Counseling Preferences of Homeschooling Families

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Abstract

This study measured homeschooling parents' perceptions of actual and preferred frequency of counseling activities. A cross-sectional online survey gathered responses from 276 participants to demographic questions and to the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS). Findings provided information on homeschool parents' counseling preferences, and pointed to recommendations on effective ways to expand counseling services to homeschoolers. The number of years a family has homeschooled was a demographic characteristic that predicted the size of the difference between actual and preferred frequency of counseling activities, with families who are more recently homeschooling having a larger unfilled preference for counseling activities. Data also revealed a weak but significant positive correlation between homeschooling for special needs and preferred frequency of counseling for students regarding school behavior and conducting small groups regarding family and personal issues. These results indicate that counselors might have a role providing services to families new to homeschooling and providing homeschool behavior counseling and small groups around family and personal issues for families homeschooling a special needs student.

Keywords: homeschooling, counseling, school counseling

WITH AN ESTIMATED 3.3% of American children being homeschooled without easy access to school counselors, it is important to collaborate with this community to determine and serve any unmet counseling needs (McQuiggan, 2017). According to the Center for Disease Control (CDC) nearly 1 in 5 children have a mental, emotional, or behavioral disorder and would benefit from early diagnosis and treatment. It is important to consider the ease of access to services for homeschooling families. Understanding the preferences of this community may help counselors offer appropriate services to their existing clients who homeschool and also allow the expansion of services to new families in a way that best meets their needs. Professional counselors, including school counselors, career counselors, mental health counselors, and marriage and family counselors, provide services that are culturally competent, and client centered with a focus on wellness and developmental needs, which could be a good fit for homeschools.

Homeschooling has gone from a fringe movement of 10,000 children in the 1970s to a mainstream alternative of nearly 1.8 million (Gaither, 2017). In 1985 a Gallup poll revealed that 70% of Americans thought homeschooling should be illegal (Gaither, 2017). Homeschooling has become normalized in the United States (U.S.) and homeschooled children are now commonly found in neighborhoods and friend and family networks (Murphy, 2013). With the advent of the global pandemic in 2020, students in the U.S. frequently attended school-at-home while maintaining enrollment in traditional schools. However, it has been noted that there are families who moved from school-at-home to independent homeschooling during this time, and the remaining impact is yet unknown (Hamlin, 2020).

The structure and process of school counseling may provide a template for providing counseling services to homeschools. ASCA's National Standards and Competencies outline the delivery of services in three counseling domains: academic, career, and social emotional and behavior standards and mindsets (ASCA, 2019). Additionally, these domains are addressed via direct student services (e.g., school counseling core curriculum, individual student planning, and responsive services) and indirect student services (e.g., referrals, consultation, and collaboration).

Children in public and private schools typically have access to counseling services within their schools, but it is unknown if the approximately 1.7 million homeschooled

children in the United States have access to similar counseling services (McQuiggan & Megra, 2017). Parents fill or find others to fill the teaching role in homeschools, but it is important to understand if the counseling role is also being filled. It may be that homeschool parents are not aware of the support services counselors can provide to children, families, teachers, and administrators in schools. There may be a space for professional counselors in family, mental health, school, and career counseling to provide that support.

School counseling activities in the domains of academic development, career development, and personal-social development take place in homeschools, but are not filled by professional school counselors. Mothers primarily take on the responsibility for home education in America, and that includes multiple roles as teacher, counselor, and administrator, and parent (Gysbers, 2010). In addition to parents, extended friend and family networks or community resources may be utilized to fill these multiple roles (Hanna, 2012). The American School Counseling Association (ASCA) created National Standards for school counseling activities based on a comprehensive foundation of academic, career, and personal-social development which would be a useful model for discussing counseling preferences and activities within homeschools (ASCA, 2004, 2019). An exploration of actual and preferred school counseling activities as perceived by parents of homeschooled children would enable licensed professional counselors, school counselors, marriage and family therapists, mental health counselors, and college and career counselors to better serve homeschooled clients and to expand counseling services to homeschooling families.

The literature on providing counseling or psychological support to the homeschool community is sparse. Arora (2003) wrote a conceptual article about the potential role for educational psychologists in the homeschool community. She noted the increase of children receiving education at home and the lack of professional support, especially for families with special needs. She also challenged the educational establishment to consider that the type of learning occurring in homeschools might be informative to schools. The pandemic has increased interest in the topic of homeschooling and mental health, with a collection of APA journal articles and a textbook on mental health and homeschooling calling for additional research and noting the role for mental health professionals (Teufel-Prida, 2021). The counseling profession is based on developmental, multicultural, and wellness models seeming to be an ideal source of support for the homeschool community.

Research Questions and Hypotheses
1. Can the difference between preferred and actual frequency of counseling services be predicted by years spent homeschooling, number or average age of children being

homeschooled, household income, or the reasons for homeschooling?
2. Is there a correlation between the preferred frequency of the overall counseling activity category and the reasons for homeschooling?
3. Is there a correlation between the preferred frequency of the ten individual counseling activities and the reasons for homeschooling?

Methods

This research used a cross-sectional online survey for data collection. We explored group differences based on the inherent characteristic of important reasons reported for homeschooling and preferred and actual frequency of counseling activities. Data was gathered using an online survey containing participant demographic questions and a frequency scale of preferred and actual school counseling activities in the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS). This survey gathered information on each family's reported important reason for homeschooling with subcategories of safer environment (safety, drugs, peer pressure, other); preferred academic instruction; preferred moral or religious instruction; and the physical, intellectual, mental health, or other special needs. Demographic information used in the analysis included length of time homeschooling, ages of children being homeschooled, number of children being homeschooled, and household income. Preferred and actual frequency of counseling activities were examined using a validated and reliable instrument within sub-categories of counseling, consultation, coordination, and curriculum. Demographic questions included, role of primary homeschool provider, role of person participating in survey, religious affiliation, and use of common support systems for homeschooling.

Participants
The sample consisted of U.S. parents 18 years old and over who were homeschooling at least one child age 5-17 years old during the data collection period of the study. Participants were recruited from online homeschool groups and events. Survey invitations were sent online to individual homeschoolers and to homeschool group leaders with a request to share with other homeschoolers. Convenience sampling was utilized through online access to homeschool discussion forums, social media sites, and listservs and posting invitations to the survey. In addition, websites with databases of homeschool group contacts across the U.S. were searched and an electronic invitation was sent to the contact with a request to share with the group. Anonymity was preserved as no identifying information was collected. Characteristics of the sample are provided in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Participant Demographics Utilized in Research Questions

Number of Years Homeschooling	n	%
1-2 years	56	20
3-4 years	40	15
5-6 years	40	15
7-8 years	44	16
9-10 years	22	8
11-12 years	17	6
13-14 years	16	6
15-16 years	14	5
17-18 years	3	1
19-20 years	10	4
Over 20 years	12	4

Number of Homeschooled Children in Household	n	%
1 child	125	45
2 children	96	35
3 children	34	12
4 children	13	5
5 children	3	1
More than 5 children	5	2

Household Income	n	%
$50,000 and under	49	19
$51,000-$100,000	110	42
$101,000-$150,000	61	23

Important or Very Important Reasons for Homeschooling [a]	n	%
Provide preferred academic instruction	258	93
Desire to meet physical, intellectual, mental health or other special needs	228	83
Provide safer environment (safety, drugs, peer pressure)	215	78
Provide religious or moral instruction	143	52

[a] Participants could select more than one reason as important or very important

Table 2

Additional Demographics

Role of Survey Respondent	n	%
Mother	265	96
Father	6	2
Other Parents	5	2

Geographic Regions of Participants (ACA Regions)	n	%
Midwest Region	100	36
Southern Region	79	29
Western Region	62	22
Northeast Region	35	13

Religious/Spiritual Affiliation	n	%
Christian	109	40
Atheist/Agnostic	74	27
Protestant	24	9
Catholic	22	8
Spiritual (not religious)	13	5
Interfaith	10	4
Buddhist	6	2
Unitarian	5	2
Pagan	4	1
Jewish	3	1
Islamic	2	1

Main Homeschooling Provider	n	%
Mother	256	93
Both parents	6	2
Father	5	2
Grandmother	3	1
Parent (no gender)	2	1
Teacher	2	1
Student	1	<1

Race/Ethnicity	n	%
White	212	77
Multi-racial	24	9
Hispanic/Latino	19	7
Black/African-American	7	3
Asian-American	3	1
American-Indian or Pacific Islander	2	<1
Non-respondent	9	3

Household Size	n	%
2 members	7	2
3 members	52	19
4 members	102	39
5 members	55	20
6 members	31	11
7 members	14	5
8 members	7	2
9 members	3	1
10 members	5	1

A list of the sources of support for participants can be seen on Table 3.

Table 3

Important Sources of Homeschool Support

Important Sources of Homeschooling Support	n	%
Homeschool Group	178	64
Partner	168	61
Friend	134	48
Professional	76	27
Relative	58	21
Other Support	55	20
Parent Group	30	11
Social Group	30	11
Local Church	29	10
Neighbor	8	03
Local School	7	02

[a] Participants could select more than one reason as important or very important

Measures

The SCARS is a 48-item valid and reliable scale based on the ASCA (ASCA) National Standards (Scarborough, 2005). The scale uses 5-item Likert-style responses to measure the perceived frequency of preferred school counseling activities and the perceived frequency of actual school counseling activities in the domains of counseling, consultation, curriculum, and coordination. The SCARS was developed through a review of counseling literature and the ASCA National Standards (Scarborough, 2005). The reliability and validity of SCARS was confirmed with a study of 361 professional school counselors. Construct validity was confirmed through factor analysis with validity of each of the five subscales reported; Curriculum (.93 actual and .90 preferred), Coordination (.84 actual and .85 preferred), Counseling (.85 actual and .83 preferred), Consultation (.75 actual and .77 preferred), and Other which includes clerical, administrative, and other non-guidance duties (.84 actual and .80 preferred). Convergent construct validity was determined by examining differences in reports of counselors at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels which mirrored what the literature indicated would be found. Differences between demographic information not expected to have a relationship to counseling activities and SCARS results were utilized to verify discriminate validity. Small correlations were found between the counselor's years of experience and Coordination and Consultation results on the SCARS, with less experienced counselors having a greater difference between their frequency of preferred and frequency of actual counseling activities.

Participants completing the SCARS reported the frequency of actual and preferred school counseling activities on a 5-point scale with the possible responses (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) occasionally, (4) frequently, and (5) routinely. Data collected was also reported as a mean score for each activity or as a mean score for each counseling sub-scale. Higher scores represented a higher perceived level of actual or preferred activity. There were ten items in the Counseling sub-scale, and a sample item was, "Counsel with students regarding school behavior." There were seven items in the Consultation sub-scale, and a sample item was, "Consult with parents regarding child/adolescent development issues." There were eight items in the Curriculum

sub-category, and a sample item was, "Conduct classroom lessons on conflict resolution." There were thirteen items in the Coordination sub-scale, and a sample item was, "Conduct or coordinate teacher in-service programs."

SCARS was utilized in previous research to measure school counselors' ratings of the frequency of actual and preferred counseling activities, as well as teacher, parent, and administrator perceptions of frequency of school counselor activities (Dye, 2014; Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008; Goodman-Scott, 2014). In addition, the SCARS instrument has been utilized within specific populations such as urban schools or predominantly African American schools, or within specific states (Scarborough & Culbreth, 2008; Goodman-Scott, 2014). This instrument has demonstrated broad and robust applications within a number of participant categories and across multiple populations.

Procedures

Before the survey for this study was released, approval from the MASKED IDENTITY Institutional Review Board (IRB) was obtained. The survey was distributed online to reach more diverse geographic regions and sub-populations in the homeschooling community which can be hard to reach through more traditional institutional methods. Online invitations with a link to the survey were emailed nationwide to homeschooling individuals and groups and posted to appropriate online homeschool sites and forums with a request to pass along the invitation to other homeschoolers. Responses were gathered anonymously and downloaded from SurveyMonkey to IBM Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) for data analysis.

The initial welcome page contained information on the survey content and a consent agreement. If a parent chose to voluntarily participate, they confirmed agreement and were taken to the second page with demographic questions. After the demographic questions, participants were directed to participants were sent to the final page: the SCARS instrument, the 48 items in the SCARS and rate the perceived frequency each counseling activity was actually performed in the homeschool, and the frequency they would have preferred each counseling activity be performed in the homeschool. The survey was designed to be completed in 15 to 20 minutes.

Data Analysis

There were three dependent variables in this study; actual frequency of counseling activities, preferred frequency of counseling activities, and the difference between the actual and preferred frequency of counseling activities as reported by homeschooling parents using the SCARS instrument. The independent variables used in this study were scaled importance of reason for homeschooling, length of time homeschooling, age of children being homeschooled, number of children being homeschooled, and household income. Descriptive statistics were provided for the dependent and independent variables. Inferential statistics such as multiple linear regression and correlations were used to determine the answers to the three operational hypothetical statements. Pearson Correlations were used to determine the relationship between the variables. The

importance of the reasons for homeschooling were scaled in 4 sub-categories: to provide a safer environment (safety, drugs, peer pressure, other); to provide preferred academic instruction; to provide moral or religious instruction; and to meet physical, intellectual, mental health, or other special needs. Standard multiple linear regression (MLR) was utilized to assess whether the 8 predictor variables would predict the criterion variable. Linearity, homoscedasticity and multicollinearity were assumptions that were assessed.

Results

A total of 276 homeschooling parents who met the previously listed inclusion criteria and completed the online survey with consent to participate were included in the results. The results of the three research questions were analyzed by using SPSS 27.0.1. Each research question and its associated hypotheses, analyses, and results are presented. Additionally, the simple descriptive analyses which follow were conducted on the demographic variables. Prior to responding to the questions in the SCARS instrument in the survey, participants were asked a number of demographic questions.

Research Question 1

The predictor variables in this analysis are all quantitative, continuous, and unbounded. They include years spent homeschooling, the number of children being homeschooled, the average age of children being homeschooled, the household income, and the importance of reasons for homeschooling (academic, religious, safety, special needs). The hypothesis is that these variables will predict the outcome variable, which is the difference or gap between the actual frequency and the preferred frequency of counseling activities in the counseling sub-scale of the School Counselor Activity Rating Scale (SCARS) as reported by parents of homeschooled children.

Multiple linear regression (MLR) was used to assess whether the eight predictor-variables would predict the outcome variable. Predictor variables were evaluated for what they added to the prediction of the outcome variable that was different from the predictability afforded by the other predictors in the model. The backwards regression method was utilized since there is not substantial literature on the topic of homeschooling and counseling. The backwards method is an exploratory process where all variables are entered and then one by one the variables are removed, and the new model evaluated. The least important variables are removed first and there is less chance of missing a predictor. An F-test was used to assess whether the sets of independent variables collectively predicted the outcome. The data was examined and met the presumptions of normality, homoscedasticity, and multi-collinearity.

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variables	n	m	SD
Gap in Counseling Subscale Item*	255	-2.1	6.6
Household Income	255	$107,160.	$70,080.
Years of Homeschooling	255	8.0	6.1
Number Children Homeschooled	255	1.9	1.1
Average Age of Children	255	10.5	3.8
Academic Reason Importance	255	4.6	.7
Religious/Moral Reason Importance	255	3.3	1.5
Safety Reason Importance	255	4.0	1
Special Needs Reason Importance	255	4.3	1

The regression model summary and ANOVA tables show 8 models with the first having all eight potential predictors included and using the backwards method of regression to remove a predictor that does not have a significant impact each time. R and R-square indicate the goodness of fit for the model. The R-squares of the eight predictor variables are all between .023 and .026, which indicates that each of the predictor variables in the model only accounts for 2% of the outcome variable. Adjusted R-square indicates an even lower amount of the variance in the outcome.

Table 5

Multiple Regression Model Summary

Model	R	R-square	Adjusted R-square	Standard Error Of Estimate
1	.162	**.026**	-.005	6.65
2	.162	**.026**	-.001	6.64
3	.162	**.026**	.003	6.63
4	.161	**.026**	.007	6.61
5	.160	**.026**	.010	6.60
6	.160	**.025**	.014	6.59
7	.158	**.025**	.017	6.58
8	.152	**.023**	.019	6.58

Model Number and Independent Variables Removed in Backwards Regression (see following)

1. No variables removed.
2. Religious/moral instructions important reason for homeschooling removed.
3. Estimated household income removed.
4. Preferred academic instruction important reason for homeschooling removed.
5. Number of children homeschooled removed.
6. Average age of children homeschooled removed.
7. Safer environment important reason for homeschooling removed.

Special-needs (physical, cognitive, emotional) important reason for homeschooling removed. Only number of years homeschooling remains.

Only two models where the F-value and ρ indicate the predictors may reliably predict the outcome. The first one is model 7 which contains two predictors; the number of years homeschooling, and special needs student as an important reason for homeschooling, with an F-value of 3.2 and a ρ of .04. The other model is model 8, which has the single predictor of number of years homeschooling has an F-value of 6 and a ρ of .02.

Table 6

ANOVA: Dependent Variable GAP in Frequency of Counseling Activities

Model		Sum of Sq.	df	Mean Sq.	F	Sig. (ρ)
1	Regression	294.3	8	36.8	**.83**	**.58**
	Residual	10890.7	246	44.3		
	Total	11185.0	254			
2	Regression	294.2	7	42.0	**1**	**.47**
	Residual	10890.8	247	44.1		
	Total	11185.0	254			
3	Regression	293.5	6	48.9	**1.1**	**.36**
	Residual	10891.5	248	43.9		
	Total	11185.0	254			
4	Regression	291.6	5	58.3	**1.3**	**.25**
	Residual	10893.4	249	43.7		
	Total	11185.0	254			
5	Regression	287.8	4	71.9	**1.7**	**.16**
	Residual	10897.2	250	43.6		
	Total	11185.0	254			
6	Regression	284.7	3	94.9	**2.2**	**.1**
	Residual	10900.3	251	43.4		
	Total	11185.0	254			
7	Regression	279.7	2	139.8	**3.2**	**.04**
	Residual	10905.3	252	43.3		
	Total	11185.0	254			
8	Regression	259.5	1	259.5	**6**	**.02**
	Residual	10925.5	253	43.2		
	Total	11185.0	254			

Model Number and the Independent Variables Removed in Backwards Regression
1. No variables removed.
2. Religious/moral instructions important reason for homeschooling removed from model.
3. Estimated household income removed from model.
4. Preferred academic instruction important reason for homeschooling removed.
5. Number of children homeschooled removed.
6. Average age of children homeschooled removed.
7. Safer environment important reason for homeschooling removed.
8. Special needs (physical, cognitive, emotional) important reason for homeschooling removed. The only remaining predictor variable is number of years homeschooling.
The two models which may have value in predicting the outcome are examined further.

Only the number of years homeschooling has a significance less than .05 indicating it is the only significant predictor of the outcome. It has a value of .15 indicating that number of years homeschooling is a small positive predictor of a gap between the perceived actual counseling activities in homeschooling and the preferred counseling activities.

Table 7

Coefficients of the Models

Model	B	SE B	βeta	t	ρ	VIF
7. (two predictors) Constant	-2.10	1.98		-1.06	.288	
Number of years homeschooling	.16	.07	.15	2.35	.02	1.02
Special needs as Important reason	-.29	.42	-.04	-.68	.50	1.02
8.(one predictor) Constant	-3.38	.68		-4.99	<.001	
Number of years homeschooling	.17	.07	**.15**	2.45	.02	1.00

The model utilizing number of years homeschooling reached significance, meaning it successfully predicted the difference between actual and preferred frequency of counseling activities (F = 6, ρ = .02). The model explained 2.3% of variance in the difference between actual and prereferred frequency of counseling activities and particpants difference between actual

and preferred frequency of counseling activities was predicted by the number of years homeschooling (β = .15, t = 2.45, ρ = .02). Model 8 indicated that number of years homeschooling was a small but significant predictor of the difference between actual and preferred frequencies of counseling activities.

Research Question 2

To test the hypothesis that there would be a significant positive correlation between preferred frequency of counseling activities and the scored importance of the reason for homeschooling, a Pearson r correlation was performed. The significance is not less than .05 for any of the correlation results between the preferred frequency of counseling activities and the importance of four different reasons for homeschooling.

Table 8

Correlation: Reasons for Homeschooling and Frequency of Preferred Counseling Activities

Reason		Special Needs	Religious or Moral	Academic Instruction	Safer Environment
Preferred Counseling Activities	Pearson r	.112	.010	.005	.076
	Sig. 2-tail	.063	.865	.940	.210
	N	276	276	276	276

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

Research Question 3

Does the frequency of preferred individual items in the ten individual activities within the counseling category reported by homeschooling parents vary according to the scaled importance of the reasons for homeschooling? The preferred frequency of the ten activities in the counseling category of SCARS as reported by parents of homeschooled children will vary in relation to the scored importance of the four reasons for homeschooling. Correlation analysis was conducted using the variables of the mean score of preferred frequency for the ten activities found in the counseling category of SCARS, and the mean score of importance for the four reasons for homeschooling. The results suggested a weak correlation between the scored importance of homeschooling for special needs and two of the activities found in the counseling category of SCARS. There was a small but significant correlation between special needs as a reason for homeschooling and preferred frequency of counseling students regarding school behavior, with r = .140 and sig.(two-tailed) = .02. In addition, there was a small but significant correlation between special needs as a reason for homeschooling and preferred frequency of conducting small groups regarding family and personal issues such as divorce and death. No other reasons (safety, academic, or religious) showed a significant correlation with preferred frequency of the activities in the counseling category of SCARS, with α = .05 in two-tailed test.

Table 9
Correlation: Counseling Category Activities and Importance of Reasons to Homeschool

Correlation of Activities to Reasons		Special-needs	Safety	Academic	Religious
SCARS Q1: Counsel with students regarding personal/family concerns.	Pearson r	.111	-.006	.032	-.016
	Sig. 2-tailed	.066	.915	.598	.795
	N	275	275	275	275
SCARS Q2: Counsel with students regarding school behavior.	Pearson r	**.140***	.015	.027	-.004
	Sig. 2-tailed	**.020**	.804	.651	.953
	N	275	275	275	275
SCARS Q3: Counsel students regarding crisis/emergency issues.	Pearson r	.003	.105	.016	.018
	Sig. 2-tailed	.962	.083	.791	.761
	N	275	275	275	275
SCARS Q4: Counsel with students regarding relationships (e.g., family, friends, romantic).	Pearson r	.022	.001	.065	-.036
	Sig. 2-tailed	.714	.981	.287	.551
	N	273	273	273	273
SCARS Q5: Provide small group counseling addressing relationship/social skills.	Pearson r	.116	.072	-.050	-.107
	Sig. 2-tailed	.057	.237	.412	.078
	N	273	273	273	273
SCARS Q6: Provide small group counseling for academic issues.	Pearson r	.042	.118	.018	.089
	Sig. 2-tailed	.486	.051	.761	.142
	N	274	274	274	274
SCARS Q7: Conduct small groups regarding family/personal issues (e.g., divorce, death).	Pearson r	**.127***	.083	-.015	.004
	Sig. 2-tailed	**.036**	.171	.805	.942
SCARS Q8: Conduct small group counseling for students regarding substance abuse issues (own use or family/friends, etc.)	Pearson r	.068	.108	-.056	.096
	Sig. 2-tailed	.265	.075	.353	.115
	N	273	273	273	273
SCARS Q9: Follow-up on individual and group counseling participants.	Pearson r	.099	.129	.005	.047
	Sig. 2-tailed	.104	.033	.937	.443
	N	271	271	271	271
SCARS Q10: Counsel students regarding academic issues.	Pearson r	.039	-.037	.006	.035
	Sig. 2-tailed	.515	.542	.926	.562
	N	274	274	274	274

*Correlation is significant at the .05 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

Participants indicated preferred activities from the simple descriptive statistics on preferences for activities across all counseling categories. The top ten in descending order are; 1) counsel with students regarding personal/family concerns, 2) counsel with students regarding relationships (e.g., family, friends, romantic), 3) conduct classroom lessons on various personal/social traits (e.g., responsibility, respect), 4) counsel students regarding academic issues, 5) conduct classroom lessons on relating to others (e.g., family, friends), 6) conduct classroom lessons on personal growth and development issues, 7) conduct classroom lessons on conflict resolution, 8) counsel with students regarding school behavior, 9) conduct classroom lessons addressing career development and the world of work, and 10) conduct classroom lessons on personal safety issues. These represent the counseling activities most preferred by the parents participating in this research study. As providers begin to consider how to best serve homeschooling families, this information can serve as an initial guide (Dennison, et al., 2020; DeRish, et al., 2020; Goodrich, et al., 2020).

Perhaps even more salient are the descriptive statistics showing the difference between actual activities and preferred activities. This represents a gap where counseling activities are not occurring as often as would be preferred. The top ten activities in descending order, starting with the largest gap between actual frequency and preferred frequency are: 1) provide small group counseling addressing relationship/social skills, 2) provide small group counseling for academic issues, 3) conduct classroom lessons addressing career development and the world of work, 4) coordinate and maintain a comprehensive school counseling program, 5) conduct or coordinate parent education classes or workshops, 6) coordinate school-wide response for crisis management and intervention, 7) conduct small groups regarding family/personal issues (e.g., divorce or death), 8) coordinate special events and programs for school around academic, career, or personal/social issues (career, drug awareness, test prep), 9) inform parents about the role, training, program, and interventions of a school counselor within the context of your school, 10) attend professional development activities (e.g., state conferences, local in-service). These represent the counseling activities with the largest difference between actual and preferred frequencies as expressed by the parents who participated in this research study. The statistics reveal which activities are preferred and also those activities which are occurring less frequently than preferred within this specific sample of homeschoolers. These are the areas where counselors may be able to offer services and programs to meet the unmet preferences of homeschooling families. Dennison, et al. (2020) indicated that after a review of literature there was a lack of empirical data which presented a significant limitation in the field. Looking at the 10 areas with the greatest perceived unmet need, it becomes clear there is room for school counselors, family counselors, career counselors, and mental health counselors to provide services in this community.

The multiple linear regression in question one revealed whether there are specific attributes of homeschoolers which could predict this difference in frequency of actual and preferred counseling activities in the general population. The only predictor determined to be significant and generalizable was the number of years homeschooling. This suggests that knowing the number of years a family has homeschooled may be somewhat helpful in predicting which counseling activities have a gap between the preferred and actual frequency. The number of children being homeschooled, the average age of the children, household income, and the importance of academics, safety, religion, or special needs in the decision to homeschool were all not significant predictors. Finding non-significant results still provides useful information for counselors. It was surprising that income-level turns out not to predict of unmet student counseling activity needs in homeschools, as it would be expected that a higher income would provide greater access to services. However, there are unmet counseling needs (preferred

frequencies greater than actual frequencies) present at all income levels. Neither the age nor number of children being homeschooled, nor the reasons a family chooses to homeschool are predictors for the differences in actual and preferred frequency of counseling activities on the SCARS. It may be that instead of characteristics attributable to homeschooling, it is more complex factors that apply to all families which determine this gap between preferred and actual frequency of counseling activities. Guterman and Neuman (2020) reported no difference between homeschooled and traditionally schooled groups in the correlation between parental attachment with internalizing and externalizing behavior. It may be that many social-emotional patterns are similar between homeschooled and traditionally schooled families. In addition, there may be elements of stigma and other barriers which prevent access to services (Carlson, 2020; Dennison, et al., 2020).

Preference for Counseling Category Activity and Reason for Homeschooling

Research question two explored the correlation between preferred frequency of activities in the overall counseling category and the scaled importance of the reason for homeschooling. The correlation statistics revealed that the significance was not less than .05 for any of the correlation results between the preferred frequency of counseling activities and the importance of four different reasons for homeschooling, indicating no significant results. Much research on homeschoolers focuses on reasons for homeschooling. However, this characteristic does not correlate with preferred frequency for the overall counseling category in the SCARS. While counselors may still want to know reasons for homeschooling in order to develop a cultural understanding for their clients, they may not correlate the reason a family homeschools with the preferred frequency for the overall category of counseling activity.

Although it was not part of the research question, a weak correlation was found between deciding to homeschool to provide religious or moral instruction and deciding to homeschool due to preferred academics with r = .218 and sig.(2-tailed) < .001. Additionally, a moderate correlation was found between deciding to homeschool to provide religious or moral instruction and deciding to homeschool to provide a safer environment, with r = .374 and sig.(2-tailed) < .001. Finally, a small correlation was found between deciding to homeschool for preferred academic instruction and a safer environment, with r = .174 and sig.(2-tailed) = .04. This points to a connection between religious or moral instruction and a preference for academics which has been found previously in homeschool education research (Collum, 2005).

Correlation to Preferred Individual Activities

We found a weak correlation between the scored importance of homeschooling for special needs and two of the individual activities found in the counseling category of SCARS. There was a small but significant correlation between special needs as a reason for homeschooling and preferred frequency of counseling students regarding school behavior. In addition, there was a small but significant correlation between special needs as a reason for homeschooling and preferred frequency of conducting small groups regarding family and personal issues

such as divorce and death. None of the other reasons for homeschooling such as safety, academic, or religious reasons showed a significant correlation with preferred frequency for the specific activities in the counseling category of SCARS.

Since research question one in this study found only one predictor (number of years homeschooling) for differences between preferred and actual counseling frequencies, this may be considered a correlation which may apply to the preferred frequency for specific counseling activities as well. However, there must be other factors which create the observed variations in preferred frequency of counseling activities for homeschooling families. These other factors may be similar to those found in the general population.

Clinical Implications

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the frequency of actual and preferred counseling activities of parents who are educating children at home. Counselors who already have homeschool clients may want to take note from the information in the demographics section that there are many overlapping reasons for homeschooling and there is wide diversity within the homeschool community. This aligns with current educational literature on homeschooling (Carlson, 2020; Dennison, et al., 2020; Kunzman & Gaither, 2020). One of the resources offered by counselors to increase resiliency in clients is helping them identify and connect with support systems. The last demographic question in this survey asked about sources of support used in homeschooling. Knowing that in this sample of 276 homeschoolers, the majority relied on homeschool groups, partners, and friends, helps counselors know what resources might be useful to clients. Almost half of homeschoolers utilized professionals for support, indicating they may be open to working with counselors. Less than 5% of the participants utilized neighbors or local schools as part of their support system. Thus, the vast majority were interested in and engaged in connecting to some type of outside support while schooling within the home.

It is hoped that for counselors who do not yet work with homeschooling families, this research will provide a starting place. Simple descriptive statistics for the research participants indicated gaps where counselors might provide counseling activities that were preferred more frequently than they occurred. These gaps might be served by individual, or family counseling services or group counseling services in homeschool co-ops or organizations. This reinforces the collaborative call for clinicians to reach out beyond schools into homeschooling communities (Carlson, 2020; Dennison, et al., 2020). The largest gap between preferred and actual counseling activities tended to be group counseling activities. The three group activities with the largest gap were group counseling addressing relationship and social skills, group counseling for academic issues, and group lessons on career development and the world of work. Across the variety of counseling activities, there is space for family counselors, school counselors, mental health counselors, and career counselors in serving this community. Group counseling activities in these areas might be offered to families through homeschool co-ops, conferences, and other homeschool organizations. There is little literature on the use of group counseling resources within the homeschool community, but

data from this survey indicates an unmet preference for small group counseling activities.

It might make sense to ask how many years the family has been homeschooling, since this seems to be the significant predictor for counseling preferences. The data indicated that families who are new to homeschooling tend to have a higher unmet counseling need. DeRish, et al., (2020) revealed the benefit for some families of providing consultation to homeschooling families with behavior concerns. The data from this study might help to provide focus on which families may be more likely to have an unmet need for this type of support. Although not examined in this research, level of student crisis prior to homeschooling, family crisis during homeschooling and number of personal and community supports may play a role in preferred frequency of counseling.

Limitations

Several limitations were present in this study. One limitation was the use of convenience and snowball sampling as part of the methodology. Lack of a control group and random assignment made the design less controlled. The use of snowball sampling may mean the survey was seen more frequently in some sub-communities than in others. If the sample was not like the general homeschool population, the results may not be generalizable. Compared to the largest pool of data available collected on homeschoolers by the National Household Education Survey, the participants in this research were more often White and had a higher average income level. This could be due to the way data was gathered, by reaching out to homeschool organizations listed online. It could also be due to higher income families having more time and inclination to participate in research. Participants were reached online, so those who did not have access to the internet were not included. The survey was lengthy, thus, parents who had available time may have been more likely to participate than those who were overwhelmed and had little spare time. Further, since participants were reached online, those who do not have access to the internet were not be included.

The use of closed-ended survey questions did not allow for a greater range of expression by participants. There were some open-ended demographic questions which allowed for freer response, but the instrument on counseling preferences contained scaled rating questions that did not allow for description. Perhaps the largest limitation in this study was that the instrument used in the survey was a school counseling instrument and had language which was specific to the profession of school counseling. For instance, the term "referral" would be understood by a counselor, but might not be understood by a parent. The SCARS was also originally designed for us in traditional schools. This instrument has been used in research with parents in the past, but it is possible the respondents may not have understood some of the terminology. Ideally a survey would be developed in the future that was more specific to the context of homeschooling.

Future Directions

Prior to this article, there was sparse research on the counseling activities and counseling preferences in homeschools as it appears the homeschooling population is often overlooked by the counseling profession. Because this is such a new area of research, there are endless questions to ask and much information to gather in both quantitative and qualitative formats. Hispanic individuals are the fastest growing homeschool demographic, yet there is little research with this population (McQuiggan & Megra, 2017). In addition to learning more about Latino homeschools, some areas for potential future research might include attitudes and stigma. What are homeschoolers towards the counseling and helping professions, and the attitudes of professional counselors towards homeschoolers? What stigma and discrimination have homeschoolers experienced? Qualitative research can explore the lived experience of homeschool parents. Case studies might relate successful uses of professional counseling within homeschools and homeschool groups. Research can explore the potential roles of counselors within homeschools and homeschool groups. Needs assessments might support the creation of counseling curriculum for homeschool families and groups. Pre and post-assessments might explore the benefits of small group counseling for youth within homeschool co-ops. Pre and post assessments might assess the benefits of psychoeducation in conflict resolution, growth-mindset, wellness and other counseling topics for homeschool youth, parents, and families.

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