



RESEARCH ARTICLE

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## THE REALITY OF PSYCHOLOGICAL AND EDUCATIONAL COUNSELING IN PALESTINE IN LIGHT OF INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS

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### ABSTRACT

This article aims to introduce the Reality of Psychological and Educational Counselling in Palestine in Light of International Standards. The article is based on descriptive analytical method. The research results have shown that there are obstacles considering psychological and educational counseling as same as international ones. These obstacles are at the level of each legislation, administration, the culture of society concerning counselling, and some other obstacles. Moreover, that the reality of counselling is still kind of late more than a lot of other advanced countries as it's a modern science in the Palestinian culture, beside that there is particularity for Palestinian reality because it's under the Israeli occupation. As a result, the author has recommended more training concerning counselling field, and strengthen counselling role in different institutions, and working on developing the legislation that help satisfying the need of Palestinian society in counselling. In addition to provide them with enough financial support to achieve this purpose.

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## INTRODUCTION

Psychological and educational counseling is of paramount importance in our lives and in our institutions, whether educational, psychological and social, especially in schools. In Palestine, the concept of counseling is linked with the notion of providing support and aid to individuals to realize and reach a sound mental and psychological health capable of acing their problems. This concept is in line with the definition of Zahran's study (2003) who stated that the importance of counseling is evident in the ability of the individual to address the problems he/she faces. According to Zahran, man is a social being living in a world of standards and values. The social interpretation of the individual's actions that affect the community are as well under the influence of his/her various needs and what he/she might face. This interpretation is illustrated by the reality of the Palestinian community where the need for counseling programs became a necessity. Radwan's study (2002) considered counseling a psychological need for human beings and a demand for a sound growth to satisfy this need. As a consequence, counseling grew to become a right for every individual living in a community and should be provided for those in need of it. The importance of counseling is evident in the theories that contributed in raising the level of the counseling programs and identifying their

importance in the educational process to achieve a sound human character (al-'Ajez, 2001). However, providing counseling services at schools faced several hardships as the study of Abdallah (2000) showed. It stated that the crisis and problems that school students face necessitated the existence of counseling programs in the Ministry of Education directorates. At schools, counseling is a measure employed to deal with the students' problems who need help and support. It is important to develop counseling programs for school counselors, students and parents that help in identifying the crisis and qualify them to anticipate any future crisis that might happen and affect the personalities of the students. Counseling comprises achieving many objectives related especially to school counseling. School as an educational institution is considered the broader sphere within which to apply the psychological counseling. School is entrusted to raise individuals who enjoy a sound physical and mental health. Vocational/Professional counseling aids the individual in selecting a profession consistent with his/her capacities, tendencies, social and familial circumstances and the market demands. Familial counseling is a measure that aids family individuals understand family life and responsibilities to reach stability and harmony. Counseling can be either individual or group therapy (al-Farkh and Taym, 1999).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Despite the importance of counseling in Palestine, still the reality of counseling is unsatisfactory. The purpose of conducting this study is to identify and find answers to the main question, what is the reality of psychological and educational counseling in Palestine? What are the measures needed to develop and improve counseling services in Palestine? The researcher seeks to answer these questions to realize the objectives of the study. The research scope was conducted in Palestine where the researcher adopted the analytical descriptive approach. The researcher described the counseling status in the Palestinian institutions, relying on the available data and information where he analyzed the data to conclude his study's results. The researcher sees that the accelerating fluctuations in our ages are reflected on the entire segments of life. This necessitated an evolution in the education sector in general and in the counseling domain in particular. Therefore, the importance of counseling services is obvious and reflected on our lives. This required the development of educational and psychological counseling to keep up pace with the evolution of the world we live in (Yalgin and al-Qadi, 1997). The development of educational and psychological counseling was also highlighted in the scientific conference entitled "The Psychological and Educational Counseling in Counseling Reality and Prospects." The Faculty of Education at al-Quds Open University in collaboration with the General Directorate of Counseling in the Ministry of Education and Higher Education organized this conference which was conducted on 16/4/2014.

The conference called for adopting successful experiences in school counseling at schools. The conference as well called for recruiting school counselors in every school and establishing counseling centers at schools which have no counseling staff. Moreover, the conference called for enriching the positive trends among students, parents and educators (see conference press release <http://www.maannews.net/Content.aspx?id=690624>). The General Directorate of Counseling at the Ministry aims to instill the concept of school as a safe and motivating environment, amicable to the students, that realizes a sound mental health and protects against all forms of violence. As a consequence, the directorate signed several agreements, amongst which the agreement with UNICEF to implement projects especially in the field of education and counseling. However, counseling is still in need of supportive projects (<http://www.mohe.ps/home/2016/01/06/23337>). At the beginning of 2018, the Ministry of Education and Higher Education launched the second conference in educational counseling entitled: "Studies and Researches on Educational Counseling." The conference touched on the exerted efforts to alleviate the reality of educational counseling by employing counselors in schools, offering diverse counseling services, and providing a supportive environment for students and their parents. The conference tackled the counseling profession from the perspective of counselors in the public schools. The conference recommended enlisting the school counselor profession within the school structure (<http://www.mohe.pna.ps/news?p=articles&news=4073&title>).

### The need for Counseling

The need for counseling in Palestine is an urgent requirement that focuses on finding appropriate solutions to the social problems facing the citizen, and the members of society who

need help and support considering the rising problems in the human communities (al-Zayoud, 2002). The study of al-'Ajez (2001) tackled educational counseling in middle and high schools in Gaza governorates in terms of reality, problems and solutions. The study results stressed the problems related to rehabilitation and training, work conditions, problems related to management and teachers. The study hinted out that the need for counseling emerged from the mental health, vocational and educational guidance trends and mental therapy, which serve the individual and the community to overcome impediments. Guidance and counseling grew to become a science, an art, a practice, an education, and a learning. A study conducted on Gaza Community Mental Health Program showed that 32% of adolescent aging 10-19 years old suffered from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The study of Zakrison (2004) which was conducted in Bethlehem in West Bank showed that 42% of children suffered from psychological issues (emotional and behavioral). Another study conducted by Treatment and Rehabilitation Center for Victims of Torture (TRC) clarified that 38.1% suffered from PTSD symptoms and 3.1% suffered from acute stress (Sehwail and Rasras, 2004). The Palestinian Counseling Center (PCC) pointed out the difficulties that the practitioners face regarding the reality of mental health in the Palestinian community which comprise the availability of data and statistics related to the level of mental diseases widespread in Palestine. The PCC statistics showed that individuals seeking mental therapy in 2007, 2008 and 2009 suffered from different types of anxiety which amounted to 25%. While 22% suffer from mood disorder, 18% suffer from schizophrenia and mental disorders, 11% suffer from adaptation disorders and 8% suffer from personality disorders. In the same context, those who seek psychological counseling amount to 27% as they suffer from family relationships, 16% suffer from anxiety and 13% from mood disorders. The statistics showed that the highest rates of individuals seeking help suffer from anxiety disorders, then mood disorders and finally mental disorders. Regarding children, results showed that the majority of them suffer from family relationships, fear, insecurity and aggressive behaviors (<http://www.pcc-jer.org/new/index.php?mylanguage=1>).

### Mental health services in Palestine

The governmental sector provides mental health services through several ministries such as the Palestinian Ministry of Health. The Ministry provides primary psychological care through community mental health centers, while secondary psychiatric care services are provided through hospitals (Bethlehem Mental Hospital and al-Nasr Hospital in Gaza). Moreover, there are six community mental health centers in the West Bank located in Ramallah, Hebron, Nablus, Jenin, Salfit and Halhul. Some centers have no permanent doctors. In the Gaza Strip, there are community mental health centers in Jabalia, Khan Younis, and Gaza in addition to a community mental health center for children in Gaza (<http://www.pcc-jer.org/new/index.php?mylanguage=1>). The Ministry of Education and Higher Education provides psychological and educational counseling through employing counselors in schools with a total number of 1047 counselors distributed among the West Bank governorates. The number of males is 488 and the number of female counselors is 559. The inception of school counseling was in 1996 where counselors offer counseling services to individuals and groups and they transfer cases that suffer from problems and mental disorders that need more specialized intervention to institutions abroad. The study

of Jukman (2004) showed that more than 50% of mental health service providers work in the public sector. The Arab Human Resources Workshop that was conducted in 2008 showed that there are 21 psychiatrists working in Palestine, 18 of them work in the public sector, 3 work in the private sector. The workshop showed that there are 40 therapists working in Palestine, 13 of them work in the public sector and 27 of them work in non-governmental institutions (WHO, 2006). The non-governmental sector (NGOs) includes a group of Palestinian institutions providing mental health services. Most of these institutions operate on several levels of mental health, such as prevention, awareness in mental and therapeutic health. These services include individual therapy, group therapy, and rehabilitation. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) provides services to refugees, psychological counseling and educational services in UNRWA schools. The UNRWA offers guidance in the mental clinics camps in addition to prevention and initial intervention in mental health. It also works on transferring cases which need psychiatric intervention as those clinics do not offer such services. However, the UNRWA contracted psychiatrists and mental health centers that offer psychiatric help incurring the treatment costs. The Agency provided group-counseling services for parents, teachers, children and adolescents. The Mental Health Program in institutions affiliated to UNRWA was accepted in 2001 as a preventive awareness program including 64 and 120 counselors in West Bank and Gaza Strip respectively. In addition, 36 counselors work in mental health clinics offering counseling services to the camp residents (<http://www.pcc-jer.org/new/index.php?mylanguage=1>).

Literature review indicates to the impact of psychological disorders on the society in terms of productivity and work; it was found that they impact the health of the individuals leading to a poor job performance. In a study conducted by WHO (2002), the measure of Disability-Adjusted Life Years (DALY) shows that psychological disorders form half of the ten disorders that impact productivity, some of which are depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and OCD. These disorders affect work performance and productivity of the individual, leading him/her to be a burden on the society. Albarzeni study (2006) aimed at identifying the reality of educational counseling at UNRWA and public schools in the Gaza Strip, and the most important issues that face educational counselors. The study concluded that the top issues faced by counselors are related to administration (92%), followed by challenging work conditions and finally preparation and training. The study recommended the need for training counselors and developing their skills professionally and cognitively, in addition to hiring at least one educational counselor per school. The reality and commencement of counseling in Palestine is similar to the one in the Arabic region with minor differences. Smily study sheds the light on the reality of counseling in Algeria. He shows that Algeria only recently realized the importance of psychological counseling in secondary schools. In 1991, the real commencement of counseling occurred, when Algeria developed new specialized counseling posts in secondary schools. However, this mission in its current framework did not meet the desired goal because of the complexity of the tasks assigned to counselors and the lack of work tools and mechanisms. In addition, there are many obstacles and challenges facing counseling program at the schools in Algeria. These challenges are the lack of the required personal skills, the variation among counselors in terms of the academic

qualification, the lack of interest by the administration in counseling and its services, the attempt to limit counseling work to admission and orientation, and the attempt of some directors in making counseling an administrative process. There are also challenges related to the students, such as their lack of awareness on the importance of counseling, and their reluctance to interact with counselors due to the fear of being accused of insanity. In addition, there are issues related to the parents of the students, such as having poor communication with parents and the lack of awareness among some parents. Finally, there are issues related to the legislative and regulating framework of counseling, and issues related to finance and the lack of material tools and means that assist in the execution of the counseling program at the schools (Ministry of National Education, 1993).

According to Ghani (2011), the reality of counselors in Iraq is miserable as counselors do not have a job description. Therefore, they are sometimes assigned to work with the rest of the employees at the school and other times with the school assistants, causing confusion among counselors and influencing their work. Moreover, there is a great confusion between the positions of "Educational Counselor" and "Educational Supervisor". Lately, some counselors are being called "Teaching Counselor". In some directorates, supervisors of counseling are not specialized in psychological counseling but in other related fields, such as psychology, psychology and education, and mental health, causing negative impact on counseling in schools. Moreover, there are no available educational and psychological measures to be used by the counselors in order to measure phenomena, besides the lack of professional experience and practice among counselors. Thus, counselors should be enrolled in training courses continuously. In the Western communities, despite the advancement of counseling services at various levels, it still faces many challenges. Nagato study (1999), as mentioned in Albarzeni (2006), sheds the light on the role of educational counselors in secondary schools from the perspective of the students, in light of the instructions of Hawaii School Counselor Association. The study showed significant differences between the ideal role of the counselor and the actual role he/she administers. Bar-Yael study (1999), as mentioned in Albarzeni (2006), focuses on the perception of educational counselors and of their role in day schools in the United States. The results show that Jewish rabbis, who have a background in human development, provide counseling services related to religion more than their counterparts. The results also reveal that counselors aged 43 years and more provide more counseling services than others.

### **Obstacles and challenges facing counseling programs in palestine**

There are shortcomings in the needed special competencies and personal skills for carrying out counseling efficiently in Palestine, in addition to the lack of attention to counseling and its services and belief in its importance. Moreover, counseling is being limited to administrative work, especially in schools. There are also challenges related to the students, such as their lack of awareness on the importance of counseling, and their reluctance to interact with counselors due to the fear of being accused of insanity. In addition, there are issues related to the parents of the students, such as their lack of awareness on the importance of counseling and their negligence in addressing their children problems and only paying attention to their

academic progress. Other challenges are related to the attitudes of the workers at schools, the legislative and regulating framework of counseling, the busy schedule of counselors to carry out other unrelated tasks, the large number of students amounting to 2000 students and more. Not to mention the financial obstacles, such as the lack of suitable offices to practice individual and group counseling, and the lack of facilities and materials provided by the management of the institution to implement counseling, in addition to the ambiguity and overlap of the roles assigned to the counselors. Moreover, counselors face conflicts with various educational partners. Success stories were presented in the field of school counseling in a scientific conference and were recommended to be developed and applied in all local schools. The conference was organized by the Faculty of Educational Sciences at al-Quds Open University, in cooperation with the General Directorate for Counseling and Special Education at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, under the title "Psychological and Educational Counseling in Palestine: Its Reality and Future" which took place on 16/04/2014. Participants in the conference called for assigning one counselor for every 300 students in schools. The participants also stressed the need for fostering the culture and importance of educational and psychological counseling and the positive attitudes towards it among students, parents and workers in the field of education. Recommendations also included identifying the roles of the school counselor and abiding to them, assigning tasks to counselors that are related to their work only, coordinating between the Ministry of Higher Education and the local universities in order to develop specialized programs at the level of diploma and bachelor in the field of psychological and educational counseling, and providing psychological and educational services for the students (<http://www.maannnews.net/Content.aspx?id=690624>). On 15/1/2018, the General Directorate for Counseling and Special Education at the Ministry of Education and Higher Education, in cooperation with the Palestinian Bible Society, launched the second educational counseling conference under the title "Studies and Research in Educational Counseling". The participants recommended the need to put an end to the violations carried out by the Israeli occupation, due to their negative impact on counseling, in addition to the inclusion of the post of educational counselor in the school structure. Moreover, participants recommended holding this conference on an annual basis and emphasized the importance of counseling and the need to foster a positive relation between the educational counselor and the parents as well as the school. Other recommendations can be found at <http://www.mohe.pna.ps/news?p>.

### The Researcher analysis and comments

There are clear concepts presented by the theories in literature that define the relation between counseling and other fields, and the notion of psychological and educational counseling, in addition to the ideal counselor in terms of skills, training, and knowledge. Moreover, there are legislations that dictate how counseling should be obligatory in various institutions. The researcher concluded that there is a variation from one country to another in the level of application of these criteria. The researcher reviewed some of the experiences and history of psychological and educational counseling at the Palestinian institutions. In addition, he compared these experiences with their counterparts in the Arabic region and overseas communities. He found some similarities in terms of the

difficulties facing counseling. This article corresponds with Smily study in terms of the recency of counseling in the Arabic region which means counselors in that region still have a humble experience and training programs in this domain are still weak. Moreover, the culture of counseling in Palestine is similar to the one in Algeria, people have negative attitude towards counseling. Ghani(2011) study on Iraq coincides with the reality of counseling and the unclear roles of the counselors in Palestine and their lack of experience. On an international level, the reality of counseling as mentioned in the study of Nagato (1999), mentioned in the study of Alberdeni (2006), revealed a variation between the ideal role of counselors and their actual role and in the type of their references. This is consistent with the reality of counseling in Palestine to an extent. Furthermore, there are similarities in a number of Arabic and international studies related to the importance of years of experience among counselors, as mentioned in Bar-Yael study(1999). This is due to the consideration of the field of counseling as a recent one, especially in Palestine in comparison to other countries.

**Recommendations:** This article recommends the following, in hope of developing the field of counseling in Palestine:

- Endorsing legislations and legal provisions on counseling that contribute to its promotion at the civil and public Palestinian institutions.
- Promoting the culture of counseling in Palestine, and recognizing it as an emerging field.
- Increasing the number of counselors in Palestinian schools.
- Providing material, technical, and training support to counselors in Palestine through workshops or training centers. In addition to the need to consider the special circumstances that Palestinians go through, such as the Israeli occupation and the daily life struggles, which impact negatively the reality of counseling in Palestine. Counseling services are especially important for people living under the military occupation.
- Identifying the roles of counselors clearly to help achieve their work efficiently.
- Identifying the ideal counselor along with his/her required professional and personal capacities. In addition, the need to issue a license to practice counseling, after only passing the training requirements.
- Disseminating success stories in psychological and educational counseling on an international level and adopt what is suitable to the Palestinian environment.
- Applying the international agreements signed with the institutions of the Palestinian Authority in the field of educational and psychological counseling and its development.

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