

## Research Article

# Perceived Need to Counseling Service and Associated Factors among Higher Education Institutions: The Case of Dilla University, Southern Ethiopia

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In the university academic atmosphere, guidance and counseling practices are an efficient and effective way of supporting and helping students deal with problems and issues in educational, career, and personal/social areas. This study aimed to assess the magnitude, perceived need, and associated factors to counseling services of students in Dilla University, Southern Ethiopia. A mixed-study design was employed with both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. Both primary and secondary sources of data were employed. Data collection tools are questionnaires, focus group discussions, and in-depth interviews. The collected data were coded, entered, and analyzed using SPSS version 20 software. Quantitative data were presented as mean, percentage, frequency, and cross-tabulation. The qualitative data were analyzed and interpreted thematically, and the results are presented in narrative form. The finding of the study shows that there are a high number of students who need guidance and counseling at Dilla University from different colleges and departments. The student's age level, sex, parental marital nature, the department they joined, family economy, occupation, and residence are the main factors that affect positively or negatively their counseling needs in higher education. The identified highest personal counseling needs and indicators in Dilla University students are for maintaining good physical and mental health, handling stress and anxiety in their life, solving personal problems, overcoming procrastination, dealing with stress due to their job, and coping with a broken relationship. The items that were indicated as having the lowest prevalence for concerns in terms of personal needs required by students were concerns about learning how to manage drug addiction, to become overcome insomnia, and reproductive health problems are the lowest need reported by participants of the study. This needs all stakeholders' attention and support on the issues of guidance and counseling at Dilla University.

## 1. Introduction

*1.1. Background of the Study.* In the university teaching-learning milieu, guidance counseling is a multidimensional form that encompasses personal, academic, and occupational perspectives. Hence, the need to offer diverse guidance counseling services is foreseeable. According to Day in the university academic atmosphere, guidance and counseling practices are an efficient and effective way of supporting and helping students deal with problems and issues in educational, career, and personal/social areas [1].

Higher education institutions will experience many changes shortly as a result of an increasingly diverse student population and a more complex college system. Current trends regarding college enrolment indicate greater diversity in characteristics involving not only gender and ethnicity but also in the areas of age, socioeconomic background, physical and learning disabilities, and sexual orientation. Although underrepresented groups have benefited from increased college admissions, problems associated with unequal academic and social preparation enhance the need and scope for services. To accommodate this new student population,

universities and colleges in different regions of the world are adjusting their services to increase positive student service outcomes. Although the changing college population has substantially contributed to revisions in counseling services, societal adjustments also create new demands for student services [2, 3].

In Africa, the guidance movement is relatively new in the education system. In many African countries, guidance services are still on a trial-and-error level. The place of such services in African education systems is not yet well established. However, there is now a greater awareness of the need for guidance services in schools [4].

The concept and tradition of “modern” counseling service in Ethiopia’s higher education have no long history. It was in the early 1960s that the word “guidance” appeared in the Ethiopian educational literature.

*1.2. Statement of the Problem.* It is assumed that with the increasing complexities in society and industrial and technological development all going hand-in-hand, succeeding generations will find it difficult to adjust themselves both to society, work, family, and schools. Failures in proper adjustment to all the facets mentioned could affect the education of young people and expose them to environmental and personal problems in development [5].

Today, guidance and counseling have gained prominence in the African educational system and many people are getting interested in the guidance of youth in making wise educational, vocational, and personal/social decisions [6, 7].

Counseling is becoming a cross-cultural activity as modern societies become more conscious of their pluralistic composition and as increasing numbers of professional counselors are being asked to work effectively in settings that involve culture and ethnic [8]. Every cultural group has its characteristic style of addressing personal issues; hence, counselors should possess the ability to recognize and understand cultural differences in coping patterns. The counselors should have the ability to examine the role that culture shock plays in the cultural adjustment of diversified students [9, 10].

Counseling psychology is a profession and a discipline, which is not known in Ethiopia until recently. It is a discipline in search of identity [11, 12]. Our school counselors are ill-trained and ill-prepared and the discipline is not given due and direct attention in the transitional governments’ new educational and training policy and little research is available in the field [4].

The studies conducted in Ethiopia are more dominated on indicators of counseling and guidance services, but the major causes are missed. The previous studies have also methodological gaps. Most of them are conducted by qualitative data only, but this study is with a mixed research approach. Geographically, most of the studies are conducted in the northern part of the country; no study is conducted in higher education institutions located in southern Ethiopia. This study is to assess the major counseling needs of students for the structural capacity of counseling centres to address their needs in universities in Ethiopia, specifically the

southern part of the country. To fill the abovementioned gaps, the researcher will examine the qualification of personnel providing guidance and counseling services, availability of materials for the successful execution of the university guidance and counseling services, prevalence, magnitude, and the impact of guidance programs on students’ adjustment in higher educations of Ethiopia.

*1.3. Objective.* The objective of this study was to assess the magnitude, perceived needs, and associated factors of counseling services in Dilla University, Southern Ethiopia.

## 2. Research Methodology

*2.1. Description of the Study Area.* Dilla University is a public university in SNNPR, located in Gedeo Zone, Dilla City. DU was established in 1996. The driving distance from Addis Ababa to Dilla is 351 km. It has over 30,000 students belonging to different colleges, institutions, and schools with undergraduate and postgraduate programs.

*2.2. Research Design and Approaches.* Mixed research design was with both quantitative and qualitative research approaches. According to Alutu [13], using both quantitative and qualitative methods at the same time is more advisable. The researchers believed that a mixed research approach is appropriate to examine a complex social phenomenon, both through description and explanation of the overall issues of interest through qualitative and quantitative methods of study.

*2.3. Sources of Data.* In this research, both primary and secondary sources of data were employed. Yilfashewa [4] explained that variation in data collection yields greater validity and provides detailed information that one methodology cannot solely produce for the information required.

*2.4. Data Collection Tools.* Multiple data collection strategies are more advantageous than a single data collection strategy in research work. Based on the research problem and objectives, both primary and secondary data sources were used. Primary data were collected through questionnaires, KII, and FGD. Published and unpublished documents, reports from the student council, HIV protection office, guidance, and counseling office are used as secondary data sources.

*2.5. The Study Population and Sample Size.* The target population of this study was Dilla University students in the 2021 academic year. To determine sample size, a researcher used a simple mathematical formula, which was derived by Cochran [14] cited by [4]. The formula for sample determination at 95% confidence level, 0.05% degree of variability, and 5% level of precision is described as follows:  $n = (N/1 + N(e)^2)$ , where  $n$  = the sample size,  $N$  = the population size, and  $e$  = the acceptable sampling error =  $(150,000/1 + 150,000(0.05)^2) = 399$  (the total sampled participants).

TABLE 1: Demographic characteristics of respondents.

Variable	Frequency	Percent
<b>Age</b>		
15–19	52	13.1
20–25	199	49.9
26–29	120	30
30 and above	28	7
<b>Sex</b>		
Male	229	57.4
Female	170	42.6
Total	399	100.0
<b>Educational status</b>		
I year	41	10.3
II year	51	12.8
III year	154	38.6
IV year	90	22.6
<b>Family residence of the respondents</b>		
Urban	146	36.6
Rural	253	63.4
Total	399	100.0
<b>Marital status of parents</b>		
Live together	322	80.7
Divorced	24	6.0
Both have died	12	3.0
Widowed	41	10.3
Total	399	100.0

Source: researcher’s field data, 2021.

2.6. *Sampling Techniques and Procedures.* In this study, both probability and non-probability sampling methods were used. From probability sampling methods, simple random sampling was employed to select survey respondents. The random sampling technique is best suited for such a homogeneous and finite population, and it gives equal chance for all respondents to be considered in the study. For the qualitative part of the research, the purposive sampling method was used. The purposive sampling is used to select respondents who participated in in-depth interviews with FGD and key informants. Then, a student from each department was considered based on their academic year level, sex, and enrolment type (extension and regular).

2.7. *Method of Data Analysis.* Data were coded, entered, and analyzed using SPSS version 20 software. Quantitative data were presented as mean, percentage, frequency, and cross-tabulation. The qualitative data were analyzed and interpreted thematically, and the results are presented in narrative form.

2.8. *Ethical Consideration.* Consent was sought to form the research participants. The informed consent of the research participants took a verbal form and was preceded by an explanation of the kind of research we intend to do. The purpose was to tell not only what the study is about but also to ease the skepticism they might have about the research. The research participants were told that they had the right to withdraw from the research at any time and explained the consequences of their participation (including any discomforts and inconveniences they may experience during

TABLE 2: Departments of respondents.

Department (stream)	Frequency	Percent
Sociology	26	6.5
Land administration	21	5.3
Horticulture	13	3.3
Food engineering	61	15.3
Mechanical engineering	69	17.3
Mathematics	45	11.3
Physics	42	10.5
Public administration	28	7.0
Geography	20	5.0
Amharic	33	8.3
Civil engineering	41	10.3
Total	399	100.0

Source: researcher’s field data, 2021.

TABLE 3: Occupation of respondent’s parents.

Your father’s employment status	Frequency	Percent
Jobless	144	36.1
Daily labourer	8	2.0
Farmer	85	21.3
Merchant	80	20.1
Government employee	60	15.0
Other	22	5.5
Total	399	100.0

Source: researcher’s field data, 2021.

the research) and the things expected from them to do if they agreed to participate.

### 3. Results Analysis and Discussion

3.1. *Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents.* The result of the study revealed that the majority of the study participants are in the age category of 20–25, 199 (49.9%) followed by 26–29 (30%). Sex is one of the demographic factors that influence the counseling need of the students. These study results show that from the total of study participants, the major (229 (57.4%)) are male and the rest (170 (42.6%)) are females. Many of the study participants are from 3<sup>rd</sup> year (154 (38.6%)), and the next is 4<sup>th</sup> year (90 (22.6%)) and 5<sup>th</sup> year (61 (15.3%)). Most of the study participants are from rural areas (253 (63.4%)), and the rest (146 (36.6%)) are from rural areas. The study result revealed that the marital status of respondents’ parents is living together (322 (80.7%)), the next majority are from separated for a long period (41 (10.3%)), and the rest are divorced (24 (6.0%)) and died (12 (12%)) (see Table 1).

3.2. *Departments of Respondents.* The majority of the study participant is from engineering college (mechanical engineering, food engineering, and civil engineering), 17.3%, 15.3%, and 10.3, respectively (see Table 2). The finding shows that the enrolment number is high in this college.

3.3. *Occupational Status of Respondent’s Parents.* The result shows that many of the respondents (144 (36.1%)) are from families who have no job, the next major (80 (21.3%)) are

TABLE 4: Cross-tabulation result from the major factors that affect counseling needs of respondents.

Sex			Family residence			Total
			Rural	Urban		
Male	Have you ever visited your university counseling centre seeking counseling/professional help?	Yes	11	25		36
		No	65	127		192
		Total	76	152		228
Female	Have you ever visited your university counseling centre seeking counseling/professional help?	Yes	13	23		36
		No	57	77		134
		Total	70	100		170
Total	Have you ever visited your university counseling centre seeking counseling/professional help?	Yes	24	48		72
		No	122	204		326
		Total	146	252		398

  

Sex			Parent's marital status				Total
			Live together	Divorced	Both died	Widowed	
Male	Have you ever visited your university counseling centre seeking counseling/professional help?	Yes	31	1	0	4	36
		No	149	14	6	23	192
		Total	180	15	6	27	228
Female	Have you ever visited your university counseling centre seeking counseling/professional help?	Yes	32	2	2	0	36
		No	109	7	4	14	134
		Total	141	9	6	14	170

Source: researcher's field data, 2021.

from merchants' families, and the rest are from farmers, government employees, and daily labourer's families (see Table 3).

**3.4. Factors that Affect the Counseling Needs of Students in Higher Educations.** The study result shows that both male and female students were seeking counseling. The quantitative data result shows that both male and female students need counseling services, but students from widowed and divorced families have a high need for counseling services and they often seek counseling centre in the university. Female students who are from divorced families and dead families have high counseling needs, and they often seek counseling professionals to build their emotions.

Another factor that affects is the area of residences, and the study result shows that most of the students who are from rural areas (both males and females) have high counseling needs (25% and 23%), respectively (see Table 4). The result of the study confirmed that most of the students are enrolled from rural areas with shortage of social services. This limits and affects their academic capacity, socialization skill, and communication in higher education. Then, they fall into depression and stress. These factors push them to counseling services.

One of the key informants explains that most of the students who came from rural areas are more depressed because some cannot speak and communicate Amharic, and some are hated living in a group and sleeping in one room together. They cry in dorms and classrooms and fall from chairs in examination rooms and beds because of stress and fear of university life.

**3.5. The Major Counseling Needs of Respondents.** Among the reasons they stated were developing proper study skills and coping with personal problems and social problems, respectively (see Table 5). This finding is similar to the finding of Yirgalem who stated that study skills and fostering a healthy heterosexual relationship are the most important functions of school guidance and counseling programs. Similarly, this finding aligns with what Terje and Cherinet listed as a major reason of why Ethiopian students visit the counselor. Among none users of the service, the following top four reasons were identified as a challenge not to use the service in their respective schools.

**3.6. Personal Counseling Need Service and Indicators.** Learning how to maintain good physical and mental health was the most prevalent personal need concerning university students, with 99.7% and 70.4% reporting a high to the moderate need for assistance. The second most prevalent need expressed by university students was to learn how to handle stress and anxiety in their life. From the total of respondents, 77.7% are responded high need for it. Other items ranked among the most prevalent concerns that students expressed as having a high to moderate need include learning how to solve personal problems (70.2%), overcoming procrastination (67.4%), learning how to deal with stress due to my job, family, or education (66.7%), and coping with a broken relationship (64.9%). The items that were indicated as having the lowest prevalence for concerns in terms of personal needs required by students were concerns about learning how to manage drug addiction (33.8%). The concern to become overcome insomnia (47.6%) and reproductive health problems (48.4%) was the second lowest need reported by



TABLE 5: Identified counseling needs of students in higher education.

Seeking counseling about my education	Frequency	Percent
Yes	280	70.2
No	119	29.8
Total	399	100.0
My current/future career development		
Yes	117	29.4
No	282	70.7
Total	399	100.0
Mental health (depression, anxiety, etc.)		
Yes	122	30.6
No	274	68.7
Not sure	3	0.8
Total	399	100.0
My interpersonal relationship		
Yes	66	16.6
No	333	83.5
Total	399	100.0
Love life/sexual relationship		
Yes	51	12.8
No	348	87.2
Total	399	100.0
Inability to adjust to campus life		
Yes	53	13.3
No	346	86.8
Total	399	100.0
Financial support		
Yes	42	10.5
No	357	89.5
Total	399	100.0

Source: researcher's field data, 2021.

participants of the study (see Table 6). The FGD participants explained that they have a high need to use the service based on their needs and problems they faced in the university. The participants confirmed that public speaking anxiety, especially in classroom presentation and discussion and stress and anxiety during examination time, is the majority of participants' needs.

**3.7. Discussion.** In the spirit of developing a higher education system together, the Higher Education Relevance Quality Agency (HERQA) believes that an institutional audit of the various academic sectors, including the guidance counseling, will prove helpful to higher education institutions, the Ministry of Education, university communities, parents, students, and employers [15]. This is one contribution to the combined efforts to maintain and enhance the quality of higher education. Along with this, a study assessed the magnitude, perceived need, and associated factors of counseling services of students in Dilla University, Southern Ethiopia.

The finding of these studies shows, in the study area (Dilla University), to have a professional guidance counseling officer and centre, but it is not properly serving the students. However, this had not run for some time due to staffing, timing, and budget difficulties. The finding of this

study is consistent with the study result conducted at Mekelle University. The study result in Mekelle University shows the office of the guidance counselor on campus, but was informed that no counselor had been in post for some time and that the professional service was no longer provided. The result of this study showed that low attention is given to counselling service in Ethiopian higher education institutions. The university must provide professional guidance and counseling service for its students. Not doing so is a failure to discharge its responsibilities [15–17]. In opposite to this study result, the study result in Beholder University is different from this study. Most students self-refer to the office, but some students arrive for counseling as a result of encouragement from their friends or a proctor. Although freshman students are informed of the counseling services during their orientation program, the number of students visiting the office is reported as very low about the total number of students in the university and those considered in need of help. It is confirmed that while many students know of the existence of the office, they do not know the specific services offered.

The result of this study indicates that students do not have adequate information on the guidance counseling services in general and the services offered by professionals and various university personnel in particular. The findings indicated that there is no significant difference in awareness regarding the services among the different grades and program levels of students. It means that whether a student is a newcomer, or has stayed for three or more years, there is no significant difference in knowledge of the services offered by the guidance counseling sector. It is therefore strongly urged that the university students' support services work hard in the delivery of information regarding the services offered by the guidance counseling division.

One of the most notable findings of the study under consideration was that students did not get the support they required from the non-academic staff. It is quite obvious that extensive services in guidance counseling cannot be exclusively provided by instructors and an appointed counselor. It was suggested that efficient guidance counseling services were the outcome of collective efforts [12, 18]. The other focus of the current investigation is identifying factors that affect the guidance and counseling services in the universities. The finding confirms that age, sex, family residence being in rural or urban, marital nature, the nature of their department (being from hard sciences or soft sciences), level of family economy, and type of parental job are the major factors that affect the counseling need of students in the universities.

The study also examined and identified personal counseling needs and indicators in the study area. Most of the respondents are need counseling services to maintain good physical and mental health of 99.7% and 70.4%, respectively. The second most prevalent need expressed by university students was to handle stress and anxiety in their life. From the total of respondents, 77.7% are responded high need for it. Other items ranked among the most prevalent concerns which students expressed as having a high to moderate need include learning how to solve personal problems (70.2%),

TABLE 6: Personal counseling need indicators.

	Frequency	Percent
<b>Learn how to handle stress and anxiety in my life</b>		
No need	16	4.0
Slight need	10	2.5
Moderate need	63	15.8
High need	310	77.7
Total	399	100.0
<b>Learn how to solve personal problems</b>		
No need	16	4.0
Slight need	20	5.0
Moderate need	83	20.8
High need	280	70.2
<b>Learn how to deal with stress due to my job, family, or education</b>		
No need	19	4.8
Slight need	27	6.8
Moderate need	87	21.8
High need	266	66.7
Total	399	100.0
<b>Learn how to become overcome insomnia</b>		
No need	63	15.8
Slight need	55	13.8
Moderate need	91	22.8
High need	190	47.6
Total	399	100.0
<b>Learn how to prevent me from reproductive health problems</b>		
No need	64	16.0
Slight need	51	12.8
Moderate need	91	22.8
High need	193	48.4
Total	399	100.0
<b>Learn how to manage drug addiction</b>		
No need	175	43.9
Slight need	41	10.3
Moderate need	48	12.0
High need	135	33.8
Total	399	100.0
<b>Get counseling/advice about my educational plans</b>		
No need	32	8.0
Slight need	28	7.0
Moderate need	79	19.8
High need	260	65.2
Total	399	100.0

Source: researcher's field data, 2021.

overcoming procrastination (67.4%), learning how to deal with stress due to my job, family, or education (66.7%), and coping with a broken relationship (64.9%). The items that were indicated as having the lowest prevalence for concerns in terms of personal needs required by students were concerns about learning how to manage drug addiction (33.8%). The concern to become overcome insomnia (47.6%) and reproductive health problems (48.4%) was the second lowest need reported by participants of the study.

This is evident because there was one professional who has been appointed as a guidance counseling officer for the colleges at all Campuses of Dilla University. This may play a decisive role in solving academic, personal, and psychological problems, creating better knowledge, and developing positive attitudes toward the guidance services in such students.

## 4. Conclusion and Recommendation

**4.1. Conclusion.** This study was intended to assess the magnitude, perceived need, and associated factors to counseling services of students in Dilla University, Southern Ethiopia. The finding of the study shows that there are a high number of students who need guidance and counseling at Dilla University from different colleges and departments. The counseling need of the students is determined based on different associated factors. The student's age level, sex, parental marital nature, the department they joined, family economy, occupation, and residence are the main factors that affect positively or negatively their counseling need. The identified highest personal counseling needs and indicators in Dilla University students are to maintain good physical and mental health, to handle stress and anxiety in their life,

to solve personal problems, to overcome procrastination, to deal with stress due to their job, and to cope with a broken relationship. The items that were indicated as having the lowest prevalence for concerns in terms of personal needs required by students were concerns about learning how to manage drug addiction and to overcome insomnia, and reproductive health problems are the lowest need reported by participants of the study.

Based on the findings the researcher concludes that many students need guidance and counseling service, but they are not getting the service in the university because of lack of information, professional, and time. Therefore, active counseling service for all students in their college is needed. This needs all stakeholders' attention on the issues of the students, support, guidance, and facilitating and awareness creation.

**4.2. Recommendations.** The following suggestions are drawn from the finding of the study:

- (i) The Ministry of Education of Ethiopia should reconsider the importance of guidance and counseling services in the universities and strengthen and support counseling centres in universities.
- (ii) Health professionals and psychologists should actively work and give services for students based on their personal needs in higher education institutions. These improve student, academic, social, and psychological skills and solve their problems rooted in different factors.
- (iii) Dilla University should organize, facilitate, and strengthen guidance and counseling centres and personnel in all campuses and colleges in the university.

## Data Availability

All data generated throughout the study have been included within the article and raw data can be obtained from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there are no any conflicts of interest.

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