



**Establishing a Counseling Center for
students at Shaqra University in Saudi
Arabia - A Delphi study**

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Establishing a Counseling Center for students at Shaqra University in Saudi Arabia - A Delphi study**Abstract**

University students face different problems during their academic lives. The aim of this study was to examine the importance of establishing a student counseling center and what services the center should include from the perspectives of students, their families, and faculty members. This study consists of 100 participants who participated in two rounds using a Delphi method. A paper questionnaire was given in the first round and the participants were asked to rank services that could be suggested to be included in the student counseling center. After completing the first round, an analysis was made, and participants were asked to electronically evaluate the services again in order to reach a consensus. The results have shown that all participants agreed on the importance of establishing the center. Students gave the lowest evaluation compared to their families and faculty members, and they were less accepting of group therapy compared to individual therapy. This might be related to stigma around mental health as the university is located in a province where the majority of students are well known compared to universities that are located in big cities. Recommendations from these projects would help decision makers at Shaqra University in establishing services depending on the results of this study.

Keywords, University students, mental health, counseling center, Shaqra University, Saudi Arabia

المستخلص :

يواجه طلبة الجامعة العديد من المشكلات خلال حياتهم الأكاديمية، هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى استطلاع أهمية افتتاح مركز إرشاد الطالب وأيضاً ما هي الخدمات التي من المفترض أن يشتمل عليها هذا المركز من وجهة نظر الطلاب وأسرهم وأعضاء هيئة التدريس. اشتملت هذه الدراسة على ١٠٠ مشارك تمت مشاركتهم في جولتين بإستخدام طريقة دلفي. في الجولة الأولى تم توزيع استبانة ورقية وطُلب من المشاركين تقييم الخدمات

الممكن اقتراحها في مركز إرشاد الطالب. بعد استكمال الجولة الأولى، تم تحليل البيانات وطلب من المشاركين المشاركة الالكترونية بتقييم الخدمات مرة أخرى حتى يتم الوصول إلى الإجماع على الخدمات. أشارت النتائج إلى موافقة كافة عينة الدراسة على إنشاء مركز إرشاد الطالب في جامعة شقراء. كان الطلاب أقل في تقييم أهمية الخدمات مقارنة بأسرهم وأعضاء هيئة التدريس وكانوا أقل قبول للعلاج الجماعي مقارنة بالعلاج الفردي. قد ترجع هذه النتيجة إلى وصمة العار المحيطة بالصحة النفسية نظراً لكون الجامعة تقع في محافظة حيث يعرف أغلب الطلاب زملائهم مقارنة بالمدن الكبرى. قد تساعد التوصيات المستخرجة من هذه الدراسة صناعات القرار في جامعة شقراء في توفير الخدمات بناء على نتائج الدراسة الحالية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: مركز الإرشاد الطلابي، جامعة شقراء، دراسة بطريقة دلفي، الصحة النفسية، المملكة العربية السعودية.

Introduction

University students have a high risk of facing financial, academic, and family difficulties while studying for their first degree. According to a study conducted by the World Health Organization (WHO) which consists of around 14,000 college students in their first year at university in eight countries around the world, nearly a third of college students report mental health problems, including depression, mania/hypomania, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, alcohol use disorder, and substance use disorder (Auerbach et al., 2018).

According to the Saudi National Mental Health Survey (SNMHS), around 40% of participants aged 15–24 have a mental health condition, and it recommends more focus on research and intervention for this specific age group (AlTwaijri, Al-Subaie, & Al-Habeeb, 2019). Meshal Alaqeel, a psychiatrist and an academic at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia suggests that university students are not able to visit a health professional to receive mental health services due to the cost and lack of services in some universities around the country (Alaqeel, 2018). He also points out that these problems affect their academic

lives, especially university students, who are at high risk of developing mental health problems (Alaqael, 2018).

The National Center for Mental Health Promotion in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia has a significant role in supporting universities around the Kingdom by providing counseling services for students (NCMH, 2016). There were two local experiences that should be considered when establishing a counseling center, the Well Student Center at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences in Riyadh (KSU-HS, 2020) and the university counseling center at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University in Dammam (IAU, 2020). Both centers are consistent with the Saudi Vision 2030 that aims to provide a better quality of life for Saudi citizens (Quality of Life, 2020).

Shaqra University is one of the junior universities in Saudi Arabia that was established in 2009. It consists of 24 colleges of multiple disciplines (Ministry of Education, 2019). According to the university website, it is in nine provinces and enrolls around 31,000 students (Shaqra University, 2019). Al Quwaiyah province has colleges under the direction of Shaqra University. It has a psychological and academic counseling unit supervised by an associate professor in psychology (Shaqra University, 2019). However, the distance between Shaqra province and Al Quwaiyah is 187 km, so it is difficult for students to travel to receive counseling services since the main campus is at Shaqra.

Thus, the aim of this study is to combine evidence from three graduation projects conducted by twelve psychology students in Shaqra University which ask students, their families, and faculty members about establishing a student counseling center in Shaqra province. The recommendations from these projects could help decision makers at Shaqra University in establishing services depending on the results of this study.

Methodology

Ethical approval was sought from the Research Ethics Standing Committee at Shaqra University, reference number is ERC-SU-

2020011 on 22/7/2020. A Delphi method was used in two rounds. Participant information sheets were given to all prospective participants (students, their families, and faculty members). When they agreed to take part in the two rounds of this study, consent forms were obtained. They were then asked to rank some services that could be included in the student counseling center. Rankings were from 1–10, with 1 indicating that the service is not important and 10 indicating that the service is important for the center. After the participants completed the first round, the data were analyzed. Participants were given a mean rank of each service and were then asked to re-rank the suggested services in order to reach a consensus between the participants in each version (faculty members, family members, and students versions) After completing round two, the data were again analyzed, and services were suggested to be included when they had a mean rank of 8 or above in all versions. Paper forms were used for the first round, whereas online surveys were sent for the second round.

Results

100 participants agreed to take part in the study and completed the two rounds. They consisted of eight faculty members, 45 family members of students, and 47 students who were registered with the university when the study was conducted.

The services which were suggested to be included in the student counseling center and the mean rank of each round can be found in the following table:

| Service | Mean rank in round one | | | Mean rank in round two | | |
|---|------------------------|----------------|----------|------------------------|----------------|----------|
| | Faculty members | Family members | Students | Faculty members | Family members | Students |
| Do you think it is important to establish a student Counseling Center in Shaqra province run by Shaqra University | 9 | 9 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 9 |

| What services should be included in this Center? | | | | | | |
|---|---|----|---|---|---|---|
| Individual sessions for prevention services | 9 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 9 |
| Group sessions for prevention services | 8 | 8 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 7 |
| Courses to help students increase their study skills | 9 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 9 |
| Courses to help students know their abilities and guide them toward a better future | 9 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 9 |
| Courses to help students adjusting with university life | 8 | 9 | 8 | 8 | 9 | 9 |
| Individual sessions for intervention services | 9 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 9 | 8 |
| Group sessions for intervention services | 8 | 8 | 5 | 9 | 9 | 7 |
| Referred patients who need pharmacological interventions at Shaqra General Hospital | 9 | 8 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 9 |
| Courses for couples before getting married | 9 | 8 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 8 |
| Courses for couples who are newly married | 9 | 8 | 6 | 9 | 8 | 8 |
| Parental guidance on dealing with their children | 9 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 8 | 9 |
| Counseling courses for parents of special needs | 9 | 10 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 9 |

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| children | | | | | | |
| Counseling services for students diagnosed with long term conditions | 9 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| Counseling services for students who have low GPA | 9 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 9 | 9 |
| Counseling services for students who have lost one or both parents | 9 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 9 | 8 |
| Counseling services for students who want to quit smoking | 9 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 8 | 9 |
| Counseling services for students who have family members struggling with drug addiction | 9 | 9 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 8 |
| Counseling services for students who have a family member in prison | 9 | 9 | 7 | 8 | 8 | 8 |

The table indicates that students gave services a lower mean rank compared to faculty members and family members. Family members were in the middle when ranking services and faculty members gave the highest rank for each service. Students ranked services higher when they were related to general life skills and ranked them lower when they were related to mental health services for both individual and group services.

A mean rank of 8 has been chosen for the services to be included in the second round. Thus, the student counseling center is

recommended by all participants (by the students themselves, their family members, and faculty members).

The final services to be suggested are as follows: individual sessions for prevention services, courses to help students increase their study skills, courses to help students know their abilities and guide them toward a better future, courses to help students adjusting with university life, individual sessions for intervention services, referred patients who need pharmacological interventions at Shaqra General Hospital, courses for couples before getting married, courses for couples who are newly married, counseling courses for parents on dealing with their children, counseling courses for parents of special needs children, counseling services for students diagnosed with long term conditions, counseling services for students who have low GPA, counseling services for students who lost one or both parents, counseling services for students who want to quit smoking, counseling services for students who have family members struggling with drug addiction and counseling services for students who have a family member in prison.

Prevention and intervention group sessions were not recommended to be included during both rounds according to the students' responses.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to combine evidence taken from three graduation projects conducted by twelve psychology students at Shaqra University which asked students, their families, and faculty members about establishing a student counseling center in Shaqra province. The recommendations from these projects could help decision makers at Shaqra University in establishing services depending on the results of this study.

A mean rank of 8 has been chosen for the services to be included in all versions in the second round. Thus, the student counseling center is recommended by all participants (the students themselves, their family members, and faculty members). This is in

line with the efforts by the National Center for Mental Health Promotion in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, which has played a significant role in supporting universities around the Kingdom by providing counseling services for students (NCMH, 2016). In addition, this is also in line with the Saudi National Mental Health Survey recommendation which emphasizes more research and intervention on age 15-24 (AlTwajri, Al-Subaie, & Al-Habeeb, 2019). Further, this is consistent with the Saudi Vision 2030 that aims to provide a better quality of life for Saudi citizens (Quality of Life, 2020).

All services have been suggested to be included except for two. Group sessions to prevent and manage psychological problems were excluded as they had a mean rank of 7 even in the second round from the students' responses. This could be explained by the stigma surrounding mental health problems (Clement, Schauman, Graham, Maggioni, Evans-Lacko, Bezborodovs, & Thornicroft, 2015). In addition, Shaqra is a province, not a city, and people usually know each other, which could make it difficult to talk about problems openly.

Stigma around mental health is still an issue in Saudi Arabia. Local specialists work hard to minimize its effects. Arwa Arab, a psychologist and an academic at King Abdulaziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia is encouraging students to seek help when they are having a tough time by emphasizing that "it is not shame" to talk about mental health (Arab, 2018). Mesha'al Alaqeel, a psychiatrist and an academic at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences in Riyadh presented an awareness TEDx talk titled *Caution! A psychiatrist patient, avoid him* (Alaqeel, 2016) which can be used for awareness materials to encourage students to seek help.

Family members seem to be more open in giving services a higher mean rank compared to the students, especially in the first round. This could be explained by the fact that family members prefer to establish the student's counselling center to avoid traveling to

Riyadh or Alqassim since it is around 200 km from Shaqra to receive such services when needed.

Recommendations

Following the two study rounds which obtained three different perspectives, the study concludes that the student counseling center is an important service to be provided on the Shaqra University campus.

Students could be easily encouraged by faculty members to receive appropriate services that could positively affect their academic lives. They should also learn that experiencing difficulties during their academic careers is common all around the world. This could change their perspectives even though they gave the services the lowest mean rank among the participant groups.

A competition to create infographics after listening to the awareness materials (e.g., the TEDx talk) is recommended. This may increase student awareness towards mental health disorders.

Local experiences, namely the Well Student Center founded at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences in Riyadh and the University Counseling Center founded at Imam Abdulrahman bin Faisal University in Dammam, can serve as examples when establishing the center in Shaqra.

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