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PROGRAM EVALUATION OF SCHOOL-BASED MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING SERVICES

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PROGRAM EVALUATION OF SCHOOL-BASED
MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELING SERVICES

A Project
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Social Work

by
Emily Ann Rodriguez
Yvette Torres
May 2024

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Approved by:

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the effectiveness of school-based mental health (SBMH) services from a mental and behavioral health program at a School District in Southern California, specifically counseling services, on academic performance and attendance for K-12 students. This study targets students from minority groups and low-income families, who often face unmet mental health needs. This research fills a gap in the literature regarding the effectiveness of SBMH counseling services on academic success by analyzing data from 151 participants ($N = 151$) collected via the school district's electronic systems, focusing on program enrollment during the 2022-2023 academic year. Utilizing the pretest-posttest design, this evaluation assessed students' academic progress and attendance before and after they received mental health counseling services. The findings indicated a significant improvement in attendance, with absences decreasing post-enrollment in the program ($p < .0001$). However, GPA scores post-enrollment did not show a statistically significant increase ($p = .303$), suggesting the program's limited effect on academic performance. Despite having a minimal impact on GPA, the notable improvement in attendance emphasizes the value of integrating mental health services into school-based settings. These findings hold implications for stakeholders in other school districts, addressing the potential for SBMH services to enhance student well-being, leading to improved long-term academic outcomes. However, further research is required to fully understand the effects on academic performance.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to our families and loved ones for your unconditional love and support throughout our academic journey. We thank the Director and partner of the Behavioral and Mental Health Department for collaborating with us to make this project possible. Thank you for being mentors and leaders and for focusing on your program's growth and development. You are an inspiration to the community. Thank you for being compassionate and strengthening our dedication to social work. Your resiliency and passion are highly admired. We would also like to thank Dr. Armando Barragán, our project advisor at California State University, San Bernardino. Thank you for your guidance and your dedicated time to this project. As first-generation college students, we recognize that we could not have achieved this without the support and encouragement of all those mentioned above. Gracias por ser parte de nuestra historia, se les agradece mucho. ¡MUCHAS GRACIAS!

DEDICATION

We want to dedicate this research project to the minority community and low-income families facing challenges and striving for a better life. We see your pain in silence; we encourage you to start overcoming the stigma of mental health and break generational cycles. Seeking support can foster healthy relationships and contribute to positive outcomes in the community.

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CHAPTER ONE

PROBLEM FORMULATION

Introduction

Mental health is defined as a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her potential, can cope with the everyday stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and can contribute to her or his community (World Health Organization, 2022). Mental health is essential at every stage of life, from childhood and adolescence through adulthood. Mental health involves psychological, emotional, and social well-being. Learning and being aware of how an individual's thoughts, emotions, and behaviors are affected is necessary. Students who experience unmet social and emotional needs or traumatic events in their lives may encounter challenges that do not just affect their mental health but also affect their academic performance (Albeg & Castro-Olivo, 2014).

Purpose of the Study

The School District in Southern California that is being studied has a Department of Behavioral and Mental Health that is relatively new and provides mental and behavioral health services to students within their school district. This program aims to provide students with social and emotional support by limiting or removing social barriers that may prevent or impede students from experiencing a successful future. Counseling is an essential component of this program that contributes to addressing and reducing those barriers.

The overall purpose of this study was to evaluate the effectiveness of the School District's Department of Behavioral and Mental Health Program, specifically the counseling services, on students' academic and attendance progress. This program evaluation is an essential contribution to social work practice because the evaluation data may provide helpful information for the School District to determine the mental health statuses of the students, academic outcomes, and attendance status or modify the quality of their program if needed. A program evaluation could determine what is effective and find areas for improvement (The Administration for Children and Families, 2010).

This research study aimed to answer the question: Does the School District's Behavioral and Mental Health Counseling Services impact students' academic success? This research is essential for appraising the effects of SBMH counseling on students' school performance. The School District consists of elementary, middle, and high schools, serving over 20,000 students. This research will benefit the community by spreading awareness and providing valuable information on the effectiveness of SBMH counseling for school-aged children. This study may also positively impact other school districts' changes or improvements in mental health services.

Significance of the Project for Social Work. The findings of this study carry implications for social work research and practice for macro policy informing mental health stakeholders and policymakers. Social workers can rely on the findings to advocate by proposing policies that reinforce existing SBMH programs

across various school districts. Additionally, initiating development in districts lacking mental health services, with a special focus on those serving low-income, minority populations. As the majority of students within the School District are low-income, Hispanic/Latinx, it is important to recognize the urgent need for targeted mental health support. This project aims to highlight and address this critical gap by advocating for increased access to SBMH services and proposing specific policy recommendations that could serve as models for enhancing programs. By doing so, the study contributes to the broader social work literature and offers practical strategies for improving mental health outcomes among vulnerable student populations.

On a micro-level, social workers can utilize this study's findings to improve their understanding of mental health counseling's role within school districts and its effects on students' social and emotional well-being. They have a critical role in advocating for individualized support, which includes seeking out resources, accommodations, or changes in the school environment to support the mental health of all students. This advocacy is crucial in mitigating the stigmatization often associated with mental health counseling, thereby increasing the utilization of services among those in need. Furthermore, the findings may help increase parent involvement by making mental health services understandable and demonstrating the value of counseling in schools. This, in turn, is anticipated to lead to higher enrollment rates in SBMH programs, contributing to a supportive

school environment that promotes students' mental and emotional well-being and academic success.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The research focuses on SBMH counseling and its potential impact on students' academic achievement and school attendance rates. This study aimed to identify positive outcomes on the academic grades of kindergarten through 12th-grade students who have received mental health counseling services at their schools. Specifically, it sought to determine whether SBMH counseling effectively improves students' school academics and attendance rates.

Research on Academic Performance

Academics are essential to the educational outcomes that evaluate students' academic progress. Report cards are mandated by law under The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, and the Every Student Succeeds Act for local and state elementary and middle schools. They serve to document and monitor students' academic performance (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Borghans et al. (2016) found that grades and achievement can measure student intelligence and effectively predict life outcomes. Additionally, report cards that contain students' grades are essential for parents as they provide them with a comprehensive understanding of their children's achievements and academic limitations (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). These grading reports also promote parent involvement in their children's

academic lives because they provide information about their academic performance and progress (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Furthermore, grades are feedback for students to receive praise for their achievements and acknowledge their challenges (Guskey, 2022). An essential part of this perspective is for schools to educate the students and their parents that their grades reflect their performance, not their skills (Guskey, 2022). Grades and assessments are meant to provide students and parents with a clear depiction of where their level of learning lies in their educational progress at a particular stage, not indefinitely (Guskey, 2022). Grades and report cards are a legal academic requirement and necessary to evaluate, guide, and challenge students to continue improving and maintaining an outstanding academic path (Guskey, 2022; U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Moreover, grades and report cards are indispensable tools in the educational process, empowering students and parents with valuable insights and guidance to navigate their academic journey.

Research on School Attendance. Literature on school attendance emphasizes the requirement under California law that everyone between the ages of six and eighteen must attend school. Exceptions include students who have graduated from high school or passed the California High School Proficiency Exam (CHSPE) and obtained parental permission (California Department of Education, 2022). Regular attendance is vital to providing students with learning opportunities; opportunities are limited when students are

absent. Research shows that attendance is essential to student achievement (National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). Chronic absenteeism is a widespread hidden educational crisis. About one out of every six students have missed fifteen or more school days during the 2015-2016 school year. Chronic absenteeism rates appear highest among high school students (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

Challenges and Impacts of Chronic Absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism varies due to several challenges faced by families and students, including socio-economic hardship, limited transportation, lack of safety, poor health, bullying, mental health issues, trauma, and more. These challenges can cause adverse effects on students' social and emotional development, magnifying learning disabilities, developmental delays, and related disorders. For instance, according to the Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA), approximately 32 percent of adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 years old are affected by anxiety disorders (ADAA, 2022). Addressing chronic absenteeism requires a complex approach incorporating social and mental health support systems and educational interventions. This approach is crucial to ensure that all students have equitable access to learning opportunities and support services.

SBMH Counseling. Schools are suitable locations to provide mental health services; students are more likely to seek services when they are available in schools. Care delivery can overcome critical barriers faced by low-income children and families (JAACAP, 2018). Mental health counseling may add

significant value in schools because it provides more accessible mental health care opportunities while diminishing the stigma attached to receiving mental health counseling (Christian & Brown, 2018). SBMH interventions may include psychoeducation, problem-solving, emotion regulation, prevention, early intervention, and other coping strategies. Counseling services can improve positive school climates and provide a safe and nurturing environment. Previous studies show that school-based mental health programs decrease negative behaviors and promote better emotional outcomes. Some positive outcomes include decreasing disciplinary referrals, truancy rates, and suspensions and improving school attendance, grades, and grade promotions (Kang-yi et al., 2013).

Relationship Between Academics, Attendance, and SBMH Counseling.

Limited research exists concerning the relationship between the effects of school-based mental health counseling on academics, attendance, and graduation rates. Larson et al. (2017) found that SBMH counseling is an effective tool in reducing symptoms of childhood trauma in students who utilize the services. Thus, the utilization of services and the reduction of symptoms lead to improved GPAs, attendance rates, and decreased school dropouts among high school students (Larson et al., 2017).

Evidence specifically on the impact on academic achievement suggests that child-centered play therapy (CCPT), a therapeutic approach that promotes children's expression through play techniques, has been found to increase

children's academic success on the Young Children's Achievement Test (YCAT) (Blanco & Ray, 2011). The YCAT measures first-grade students' five academic areas: general information, reading, mathematics, writing, and spoken language (Blanco & Ray, 2011). The scores from the YCAT were calculated, and Blanco & Ray (2011) found higher overall scores among children who had engaged in 16 sessions of play therapy as opposed to children who did not. SBMH counselors who work with children can help them achieve academic success by addressing mental health concerns that may affect their performance in school. This might involve techniques such as CCPT.

Students facing mental health challenges may impair learning and cognitive thinking; a decline in performance may result in high-pressure expectations of assignments and exams. Providing mental health counseling services can help address risk factors for poor academic performance. Counseling services can help students meet unmet needs and provide safety and a sense of connection that helps human motivation. In addition, counseling services can help modify behaviors and teach students new skills to adapt for academic improvement.

A consistent pattern of school attendance is imperative to a student's academic success. Students who reported experiencing mental health issues demonstrated poor attendance at school in comparison to students who did not (Lawrence et al., 2019). When students are suspended, they are inhibited from attending school, thus impacting their academic performance.

Ballard et al. (2014) found that the implementation of SBMH services affected children's suspension rates in that they caused a significant reduction in suspensions by the end of the treatment period. The decrease in suspensions may positively impact attendance rates, considering that children attend more school days than receiving suspensions. Therapeutic techniques such as critical thinking skills and coping strategies taught by a school-based counselor may be contributing factors that encourage change in students' behavior. This results in decreased disciplinary actions against them through suspensions (Ballard et al., 2014). Therefore, integrating SBMH services not only directly supports students' mental well-being but also contributes to an improved learning environment by enhancing attendance rates and academic outcomes, demonstrating the critical role of mental health interventions in promoting educational success.

Theory Guiding Conceptualization. Program evaluation theory (PET) is the systematic collection and analysis of information related to a program's design, implementation, and outcomes to monitor and improve the quality and effectiveness of the program (Frye et al., 2012). This approach has been increasing throughout the years and utilized by not-for-profit organizations. Federal research financiers have discussed it to measure functioning and efficacy (Rogers et al., 2000). In other words, program evaluations aim to identify effective contributions and address the need to strengthen a program's quality (Rogers et al., 2000).

There is a multitude of interconnected components of PET: the output model, which is services provided by a program; the outcome model, which is the observation of particular changes within a program; and the impact model, which analyzes the results of a whole program in its entirety (Linzalone & Schiuma, 2015). The outcome and impact models yield results similar to the output (Linzalone & Schiuma, 2015). Due to the broad nature of PET, all three of these models are interrelated and can be utilized when preparing to evaluate a complex structured program (Rogers et al., 2000).

PET helped appraise the effectiveness of the School District's Behavioral and Mental Health Counseling Services by utilizing the output model for the counseling interventions and resources, the outcome model as a representation of the student academics and school attendance, and the impact model for the evaluation of the effectiveness of the SBMH counseling (Linzalone & Schiuma, 2015). The complexity of PET contributed to the feedback that the Behavioral and Mental Health Program may refer to in determining whether or not the elements of their counseling services benefit the recipients. Additionally, the empirical evidence generated from this theory and the overall study will have a long-lasting impact on the Behavioral and Mental Health Program.

Significant Themes and Limitations of Literature. Little is known about the effectiveness of SBMH services. Historical data revealed gaps in the literature on mental health counseling and its effectiveness. Further research is required to explain barriers such as alternative interventions, attitudes toward receiving

services, and maintenance or long-term durability of post-treatment outcomes in order to understand better the utilization of SBMH services among students.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODS

Introduction

This study assessed the impact of SBMH counseling services on academic performance and attendance among students who participated in the School District's behavioral and mental health counseling program. This chapter provides a detailed explanation of the process for executing this program evaluation. The following sections will be reviewed: study design, sampling, data collection and instruments, procedures, protection of human subjects, and data analysis.

Study Design

This study evaluated students' academic performance and attendance before and after receiving SBMH counseling services within one academic calendar year. This research project is a program evaluation that assessed the effectiveness of the behavioral and mental health program and the quality of its counseling services. Due to the necessity of analyzing the progress of subjects prior to and after receiving counseling, this is a pretest-posttest design. This quantitative study used secondary data from the School District's electronic documentation system.

Analyzing secondary data saved time compared to primary data collection. An additional advantage is a more significant opportunity to collect more data in a shorter period. Furthermore, the electronic documentation system provided

access to all attendance rates, academic grades, mental health counseling services duration, and interventions utilized during counseling sessions. The population being studied is students within the School District. It was the most effective method to gather data that had been previously collected in an electronic system to provide accurate and valid results, rather than interviewing or surveying the students or parents, which may generate subjective results. Moreover, the secondary data facilitated the data-gathering process by clearly identifying students who may have been referred to an external mental health clinic for a higher level of treatment.

Utilizing a pretest-posttest design allowed researchers to evaluate students' academic performance and attendance before they began receiving mental health counseling and measure any changes that may have occurred. However, a limitation of this design is that it may not have accounted for confounding variables between the pretest and posttest measurements, such as tutoring services, attendance incentivizing programs, or the long break during the summer. Using an experimental design not only added to the pre-existing time constraint of the research project but limited the ability to control for some extraneous variables. Furthermore, using quantitative data generated from these research designs provided personal details of students' thoughts and experiences from receiving mental health counseling.

This study answered the following question: Does the School District's Behavioral and Mental Health counseling services affect students' academic

achievements and attendance? The hypothesis was that the School District's counseling services positively impact students' academic achievements and school attendance rates.

Sampling

This study utilized a secondary data sampling method of students attending SBMH counseling services from the School District. The target population was Elementary, Middle, and High school students who began receiving services in the Fall or Spring of the 2022-2023 academic school year. The Behavioral and Mental Health Program Director was contacted to approve access to their existing documentation system and the school district's student database.

Data Collection and Instruments

Secondary data was collected via the School District's electronic documentation system and student database in the Fall of 2023. The independent variable for this study is the School District's mental health counseling services. Two dependent variables were measured: academic performance and attendance. Both dependent variables were measured by utilizing historical data of the participants recorded in the program's documentation system, and the school district's student database. Participants were students enrolled in the School District who had begun receiving counseling services in the Fall or Spring of the 2022-2023 academic school year and had completed the program. Demographic information, including gender

identification, age, achieved education level, nationality, and ethnicity or religion, was collected for this study. Information regarding the primary interventions used for treatment during mental health counseling sessions was also examined and collected to assess the effectiveness of the counseling services.

The researchers collected secondary data with the program director's assistance. Data extraction was utilized specifically for this study to elicit students referred out for a higher level of treatment, students who started counseling services within the 2022-2023 academic year, and students who have completed the program. The data was collected on the student's academic performance and attendance from the semester prior to and after the completion of the program.

Procedures

A letter was written to provide information about the purpose of this study and the necessity for gathering historical student data. This letter was given to the Behavioral and Mental Health program director for approval to access the program's documentation system and retrieve the data of the students who had received mental health counseling services. Since the data and demographic statistics gathered are secondary data, it was unnecessary to solicit students' participation or ask for parental consent. Since the demographic data is archival, it was utilized for this study.

A space with cubicles, desks, and Chromebooks was provided to assist the researchers in data retrieval at the School District Office. Time and dates

were organized to ensure data was completed and collected promptly. The data gathering included the utilization of the documentation system to access notes regarding individual cases to identify client participation, diagnoses, and interventions implemented by providers. Researchers utilized Microsoft Excel spreadsheets to organize and store historical data. Additionally, access to the student database for retrieval of students' information regarding attendance reports and GPA was required to assess the effectiveness of mental health counseling on academic performance and attendance.

Protection of Human Subjects

Both researchers have completed the ethics training with certification (CITI Certificate) to ensure confidentiality and protect participants. Approval from California State University San Bernardino Institutional Review Board was granted for the study. Identifying information about the students was not disclosed in this study. However, identifiable confidential information was obtained to extract the students' academic and attendance information from their electronic charts. Nonetheless, the students' identifiable personal information was reported in this study to maintain confidentiality. The only student information disclosed in this study was academic performance, attendance, diagnoses, and interventions. The data remained confidential and stored in a locked office at the School District. Three years after the completion of the study,

all of the data collected will be eliminated from the Microsoft Excel computer program.

Data Analysis

The independent variable statistically analyzed is the School District's mental health counseling services, while the dependent variables are academic progress and attendance. The IV and the DVs were analyzed using a t-test for paired samples. To analyze students' academic performance and attendance, datasets for GPA points and the total number of school days attended and absent were created using SPSS software. GPA points were categorized into SPSS using an interval measurement scale, whereas the total number of attendances and absences were categorized using a ratio measurement scale.

Summary

This study evaluated the effectiveness of the School District's Behavioral and Mental health counseling services on students' academic performance and attendance. Secondary data assisted in collecting records of students' academic grades and attendance rates pre- and post-receiving counseling services. The findings determined if counseling services positively impact students' academic performance and attendance.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the data collected through the School District's electronic databases gathered from participants who have completed SBMH counseling services during the 2022-2023 academic year. It analyzed the participants' records of academic grades and attendance rates pre- and post-receiving counseling services. Demographic information, including gender identification, age, achieved education level, nationality, and ethnicity were analyzed for this study. The study also examined client participation, diagnoses, and primary interventions used during treatment to evaluate the effectiveness of the counseling services.

Frequency Distributions

A total of 151 students were sampled for this study. The participants are predominantly Hispanic/Latino heritage, representing 92.1% of the total sample. The remainder of the population comprises 3.3% White students, 2% African American students, and 2.6% students of Other/Asian/American Indian/Alaskan Native/Biracial backgrounds. Regarding gender distribution, female students account for 59.6% of the population, and males represent 40.4% of the population. The distribution across school levels consists of three categories: Elementary, Middle, and High School. Elementary students comprise 41.7% of the population with sixty-three students, Middle School students represent 27.8%

with forty-two students, and High School students account for 30.5% with forty-six students.

Paired Sample T-Test. A t-test for paired samples was conducted to compare the means of the number of absences and GPA scores before and after enrollment into counseling services. The analysis revealed significant results for absences but not for GPA. The data in Table 2 demonstrates a significant decrease in the number of absences post-enrollment, with a mean reduction of 2.255 (SD = 6.902), $t(148) = 3.988$, $p < .001$, indicating a reliable decrease in the number of absences. On the contrary, Table 3 presents results for GPA scores before and after. The data reveals that there was no significant change found, as the mean difference was -0.039 (SD = 0.924), with a t-value of -5.17 and non-significant p-value ($p = .606$ for the two-sided test), suggesting that any change in GPA scores could be attributed to random variation rather than enrollment in counseling services.

Table 1.

Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variable	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	61	40.4
Female	90	9.6
School Level		
Elementary School	63	41.7
Middle School	42	27.8
High School	46	30.5
Ethnicity		
Hispanic	139	92.1
White	5	3.3
African American	3	2.0
Other/Asian/American Indian/Alaskan Native/Biracial	4	2.6

Table 2.

Mean Differences in Number of Absences Before and After Intervention

	M	SD	SE	95% CI	t	df	p
Absence Difference	2.255	6.902	.565	[1.138, 3.372]	3.988	148	<.001

Table 3.

Differences in GPA Total Unweighted Scores Before and After Intervention

	M	SD	SE	95% CI	t	df	p
GPA Difference	-0.039	0.924	0.075.	[-0.188, 0.110]	-5.17	149	.606

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter will provide a synopsis of the results to address the research question: Does the School District's Behavioral and Mental Health counseling services affect students' academic achievements and school attendance? The results highlighted the significance of the utilization of SBMH programs. Based on the findings, the researchers explored recommendations for social work practice, policy, and future research to help improve the effectiveness of SBMH counseling services within the School Districts in Southern California.

Consistency with Previous Findings

Research into the impact of SBMH counseling services on students' attendance and academic performance are limited. Previous findings suggest counseling services and implementing child-centered play therapy interventions improve GPA scores and attendance rates (Blanco & Ray, 2011; Larson et al., 2017). While an increase in attendance was found in this research study, the findings on GPA scores were inconsistent. This shows that further exploration is required to understand better the impact of SBMH services on attendance and GPA.

Additional studies show that SBMH programs help decrease truancy and suspensions while improving attendance and academic performance (Kang-yi et al., 2013). This highlights the role of addressing unmet mental health needs in

enhancing student outcomes. Furthermore, the literature demonstrates a positive relationship between SBMH counseling and decreased suspension rates in children, which translates to fewer absences (Ballard et al., 2014). Although our current study examined the total number of absences rather than suspension rates specifically, the findings demonstrate the potential for SBMH services affect attendance positively.

The existing literature already acknowledges that SBMH programs not only reduce truancy and suspensions but also sustain improvements in attendance and academic performance (Kang-yi et al., 2013; Ballard et al., 2014). These findings align with our results, highlighting the potential for SBMH services to improve attendance, although effects on GPA scores remain inconclusive, suggesting the need for further research. Additionally, the literature connects chronic absenteeism with border socio-economic issues, including financial instability, safety and security, and unmet mental health needs, which, although not directly measured in our study, could influence chronic absenteeism (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). This broader perspective supports our findings and indicates significant areas for future investigation, especially the indirect effects of socioeconomic factors on academic outcomes.

Implications of the Findings. The research exhibits a substantial need for the widespread implementation of SBMH services across all school districts in the nation, with a particular focus on serving minority groups facing unmet mental health needs. There is a profound opportunity for communities to engage with

and learn from this research, which could support increased participation in these school-based programs. An important aspect to consider is that minority groups often encounter financial and educational barriers that inhibit their access to mental health services in non-school settings. SBMH services offer easier accessibility for these communities to receive their needed support.

Implications of the Findings for Social Work Practice. The findings from this research suggests a significant need for social workers to advocate for SBMH services, particularly in school districts that serve minority groups, such as the one studied in this research project, which mainly serves the Hispanic/Latino communities. Furthermore, the findings suggest an increased demand for social workers within school settings. Employing more social workers in schools can facilitate the implementation of SBMH services and ensure these programs are accessible, culturally competent, and effective. Social workers can also play a crucial role in raising awareness about the importance of mental health services, reducing stigma and encouraging using these services among students and their families.

Implications for Policy. Currently, there are no existing policies surrounding mandates for the availability of mental health counseling services in every school district in the U.S. Establishing this policy could facilitate change, ensuring that all students have access to mental health support despite their socioeconomic backgrounds. Implementing a policy requirement for school districts to offer mental health counseling would be particularly transformative for

minority and low-income families. By integrating these services within the school settings, we can ensure an equal opportunity where mental health support is seen as a right rather than a luxury.

Limitations of the Findings. One limitation of this study was the absence of measurement for certain confounding variables, such as the number of absences and attendance rates. The summer break between semesters created a gap during which several factors could have impacted students' attendance and GPA scores. Factors such as potentially limited socialization, increased boredom, or even increased extracurricular activities may have impacted student outcomes but were not accounted for in the analysis. During data collection, limitations were encountered regarding the verification of absences. Some absences were left unverified, making it difficult to determine the accuracy of the absence records. Another significant limitation was that COVID-19 appeared to account for a considerable number of absences. The pandemic disrupted traditional schooling patterns, leading to various health and safety measures that profoundly affected student attendance and academic performance. Consequently, it is difficult to determine whether attendance rates and GPA scores would have exhibited equivalent results without the impact of the pandemic.

Conclusion

This research aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of SBMH counseling services on students' academic performance and attendance. Based on the data collected, it highlights the utilization of SBMH services in vulnerable communities

within Southern California. Furthermore, there is an increased exposure to available services for families to help meet their needs. By implementing these recommendations, families will have additional support and direct engagement with social workers to address their needs. In the meantime, the findings of this study can inform local mental health stakeholders by continuing to contribute and collaborate with schools in other vulnerable populations. These findings can help serve as a template for future research.

APPENDIX A
IRB APPROVAL

IRB #: IRB-FY2023-220

Title: Program Evaluation of Colton Joint Unified School District School Based Mental Health Counseling Service

Creation Date: 2-2-2023

End Date:

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Armando Barragan Jr.

Review Board: Main IRB Designated Reviewers for School of Social Work

Sponsor:

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ASSIGNED RESPONSIBILITIES

This research study was a collaboration between two researchers who worked together on the implications of this project. Both researchers completed the necessary sections of the project in a joint effort, including conducting literature reviews, collecting, and analyzing data, creating figure tables, interpreting results, and editing the manuscript. The outcome of this study displays hard work, dedication, and interest in specialization.