


ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Ethical dilemmas of school counsellors: A vignette study

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(Received 29 September 2020; revised 13 December 2021; accepted 16 December 2021; first published online 14 March 2022)

Abstract

School counsellors often encounter ethically challenging situations due to contradictory values and roles. This qualitative research aimed to define school counsellors' ethical dilemmas and their responses to such situations. Twenty-seven school counsellors in Turkey were asked to respond to 13 vignettes with ethical dilemmas. The most frequent ethical dilemmas involved the limits of confidentiality, confusion about counsellors' professional roles in school settings, uncooperative behaviours among stakeholders, and suspected child sexual abuse. It was revealed that counsellors prioritise the students' benefit and respect students' privacy. They follow legal guidelines in risky situations and insist on working within their areas of competence; they are not willing to accept noncounselling tasks. The results and implications for counsellors, counsellor educators and researchers are discussed.

Keywords: counselling ethics; ethical dilemma; ethical judgments; school counselling; Turkish counsellors

Counsellors in Turkish schools frequently experience ethical challenges while discharging their responsibilities. These challenges come from a variety of sources, but particularly from schools' expectations of counsellors. The Turkish Ministry of National Education (MoNE, 2020) has formally outlined school counsellors' roles and responsibilities. Their primary responsibilities are to focus on the psychological needs of students and to enhance their personal development. Concurrently, they are responsible for following current laws and standards of professional ethics to preserve students' welfare (İköz, 2017). However, contradictory values and roles sometimes cause ethical dilemmas (Hayman & Covert, 1986). For instance, the personal values of counsellors may conflict with each other, or the ethical principles of different institutions, such as two different associations with which a counsellor is affiliated, may differ (Camadan, 2017). Similarly, counsellors' distinctive responsibilities may require conflicting decisions. These situations make it difficult to choose the 'right' course of action (Remley & Huey, 2002). Thus, maintaining ethical judgments is not always possible for school counsellors.

Confusion about school counsellors' professional roles in Turkey is one of the challenges to their ability to make ethical decisions. A lack of consensus in defining their professional roles due to frequently changing regulations and title-based role conflicts poses difficulties in making ethical judgments (İköz et al., 2017). Over the years, the title of school counsellors has changed inconsistently many times in legal materials, ranging from 'guidance expert' and 'consultant guide' to 'group guide' or 'guidance consultant' (Eren Gümüş, 2017). Although the National Occupational Standards (Vocational Qualifications Authority, 2017) confirm the title of *school counsellor*, MoNE (2020) currently emphasises the use of both 'guidance teacher' and 'psychological counsellor' as titles rather than 'school counsellor'. These inconsistencies obscure the responsibilities of school counsellors and may potentially cause difficulties in making decisions in ethically challenging situations.

Introducing their professional roles to other school staff is also among school counsellors' responsibilities (Froeschle & Crews, 2010). Ambiguity about their responsibilities in schools may cause additional obligations for them beyond standard counselling tasks. For instance, the expectations of stakeholders such as school leaders or teachers can influence their tasks and role definitions (Gibson & Mitchell, 2016). Counsellors must try to find a balance between their responsibilities and these expectations (Culbreth et al., 2005). Due to confusion about the professional roles of counsellors, school leaders have sought to intervene in school counsellors' work by assigning them administrative and other tasks (İkiz et al., 2017); for example, school leaders sometimes ask counsellors to give classroom lectures (Aydın et al., 2011). Teachers often agree with school leaders that counsellors should lecture, supervise exams, or be involved in disciplinary processes (Akın, 2007). These noncounselling tasks demonstrate the counsellor as an authority figure that may make students hesitant to talk to them (Ünal & Ünal, 2010) and contradicts the nonjudgmental nature of the profession. Consequently, school counsellors experience ethical dilemmas related to noncounselling tasks. Moreover, they are legally responsible for reporting cases of harassment, abuse and neglect as per students' statements (Eren Gümüş & Gümüş, 2018). This legal responsibility inevitably requires a collaborative understanding of school staff and the cooperation of government officials. Therefore, collaboration with stakeholders, including school leaders, teachers and governmental authorities such as police officers, is essential for school counsellors to minimise ethical dilemmas.

There are further duties of school counsellors that may lead to ethical dilemmas. In Turkey, MoNE (2020) has the authority to assign them to work at more than one school at the same time, particularly when there is a lack of counsellors in a certain region. The Child Protection Law (Çocuk Koruma Kanunu [Child Protection Law], 2005) further assigns them as forensic interviewers in judicial processes if required. These additional duties are intended to meet the need for qualified mental health professionals in practice. However, they are not always conducive to good practice (Tuzgöl Dost & Keklik, 2012); instead, they may cause time-management issues for counsellors. Working across numerous schools and additional roles limits the time that counsellors can spend in their school and in turn hinders them from focusing on their work with students. School leaders think that the full-time presence of school counsellors strengthens the parent-school relationship (Özgan & Aydın, 2010), whereas their absence hinders the efficiency of counselling and guidance services (Apaydın & Çakır, 2016). Thus, school counsellors are more effective as full-time staff.

No matter the source of their dilemmas, counsellors try to respond to ethically challenging situations with the guidance of ethical codes (Remley & Herlihy, 2014). The Turkish Psychological Counselling and Guidance Association (TPCGA) offers several guidelines for the ethical practice of counsellors in Turkey (İkiz et al., 2021). However, since there are no specified legal procedures for counselling practitioners (Öncü, 2020), there are also no negative legal sanctions for ethical violations. Counselling relationships are considered only as a service procurement in economic terms (Eren Gümüş & Gümüş, 2018) and are not bound by legally acknowledged ethical norms. This means that the ethical violations of counsellors are not seen as a matter of legal doctrine. Hence, adhering to ethical guidelines is generally a counsellor's choice rather than a legal requirement.

More importantly, knowledge of and previous education on counselling ethics do not guarantee ethical behaviour (Tryon, 2000). It is more important to internalise ethical values rather than know the existing rules (Bond, 2017). Each ethical dilemma is unique to the situation (Luke et al., 2013), and ethical decision-making processes differ among individuals due to their different personal characteristics (Lambie et al., 2010). Therefore, individuals may respond differently to a particular situation. The current literature in Turkey defines sources of dilemmas for school counsellors as confidentiality and competencies (İkiz et al., 2017), conflicts with school leaders, dual relationships, boundary issues (Siviş-Çetinkaya, 2015a), and title confusions (Arslan et al., 2019). Camadan et al. (2020) also revealed the top three kinds of information for school counsellors in the context of counselling ethics to be competence, continuing professional development, and sensitivity. To our knowledge, only one study has examined the ethical judgments of Turkish counsellors, and that research was not specific to school counsellors (Siviş-Çetinkaya, 2015c). Therefore, it remains necessary to discover how school

counsellors respond to these challenging situations. The current study focuses on experiences of school counsellors that include internal conflict and difficulty with taking action for fear of doing something wrong. The study aims to examine school counsellors' responses to ethical dilemmas using vignettes developed for this purpose.

Method

Design

Counselling ethics is a newly emerging field of study in Turkey, and the majority of existing studies have investigated the ethical challenges of counsellors with qualitative approaches for exploratory purposes (e.g., İkiz et al., 2017; Siviş-Çetinkaya, 2015a). The current study also adopted a qualitative approach. A phenomenological perspective was applied to capture the essence of school counsellors' responses to the ethically challenging situations (Merriam, 2009). A phenomenological approach was employed here to discover the commonalities and fundamental components of ethical dilemmas based on participants' lived experiences. Participants' responses to ethical dilemmas were discovered through their responses to vignettes. Each vignette represented a specific ethical dilemma. Vignettes often involve a character's response to a moral dilemma (Barter & Renold, 2000). Since they enable researchers to discover participants' behaviour or action in a certain circumstance, they are generally considered useful in qualitative research (Wilks, 2004). In the current study, the vignettes were developed through the lived cases obtained in the preliminary study of focus group discussions with school counsellors. Participants were asked to respond to the vignettes in the subsequent interviews.

Participants

Participants were school counsellors working in public schools in the city of Uşak. Turkey's education system comprises three levels, namely primary school (1st to 4th grades), middle school (5th to 8th grades), and secondary school (9th to 12th grades). Participants were recruited from all three levels of schools and were identified through snowball sampling, which helped the researchers reach new volunteers via previously enrolled participants (Merriam, 2009). Uşak is a small city in western Turkey where people working in educational institutions usually know each other. From that starting point, the researchers initially contacted several school counsellors who were potential participants for the focus groups and asked them whether they could provide the contact information of other school counsellors. After contacting counsellors who volunteered to participate, two meetings were set for the focus groups. The first focus group interview was conducted with eight counsellors (seven female and one male) from different secondary schools, and the second one included five counsellors (four female and one male) from primary and middle schools.

Similarly, to reach counsellors for individual interviews, the researchers again contacted potential participants and asked them about other counsellors who might participate in the study. Interviews were conducted with 27 counsellors (23 female and four males) who did not participate in either of the focus groups. Ten participants worked in primary schools, seven worked in middle schools, and ten worked in secondary schools. Participants in all stages of this study had a bachelor's degree from a guidance and psychological counselling department, except for three counsellors who had graduated from a department of psychology. Their ages ranged between 29 and 54.

Procedure

The present study was approved by the review board of the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Buca Faculty of Education of Dokuz Eylül University, and the MoNE. All participants provided informed consent before interviews. The researchers explained the purpose of the study and the duration and location of interviews to each participant. Counsellors participated voluntarily, acknowledging that they could end their participation at any time in the event of discomfort. The privacy of their data

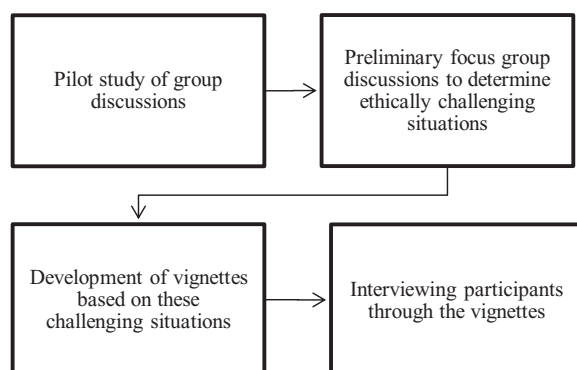


Figure 1. The research flowchart.

and the confidentiality of all personal information was ensured by the researchers. Participants who were willing to respond to member checking or who wished to be informed about the results of the study provided contact information for further communication.

School counsellors were asked to respond to vignettes in individual interviews. Prior to those interviews, the researchers conducted preliminary work to develop the vignettes. Two focus group discussions were held, considering that this method is advantageous to provide foreknowledge for further investigations (Kitzinger, 1995). The ethically challenging situations described by the participants in the focus group discussions were used to design vignettes. Afterwards, another group of school counsellors were interviewed. They responded to the 13 vignettes that had been created following the group discussions. The research process is illustrated in Figure 1.

Focus Groups

Focus groups are effective tools for discussing sensitive issues (Kitzinger, 1995) such as ethical dilemmas. Researchers encouraged participants to describe their experiences with ethically challenging situations in two focus group meetings that lasted 46 and 59 minutes. Before these meetings, interview questions were tested in a pilot study (Meriam, 2013). Five senior undergraduate students who had recently attended a course on occupational ethics and law in counselling at Uşak University participated in the pilot study and were asked to imagine themselves as school counsellors while responding to the interview questions. Two questions were revised following the pilot study, and an expert opinion was then obtained from a counsellor with a PhD degree. The final focus group questions were as follows:

1. How do you spend a day as a school counsellor?
2. What are the situations for which you have difficulty in making decisions in a work day?
3. Can you give examples of ethically challenging experiences?
4. How do you solve such ethical dilemmas?

Development of the Vignettes

Participants in the focus group discussions discussed a total of 25 cases categorised among five main topics: confidentiality (11 cases), unethical requests (10 cases), suspected child sexual abuse (5 cases), uncooperative behaviours of stakeholders (4 cases), and misunderstandings of the professional roles (3 cases). All cases were evaluated in terms of their suitability for being used as vignettes. Thirteen open-ended vignettes were then created, each involving an ethically challenging situation. These vignettes were reviewed by two academics (one with a PhD in psychological counselling and the other

in Turkish language and literature) who suggested minor corrections for professional and semantic issues. The vignettes are presented in [Table 1](#).

Interviews

In vignette studies, researchers ask participants to respond to hypothetical situations about their own or a third person's actions (Spalding & Phillips, 2007). Participants of this study were asked what they would do if they were to experience the situation in each vignette. Interviews were voice-recorded to prevent data loss; they ranged between 40 and 92 minutes in length.

Data Analysis

The first researcher transcribed the recorded material. Verbatim documents were shared with two other counsellors, one a PhD holder and one a PhD candidate, excluding the personal information of the participants. For the systematic description of the data and to capture the essence of ethical dilemmas, content analysis was used (Schreier, 2012). Three coders analysed the vignettes independently. Categories and codes were first determined and then compared. The credibility of the data was preserved with researcher triangulation; the consistency between coders was found to be 85% (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Results

Results were reported specifically for each ethical dilemma topic: confidentiality, unethical requests, suspected child abuse, uncooperative behaviours of stakeholders, and misunderstandings of professional roles. Responses are summarised in [Table 2](#).

Confidentiality

According to the results, ethical dilemmas mostly emerged due to the school staff's demands for disclosure of private information. Most participants reported that they did not choose to share such information. However, in certain cases, informing authorities and school leaders, colleagues and/or the child's family members was found appropriate by most participants in terms of security concerns. Their responses to ethical dilemmas related to confidentiality included respecting students' privacy and considering their willingness and welfare. Some statements from participants are provided below.

Vignette 9: 'We should inform the teacher so that she can take precautions in her class. I don't give in-depth information; students talk because they trust me. If I tell everyone, they won't speak to me again.' (P13)

Vignette 10: 'It is our duty to inform authorities when the child tells you something like that. We don't determine whether it is true or not; we just make a legal report. Seeking the truth is the responsibility of the police and prosecution office.' (P8).

Unethical Requests

Results showed that participants would prioritise emergencies over student meetings to cooperate with parents. Two different responses were stated for a situation in which a parent wants to see the counsellor when she/he is already in a session. These were stopping the session, sending the student back to class and talking to the parent, or making an appointment with the parent for later. Moreover, almost all participants refused to supervise idle classes, oversee exams, or plan in-class activities on subjects suggested by school leaders. Participants responded to these unethical requests by establishing boundaries and enhancing their competencies.

Table 1. Final form of the vignettes

No.	Vignette	Ethical dilemma
1	You are conducting a counselling session with a student. Someone knocks on the door, steps in without asking, and tells you that s/he is the parent of another student. S/he then immediately says that s/he has only received permission for 30 minutes of absence from work and cannot easily come again.	Unethical requests
2	Two students have had a fight during the lunchbreak. The hall monitor comes and tells you that the deputy school administrator asked her/him to find you and tell you that you should call for an ambulance.	Misunderstandings of professional roles
3	In the school at which you work, school management collects students' mobile phones before classes start in the morning and gives them back at the end of the day. Today, a student did not deliver his/her phone and kept it hidden. A teacher has realised this and has told the school administrator. The school administrator wants you to write a report indicating whether the student should be judged by the school disciplinary board or not.	Misunderstandings of professional roles
4	Today you are assigned as a social worker to conduct legal interviews with children in need. You are summoned to the courthouse at around 16:30 and asked to come and see a child until the shift ends at 17:00. Considering the road, you will have 10 minutes with the child if you are lucky.	Uncooperative behaviours of stakeholders
5	You have planning and preparation duties for activities at your school. The administrator often calls you with little warning and asks you to supervise idle classes and conduct activities that s/he chooses. S/he also asks you to monitor exams.	Unethical requests
6	A female student is being forced by her family to marry a stranger much older than her. She wants you to help her report her family to the police. You know that the government can take her to a safer place, but she also states that if that happens, her older brother will hold you responsible for losing her and will threaten to kill you.	Suspected child abuse
7	A female student wants to press charges against a male student for sexual harassment by touching, but you are aware that she lies often. When describing the incident, she sounds contradictory, and you cannot be sure if she is telling the truth. If you report this, police officers will come and take him.	Suspected child abuse
8	A student has told you that another student sexually harassed him/her. School administrators want to make peace between the families of the students instead of making an official report. You call the police without the administrator's permission, and the police officers tell you that they are being called about sexual harassment very often and you should resolve this on your own without their help.	Suspected child abuse
9	You summon a student to conduct a counselling session during course hours. After this session, the school staff wants to know what you two were talking about.	Confidentiality
10	A student, crying, tells you that her/his father has been beating her/him. You want to call the authorities, but you realise that the father beat the student before and the police came to their house, but after the police left, the father beat the student even more severely.	Confidentiality
11	Teachers in the school at which you work refer students to you without asking you or the students whether psychological help is necessary. Students are being referred for any little issue and so they start to cause problems when they do not want to attend a class.	Uncooperative behaviours of stakeholders
12	Because there are not enough school counsellors in your region, you are assigned to two different schools in addition to your own. One of these schools has many behavioural and psychological issues. The school administrator tells you that s/he has not observed any improvement in the students since you were assigned.	Uncooperative behaviours of stakeholders
13	You work in an area with high crime rates. You observe people using illegal substances near the school. You call the police a few times, but no one comes to help.	Uncooperative behaviours of stakeholders

Table 2. Summary of the results

Ethical dilemma topics	Participants' responses
Confidentiality	Respecting privacy, considering willingness and student welfare
Unethical requests	Establishing boundaries, enhancing their own competencies
Suspected child abuse	Informing authorities, seeking students' benefit
Misunderstandings of professional roles	Refusing administrative tasks and establishing boundaries
Uncooperative behaviours of stakeholders	Seeking the welfare of children, pursuing efficiency, introducing their professional roles

Vignette 1: 'In that case, if their demand is not very urgent, we keep the parents waiting. I would tell the parent I'm with a student at that moment and they need to wait. If the parent tells me it's really urgent, I may let the student go and listen to the parent.' (P8)

Vignette 5: 'I prefer doing some guidance activities with a class if I need to see those students that week. The school leader cannot decide the activities for us. We have an annual plan and we follow it.' (P13)

Suspected Child Abuse

Participants' responses showed that they prefer to inform the authorised security units when they are concerned about students' security and cannot ask for help from school leaders. However, participants showed no consensus about a student known to lie frequently claiming that another student had sexually abused her. About half of the participants expressed their desire for being certain before informing the authorities, explaining that they are responsible for the other student's welfare as well as that of the alleged victim. The other half of the participants indicated that they would inform the authorities immediately and follow legal procedures due to the potential seriousness of the situation. Thus, their responses involved informing the authorities and seeking students' benefit.

Vignette 6: 'On these occasions, I inform the school leaders and ask them to call the authorities. . . . I inform the leaders verbally or make an official report about it. I also talk to the child about the administrator's call and how the process will proceed.' (P4)

Vignette 7: 'What matters is the child's statement. I don't have to search for the truth. It is some other people's responsibility to detect whether this is a lie.' (P18)

Vignette 8: 'With a suspicion of sexual abuse like this one, we have to inform. I would tell the administrator that we can be punished if we don't inform. I would make the call myself, even, if the administrator doesn't stand with me.' (P3)

Misunderstandings of Professional Roles

Participants generally considered the needs of the students and chose to call for an ambulance when needed. Five participants indicated that this is an administrative task and they would not make such a call, while several other participants wanted to know what had happened before making the call. The professional role of the counsellor creates a contradiction in itself by holding them responsible for some administrative duties. The vast majority of the participants rejected the option of referring students to the disciplinary board. Overall, participants chose to reject administrative tasks and sought to establish professional boundaries.

Vignette 2: 'It doesn't matter if it is lunchtime or a break. I would definitely help; I would learn what happened, make the call for an ambulance, the parents, or the police, whatever is necessary.' (P7)

Vignette 3: 'I never stated my idea about a referral to the school disciplinary board in my reports. I only report what I observe in the students. Disciplinary referral is the administrator's responsibility, not mine.' (P3)

Uncooperative Behaviours of Stakeholders

Several vignettes included uncooperative behaviours of school staff and government employees. First, participants wanted to explain the counselling profession to the school staff and limit the number of sessions to prevent the misuse of counselling hours. In addition, they chose to make an official complaint about the noncooperative behaviour of police officers regarding school safety, and specifically regarding substance use near the school. They stated that they would notify the authorities with a written document and ask for advice from higher authorities (e.g., the MoNE, the governor, or the mayor). Moreover, being assigned to more than one school or as social workers for legal interviews were found to be ethical challenges by the participants. They chose to seek benefits for the children and pursue efficiency under both circumstances. Hence, they responded to the uncooperative behaviours of others by introducing their professional roles and limits and by seeking efficiency and the wellbeing of students.

Vignette 4: 'Most of these are not in the scope of our profession . . . they lack social workers and thus need our support. The settings there and our tasks are not alike. We aren't even helpful most of the time. But we need to do it, because it's a civil service. We do what we can for the benefit of the child.' (P5)

Vignette 11: 'That really depends on the attitude of the school counsellor. The students come with an intention, and you understand that. I would not accept the student with that intention for a second time, like planning to skip a class. I would also speak with the teacher and the school leader to resolve that situation.' (P5)

Vignette 12: 'I would try to explain to them that behavioural change needs time. Talking to a student once and waiting for him to change is not realistic. I don't have a magic wand to fix the behavioural issues of students.' (P1)

Vignette 13: 'Providing security is the police's job. I would inform the police headquarters, a higher authority, and let them know that we called for an emergency and nobody came.' (P6)

Discussion

The present study aimed to determine school counsellors' ethical dilemmas and their responses to such situations. In line with previous studies on counselling ethics (Siviş-Çetinkaya, 2015a, 2015c), and specifically, school counselling ethics (İkiz et al., 2017), the results revealed that the most common ethical dilemmas of participants pertained to confidentiality. Since counsellors are responsible for many students and need to consult with third parties (Remley, 2002), it is not surprising that pressure to breach confidentiality raises ethical dilemmas. Both teachers (Trice-Black et al., 2013) and school leaders (İkiz et al., 2017) often try to force school counsellors to disclose confidential information. The characteristics of different situations may lead counsellors through different decision-making processes in the case of a breach of confidentiality (Zhu et al., 2018). For example, Jenkins and Palmer (2012) suggested that even though school counsellors acknowledge that reporting child abuse is a legal responsibility, it is not necessarily their automatic response. Participants of the current study respected students' privacy,

in line with the findings of Eremie and Ibanga (2018). Siviş-Çetinkaya (2019) also reported that school counsellors in Turkey emphasise protecting student welfare whenever they are asked to share confidential information with the school administration.

Unethical requests also occur due to confusion about professional roles. Although the MoNE (2020) has explained the responsibilities of school counsellors, the support of school leaders is needed for planning counselling activities (Yüksel-Şahin, 2016). However, as expressed by the participants of this study, school leaders occasionally intervene in school counselling services and assign counsellors to administrative tasks (Siviş-Çetinkaya, 2015a), which leads to ethical dilemmas. Participants emphasised pursuing the wellbeing of students without considering whether something is an administrative task or not. In the process of undertaking such tasks, however, the counsellor may damage the trust that they have established with students. For instance, when students feel that school counsellors can judge them, they will begin to view counsellors as frightening people (Ünal & Ünal, 2010) and fear that they will not be understood by counsellors (Nas, 2019). Almost all participants declined to be involved in disciplinary processes. Thus, they needed to explain their professional roles to school staff to prevent such ethical dilemmas.

School leaders' interference in counselling activities was identified as another ethically challenging situation by the participants, similar to other studies (Aydın et al., 2011; İkiz et al., 2017). It was deemed unethical to supervise exams, monitor idle classes or plan activities according to the wishes of school leaders. Although school leaders deem it appropriate to assign counsellors to teaching-related tasks (Buchanan, 2011), 'lecturing' counsellors are considered untrustworthy by students (Doyle et al., 2017). Consequently, participants do not accept noncounselling tasks to prevent ethical dilemmas that might decrease the effectiveness of their work.

In Turkey, the MoNE can assign school counsellors to more than one school if there is a lack of personnel in a particular region. This is another important challenge for counsellors as working for more than one school negatively affects efficiency and is perceived as an obstacle to performing sufficient activities (Yüksel-Şahin, 2016). School leaders frequently have high expectations of counsellors (Tuzgöl Dost & Keklik, 2012), as expressed in one of the vignettes of the current study. Thus, rather than simply satisfying school leaders' wishes, participants preferred to explain to them that behavioural change requires time and the cooperation of school leaders.

Besides school leaders, the ethical dilemmas of school counsellors may also be related to parents and other stakeholders (Brown et al., 2017). Wrong judgments by school staff in referring students to counsellors are among the factors that impact the functionality of counselling services in Turkey (Tagay & Savi-Çakar, 2017). Teachers need to properly identify students in need before referring them to counsellors (Khansa, 2015). Participants emphasised the behaviour of teachers in referring students, suggesting limiting the number of sessions and talking to teachers as solutions. Additionally, the attitudes of parents have a serious impact on students' wellbeing (Locke et al., 2012) along with their help-seeking behaviours (Kaya et al., 2012). However, counsellors may have difficulty in building an alliance with parents. In the current study, participants considered the rights of the students while they also wanted to listen to parents. These findings showed that proper evaluation of students' and parents' intentions and, once again, the successful establishment of professional roles may help school counsellors prevent and resolve ethical dilemmas.

Other stakeholders involved in ethical dilemmas are police officers. Students can easily obtain illegal substances outside and near the school (Dönmez & Güven, 2002). School leaders believe that the absence of a school counsellor is a threat to school security (Yıldırım et al., 2018). Participants in the current study preferred to consult with higher authorities if police officers refused to help them with a substance abuse-related situation. Counsellors' communication with the police is required and helpful for children (Çokamay et al., 2017). Findings suggest that school counsellors are aware of the importance of police support in challenging situations and that they seek help from government agencies such as the MoNE or the governor.

The results outlined above suggest the importance of the collaboration of stakeholders. However, certain topics like suspected child sexual abuse can be challenging due to the perceptions of stakeholders,

including negative attitudes among school leaders (Siviş-Çetinkaya, 2015a). Although this is a major ethical issue in school counselling, leaders in Turkey occasionally do not inform the authorities about sexual abuse due to concerns about the reputation of the school or the privacy of the child (Siviş-Çetinkaya, 2015b). In contrast, school counsellors generally feel an obligation to report due to the fear that the child is still at risk (Goldman & Padayachi, 2002) and they think that they have to inform the authorities (Siviş-Çetinkaya, 2015c). The findings reveal that school counsellors inform authorities by formal written documents even if they do not have the support and collaboration of school leaders; otherwise, they feel unreliable. This study has identified two different approaches to this dilemma. If the situation is not clear, some participants would choose to inform the authorities immediately based on the student's statement. However, others would prefer to be sure before making a call. Goldman and Padayachi (2002) similarly found no consensus on seeking the truth before reporting, while a study in Turkey reported that school counsellors do not consider themselves competent in addressing child sexual abuse issues (Uçar et al., 2018). Although school counsellors are concerned about being perceived as dishonest (Lambie, 2005), Remley and Fry (1993) suggested reporting when it is not possible to be sure.

Turkey's Child Protection Law assigns school counsellors as forensic interviewers in judicial processes if there is a lack of social workers in the region. However, participation in judicial processes requires specific competencies (Francis, 2015). Interviewing without competency leads counsellors to ethical dilemmas. Moreover, the ensuing absence of counsellors from their schools poses an obstacle to the achievement of counselling aims (Karataş & Şahin Baltacı, 2013). Participants found this practice improper and unethical, but they are still bound to serving as forensic interviewers due to legal obligations. Consequently, they experience hesitation in such interviews due to feelings of not being competent.

Limitations and Directions for Future Studies

The results of this study should be considered and evaluated in light of the limitations of the design and sampling. Participants frequently tend to give socially desired responses to vignettes (Barter & Renold, 2000). The researchers assumed that participants responded honestly to the vignettes as only volunteering counsellors participated. Therefore, it can be thought that the participants felt confident enough in their judgments to explain their action plans honestly to the researchers. Moreover, this study included school counsellors living in a small city in western Turkey. Future studies with participants from different areas across the country would offer a broader understanding of school counsellors' perspectives regarding ethical dilemmas.

The above limitations of this initial study highlight the need for more comprehensive research. Researchers in Turkey might consider developing surveys to determine counsellors' ethical beliefs and discuss common opinions in the counselling field. In addition, ethical decision-making models for Turkish culture should be developed for promoting the ethical judgments of school counsellors. School counsellors tend to use components of decision-making models even if they do not follow the steps specifically (Brown et al., 2017). Noting that none of the participants mentioned such models in their action plans, a familiarity with models might provide further benefits for resolving dilemmas. There are several models specific to the Turkish context (e.g., Eren Gümüş & Gümüş, 2018; Ergene, 2004) that provide a general perspective for resolving counsellors' ethical dilemmas. However, to our knowledge, only one study (Karacan Özdemir & Aracı İyiaydın, 2019) has addressed ethical dilemmas regarding risky student behaviours. Further models should be developed and integrated into counsellor education curriculums to promote judgement skills among prospective school counsellors.

Conclusion and Implications

The present study has shown that school counsellors' ability to collaborate with stakeholders is essential in ethical matters. They need these people involved in these situations to be familiar with their professional roles, and they are willing to explain those roles themselves. At the same time, being assigned as a

forensic interviewer is viewed as unethical by participants due to their lack of competency in forensic psychology. Overall, this study has examined school counsellors' responses to ethically challenging situations with a qualitative method and the results indicate that confidentiality, others' perceptions of school counsellors' roles, uncooperative behaviours of stakeholders, and cases of suspected child sexual abuse are particularly important ethical issues for counsellors.

This study offers contributions to counsellors, counsellor educators and researchers. Despite the recently increased need for and attention to new research on counselling ethics, the number of studies remains limited. This research is therefore important in terms of offering findings on school counsellors' action plans in the face of ethically challenging situations. In Turkey, the TPCGA recently updated the ethical codes for counsellors (2021), but the concerns presented here still have the potential to pose further dilemmas for counsellors in Turkey unless their competencies and ethical codes are legally recognised and clearly defined for different working settings. Due to the lack of relevant legal regulations in Turkey, the practices of counsellors are not monitored in terms of ethical matters. As Arslan et al. (2019) noted, these concerns do not correspond with the international literature since understanding and practising these ethical codes remains under the initiative of counsellors in Turkey. Whether this poses an ethical dilemma or not is open to debate. However, we consider the points presented here as ethical issues since they represent obstacles to maintaining the efficient work of counsellors in school settings.

Author note. This study is a part of the first researcher's master's thesis with the supervision of the second author at Dokuz Eylül University. The first author was a master's student at Dokuz Eylül University during this research, then changed affiliation to Middle East Technical University.

Conflict of interest. None.

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