

DYSLEXIA AND THE SCHOOL COUNSELOR

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INTRODUCTION

One in 5 children, about 15 to 20 % of the population is diagnosed with dyslexia (IDA, 2016). Most students are first diagnosed in a school setting, making school counselors the first resource for mental health resources for the children. Research suggests that parents of children with dyslexia have seen different mental health concerns like self-esteem issues, anger/frustration, de-motivation, learned helplessness, and loneliness (Falzon & Camilleri, 2010). It is vital that techniques are provided to children within a school setting to help manage a healthy learning environment (Falzon & Camilleri, 2010). There is very limited research on school counselors working with children diagnosed with or suspected of having dyslexia within the school setting.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What was the experience of parents of children with dyslexia before, during, and after the diagnosis? And how might those experiences inform school counselor's practice?

PARTICIPANTS

The participants were parents of children with dyslexia. The study had a total of 601 parents participate.

METHODS

Recruitment for the mixed methodology study was completed electronically through a Qualtrics survey link which was shared on different platforms with parents. Screener questions including informed consent were used to qualify parents of children with dyslexia and/or suspected dyslexia. The qualitative data was then compiled to understand some of the mental health concerns parents addressed in the data and ways in which they were overcome and coded using descriptive coding, which is an elemental method of coding

(Saldaña, 2016). The qualitative data was then analyzed using descriptive coding to identify some of the mental health concerns and coping skills identified by the participants.

RESULTS

Percentage of children with Dual Diagnoses:

| Diagnosis | Percentage |
|---|------------|
| Attention Deficit & Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) | 40.1% |
| Auditory or Hearing Impairment | 5.3% |
| Autism | 3.9% |
| Emotional Disturbance | 4.7% |
| Intellectual Disability | .5% |

Suspected diagnosis leading to Dyslexia:

Parents reported contacting the school due to ADHD or anxiety disorder concerns and receiving a diagnosis of dyslexia. A parent reported, "I suspected my child had ADHD, so I had him evaluated. Dyslexia was the diagnosis."

Concerns:

The mental health concerns parents shared for their children in the study included trauma, emotional impact/pain, confidence and self-esteem concerns, anxiety, dyslexia being identified as a behavioral problem before testing, bullying, frustration, mental breakdown, social stigma, burn out, learned helplessness, and feeling beaten down. A participant reported, "One year of Kindergarten completely ruined his self-esteem and confidence level. I never understood the severity of the teasing he received until I removed him from the public school system. I never plan putting him back into that toxic environment. He still has anxiety talking about his "old" school."

Techniques:

The techniques that the parents reported using to help their children included using strengths, developing positive self-esteem, and meeting with psychologists and counselors. "I see amazing dyslexic thinkers, and know to look

for those strengths within my own child and encourage him to find what he excels at and go after his strengths."

IMPLICATIONS

- School Counselors need to be aware of the children diagnosed/suspected with dyslexia and develop a curriculum that helps meet the mental health needs like frustration, self-esteem concerns, ADHD, stigma, anxiety, burnout, and learned helplessness of children with dyslexia.
- School Counselors can help identify some behavioral problems and work with children to better understand the causes for the behavioral problems.
- Parents, school counselors, teachers, and administrators should work together to develop a positive learning environment that will benefit all children.
- School Counselors can work with parents advocating for the needs of the children.
- Master's level School Counseling programs need to emphasize different techniques like Cognitive Behavioral Therapy & Person-Centered Therapy, that can benefit the mental health concerns of children with dyslexia.
- Further study is needed to review the unique mental health needs of children with dyslexia.

REFERENCES

- Falzon, R. & Camilleri, S. (2010) Dyslexia and the school counsellor: A Maltese case study, *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 10:4, 307-315, DOI: 10.1080/14733140903370228
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