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'I Know We've Got Someone in the School I Can Trust': Students' Attitudes Towards School Counselling Services in Slovenian Schools

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Abstract. This article examines the role of the school counselling service as a protective factor in adolescents' lives. School counsellors provide adolescents with information, emotional support, and counselling, and for many adolescents, they are the only source of support outside the family. The findings of a study conducted among 1,363 primary school students and 306 secondary school students from Slovenia are presented. The data showed that the students regard school counsellors favourably, and they generally have a high degree of trust in them.

Keywords: *protective factors, students, school counselling service, counselling.*

Introduction

When growing up, children and adolescents are faced with numerous changes in the four interrelated areas of physical, cognitive, emotional/personality and social development (Gutgesell & Payne, 2004; Lohaus & Vierhaus, 2015). It must be emphasised that each child's or adolescent's development differs and that it may not be entirely smooth or without problems (Gutgesell & Payne, 2004; Lohaus & Vierhaus, 2015). During this

process, developmental tasks that are undertaken depend on factors stemming from the individual's own development as well as their environment (Gutgesell & Payne, 2004; Lohaus & Vierhaus, 2015; Tomasik & Silbereisen, 2012). Developmental tasks comprise the knowledge, attitudes, skills, and behaviour that each individual must acquire during a specific period in order to function effectively in their society and time. The majority of children and adolescents succeed in mastering developmental tasks, while a minority experience periods of uncertainty, dissatisfaction, self-doubt, sadness, etc. These are typically the children and adolescents who are exposed to unfavourable and risky factors in their homes, schools or the wider environment that accompany them on their path to adulthood (Gutgesell & Payne, 2004; Inchley et al., 2016).

In recent years, developed European countries have witnessed a number of social changes, increasing social and cultural uncertainty, moral and value contradictions and significant insecurity about the future; these issues affect young people as well (Gutgesell & Payne, 2004; Tomasik & Silbereisen, 2012). Contemporary societies require early mental and behavioural adjustments to contradictory situations, which cause new distress and insecurity in the young. Findings from a number of European studies have shed light on this issue (e.g. Inchley et al., 2016), suggesting that, on the one hand, most children and adolescents are mentally healthy and satisfied with life; however, on the other hand, the number of children and adolescents with mental health problems has increased in the last decade. The KIDSCREEN study,[1] carried out in 13 European countries, demonstrated that 14.7% of adolescents aged 12–15 had a borderline or increased likelihood of mental health problems. The smallest percentages were measured in Germany and the Netherlands, while the largest was recorded in the UK (Ravens-Sieberer et al., 2008).

Facing Developmental Tasks and Potential Problems When Growing Up: The Role of the School Counselling Service

Children and adolescents differ in how they deal with developmental tasks and issues, dilemmas and problems when growing up. Some of them do it alone, others with the help of peers and/or adults. They are mostly supported by the people closest to them primarily parents and the family. Protective factors and processes function as counterbalances to unfavourable influences and experiences, decreasing the likelihood of the onset of problems and impacting positively on individuals' (mental) health. They also reduce individuals' exposure to risk factors (Bengel et al., 2009; Mikuš Kos, 2017). Protective factors originate in adolescents themselves, but the majority of protective factors and processes are built into adolescents' everyday experiences through their social networks and are primarily formed by families (Bengel et al., 2009; Sieving et al., 2017). Most children and adolescents in Slovenia have good family support and security, but about 20% of them do not receive adequate support from parents or they have no adult reference person

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[1] https://www.kidscreen.org/english/project/

they can rely on when in distress (Rener, 2002). The Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children (HBSC)[2] study (Inchley et al., 2016; Jeriček Klanšček et al., 2015) showed that 84.6% of adolescents could communicate with their mothers about the things that really troubled them, and 67.2% of them could communicate about the same with their fathers. In addition to family, adolescents find an important source of support in friends/peers; the support of friends/peers in Slovenia is strong, a little stronger for girls than for boys (Jeriček Klanšček et al., 2015).

Although school is a burden for some children and adolescents, for the vast majority it is an important source of support when they find themselves in trouble (Bengel et al., 2009; Gilligan, 2001; Jeriček Klanšček et al., 2015; Mikuš Kos, 2017; Sieving et al., 2017). The HBSC study demonstrated that schoolmates' and teachers' support was strong in all age groups for both boys and girls (Jeriček Klanšček et al., 2015).

Teachers, school counsellors and volunteers working in the school provide information, advice, emotional support and counselling to children and adolescents with problems. For many adolescents, they are the only source of help and support outside the family (Mikuš Kos, 2017). The school and associated positive psychosocial processes are important protective factors for children and adolescents; they are particularly significant for those who grow up in unfavourable and risky family and social environments. The school may include a number of protective factors; for instance, good relationships with school friends (at least one), a good relationship with at least one teacher, good school achievement or at least good grades in one subject (Bengel et al., 2009; Mikuš Kos, 2017; Sieving et al., 2017). The school counselling service is another important source of assistance and support for children and adolescents who must face and overcome developmental tasks and potential problems.

The School Counselling Service in Slovenia

The concept of school counselling services differs around the world (Carey et al., 2017; Harris, 2013); the services offered in Slovenian schools are specific to Slovenia. The concept of the Slovenian school counselling service dates back to the second half of the 1960s; since the mid-1990s, the law has required every public preschool, primary and secondary school to have a school counselling service. The service participates in resolving pedagogical, psychological and social issues in schools through the following central activities: activities of assistance, development and prevention, as well as planning and

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[2]   HBSC, a collaborative cross-national study by the World Health Organisation, has provided information about the health, well-being, social environment and health behaviour of 11-, 13- and 15-year-old boys and girls for over 30 years. The latest international report from the study presents findings from the 2013/2014 survey, which collected data from almost 220,000 young people in 42 countries in Europe and North America. The data focus on social context, health outcomes, health behaviours and risk behaviours relevant to young people's health and well-being (for more, cf. Inchley et al., 2016).

evaluation. These activities enable school counsellors to support all school participants (National Education Institute Slovenia [NEIS], 2008a, 2008b).

In Slovenia, the school counselling service is a school subsystem, which works together with other subsystems (teachers, head teachers, parents and community) towards the fundamental goal of the school as a whole (Gregorčič Mrvar & Mažgon, 2018; Gregorčič Mrvar & Resman, 2019; Šteh et al., 2018; Jeznik et al., 2019). The school counselling service is interdisciplinary, which means it is made up of counsellors with varying professional profiles. These include pedagogues, psychologists, social workers, social pedagogues, special pedagogues and others (Gregorčič Mrvar & Resman, 2019; Organisation and Financing of Education Act, 2017). People with all these profiles are professionally qualified to do counselling work in schools, but each brings his or her own specific knowledge, skills and competences to the work.

The central starting point of school counsellors is the wellbeing of all children and adolescents, who deserve optimum development and a high-quality educational process regardless of their individual or group differences. Therefore, an important aspect of school counsellors' work relates to working with the class. The class is the basic social and educational community in the school and comprises children/adolescents and teachers, where relationships between children/adolescents and teachers as well as among children/adolescents themselves are built. In the view of the school counsellors, the class community is the shared space in which the child/adolescent gains knowledge, values, and skills needed for life; it is also a space in which solutions must be found to individuals' developmental, personal, career, learning and discipline problems, as well as problems of accepting and adapting to school requirements and basic norms of mutual behaviour (Kalin, 2019; Resman, 2007). In collaboration with classroom teachers, counsellors plan, conduct and evaluate the work of each class. For instance, they may do any of the following: participate in the educational process in the class; actively participate in solving acute problems; take part, if necessary, in class community lessons; and carry out or coordinate prevention activities, career counselling, etc.

It should be pointed out that the work of school counsellors in primary and secondary schools differs slightly in terms of tasks, content and work strategies, mainly regarding the level and type of school as well as the developmental characteristics of children and adolescents.

Children's and Adolescents' Attitudes towards the School Counselling Service

There have been only a few representative empirical studies done of the school counselling service in Slovenia since the mid-1990s (Bezić, 2008; Resman et al., 1999; Valenčič Zuljan et al., 2011; Vogrinc & Krek, 2012), when its functioning became formally regulated and each school began to employ one or more school counsellors. These studies mostly included school counsellors, although some of them also included head teachers, teachers and parents. The most recent study of children's and adolescents' attitudes and

expectations about school counselling support was conducted in 1999 (Resman, 1999). Internationally, however, the number of studies of children's and adolescents' attitudes towards school counselling services has increased in recent years (e.g. Fox & Butler, 2007; Harrison, 2019; Knight et al., 2018).

Fox and Butler (2007) reported the results of a survey of 415 pupils from secondary schools supported by nine focus groups that aimed at gaining an in-depth understanding of young people's views of a counselling service. The findings suggested that young people value having a counsellor at school. However, they do not always make use of the counselling service because of the social stigma attached to counselling or questions of confidentiality and privacy. Similarly, in an interview study, Knight et al. (2018) found that adolescents highly value the accessibility and authenticity of school counsellors. In reporting their experiences with the school counselling service, the adolescents highlighted the safe space and opportunity to be heard as important aspects of the relationship with a school counsellor. Exploring the processes of school-based counselling, Harrison (2019) pointed out barriers to its effectiveness, such as a lack of familiarity with the counsellor, unclear understanding of the counsellor's role and the slow process of building trust. Taken together, the results of these studies suggest there is a need to improve the accessibility of school counselling services, with special attention to conveying confidentiality and genuine interest for the wellbeing of young people. One possibility for reducing these hindrances is to enable pupils to get to know the counsellor and the counselling services better through activities that are not primarily related to the specific problems of individual pupils, but rather are intended to reach all the pupils. For example, the counsellor could develop a closer relationship with the pupils by being present in the classroom, presenting their role as a counsellor or conducting prevention activities, addressing issues such as social and emotional learning, classroom group dynamics, stereotypes about counselling etc.

The studies of school counselling services carried out in Slovenia demonstrated that the school counselling service is an important component of each school (e.g. Bezić, 2008; Resman et al., 1999; Valenčič Zuljan et al., 2011; Vogrinc & Krek, 2012). According to a study done among educators in Slovenian schools (Valenčič Zuljan et al., 2011), the majority of head teachers and teachers consider the counselling service to be an integral part of the school. Nearly three-quarters of the teachers and most of the head teachers described their own collaboration with the school counselling service as 'very good' or 'good'. On the other hand (Bezić, 2008; Vogrinc & Krek, 2012), school counsellors have had to shoulder great professional burdens in recent years with numerous educational, coordination and administration tasks. They spend most of their time on remedial work with students, that is, individual work with students with learning difficulties, special needs and discipline problems as well as those with problems in their physical, personal and/or social development, while they work less frequently with the entire population of students or with individual classes. They cite a lack of time as the primary reason for

infrequently doing prevention and development work or monitoring and evaluation work in educational institutions (Bezić, 2008; Bizjak, 2014).

While this is the image painted by school counsellors, head teachers and teachers, there is little information about students' attitudes. Due to the lack of studies of children's and adolescents' attitudes, opinions, and expectations about school counselling services, we designed a study to fill this gap at least to some degree. The present study aimed to examine the perceptions and attitudes of students towards school counselling services. Specifically, we were interested in what the students perceived as the main task of school counsellors, what the frequency was of the school counsellors' presence in the classroom and how the students evaluated their relationship with the school counsellors. In addition, we examined the differences between primary and secondary school students because of the differences in the work characteristics of school counselling services in primary and secondary schools in Slovenia.

The Context of the Research Study and the Research Problem

Below, we present part of a wider study of school counselling in Slovenia (Gregorčič Mrvar et al., in press). This study focused on the different dimensions of school counselling work according to the guidelines of the National Educational Institute (NEIS, 2008a; 8008b) and the attitudes, beliefs and expectations of school counsellors as expressed by teachers, head teachers, students, and parents. The present study presents the findings of the analysis of the responses given by primary and secondary school students, aged 11–15 and 15–16, respectively. In the present study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. What do students see as the school counselling service's main tasks? Are there differences between primary and secondary school students?
2. How frequently do school counsellors go to classrooms and what for? Do the frequency assessments differ between primary and secondary school students?
3. What is students' perception of the relationship with the school counselling service? Are there differences between primary and secondary school students?
4. What other messages do students give about the school counselling service?

Method

Participants

In the 2017/18 school year, there were 455 primary schools and 182 secondary schools in Slovenia. Our random sample included 45 primary schools and 20 secondary schools. In phase II, we included primary school students from classes 6A, 7A, 8A and 9A and

secondary school students from classes 1A and 2A. The study included 1,363 (81.7%) primary school students and 306 (18.3%) secondary school students. With regard to the selected schools at each education level, the study participants' sample was representative.

Table 1.
The school years attended by the students

Primary school		
Year	n	%
Year 6	373	27.4
Year 7	307	22.6
Year 8	340	25.0
Year 9	339	24.9
Total	1,359	100.0
Secondary school		
Year	n	%
Year 1	159	52.5
Year 2	144	47.5
Total	303	100.0

The data in Table 1 shows a relatively even distribution of the participants by school year and class. The data regarding the participants' age confirms the expected age range from 10–21 years, with the majority of the sample (97%; n = 1,610) aged 11–16. The participants' gender was evenly distributed, as the share of girls (52%; n = 870) and boys (48%; n = 792) was almost equal.

Data Collection

The schools participating in the study agreed to allow their students to be surveyed and parental consent was obtained. We phoned each of the schools to decide on the surveying procedure. The schools could choose between a paper and an online version of the questionnaire; the two versions were identical. The students' responses were anonymous. The paper questionnaires were transformed into digital format with an online surveying tool and then combined with the online questionnaire data. The survey was carried out from January to April 2018.

Measures

Two questionnaires were prepared for the study, one for primary school students ('How do I see the school counselling service?') and one for secondary school students ('Students' attitudes and experiences'). The first part of both questionnaires included

demographics (school year, age, sex, school name, specific student status [special needs, talented, active in the arts or sports, etc.]). The second part of the questionnaire comprised six closed-ended questions. The questions related to perceptions of what the school counselling service does, the frequency of the school counselling service's participation in the classroom and identifying the reasons for this. We collected some additional data, too, but due to the limited focus of this article, we will not present them here; they are published separately in Gregorčič Mrvar et al. (in press). We also asked students how the contact between the school counselling service and students was established, what the reasons were for students to access the school counselling service, who initiated the talks and what the content of the talks was.

The third part of the questionnaire comprised opinion scales. The students used a five-point scale to express their attitudes towards 12 statements relating to school counsellors and their work, and towards seven statements relating to the students' experiences with school counsellors. Statistical analysis showed that the scales were reliable (Cronbach's coefficient α ≥ 0.70) and valid (the first factor explained 20% of the variance). The last question was an open-ended one, in which the students were invited to write a general comment about the school counselling service in their schools.

Data Analysis

The data were processed using the SPSS (version 25) statistical package. We performed basic statistical analyses (the figures are shown in frequency and structural tables). We used the χ^2-test to test the hypotheses on the correlation among the variables and the independent t-test to test the differences between two means. We only included valid answers. The open-ended answers were coded following the inductive approach of qualitative analysis. The first-level analysis was conducted by one researcher and then another separately coded 20% of the students' answers according to the suggested coding scheme. When discrepancies were high, the researchers sought agreement through revising the codes. Subsequently, related codes were combined into higher-level categories. The second researcher reviewed the emerging categories and the ascribed codes, making suggestions as to the meaning of each category until the final agreement among the researchers was reached.

Results

The Main Tasks of the School Counselling Service

We were first interested in what the students saw as the main task of the school counselling service. The students (n = 1,656[3]) had a selection of statements to choose from, and

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[3] Since different numbers of participants responded to individual statements, each analysis states the number of respondents.

they could select up to five statements. The most frequently selected statements referred to the activities of informing, helping and counselling all students (81%), the activities for individual students (those with personal or family problems; 63%) and those who behaved inappropriately (58%). Less frequently, the respondents selected working with parents (44%), with students with lower school grades (42%), career orientation (41%), lectures and workshops for students, teachers and parents (14%) and management work (9%) as the main tasks of school counsellors. From the 'other' category (2.6%), 10 statements could be included in the answers described above, with an emphasis on assistance (e.g. *they help us, they help students with personal problems*) and 10 showed negative attitudes (e.g. *they annoy us, call parents for no reason, do nothing important*); the rest were humorous, offensive or failed to respond to the question.

We examined whether there were differences in individual statements regarding attitudes towards the school counselling service between the primary and secondary school students. Statistically significant differences occurred in two statements: *They have different workshops, lectures, etc. for students, teachers and parents* (χ^2 = 13.500; df = 1; p = 0.000) and *They advise us on what school, faculty, etc., to choose when we leave this school* (χ^2 = 7.888; df = 1; p = 0.005).

One-fifth (20.8%) of the primary school students thought that one of the main tasks of school counsellors was having workshops, lectures, etc., for different groups (students, teachers, parents); a larger percentage of secondary school students thought this, as 30.5% of them thought this was one of the main tasks of the school counselling service. Similarly, more of the secondary school students than primary school students thought that the school counselling service mainly provided counselling with reference to further education. Almost half (48.2%) of the secondary school students selected this response, while the percentage of the primary school students who did so was 39.4%.

School Counsellors in the Classroom

School counsellors' work is not limited to their offices; rather, they can actively participate in activities during classroom instruction. Table 2 shows how frequently the students said school counsellors came into the classroom. The comparison between the primary and secondary school students shows differences in their responses. According to the primary school students, school counsellors came into their classrooms more frequently. Just over 45% of them stated that school counsellors came more times a month, a couple of times a week or even every day (we combined these responses for a better overview). The responding secondary school students encountered school counsellors in their classrooms less frequently, and 35% of them stated that school counsellors never came into their classroom or that they only did so once a year. The differences between the two groups proved to be statistically significant (χ^2 = 58.876, df = 6, p = 0.000).

Table 2

The frequency at which school counsellors come into the classroom

Does the school counsellor come into your classroom?		Primary school students	Secondary school students	
Every day	f	36	4	40
	f%	2.7%	1.3%	2.4%
Between once and a couple of times a week	f	205	39	244
	f%	15.2%	12.8%	14.8%
Between once and a couple of times a month	f	366	53	419
	f%	27.2%	17.4%	25.4%
Less than once a month	f	233	39	272
	f%	17.3%	12.8%	16.5%
Once a year	f	146	52	198
	f%	10.9%	17.1%	12.0%
Never	f	89	54	143
	f%	6.6%	17.8%	8.7%
I don't know/I don't remember	f	270	63	333
	f%	20.1%	20.7%	20.2%
Total	f	1345	304	1649
	f%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

When choosing among the possible reasons for school counsellors' coming into the classroom, the students (n = 1,628) most frequently said that school counsellors came to collect a student (58%). Less frequently, they said that school counsellors talked to all students about discipline during instruction and in the school (33%), that they had workshops on different topics (32%), that they talked to all students about further education and jobs (31%) and learning and school achievement (27%). A small share of the students said that school counsellors generally talked only to teachers (12%) and that school counsellors taught teachers (8.8%). The responding students could also add their own replies; 110 did so (7%), of which 72 were unrelated to the question and 18 could be included in the provided statements. The remaining replies described the general nature of school counsellors' assistance work, such as '*talking about classroom problems*', '*to help students*', or specific experiences, for instance, '*they replace the teacher*', '*they teach at the camp for the talented*' and '*we do various surveys with them*'.

We then examined the differences between the primary and secondary school students in the reasons stated for why school counsellors came into their classrooms. The analysis showed that they were mostly in agreement. Statistically significant differences occurred only for the statement '*School counsellors come to collect a student*' ($\chi^2 = 4.991$; df = 1; p = 0.025). The primary school students expressed the view that school counsellors came to take a student from the classroom (59.7%), whereas just over half (52.6%) of the secondary school students said so.

The Assessment of the Mutual Relationship with School Counsellors

The students used a five-point scale to evaluate their attitudes towards school counsellors and the school counsellors' attitudes towards them (Table 3). The data showed that among students, there was high agreement that school counsellors would take time to talk to them, that they would not hesitate to go to see them and that the school counsellor would help them change a class if they did not feel good in the classroom. One important finding was that students were in relatively high agreement on the item about seeking help from the school counsellor after other students had already left the school. This might be related to their answers about not seeing the school counsellor despite knowing the benefits and being ashamed if others saw them going to counselling.

Table 3
Assessment of the mutual relationship with school counsellors

Statements referring to school counsellors and their work	n	M	SD
If I wanted to talk, the school counsellor would immediately take the time for me.	1,653	3.86	.95
If I had a problem or worry, I wouldn't hesitate to go to the school counsellor.	1,638	3.46	1.10
If I didn't feel good in the classroom, among other students or teachers, the school counsellor would help me change the class.	1,639	3.17	1.14
It would be easier to ask for advice or help from the school counsellor when other students were no longer in the school.	1,620	3.16	1.18
The school counsellor speaks on our behalf with the teachers.	1,623	3.04	1.00
I'd choose the school counsellor as my ally if I thought that I was being wronged in the school.	1,630	3.01	1.19
I know that talking to the school counsellor would benefit me, but I still don't go there.	1,624	2.75	1.19
There are times when I would go to the school counsellor, but I would be ashamed that schoolmates or teachers might see me.	1,625	2.47	1.20
The school counsellor defends teachers although they know the teachers are not right.	1,617	2.44	1.17
I think the school counsellor has too many worries as it is to deal with me.	1,625	2.40	1.10
The school counsellor would get me into even more trouble if I happened to do something wrong.	1,635	2.26	1.18
Only students with poor grades and problems go to the school counsellor, so I won't go.	1,632	2.20	1.19

Note. The items were measured on a five-point Likert scale from 1–Strongly disagree to 5–Strongly agree.

Statistically significant differences between the primary and secondary school students appeared in the following three statements: '*I think the school counsellor has too many worries as it is to deal with me*' (t = 3.254; df = 1621, p = .001); '*If I didn't feel good in the classroom, among other students or teachers, the school counsellor would help me change the class*' (t = 4.374; df = 1635, p = .000); and '*The school counsellor would get me into even more trouble if I happened to do something wrong*' (t = 4.091; df = 1631, p = .000). For all these statements, the secondary school students expressed a higher level of agreement than the primary school students.

Analysis of the open-ended responses

At the end of the questionnaire, the students had the opportunity to add anything they wished about the school counselling service. Replies were given by 426 students. The analysis excluded responses that were '*no*', '*I don't know*' or unintelligible, humorous or offensive. We were left with 317 (19%) responses, which we combined into the categories described below.

The characteristics of school counsellors. The students' most frequent responses were that their school counsellor was *friendly* (75 responses) and *generally good* (37 responses) (e.g. *She's okay*, *they're good*, *I like them*, *great*). Less frequently, they listed other individual traits of their school counsellors, such as *sincere*, *reliable*, *nice*, *old-fashioned*, *annoying*, *caring* and *hard-working*.

The characteristics of the school counselling service's work. In addition to their school counsellors' personality traits, the students also listed the characteristics of the school counselling service. Of the respondents, 69 students said that the school counselling service was helpful and that school counsellors were willing to help. Typical responses included in this category were: *they help us all in the school*; *the school counselling service gives comfort in any sort of distress and helps in different ways*; *they are in the school to help students, parents and teachers although we often don't dare go to them*.

In their replies, the students often described the quality of their school counsellors' work. Of the respondents, 39 said that they worked well, for instance: *they do their work well and do their best*; *our school counsellor stands up for us when we've got problems*.

The students also said that it was good and right for school counsellors to be in the school (27 responses). This category included simple statements (*it's good to have them in the school* and *I find the service useful*) as well as more complex explanations (*I like this system very much, because I know we've got someone in the school I can trust*; and *I think it's good to have them in the school, as some children have big problems at home and in the school. I think they understand some things better than teachers*).

Some students merely described school counsellors' work (7 responses); for instance: *school counsellors have a difficult job*; *they have a great job*; *a lot of children need them*. Others (12 responses) explained that the areas of the school counselling service's work related to career orientation (*help with the choice of secondary schools*), to emotional

problems (*they help students who have problems with anger management*; *when their parents get divorced or when someone dies in their family*; *the counsellor can help me in difficult times*), to help with learning (*they help students with low grades get better grades*), to (un)desired behaviour (*they resolve problems with violence, smaller fights*) and to formalities (*applying for scholarships, citizenship*).

Criticism and suggestions for improvement. Some students gave critical or negative responses (34 responses). Some were very general; for example: *they scream too much*; *they don't care much about students*; *we should have her replaced*; *they complicate too much*. Some critical replies were more elaborate, such as the following examples:

- *The school counsellors in our school only work with the students with problems and those adjustments they have. They have no time for the rest of us. I think it makes no difference if they are in the school or not. Teachers and class teachers do everything anyway. They talk to us and to parents, solve all problems and do counselling.*
- *The school counsellors in our schools are friendly, but I don't want to tell them everything because they sometimes name the students who trust them, and I don't like it. Also, they don't always take the time for us.*

Of the respondents, 29 students used this question to offer suggestions about how the school counselling service's work could be improved. The predominant wish was for school counsellors to come into the classroom more frequently, to participate in classroom management lessons or to do workshops with all students.

Discussion

Our findings indicated the generally favourable attitudes of students towards the school counselling service. Regarding our first research question, the results showed that the students recognised the activities of informing, helping and counselling all students as the main tasks of school counsellors. These were followed by the activities for individual students – those with personal or family problems and those who behaved inappropriately. The results indicated that the students designated remedial tasks as central to the school counselling service, whilst they chose development and prevention activities less frequently. Their assessment was in line with the above-mentioned Slovenian studies (e.g. Bezić, 2008; Bizjak, 2014), showing that school counsellors spend most of their time on individual work with students with different difficulties, while they work less with the entire populations of students or with individual classes.

The differences between the primary and secondary school students in describing school counsellors' main tasks occurred in two statements: the secondary school students chose career orientation and workshops, lectures for students, teachers and parents more frequently than the primary school students. This may be due to the fact that secondary school students ascribe more importance to further education and career orientation

than primary school students. Secondary school students are probably more aware of the significance of making the decision; moreover, the differences may have resulted from the different kinds of work done with primary and secondary school students in this area. School counsellors are bound by professional standards when providing secondary school students with career orientation (NEIS, 2008a; 2008b). They also adjust their work in accordance with the institution and population they work with.

Concerning our second research question on the frequency at which school counsellors come into classrooms, it is especially striking that a fifth of the students could not remember or did not know how frequently school counsellors came into their classroom; there were no differences between the primary and secondary school students in this regard. Perhaps the statements given did not adequately reflect the students' experiences. Yet, combined with the responses to the question about the main tasks of school counsellors, these figures may confirm the conclusion that school counsellors do their work mainly in their offices with individual students rather than with entire classes (e.g. Bezić, 2008). However, it could also point to the students' indifference to who entered their classroom, and that they do not pay much attention to people other than themselves and their peers.

The findings show that the most frequent reason for school counsellors to come into the classroom was for them to collect a student. Again, this indicates that the school counselling service focuses on activities to provide help to individual students, working less on developmentally oriented prevention activities targeted at the class as a group. The primary and secondary school students were nearly unanimous in their answers about the reasons for school counsellors to come into their classroom. Nevertheless, differences did occur in the most frequent statement ('*school counsellors come to collect a student*'), with primary school students choosing this option more frequently. In both groups, the percentage of the respondents was large and did not change the conclusion regarding the dominance of remedial activities over the development and prevention activities of the school counselling service. This is a likely consequence of some systemic changes in the Slovenian education system (e.g. the integration of children with special needs). The so-called pull-out model has spread in the pedagogic practice of Slovenian schools; with this model, students with special needs or who require additional assistance are 'pulled out' from the classroom by the educators who work with them individually (Lesar, 2018).

To gain more insight into the students' perceptions of their relationship with school counsellors (the third research question), we asked them to rate several statements relating to their attitudes and views on the work and demeanour of school counsellors. The findings implied a high degree of trust that students had in school counsellors; however, there were certain obstacles that prevented students from talking to them. Many of the students in our study agreed that school counsellors would take time to talk to them; at the same time, many of them agreed that they would find it easier to ask for advice or help from the school counsellor when other students were no longer in the school. There was relatively high agreement about not going to a school counsellor, although the students

knew talking to them would be beneficial, and some students agreed that they would be ashamed to do so. These figures can be compared to another study (Fox & Butler, 2007), in which the authors stated that 'the confidentiality of the school counselling service was perceived to be one of the benefits. However, this was also reported to be a hindering factor – the concern that it may not, in fact, be confidential' (p. 97). An obstacle to accessing the school counselling service was a 'concern about other people finding out' (p. 97). The doubt associated with the social stigma of going for counselling was surely an important factor influencing children's and adolescents' decision to seek assistance from a school counsellor (or other expert) or to try to solve their problems on their own or with the help of peers or parents.

The differences observed between the primary and secondary school students regarding their attitudes towards school counsellors imply no obvious pattern; the fluctuations in the secondary school students' responses were especially pronounced. The secondary school students perceived school counsellors as allies more frequently than the primary school students; at the same time, a large percentage did not feel protected/supported in cases of undesired behaviour. These findings reflected the characteristics of the developmental period of adolescence (identity formation, differentiation, the importance of autonomy, etc.) (Lohaus & Vierhaus, 2015). The findings can be an important source of information for school counsellors in their work with adolescents. Ambivalence in students' attitudes towards school counsellors, as implied by our findings, is something school counsellors can face if they are ready for it. If they understand this ambivalence, they will experience less frustration, which can happen when working with adolescents. Counsellors can address adolescents' misgivings and scepticism towards counselling through establishing trust and accommodating their developmental desire for autonomy and connectedness (Lavik et al., 2018).

Our fourth research question enquired into other messages from students that were not included in the closed questionnaire items, so the students could express thoughts that might elucidate our understanding of their views on the school counselling service. The findings of our study also show that just under a fifth of the students decided to respond to the open-ended question. They predominantly described the positive personal characteristics of the school counsellors with whom they had experience. Many of them also stressed that school counsellors helped them, that they worked well and that it was right or good that school counsellors were in the school. We can take these findings to mean that many students recognised the important role played by school counsellors in the school, as many of the respondents wished to stress it. Similar conclusions were reached by other studies; for example, Fox and Butler (2007) 'found that young people value having a school counsellor. Eighty-four percent of the children surveyed described the service as "useful", "very useful" or "extremely useful"' (p. 107). 'One of the main benefits of having a school counselling service reported by the young people in the survey was that it is good to have someone to turn or talk to' (p. 108). Knight et al. (2018)

reported that the school counselling service was seen as 'an important refuge from the pressures of the school environment, within which young people might feel accepted, valued and supported' (p. 382).

In addition to satisfaction and praise, the students also expressed criticism and suggestions for improvement. We would like to highlight the criticism that pointed to school counsellors' unprofessional actions, such as a lack of attention paid to students and a breach of confidentiality. The latter is especially important, as students often perceive 'confidentiality as a problem associated with having a school counselling service' (Fox & Butler, 2007, 109). The students' responses revealing their criticism of individual remedial work done by school counsellors are also telling. This is clear from the suggestions for improvement they provided. The responding students frequently stated they wished for school counsellors to come into the classroom more frequently, to participate in class-management lessons or to do workshops with all students.

Conclusion

The starting point of this article proposed that, among other protective factors, the school counselling service is an important source of help and support for children and adolescents in facing and overcoming developmental tasks and possible problems when growing up. Our findings suggest that students understand the role of school counsellors, they appreciate their assistance, they are aware of their work and express a relatively high degree of trust in their work. The students in our study also stressed the importance of the constant presence of school counsellors in the school, '*because I know we've got someone in the school I can trust*'. Our results support the position of the school counselling service as part of the supportive structure during children's and adolescents' growing up.

On the one hand, the responding students saw individual remedial activity as the central task of the school counselling service; on the other hand, however, they were critical of this orientation. They recommended that school counsellors come into the classrooms more, participate in classroom management lessons or do workshops with all students. Although development and prevention tasks are clearly specified in key documents from the field, the tasks are lacking at the level of practical work in schools. The findings of our study suggest further work and research with the goal of 'making counselling services more accessible and acceptable' (Fox & Butler, 2007, 110) and the goal of establishing conditions for the joint work and mutual cooperation of all the members of the school community.

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„Aš žinau, kad mokykloje turime tai, kuo galime pasitikėti" (konsultavimo paslaugos Slovėnijos mokyklose): mokinių nuostatos

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Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjamas konsultavimo paslaugų, kurios yra tarsi apsauginis veiksnys paauglių gyvenime, vaidmuo mokykloje. Konsultavimo paslaugos yra apsauginiai veiksniai, atsvara nepalankiai patirčiai; jos sumažina problemų atsiradimo tikimybę ir daro teigiamą poveikį paauglių (psichinei) sveikatai. Mokyklos konsultantai teikia paaugliams reikalingą informaciją ir emocinę paramą, o kartais daugeliui paauglių jie yra vienintelis paramos šaltinis už šeimos ribų. Tyrimai apie vaikų ir paauglių nuostatas į mokyklų konsultavimo tarnybą yra reti tiek Slovėnijoje, tiek tarptautiniu mastu. Šiame straipsnyje pateikiami kiekybinio tyrimo, kuriame dalyvavo Slovėnijos pagrindinių mokyklų 1363 mokiniai ir 306 vidurinių mokyklų mokiniai, išvados. Tiriamųjų amžius 15–16 metų. Tyrimui buvo parengtos dvi anketos: viena – pagrindinių klasių mokiniams („Mano nuomonė apie konsultavimo paslaugas mokykloje"), kita – vidurinių mokyklų mokiniams („Mokinių nuostatos ir patirtis"). Pirmosiose abiejų anketų dalyse buvo renkami demografiniai duomenys. Antrąją anketos dalį sudarė šeši uždari klausimai, kurie buvo susiję su suvokimu, kokias paslaugas teikia mokyklų konsultantai. Taip pat buvo klausiama, kaip buvo užmegztas kontaktas tarp mokyklos konsultantų ir mokinių, kokios priežastys paskatino mokinius kreiptis į mokyklos konsultantus, kas inicijavo pokalbius ir koks buvo pokalbių turinys. Trečiąją anketos dalį sudarė nuostatų skalės. Mokiniams buvo pateikta penkių balų nuostatų

skalė, kad jie galėtų išreikšti savo nuomonę, susijusią su mokyklų konsultantais ir jų darbu, bei atskleistų savo, kaip mokinių, patirtį su mokyklos konsultantais.

Mokiniai pripažino, kad pagrindinė konsultanto užduotis yra pagalbos ir palaikymo teikimas įvairiose mokymosi ir tobulėjimo srityse. Rezultatai patvirtina nuomonę, kad konsultavimo paslaugos mokykloje gali būti kaip palaikomosios struktūros dalis mokiniams paauglystėje. Vis dėlto taip pat atskleidžiamos kliūtys, trukdančios paaugliams naudotis konsultavimo paslaugomis mokykloje; jos yra susijusios su pasitikėjimo ir konfidencialumo principais.