

PROMOTING THE MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS IN THE ERA OF MAJOR GLOBAL CRISES: THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL COUNSELLORS

By

DOROTHY MMA AFUNUGO PhD.

Department of Educational Psychology,
Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe, Anambra State, Nigeria
dorammafunugo@yahoo.com
08035534622

and

ENWERE CHINWE AUGUSTINA PhD.

Department of Educational Psychology,
Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe, Anambra State, Nigeria
chinweenwere@yahoo.com

Abstract

Schools are crucial in fostering students' mental health and acting as a vital learning environment for acquiring fundamental skills in the social, emotional, and behavioral domains. However, the many consequences of global crises including global conflicts, child abuse, COVID-19, and climate change frequently influence the school climate, having a serious impact on students' mental health. The current study suggested potential roles for educational counsellors in identifying and meeting the demand for mental health services that support social and emotional growth and wellness for all students. This study, which was based on role theory, explored the scenario of mental health disorders in schools, factors that affect mental health, how global crises affect children, ways to promote mental health, and the role that educational counsellors play in doing so. It was upheld that educational counsellors could respond to the mental health needs of all students by providing instruction that improves awareness of mental health, evaluation and advice regarding academic, career, and social/emotional development, short-term counseling interventions, and referrals to community resources for long-term support in promoting students' positive mental health.

Keywords: Educational counsellors, mental health, students, global conflict, child abuse, climate change and COVID-19.

Introduction

Students with mental disorders are characterized by significant shifts from how they regularly behave, learn, or manage their emotions, which create anguish and difficulty getting through the day. Mental health is defined as a “state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, copes with the normal stresses of life, works productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community” (WHO, 2022). There are two ways that problems with mental health might present themselves: internally or externally. Students who experience mental health issues often struggle in school, have trouble focusing, perform poorly academically, and struggle in their social and interpersonal interactions (Nwachukwu, Olufunmilayo, Otor, Yakubu, Akingbade, Odefemi, Ikwunne, Kowe, Morakinyo, Oyebamiji and Adebayo, 2021). But if the right counseling services are implemented to assist a young person's mental health needs, we may frequently maximize success and reduce adverse effects for students. The educational counsellor's mental health interventions should be focused on each student's unique needs and flexible enough to offer more or less care as necessary (Pederson, Burnett-Zeigler, Fokuo, Wisner, Zumpf & Oshodi, 2020).

Psychological counseling, assessment, and intervention services are provided by educational counsellors to assist students. In order to provide secure, healthy, and encouraging learning environments that develop ties between the home, school, and community, school counseling personnel collaborate with teachers, families, school administration, and other professionals (Putri, Supriyanto, Martaningsih & Rosada, 2022). Educational counsellors assist students with a variety of concerns pertaining to academics, relationships with peers and family members, and emotion management, such as despair, anxiety, worry, or isolation. Because mental health issues resulting from global crises like global conflicts, child abuse, COVID-19, and climate change are common and frequently manifest during student hood and adolescence, they are treatable, and early detection and intervention strategies can help improve resilience and the capacity to succeed in school and life, the capacity of educational counsellors to recognize and support students' mental health in schools is important (Atilola, Ayinde, Obialo, Adeyemo, Adegaju & Anthony, 2022; Ohunene, Audu, Ifeagacukwu & Ogunode, 2022). Professional educational counsellors can actively assist adolescents affected by global conflicts to flourish emotionally and academically by collaborating with, providing resources for, and supporting family members through partnerships. Therefore, educational counsellors are in a unique position to support and mentor students as they deal with the realities of international conflicts and child abuse (Clark, Ponjuan, Orrock, Wilson & Flores, 2013).

Counseling is also necessary for victims of child abuse to be able to process the emotional trauma that occurred from their abuse. Counseling frequently aims to help people regain their ability to trust others, as well as their communication skills and self-advocacy abilities (Brown & Grothaus, 2019). Counselors who focus on helping child abuse victims should be skilled at managing the mental health issues that arise as a result of the traumatic abuse. Counseling for child abuse is crucial, it cannot be overstated. If child abuse victims are left untreated, they will suffer many challenges in the future (Selph, Bougatsos, Blazina & Nelson, 2013). Child abuse victims frequently experience mental health problems, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, dissociative disorders, substance misuse, and anxiety disorders, as was mentioned above. Understanding and addressing the causes of these disorders can help people feel less anxious and help the world fight disasters. The COVID-19 pandemic is a global emergency that has a detrimental effect on students' mental health as well as their social, emotional, psychological, and educational well-being (Golberstein et al., 2020). Although dread and worry are common reactions to outbreaks in society, these emotions may make it more challenging for people to deal with the outbreak's effects. In other words, in addition to the risk of illness and death, the pandemic has also had a detrimental psychological impact. For instance, dread of illness, worry of being alone at home and delaying schooling, fear of families being unable to pay for students' tuition owing to a lack of income, and viewing depressing information on social media all had a negative impact on students' mental health.

Theoretical framework

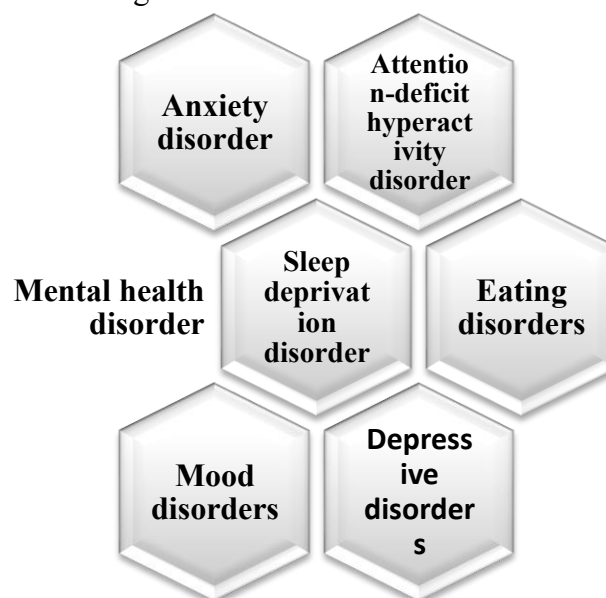
The present research is positioned within the organizational theory literature and used role theory to address issues regarding the professional responsibilities that educational counsellors have in the era of major global crises. Role theory offers a framework for analyzing expectations and roles in the setting of organizations (Kahn et al., 1964). This concept according to Richards, Hemphill and Templin (2018) is frequently used by academics to explain how particular individuals within an organization should operate in various situations. Roles are social positions that are linked to a person's identity, including their career, and are connected to societal norms of behavior (Biddle, 1986). Roles, however, are not constant and change depending on the structure in which they are found. The complexity of roles varies based on their breadth, difficulty (i.e., the level of expertise required to fulfill the role), and

coherence (i.e., how the components of the role fit together). Roles are "embedded inside social systems" (Biddle, 1979). Role concepts can be utilized to better comprehend an individual's and an organization's actions (Biddle, 1986). This is a useful framework to guide the research because we are looking at a highly specialized function inside the school, which in many schools may be a single role or one held by only a few people. According to role theory, job stress, which happens when employees and supervisors have divergent expectations about a given role and there is an imbalance between the amount of work required and the amount of time available, is one of the main elements determining counsellor's effectiveness.

In general, American Educational counsellor Association (2019) suggests that a educational counsellor's responsibilities include working with students in all grade levels and implementing a complete school counseling program to promote their growth in three areas: academic, social and emotional, and postsecondary. Individual counseling, group counseling, classroom instruction, family outreach, and college and job preparedness counseling are just a few of their professional duties. However, Baker, Zyromski and Granello (2021) suggests that these professionals deal with various expectations of their job and obligations from students, parents, school principals, teachers, and even counselors themselves, despite national standards, a professional model, and advice on suitable roles. Roles are context-bound, which means an individual's comprehension of the expectations for their position is influenced by organizational aspects in their surroundings. This is partly the cause of the problem. In order to comprehend counselors' experiences amid a global crisis where distant and hybrid schools further complicated their responsibilities, this study builds on previous literature in the field.

Mental health disorder: Situation in schools

Mental health is a condition of mental wellness that enables people to manage life's stressors, develop their potential, study and work effectively, and give back to their communities (Danowitz & Beddoes, 2018). It is a crucial element of health and well-being that supports both our individual and collective capacities for decision-making, relationship-building, and influencing the world in which we live.



Source: Adapted from Low, Rumker, Talkar, Torous, Cecchi, & Ghosh (2020)

Fig. 1: Mental health disorder in Nigerian schools.

The global conflict, child abuse, climate change, and COVID-19 stay-at-home orders have raised mental health and behavioral challenges in schools that have never been seen before (Hamadani, Hasan, Baldi, Hossain, Shiraji, Bhuiyan, Mehrin, Fisher, Tofail, Tipu, & Grantham-McGregor, 2020). Globally, 1 in 6 people are aged 10-19 years and according to World Health Organization (2023), half of all mental health disorders in adulthood start before age 14, and two-thirds before 24. It is estimated that 1 in 7 (14%), 10–19-year-olds experience mental health conditions, yet these remain largely unrecognised and untreated. Mental health conditions account for 16% of the global burden of disease and injury in people aged 10–19 years with suicide being the fourth leading cause of death in older adolescents (Maymunah, 2022). Since the onset of COVID-19, there is a 25% increase in the prevalence of anxiety and depression worldwide and young people are disproportionately at risk of suicidal and self-harming behaviours – In Nigeria, UNICEF in 2021 stated that 1 in 6 young Nigerians is depressed (UNICEF, 2023). Mentally healthy students are more likely to go to school ready to learn, actively engage in school activities, have supportive and caring connections with adults and young people, use appropriate problem-solving skills, have nonaggressive behaviours, and add to positive school culture.

In Fig. 1, mental health problems may be brought on by governmental lockdowns, social isolation, domestic problems, death and illness, and uncertainty associated to these crises. such as anxiety disorder, attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder, eating disorders, mood disorders, depressive disorders, and sleep deprivation disorder, which may have a negative impact on students' motivation for academic performance and lead to behavioral problems in schools. There are various anxiety disorders. Obsessive compulsive disorder, Post-traumatic stress disorder, social phobias, and generalized anxiety disorder are a few of the most prevalent types that affect students. Some amount of worry is normal for any person to experience, student or adult, but when it makes it difficult for the student to function in school or in social interactions, it could be something more serious (Egbe, Ugwuanyi, Ede, Agbigwe, Onuorah, Okon & Ugwu, 2022).

A complicated neuro-developmental illness known as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder causes a wide range of symptoms. Many people believe that the main symptom is having trouble focusing, although that is not always the case. Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder impairs a student's capacity to understand their own emotions as well as to comprehend the needs and emotions of others (Hogan, Akpan, Ijezie & Edem, 2022). This frequently manifests as irritability and restlessness, but it can also manifest as difficulty adhering to directions and a propensity for daydreaming.

Students of all ages can suffer from eating disorders and mood problems, which are frequently triggered by stress or traumatic events (Gokkaya & Kargul, 2022). Sometimes, students struggle to recognize and manage their emotions, which causes them to resort to inappropriate coping techniques. Mood disorders can cause harmful and even suicidal thoughts, while eating disorders including anorexia, bulimia, and binge-eating disorder can become life-threatening. Trauma, suicidality, technology addiction, drug and alcohol abuse, family conflict, and other mental health concerns have increased. If these mental health problems are not properly handled in order to prevent catastrophes, then school safety may become an additional issue. Mental health issues in students can affect how they learn, behave, and manage their

emotions, which can result in a variety of issues both at home and in the classroom if they go undetected or untreated.

Determinants of mental health

Numerous individual, social, and structural factors may interact throughout to support or undermine mental health and cause a change on the mental health continuum. People may be more susceptible to mental health issues due to personal psychological and biological characteristics like emotional intelligence, substance use, and heredity (Kowe, Morakinyo, Oyebamiji, and Adebayo, 2021). Students are more likely to experience mental health disorders if they are exposed to unfavorable social, economic, geopolitical, and environmental factors such as violence, inequality, abuse, and environmental deprivation.

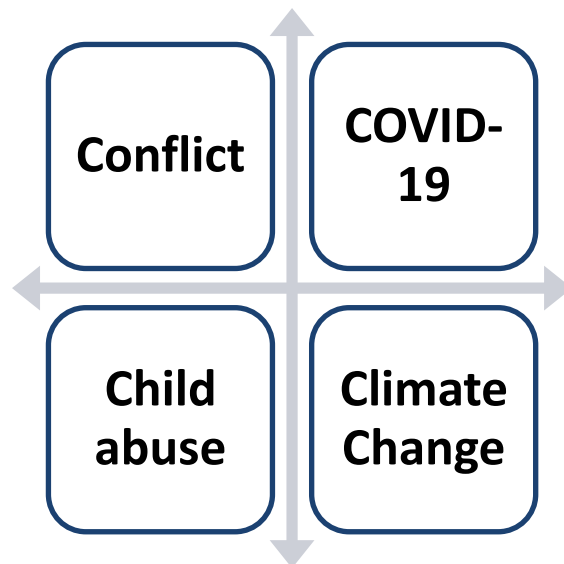
Risks can appear at any stage of life, but those that do so during developmentally vulnerable times, particularly early student life, are more harmful. A period of poor mental health, for instance, might be brought on by childhood abuse, trauma, or neglect, social isolation or loneliness, social disadvantage, poverty, or debt, bereavement, severe or protracted stress, having a chronic physical illness, living in substandard housing or being a long-term caregiver, abusing drugs or alcohol, engaging in domestic violence, bullying, or other forms of abuse (Atilola, Ayinde, Obialo, Adeyemo, Adegaju & Anthony, 2022).

At various scales, society contains both threats and safeguards for mental health. Global risks, which include economic downturns, disease outbreaks, humanitarian crises, forced displacement, and the escalating climate issue, raise the risk for entire populations. Only a few risk and protective factors can be reliably predicted. Despite being exposed to a risk factor, the majority of people do not go on to acquire a mental health illness, while many people who have no known risk factor do so nonetheless (Pederson, Burnett-Zeigler, Fokuo, Wisner, Zumpf & Oshodi, 2020). However, the interrelated factors that affect mental health can either support or detract from it.

Effects of Global Crisis on students

A global crisis is an occurrence like a war, a recession, a pandemic, or extreme weather that affects all nations' economies, social structures, cultures, and politics, among many other things. A crisis may be of a national or international scope. Financial collapse, war, natural disasters like the tsunami, and the pandemic healthcare crisis are all examples of global crises. A global generation of students health and aspirations are being negatively impacted by a number of overlapping crises that hundreds of millions of students are caught in the middle of. Years of advancement are being undone, and in every country, insecurity, turmoil, and uncertainty are increasing.

During civil and internal conflicts, students are exposed to terrifying and horrifying conditions, an experience that could have long-lasting effects on posttraumatic stress disorder. Students who have been touched by conflict may have significant rates of anxiety and despair due to severe losses and interruptions in their life (Yamada & Matsushima, 2020). Food, gasoline, and fertilizer prices have skyrocketed as a result of the crisis, which has also severely disrupted supply chains and international trade, shaken the financial markets, and put the world's food security and humanitarian flows in jeopardy. Massive amounts of fossil fuels are consumed by the military, directly causing global warming (Jacobson, von-Krauland, Coughlin, Dukas, Nelson, Palmer & Rasmussen, 2022). Modern combat techniques such as bombings adversely destroy wildlife and biodiversity.



Students encounter enormous obstacles that seriously jeopardize their ambitions and dreams for a better life in the face of many calamities. They and their families are being forced to make awful decisions in order to survive due to conflict, starvation, displacement, and poverty. Students living in crisis zones around the globe continue to experience attacks and abuse on a terrible scale, ranging from widespread murdering, maiming, abduction, and sexual violence to recruitment into armed organizations and strikes on schools, hospitals, and crucial water systems (Rosenthal & Thompson, 2020).

Attacks on educational institutions or healthcare facilities can target them and result in their complete or partial destruction. New COVID-19 varieties will emerge as a result of these crises, showing why nobody is safe unless everyone is. Hospitals and health systems are overburdened due to the more than five million deaths globally caused by COVID (Golberstein, Wen & Miller, 2020). The poorest people's livelihoods have been severely damaged by lockdown measures, particularly in nations with minimal social welfare. Many months of school closures have also caused hundreds of millions of students to miss out on months of education. As people struggled with loneliness, job losses, and the loss of friends and families, mental health problems increased around the world (NDTV, 2021). When students return to school following child abuse, armed war, climatic change, and COVID-19 stay-at-home orders, mental health specialists predict high levels of despair, substance misuse, posttraumatic stress disorder, and suicide.

Mental health promotion and prevention

The goal of mental health promotion is to develop conditions that support and sustain good mental health for all people. Enhancing protective factors and reducing risk factors are the goals of activities and treatments (individual, family related, environmental and economic in nature). With the chance to reach large numbers of students throughout their early years of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development, schools are a great place for promoting mental health for students (Nwachukwu, Olufunmilayo, Otor, Yakubu, Akingbade, Odefemi, Ikwunne, Kowe, Morakinyo, Oyebamiji & Adebayo, 2021). The best school-based programs for promoting mental health are comprehensive, target various health outcomes, involve the entire school, emphasize the development of personal skills, involve parents and the larger community, and are implemented over time. In order to lower risks, foster resilience, and create

environments that support mental health, promotion and prevention interventions the individual, social, and structural determinants of mental health are first identified.

Fostering good mental health fundamentally involves promoting and improving resilience. The capacity to "bounce back" after adversity, failure, and stress is known as resilience. Students' mental health will be improved throughout adulthood if they are thought how to cope with life's unavoidable ups and downs (Atilola, Ayinde, Obialo, Adeyemo, Adegbaaju & Anthony, 2022). Students who are resilient feel good about themselves, trust other people, and are generally upbeat about the future. Resilience can be developed through school-based initiatives that emphasize problem resolution, emotional literacy, and social skill development (Cavazos, Johnson, Fielding, Cavazos, Castro & Vela, 2010).

Interventions may be created for single people, particular groups, or entire communities. Promotion and prevention programs should encompass the education, labor, justice, transportation, environment, housing, and welfare sectors since changing the determinants of mental health frequently requires action beyond the health sector (Selph, Bougatsos, Blazina, & Nelson, 2013). Another goal in promoting student and adolescent mental health, is by enacting laws and policies that support and protect mental health, helping parents offer nurturing care, adopting school-based programs, and enhancing community and online environments.

Specific role of school counsellors in promoting the mental health of students in the era of major global crises.

Global conflict: Students who are impacted by a global conflict frequently experience a lot of uncertainty and movement. Students and adolescents from military families who are going through this crisis frequently experience pressures that have an impact on their academic and socio-emotional growth. Educational counsellors are in a unique position to help students who are affected by big global crises with their educational needs because of their position and expertise. By teaching courses on subjects like bullying prevention, conflict resolution, and respect for others, educational counsellors can address problems associated to international conflict (Baker, Zyromski & Granello, 2021). By helping students to develop their critical thinking and problem-solving abilities as well as their worldview and belief systems to be inclusive and celebrate diversity, they assist students in becoming ready to face these occurrences.

Educational counsellors participate in the school's office discipline referral procedures as well as small group and one-on-one counseling interventions to address specific learning and behavioral issues. It's important to keep up with and reinforce these exercises. In addition, the illustration below identifies six areas where educational counsellors should concentrate to actively assist students in comprehending and efficiently resolving international conflict. Many of the issues relating to international conflict might be direct or indirect, necessitating discussions between students and the educational counsellor in small groups or one-on-one (Ohunene, Audu, Ifeagacukwu & Ogunode, 2022). In these situations, counselors address highly individualized problems that have an impact on students' feeling of wellbeing, emotional stability, and executive function. Educational counsellors are frequently in the front lines of having to offer explanations when none are available and to offer comfort and support that appears insufficient to assist others in coming to terms with and healing the broken hearts, minds, and psyches of people who are devastated by such tragedies.

Programs for school counseling, as mentioned above, have an emphasis on both prevention and intervention. Teaching students effective coping skills is a crucial part of the educational counsellor's job. Educational counsellors should actively promote the delivery of activities that are focused on global conflict prevention and intervention. Being alert and

keeping an eye out for indications of thought and behavior patterns that could interfere with students' ability to study or have a negative impact on their life can help one to achieve this goal. Every student has access to comprehensive school counseling programs. The rights of children and families in the educational process are protected by counselors.

Child abuse: Counselors that assist abused students often concentrate on helping them process their experiences and emotions. The majority of counseling sessions take place in one-on-one settings, but if the goal is to reunite the family, the abused student will probably participate in family therapy. Additionally, child abuse counseling aims to assist students in resolving mental health problems brought on by abuse, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorders, or somatization disorder (Sanderson, 2013). It is the legal, moral, and ethical duty of the educational counsellor to alert the appropriate authorities about any suspected incidents of child abuse and neglect. In order to ensure that the essential supports are in place for students, educational counsellors seek to identify the behavioral, academic, and social/emotional effects of abuse and neglect on students.

Educational counsellors should acquire crucial understanding of policies and referral processes by remaining up to date on reporting requirements and state laws. Educational counsellors should understand child abuse and neglect and its impact on students' academic, career, and social/emotional development in addition to knowing current laws and being required to report incidents (Olotu, 2013). They should also provide interventions promoting resiliency, healthy interpersonal and communication skills, and self-worth, make referrals to outside organizations when necessary, involve families in the school community, and identify obstacles and limitations that prevent healthy family functioning.

Climate change: By assisting students in developing a comprehensive understanding of climate change and a future that is environment-friendly, guidance counselors can have a positive impact. With these responsibilities, educational counsellors are positioned to take the lead in tackling existential risks brought on by a changing world. Educational counsellors are in a unique position to lead collaborative efforts to address the climate catastrophe at the school level. In particular, they can address the existential dangers that a changing climate poses to students' current social and emotional well-being and view on the future (Nnadi, , Uzoekwe, Obi & Chigbu, 2021). By providing pro-active and timely school counseling services, educational counsellors can support students' wellbeing and resilience by implementing prevention and intervention strategies that focus on the psychological benefits of connecting with nature, students' reactions to climate change (such as worldview, eco-anxiety, eco-trauma, motivation, and ambivalence), and increasing students' self-efficacy as they think about their own futures that may be impacted by the environment. Students may be better prepared to deal with the scientific and social/emotional effects of climate change and to build the personal resilience to face the personal and community crisis of natural disasters if educational counsellor roles are clarified and made more specific when it comes to school responses to climate change.

The educational counsellor would naturally play a role in education pertaining to climate change awareness, including attending to the psychological and emotional needs of students as they learn about environmental conditions related to climate change impacts. This is because the educational counsellor has historically served as a bridge to services during times of crisis. Educational counsellors can mitigate the adverse consequences of climate change impacts in addition to offering supportive psychological education connected to it by implementing programs that foster resilience (Undiyaundeye & Denga, 2018). This can be achieved by employing techniques and methods for wellness assessment and promotion that go beyond the comprehensive perspective that educational counsellors have of their students. This research suggests partnerships between educational counsellors and science instructors,

recognizing the benefits of including educational counsellors in environmental education initiatives. These partnerships can better serve students' and the school community's needs in terms of how they are processing climate change psychologically as a whole.

Covid-19: There may be an increase in demand for mental health services as a result of the COVID-19 stay-at-home directive and school closings. Since this pandemic is a true crisis, educational counsellors have received training in how to approach crises both individually and methodically. Educational counsellors are prepared for the multitude of ongoing and emerging issues that may become more prominent following a crisis like COVID-19 (Vostanis & Bell, 2020). Educational counsellors are specially trained to handle the academic, career, and social/emotional needs of all students and have a beneficial influence on conduct, attendance, and academic performance. Even if reduced budget forces administrators to evaluate line items, they should acknowledge the crucial part educational counsellors play in addressing children's social and emotional needs and keep them on staff to help students, families, and the community through this difficult time.

The educational counsellor can engage with many districts, parents, and mental health stakeholders and is frequently the only mental health clinician able to diagnose, manage, and provide interventions for students who are at risk. Since adolescents typically spend the majority of their time at school, school employees typically become aware of mental health difficulties before families, even during non-pandemic periods. The job of the professional counselor is crucial in times of distress. It is expected of counselors to provide counseling to students, plan all counseling events, interact with staff, parents, and the crisis team, as well as reach out to nearby schools. Throughout the crises' intervention and postvention phases, counselors offer one-on-one counseling sessions. They are expected to consult with administrators, professors, parents, and professionals; provide individual and group interventions for children and staff during times of crisis; and coordinate services with the school and the community.

Conclusion

The present research examined the role of educational counselor in promoting the mental health of students in the era of major global crises such as global conflict, child abuse, climate change and COVID-19 stay-at-home orders. Due to social isolation and unfavorable experiences, trauma is becoming more common among students in this era of severe global crises, which is leading to a surge in mental health problems. Suicide instances, technology use, and school safety issues could all continue to climb if left unchecked. As a result, in addition to developing and implementing interventions to help students with their emotional and social development, schools through the services of educational counsellors will need to be ready to address the intellectual shortcomings brought on by these global crises. Educational counsellors are trained in human growth and development, group counseling, and counseling theories and procedures; as a result, they have the skills necessary to provide and manage short-term mental health assistance to students in need during major global crises.

Educational counsellors play a crucial role in the network of organizations that prevent child abuse by assisting students in coping with the devastating effects of global conflict, climate change, and COVID-19. Counselors at schools need to be able to advise and help students by offering the right services. Educational counsellors are devoted to offering students who are impacted by international conflict, child abuse, climate change, and COVID-19 high-quality services and research-based intervention strategies. Educational counsellors have a special contribution to provide because of their knowledge in trauma-informed methods to resilience, crisis response, developmental and wellness approaches, and a humanistic connection to students' and adolescents' lived experiences.

In order to effectively address the complex needs of various school communities as they deal with issues like child abuse, climate change, and COVID-19, educational counsellors should have a strong social justice lens. Educational counsellors play a crucial role in bringing together students, scientific and environmental educators, local/community specialists, and guests to assist with every aspect of growth and processing. They act as a center for stakeholders and collaborative partnerships.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are presented

- The schools should seek suggestions from students on how to create a welcoming, safe and comfortable classroom.
- Counsellors should provide students with accurate information around COVID-19
- Government should equip schools with the capacity to review mental health-related accommodation requests while maintaining the confidentiality of the student.
- The schools should strike a working group that recommends implementable best practices around exam and evaluations with a wellness viewpoint in mind.
- Government should develop an online resource to record good practices for embedding universal instructional design and mental wellness into teaching.
- Government should develop a protocol to include community partners when communicating adverse events that involve a member of the community, while ensuring that support services are available to those impacted by the event.

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