

## **Manage Risks in Vulnerable Ages:**

### **The Tertiary Prevention in the Taiwan's School Counseling System**

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#### **Abstract**

The mental health of young people is emerging as a world-wide “problem” that had received considerable attention. The school is regarded as an important field that help students who might have psychological or socio-cultural adaptation problems. Taiwan enacts the “Student Guidance and Counseling Act” in 2014. This act specify schools to establish the tertiary prevention model and to increase the number of teacher-counselors. A considerable amount of research has been examining the construction process of the school counseling and guidance system, but few studies consider the social mechanism of the risk management in the system. This article is concerned with what juvenile behavior would be problematic concerning troubled students, and how the counseling system treats the students’ emotional and behavior problems after classifying them as “deviant”. The research focused on the analysis of the manuals used by the counselors, guidebooks issued by the Ministry of Education. The study examines how these materials define “deviant students” and what kind of intervention strategies these materials propose. Furthermore, this study selected one secondary school counseling office as a research field where the researcher worked as a volunteer for three months in order to understand the daily practice of the counseling office and to observe how the teachers identify and help troubled students. Differing from Japan and Korea school system that merely rely on professionals to counseling solely (Lee & Yang 2008, Yagi 2008), Taiwan constructs a counseling system in school that combines different actors to practice the Tertiary prevention. The research findings show the Tran-cultural results that the transformation of foreign knowledge introduced to Taiwan. This type of system differs from the previous practice in complexity of prevention, intervention and treatment of youth risk behavior. The tertiary prevention makes the risk surveillance more comprehensive, well-identified and cross-life stage. In short, the findings indicate the order of the socialization for teenagers that the Taiwanese society tends to sustain.

Keyword: teacher-counselor, at-risk student, risk management, professionalization.

## **1. Introduction**

The issue of student well-being has received considerable attention recently as the student problems growing more complicated. More and more scholars have dressed the importance issues of helping the needed student. In recent years, there have been many papers describing the establish progress of the school mental health system in Japan, Korea, Hong-Kong. Like. Yagi (2008) suggested that Japan raised the school counseling issue due to the severe student bullying accident in 1994. In order to fix the problem, the school system in Japan creates a school psychologist position to counseling students. Taiwan also has a similar situation, however the approach has little difference. Taiwan enacts a twenty-four articles of Student Guidance and Counseling Act II on November 12th, 2014, which is a law comprising were issued on. The Act ensures the legitimacy of the school counseling system. Differ from Japan and Korea cases which merely rely on professionals to counseling solely, Taiwan established a school counseling system that combine different actors to practice the Tertiary prevention. This type of system differs from the previous practice in complexity of prevention, intervention and treatment of youth risk behavior. The research investigates how the counseling profession conducts the tertiary prevention model and identifies at-risk youth. As some juvenile behaviors are problematic concerning at-risk students, the counseling profession has intervention strategy to treat them after classifying them as “abnormal”. The aim of the research is discussing how professions control risk and what kind of trait would be regarded as “at-risk”. To understand the issue about this issue, it helps readers realize the way that professions influence our life for controlling uncertainty.

## **2. Method**

Since the research concerns about the way the counseling professions managing student mental-wellbeing, it needs to collect data about how they work with students. Beside, it is also important to investigate the categories of the overall student and the trait of the at-risk student. It reveals the boundary of “normal” student and “trouble” student. The subject of the research is the school teacher-counselor. Several data collection methods have been used in this research, including textual analysis, participant observation and in-depth interviewing. The first step of the research focused on the analysis of the manuals used by the counselors, guidebooks issued by the Ministry of Education etc. The research examines how these materials define “at-risk students” and what kind of intervention strategies these materials propose. The textual analysis of these materials is further compared and extended by the analysis concerning the youth incidents reports. Furthermore, the researcher selected one counseling office at secondary school where I worked as a volunteer for three months in order to understand the everyday practice of the counseling office and to observe the interactions between the counselor and students. Finally, the researcher interviewed nine counselors with different background and recorded their experience regarding the administration and the counseling services to students based on particular cases in order to understand the situation of counselors who participate in the counseling system management.

### **3. Result**

The discussion included three main parts: The tertiary prevention for at-risk student, professions for managing uncertainty, and work with at-risk student. It scrutinizes the circumstances of the teacher counselor's work within the tertiary prevention of the counseling system. First, it describes the functioning of the tertiary prevention model within the counseling system and from the risk point of view investigates the categories of students that are classified as "at-risk". Second, it discusses the topic how the counseling can become a profession and what is the content of this specialization, how the services provided to students differ from the specializations of a social worker, a psychologist, a psychiatrist and an educator. Finally, it examines how in a profession that specializes in treating personal emotions, the counselors use the techniques for expressing feelings and emotions and based on each case offer counseling that helps students to comply with the standards of "psychic and physical health".

#### **3-1. the tertiary prevention for at-risk student**

In 2014, the Taiwan government enacts the "Student Guidance and Counseling Act" commanding schools to increase the number of counselors and establish the tertiary prevention model. The administrative provisions have made the guidance and counseling profession getting different significant position and endow the counseling system a risk surveillance function.

Many research concerns how the "at-risk student" been defined. The research tends to investigate how to work with at-risk student. The tertiary prevention system is deprived from the public health model for controlling epidemic disease. The tertiary prevention creates an inter-professional division of labor that combine with teacher-counselor in school and the profession of psychiatry, social work and counseling psychologist outside of the school. In the tertiary prevention, primary prevention for students without serious problem behaviors - those estimate take 80-90%. There is some educational propaganda for most of students with behavior expectation. Secondary Prevention concerns about the student at-risk who have problem behavior. The teacher-counselor would give counseling service to investigate the genesis of the problem. When students have a more severe problem that a teacher - counselor cannot handle, the teacher-counselor would referral the student to institutes outside the school. Like social welfare hall for whom lack of social resource. And others have chronic or intense psychological problem were gave them a referral to a psychiatry section in hospital or student counseling and guidance center. Ideally, the teacher-counselor is the mediator of the tertiary prevention. A respondent describes the teacher-counselor just like a bridge that connects the teacher, student, parent, and other profession. The duty of the teacher-counselor is to make the conversation between different actors clearly and smoothly. In spite of conversation, the teacher-counselor also needs to connect a variety of resources for student, like institute outside the school. Moreover, the respondent uses another metaphor "fire fighter" to teacher-counselor. Every time when the school has emergent incidents that related to the student's emotion, teacher-counselor needs to go the spot and "to extinguish the flames" - like to make the student

calm down. All in all, the teacher-counselor plays a great part of the inter-profession network and takes over the student referral between each part

In theoretical, each profession should cooperate together to help the needed student. However, each discipline has different jurisdictions defining “At-risk” and administrative priority. Sometimes the teacher-counselor deems an urgent case, but for psychiatry or social work profession thinks it is not a big deal. For example, my respondent Judy told me an experience that she did not successfully referral her case to the social worker. Judy’s case was a teenage girl who lived in single parenthood. She was not getting along well with her mother’s new boyfriend. One night when she was showering in the bathroom, the drunken cohabitation shouted at her outside the bathroom, he complained that she didn’t respect him as her mother’s boyfriend. The girl shouted back with an impatient tone that irritated the cohabitation. The furious man was breaking through the bathroom door, yelling at the girl and pushing her shoulder. She felt very shocking about the cohabitation’s rudeness, then she immediately asked her mother for help. Her mother and her brother separate the cohabitation from the girl. Then she took refuge in her grandparent’s house that night. After knowing this incident, Judy was worrying the girl will have an indelible trauma about the cohabitation - who not only did violence to her but also had a possibility seeing her naked. Judy took the case seriously concerning that involving domestic violence and likelihood of sexual harassment. It beyond the capability of the teacher-counselor and needed professional social intervention, so Judy sought for help from the social worker center. After sending the referral application forms to the social worker center, the institute rejected Judy’s application. The social worker replied they judged the case was not so urgent that cohabitation would immediately harm the girl. They suggested Judy having more long-term observation of the student. Judy felt upset about the outcome, but only accepted it. She guessed social workers were so busy that raise the standard to accept intake interview. This case reveals the judgment difference between professions that cannot successfully coordinate within intervention and postvention.

In 2011, there are first recruitment of full-time teacher-counselor<sup>1</sup>. Teacher-counselor is different from school counselor. The former are recruited as teacher who has trained by counseling or psychology department of the school. After 2014 the Taiwan government enacts the “Student Guidance and Counseling Act”, every elementary school and junior high school needs at least a teacher-counselor to assistant the tertiary prevention. Thus the needs of teacher-counselor are getting double. Public Schools hire several teacher-counselors depends on the scale of the school. More of the class of students accompany with more teacher-counselor. In regulation, the junior high school that the class number less than 15 only has one teacher-counselor quota. So average a teacher-counselor is responsible to hundreds of student of the school. In the USA, recommend ratio of counselor to students is 1:250 stated by American School Counselor Association (ASCA, 2005). So does the ratio 1:250-350 that recommended by Taiwan Guidance and Counseling Association. However, most of the teacher-counselors have loaded exceeding the ration. It causes teacher-counselors burden high pressure to service

<sup>1</sup> Definition Accessed on 6 Sept 2016 at <http://terms.naer.edu.tw/detail/1313527/>.

all the student in school. So the Ministry of Education keep recruiting teacher-counselors up to 7 thousands till 2016 in order to solving the unbalanced ratio problem.

According to the recent researches. Tait (1995) investigated how the Finn Report is shaping the 'at-Risk youth'. Some at-risk youth are supposed to have more difficulty to grow up to adulthood. The process is about governmentality. So do Freeland (1991) states that: As is to be expected not all teenagers experience the same probability of being at risk in the transition to adulthood. Those most likely to be at risk tend to be members of households and groups experiencing socioeconomic and cultural discrimination and disadvantage. The at-risk students are deemed to be more vulnerable to some harm about even violence or sexual abuse. And usually they do not have enough resources to improve the situation. So the connotations of the "at-risk youth" means those who a tray from the "normal" part of being an adult.

### **3-2. Professions for managing uncertainty**

In spite of the association or credentials, knowledge is an important component of the profession. A profession controls knowledge by having the skill or abstraction ability (Abbott 1988: 8). The counseling professions attain the jurisdiction of troubled student by the abstraction ability to redefine the problem. 1990s, before the trouble students were not the main business of the counseling office. The counseling profession was introduced from American discipline to Taiwan for vocational guidance purposes. Although counseling profession also related to student emotional well-being, the issue was not the priority for the high tension examine the competition. At the same time, the discipline section of student affairs overly administered the defiant student and juvenile delinquency, those who are more likely get involved in truant, flunk, dropout, or even violence and sexual abuse. Thus the counseling section handles with the academic guidance while the discipline section governed the behavior norm. However, the division of labor shifted as the social structure changed. Since economic growth rapidly in 1990s, juvenile crime rates also increased sharply at the same time. School administrators apprehended the disciplinary way was not working effectively as usual. At that time, the counseling profession used abstracting ability to redefine the problems and task in a new way. The experts pointed out the increase were related to the personal ability of mental adaptation. When the external environment changes, everyone has the probability having temporal or long-term mental adoption issue. In 1998, the new system of experimental programs for student guidance launched. The program lets the guidance and counseling profession, having justification to get involve the student behavior affair. As Abbott (1988) gives a definition of profession are somewhat exclusive groups of individuals applying somewhat abstract knowledge to particular cases (318). So the abstraction of knowledge helps the counseling profession redefining the case and gains the jurisdiction of student problem.

Beside the redefinition of the problem, experts need to acquire formal knowledge and tacit knowledge about the object. So teacher-counselors were trained to work with variety type of students, especially the troubled student. On one hand, teacher-counselors learned formal knowledge of the college program, including psychological theories and practice internship. Or teachers could depend on criteria on a guidebook and professional experience. On the other hand, teacher-counselors gained tacit knowledge from everyday work, like identifying risk

factor or constructing an expert-client relationship. To maintain a relationship is more like a skill, craft or tacit knowledge. The tacit knowledge depends on the individual and context that is hard to verbalize (Svensson 1990: 62-63). The personality may influence the way that teacher-counselor interacts with students. Just as one of my respondents told me she had a creative experience of breaking the ice. She notices that her client was fond of the high - fashion thing like makeup or dress up. Once when she counseled with her client, she gave her a flyer with information on it about a nail polish product. The respondent told to the student "please choose a color that best represent your mood today." The student surprised about ice breaking and felt close to the teacher-counselor. Since that, the student has become more willing to talk to the teacher-counselor. This strategy depends on the personality of both of the teacher-counselor and student. It would not be effective beyond the context. The tacit knowledge is accumulated in everyday work.

### **3-3. Work with at-risk student**

The collecting of the student information is an important process. There is a common form for Taiwan student to document their school performance that called "AB form". Literary, there are A page and B page of the form. On one page, the student would fill in the personal information like address, family member's status, parents' occupation, household income, hobbies, good friends in school on the A side. On the other page, homeroom teacher and teacher-counselor record the observation of performance and personality of the student. If teacher-counselor has interviewed the student, it would show the meeting point on the B page. The AB form is like a risk biographies. As Kelly (2007) argues governing individualized risk biographies promote the emergence of an increasingly risky stage of the life course (47). The social classification such as foreign-born Taiwanese, indigenous youth, single parenthood, low-income family, domestic violence are easier to identify as the at-risk student. Some teachers beware of the labeling effect. Students need to fill the AB form from elementary school till senior high school. When a student transfers to another school, his/ her AB form also passes to the new school from the former school. In the school rule, the AB form would be reserved for ten years for reference. Furthermore, if the teacher-counselors concern about some specific student, they could go to the student's former school counseling office to give them the student's AB form. As the proverb said, a straw shows which way the wind blows. The profile in AB form may give some clue to teacher-counselor what troubles the student in some aspect. The AB form makes the student's behavior tracking possible in the archival way during the twelve-year compulsory education. It makes the risk surveillance being cross-life stage.

In addition to AB form, some teacher-counselor would contact the teacher-counselor at the former school. Like Wendy's case, she gave a home visiting to 8 grade boy who frequently truants in office Hours. She surprisingly saw the boy's younger sister also at home. The little sister was studying on her first grade in the elementary school nearby the junior high school where Wendy worked. For the little girl did not seemly in sick leave, Wendy asked her why she was at home not going to school. The girl innocently replied "Because of the hot weather, my mother cannot be bothered to take me to school." Wendy worried the mother will keep spoiling the children. Due to the school district, the girl has highly chance to enroll the school where Wendy might work in the future. For precautionary, Wendy actively contacted the

teacher-counselor at the elementary school to beware of the girl's absent. The connection between different studying stages called assistances in transitions. It helps the risk surveillance woven into the fabric of compulsory education.

In addition to the archival form, homeroom teacher's observation is also an influential source of student information. Some teacher-counselors even observant students by themselves. One of my respondent Tom said that he would observe the facial expression of the student, or even the integration of students to each other. He especially notices who show gloomy or stays, distance with others. After class, Tom will invite the student having small talk with him if the student needs. The other respondent Peggy also has similar tips on observation. She is even more sensitive to psychological syndrome because Peggy took several psychiatric cases before when teaching in senior high. Peggy had a case the girl is usually being late for school and reluctant to attend the class. One-day the girl's mother called Peggy for help getting her daughter to school that the girl hanging in the park near the school. When Peggy saw the girl, her intuition was telling her that the girl was something wrong. The girl's bangs were too long to cover her eyes and she did not have any facial expression just like a wooden puppet. Peggy asked the girl that was she sleeping well recently and whether she heard crackling sound or seeing light spot when she closed eyes. It is some syndrome of auditory hallucination - an experience in which someone see, hear, feel, or smell something that does not exist, usually because there are ill or have taken a drug. Then Peggy suggests the girl to go to hospital psychiatry. The psychiatrist's diagnosis, proof that the girl indeed has a psychiatric problem. This observation is an important method of gathering information about the student. It could facilitate teacher-counselor to decide how to help the student.

The core work of the counseling is conversation. Some students are eloquent and willing to talk. Usually this kind of clients create a diversion to distract the teacher-counselor from deepening their heart. However the challenging part for a teacher - counselor who face the children and teenager is not the talkative client, is "mute client" - who are uncommunicative. Some mute clients are not good at expressing themselves discursively. Others are not trusted with a teacher - counselor. Because most of the students are passively referal to the teacher-counselor, they sometimes feel distressed or hostile to teacher-counselor. Handling this kind of case, Wendy described the students just like "stone" that do not have any reaction to whatever she does everything.

#### **4. Discussion**

The research results indicate that the counseling system is indirectly influenced by the public opinion concerning the definition of "normal/healthy" student. The discussion on the topic of student counseling system management is helpful for clarifying the social control and social norms hidden behind the counseling system. The discussion is also helpful for monitoring schools that in order to protect social order justify the management of "problems" and "risk" student behavior.

The tertiary prevention categorizes the student at-risk behavior and creates an inter-professional division of labor. It shows the behavior expectation for the children and teenager in school. As a professional in school to promote students' mental health, the teacher-counselor is the mediator of the tertiary prevention. In theoretical, each profession should cooperate together to help the needed student. However, each discipline has different jurisdictions defining "At-risk" and administrative priority. There is unbalanced teacher-counselor to student ratio problem. At-risk students are significant risk targets. The at-risk students are deemed to be more vulnerable to some harm and having difficulty to adulthood. The experts pointed out the increase were related to the personal ability of mental adaptation. So the abstraction of knowledge helps the counseling profession redefining the case and gains the jurisdiction of student problem. Experts require formal knowledge and tacit knowledge about the at-risk student. They learned formal knowledge in the training program and tacit knowledge from everyday work. When working with students, collecting of the student information is an important process. Teacher-counselors use AB form to get the student profile. The AB form makes the student's behavior tracking possible in the archival way during the twelve-year compulsory education. It makes the risk surveillance being cross-life stage. The connection between different studying stages called assistances in transitions. It helps the risk surveillance woven into the fabric of compulsory education. Another tacit knowledge is to construct the relationship with the student. It is essential to let the student trust the teacher-counselor. The teacher - counselor needs to construct a relationship with the student to have a conversation with them, so that they could clarify the student's problem and to help them. Overall, the tertiary prevention makes the risk surveillance more comprehensive, well-identified and cross-life stage. It is for all of the student that prevent them to be in real trouble. With the help of some criteria and tool, the teacher-counselor could be more scrutiny of some trait of at-risk. And the prevention is not only in the present, but also the past and the future. In short, the findings indicate the order of the socialization for teenagers that the Taiwanese society tends to sustain.

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