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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Factors Affecting the Development and Practice of School Counseling in Barbados

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Abstract

The influence of 11 factors on school counseling in Barbados were examined in this ethnographic study: (1) cultural factors; (2) national needs; (3) larger societal movements; (4) models of school counseling; (5) laws and educational policy; (6) characteristics of the public education system; (7) the counseling profession; (8) research and evaluation; (9) related professions; (10) community organizations or NGO coalitions; and (11) local stakeholder perceptions. Examining school counseling across four sites and five participants, findings revealed that the factors mostly aligned, but one new factor emerged and two previously identified factors were renamed, due to presenting somewhat differently in the Barbados context. Implications for practice, policy, and training are discussed.

Keywords Barbados · School counseling · Small island developing state · Counselor education · Caribbean

School counseling approaches in western countries are centered in the school counseling literature, with much focus on The American School Counselor Association (ASCA) National Model (2019). Yet, worldwide, many countries such as Barbados, Brazil, Haiti, Jamaica, Kenya, Lebanon, Nigeria, and South Korea have implemented school-based counseling (Griffin, 2019; Harris, 2013; Morshed and Carey, 2020; Martin et al., 2015). While some school counseling programs in these international contexts draw on the ASCA National Model, their counselors often find that the model cannot be adopted wholesale (Goodrich et al., 2014; Harris, 2013). The work of school counselors in these countries may not only benefit from, but also enrich the ASCA National Model by adding an international cultural lens that makes the model more useful for international school counseling (Griffin & Bryan, 2021a,

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2021b). Developing their own model will require school counselors and their professional associations to have an understanding of the factors that influence the development and practice of school-based counseling in their own context (Griffin, 2019). In this study, we examined the factors that influence the development and practice of school counseling programs in Barbados.

School counseling is still relatively young in Caribbean countries such as Barbados, and few studies have examined the development and practice of school counseling in the region. In Barbados, counseling was formally introduced into the schools in 1988 (Griffin & Bryan, 2021a, 2021b; Maynard, 2014). Barbados, a small island developing state (SIDS) with a dense population of 282,000 people and one of the highest income per capita in the Caribbean region, is known for its strong universal educational system (Hornby, 2023; Prime Minister's Office, 2023). Like many SIDS, Barbados is subject to overwhelming economic, political, and cultural influence from larger countries such as the USA and Britain, including the challenge of educational access and equity. Similar to other SIDS that were British colonies, it also has a selective or elitist education system that sorts students based on their scores on a national examination, the *Barbados* Secondary School Entrance Examinations (*BSSEE*), which children take at 11 years old (Hornby, 2023; Maynard, 2014; Pilgrim et al., 2018; Pilgrim and Hornby, 2019). The students with the highest scores are tracked to the higher performing or "older" secondary schools, while those with lower scores are tracked to the lower performing or "newer" secondary schools. This system of selection, which excludes or disadvantages students who need additional learning support and enrichment, has perpetuated inequitable education and led to a lack of postsecondary opportunities and social mobility for students who fail in a test-driven education system (Griffin & Bryan, 2021a, 2021b; Pilgrim et al., 2018; Pilgrim and Hornby, 2019). Recently, the Barbadian government has proposed education reform or transformation to replace its selective system of education with one that is fair, inclusive, relevant, and modern (FIRM) to create a brighter future for its youth (Prime Minister's Office, 2023).

Most of the 21 Barbadian public secondary schools have one counselor with two schools currently having two counselors with enrollment ranging from 900 to 1200 students each (Griffin, 2019; Griffin & Bryan, 2021a, 2021b; Maynard, 2014). The school counselors, called "guidance counsellors," are responsible for providing counseling services and coordinating and delivering the Health and Family Life Education (HFLE) program (Griffin & Bryan, 2021a; Jones et al., 2023; Onuoha et al., 2017). In a previous study of school counseling in Barbados (Griffin, 2019; Griffin & Bryan, 2021a, 2021b) using inductive analysis, three themes emerged that encapsulate the roles, practices, challenges, and demands of school counseling in Barbados: Roles, Responsibilities, and Requirements; Policies, Politics, and Culture; and School-Family-Community Contexts. In contrast, in the current study, we use a combined deductive and inductive analysis and a pre-existing framework (Martin, et al., 2015) to examine what factors influence school counseling in Barbados.

Theoretical Framework: Factors That Influence School Counseling

In a comprehensive review of the literature and thematic analysis of the factors that impact school-based counseling in 48 countries and SIDS including Belize, Bhutan, Botswana, Haiti, Jamaica, Venezuela, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Malta, and Singapore, the authors (Martin et al., 2015) found 11 influential factors: (a) cultural factors, (b) national needs, (c) larger societal movements, (d) models of school counseling, (e) laws and educational policy, (f) characteristics of the public education system, (g) the counseling profession, (h) research and evaluation, (i) related professions, (j) community organizations or NGO coalitions, and (k) local stakeholder perceptions. These factors highlight the social, cultural, economic, and political factors that promote or hinder school counseling in these countries. We briefly summarize and provide examples of the identified factors or themes below.

Cultural Factors

Cultural factors include local cultural views and aspects of culture, like religion, spirituality, and indigenous or local healing and helping practices that influence the school-based counseling. For example, in countries like Bhutan, Botswana, and Haiti, people see help from religious officials and indigenous healers as a more holistic form of wellness (Amundson et al., 2015; Coker & Majuta, 2015; Guth et al., 2015; Nicolas, et al., 2012; Reid & Dixon, 2001). Counselors in these countries often integrate their indigenous religious values and beliefs into their practice.

National Needs

National needs or concerns influence the government's and people's support for school-based counseling affecting its development and practice. Some examples of these national concerns include workforce and career needs, school violence, war and natural disasters, poverty, and public health concerns. For example, Kenya's government recommended that counselors be placed in the schools to help curb violence (Wambu & Fisher, 2015). In some countries, people attributed existing national challenges to their government failing to assign school counselors at the primary school level (Aluede et al., 2017).

Larger Societal Movements

Larger scale social movements include issues such as broader education reform and cultural shifts in the country, which create an impetus for school-based counseling. For example, due to the health pandemics like HIV/AIDS outbreaks in countries like Kenya and Botswana, school counseling arose in response to the need for support

by students and families who were overwhelmed and devastated by the disease (Amundson et al., 2015; Okech and Kimemia, 2012; Wambu & Fisher, 2015; Stockton, et al., 2010). In Haiti, the devastation arising from the 2010 earthquake led to the country's first mental health initiative (Amundson et al., 2015; Raviola, et al., 2012).

Models of School Counseling

This factor focuses on responses to existing models and adaptation or creation of new models. Many countries and SIDS draw on western models of school counseling especially ASCA's National Model (2019). For example, countries such as Kenya and Botswana borrowed from western countries in developing their own model (Amundson et al., 2015; Okech and Kimemia, 2012; Stockton, et al., 2010).

Laws and Educational Policy

This factor comprises education policies and laws that directly impact school counselor roles, activities, and responsibilities; government suggested practices and interventions; and curriculum. For example, Nigeria mandated personal-social, academic, and career development as the focus of school counseling (Aluede et al., 2017; Okocha & Alika, 2012), and in Malta, mental health protocols such as "freedom of choice" were instituted (Cauchi et al., 2017).

Characteristics of the Public Education System

This factor refers to the influence of the structure of the education system on school counseling practices. Examples include the presence of universal education and selective school systems that influence the ways in which students matriculate through primary and secondary school and how counselors interact with students and families (Griffin, 2019; Martin, et al., 2015).

The Counseling Profession

This factor comprises the larger overall counseling profession's effect on school-based counseling. Conditions that influence the work of school-based counselors include whether training or professional development is available or provided by the government, the presence and role of professional associations, the establishment or lack of ethical guidelines and standards of practice, and the presence of local national or international mental health organizations as referral resources. For example, in Botswana and many countries, school-based counselors' training needs developed much faster than the availability of training avenues (Stockton, et al., 2010).

Research and Evaluation

This factor concerns research and evaluation conducted on school counseling practices and effectiveness, including research on and evaluation of counseling programs and models, training practices, role differentiation, and student outcomes (Martin, et al., 2015). Several countries highlighted the lack of research and evaluation of school-based counseling programs (Griffin, 2019).

Related Professions

This factor refers to the relationship of school-based counseling to other helping professions including the comparison and overlap of their roles. For example, in some countries, no clear demarcation exists between school-based counselors and teachers with teachers sometimes treated as counselors and counselors treated as teachers. Indeed, in many countries, teachers were assigned counseling responsibilities (Martin, et al., 2015).

Community Organizations or NGO Coalitions

This factor comprises relationships with and support from non-governmental and community organizations (NGOs) that influence school-based counseling. In some countries like Latin America and the Caribbean, worldwide organizations like The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) often influence approaches to school counseling, development of curriculum materials, education policies that affect school counseling, and even provide funding for school counseling. Also, school counselors often partner with community agencies and NGOs to support students and families. These groups assist with funding, advocacy, and supplying resources for counseling (Martin, et al., 2015).

Local Stakeholder Perceptions

Local stakeholders' views and perspectives of counseling services can influence school-based counseling. For example, in many countries, students' and families' cultural understanding about counseling influences their help-seeking behaviors and the stigma related to counseling.

Martin et al.'s (2015) identification of factors has influenced a body of work on international school-based counseling such as the *International Handbook for Policy Research on School-Based Counseling* (Carey et al., 2017) and the *Journal of School-Based Counseling Policy & Evaluation*. Other scholars have used the factors as an organizing framework. For example, Lee and Na (2017) used it as a framework for an international advocacy model. They divided the factors into school-based

counseling factors and influencing factors. The school-based counseling factors are (a) access and equity, (b) cultural competence, (c) the counseling profession, (d) models of school-based counseling, and (e) research/evidence and outcomes; these are practice-based factors that affect school counseling on a micro level. The influencing factors are (a) professional organizations, (b) government agencies, (c) education policy and public schools, (d) national need, and (e) partnerships; these are structural and institutional factors that affect school counseling on a macro level.

Similarly, building on Martin et al.'s (2015) framework, Morshed and Carey (2020) further explored one of the 11 identified factors: laws and education policy. They developed a working taxonomy for organizing and understanding the policy levers that governments use to directly influence the practice of school-based counseling. They grouped the 21 policy levers under seven dimensions: (a) assuring the initial competence of school–based counselors; (b) assuring the continuing competence of school counselors; (c) promoting the use of effective school counseling practices; (d) ensuring that school counseling activities are planned organized and evaluated well in schools; (e) promoting a distinct counselor role in schools; (f) promoting the hiring of counselors in schools; and (g) ensuing that the country's school counseling system continuously improves.

Purpose of the Study

The research question guiding this study was as follows: What factors influence school counseling in Barbados? Given the lack of research on school counseling in Barbados and other Caribbean islands, we applied Martin et al.'s (2015) framework to test whether the theory might apply to school counseling in Barbados. The intent of referring to the 11 factors was to see if similar as well as additional factors influence school counseling in the Barbadian context. In identifying the factors that impact counselors' work, this study will help local counselors, education policy makers, and counselor educators understand how to support and improve school counseling in Barbados, and perhaps, in the Caribbean, and other small island states (SIDS).

Method

Participants

The five participants were school counselors who worked at four of the 21 public secondary schools across the island including "older" and "newer" secondary schools. Two of the counselors worked at the same school site. Based on the Barbadian context, two schools were in a "town" or urban setting and two were in a "country" or rural setting. Four participants identified as female and one as male, but to preserve confidentiality, all were assigned female gender as few male counselors exist in the schools. Participants all had master's degrees in counseling or psychology. Their years of experience ranged from 10 to 39 years of experience and school

sizes varied from 600 to 1100. The pseudonyms assigned to the five counselors were Syl (30 years experience, school size and caseload of approximately 1100), Nik (24 years experience, school size and caseload approximately 1000), Sebrina (39 years experience, school size and caseload approximately 800), Sham (10 years experience; school size 600, caseload 300), and Chele (23 years experience; school size 600, caseload 300). Sham and Chele both worked in the same school.

Research Design and Data Collection

The first author was the primary investigator who received Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and collected the data, with both authors working as a research team in analyzing and interpreting the data. We used a focused ethnography, which is suitable when researchers have a limited study timeframe, are interested in capturing the nuances of a sub-culture (e.g., counselors or nurses), are focused on concentrated research questions, and include insider researchers (Knoblauch, 2005; Rashid et al., 2019). Focused ethnography is not often conducted in counseling despite being popular in applied fields such as the health professions. It is useful for understanding how beliefs, values, rituals, and practices common to a sub-culture influence a particular issue, problem, or practice (Moisey et al., 2022; Trundle & Phillips, 2023).

While completing a doctoral internship at a local secondary school in the previous semester, the primary investigator was introduced to all of the school counselors. After receiving approval from both the university's IRB and the Barbados Ministry of Education (MOE), the primary investigator shared information about the study with the school counselors at a meeting of their professional association, the Barbados Association of Guidance Counselors (BAGC). Recruitment letters were sent to the counselors and principals at all 21 secondary schools. Then, using a combined process of snowballing and purposing sampling, she identified counselors interested in participating in the study. The inclusion criterion was current school counselors in Barbados public secondary schools. School counseling interns, administrators, staff, and other professionals were excluded. The counselors at four schools were eventually selected due to their willingness to participate, availability, and providing unrestricted access to their schools. Prior to collecting data, she shared the purpose of the study and received informed consent at an initial meeting with the counselors and their principals.

The primary investigator conducted three themed face-to-face interviews with each counselor, with each interview ranging from 20 min to 1 h. The interviews were audio recorded on two devices, a portable recorder and a computer and transcribed verbatim. The semi-structure interview protocol comprised 37 questions including grand tour questions to understand participants' space, time, and familiar events; probing questions to allow participants to share in ordinary and cultural terms; and experience questions to understand participants' atypical experiences (Spradley, 1979). The questions focused on school counselors' roles, practices, challenges, and policies. Probes and follow-up questions were used to gain greater depth and insight. Example of questions included the following:

- "Describe a typical day for you at your school;"
- "What is your role as a guidance counsellor? Tell me more"
- "What are the challenges you face as a guidance counsellor?"
- "What are the challenges/issues in your school (e.g., System/government, student related, curriculum, family engagement)?"
- "How is school counseling in Barbados changing?"
- "What are some challenges you foresee with the current position and practices of your role?"
- "What policies from the ministry most influence your work?"
- "What school policies most influence or impact your work?"
- "What changes would you like to see in policies regarding school counseling?"
- "If you could change the school counseling program in Barbados, what would you change?"
- "How often do you involve parents when counseling a child? What are your relationships with parents like? How does the school see parents?"

Data were also collected via persistent observations (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) to triangulate the data and clarify lingering questions about school counselors' roles, practices, challenges, and policies. The first author observed participants and their interactions and events in different settings for 10–15 days at each site using an iterative process of going back and forth between data collection and analysis until data saturation. The observations provided context giving the first author more of an insider perspective and helped her to better understand comments that participants made in the interviews. She wrote copious field notes, using notes and memos to develop more clarifying questions and make meaning of the observations.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed verbatim to retain the Barbadian vernacular English called Bajan. We read the transcripts and observation field notes many times to gain a deep understanding of participants' experiences and context. Using thematic analysis to analyze the data, we followed the data analysis steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006): (1) taking time to know the data well; (2) identifying the codes; (3) searching for themes; (4) reviewing initial themes; (5) defining and labeling the themes; and (6) creating the report. First, we coded three transcripts separately to ascertain intercoder reliability, arriving at agreement on the codes and themes and any discrepancies. Then, working independently, we familiarized ourselves with the data, engaging in an iterative process with several rounds of reading, reviewing, and re-reading the data, and generating initial codes. We coded the data from the interviews and observations independently. In generating codes, we were careful to move between the a priori or pre-defined codes identified by Martin et al., (2015; e.g., cultural factors, national needs, laws and educational policy) and a posteriori or emerging codes (e.g., HFLE curriculum, teaching HFLE, relationships with families; relationships with the community). We were careful to only use the a priori or pre-defined code when there was a clear connection between the text and the code.

The intent of referring to the 11 factors and moving back and forth between a priori and a posteriori codes was to see if similar and additional themes emerged in the Barbadian context. Throughout the process, we met continually to discuss the codes, moving between the transcripts and field notes to determine the consistency and coherence of the codes. We also met with our peer debriefers. The peer debriefers were a Barbadian school counselor with 30 years of school counseling experience, two U.S. professors with Caribbean roots, one of whom does research in the Caribbean and Latin America. We compared and corroborated the codes, identified the themes and subthemes, and ensured that the themes matched the complete data set and the culture and experiences of the participants and were contextually meaningful (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Finally, we created the report with theme definitions with selected data elements to illustrate each theme. The final themes with selected codes are presented in Table 1.

Researcher Positionality and Trustworthiness

The research team both have connections to Barbados. The first author has a Barbadian grandparent who immigrated to the U.S. She grew up immersed in New York's Barbadian and Caribbean cultures and visited Barbados during her childhood. The second author is a Barbadian, completing primary and secondary school and university there, and was among the first group of formal school counselors in Barbados, serving in a secondary school for 10 years before pursuing a counselor education degree in the U.S.A.

Our backgrounds provided opportunity for bias as it influenced how we approached the study and our perspectives about the underpinnings of the education system and school counseling in Barbados. We see ourselves as insider-outsiders and are aware of our immense pride in our Barbadian heritage and love of Barbados. At the same time, we felt our immersion in school counseling in the U.S.A., which we saw as more developed and equity-focused, could bias our perceptions about school counseling in Barbados. We sought to bracket our biases by using method of trustworthiness such as peer debriefing, triangulation of the data, and immersion in the settings. We used the peer debriefing meetings to examine and challenge our beliefs, assumptions, and explore any biases, and to make sure we did not miss what the data were saying, that is, to ensure that we could see themes and codes in the data that were outside of the a priori themes and codes in the theory. For example, we had to challenge our biases about the importance of advocacy, equity, and social justice in the schools and what it should look like. Our discussions helped us see that this was not a theme in the data. The peer debriefers assisted with contextualizing the data, through their understanding of social justice, equity, and familiarity with the work of school counselors.

Trustworthiness

In addition to peer debriefing, the researchers used various methods to ensure the data were triangulated. Multiple data sources were used, including interviews,

Table 1 Comparison of themes and examples of representative codes

	Themes in Martin et al.'s study (2015)	Themes in the current study	Example codes
1	Cultural factors	Cultural factors	Students weren't used to coming in and talking about their problems; counselor talking my business; everyone know each other; prayers and devotion in schools; Christian commitment; go to Prayers; importance of Christianity; close knit society; Barbados is small; becoming Americanized
2	National needs	National needs	Increased school violence; HIV/AIDS prevention; suicide prevention; counselor for each year group; more counselors needed; families with economic difficulties; need for additional support in schools; need for more school counselors in schools and more training
3	Larger societal movements	Larger societal movements	Education reform; influence of global funders and initiatives that affect education (e.g., UNICEF); regional influence (e.g., CARICOM); influence from companies; removing corporal punishment in schools; career planning; importance of career planning; increase access to tertiary education; need for special education
4	Models of school counseling	Models of school counseling	American model of school counseling; application of ASCA model to culture; attending ASCA national conference; attend international conferences like ACA; need to develop our own model; need to establish ethical and legal standards
5	Laws and educational policy	Laws and educational policy	Ministry of Education (MOE) and education officer responsible for counselors; funding and hiring counselors; outdated role description and guidelines; mandates for referrals to agencies, (e.g., Child Care Board); procedure to notify parents; notify the principal who will notify MOE & Child Care Board; child abuse; self-harming behavior

Table 1 (continued)

	Themes in Martin et al.'s study (2015)	Themes in the current study	Example codes
6	Characteristics of the public education system	Characteristics of the public education system	Older secondary school; newer secondary school; elite schools; 11-plus exam/ *Barbados* Secondary School Entrance Examinations (*BSSEE*); counseling; school programs (e.g., speech day); race in schools; "I don't see race"; annual career showcase; principal-counselor relationship
7	The counseling profession	The counseling profession	Counseling in schools; need for representation at the MOE; need an education officer; no support from MOE; Barbados Association for Guidance Counsellors (BAGC); guidance certificate in local teacher's college; local master's degree in school counseling at University of the West Indies (UWI) Cave Hill campus; need counselors in primary schools; need for standardized qualifications; need for additional staff; need for social worker
8	Research and evaluation	Research and evaluation	MOE wants documentation; lack of documentation of services; we don't do research; no evaluation of school counseling program; large caseloads; documenting difficult due to large caseloads
9	Related Professions	Relationships with key stakeholders	relationships with teachers, parents, principals; teacher referrals to counselors; boundaries; teachers do not understand counselor role; teachers overstep role and take on counseling role; counselor's work with administrators important; lack of other helping professionals to support counselors; need for additional staff; need for social worker
10	Community Organizations or NGO Coalitions	Partnerships with community, government organizations, and professionals	External partnerships; community partnerships; community outreach; challenges of community outreach; benefits of liaising; counselor collaboration with community and government organizations (e.g., Child Care Board, community health centers/clinics, parent organization; probation, Juvenile Liaison Scheme); collaborating with agencies; liaising with psychologists and psychiatrist; collaboration with churches

Table 1 (continued)

	Themes in Martin et al.'s study (2015)	Themes in the current study	Example codes
11	Local stakeholder perceptions	Local stakeholder perceptions	Role perceptions; role confusion; counselors' perceptions of their role; teacher perceptions of counselor's role; principal's perception of counselor's role; parents perceptions; community perceptions; Principal-counselor relationship; counselor left out of decisions communication with administration, principal style
12		Local curriculum	Health and Family Life (HFLE) curriculum; timetabling HFLE; inconsistency in number of periods counselors' timetabled for; teachers teaching HFLE; teacher knowledge of HFLE; teacher knowledge to teach sexuality; strengthen HFLE curriculum; need to update HFLE curriculum

observations, field notes, and memos. The primary researcher was immersed in the schools. We utilized member checking to clarify points made by the informants, include missing information, and acknowledge the informants' perspectives on the findings. Member checking was completed with four informants, and the fifth informant was unavailable to review the findings, but provided feedback when the researcher contacted them. The member checks included face to face meetings at the school sites, as well as informal phone calls and emails when the primary researcher was no longer on the island.

Findings

The thematic analysis produced 12 themes (or factors) that influence the development and practice of school counseling in Barbados. In Table 1, we present the themes that emerged from the data with selected codes. Below, we describe each theme (or factor) with verbatim quotes (in Bajan dialect, the local vernacular English) from the data to illustrate the coding and analytic process. Each excerpt/quote is followed by the participant's pseudonym.

a) **Cultural Factors**: Culture emerged from the data with all participants referring to Barbadian views and beliefs and the influence of culture on students' help-seeking. Participants all shared perspectives that Barbadians simultaneously operate with a collectivist mindset of valuing care and concern for their neighbors and a privacy mindset of not sharing family business. Sebrina and Chele all depicted students' hesitancy to seek services due to a fear of others knowing their business.

> Barbados is a very close-knit society. 166 square miles and a population of over 285,000 people. So things get around, and people are a little reluctant in disclosing their personal business. (Sebrina)

> In reference to the students, … They are told, "Well look, don't take business from out of the house," and if it becomes too overwhelming for them, then they will come and they will talk to us, as counselors. They will come and talk to me, and then it then becomes an issue because they don't want their family to hear or they don't want their mother, father, whoever it is, to be aware that they had spoken. … (Chele)

Religion was another cultural value that participants reported as affecting counseling, often making references to church, God, and Christianity. They indicated that religion is infused in the culture, and in the schools, and that many counselors ascribe to the Christian faith. Students take Religious Studies as a subject and schools hold morning assembly often with prayers. All participants mentioned religion as important to them and in their school.

> Definitely religion. Even thinking about my colleagues and trying to put all of them in my mind now, I'm really seeing all of them belong to some reli-

gious organization or some group. And even as we, when I think about in terms of our chat, because we have a chat where the counselors, there is using something or some train with religion and so on. It really drives that thought or behavior. Being altruistic, thinking about others and so on, and humanitarian. I believe that we are called, we are called to do this. Yeah, so the religion definitely. … (Chele)

Codes in this theme related to aspects of the culture that directly influenced school counseling such as everyone knows each other, confidence in counselor, trust, go to the counselors whom they trust, cultural impact on counseling, things get around, reluctant in disclosing, reserved about telling their personal business, gets around easy in society, not going to any and everybody, Christian commitment, go to prayers, and prayers and devotion.

b) **National Needs**: The analysis revealed that local government decisions about school counseling were based on national needs such as violence in schools and the community; behavioral problems; public health issues such as drugs, HIV/AIDS; and concerns about unemployment, work, and careers for youth. Participants shared that education policymakers, school administrators, and teachers are concerned about the increased violence in schools and how "block culture" impacts students. Participants mentioned that the current Prime Minister and the Minister of Education have called for more counselors in the schools to address school violence. Sham captured some participants' views of the need for school counselors to be a part of the process of developing and implementing strategies to counteract school violence.

I see counselors possibly being trained more to deal with aggression, violence, in a more forceful way. Whereas, yes, it was something that the principal, the deputy principal dealt with. I believe that counselors will ... Because there's a marriage between behavioral issues and psychological issues, I see that as something counselors will have to deal more with. (Sham)

This factor's codes addressed larger national issues such as school violence, self-harm, drugs, HIV/AIDS, block culture, and other issues that indicate a need for more school counselors in schools and for more counselor training.

c) **Larger Societal Movements**: Participants shared about societal movements such as reforms in education including the move to reduce corporal punishment in schools and to find alternative behavioral strategies, a move influenced by UNICEF. Participants indicated that currently, principals and deputy principals are typically the only ones permitted to give corporal punishment or "lashes" to students. Nik mentioned some heavily debated opinions on the matter.

I'm also on the school's positive behavioral management program as a counselor because it's the opinion of the ministry that we can get across the students without necessarily flogging. That we can use other positive behavioral issues like using behavioral change issues to get them to adhere. And like I said I was on the behaviors before but some of the things that you use in behaviorism can work. It just depends on you have to know the individual child.

Sometimes the only thing that will wake up a child however is a flogging. And when they get a flogging sometimes they don't want another. And they do what they're supposed to do. So I am a proponent of tough love when it's needed. You have to know when it's needed, when it can be used, and when it can't be used, and what you can use to apply it. (Nik)

Another societal movement participants mentioned was the increased national emphasis on career guidance and planning by government and other national stakeholders. For example, Chele explained the work she engages in with students around career planning and preparation with a central focus on exposing students to a variety of tertiary options.

But mainly as I said it is to work with the children and … give them, take them on tours, because just recently we went to the Samuel Jackman, well the Institute of Technology, yeah SJPPI. The institution of technology. And they are writing applications or print applications for that institution, and that is the practical experience and so on that they will get. So they were able to go and see and view and observe what happens in that institution, so they will have had a tour first, and that would help them to make a decision as to which particular area or division they would want to apply for. We will also do tours in another institution, the Barbados Vocation Training Board, right, the Barbados Vocational Training Board. Also the Youth Service, and community college, they will get some opportunities to go there. And to plan career guidance programs, usually we have a career showcase every year, and I assist with planning that career showcase as well. We usually do a national one, and usually I'm on that committee. We do a national one, where we bringing it a little later this year. Usually by this month that's when we already have that taken care of, but we're thinking about having it a little later, maybe October this year. So having a career showcase is something that we plan as well. (Chele)

The codes included international influence, international organizations (e.g., UNICEF), regional influence, regional entities (e.g., CARICOM), influence from companies, increase access to tertiary education, need for special education, corporal punishment in schools, and importance of career planning.
d) Models of School Counseling: Participants shared that many guidance counselors were trained in "the U.S. model" of school counseling and highlighted ways in which their local work diverged from that model.

They concentrate on the academics, and the career guidance for program planning and that kind of thing is in the school setting…That's after the American model. …the American model is academic and job shadowing and attachment, or program planning, career development, and so on. … The role of the counselor may not necessarily be doing home visits and intervening at that level, but they do it here. … We do it here because there are no social workers in the school. (Sebrina)

Some participants stressed the need for a school counseling model that aligns with local perspectives, responsibilities, and practices of school counselors. They

indicated that although they loosely refer to "the U.S. model," it does not include cultural aspects of Barbadian society such as the role of Christianity and religion in schools, the inclusion of Health and Family Life Education (HFLE), and the work counselors do with students and families, on committees, and in the community. Both Nik and Sebrina captured participants' views of the importance of applying counseling theories and models to the local culture if they are to be suitable and effective.

> They are more European, North American. Caribbean people is a different culture, a different mindset, although you can find some things overlapping because we are now becoming so Americanized, but I think you have to look at things that would apply to your own culture, rather than adopt wholesale tools from other people. (Nik)Yeah, there are specific theories that would apply … you need to be able to apply a specific theory to the culture. Otherwise, you can be off the mark. (Sebrina)

Codes included the U.S. model, attend conferences overseas like the ASCA national conference, develop a model of our own, and the need to establish ethical and legal standards.

e) **Laws and Educational Policy:** This theme captured the role of the government in determining policies about school counselors' role and training and hiring counselors. All participants frequently mentioned the lack of and need for MOE policy specific to counselors, highlighting that counselors, just like teachers, are listed under the Public Service Teachers Order (BGIS, 2016), which adds to the misinterpretation of their role. All participants emphasized that despite the evolution of counselors' roles and practices, their role description and duties have not been updated since guidance and counseling's formal inception in 1988, leading to role confusion and lack of consistency in practices across schools. Some participants expressed frustration that school counselors did not have a say in the policies that influenced their practice or their students.

> …yes, I know we are recognized, however when it comes to our input in terms of policy, we don't get that chance to make that input. We are the person on the ground. So therefore I believe that we should be able to help influence policy, help influence our role. Help influence the guidelines of our role, after all we've been doing it for X number of years. (Sham)

The codes included outdated role description and guidelines, referrals, procedures for referrals, policies and mandates (for cases of abuse, violence and aggression, self-harming behavior), and procedures to notify parents.

(f) **Characteristics of the Public Education System**: Participants highlighted the Ministry of Education's role and the principal's autonomy in the system. Another characteristic that all participants frequently mentioned was the educational ranking and selective structure of the education system with schools colloquially ranked according to academic performance and referred to as "older" or "newer" secondary schools depending on when they were established and what scores students must earn on the *Barbados* Secondary School Entrance Examinations (*BSSEE*; also the "11-plus exam"). Participants described the "newer"

schools as comprised of students who often struggle academically and the older secondary schools as "elite" schools, which comprised students with higher academic performance and increased access to resources due to the historical wealth and capital poured into these schools. Sebrina highlighted the difference between the schools in student performance and curriculum and the disparities in counselor resources and role.

> Elite schools... they don't have so much behavioral challenges. They don't focus on the behavioral so much…Their focus is the academic and career development, getting students into institutions, or overseas, and finding jobs shadowing and training attachment, and interns, all of that. They focus more on that. Other schools that have students of low academic profile or behavioral challenges, low self-esteem, we have to focus more behavioral, attitudinal challenge of trying to build their self-esteem, or we're dealing with issues of fighting and anger. You can see there's a shift based on the schools, on the emphasis of the guidance counselor (Sebrina)

Each participant consistently emphasized the difference in school culture and hinted at elements of difference among racial/ethnic groups, but this was not an issue that participants appeared to have reflected on with any depth of consciousness. Participants also discussed segregation in society and in school, which they perceived to exist more so in the older secondary schools where there are more White children. Their responses indicated the link between racism and classism that was apparent to them, but which they never discussed. Syl described Barbados as "very classist" and described the racial "undercurrent" in schools and society.

> If there are racial issues here, they are very undercurrent. If there are. But I have neither come across any racial issues. What you might find though is when children are in the classroom. There's a good mix. But at lunchtime, or even before school, and you have to go outside and just walk around, you will find the whites all in one area, maybe sitting at one table at every lunch time or before school, go down the garden and you'll see it. …Even when people come here, it always hits them in the eye, because you see all the white ones together, then the high browns may be with the whites. Then the Black ones by themselves. (Syl)

Codes for this theme included the following: older secondary school; newer secondary school; elite schools; 11-plus exam; school programs (e.g., speech day); annual career showcase; and principal-counselor relationship.

(g) The Counseling Profession: Participants delineated how school counseling and the role of school counselors in Barbados have expanded since 1988, described the larger counseling field, and emphasized the lack of support and resources for school counselors including a dearth of other counseling professionals and resources. Participants noted that training has also expanded with the local teachers' college, Erdiston Teachers' Training College, offering a guidance and counseling certificate and a HFLE certificate, and more recently,

the local university, UWI Cave Hill, offering a master's degree in School Counselling. The university also offers social work and counseling psychology programs whose interns receive supervision from guidance counselors. However, participants shared their dissatisfaction that qualifications and requirements for school counseling positions are not standardized. Chele discussed the inconsistencies in qualifications.

> There are some counselors that have a degree in social work, some, very few but most counselors have along with teacher training and a teacher certificate, or a with diploma teaching, most counselors have their degree either in counseling or counseling psychology. … there is a certificate in guidance and counseling. That is done by universities. It's not a full degree or as well as Erdiston Teachers Training or they're not full degrees so most of the counselors who have masters have a masters in either counseling or counseling and psychology.…A bachelor's degree. I think there was a new policy, in terms of the qualifications. I think we are supposed to have a first degree in counseling, behavioral science, guidance and counseling, in that area. (Chele)

Participants frequently mentioned the Barbados Association for Guidance Counsellors (BAGC) and its impact on school counseling. Codes related to this factor included the need for representation at the MOE, need for an education officer, need for standardized qualifications, and the need for ongoing training.

(h) **Research and Evaluation**:Some participants identified the need for research and program evaluation, indicating that this gap in school counseling data is related to the lack of documentation of their cases and services. They emphasized that counselors are inundated with large caseloads, making it difficult to document daily practices and conduct research and evaluation. Syl provided an example of how research and evaluation would influence the school counseling program as well.

> As far as guidance counselors concerned, we'll have been here for the last 30 years and research … should have been done to show what we need to improve because cases have increased over the years. Problems have increased and therefore what kind of skills are necessary. Training for counselors should also be ongoing, spearheaded from the Ministry of Education based on the research that is done on yearly or bi-yearly basis. …And one, if we can get the research done, if we can get the feedback, if we can get the policy in place that supports training, ongoing training every two years so that we ... you know? … The clerical work is increasing. I'm supposed to write a report on everything that I do, I'm supposed to document the number of cases I see on a daily basis, if I'm supposed to respond to correspondent that comes in, whether it be to get children to go to some section outside of school, some workshop or whatever. It is a lot. I find that all of that really impacts negatively on the amount of time I spend with students. (Syl)

Some participants spoke about how the large case load affected their ability to keep track.

The codes included lack of documentation of services, we don't do research, no evaluation of school counseling program, large caseloads, and documenting difficult due to large caseloads.

(i) **Relationships with Key Stakeholders**: Initially named Related Professions by Martin et al. (2015), we renamed this theme Relationships with Key Stakeholders. Participants spoke about the relationships that counselors share with related professionals (i.e., professionals in the school, mental health professionals like psychologists, social workers, and psychiatrists) and how these relationships influence the development of counseling in the schools. In this study, this factor is named Relationships with Key Stakeholders because of participants' emphasis on the work that counselors do with parents, teachers, administrators, and with professionals at other government and mental health agencies. The counselors engage with teachers frequently and take on the role of teacher when they teach HFLE courses. Teachers often refer students to the counselor, but in some instances, participants reported that teachers overstep their role in their assistance to students and families. However, with no clear role definition of what counselors are responsible for, counselors face challenges in advocating for their position and promoting their responsibilities. Participants especially identified the relationship with their administrators as vital to them getting their work done as their tasks are assigned by the administrators.

> So, I think sometimes that is where some principals have to be understanding, but luckily for me, I have been able, all of my principals have really embraced the guidance program. They have embraced the HFLE program, because when I first started, what I did ever, I told counselors this, create a list of things that you want to do on a termly and a yearly basis, and you have a time with the principal, and you sit with the principal and you go through all of the things that you would like to accomplish. (Syl)

Participants also discussed the importance but lack of other helping professionals to support them in their work and the "limited avenues for external referrals" especially given the overload on the few helping professionals (i.e., psychologist, social workers) in the ministry of education.

> Cases that we can't manage and we want to refer them, that we should refer them to her. But, because she is the only psychologist there, I mean, her hands are full…Because she is taking cases from primary schools and the secondary schools…And therefore, it can't be easy for her. Yes, they do have the student services department there, but there are about four social workers, or I think three social workers, but still… (Syl)

The counselors spoke frequently of their need for other mental health professionals in the schools with them especially social workers.

> The role of the counselor may not necessarily be doing home visits and intervening at that level, but they do it here. We do it here because there are no

social workers in the school. The social workers can have a separate role and work along with the guidance counselor. If you're going to be effective, at least two guidance counselors and a social worker. (Sebrina)

Syl expressed a need for "a team approach. Two counselors and a social worker. Or, a counselor, a social worker, and a HFLE teacher." In addition to the need for additional guidance counselors, social worker, and psychologist, other codes included the need for additional staff, the need for a social worker, and the need for counselors in the primary schools.

(j) **Partnerships with Community and Government Organizations and Professionals**: Labeled Community Organizations or NGO Coalitions by Martin et al. (2015), we renamed this theme Partnerships with Community and Government Organizations and Professionals due to how often participants mentioned their partnerships with government and community agencies and professionals and how crucial these are to their work. This factor or theme needed to be renamed to fully describe the collaboration counselors engage in with diverse partners to develop and promote the work of school-based counseling in Barbados. The school administration and counselors partner with a variety of community organizations and professionals in order to gain access to limited resources to provide services to students. Sham discusses her role with a local NGO that provides services to her students:

They can talk about things that they would relate to. Drugs, alcohol, deviance, violence, stuff like that. That time is specifically for me. I am to liaise, in terms of the program, the out of school program that comes into our school, there's a non-profit organization called Supreme Counseling for Personal Development and I liaise with their persons to coordinate, assume the running of that program here on site because the way how it works is their personnel will come to the school when students are being ... are here for orientation. Parents sign them up for the program. Then based on how many students that they have, they create lists and the students have facilitated small groups… (Sham)

Counselors shared many examples of partnerships with agencies and community organizations.

We make various referrals to agencies that assist us, Childcare Board in the case of abuse, PAREDOS for parenting, and Edna Nichols for intervention in anger management, and conflict resolution, and to get an assessment too, of the child behavioral pattern, the Juvenile Liaison Scheme. Those are agencies to which we refer as guidance counselors, students that need intervention. (Sebrina)

Some codes demonstrating the partnerships include the following: external partnerships (clinic, welfare, agencies, community health nurse, probation, psychiatrist, Child Care Board, PAREDOS, Edna Nichols, Juvenile Liaison Scheme, Here to Care Program, Breakfast program, mentorship, My Child and I program, UWI Open Campus World to Work program, Sunshine Optimist Club International), community outreach (ex. media calls, churches, foundations, NGOs), and

liaising (e.g., non-profits, more with psychologists and psychiatrists, and tertiary institutions).

(k) **Local stakeholder perceptions**: Counselors' responses indicated that the perceptions of local stakeholders in Barbados, that is, teachers, parents, administrators, other counselors, and local community agencies and organizations, impacted school counselors with each stakeholder group presenting its own challenges. However, participants felt that the local stakeholders with whom they collaborated valued them and promoted the work of counselors. Syl described the numerous ways in which she is involved in the community.

> In the community, I'm invited, whether it be church, school, PTA, or conducting seminars, workshops, to men's health groups. I also do a lot of seminars and talk to men's health groups. I speak in the community at PTA meetings That's a connection to school, but parents are involved. Then I'm also invited to community, sometimes to give talks. Whether it be on parenting, or career, or just in helping them in terms of what programs they can put in place. I also work with the Ministry of Community Development, and the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports, in terms of the Endless Possibilities Mentorship program, and also the Positive Parenting Program, again with the Ministry of Youth and the Family (Syl).

Participants also highlighted the importance of administrators' perceptions of and relationships with counselors as principals are ultimately responsible for assigning their roles and responsibilities. Sebrina depicted the wish that she and the other counselors have.

> Some kind of autonomy to be able to make certain decisions with the welfare of the children. At least if the principal consults with, even that would be good. Sometimes the guidance counselor may not know who is sent home. The students may not be referred to him, and the counselor may know the background in terms of welfare of the child. (Sebrina)

The counselors overwhelmingly discussed the ways in which they were impacted by the principal's approach. Sham highlighted how principals' perceptions and approaches impacted her role.

> … this principal, but the deputy as well. He is is able to leave you within your role to do what you need to do, and just inform him. It is not where he is setting the tone and you follow. …So it allows me to actually do my job. Whereas before you would feel like you were kind of the principal's secretary, just doing what he asked you to do. (Sham)

Some of the codes from this factor included the principal-counselor relationship, principal style, communication with administration, counselor left out of decision, counselors' perceptions of their role, and teacher perceptions of counselor's role.

(l) **Local Curriculum**: This factor is a new one that emerged from the data. The participants so often referred to the local curriculum, the Health and Fam-

ily Life Education (HFLE) curriculum, throughout the interviews that researchers believed it was its own factor. The HFLE curriculum that is taught in the schools by counselors and teachers in Barbados and across the Caribbean is a school health and life skills program and curriculum developed to promote healthy life skills and behaviors, relationships and sexuality, and decision-making among elementary and secondary students. HFLE was funded by the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) and the Caribbean Community and Common Market (CARICOM; Griffin & Bryan, 2021a, 2021b; Jones et al., 2023). All participants described the facilitation of HFLE and managing the HFLE "pseudo-department" as huge components and responsibilities of their position. Participants indicated that the counselors like, but have conflicting feelings about the curriculum, including their dislike of timetabling restrictions.

> It is a great program but being timetabled is like being chained. And, it takes away the autonomy that a counselor has. It also puts a counselor in a position where sometimes you have to make a decision: the client or the class. And, sometimes too, when you are timetabled to teach a class, a case can come up almost every time you have that class. And then children start to feel slighted because it's like "mam you never come to us." But it's not because mam doesn't wanna come to them. It's because mam had a long day or mam had an emergency situation that she had to attend to. (Syl)

They also believe that the curriculum needs updating to fit the current needs of the island and to integrate the skills and mindsets that students need. Nik described how she adapts the curriculum.

> I don't have a problem with the HFLE program. I adapt it to suit myself… 'Cause we look at sexuality, how sexuality in maleness or femaleness, and we look at adolescent development, I look at bullying, That's all part of the program…I would just adapt it if there are issues going on, I adapt it to suit my particular needs. … we look at the family. We look at human development. Human growth development. We look at self-esteem issues. When I deal with human development, I also look at puberty, adolescent development, and I talk to the first formers on a level that they can understand. When it gets to other students, we look at the second formers performance. I will look at sexually transmitted diseases. I will look at ... I talk about abstinence because some children become sexually active quite early. I don't talk about condom use. I talk about abstinence and avoiding STIs... There's a curriculum there that we use but ... and there's some books that we have but we don't have a specific book per say to suit ... So you have to take from here and you have to take from there. You adapt it to suit. You supplement what you're given and you take that information because we look at ... I look at study skills as well. (Nik)

Counselors spoke frequently of the challenges that come with coordinating HFLE including working with teachers assigned to teach it who felt inadequate or

disinterested in it. The codes included various aspects of the HFLE curriculum, including the qualifications in which counselor trainees should have knowledge of HFLE, no fear of teaching sexuality in HFLE, teach HFLE, timetabling, and strengthen the HFLE curriculum.

Discussion and Implications

The 12 factors found in this study help to provide a lens that deepen understanding of the current status, development, and needs of school-based counseling in Barbados. All the factors or themes outlined by Martin et al. (2015) emerged from the data in the Barbadian context with one new factor emerging, local curriculum, and two factors renamed because they were somewhat different in the Barbadian context. We discuss the results and provide the most relevant recommendations stemming from these themes recognizing that counselors, policy makers, and researchers in Barbados need to interpret these findings through their cultural lens. A number of important questions emerged from the study. For example, how can school counselors address cultural factors in their national school counseling model and approach to interventions? To what extent is or should school counseling be responsive to national needs and larger societal movements and how can they do so in ways that meet student needs? What would be an effective process of developing a local school counseling model? What laws and policies should be changed or implemented to improve the effectiveness of school counseling in Barbados? What can be done to promote research and evaluation of school counseling programs and practices in Barbados? How can school counselors advocate for a more equitable education system? How should the local curriculum (i.e., HFLE) be transformed or integrated to effectively meet the needs of students? What strategies can school counselors use to advocate for their roles and the related policy changes and updates needed?

Like many small island developing states, cultural factors, national needs, larger societal movements, models of school counseling, laws and educational policy, and characteristics of the public education heavily influence the position, role, and influence of the school counselors in Barbados (Harris, 2013; Martin et al., 2015). Notably, the counselors in Barbados draw on the ASCA model like many counselors across the globe with similar results. While useful, the model appears to be somewhat limited unless adapted in significant ways to their cultural and economic context (Goodrich et al., 2014; Harris, 2013). For example, in Barbados (and other Caribbean countries such as the Eastern Caribbean), counselors are responsible for delivering and for coordinating teachers who deliver the culture-specific HFLE curriculum developed to meet local and regional needs (Griffin & Bryan, 2021a; Jones et al., 2023; Maynard, 2014; Onuoha et al., 2017). Further, given the emphasis on religion in the Barbadian culture and in schools, the counselors integrate spirituality in their practices. However, no directions or guidelines appear to exist on how to do so in an ethical manner. The school counselors' handbook developed by the Education Development Management Unit of the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States Commission in 2021 (see https://www.oecs.org/en/our-work/knowledge/library/education/school-counsellors-handbook) may provide a guide for the Barbados

counselors, their professional association, BAGC, and the MOE on how to develop a similar handbook laying out the vision and mission of their model, counseling approaches and practices, ethical and legal guidelines, and strategies for program management and evaluation.

Counselors feel the press from national concerns around youth needs such school violence and youth mental health and the conversations about education reform and career guidance. These strong influences drive the push for school counselors to embrace counseling approaches and best practices to address these concerns (Harris, 2013; Morshed & Carey, 2020). However, they believe they should be at the table in these nationwide discussions on such topics as career guidance, social-emotional learning (SEL), mindfulness, trauma, positive behavior management, and restorative practices in schools. Also, they continue to emphasize the need to update the local HFLE curriculum to integrate SEL, trauma, and mental health.

Counselors in Barbados want their voices to be heard in education policy decision-making but often feel excluded from decisions by the MOE and their principals that directly affect how they do their work. Given the important role that school counselors play in students' social-emotional, academic development and career planning, they need to be invited to the conversations on education reform. Education reform is a critical time to determine the best strategies and practices for building effective counseling departments and programs in the schools that better meet the career, social-emotional, and academic needs of Barbadian students. Counselors will need to address whether and how these approaches should be adapted to meet the local cultural context. They need to courageously advocate to the MOE for the resources, additional support, and training necessary to more effectively develop programs that better meet the needs of students and families. It is imperative that school counselors understand the importance of intentionally and courageously advocating for their own roles and for equity for students especially at this time of education reform.

Many of the issues that counselors are currently experiencing are due to role confusion and uncertainty, numerous responsibilities, and non-standardized requirements for entry to the profession. Role confusion is not unique to counselors in Barbados, but occurs in other countries such as Botswana and Nigeria, and a host of other countries (Amundson et al., 2015; Aluede et al., 2017; Stockton et al., 2010). For example, in Belize, Bhutan, Botswana, and Barbados, counselors were initially teachers and then assigned simultaneously to both teacher and counseling roles or then placed in the role as full time counselors in schools (Cauchi et al., 2017; Griffin, 2019; Griffin & Bryan, 2021a, 2021b; Guth et al., 2015; Maynard, 2014; Stockton et al., 2010). In some countries such as Nigeria, guidance has been included in national policy and written to show the expansion of the school counselors' role (Aluede et al., 2017). Once Nigeria switched from the inherited British system of education to the U.S. system, guidance was included in the National Policy on Education in 1981 (Aluede et al., 2017).

With the current efforts at local education reform, Barbados' Education Act should be updated to explicitly include counselors and clearly define their role which is much different from teachers. Further, counselors should have a voice in helping to design the responsibilities and requirements for counseling positions to

clearly delineate the roles they play in the schools. Importantly, the MOE should collaborate with the professional association, BAGC, to develop credentialing and delineate the roles and responsibilities for counselors. Given that the local HFLE curriculum is so central to the counselors' role, the counselors should work with the BAGC to advocate to the MOE for periodic upgrades of the curriculum, develop a portal of lesson plans that counselors and teachers can use, and create a task force of counselors and their stakeholders to upgrade the curriculum. BAGC can reach out to regional and international organizations such as CARICOM, UNICEF, and PAHO for support in upgrading the HFLE curriculum and providing ongoing trainings and workshops.

Relationships with key stakeholders; partnerships with community, government organizations, and professionals; and local stakeholder perceptions play a major role in counselors' work in Barbados schools. Given the limitations counselors face in meeting students' needs due to large caseloads (i.e., typically 1 counselor to over 1000 students), these partnerships are how the counselors gain access to support and resources in meet the needs of their students. The relationships with key stakeholders and partnerships with community, government organizations, and professionals indicate school counselors' understanding of the need for collaborative, team-based roles necessary to foster successful counseling programs. To some limited extent, these connections help provide services to a few more students; however, there are not enough partnerships to address the needs of large caseloads of students. Counselors will need to collaborate with their stakeholders and professional association to engage in advocacy for more counseling professionals and social workers in the school and community. Also, joining with the new school counselors housed in the MOE to advocate may allow them to have more power in numbers to advocate for their profession, consistent training, standardized requirements and credentialing, and more counseling professionals and resources in the schools.

Limitations and Conclusion

This study's limitations include the small number of school counselors (i.e., guidance counselors) who participated in the study (5 out of 23 counselors from 4 out of the 21 schools). Further, the use of a pre-existing theory or categories may have limited the emergence of new codes and themes, despite our efforts to attend to a posteriori codes and themes. Nevertheless, the findings are useful for expanding understanding about school counseling in Barbados and other Caribbean islands and small states in general. In particular, several recommendations emerged from the study's findings for school counselors, the Ministry of Education, and the Barbados Association for Guidance Counsellors (BAGC).

Ultimately, this study helps to expand the understanding of economic, sociocultural, and political realities that shape school-based counseling in Barbados. This information provides a strong basis for making decisions and creating policies to improve the practice of school counseling in Barbados. Future research should continue to expand upon this study. Barbados can serve as a model for other small states in earlier stages of implementing school-based counseling programs. Replicating a

study like this in other small states will create opportunities to further understand the experiences and practices of counselors in various settings. As Crossley (2008) suggests, larger states can learn from small states. By changing the paradigm, the broader school counseling community will learn more about working with diverse populations and preparing counselors to enter such spaces. Also, more qualitative studies in small states (Crossley, 2008) would assist in getting a more accurate perspective of school counseling and ultimately impact the work they do with students, families, and the community.

Concerning school counseling in Barbados, some questions remain to be explored concerning what role counselors play in education reform, in alleviating inequities in education, and as advocates for their own role as well as regarding some of the larger national needs and inequities that impact students and families. Research on these questions may expand school counselors' understanding of their roles and help shape future school counseling development and practice.

Declarations

Competing Interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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