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**School Guidance Counsellors and Adolescent Depression:
Beliefs, Knowledge and Practice**

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for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Abstract

Adolescent depression is a significant problem in New Zealand. The Youth2000 survey indicated that around 9.0% of male and 18% of female secondary school students reported feeling depressed. School Guidance Counsellors (SGCs) are ideally placed to identify, assess and treat these adolescents. However, SGCs are rarely included in mental health research.

I investigated the beliefs, knowledge and practice of SGCs around adolescent depression. There were three stages to the research. Stage One used a qualitative approach, with nine focus groups held in Auckland in 2004. Fifty-two SGCs participated. I developed a thematic map from the results that emerged. Category One “Beliefs and Knowledge” had three themes: causes, negative connotations and different presentations. Category Two “Practice” had five themes: assessment, referrals, effective therapy, systems and training needs.

Stage Two comprised a questionnaire based on these results. This investigated SGCs’ knowledge of depression, assessment, training and referral decisions. It also requested demographic data. In 2005, this was sent to 455 SGCs throughout New Zealand. Two hundred and forty SGCs (53%) responded. Eighty percent did not believe that their initial training equipped them adequately to work with mild to moderately depressed adolescents. SGCs wanted further training, especially appropriate strategies. They requested information based on research and presented by clinicians.

In Stage Three, I developed a training workshop on assessment, referral and treatment of adolescent depression, tailored to SGCs’ needs. Thirty-nine SGCs attended workshops in 2006. Evaluations were positive and indicated that this training was appropriate and useful. SGCs would recommend the workshop to others.

Strengths and weaknesses of the study are discussed and recommendations made about future developments. There is emphasis on the need for policy to encourage collaboration between SGCs and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), education and health, training providers and the New Zealand Association of Counsellors. As SGCs are placed outside both teaching and health, they need to be adequately trained and receive regular professional development, supervision and consultation around depression. CAMHS are well placed to offer training to SGCs based on identified needs and evidence-based practice.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1.....	1
1.1 Overall aims and objectives of the research.....	1
1.2 General introduction to the research.....	1
1.3 The need for exploratory research	3
1.4 Summary	4
Chapter 2.....	1
2.1 School Guidance Counsellors or School Counsellors?.....	5
2.2 The separation of counselling from guidance and pastoral care ...	7
2.3 Weakening of support for school counsellors by education policy makers, local education authorities and school management	12
2.4 Increased isolation of counsellors from teaching staff and the increasing employment of trained counsellors who are not teachers.....	16
2.5 The Growth of School Health Services.....	24
2.6 Are SGCs mental health professionals?.....	26
2.7 Training in Mental Health	30
2.8 Redefining the role of SGCs.....	31
Chapter 3.....	1
3.1 The importance of recognising adolescent depression	32
3.2 Depression and adolescent development.....	34
3.3 Screening and identification of adolescent depression	36
3.4 Effective ways of preventing adolescent depression	38
3.5 Interventions for adolescent depression	42
3.6 Research with School Guidance Counsellors.....	45
3.7 Mental health research in schools.....	47

3.8	Why research is important for counsellors.....	48
3.9	Why school counsellors are not involved in research.....	49
3.10	Implications of paucity of research by school counsellors	50
3.11	School counsellors and depression research	51
3.12	New Zealand School Guidance Counsellors and Research	51
3.13	Conclusion.....	52
Chapter 4.....		1
4.1	Reasons for choosing qualitative research	54
4.2	Quantitative Research and its uses.....	58
4.3	Adult learning.....	60
4.4	Summary	61
Chapter 5.....		63
5.1	Aims and objectives.....	63
5.2	Research design and methods.....	63
5.3	The pilot study focus group.....	71
5.4	Conducting the focus groups	73
5.5	Transcription of tapes.....	74
5.6	Analysis of the qualitative data.....	74
5.7	Thanking the SGCs for their participation	74
5.8	Descriptions of focus groups	75
5.9	Sample characteristics.....	75
5.10	Summary	77
Chapter 6.....		78
6.1	General inductive approach.....	78
6.2	Development of a thematic map of SGCs' beliefs, knowledge and practice around adolescent depression.....	78

6.3	Category One	83
6.4	Category One	85
6.5	Main Theme One: causes of depression.....	89
6.6	Main Theme Two: negative connotations	92
6.7	Main Theme Three: different presentations	96
6.8	Summary of Category One	110
Chapter 7.....		78
7.1	Category Two: Themes	112
7.2	Main Theme One: Assessment of adolescent depression	114
7.3	Main Theme Two: Referrals	119
7.4	Main Theme Three: Effective Therapy.....	131
7.5	Main Theme Four: Working with systems.....	142
7.6	Main Theme Five: Training needs.....	145
7.7	Summary of Category Two	148
Chapter 8.....		78
8.1	Main findings.....	150
8.2	Strengths of Stage One.....	151
8.3	Weaknesses of Stage One.....	154
8.4	Summary	157
Chapter 9.....		78
9.1	Aims and objectives	158
9.2	The Questionnaire: research design and methods	159
9.3	Procedure.....	161
9.4	Analysis of Questionnaire	164
9.5	Summary	168
Chapter 10.....		78

10.1	Section A: Identification and assessment of depression	169
10.2	Assessment of depression.....	170
10.3	Section B: Working with depressed adolescents	173
10.4	Section C: Relationship with CAMHS and other services.....	179
10.5	The relationship between SGCs and CAMHS	181
10.6	Section D: Analysis of training of SGCs	183
10.7	Specific training needs of SGCs	185
10.8	Style and form of training requested by SGCs	186
10.9	Support from school for SGC training.....	188
10.10	Māori rangatahi.....	191
Chapter 11.....		78
11.1	Main findings.....	193
11.2	Strengths of Stage Two	196
11.3	Weaknesses of Stage Two.....	198
11.4	Summary	199
Chapter 12.....		201
12.1	Background: The changing role of SGCs	201
12.2	Aims and objectives	201
12.3	Use of information from Stages One and Two.....	202
12.4	Workshop	203
12.5	Ethics approval	204
12.6	Selection of participants	204
12.7	Procedure.....	205
12.8	Summary	207
Chapter 13.....		78
13.1	Evaluations of workshops	208

13.2	Pre-workshop Questionnaire	217
13.3	Post-workshop Follow-up Questionnaire.....	222
13.4	An informal comparison of answers	224
13.5	Comments made by SGCs in discussions during the first workshop	225
13.6	Further comments from SGCs.....	231
13.7	Summary of results from Workshop.....	233
Chapter 14	.....	234
14.1	Main findings.....	234
14.2	Strengths of the Workshop	234
14.3	Weaknesses of the Workshop.....	236
14.4	Comparison with similar studies	239
14.5	Summary	240
Chapter 15	.....	241
15.1	Summary of findings.....	241
15.2	Strengths of this study.....	242
15.3	Weaknesses of this study.....	244
15.4	Strengths and weaknesses in comparison with other studies	246
15.5	Meaning of this study.....	247
15.6	Where to from here? Taking this research forward	251
15.7	Suggestions for implementation	257
15.8	Summary	259
Appendix 1	.....	260
Appendix 2	.....	262
Appendix 3	.....	263
Appendix 4	.....	265
Appendix 5	.....	266

Appendix 6.....	267
Appendix 7.....	270
Appendix 8.....	272
Appendix 9.....	273
Appendix 10.....	275
Appendix 11.....	278
Appendix 12.....	280
Appendix 13.....	281
Appendix 14.....	283
Appendix 15.....	284
Appendix 16.....	286
Appendix 17.....	288
Appendix 18.....	293
Appendix 19.....	298
Appendix 20.....	299
List of References	300

List of Tables

Table 3.1 The stepped-care model	38
Table 5.1 Numbers of schools contacted, consent forms returned and SGCs attending focus groups	70
Table 5.2 Interview guide used in pilot group	72
Table 5.3 Descriptions of the focus groups run in Auckland region	75
Table 5.4 Which part of the region did the SGCs come from?	75
Table 5.5 Age groups of SGCs at focus groups.....	76
Table 5.6 Ethnic identification of SGCs.....	76
Table 5.7 Formal qualifications held in counselling.....	77
Table 5.8 Length of employment as SGC	77
Table 9.1 Questionnaires sent out in October 2005, showing breakdown by regions	162
Table 9.2 Questionnaires completed and returned.....	164
Table 9.3 Age groups of SGCs in Stages One and Two	165
Table 9.4 Ethnicity of SGCs.....	166
Table 9.5 Formal qualifications in counselling.....	167
Table 9.6 Length of time working as SGC.....	167
Table 9.7 Years working as SGC and counselling qualifications.....	168
Table 10.1 Ways that SGCs identify adolescent depression	169
Table 10.2 Main assessment tools used by SGCs.....	171
Table 10.3 Was the assessment tool useful?.....	171
Table 10.4 Usefulness of tools.....	171
Table 10.5 Are there differences between Māori and non-Māori?	172
Table 10.6 Differences reported between Māori and non-Māori	172
Table 10.7 Frequency of meeting with depressed adolescents.....	173
Table 10.8 Length of time SGCs meet with depressed adolescents	174

Table 10.9 Supervision received around adolescent depression.....	175
Table 10.10 Summary of provision during school holidays.....	176
Table 10.11 Are there barriers in accessing SGCs?.....	176
Table 10.12 What are these barriers?	177
Table 10.13 The main ways SGCs work with depressed adolescents	178
Table 10.14 Who do SGCs refer to?	179
Table 10.15 Criteria for referral to CAMHS	180
Table 10.16 Main questions asked to determine referral	180
Table 10.17 Other questions SGCs asked	181
Table 10.18 What would help you do this well?.....	181
Table 10.19 Improvements wanted in the interface between CAMHS and SGCs	182
Table 10.20 What do SGCs see as helpful about CAMHS services?	183
Table 10.21 Main post-initial training providers mentioned by SGCs	184
Table 10.22 Numbers of SGCs requesting training	185
Table 10.23 Summary of training requests.....	186
Table 10.24 Style of delivery requested by SGCs	187
Table 10.25 Training providers requested.....	187
Table 10.26 Preferred length of training sessions.....	187
Table 10.27 Preferred time for training	188
Table 10.28 Expected support from school for training.....	189
Table 10.29 Additional comments about training.....	189
Table 12.1 Principals contacted, consent forms returned and SGCs at workshop	205
Table 13.1 Summary of results of 13 evaluation questions.....	209
Table 13.2 Summary of learning outcomes.....	212
Table 13.3 Summary of relevance and benefits.....	212
Table 13.4 Practical aspects of workshop	213

Table 13.5 Future workshops.....	214
Table 13.6 What SGCs liked most about the workshop.....	215
Table 13.7 What was most beneficial to you?.....	216
Table 13.8 Suggested improvements to the workshop.....	216
Table 13.9 Requests for future training.....	217
Table 13.10 Summary of how SGCs identified depression.....	218
Table 13.11 What tools were used and comparison with 2005	218
Table 13.12 Usefulness of tool	219
Table 13.13 Frequency of meeting with depressed adolescents.....	219
Table 13.14 Length of time SGCs see depressed adolescents.....	220
Table 13.15 Ways SGCs work with depressed adolescents	220
Table 13.16 Referral to services	221
Table 13.17 Questions to determine referrals.....	221
Table 13.18 Making good referrals	222

List of Figures

Figure 6.1 Final Thematic Map showing Categories and Main Themes	82
Figure 6.2 Main Themes, Sub-themes and Minor Sub-themes of Category One.....	84
Figure 7.1 Main Themes and Sub-themes of Category Two.....	113
Figure 9.1 Age groups and gender of SGCs in Stage Two.....	165
Figure 13.1 Assessment of depression	210
Figure 13.2 Risk factors	210
Figure 13.3 Decision-making	211
Figure 13.4 Ways of working	211