to evolve and mature as the school counselling services grow. A case management approach used in Australia (De Jong & Griffiths, 2008) may be useful. Perhaps an urban school-based family counselling model, as illustrated by Evans and Carter (1997), or more specifically, the Community-sited: Agency model of school-based family counselling as described by Gerrard (2008) maybe an option to consider. A better referral system between schools and community-based agencies such as FSCs may be a possible solution as well. While integrated or seamless working models have been established or are being establishing elsewhere, Singapore seems to be evolving towards a suitable model for itself, which will become more evident in the near future.

Limitations

The current study was conducted in an attempt to explore stakeholders' perceptions of school counselling through interviews that reflected their views. The small sample size of each group of stakeholders, however, restricted the exploration. By extension of this observation, future studies in this area should gather a larger sample size, perhaps 15 participants in each stakeholder group. While the focus of this study was clearly placed on understanding the stakeholders involved directly and professionally in school counselling services, inclusion of others such as school leaders, parents and students in a single larger study will help create a meaningful ecological review of school counselling in Singapore.

Conclusion

The current study seemed to show that school counsellors were adapting to the school setting and the various aspects of their work. They were seen to be striving to establish a working relationship with school leaders while mindful of the line of reporting between them. The data also suggests that school counsellors are trying to balance the need to share information with colleagues in the school context and the need to maintain reasonable confidentiality for the students they work with. In addition, school counsellors often have to make a conscious choice on how much they should attend to students' parents and families. Collectively, the findings revealed that the school counsellors, as new members of the school system, are constantly in a balancing act as they are finding their suitable positions in the schools.

As the school counselling service matures, stakeholders, including school leaders and counsellors, may focus on developing clarity and consensus on matters concerning working with families, confidentiality and exchange of information, as well as working relationships. While these findings are not representative of a crosssection of Singapore, it has provided a channel to hear stakeholders' experience of the implementation of the nationwide counselling service in schools. Finally, this article adds to the global understanding of the impacts of the ever-changing social-cultural environment surrounding child development across cultures.

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APPENDIX E

Counselling without Borders : School-Community Partnership

Participant Workbook Version 1.1

Welcome

A warm welcome to the Counselling without Borders: School-Community Partnership workshop.

Objective one – Becoming more aware of barriers toward seamless counselling services for children and young persons within and outside schools.

Objective two – Take action to make seamless school-community partnership in counselling a reality.

Stakeholders : Who are we?

- School-based Counsellors
- Community-based Counsellors
- Social Workers
- Community Workers
- Youth Workers
- Teachers
- Teaching Aides
- School Leaders i.e. principals
- School Psychologists

Why do we need school-community partnership in counselling for children & young persons?

"*It takes a village to raise a child.*" - Old African proverb

School-Community Partnerships: A Guide says : "*To enhance effectiveness, To provide a comprehensive, multifaceted, and integrated continuum of interventions, To support all youth & families.*"

- School Mental Health Project, Dept. of Psychology, UCLA

"*.....supported by the findings of the growing debate and discussion of greater integration or alignment of school and community services for children, both overseas and in Singapore (Evans & Carter 1997; Shaw, 2003; De Jong & Griffiths, 2008; Gerrard, 2008; Chong et al., 2013; Kok, 2013; and Luk-Fong, 2013).*" *P.K. Low (2018)*

Instructions: Read the statements on both Left and Right of the chart. Indicate your perceptions using a 'X' or a stroke '|' on the line separating the statements.

Stakeholders' Perceptions of School-based Counselling Chart

	MY PERCEPTIONS	
School counsellors do not work with students' families		School counsellors actively work with students' families
School counsellors currently do not provide counselling for students' families		School counsellors are providing counselling for students' families
School counsellors should not offer family counselling		School counsellors should offer family counselling
In the school setting, information gathered during counselling is never treated with strict confidence.		In the school setting, information gathered during counselling is always treated with strict confidence.
A different standard of confidentiality should apply to counselling work in the school setting as compare to other sectors (i.e. healthcare, social care)		The same standard of confidentiality should apply to counselling work in the school setting as in other sectors (i.e. healthcare, social care)
I do not feel confident in sharing confidential information about student / families with a school counsellor		I feel very confident in sharing confidential information about student / families with a school counsellor
School counsellors do not have a good knowledge of community resources available		School counsellors have a good knowledge of community resources available

What do we agree?

- Stakeholders agreed that families are important stakeholders and they need to be engaged appropriately by the school counselling service.
- Stakeholders also agreed on the need to share information to better care for the students, inside and outside schools

Others:

_____

_____

_____

_____

What are the gaps? –Working with Families

Teachers hold the expectations for school counsellors to be engaged with parents appropriately, and especially working with them in tandem on students' educational goals.

Community-based counsellors, on the other hand, felt school counsellors should provide some family counselling.

School counsellors struggled with whether and how they should engage the parents and families on a case-by-case basis.

What are the gaps? – Sharing Information

Teachers were concerned about whether they were getting all the relevant information for them to understand their students better.

School counsellors were concerned about what information they have obtained in counselling sessions that they should share, how it should be shared and with whom they should share it.

Community counsellors were concerned about how the information they provided to school counsellors was shared with teachers and how the information was being used.

My Take Away

Reflections

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Ideas

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School-Community Networking

School Partners Contacts

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Community Partners Contacts

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- _____
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Partnering towards seamless social & mental health care services for children & young persons

APPENDIX F

DOI 10.1007/s10447-009-9069-1

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Considering the Challenges of Counselling Practice in Schools

Poi Kee Low

Published online: 17 March 2009

Abstract School counselling is developing rapidly in many countries around the World. As with any practice in a secondary setting, challenges and special issues are often identified, discussed, and managed. These can be categorized into four distinct domains: 1) Internal challenges, which include issues related to clientele groups, teachers' attitudes towards counselling, and students' willingness to seek counseling; 2) External challenges, which refer to social-economic changes beyond the school. These include popular culture, globalization and societal trends of more families and students moving across borders; 3) Systems challenges, which are those within the guidance programmes implemented by ministries, schools or counselling bodies. These issues may reside in the guidelines for practice in schools, referral procedures, and resource planning; 4) Personal challenges, which relate to the needs as well as the skills of the counsellor. Some examples here are training, supervision, and attitudes towards school systems. The four domains and interactions among them are discussed in this paper.

Keywords School counselling . School counsellors . Teachers . Challenges

Introduction

Counselling as a formal practice in schools is growing rapidly in many developed and developing countries around the World. Many complex challenges surround the provision of counselling in schools. This paper seeks to examine some of these and to categorize them according to the domains in which they arise; these being the internal environment, the external environment, wider systems and the personal domain. An intention of the paper is to propose a simple framework for focusing on the issues using these domains, towards greater understanding of the dynamics and developing coping strategies or solutions for practitioners and other stakeholders.

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Challenges in the Four Domains

Internal Challenges

The role of a school counsellor can be precisely defined in some schools while remain vague and open in others. Roles vary as the education systems as well as individual schools differ from one and another. Role clarity is often a much highlighted internal challenge in many studies. In Israel, as highlighted by Tatar (1995), counsellors perform a number of roles beyond traditional counselling duties. These include admission processes and referral to other schools or institutions following students' graduation. In Maluwa-Banda's (1998) study conducted in Malawi, role clarity was one of the key issues discussed in the context of school counsellors' perceptions of the guidance and counselling programme. Bunce and Willower (2001) also reported in their study of counsellors' subculture in American schools that counsellors often have to manage role ambiguity. The issue of increasing workload was also highlighted in both studies. Paisley and McMahon (2001) also highlighted the concern on school counsellors' ambiguous role definition and functions in the context of American schools. The relationship between the two issues of role clarity and increasingworkload may be worth further exploration in future studies. Defining 'what' and 'how' a counsellor contributes to the overall function of the school is an essential internal challenge faced by practitioners.

Students' perceptions shape their expectations of the school counselling service in many ways. Back in 1977, Murgatroyd shared his findings that counsellors who were seen in more administrative roles and were managing school affairs were considered less approachable by students. Siann et al. (1982) also found that students who perceived guidance staff as more approachable increased their tendency to seek help when in need. More recently, Fox and Butler (2007) found that among other things, familiarity with the school counsellor is essential to encourage students to use school counselling services. It is essential for counsellors to effectively manage students' perceptions in order to encourage them to use counselling services. This is one of the key internal challenges for counsellors practicing in schools.

Another important stakeholder in the school counselling process is the teachers. Their perceptions of school counselling and school counsellors are of considerable importance. School counsellors often gain access to clients through referrals made by teachers, so their attitudes towards counselling in schools should not be underestimated.

According to Polat and Jenkins' (2005) study in England and Wales, the local education authorities differed in the qualification requirements for school counsellors they employed as well as the service evaluation methods used

in the schools. Accordingly, the data gathered from their study indicated differing perceptions of counselling among the education professionals concerned. Chan (2005) in Hong Kong found in his sample that teachers involved in guidance work took a more humanistic view as compared to those not so involved. The study also noted that teachers believed that a healthy personality (of the counsellor) was a major factor in delivering good quality counselling. In another effort to explore teachers' attitudes, Best et al. (1981) indicated that teachers preferred counsellors who were familiar with the school and education system. Teachers' acceptance of counsellors in schools was also highlighted by them. Cooper et al. (2005) found that a majority of the teachers in Scotland they studied held positive attitudes towards school counselling, while a small minority did not. It was also found in their study that some teachers viewed counselling as advice-giving.

Teachers, being the largest group of professionals in schools, are important actors in shaping the guidance and counselling landscape in their institutions. Their acceptance of school-based counselling is critical for the development of a sustainable counselling service that is beneficial to the students. School counsellors face challenges in managing teachers' perceptions and expectations in order to establish a balanced and collaborative relationship with them.

Apart from the role distinctiveness issue and perceptions of teachers and students, another internal challenge is the need to provide counselling for special populations. These may involve students with special needs, including the psychologically and physically disadvantaged, and students from foreign cultures. Hamblin (1975) suggested in his study that school counsellors can play key roles in tailoring programmes to help 'disturbed' children. These roles include assessment and recommendations for children to special programmes, and the provision of consultation to teachers and special units. Tatar (1998) also identified some different roles played by counsellors to immigrants in schools, which involved helping them integrate into society, the school and the local culture. As indicated, school counsellors need to adapt, develop programmes, and play specific roles relevant to the different needs of clientele groups in schools.

Many other issues reside within the internal environment of the school setting. The above are some of the more prominent considered in a number of studies. Internal challenges are present across cultures and countries; however, their intensity varies in relation to education systems, cultures and stages of development of school-based counselling services.

External Challenges

Schools like other organizations have to adapt to the many changes happening around them. To stay relevant, schools must respond to changing needs of society and the communities they are situated in. This is especially true for those in urbanized areas.

Schools are faced with the need to respond to global changes, such as intensification of human movement across borders, the move towards borderless learning and developments in information technology. Paisley and McMahon (2001) discussed the increasingly diverse student population as one of the challenges facing school counsellors in America. They encouraged better cross-cultural preparation to help school counsellors in meeting the needs of the students in their schools. With more people moving within and between countries, school counsellors need to be more culturally sensitive and be skilled in managing crosscultural barriers in the counselling context. Lairio and Nissila (2002), in their study conducted in Finland, suggested that language barriers as well as cultural differences may pose major challenges for school counsellors.

School counsellors are a part of a larger professional community of mental health practitioners that includes psychologists, community workers and social workers. While working with other mental health workers beyond the schools, counsellors may face issues pertaining to the definition of their professional roles and managing professional boundaries. According to Maguire (1975), other mental health professionals expressed concerns about school counsellors providing therapeutic help to disturbed children. It was reasoned that a lack of proper training reduced the confidence that other professionals had of school counsellors to provide therapeutic services for this group of children. Although the training of school counsellors has improved markedly over past decades, this negative perception may still affect some states or countries where school counselling services are in early stages of operation.

Counselling practice operating within schools has to be responsive to changes not only in the schools themselves, but also in society at large and the communities and regions in which they operate. These changes influence the nature of presenting problems, clients (students and parents), as well as support networks, thus posing significant challenges to school counsellors.

Systems Challenges

Working in schools, counsellors are involved in a number of systems. These include the education system, professional counselling bodies, community and social services, and at times, the legal system.

As systems are often interrelated, changes in one system easily affect another. One example is highlighted by Jenkins and Polat (2006) involving England and Wales and the changes in approach brought about by the Children Act 2004, which are likely to pose challenges to existing school counselling services. The suggested changes in information-sharing arrangements among professionals and the focus on behavioral outcomes in clients will inevitably impact the current school counselling system. Hence, school counsellors need to develop dynamic working styles that are adaptive to the many systems they interact with as well as the challenges brought about by changes that are implemented from time to time.

As highlighted in studies by Bunce and Willows (2001) and McMahon and Patton (2001), external networks of peers and other allied professionals are key systems that school counsellors naturally approach and rely on for support. These systems also pose challenges, such as adhering to professional ethics, ongoing professional development, and other professional requirements. The time needed to manage links with counselling networks and professional bodies is also a major challenge.

The community and social services is yet another set of systems that school counsellors often have to work with. Referral procedures for social services often differ from one agency or locality to another. Programmes and schemes such as financial subsidies and hardship scholarships may not be under the counsellor's control, so school counsellors may encounter particular difficulties in helping clients and/or families in accessing those services and resources.

From time to time, school counsellors may be required to interact with the legal and healthcare systems. This is especially so when students or clients are involved in crime or 'at risk' behaviours or require mental health assistance. Counsellors may find interacting with such systems challenging, as they themselves may not be regularly up-to-date on vital procedures and information due to their typical everyday separation from these institutions.

Overall, school counsellors have to manage the differences as well as the inconsistencies that almost always exist between and among the many systems they have to work with. The main challenge is to ensure that they are sufficiently familiar with and able to work with different systems so that their clients and other stakeholders can benefit from the opportunities, services and resources available.

Personal Challenges

Personal challenges may be separated into two broad categories. These are professional issues, such as professional supervision, professional development and support, and individual issues, including values, attitudes and self-awareness.

McMahon and Patton (2001) highlighted the lack of suitable supervision for school counsellors in Australia. According to their study, practice supervision was able to be accessed two times or less in a year by almost half of the respondents in their study. School counsellors may have access to informal support networks providing peer supervision and support, but the need for adequate formalized supervision largely remains unmet. Bunce and Willower (2001) also revealed the sporadic nature of professional contacts and the lack of supervision for school counsellors in their study undertaken in America. As school counsellors are often working independently in a school, physical distance posed a considerable challenge to having regular supervision and discussion of work-related difficulties with other colleagues. Therefore, school counsellors may be left poorly supported and 'isolated' from their peers or a supervisor. Bunce and Willower's study

(2001) also revealed that the same problem extends to the lack of opportunities for ongoing professional development. Therefore, school counsellors often have to face challenges in receiving proper supervision, support, and ongoing education and training while practicing in schools.

Professional counsellors typically adopt theoretical approaches they are most comfortable with and skilled in for their practice. Antonouris's study in Britain (1976) highlighted that school counsellors strongly supported the Rogerian and eclectic approaches and were less likely to use psychoanalytic and behavioral approaches. Such choices are likely to be influenced by the characteristics and needs of the clientele groups in schools. Platts and Williamson (2000), on the other hand, highlighted the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in school-based counselling. It was argued that the theoretical underpinnings of CBT and its structured nature harmonized with the culture of schools. Hence, school counsellors face challenges in balancing their own preference and the needs of students as they practice in schools.

Counsellors' perceptions of the clientele groups that they are working with in schools are also influential to their practice. According to Tatar (2001), school counsellors seem to describe five key types of teenagers; drive-oriented, intellectual-oriented, group-oriented, community-oriented and isolated. These perceptions of the adolescents they work with affect their expectations and the focus of their work with them. School counsellors face challenges of adapting to the changing needs of the young as well as their own changing perceptions of them as individuals. As discussed, students and teachers may have established perceptions and expectations of the counsellor and the counselling service. These expectations of their practice, behaviours, conduct and performance may contribute to stressors for school counsellors.

Issues relating to personal well-being and professional development of school counsellors are important matters of concern for practitioners as well as other stakeholders. These issues may lead to a loss of professional identity as suggested by Bunce and Willower (2001). In which case, the quality of counselling services and the well-being of students may also be impacted.

Discussion

The list of challenges discussed above is not an exhaustive one. Many other issues are likely to exist within the four domains highlighted. It is important to note that such issues interact among themselves, within as well as between the domains. The dynamics of such interactions will prompt coping strategies or solutions for practitioners in school counselling. This paper suggests that careful and creative examination of the interaction between the four domains will help in understanding and meeting some of the challenges that exist in school counselling practice. Some examples of the process are illustrated in the following paragraphs.

As noted in Lairio and Nissila (2002), the use of networking with external agencies and tapping into their resources and expertise may help school counsellors meet internal challenges within schools. For example, relevant workshops by external agencies may be helpful in meeting internal demands for specialized programmes that may consume more time and effort for school counsellors to develop on their own. Another example of purposeful interaction between the challenges of the internal and external domains is the involvement of students-clients in community-based services, such as youth drop-in centres and community programmes for children. Hence, with some intentional management by school counsellors, the interactions between the internal and external environment may be helpful in meeting the challenges in both domains.

One example of how changes and development of one domain would have an effect on another can be observed in Mclaughlin's (1999) article reviewing counselling in schools. It reasoned that the reform of the education system in the United Kingdom over the years had indirectly influenced the school counselling landscape. It was further argued that pastoral care was not an area of focus at the policy-level (system domain) and the impact of this was felt in the schools (internal domain), particularly in the increase in student exclusion. Considering the presenting problem of one domain and reflecting on its root causes within another domain helps to understand the problem in a more holistic manner and to target responses in ways that might have most impact.

Practitioners often adjust their clinical approaches (the personal domain) to meet the needs and demands of students (the internal domain) in schools. The development of a suitable personal approach also aids school counsellors in coping with internal challenges, such as coping with time restrictions. The use of group work, for example, may be employed to allow counsellors to reach out to more students in a short time. Hayes (2001) highlighted the importance of group counselling in school settings. Group work not only covers a larger number of participants but also provides peer feedback and assistance in the process. The personal adaptation of theoretical/practice approaches (such as Rogerian and eclectic) suitable for school-based work, as noted by Antonouris (1976), and CBT as supported by Platts and Williamson (2000), also helps school counsellors in managing internal challenges in relation to engaging youth. Therefore, school counsellors could benefit from examining the personal and internal domains for areas of positive interaction that may help address some of the issues faced in the setting.

One interesting observation reported by D'Rozario and Romano (2008) in their study on perception of counsellor effectiveness among college students, shows that the country of origin of the students seems to have some influence on their preference of counselling approach. Although the study was conducted with tertiary students, the findings are relevant in demonstrating the interaction between the external domain (globalization and increased movement of students from country to country), the internal

domain (reflecting the changes in students' preference of counselling approaches) and the personal domain (the adapting of approaches and styles by school counsellors to meet the students' needs).

Bunce and Willower (2001) also highlighted that counsellor educators, counselling bodies and administrators (the system domain) may help in providing support to school counsellors in meeting the internal challenges of organizational pressures and the risk of losing professional identity. Active interaction and engagement between the players in the system domain and the internal domain are likely to bring about political will and financial resources that are required to ensure the delivery of such support. Through regular discussions on school counselling issues between the internal, external, as well as the systems domains, policies and guidelines influencing the school counselling service may be enhanced.

As suggested by Lloyd (1999), schools may develop their own statements or policies on ethical issues concerning school counselling and the use of counselling skills. This task is likely to bring together the stakeholders of the internal domain (school administrators) and systems domain (counselling bodies and/or funding authorities). Dwyer and McNaughton's (2004) findings in their study on the needs of students and teachers in China suggested that teachers should be given as much attention as students in the school counselling programme. It highlighted the need, perhaps, for a rethinking of Western school counselling programmes in regard to teachers' self-care and wellness. This further reflects the need to consider the system domain, which consists of policies and the development of counselling programmes, as triggered by a presenting problem of teachers' expectation from within the internal domain. Such linkages and triangulation is helpful in developing holistic resolutions or advancements of school counselling.

The internal, external, system and personal challenges are interrelated in many ways. Solutions and coping strategies can be sought by examining the connections and interrelationships between and among these four domains, as indicated above. In many aspects of their work, school counsellors may benefit from understanding and leveraging on the strengths across the domains to enhance the quality of their work-life as well as of their performance. Figure 1 illustrates the interactive relationships involving the various domains.

As illustrated, this paper offers a framework for practitioners to understand the challenges faced in school-based practice and to develop coping strategies to meet such challenges. Some challenges may present or reveal issues that can be dealt with within one domain, while the root causes may reside in another. An example is teachers' perceptions, which can be addressed through impression management by the counsellor (the personal domain), as well as by enhancing teachers' training to heighten teachers' awareness of counselling within the education system (the system domain).

Conclusion

Education is a major social service and development process in developed and developing countries. Along with the growth and expansion of the education service, the guidance and counselling services as part of this are increasingly being deployed. Learning from previous

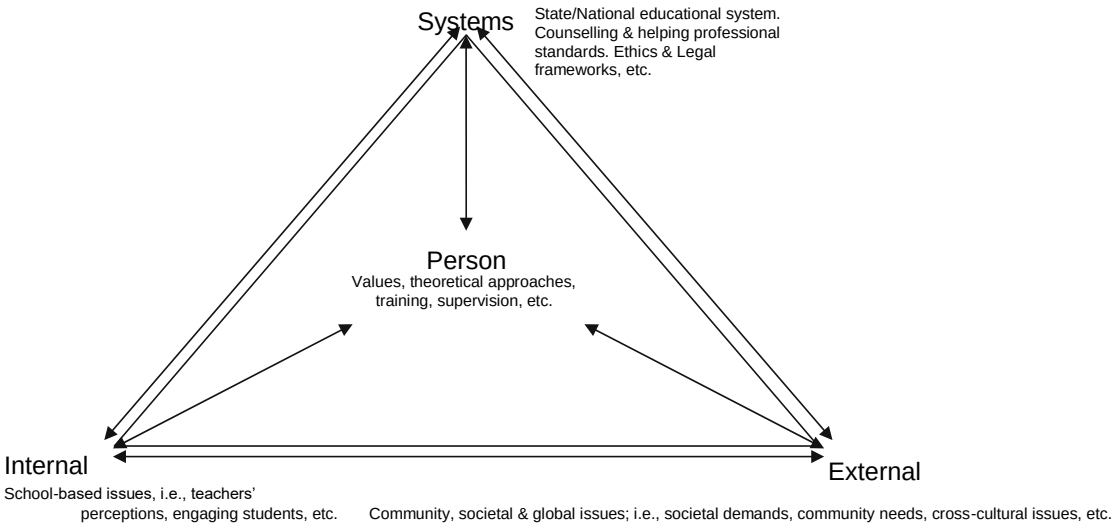

Fig. 1 Triangle of interactions.

studies, current practitioners can readily develop a mindset to recognize, understand, manage and contain the challenges in counselling practices in the school context.

Practicing in a complex secondary setting, counsellors need a framework for understanding and examining challenges they face. This paper suggests a possible perspective from which to view the different domains of the challenges' origins and their interaction with each other when examining challenges faced in the school counselling context.

The challenges presented in this paper involve and affect not only school counsellors, but also teachers, administrators, and students. All stakeholders in school counselling can benefit from understanding the dynamics of the domains and use the information gathered in their work. Teacher and counsellor educators can also provide the will and resources to support school counsellors and teachers to integrate the counselling service in schools to provide a more holistic guidance service for the ultimate benefit of the end users—the students.

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