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## Collaboration of the school counselling service with parents during the Covid-19 pandemic

**Abstract:** This article focuses on certain aspects of collaboration between school counsellors and parents during the Covid-19 pandemic. In mid-March 2020, Slovenia declared the Covid-19 emergency, which led to the closure of schools and the transition to distance education. Life and work in educational institutions, including the work of the school counselling service, suddenly changed. The collaboration of the school counselling service with other actors in the school, including parents, was also transformed. This article presents the findings of a study conducted during the lockdown among 328 school counsellors in educational institutions in Slovenia. The main research questions were *how frequently* did school counsellors collaborate with parents during that period and how did they *evaluate* and *experience* this collaboration. The results show that the counsellors were aware of the importance of strong collaboration with parents during crisis education. The counsellors expressed awareness of the heterogeneity of parents and the different issues they were facing. Counsellors ought to prioritise collaboration with parents as a key task that needs to be carefully planned and evaluated every year, especially in situations such as school closures, distance education and other crises that have a major impact on the immediate environments and private lives of students and their parents.

**Keywords:** school counselling service, parents, collaboration with parents, counselling

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## Introduction

The school counselling service mentioned in this study is specific to Slovenian preschools and schools and has certain unique characteristics (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020, 2022). The formal framework is set out in the Organisation and Financing of Education Act (Zakon o organizaciji in financiranju vzgoje in izobraževanja 2023). Article 67 of this act mandates counselling services in public preschools and schools to counsel and collaborate with various stakeholders who are part of the educational process. Counsellors need to cooperate well with headteachers, teachers, pupils, and their parents. This article focuses on the collaboration between counsellors and parents.

In recent decades, there have been several discourses on the topic of parents and parental involvement in Europe, including parents as supporters in the learning process (especially at home), parents as actors in schools as organisations, parents as consumers, and parents as partners of schools (Byrne 2020; Killus and Paseka 2021; Paseka and Byrne 2020; Paseka and Killus 2020; Živoder and Ule 2020). This article emphasises parents as partners of schools and as supporters in learning processes. It approaches cooperation between school and home from both a normative perspective, as it can be found in professional discourses (e.g. school documents), and an empirical perspective (Killus and Paseka 2021; Paseka and Killus 2020).

The article begins with a definition of collaboration and partnership between schools, school counselling services and parents. Attention is drawn to the basic principles of building a partnership between schools, school counsellors and parents and to some of the barriers that counsellors should be aware of and work to overcome. Next, some of the findings of a broader study on the functioning of schools and school counselling services in Slovenia during the Covid-19 pandemic are presented (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2021; Skubic Ermenc et al. 2021), especially those aspects concerning the cooperation between counselling services and parents. The main research questions of the current study are *how frequently* did school counsellors cooperate with parents and how did they *evaluate* and *experience* this collaboration during that time.

## Cooperation between schools, school counsellors and parents

Approaches to cooperation and relationship building between school and home vary. Hornby (2000) classifies such relationships as ranging from those that reduce parental involvement and discourage an active parental role to those that actively promote collaboration and partnership. The characteristics, importance and limitations of quality partnerships have been studied and discussed by many authors in the past from both international (Esler et al. 2002; Huth 2006; Killus and Paseka 2021; Paseka and Byrne 2020; Sheridan et al. 2002; Textor 2018) and Slovenian (Kalin et al. 2009; Kroflič 2015; Ule 2015) perspectives.

Partnership between the school, the school counselling service and parents is crucial on at least two levels (Čačinovič Vogrinčič 1999; Davis 2005; National Education Institute Slovenia [NEIS] 2008a, b): the level of providing quality educational work overall and the level of supporting and working with students who need help to overcome specific difficulties or various distressing situations. Both of these levels were acutely pressing in Slovenia and elsewhere during the Covid-19 pandemic (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2021; Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2022; Killus and Paseka 2021; Skubic Ermenc et al. 2021; Savitz-Romer et al. 2020), as well as more broadly during times of crisis. We can recognise the interplay of two discourses: parents as supporters in the learning process and parents as partners (cf. Killus and Paseka 2021).

### *The school counselling service and collaboration with parents*

Many authors (Bryan and Henry 2008, 2012; Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy 2007; Čačinovič Vogrinčič 1999; Davis 2005; Esler et al. 2002; Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020, 2022; Griffin and Steen 2010; Šteh et al. 2018; Walsh and DePaul 2011) emphasise the key role of the school counselling service in collaborating with parents and agree that the school counselling service should take a leading and coordinating role in this collaboration. Collaboration with and support from parents are beneficial for children / young people as well as for other participants in school life and work, such as teachers, school management and parents (Bryan and Henry 2008; Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy 2007; Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020, 2022; Šteh et al. 2018; Walsh and DePaul 2011).

The process of collaboration is dynamic and depends on a variety of factors. Counsellors indicate that their roles and involvement in partnerships with other actors depend on the collaborative culture and climate of the school, headteachers' expectations, time, knowledge of other actors' roles, etc. (Bryan and Henry 2012; Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy 2007; Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020, 2022). The quality of collaboration with parents depends significantly on how the school counselling service manages to present its role and tasks (Davis 2005; Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020, 2022). Most parents are familiar with the counselling service to some extent, having been introduced to it during their own or their children's schooling (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020, 2022). Davis (2005, p. 197) lists three principles to

consider when presenting the school counselling service to parents: *visibility*, *accessibility* and *flexibility*. In order for counsellors to be recognisable and create a positive image of themselves, they should »see and be seen« (ibid.).

Creating a trusting and collaborative relationship with students and parents is not always easy and depends on a great variety of factors. The *expectations* that school (teachers and other educators) and parents have of one another are important (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2022; Kalin et al. 2009). These expectations often match, but they may also be different or have no overlap at all (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2022). The less agreement there is between the expectations of the school and those of the parents, the greater the risk of failure in collaboration and the more likely that there will be dissatisfaction and frustration on both sides. As shown by research conducted among Slovenian parents and children (Ule 2015; Živoder and Ule 2020), parents' expectations and aspirations are an important element of parental involvement in their children's education. In other words, there is a positive correlation between parents' expectations and aspirations and the level and extent of their involvement in their children's education (ibid.). Thus, it is important to gain insights into parents' and educators' mutual expectations and perceptions.

When considering the characteristics of parental involvement with the school counselling service, we should not overlook those parents who are not motivated or able to engage in more intensive collaboration with the school. Liontos (1992, in Esler et al. 2002; Kalin et al. 2009; Šteh et al. 2018) argues that parents' barriers to collaboration originate in feelings of failure and low self-esteem, negative attitudes and bad experiences with their own schooling, feelings of being disrespected and unaccepted by the school or educators compared to other parents, the belief that the child's schoolwork is the school's business, etc. However, reasons should also be sought from the school and its educators, including educators' stereotypes towards certain groups of parents, paternalistic attitudes, lack of listening, and ignorance and misunderstanding of parents, families, their social environments and the economic conditions of their lives (Resman 2008). Nevertheless, it is worth noting that it is not uncommon for teachers in Slovenia to feel that parents interfere too much in their work (Ule 2015; Živoder and Ule 2020).

By contrast, studies of relationships between school counsellors and parents in Slovenian schools generally suggest an optimistic picture (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020, 2022; Kalin et al. 2009). School counsellors mostly see parents as allies, rating positively the quality of their communication as well as that between parents and teachers (ibid.). Although school counsellors often cite various barriers to collaboration with parents, most report that school–parent–community partnerships are important and necessary (Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy 2007; Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020, 2022; Griffin and Steen 2010; Kalin et al. 2009; Šteh et al. 2018). Most school counsellors involve parents in their work and have relatively good personal experience of working with them (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2022; Kalin et al. 2009). On the whole, predictable and established means of contacting, interacting with and cooperating with one another are employed, including phone calls, written correspondence and messages through children/students. Counsel-

lors typically meet parents in formal forms of collaboration, such as individual conversations, parent–teacher meetings and teachers’ office hours (*ibid.*).

The focus of previous studies has been on the activities of the school counselling service in general rather than during times of various crises. In the following, we focus specifically on the role of the counselling service during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. In this context, we provide some answers to the broader questions regarding what are appropriate and relevant supportive responses to parents and what kinds of supportive interventions might be needed by a school counsellor during a crisis.

## Research problem and methodology

In the current study, we explored school counsellors’ experiences and evaluations of their collaboration with parents during the Covid-19 pandemic, specifically at the time of the first wave of school closures. The main objective of the study was to determine the following:

- How did school counsellors evaluate their collaboration with parents while working from home?
- What kinds of support and counselling services did parents need from school counsellors?

To collect data, a questionnaire was designed to ask school counsellors about changes in their work as a result of schools being closed to limit the spread of Covid-19. The counsellors were invited to take part in the survey via email, social networks and various professional associations of counsellors. The questionnaire was answered electronically via an online survey, which was conducted from 13 to 23 April 2020 during the first wave of Covid-19 restrictions.

In total, 328 respondents (96.3% of whom were female) answered the call for participation. Of these, 59.6% were primary school counsellors, 28.1% secondary school counsellors, 5.9% preschool counsellors and 3.7% boarding school counsellors. Moreover, 64.6% of the respondents stated that the educational institution in which they worked was located in an urban area, while 35.4% indicated a non-urban area. The majority the respondents were pedagogues (48%), followed by psychologists (28.3%), social pedagogues (10%), social workers (7.2%), special pedagogues (2.8%) and three inclusive pedagogues (0.9%). Most of them did counselling work (89.8%), but some also provided additional professional support (49.2%), taught a subject (13.9%) or carried out other systematised work (24.1%).

In the present analysis, we examine the responses of the counsellors working in primary (students aged 6 to 15 years) and secondary (students aged 15 to 19–20 years) schools ( $N = 297$ ), while omitting the responses of the counsellors working in preschools and boarding schools due to the specific features of their work with parents and children.

This article presents analyses of the participants’ responses to the open-ended survey questions regarding the counsellors’ collaboration with parents. The

answers were coded following the inductive approach of qualitative analysis. The first-level analysis was conducted by one researcher, and another researcher then separately coded 20% of the answers according to the suggested coding scheme. When discrepancies were high, the researchers sought agreement through a revision of 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 final agreement among the researchers was reached. This article discusses only the data related to collaboration with parents; other findings have already been published elsewhere (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2021).

## Results

### *School counsellors' evaluations of their collaboration with parents while working from home*

We summarise below the key points of the evaluation of the collaboration between school counsellors and parents. A total of 201 school counsellors explained their evaluations in the open-ended responses. We categorised the responses of 130 primary school counsellors and 60 secondary school counsellors,<sup>1</sup> as presented in Table 1.

Category	Primary school	Secondary school	Total
Parents' responsiveness	46	22	68
Means of collaboration with parents	24	15	39
There were no problems with collaboration	25	9	34
Content of collaboration	6	6	12
Barriers to collaboration	8	3	11
Difficult family situations and family hardship	9	1	10
Frequency of collaboration with parents	6	0	6
Other	10	3	13

*Table 1: Counsellors' explanations of their evaluations of collaboration with parents/carers when working from home<sup>2</sup>*

Most of the counsellors agreed that parents were responsive to their invitation to collaborate. Among the responses we grouped in this category, some were quite general and indicated a positive response from parents: »*All the parents I've been in contact with so far have been responsive and cooperative.*« However, some

1 We have omitted the answers of 11 counsellors working in preschools and boarding schools because of the specific differences in their work with parents and children.

2 The total sum of the frequencies is greater than the total number of responses, as some of the responses were more complex and included in more categories.

of the counsellors also highlighted more reticent responses from parents: *»Parents are overwhelmed, and some make you feel your calls are unwanted. Others fail to support their children and don't even recognise the problems they're having.«* One school counsellor wrote that some parents were responsive and others were not: *»Some parents are responsive; they express concern about their children's work from home. Some are unresponsive, and I can't get in touch with them.«* A few respondents also reported that parents were unresponsive.

Several counsellors described the ways in which they cooperated with parents. They reported calling parents and asking them directly whether they needed help: *»I just call parents and ask them directly about problems, or I offer help. Everyone's very happy to receive help and be in touch, and I've been in contact with parents who needed help before.«* Some counsellors indirectly contacted parents through teachers and class teachers. Such responses were slightly more common among secondary school counsellors. Contact through class teachers was mentioned by four counsellors: *»So far, all contact with parents has been done by class teachers and the headteacher.«* Three counsellors reported establishing contact through students. Given that students in secondary school are already more independent, such answers are not surprising.

A few counsellors indicated that parents knew where and how to contact the school counselling service. Some described how they contacted parents, and some highlighted the increased initiative to establish collaboration. However, some reported that establishing contacts with some of the parents was challenging: *»We have to put a lot of effort into contacting parents of immigrant and Roma students. They don't answer the phone, their numbers aren't available . . . their phones are blocked. It took a lot of effort to reach all the students.«*

A few counsellors described the ways in which parents contacted the school counselling service. Among the responses, we were able to identify some expectations of the school counselling service in terms of how parents should respond. For example, parents' poor responsiveness was described: *»They mostly didn't initiate the contacts, but some responded to emails, some to phone calls. There was a lot of guesswork about who needed help and more contact.«*

A greater focus on the content of the collaboration was observed by some counsellors. They highlighted support for learning, IT and other areas. They stated that it was important to address parents' concrete difficulties: *»I motivate parents to work with their children; I talk to them about their problems; I also help them.«* They also emphasised providing guidance on education and various forms of assistance: *»We are in contact with parents – more with those who're having problems but also through information on various education and assistance opportunities. The parents' reactions have been positive.«* By contrast, some respondents were rather brief: *»It's mostly an exchange of information.«*

Our analysis of the responses continues with the way in which the school counsellors discussed barriers to collaboration in their evaluations. These were related to the weak digital literacy of some parents of primary school students: *»I was only able to reach some of my students after we'd opened their school email account; before that, the parents didn't get back to me.«* In some cases, the lack of

personal contact was also a factor: »*There is no possibility for social contact, which means a great deal to parents when their child is in need.*« Interestingly, some of the responses indicated that the school counselling service was perceived by parents as a controlling service intended to monitor the child's work in the home environment, which was seen as a barrier.

Through their collaboration with parents, some counsellors recognised the difficulty of the family situation and parents' distress. They also described very specific situations in which parents found themselves. For example, parents had increased workloads due to balancing work and home lives: »*Parents are very busy with children's schoolwork and their own housework, and in addition, many of them go to work. They don't read our extra guidance literature because they don't have the time . . . But they do answer the phone and are happy to chat.*« The respondents pointed out the differences between younger, less independent children and older, more independent ones: »*The parents of children who are more independent monitor their work and respond when needed. The parents who have more organisational problems, younger and less independent children or problems at home are less responsive, less cooperative, withdraw from collaboration, etc. They give the impression that they find it annoying to organise help.*« The respondents also noted differences among parents: »*These days, a huge burden of schoolwork is placed on parents, and we know from before that there are differences in willingness, in the ability to help and support their child's learning and in the perception of the importance of school. Besides, many of them work either away from home or from home.*«

The counsellors noticed that some parents were experiencing social difficulties. Their responses indicated that they were aware of the children's changed family situations and environments and that some of the counsellors were also burdened by this at a very personal level.

Some reflected on their collaboration with parents through the prism of the frequency and quantity of contact: »*We communicate every day or several times a week; we are all looking for ways to do a better job.*« Finally, some school counsellors replied that there were no problems with collaboration. Indeed, some wrote that collaboration was the same as it had been prior to the pandemic. However, others wrote that parents felt that they did not need help: »*There are many families where problems are expected, but they deny it – they say everything's fine, they can manage, they'll let us know if they need help.*«

### *The need for support and collaboration with the school counselling service*

We subsequently asked the counsellors who, in their opinion, needed the most support and collaboration during the school closures and why. A total of 225 respondents answered this question, providing a wide range of answers, some short and concise and others more comprehensive. The analysis of the responses revealed that 85 participants mentioned parents as in need of support from counsellors. Among those who mentioned parents, significantly more were counsellors from primary schools rather than secondary schools, as shown numerically in Table 2.



	<b>Primary school</b>	<b>Secondary school</b>	<b>Total</b>
All responses	157	68	225
Responses mentioning parents (percent share)	76	9	85

Table 2: The share of responses that mentioned parents as needing support

The respondents often mentioned several stakeholders. For example, »students and their parents« was a common answer. Parents were cited as the only ones needing support in 12 responses, all of which were given by primary school counsellors, while secondary school counsellors did not mention parents without others.

Among those who mentioned one or more other groups needing support from the counselling service were 64 primary school counsellors and 9 secondary school counsellors. Along with parents and students, teachers/colleagues and headteachers were also mentioned. Table 3 shows the frequency of the responses.

	<b>Primary school</b>	<b>Secondary school</b>	<b>Total</b>
Students	55	8	63
Teachers/colleagues	34	7	41
Headteachers	4	/	4

Table 3: Other participants in the educational process who, together with parents, were considered to be most in need of assistance

In the open-ended question, the counsellors identified parents as a group of educational stakeholders who, in addition to students, teachers and other educators, needed support and collaboration during the school closures and Covid-19 measures. The difference between primary and secondary school counsellors was considerable. Parents are certainly more involved in their children's education during primary school, while in secondary school, they play a less prominent role, as students take more responsibility for their schoolwork. With the closure of schools and the introduction of distance education, primary school counsellors recognised the burden of parents who, in the words of a study participant, »suddenly found themselves having to teach their children and possibly work and support their families, too.« The great level of understanding of the need for support was probably also due to the fact that many of the counsellors were themselves parents who were caring for school-aged children at home while at the same time carrying out their own work. It is possible that the responses reflected their own experiences of how parenting made them feel at the time.

To better understand the ways in which the counsellors viewed parents as being in need of support, we further analysed their responses. In 55 responses, the counsellors mentioned a specific group of parents rather than parents in general as needing support. These specific groups of parents were as follows:

- parents of students with special educational needs or learning difficulties (f = 13);
- parents or families with low socio-economic status or in financial need (f = 11);
- families who were vulnerable, at risk, and in precarious situations (f = 9);
- parents who were unable to provide IT or learning support to their children (f = 7);
- working parents (f = 3);
- immigrant parents and foreigners (f = 2);
- families with many children (f = 2);
- single parents (f = 2);
- parents working from home (f = 1);
- parents of younger students (f = 1);
- parents of restless or unmotivated children (f = 1).

The counsellors observed differences among parents in terms of how prepared they were for the crisis and how capable they were of coping with school closures on their own. From the responses described above, we can infer that the counsellors were sensitive to the diversity among parents in terms of their status (employed, working from home, single parents, immigrants, etc.), the social situation of their families (many children, low socio-economic status, etc.) and the difficulties or obstacles that their children faced (special educational needs, restlessness, young age, etc.). In explaining their answers, two counsellors mentioned accessibility. As one said, *»the most vulnerable groups of children and parents, who need the most support, are also the ones who are often the hardest to reach at this time.«*

It is interesting to note that the counsellors who stated in their answers that the parents of students with learning, emotional and behavioural difficulties needed the most support did not add an explanation as to why they felt this to be the case. Perhaps the underlying assumption was that the parents were not qualified to educate students with difficulties. However, from the responses in which the counsellors did give an explanation, we can see that a lack of parental competence in educational work was also true of other parents (f = 10). In some of their responses, the counsellors stated that parents were *»unskilled at teaching«* or that *»children often appeared to be lost in this way of learning, and parents were unable to help.«* This was also noticeable in other explanations provided by the school counsellors in our study. Besides the parents' inability to help their children learn, the respondents also described the following issues:

- taking on the role of the teacher (f = 6);
- problems in organising housework (f = 7);
- emotional strain (f = 3).

Furthermore, it is important to highlight the answer in which a counsellor mentioned all of the people involved, including herself, as needing support and collaboration. In this answer, she reflected on the way in which the role of

counsellors in relation to other participants in the educational process, including parents, had already been delineated by the question itself. She highlighted the participants' interdependence in a crisis, as well as her limitations in coping with the crisis and her need for support to achieve her goals: *»I cannot give priority to anyone. We all need support from each other. We all found ourselves in this mess together. I also need support myself. This question is a typical reflection of thinking about counsellors in general. We need to be supportive of everyone, accommodate everyone, solve every problem (even if with a magic wand). Unfortunately, it doesn't work like that. Counsellors aren't gods who know everything, can do everything and accept new and additional work without restrictions.«*

## Discussion

The aim of the present study was to determine how school counsellors collaborated with parents during the school closure and distance education, how they evaluated this collaboration and which groups of parents needed specific kinds of support. The findings suggest that the most frequent collaboration during this time was with other educators, which certainly demonstrates the importance of supportive professional networks in distance education (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2021). At the same time, it emerged that counsellors often collaborated with parents.

Based on the responses presented in this paper, we can conclude that, according to the school counsellors' assessments, collaboration between school counsellors and parents during the school closure and distance education was present, but its depth and intensity varied according to the individual counsellor, the type of school and the complexity of the needs of parents and their children. In their evaluation of collaboration with parents, the counsellors mostly described parents' responsiveness and the ways in which they cooperated with them. Some thought that the collaboration had not changed significantly, while others pointed to specific barriers (e.g. poor digital literacy and lack of face-to-face contact) that hindered or prevented successful collaboration with parents. The counsellors also perceived family distress and the general difficulty of family situations as consequences of the pandemic, which in turn led to a changed relationship between counsellors and parents.

On the one hand, this confirms the findings of previous studies (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020; Kalin et al. 2009) that were conducted before the Covid-19 pandemic and found that school counsellors mostly saw parents as allies, evaluating the quality of communication between them positively (ibid.). On the other hand, we note that most of the responses of the school counsellors presented in this paper indicated their sensitivity to the changed situation of the pandemic in which both counsellors and parents found themselves. As we concluded in our earlier study (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2021), some counsellors were forced to balance their family lives with working remotely from home. The same was true of parents. The counsellors also described parents in terms of their differences:

some parents underwent changes in their status as a result of the pandemic (unemployed, working from home, etc.), some were described in terms of the barriers their children faced (special educational needs, children's age, etc.), and some were described in terms of their family situation (low socio-economic status, large families, etc.). The descriptions of the collaboration with parents were sufficiently varied to conclude that the school counsellors were aware of the differences between the parents with whom they cooperated. Differences between parents were also highlighted in previous research (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020); however, some new groups of parents emerged during the period of distance education (e.g. those with poor digital literacy), and some of the differences were probably only relevant for the duration of distance education (e.g. simultaneously working from home and providing family care).

To a lesser extent, the counsellors argued that parents should contact the school counselling service themselves if they perceived a need to do so. This understanding of the role of the school counselling service in emergencies can be problematised, even though the aforementioned study (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2021) indicated that, due to balancing their own family life and work, many school counsellors were themselves placed in changed and challenging situations that may have affected the quality of their work. However, the onus should be on the school counselling service to make contact with parents in the first place, not simply to respond to parents' enquiries and concerns or answer their questions. For example, a study on counselling conducted shortly before the pandemic (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020) revealed that parents get to know the counselling service at their children's enrolment in (pre)school, parent-teacher meetings, information days, etc. Under normal circumstances, counsellors attributed the lack of collaboration with parents to their heavy administrative workload and lack of time due to dealing with certain groups of students. We emphasised at the time that it was crucial for the school (headteachers, teachers and counsellors) to initiate collaboration with all parents as one of its key tasks, carefully planning for it every year (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020).

In addition to the discourse of parents as partners, the discourse of parents as supporters of the learning process can also be identified in the counsellors' answers. In their responses, some counsellors recognised the problematic nature of the discourse about parents as supporters. Despite some of the parents' efforts, the school counsellors felt that, in general, parents were unable or unqualified to support their children's learning adequately because they were not properly trained to do so. Such explanations are in line with the findings of a previous study (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020) in which counsellors expressed doubts about the ability and competence of parents to support their children in preparing for school. Even then, most of the counsellors felt that, while parents were doing their best, they were unable to support their children in schoolwork. Such views of parents suggest a discourse in which parents are seen as supporters in the learning process (Killus and Paseka 2021). However, tension or outright conflict arises when we expect parents to support their children in their learning at home but, at the same time, do not believe that they are capable of doing so. During the

Covid-19 school closures, parents were expected to play an important role in their children's learning; however, it was also known that parents were not trained to do the teachers' job. There is a paradox where on the one hand, educators want parents to be involved and engaged, while on the other hand, they do not want that. There are also mixed conclusions about whether pupils achieved the expected standards of knowledge during their distance education. These are questions that should be the focus of forthcoming studies.

With regard to these answers, we should highlight that the study was carried out during the first wave of measures implemented to limit the spread of Covid-19, when everyone, including the school system, was adapting to restrictions on movement, changes to education and working from home. In this period, what took place was not distance learning but emergency remote teaching (Hodges et al. 2020) or, as Gregorčič Mrvar et al. (2022) have written, guided learning for children / young people staying at home, which is a fundamentally different form of education.

## Conclusion

In the future, more effort will be needed to ensure that the school counselling service remains a pedagogical development and prevention unit of the school, in which parents/carers of children/young people should be involved as partners (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020, 2022). This means that the counselling service must focus on activities and processes aimed at classes and the whole educational institution as a community, dealing with issues such as group dynamics, communication and the culture and climate of the educational institution. This was brought to everyone's attention during the Covid-19 pandemic, when active community integration was threatened by the closure of schools. Consequently, awareness of the importance of community increased considerably (Kroflič 2022). We have learned that the disappearance of community triggers a variety of existential hardships for children, adolescents and adults, while at the same time bringing major difficulties in terms of maintaining adequate knowledge levels (Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2021; Kroflič 2022). Furthermore, a number of analyses on the effects of *distance education* have shown that there has been a marked increase in the awareness of the importance of education in the school community among both theorists and practical educators, as well as among parents and students (Kroflič 2022) and the wider community (Kalin et al. 2009; Steh et al. 2018). This is the only way to strengthen partnership discourse about parents, which is recognised by professional theory as an appropriate starting point for different means of collaboration between parents and school counsellors (Bryan and Holcomb-McCoy 2007; Gregorčič Mrvar et al. 2020, 2022; Griffin and Steen 2010; Kalin et al. 2009; Paseka and Byrne 2020).

Distance education has shown that counsellors should prioritise collaboration with parents as a key task that needs to be carefully planned and evaluated every year, especially in situations such as school closures and distance education,

which have major impacts on the immediate environments and private lives of both students and their parents. To gain more insight into – and understanding of – the counselling service’s collaboration with parents throughout the extended Covid-19 period, it would be worthwhile designing more in-depth research of both a quantitative and qualitative nature. This would enable further exploration of the complexities of the relationships and collaborations between educators, students and parents, as well as the development of partnership models of collaboration.

In future, it will be necessary to develop education crisis planning, not only for new epidemiological crises but also for other potential crises, such as environmental crises. The basic guidelines for crisis education need to be planned not only at the systemic level but also at the level of individual educational institutions and indeed individual professionals. The role of the counselling service in times of crisis and unforeseen situations should be rethought, and there should be clarity regarding what support for parents is meaningful and important and what kinds of support the school counsellor needs in this context.

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### **SODELOVANJE ŠOLSKE SVETOVALNE SLUŽBE S STARŠI V ČASU PANDEMIJE COVIDA-19**

**Povzetek:** V prispevku se ukvarjamo z nekaterimi vidiki sodelovanja med svetovalnimi delavci in starši v času pandemije covid-19. V sredini marca 2020 je Slovenija razglasila pandemijo Covid-19, kar je povzročilo zaprtje šol in prehod na izobraževanje na daljavo. Ob izbruhu epidemije se je življenje in delo v vzgojno-izobraževalnih ustanovah ter obenem delo šolske svetovalne službe v trenutku izjemno spremenilo, prav tako sodelovanje šolske svetovalne službe z drugimi akterji v šoli, tudi s starši. V prispevku predstavljamo del izsledkov obširnejše raziskave, ki smo jo opravili med 328 šolskimi svetovalnimi delavci v Sloveniji v času zaprtja šol spomladi 2020. Glavna raziskovalna vprašanja so bila, kako pogosto so šolski svetovalni delavci sodelovali s starši ter kako so to sodelovanje ocenjevali in doživljali v tem obdobju. Izsledki raziskave kažejo, da se šolski svetovalni delavci zavedajo pomena dobrega medsebojnega sodelovanja v razmerah kriznega izobraževanja. Svetovalni delavci so izrazili zavedanje o heterogenosti staršev in različnih težavah, s katerimi se ti spopadajo. Svetovalni delavci bi si morali sodelovanje s starši postaviti kot eno izmed ključnih nalog, ki jo je potrebno vsako leto posebej in skrbno načrtovati, pa tudi evalvirati, še posebej v situacijah kot je bilo zaprtje šol, izobraževanja na daljavo in drugih kriznih situacijah, ki lahko močno posežejo v ožje okolje in zasebno življenje učencev in njihovih staršev.

**Ključne besede:** šolska svetovalna služba, starši, sodelovanje s starši, svetovalno delo

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