

Mapagpalayang Pagpapatnubay: Social Justice Counseling Perception and Experiences of Filipino School Counselors

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Abstract

Young Filipino students struggled because of their biopsychosocial backgrounds, which highlights the need for school counselors to advocate for students when they are subjected to disadvantaged positions. This study aims to explore the concept of social justice counseling experiences of selected Filipino school counselors by looking into the social injustice experiences of their counselees; their corresponding interventions; and the perceived areas of improvement to strengthen their intervention efforts. Through semi-structured in-depth interviews, it emerged that Filipino counselees experienced child poverty and indigence, violence, repercussions of mental health problems, prejudice and discrimination, and dysfunctional family dynamics. Filipino school counselors manage these through empowering the disempowered, advocating for the marginalized, equalizing social injustices by the law, and transforming adversities to advocacy opportunities. The participants shared that their intervention may be strengthened by supporting their professional development, reacquainting themselves and students, strengthening collaborative efforts, and alleviating obstacles to advocacy. Through these findings and the short- and long-term recommendations to aid and care for the school counselors' personal and professional wellness, this study hopes to elevate the important role of school counselors in supporting young Filipino students amidst their own struggle to advocate for their profession.

Keywords: Social justice counseling, counseling advocacies, Filipino school counselors, marginalized counselees, qualitative-exploratory

Introduction

School counselors play integral roles in the lives of students because of their functions and responsibilities. Filipino guidance counselors are defined as individuals aiming to help individuals grow to their fullest potentials and plan their futures according to their skills, interests, and needs (Guidance and Counseling Act, 2004) by providing socially relevant services (American School Counselor Association [ASCA], 2020). They are expected to guide and advocate for their clients, especially where the clients might be treated unfairly in part due to their age, sex, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or any other factors that can be abused by people (ASCA, 2020). School counselors are individuals practicing guidance and counseling in the education setting.

Social Injustice Experiences of Filipino Students

School counselors deal with the Filipino students who have been vulnerable to disenfranchisement due to circumstances that are often outside of their control. Reports and national news revealed that Filipino students suffer from oppression such as discrimination, physical, psychological, and sexual violence because of their age (Cerojano, 2016); sex (Reysio-Cruz, 2020; Ramos, 2020); sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression (ABS-CBN News, 2017; Human Rights Watch, 2017), disabilities (Arcilla, 2020; Ambiong, 2020), and socioeconomic status (Malig, 2020; Crisostomo, 2020). Being in a Catholic-dominated country, Filipino students with different religion were exposed to unique oppressions such as red-tagging, which is a state-perpetuated labeling of these students as subversives and terrorists (ABS-CBN, 2020; CNN Philippines, 2020; Naparan & Balimbingan, 2020; Talabong, 2020).

Studies show that there are concerns regarding the mental health condition of Filipino youth. A survey indicated that Filipino youth are 3.4 times more susceptible to experiencing severe stress, thrice more vulnerable to experience severe anxiety, and 2.7 times more prone to have severe depression (Mendez, 2020). According to Estrada et al. (2020), a survey on the prevalence of suicide in the Philippines showed that 16.8% of students aged 13 to 17 attempted to attempted suicide in the last 12 months prior to the study. While statutory measures are in place to protect Filipino youth against abuse, evidence pointed out that they are still demoralized and oppressed for factors outside their control.

Advocacy and Social Justice Counseling

Literature defines social justice as the concept of challenging inequality and placing importance on the well-being of individuals (Ibrahim & Heuer, 2016). It subscribes to the idea of a just society (Ibrahim & Heuer, 2016), regardless of background or status. It entails that all members of society must be accorded equal opportunities no matter their group's position

(Adams, et al., 2013). However, there is a prevalent problem in the positioning of social groups in society that ultimately creates an opportunity for others at the expense of less dominant groups (Johnson, 2018).

Social justice counseling is an approach that equalizes these imbalances between social groups. It is an approach where counselors advocate at the level of individual, community, and public arena whenever appropriate to decrease, if not eliminate, the barriers hindering the healthy development of their counselees (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2005). School counselors can use this in their exploration to understand how oppression plays out in the struggles and resulting behavior of their counselees and how counselors can use that in the counseling process (Ratts, 2009). The Advocacy Competencies is a framework that specifically lays out competencies and in performing social justice counseling at the appropriate level and arena (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2018). The levels of advocacy intervention include microlevel (client/student), meso level (schools/community), and macro level (public arena) (Ratts et al., 2007).

School counselors are privileged to make a conscious choice to abate oppressive beliefs rather than perpetuate them (Casado Pérez, 2017). They can choose to address the symptoms of what their counselees are going through, but critical counseling suggests complementing the intervention by initiating uncomfortable but necessary conversations and committing with actions that will challenge the prevailing oppressive ideologies (Casado Pérez, 2017). Critical counseling points towards individuals' radical wellness, which has been defined as the simultaneous flourishing of one's mental health and critical social awareness (Casado Pérez, 2017). In this way, critical counseling and radical wellness are closely related to the concept of social justice counseling.

Related literature sustained the relevance of the school counselors' roles in supporting students towards accessing their rights and equal opportunities. Grimes et al. (2018) emphasized that school counselors must ensure that students access their rights for education no matter their backgrounds. It could be achieved through utilizing and extending their own knowledge and privileges to their counselees who otherwise did not enjoy the same advantages (Edwards et al., 2017). Singh et al. (2018) reported that school counselors employed consciousness-raising and political savvy or discerning the appropriate time and method to intervene to achieve the maximum desired effect in their advocacy work. School counselors recognized the importance of initiating difficult conversations in helping their students (Singh et al., 2018). Likewise, school counselors formed strategic relationships in the school and in the community (Grimes et al., 2018) to widen the reach of their students' concerns.

Singh and colleagues (2018) reported that school counselors conveyed that a critical part of advocacy is teaching the students to advocate for themselves by training them to acquire the

skills for self-advocacy. School counselors must empower counselees by directing them to relevant resources and information that can help them with their issues and concerns (Singh et al., 2018). School counselors also help counselees understand and communicate their needs with the appropriate people (Singh et al., 2018). Disenfranchised counselees often feel as if their control and power have been taken away; their counselors must strive to establish in the counseling relationship that the authority to make decisions lie in the counselees (Crumb et al., 2019).

School counselors also spoke out for the issues and concerns plaguing the profession itself. Filipino school counselors, spearheaded by its local professional group, continually pushed for the acknowledgment of the guidance counselors' importance and need for commensurate support (Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association [PGCA], 2019), including financial compensation and career progression. This initiative included educating other members of the school environment about their roles and functions as school counselors as part of their advocacy practices. School counselors and their roles are often misunderstood in schools, and this consequently results in either being undervalued or being encumbered with too many expectations (Field & Baker, 2004). Clarifying their roles and duties as counselors enables them to focus on their responsibilities and advocacy more effectively (Singh et al., 2018).

Purpose of the Research

This research intends to answer the following questions:

1. What social justice issues were experienced by the school counselors' counselees?
2. What are the interventions used by school counselors in managing counselees' experiences of social justice issues?
3. What are the areas of improvement to strengthen the school counselors' interventions to counselees' experiences of social justice issues and other problems?

Furthermore, this study aims to add to the evidence-based literature on social justice counseling in the Philippines and to advocate for Filipino students, school counselors, and the guidance and counseling profession by shedding light on their current conditions and experiences. Despite advocacy or social justice work being a core component of counseling, there is limited literature devoted to the topic of social justice counseling (Duan & Brown, 2016). Studies suggest that journals related to counseling more often feature multiculturalism, further highlighting the lack of focus on producing social justice-based counseling-related studies (Dollarhide, et al., 2020). An article written on the history of counseling in the Philippines mentioned advocacy as a core component of the services of counselors (Tuason et al., 2012), which could be further explored through this study.

Exploring this topic aims to improve to provide Filipino school counselors with more options that may complement other strategies that address youth oppression and disenfranchisement. It intends to encourage school counselors to view social justice counseling as a supplementary option when selecting the appropriate approach to addressing student problems.

Methodology

As this qualitative-exploratory research intends to develop a baseline data on social justice counseling in the context of Filipino school counselors and counselees, online semi-structured individual interviews were conducted among 22 Filipino school counselors from private (50%) and public (50%) basic education institutions in various regions in the Philippines; 82% are Registered Guidance Counselors; 64% identified as heterosexual cisgender females, 18% as heterosexual cisgender males, and 5% as gay cisgender males; 36% have worked as a guidance counselor for 6 to 9 years, 32% for 10 to 14 years, 27% for 15+ years, and 5% for 3 to 5 years.

After receiving the clearance to proceed from the Philippine Normal University's Research Ethics Committee, participants were invited through referrals and snowball sampling to participate in the study until data saturation was reached. Each participant was invited to complete the informed consent form through an email sent by the first author; the informed consent form encoded in Google Forms included the purpose, perceived risks, and procedures that the participants would need to know about the study before they were asked to provide their full consent to participate, with the understanding that their participation would be purely voluntary. Participants were informed that the study is about advocacy practices in the counseling profession and the strategies employed by school counselors in managing the cases they deal with. They were also offered an amount of Php 100 as a token of appreciation as part of the informed consent form, but most participants declined to receive the token.

The online interviews, done through Zoom, Google Meet, or Facebook Messenger, were guided by an interview protocol that was developed by the researcher following the four-phase process of the Interview Protocol Refinement Framework (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). To ensure that the protocol would be effective in data gathering, experts in qualitative research, language, and guidance and counseling were tapped for validation. These experts are also long-term professors in a state university for teacher education with various qualitative research initiatives in their respective fields. Based on their comments and suggestions, revisions were made to the interview protocol and mock interviews were conducted to ensure that the interviews would be efficient in acquiring information regarding the social justice counseling experiences of school counselors.

The final version of the interview protocol included preliminaries; discussion of informed consent; interview questions that include open-ended questions about the school counselors' cases, their interventions, and areas of improvement in terms of social justice counseling; and closing statements. The individual interviews, which lasted for an average of one (1) hour per participant, were conducted by the first author who identifies as a bisexual cisgender female from a low-middle income family living in an urban area and completing her master's degree in counseling.

The gathered data were a combination of Filipino and English responses; this original form of the data was used during the thematic analysis while selected verbalizations were translated into English and checked by a researcher-linguist for accuracy for this report. Participants were assigned a code to ensure the confidentiality of their identity; during the transcription of data, all identifiable information such as specific locations or names of their schools were redacted. The data analysis followed the process of Farber (2006) involving the initial reading of the data and identification of the initial codes, tagging of codes to the data via NVivo during the second sweep of data, categorizing and clustering of the codes, and appropriating of titles and description for the emerging themes. The themes and subthemes from this process were presented individually to an expert in the process of qualitative research and an expert in qualitative research specific to guidance and counseling for peer debriefing; the themes and subthemes emerging from a specific participant were sent back to the respective participant for member checking. Finally, the themes and subthemes were grouped according to the research objectives that they were intended to address.

Results

The themes are presented according to the research objective they are addressing: a) counselees' social justice issues handled by school counselors; b) school counselors' interventions to counselees' social justice issues; and c) areas of improvement to strengthen school counselors' interventions to counselees' social justice issues.

Counselees' Social Justice Issues Handled by School Counselors

Based on the accounts of the Filipino school counselors, counselees experienced social justice issues involving a) child poverty and indigence; b) violence; c) repercussions of mental health problems; d) prejudice and discrimination; and e) dysfunctional family dynamics. These themes depicted counselees being deprived of equal opportunities or becoming vulnerable to abuse because of their backgrounds.

Child poverty and indigence. School counselors shared their encounters with counselees from indigent families. Poverty itself is a form of oppression that deprives the

students of basic needs such as food, proper shelter, and education. School counselors shared how students were tagged as lazy and demotivated by teachers, and excluded by their peers because of their low energy and unhygienic appearance, which were results of their poor living conditions. Additionally, school counselors identified indigence as a factor to other social injustices plaguing their counselees, such as gender-based sexual violence. One school counselor shared how one student was molested in exchange for money, "Her mother lets [others] touch her, molest her, and in exchange there is money)."

Violence against counselees. Based on the observations and conversations with their counselees, 13 school counselors recounted how the students experienced being intentionally harmed or humiliated by the teachers inside the classroom; how their students were bullied by their peers and experienced the bystander effect from their classmates; and how their students experienced sexual violence from their peers, teachers, or people in their homes.

Gender-based violence. GBV is one form of violence that infringes on the rights of the students to a safe environment where they can learn and grow. Almost half of the school counselor participants depicted stories of their counselees being sexually assaulted and harassed by people with moral ascendancy over them, by people in their homes, and by their peers. One school counselor shared how her counselees were assaulted by their neighbors, uncles, and even fathers. Another school counselor said, "[The mother] would bring her to a motel, check her in one room." A different school counselor also shared, "Sometimes the mother is an accomplice, because they get paid."

Bullying and the bystander effect. Half of the school counselors shared having counselees who were bullied by their schoolmates for their background, such as religion, appearance, or sometimes unidentified reasons. Ben, who was handling Muslim students during a time when rebels laid siege to an area in the Philippines, shared how his students were targeted and labeled, "They were bullied during the war in Marawi; they were sometimes labeled as rebels by their classmates." Students who experienced bullying felt how oppression damaged one's psyche and sense of safety. This theme also illustrates the instances when students experienced bullying or other social injustice in the school and shared that no one among their peers stepped up to assist them, "Their neutrality... somehow contributed to the escalation of the situation, because they did nothing." Witnessing bullying and being passive about the oppression of others' rights to safety contributes to oppression itself.

Repercussions of mental health problems. During the interviews, 59% of the school counselors shared that mental health challenges may be the effects of existing social injustices related with other issues. A school counselor recounted how a gay counselee's depressive symptoms stemmed from his family's religious and cultural views regarding his sexuality. This highlights how an individual's psychological condition, a vulnerability to social stigma on its

own, is also caused or exacerbated by other social determinants. Related to that, one school counselor shared the bullying experienced by another counselee because of depression, "I have one case before where the child had a history of depression, so they told me that they experienced bullying because they were called crazy."

Prejudice and discrimination. Marginalized students with development and learning disabilities, behavioral problems, different sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex characteristics (SOGIESC), and religion, experienced varying degrees of prejudice and discrimination are discussed by all school counselors. Prejudice and discrimination hindered students' potential to receive equal opportunities as their peers towards healthy adjustment and growth. Parents who hold prejudice against learning or developmental problems refused to follow recommendations for their children's special needs, which stunted the children's capacity to be high functioning members of society ("Even self-help skills were a little difficult for the child. She had difficulty going to the lavatory. Her age is already for elementary school... she didn't even build self-help skills").

This also tackles the prejudice and discrimination faced by students involved in truancy, smoking, drinking alcohol on school grounds, gang fights, misdemeanors, or with illegal drugs. A public school counselor shared that students like them were accused of petty crimes like theft from their neighboring residential communities. Due to the reputation of students with problem behaviors, another public school counselor found that schools often fail to provide opportunities for these students to be rehabilitated and develop into responsible citizens; she observed that classes with the problematic students have "class advisers who don't care, those who are too lazy to teach." Further, she said, "The students have no teacher in the classroom, they'll leave, they'll go out, they get into fights."

Dysfunctional family dynamics. More than half of the school counselors (68%) recognized how the family culture, family values, family upbringing, and family dynamics of some of their counsees aggravated the unfair treatment their counsees had to face or took away their opportunity to be empowered to emancipate themselves from social injustices. For instance, a school counselor held the belief that having dysfunctional families aggravated other social injustices experienced by students, "[T]he parents do not know how to be parents. They do not know how to raise a child. It's not food, not money... it's not that that concerns the child, it's because they are not taken care of." A school counselor discussed how students whose parents were not able to provide them with social support struggled with adjusting to difficult situations. Likewise, another participant noticed that students who received acceptance and social support from their families despite being vulnerable to social injustices were able to perform well academically and meet their set goals consistently.

Filipino School Counselors' Interventions to Counsees' Social Justice Issues



This section shows the face of social justice counseling for Filipino school counselors as they address the needs of their disempowered and marginalized students. School counselors a) empowered their disempowered counselees; b) advocated for the marginalized; c) equalized social injustices by the law; and d) transformed adversities to advocacy opportunities.

Empowering the disempowered. This theme entails helping counselees understand their contexts and reactions through counseling, guiding them identify their needs, and assisting them in acquiring those resources needed to overcome challenges (“When [the student] is not ready, I would ask, ‘What is it about the conversation that you’re not ready? Is it because you lack conversational skill?’ Because if it’s the conversational skill that is lacking, we’ll practice, we’ll role-play.”). These actions are grounded to the school counselors’ belief that counselees have the autonomy and capabilities to be empowered.

School counselors shared that empowering disempowered counselees further involves being educated with the social injustices that they experience and critically examining their situations, even at the expense of re-evaluating their previously held beliefs. The participants’ techniques might be dissonant with the principles of social justice counseling as the techniques focus on the counselees instead of their environment, but the school counselors also acknowledged that presenting problems could be symptoms of larger conflicts that were outside the control of their counselees.

Advocating for the marginalized. All Filipino school counselors became allies of their counselees and asserted their best interests in spaces where students do not have access or where they feel unsafe to do so by collaborating and coordinating with teachers, families, peers, government agencies, and other professionals to help students; speaking on behalf of the counselees to inform relevant stakeholders and decision-makers of students’ plights; extending their help above and beyond or sacrificing their own time and other resources to focus on their counselees; utilizing evidence-based knowledge and other information services to raise consciousness regarding the social injustices. One school counselor said, “We follow up consistently, continuous collaboration with the parents and the teachers concerned,” so as to “ensure that there is no recurrence of the same conflict.”

Equalizing social injustices by the law. Certain cases of social injustices encountered by counselees were handled by following policies and protocols that are mandated by the law. This is especially true for situations where legal procedures had to be complied with, such as during instances of bullying, drug use or possession, and child sexual abuse. All five school counselors who shared that they addressed social injustices by referring to the law in handling counselees’ cases were from public institutions. Cases of bullying were handled according to the

Anti-Bullying Law and survivors of child sexual abuse were referred to duty bearers, or government agencies that are particularly mandated by the Child Protection Policy to handle such cases. One school counselor in particular shared how she brought her student to the barangay hall after learning about the sexual abuse she suffered from her uncle at home. School counselors handling cases related to illegal drugs were also referred to other agencies following policies and laws appropriate for school-aged students.

Transforming adversities to advocacy opportunities. School counselors recognize that being creative and resourceful is necessary for performing their guidance functions and helping their students, particularly when delivery of guidance services is challenging. Public school counselors' problems often involve the disproportionate ratio between students and school counselors, and the wrong assumptions about their roles (for instance, counselors are disciplinary officers). As one school counselor said, "When it comes to things like that, it's really just up to you to find ways," school counselors transformed these adversities by training students to be peer counselors or forming support groups and turning disciplinary cases into counseling sessions.

Areas of Improvement to Strengthen School Counselors' Interventions to Counselees' Social Justice Issues

The themes discussed in this section are constructed based on the accounts of the Filipino school counselors. According to the school counselors, a) supporting their professional development; b) reacquainting themselves and their students; c) strengthening collaborative efforts; and d) alleviating obstacles to advocacy could elevate their counseling practices when dealing with counselees' social injustices.

Supporting professional development. School counselors believed in the importance of continually developing and updating their skills, capabilities, and knowledge in the profession and related processes through various means. Professional development may stem from formal education and training or from reflection based on the accounts and experiences of students.

School counselors further emphasized that a healthy mental wellbeing equips them for continuous improvement. One school counselor said, "If you're happy, if you know your boundaries, you'll have more to give, you will have love to give, you will have care to give, you will have patience to give." School counselors believed that maintaining positive emotions and resiliency are necessary for caring for their students.

Reacquainting school counselors and students. This theme underscores the need for school counselors to be mindful of their own social positions, privileges, and oppressions as it

may affect their practice. One school counselor said, "I do really separate my own beliefs and values, so they don't affect the counseling process." Likewise, it is also important for school counselors to characterize the identity, needs, and struggles of their counselees to gain added context on performing their roles more effectively ("Everyone should be included, so you should also learn who your students are, what their needs are").

Strengthening collaborative efforts. School counselors find that establishing new and strengthening existing networks within the students' communities, external agencies, families, and peers are beneficial to their intervention efforts. Given the importance of connecting and collaborating with other professionals and agencies to provide the assistance that students may need to confront social injustices, they see the need to be flexible and strategic in building social capital ("I am an introvert, I like working alone, but when it comes to collaboration... You are thinking about the students. So even if you don't like the person you're talking to, you try to do your best to collaborate with them").

Alleviating obstacles to advocacy. "I have a lot of work to do- I can still work, I have the heart, but I don't know how to divide myself," lamented one of the school counselors about the challenges in the guidance profession. Misconceptions about the roles and functions of the guidance professionals, lack of enough school counselors, and emotional fatigue are some of the obstacles to school counselors' advocacy opportunities. School counselors actively attempted to address the obstacles in the level that they can, such as through holding orientations on the guidance functions, encouraging students and other professionals to pursue counseling, and emphasizing the need for self-care and work-life balance.

Discussion

The findings of this study hone the proposed Filipino model of social justice counseling. In contrast to the framework of social justice counseling that focuses on micro-, meso-, and macro levels (ACA, 2018), Figure 1 exhibits the praxis of Filipino school counselors as facets that collectively work towards emancipating the students from their oppressive conditions. *Mapagpalayang pagpapayo*, Filipino words that translate to *emancipatory counseling*, encapsulates Filipino school counselors' efforts to address the needs of students by simultaneously empowering students, advocating with and for students, equalizing opportunities for student growth and development, and transforming counselor and student experiences. These facets are not hierarchical but rather considered and performed mutually.

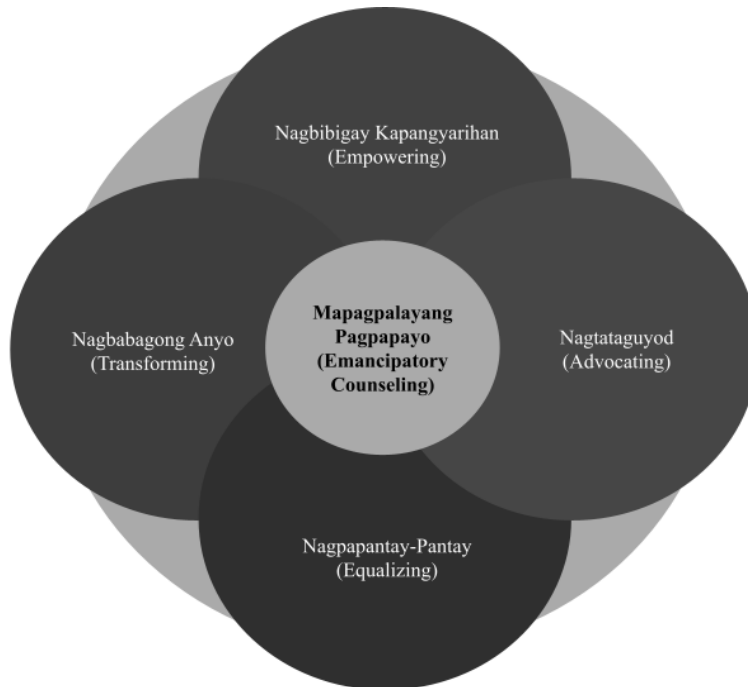


Figure 1. Framework of Mapagpalayang Pagpapayo: Proposed Filipino Model of Social Justice Counseling

Nagbibigay Kapangyarihan (Empowering)

School counselors who integrate social justice competencies into their work identify the strengths of their counselees and maximize that to build the counselees' confidence and capacity for self-advocacy (Singh et al., 2018), especially for cases of prejudice and discrimination, repercussions of mental health problems, and bullying and the bystander effect. School counselors educate others using empirical and factual data with the goal of mitigating prejudice against their counselees and encouraging them to also support their counselees and other students who might be experiencing similar situations. In advocacy work, the use of reliable information is relevant in demonstrating the veracity of the claims for advocacy.

In relation to that, school counselors also empower their disempowered counselees by educating themselves about the issues that their counselees face, particularly for cases of prejudice and discrimination. School counselors investigate what could be the factors that affect the presenting problems of their counselees by looking into the environmental and social aspects surrounding their students. Further, school counselors closely examined the issue by educating themselves on the issues that they managed, particularly for students with prejudice

and discrimination cases such as members of the LGBTQ community. School counselors who strive to be agents of change are encouraged to be informed of the social issues that their students are vulnerable to.

Nagtataguyod (Advocating)

Advocating for the marginalized counselees is essentially becoming their ally and asserting the counselees' best interests in spaces where they do not have access or where they feel unsafe to do so (ACA, 2018). Shim and Vinson (2021) recognized the role of social injustices and systemic oppression in the deterioration of mental health of the minority as they endure stigma, discrimination, and violence because of their bio-psychosocial backgrounds, hence having allies who advocate for disenfranchised students is important. In cases of prejudice and discrimination, violence against counselees that included gender-based violence and bullying and the bystander effect; child poverty and indigence; and repercussions of mental health problems, school counselors shared that they advocated on behalf of the marginalized, by leveraging their roles as adults and professionals to represent and assert the needs of their counselees in front of these stakeholders. School counselors work toward helping counselees acquire opportunities that will enable them to achieve their goals by acting as a consultant to relevant stakeholders who can provide these opportunities for the counselees (Ratts, 2009).

Nagpapantay-Pantay (Equalizing)

School counselors equalize the opportunities for students to free themselves from social injustices through existing laws and policies. The law is designed to achieve and maintain social justice by ensuring that each member of society should have access to equal opportunities to grow and thrive (Clarke, n.d.). For cases of violence against counselees such as gender-based violence and bullying and the bystander effect, school counselors cited existing laws, such as the Anti-Bullying Law, and policies such as the Child Protection Policy of the Philippines' Department of Education (DepEd), as their guide in handling cases of bullying and gender-based violence. School counselors who also encountered problem behaviors, specifically illegal drug-related incidents, were handled by following government-mandated procedures. As problem behaviors are risk factors to juvenile delinquency (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2001), more restorative means could be used to lessen the chances of these students from becoming youth offenders. In the Philippines, a lawmaker stated that children in conflict with the law must be held accountable for their actions but still emphasized reformation and rehabilitation of their behavior (Senate of the Philippines, 2011). School counselors adhere to existing laws and policies intending to facilitate the restorative growth of their counselees.

Nagbabagong Anyo (Transforming)

Although transforming adversities to advocacy opportunities does not discuss how school counselors addressed specific cases of social injustices, it depicts how school counselors exert efforts and practice resourcefulness to reduce the barriers to the delivery of the guidance services. School counselors adapt to the needs of the students using the often-limited resources that are available for their services. It shows that school counselors ensure that their profession and practice shapes itself depending on the needs of their counselees. Filipino professional groups for guidance and counseling continuously advocate for the development of guidance counselors for this reason. Subong (2021) shared the efforts being made to mold the guidance profession in the Philippines to be more equipped to help counselees. Subong (2021) further encouraged school counselors to join these efforts by lobbying to decision- and policymakers by educating them of what is the condition of school counselors on the ground—lack of enough registered guidance counselors because of the low compensation negatively affect the efficacy of guidance services for students and the potential for advocacy work; and misconceptions about the roles and functions of school counselors that need to be addressed on top of the counselees' cases that they need to manage. A steady delivery of guidance services affirms that the counselees' concerns would be given attention to accordingly.

Conclusion

It was presumed at the beginning of the research that social justice counseling was an obscure practice among Filipino school counselors due to the limited local literature dedicated to the topic. However, participating school counselors' practices display social justice counseling competencies, especially at the microlevel or the student-level. The findings denote that while Filipino school counselors are not familiar with social justice counseling, their accounts of the social justice issues that their counselees face indicate that Filipino students are vulnerable to and experience various forms of social injustices. Additionally, Filipino school counselors address these cases with interventions that focus not only on the individual processing of their counselees, but also on the environmental and social injustices at hand.

School counselors highlight the intricate ways in which they engage the participation of their networks of teachers, professionals, parents, and peers to address counselees' needs and the importance of sharing correct and relevant information regarding the plights of their counselees. This suggests a need to strengthen and disseminate an accurate narrative of what counselees are going through among stakeholders.

Evidently, the advocacy that is more familiar for Filipino school counselors at this point is the advocacy for the profession—to be more visible in the community and to encourage more people to pursue the field of guidance and counseling to bridge the significant gap between the

number of registered guidance counselors and the students, especially in public schools. Filipino school counselors themselves are exposed to social injustices such as the lack of resources to perform their functions, disinformation about their roles and responsibilities, and insufficient compensation for the level of their qualifications and labor. It makes sense, then, that those participating Filipino school counselors' identified areas of improvement all focused on their needs. While it is common knowledge among school counselors that the low salary and high academic requirements discourage other professionals from pursuing the profession, it might not be the same for the general public.

Recommendations

Recommendations for future related research and implications for practice are enumerated in this section. Future researchers who may want to explore *mapagpalayang pagpapatnubay* can look deeper into the phenomenology of students' experiences of social injustices and evaluate the effectiveness of the school counselors' interventions when applied to specific instances of social injustices. The extent of the interventions identified in *mapagpalayang pagpapatnubay* may be explored by surveying whether the practices of school counselors in different regions of the country validate this proposed model. Moreover, *mapagpalayang pagpapatnubay* may also be explored by reviewing its compatibility with existing graduate training and curriculum for guidance and counseling.

Moving forward, the present study posits several short and long-term recommendations based on the findings. The following long-term recommendations that are mostly addressed for community and national level, acronymized as A.I.D., are proposed:

- A Advertise guidance and counseling advocacies. School counselors invite the participation of more supporters to their cause by utilizing their social media and other platforms to discuss challenges in the profession vis-à-vis the cases that they handle in their schools.
- I Interact with policy and lawmakers. School counselors advocate for the profession by continually communicating the need for salary and career progression to their legislators and supporting professional groups who discuss it in public fora.
- D Develop more research as a sound basis for petitioning guidance and counseling professional advocacies. Research findings may provide more weight in convincing policy and lawmakers to pay attention to school counselors' petitions.

In the meantime, school counselors may also benefit from the following short-term recommendations that are directed towards building their competencies for advocating with and for students, presented in an acronym of C.A.R.E.:

- C Conduct continuing education for school counselors. School counselors may gain an advantage from a series of learning sessions that focus on counseling techniques that are most helpful to certain cases that involve social injustices. School counselors must also continuously update on new or emerging laws on or related to intersectional identities such as SOGIESC; disability; indigenous people; religion; child rights; etc., as these may unearth new or obscure forms of social injustices.
- A Advocate for self-care for school counselors. Emotional fatigue is a price for the emotional labor invested by school counselors in dealing with their counselees' concerns. School counselors need to be equipped with skills to effectively handle their wellbeing.
- R Reinforce the leadership skills of school counselors. School counselors may need to further heighten their skills in unifying stakeholders to achieve a common goal, as it emerges in this study that school counselors often collaborate and coordinate with communities and professionals in their interventions.
- E Explore the benefits of reflective practice in counseling. Reflective practice allows school counselors to examine their knowledge based on their own experiences in the profession and modify their practice accordingly (Taylor, 2020). School counselors may further benefit from reflective practice as it is reported to help improve one's empathy and lessen negative feelings such as stress and guilt (Taylor, 2020).

Through the results of the present study and the suggestions to A.I.D. and C.A.R.E. for the school counselors' personal and professional wellness, the researcher hopes to elevate the important role of school counselors in supporting young Filipino students amidst the school counselors' struggle to advocate for their profession.

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