PARENTAL PERCEPTIONS OF SCHOOL-BASED PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT AND READINESS FOR COLLABORATION

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Abstract: In the contemporary educational context, the rise in students' emotional difficulties increases the need for accessible and effective school-based psychological support. Parents' perceptions and their readiness to collaborate with professional services are crucial for the timely identification of difficulties and the successful implementation of interventions.This study examines the association between parents' perceptions of school-based psychological support and their readiness to collaborate with professional services in contexts of children's emotional difficulties. Guided by a descriptive–correlational design, data were collected via two Likert-type scales (10 items each): a Perception of Psychological Support scale and a Readiness for Collaboration scale, complemented with a demographic questionnaire. The sample comprised 122 parents of primary-school children (ages 6–15), surveyed through Google Forms under full ethical safeguards (voluntary participation, anonymity, informed consent). Descriptive statistics indicated a moderate average perception of school psychological support (M=22, SD=12; range 10–50) and a high level of parental readiness to collaborate (M=41, SD=4; range 10–50). Pearson correlation revealed a strong, statistically significant relationship between perception and readiness ($r=0.65$, $p<.001$). Parents reporting prior positive experiences with school-based support demonstrated higher readiness ($t(120)=5.62$, $p<.001$). Parental knowledge about the school psychologist's role correlated positively with readiness ($r=0.58$, $p<.001$). Multiple regression showed that perception ($\beta=0.62$, $p<.001$), information ($\beta=0.15$, $p=.006$), and prior experience ($\beta=0.12$, $p=.021$) jointly explained 45% of the variance in readiness ($F(3,118)=32.8$, $p<.001$). Subgroup analyses suggested higher readiness among mothers, older parents, those with higher education, full-time employment, parents of younger pupils (6–10), and among families facing salient emotional difficulties (e.g., anxiety, anger outbursts) compared with withdrawal/shyness profiles. Findings underscore perception as a key predictor of collaboration, highlighting the need for transparent communication, parent-focused psychoeducation, flexible counseling formats, and systematic partnership-building to strengthen early identification and effective school-based interventions. Practical implications include establishing clear school–family collaboration protocols, maintaining regular feedback channels, and defining measurable indicators of progress. Future research should longitudinally examine the causal impact of parental perceptions and test the effectiveness of specific psychoeducational programs. Implementing these recommendations is expected to increase parental engagement, enhance the quality of support, and contribute to better educational and psychosocial outcomes for students.
Keywords: parental perceptions, school psychology, collaboration, emotional difficulties, mental health.

1.INTRODUCTION

In contemporary educational settings, the rising prevalence of children's emotional difficulties—such as anxiety, emotional tension, low self-confidence, withdrawal, and anger outbursts—intensifies the need for accessible, responsive, and effective school-based psychological support. Schools increasingly function not only as instructional environments but also as advisory and support systems that help identify concerns early and coordinate timely interventions. Within this ecosystem, parents are pivotal partners: their perceptions of school psychological services and their readiness to collaborate with the school's professional staff shape whether, when, and how support is sought and sustained. Parental perception in this context refers to how parents appraise the availability, quality, transparency, and relevance of school psychological services, as well as the degree of trust they place in trained staff and their level of awareness and prior experience. Readiness to collaborate denotes parents' willingness to communicate with school professionals, share relevant information, accept recommendations, and participate actively in planning and follow-up. Although international scholarship indicates that constructive school–family partnerships improve student well-being, there remains a practical need—particularly in North Macedonia—to clarify how parental perceptions relate to parents' collaborative intentions when children exhibit emotional difficulties. This study examines the association between parents' perceptions of school-based psychological support and their readiness to cooperate with professional services for children aged 6–15. The objectives are to (i) describe parental perceptions of psychological support provided in schools, (ii) assess parents' readiness to collaborate with school psychologists and related services, and (iii) test whether more positive perceptions are associated with greater readiness to collaborate, including whether awareness of the school psychologist's role and prior experience with support contribute to parents' intentions to engage.

By concentrating on actionable, partnership-relevant variables, the study aims to generate evidence that informs transparent communication practices, targeted psychoeducation for parents, and flexible consultation formats in schools. In doing so, it offers a concise empirical foundation for strengthening school–family collaboration, with the broader goal of enhancing early identification and intervention for children's emotional difficulties.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Design and setting: We conducted a cross-sectional, descriptive-correlational study focusing on parents' perceptions of school-based psychological support and their collaboration readiness with professional services in cases of children's emotional difficulties.

Participants: The sample comprised N = 122 parents of primary-school children (ages 6–15). Mothers represented 66.4% of the sample (n = 81), fathers 33.6% (n = 41). Participants varied by age, education, and employment status.

Instruments: Data were collected using three parts: (a) a demographic questionnaire; (b) a 10-item Likert-type scale assessing parents' perception of school psychological support (1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree; total 10–50); and (c) a 10-item Likert-type scale assessing collaboration readiness with the school psychologist/professional services (1 = not at all to 5 = completely; total 10–50). The perception and readiness scales were adapted for the current context from established parent-perception measures.

Procedure and ethics: Questionnaires were administered online via Google Forms during May 2025. Participation was voluntary and anonymous. Prior to responding, parents viewed an informed-consent statement clarifying the study's purpose, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any time.

Variables: The dependent variable was collaboration readiness. The main independent construct was perception of psychological support. Relevant covariates included parent sex, age, education, employment, child age, teaching type (class vs. subject), prior positive experience with school support, and child emotional-difficulty status (past 12 months).

Statistical analysis: Data were processed in SPSS/Excel. We computed descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, frequencies, percentages). Associations were tested using Pearson's r (or Spearman's rho when appropriate). Group differences were examined using t-tests and one-way ANOVA with post-hoc comparisons. Predictive relationships were assessed via multiple linear regression. Statistical significance was set at $\alpha = .05$.

3. RESULTS

Sample characteristics: Of 122 parents, 66.4% were mothers and 33.6% fathers. The modal parent age was 35 years. Regarding education, 64.8% reported a university degree (first cycle), 30.3% secondary education, and 4.9% postgraduate studies. Most were employed full-time (73.0%). Children's ages clustered between 6 and 10 years (61.5%); 61.5% of pupils were in class (homeroom) teaching, and 38.5% in subject teaching.

Emotional difficulties: In the past 12 months, 77.0% of children reportedly experienced at least one emotional difficulty—most commonly anxiety (77.7%) and anger outbursts (72.3%), followed by low self-esteem (52.1%), withdrawal (50.0%), and shyness (37.2%).

Scale scores: Perception of school psychological support was, on average, moderate (M = 22, SD = 12; range 10–50). Collaboration readiness was high (M = 41, SD = 4; range 10–50). Categorically, 86.1% of parents fell into the "High readiness" band (36–50).

Bivariate associations: Perception and collaboration readiness were strongly and positively correlated, $r = .65$, $p < .001$.

Group differences and covariates: Collaboration readiness was higher among mothers than fathers ($t(120) = 3.01$, $p = .003$), showed a small positive correlation with parent age ($r = .22$, $p = .015$), and was higher for parents with higher education ($t(120) = 5.12$, $p < .001$). Full-time employed parents scored higher than those part-time/unemployed (ANOVA $F(2,119) = 4.85$, $p = .009$; post-hoc $t(120) = 2.92$, $p = .004$). Parents of younger pupils (6–10 years) showed higher readiness than parents of older pupils (11–15 years), $t(120) = 3.35$, $p = .001$. Readiness was higher among parents of children with emotional difficulties in the last 12 months than among others, $t(120) = 5.04$, $p < .001$. Parents of children experiencing anxiety or anger outbursts reported higher readiness than those whose children mainly showed withdrawal or shyness (ANOVA $F(3,90) = 4.72$, $p = .004$; post-hoc $p < .01$).

Regression model: Multiple linear regression predicting collaboration readiness from perception (composite), awareness, and prior positive experience was significant, $F(3,118) = 32.8$, $p < .001$, $R^2 = .45$. Perception was the strongest predictor ($\beta = .62$, $SE = .07$, $t = 8.86$, $p < .001$), with additional contributions from awareness ($\beta = .15$, $p = .006$) and prior positive experience ($\beta = .12$, $p = .021$).

4. DISCUSSIONS

The findings indicate that parents' perceptions of school psychological support are closely linked to their readiness to collaborate with professional services when children experience emotional difficulties. Practically, this suggests that improving transparency, accessibility, and communication about the role and effectiveness of school psychological services can elevate parental engagement. The strong predictive effect of perception—alongside awareness and prior positive experience—highlights the value of consistent, high-quality interactions that build trust.

Differences by sex, age, education, employment, child age, teaching type, and symptom profile suggest targeted approaches are warranted: engagement strategies tailored for fathers; flexible formats for busy, full-time workers; additional outreach for families of older pupils; and proactive support for parents whose children exhibit less overt difficulties (e.g., withdrawal, shyness).

These results fit within contemporary school-psychology practice emphasizing family–school partnerships and early, collaborative intervention. Nevertheless, the cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and future longitudinal or intervention studies are recommended to establish whether changes in perception produce subsequent increases in collaboration readiness.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study shows a clear, positive association between parents' perceptions of school psychological support and their readiness to collaborate with school professionals. Perception emerged as the strongest predictor of readiness, with awareness and prior positive experience adding explanatory value. Schools may enhance collaboration by communicating clearly about services, showcasing effective practices, and involving parents in the design and evaluation of support. Tailored strategies should address subgroups with comparatively lower readiness to ensure equitable access and engagement.

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