



UNIVERSITY *of* LIMERICK

OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

**An Exploration of the Guidance Counsellor's
Perspective of Smartphone Usage amongst
Adolescents in Post-Primary Schools**

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Masters in Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development

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An Exploration of the Guidance Counsellor's Perspective of Smartphone Usage amongst Adolescents in Post-Primary Schools

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Declaration

The author hereby declares that this thesis is her own work. No element of the work described in this dissertation has been previously submitted for any degree in the University of Limerick, or in any other institution.

Signature: _____

Ancora Imparo

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Glossary of terms

AGM	Annual General Meeting
ACCS	Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools
ASTI	Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland
CBT	Cognitive Behaviour Therapy
CEDEFOP	European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DoE	Department of Education
ELGPN	European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IGC	Institute of Guidance Counsellors
JMB	Joint Managerial Board
LGBTI	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender and/or Intersex
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCGE	National Centre for Guidance and Education
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFCOM	The Office of Communications
OMC	Office of Minister for Children
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PSI	The Psychological Society of Ireland
RSE	Relationships and Sexuality Education
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
WSA	Whole School Approach
WSC	Whole School Community
UL	University of Limerick

Abstract

The overall aim of this qualitative study was to explore the perceptions of Guidance Counsellors on smartphone usage amongst adolescents in post-primary schools. In particular this study focuses on the perceived effects of smartphone usage in adolescence and investigates these effects and consequences of smartphone usage for this cohort.

The researcher considers that a gap for such interpretivist research exists as there appears to be limited research on smartphone usage in adolescence thus far in post-primary education. The topic is important to understand in order to support the wellbeing of young people in this proverbial global village. This study explores the prevalent issues in post-primary secondary schools concerning smartphones and how their use may be impacting both the school teaching environment and the work of the guidance counsellor (Bimrose *et al.* 2015; Cotter and McGilloway 2011; Ging and O'Higgins Norman 2016).

An interpretive paradigm was employed using semi-structured interviews to collect the information on the perceptions of seven qualified professionals working in the post-primary sector. A thematic approach identified, analysed and reported patterns within the data collected (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

The research findings identify the possible negative effects on the students' wellbeing and learning. They also highlight that increased investment is necessary in training of safe smartphone practices and cybersafety for all stakeholders, including students, staff and parents. More concrete opportunities to continuous professional development (CPD) in digital literacy is required. The findings also identify the need to move learning beyond the physical classroom and into the global digital classroom.

The research findings conclude that parents should consider setting stricter boundaries around time limits and privacy controls on smartphone devices. Finally, a number of recommendations are put forward to inform policy, practice and research.

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter will introduce the research study, present a justification for the research and the positionality of the researcher within the study. The research methodology, aims and objectives of the study and a plan of the thesis are also presented.

1.1 Context and Justification of the Research Study

This research study is an exploration of the perceptions of Guidance Counsellors on smartphone usage amongst adolescents in post-primary schools. Merchant (p.217, 2017) describes the phenomena of smartphones as an agent of ‘civilisation-scale’ transformation and the behavioural changes the smartphone has instigated are many. Adolescence is a challenging stage in the individual’s development as they navigate their way in this proverbial global village (Boyd and Bee 2012) . As such, this study aims to consider the challenges facing the guidance counsellor in supporting students with regards to their smartphone usage in the context of their wellbeing. It investigates the prevalent issues of smartphones in adolescence in post-primary education, and how their use may be impacting both the school and the work of the guidance counsellor.

Current policy identifies the guidance counsellor as a fundamental figure in promoting positive mental health within schools as part of student support structures (Department of Education and Skills [DES] 2013). As such, the Wellbeing Module recently introduced in the Junior Cycle introduced in 2017 to Junior Cycle students (NCCA 2016a; 2017) aims to offer a continuum model of support to students at Junior Cycle and develop wellbeing as a “process of ‘wellbecoming’ across the lifespan” (DES 2017, p.14). In the context of this study, (Aiken 2016; Suler 2015b; and Merchant 2017) state that an adolescents wellbeing is impacted through smartphone usage.

Furthermore, the study seeks to examine Information and Communications Technology [ICT] policies within post-primary schools within the context of smartphone usage and the delivery of a blended guidance service. Bimrose *et al.* (2015) state ICT is a core competency for guidance counsellors and it has

the potential to bring benefits and support to guidance in more creative, social and participatory ways. The study considers the implications of ICT policies for the guidance counsellors role in supporting the wellbeing of the student in a whole-school approach. Therefore, the researcher was very interested in this area of research, to further her knowledge and to explore the opinions of guidance counsellors' in the context of this topic.

Teenagers can connect to the internet twenty four hours a day, and a teenager's way of communication using smartphones is a big change in their lives (Son *et al.*, 2014). The contemporary landscape of the adolescent in 2017 is transient, fluid and immediate which seems to equal that of a smartphone device. O'Brien (2008, p. 121) points out, "it should also be acknowledged that youth identity and selfhood is increasingly being reconstructed through media". Smartphones are now an extension of self, and the young person typically puts a value system on the number of 'likes', 'shares', 'snaps' he or she receives with each post (Merchant 2017). As such, adolescence is a critical time to access the guidance counsellor, who can offer support with issues such as conflicts of identity, loss of self-esteem, cyberbullying and cyber-safety (Dooley and Fitzgerald, 2012).

Adolescence and young adulthood is a fundamental time of change and stress in a young person's life (Boyd and Bee 2012). It involves a range of physical, emotional and psychological changes and experiences, which include the transition to post-primary education (Hargreaves and Galton 2002; Smith *et al.* 2004). With reference to the current study, every aspect of this is impacted by smartphone usage in contemporary society (Baron 2008; Sarwar and Soomro 2013). The Irish Youth Mobile Report (2014) states that 84% of Irish teenagers own a smartphone. Young people need the right support to be available to them if they experience problems, which may be linked to cyber context (relating to or characteristic of the culture of computers, digital and information technologies, and virtual reality; can be used as a prefix to describe a person, thing or idea) (DES 2013). Therefore, the guidance counsellors understanding of the value of smartphones in the adolescent's life will enrich this support and in particular for

students who are over-using them (Department of Children and Youth Affairs [DCYA], 2014, Studyclix 2017).

In terms of safety issues, Aiken (2016) attests traditional gate keepers can be bypassed on smartphones and subsequently support systems appear to be absent online. This study will address the implications for adolescents who are accessing the cyberworld through smartphone technology in a possibly unsupervised manner and how the guidance counsellor can support this usage (Zimbardo 2011). Good guidance provision adopts the holistic model to meet the personal, educational and vocational needs of students within secondary schools (DES 2005, 2012). While the DES (2005) specifies that guidance is the responsibility of the whole school, the guidance counsellor is primarily responsible for the “design and delivery of the guidance programme” within the school (DES 2009, p.8). Ling (2004) states whilst smartphone technology offers security and reassurance it equally creates anxiety and insecurity. Consequently, supporting student wellbeing is a core element of the role of guidance counsellor (DES 2005b; Hearne and Galvin 2014; NCGE 2007). Research on smartphone usage in post-primary schools is gathering pace but its relevance to guidance counselling work is still lacking. Therefore, this study will provide an insight into the perceptions of guidance counsellor’s in the Irish post-primary education system.

1.2 Researcher’s Position in the Study

Thomas (2013) addresses the importance of acknowledging the positionality of the researcher, as readers need to know who the researcher is and where they stand metaphorically as well as literally. I am a trainee guidance counsellor, with a previous professional work background in digital media working as a graphic designer and photographer. As a parent of four children, I wish to explore the usage of smartphones by teenagers and their effect, if any, on wellbeing, learning outcomes and career development. Equally, I want to explore how the guidance counsellor can support the student using a holistic whole-school approach. I have spent the past six years working as a Special Needs Assistant in the

post-primary sector. During this time, I see firsthand the influence smartphones have on teenagers everyday lives and how they communicate.

I was not acquainted with the research participants thus eliminating familiarity bias (Robson 2007). I acknowledge my previous professional background in digital media along with my interest in technology influenced my choice of research topic, hence reflexivity was imperative to ensure validity in this research (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). In my role as a mother I am concerned about the negative impacts which smartphones may have. In light of this, I have engaged in a reflexive process throughout the research process (Byram 2004; Hertz 1997). My personal interest in this topic is to develop new insights for theory and policy, and to enhance my own learning in practice and guidance delivery.

1.3 Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this research study was to gain a greater understanding of the guidance counsellor's perspectives of smartphone usage by post-primary students . Whilst the literature reveals that some research has been done with adolescents on their views of smartphone usage, relatively little is known about the perceptions of the guidance counsellor within the contemporary landscape of Irish secondary schools. Consequently, this research will consider if any support can be given to stakeholders, including students, staff and parents due to potential risks/benefits associated with smartphone usage.

The key objectives were:

1. Review the relevant literature relating to policy, practice and emerging empirical research relating to the topic, to facilitate a knowledgeable context to underpin the study.
2. To explore the current perceptions of qualified guidance counsellors' on smartphone usage by students in post primary schools.
3. Carry out seven semi-structured interviews with guidance counsellors

in a region of Ireland to gain insight into the guidance counsellors lived experience working with students in the context of their smartphone usage.

4. Identify recommendations for future school policy, practice and research in light of the findings of this study.

1.4 Researcher Methodology

The researcher used an interpretivist paradigm in this research study to gain insight into the guidance counsellor's perspectives of smartphone usage in adolescence in a range of school environments (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). In order to obtain the relevant data, seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with qualified guidance counsellors in one region of Ireland (Alshenqeeti 2014).

Throughout the research process the researcher was cognisant to preserve the validity and reliability of the research findings whilst being reflexive. Ethical principles, including institutional requirements for undertaking research in the University of Limerick, along with professional ethics as outlined by the IGC (2012) and the National Centre for Guidance and Education [NCGE] (2008) were adhered to throughout.

1.5 Plan of the Thesis

The structure of the thesis is as follows:

Chapter 1: This chapter introduces the research topic and provides a justification for the study. It addresses the researcher's position in the study, the aim and objectives, methodology and provides an overview of the six chapters.

Chapter 2: The literature review examines literature relevant to the topic from a range of sources in order to provide a contextual background to the study. It provides a critical evaluation of previous research on guidance policy and practice,

theoretical perspectives on adolescent development and identity formation, and issues associated with smartphone usage.

Chapter 3: This chapter outlines the methodology and research design underpinning the study. The methodology describes the philosophical and methodological approach used in the research design. The research questions are identified together with a rationale for the selected research paradigm. The methods used for the data collection and the analysis are described. Finally, issues of validity, reliability, reflexivity and ethics are also addressed.

Chapter 4: The data analysis and findings chapter outlines the analytical strategy adopted and presents the research findings of the primary data collection through a number of explicated key themes.

Chapter 5: The discussion chapter provides a critical interpretation of the findings from the primary data in the context of the literature reviewed.

Chapter 6: The final chapter concludes the research by reporting the overall findings of the research study and evaluating its strengths and limitations. It proposes a number of recommendations for future policy, practice and research and outlines the personal learning for the researcher.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter has introduced the research topic and positioned the researcher's interest and justification approach. It has described the aims and objectives, along with a structured plan of the thesis. The next chapter will review relevant literature relating to the research topic under investigation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

Hart (1998) states the purpose of a literature review is to provide a background to the study being proposed. As such, the fundamental goal of this literature review was to engage with a range of resources, including Irish and international policy documents; journal articles; primary texts; research reports; literature examining theories and concepts; documents from education and guidance counselling representative bodies; and relevant web based sources. This analysis will identify conflicts in theory, gaps in research and policy and practice in guidance counselling.

Smartphone technology is a phenomenon of contemporary adolescent life and is having an impact on society as a whole (Scott 2015). Furthermore, Merchant (2017) attests that smartphone technology is the largest unregulated social experiment of our time. Capturing the complexity of smartphone usage in adolescence in post-primary education is a challenging undertaking, and this review will consider the challenges facing the guidance counsellor in supporting the young person in this proverbial global village.

This literature review is divided into four sections. The first examines the service of guidance counselling in post-primary education in Ireland. The second section will look at anti-bullying policy and practice. Section three will look at theoretical perspectives on adolescent development and identity formation and the final section will address smartphone usage and cyberspace in adolescence.

2.1 Guidance Counselling in Post-Primary Education

This section discusses the provision of guidance counselling and the policies which have shaped the development of this service in post-primary education. Guidance counselling offers students learning experiences to assist them in the development of self-management skills which may lead to productive choices and outcomes in their lives (NCGE 2013, 2017). Conversely, guidance counselling in Europe, and the nature of its delivery, differs from country to country with the

emphasis either on career or a more social and personal model of guidance counselling (Hearne *et al.* 2016; OECD, 2004; Volmari *et al.* 2009).

2.1.1 Whole School Approach to Guidance Counselling

The provision of guidance is a statutory requirement for all schools within the Irish post-primary sector as implemented by the Education Act 1998 (Government of Ireland, 1998) and schools are obliged to provide same in terms of access and appropriate provision within a whole-school context (Department of Education and Science [DES] 2005b; Hearne and Galvin 2014). Since its formal establishment in 1966 by the Department of Education [DoE] post-primary guidance counselling in Ireland has evolved in response to a number of educational, social and economic changes (Hearne *et al.* 2016; McCoy *et al.* 2006; Shiel and Lewis 1993). Guidelines from the DES (2005a) advised schools and guidance counsellors on their duties to support the provisions of the 1998 Education Act, relating to students access to appropriate guidance and states that guidance counselling “encompasses three separate, but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance” (p.4). Equally, since re-allocation, the guidance counsellor in the post-primary sector may also have a dual role involving both guidance counselling and subject specialist classroom teaching (Hayes and Morgan 2011; Hearne and Galvin 2014; IGC 2016).

A whole-school approach (WSA) to guidance counselling has been implemented by Irish policy-makers as a model of good practice in the delivery of guidance counselling in the post-primary sector (Hearne *et al.* 2016; NCGE 2017). As set out in the Framework for Provision of Guidance (Association of Community and Comprehensive Schools [ACCS] *et al.*, 2012)

“Whole-school guidance planning is central to the development and delivery of an effective school guidance programme as it enables schools to identify, prioritise and respond to the guidance needs of students using the resources available to the school for guidance”.

(ACCS *et al.*, 2012, p.3)

The holistic delivery of a whole school approach incorporates personal and social, educational and career guidance (Hearne and Galvin, 2014; IGC 2008;

NCGE 2004; 2017), and this integrated approach advocates the involvement of the whole school community in guidance provision (DES 2005a, 2012; Institute of Guidance Counsellors [IGC] 2008; NCGE 2017). This method has been guided by international research and is viewed as the most effective way to deliver guidance counselling in a whole school community approach (Farrington and Ttofi, 2009). This includes teachers; management; non-teaching staff; pupils and parents and the wider community (DES 2012, O'Moore 2012; Hearne and Galvin 2014). Post-primary schools are expected to develop a School Guidance Plan to support the needs of *all* students (DES 2009).

Notwithstanding this, the concept of the whole school approach to guidance counselling has come into much sharper focus since the re-allocation of guidance counselling in Budget 2012, where the effects of reduced guidance provision is now evident (Association of Secondary Teachers of Ireland [ASTI] 2013; Hearne *et al.* 2016; IGC 2013, 2014, 2016; Joint Managerial Board [JMB] 2012; NCGE 2013). The removal of ex-quota guidance counselling hours from schools, and the provision of same has redefined the role of the guidance counsellor within the school context (DES, 2012; Hearne and Galvin 2014, Hearne *et al.* 2016). Since 2012, the term 'appropriate guidance' has become central to the discussion around the delivery of guidance and the dual role of subject teacher which the guidance counsellor undertakes (DES 2009).

However, the literature highlights that professional boundaries can become blurred in the context of teaching and delivering guidance (Hearne *et al.* 2016; IGC 2016). Equally, they observe that in some post-primary settings non-qualified teachers, support staff and other semi-professionals are fulfilling the guidance counsellors role since 2012 (Hearne *et al.* 2016; IGC 2016). Consequently, the IGC (2017) published '*Core Competencies and Professional Practice*' which underpins the need for professional practice in guidance counselling. Furthermore, a recent DES Circular (2016b) has proposed an additional allocation of 300 guidance counselling positions and this aims to support the re-allocation of guidance provision at second-level. Equally, the dual role balancing guidance

and counselling is a challenging part of the guidance practice, as demand for personal one-to-one support has seen an increase from crisis prevention to crisis counselling (DES, 2012, Hayes and Morgan, 2011). The Irish guidance service is in the minority compared to other European countries as it places a strong emphasis on personal counselling (Geary and Liston 2009; McCoy *et al.* 2006; Sultana 2004).

2.1.2 The Role of the Guidance Counsellor in Post-Primary Education

Guidance counselling within the post-primary setting aims to empower young people to be autonomous when making cogent decisions and choices about their lives and facilitate their own development (ACCS *et al.*, 2012; IGC 1998). Its provision is viewed as a support to the European 2020 strategy, where it is acknowledged as a key element in helping reduce early school leaving and participation in further education, which can increase employment rates and help combat social exclusion (ELGPN 2012). Nevertheless, Hooley *et al.* (2013) note the rapid technological advancements and the impact of globalisation has altered the concept of career as 'one job for life'.

In recent years the role of the guidance counsellor has become multi-faceted and complex. Guidance counselling is a specialist area in the post-primary education, encompassing a broad range of activities to support a student's personal, educational and vocational needs (DES 2005a; IGC 1998). The IGC (1998; 2008; 2017) and the NCGE (2007) define guidance provision as three interlinked tasks including personal/social, educational and career counselling. Moreover, the guidance counsellor plays a key role in the review and planning process of the Guidance Plan (Hearne *et al.* 2016). The guidance practitioner contributes to the co-ordination of pastoral care teams and support for students and their parents (DES 2005a, NCGE 2007). The guidance role also refers to a range of learning experiences provided in a developmental continuance to the student. Effective guidance also promotes social inclusion and equality and encourages the students' educational endeavours in achieving self-fulfilment (DES 2017). Additionally, supporting student wellbeing is a core element of the role of guidance counsellor but is an aspect that entails a significant time

commitment and levels of understanding (DES 2005a; DES 2013c; DES 2016a; Hearne and Galvin 2014; NCGE 2007).

Personal and social guidance aims to instill independence, responsibility and self-awareness in students and to support them to follow through on their choices (DES 2005a). The NCGE (2004) state personal and social guidance facilitates individuals to manage their personal, social and life choices to enable them to form an identity by assisting them in gaining a greater self-understanding of themselves. As such, the guidance counsellor provides a Rogerian approach of confidential, congruent, person centred and non-judgemental counselling within the guidance service (Hough 2006). Accordingly, Reid and Westergaard (2011) concur and state that the guidance service should offer a safe place where the adolescent can discuss their anxieties or troubles.

Personal counselling is a key component of the guidance service in Ireland as post-primary schools are faced with the issues associated with cyber communication amongst adolescents (Corcoran and McGuckin 2014). Therefore, it is essential that the guidance counsellor has a full understanding and knowledge of human growth and developmental theorists which should underpin their practice within the guidance service (IGC 2017). The inclusion of personal counselling is vital as adolescents may have been affected by low self-esteem, social anxiety and social withdrawal as a repercussion of poor choices in a cyber context (Kavanagh and O'Rourke 2016; Fox and Boulton 2005; O'Moore and Kirkham 2001).

Watts and Kidd (2000) posit counselling is a critical part of guidance provision and counselling skills underpin good practice within the guidance service, where there is a clear cohesion of core values across both disciplines. Self-esteem issues that now typically present to the guidance counsellors include eating disorders, body shape, cyber bullying, self-harm and forms of alienation from peers are on the rise (DES 2013a). Self-esteem reflects an individual's overall emotional evaluation of their own self worth and access to the guidance counsellor can support the students overall wellbeing (DES 2005a, 2005b, 2013; Rosenberg, 1965).

2.1.3 Adolescent Wellbeing

Adolescence and young adulthood is a fundamental time of change and stress in a young person's life (Boyd and Bee 2012). It involves a range of physical, emotional and psychological changes and experiences, which include the transition to post-primary education (NCGE 2007). With reference to the current study, every aspect of this is impacted by smartphone usage in contemporary society (Sarwar and Soomro 2013). Young people need the right support to be available if they experience problems, which may be linked to cyber context (relating to or characteristic of the culture of computers, digital and information technologies, and virtual reality; can be used as a prefix to describe a person, thing or idea) (DES 2013). Therefore, the guidance counsellors understanding of the value of smartphones in the lives of adolescents will enrich this support for the young person (DCYA 2014; Rutledge 2013; Suler 2015b).

The IGC (2017) state vocational development is linked to identity formation. The image adolescents have of themselves and their self-concept, plays a major role in career choice and changes with time and experience, making choice and adjustment a continuous process (Kavanagh and O'Rourke 2016). Currently, in post-primary education, the government is promoting positive mental health amongst pupils with the publication of 'Well-Being in Post Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention' (Grogan *et al.*, 2013). By using a whole school approach the guidance counsellor can implement these guidelines to enhance the student's wellbeing (IGC 2008; Kavanagh and O'Rourke 2016; NCGE 2017). Furthermore, a Wellbeing Module is being introduced in 2017 to Junior Cycle students (DES 2016a; NCCA 2016a; 2017). This module aims to offer a continuum model of support to students at junior cycle level and develop wellbeing as a "process of 'well-becoming' across the lifespan" (DES 2017, p.14). The DES (2013a; 2013b; 2017) state that a school's anti-bullying policies and internet safety guidelines will explain the implications for students' behaviour and personal safety.

Adolescent wellbeing is about young people feeling confident, happy and connected (Grogan *et al.*, 2013). In recent years, there are growing concerns

worldwide about young people's safety online, which could have a negative effect on their overall wellbeing. Dooley and Fitzgerald (2012) report anxiety and depression amongst adolescents as the most common mental health problem amongst 12-25 year olds. This increase has been exacerbated by the use of smartphones and social media, lack of connectedness, sexting and cyberbullying (Barry and Murphy 2014; Ging and O'Higgins Norman 2016; Vandebroek 2000). The current discourse on teenagers use of smartphones considers the dynamics of online friendships, behaviours and risks, and the increasing acceptability of sexualisation of young people (Ging and O'Higgins Norman 2016).

Notwithstanding this, O'Neill and Staksrud (2014) observe that many teenagers interpret personal information through smartphones in various ways, and personal guidance assists students in exploring their thoughts and making them aware of choices open to them. Furthermore, Weare (2000; 2004) puts forward the benefits of developing emotional literacy in schools such as improved behaviour, pupil welfare and examination results. Equally, Välimäki *et al.*, (2012) posit that adolescents should be taught skills to navigate cyberspace (the online world of computer networks and the internet) safely and to respond effectively when confronted with issues.

As such, O'Moore and Minton (2009) note that the guidance counsellor should be a 'safe contact' should smartphone or cyberspace issues arise. Moreover, Ging and O'Higgins Norman (2016) observe that school policy should attend to *critical* (cyberbullying, sexting) as well as developing emotional and digital literacy. Collier (2012) states that literacy has to include technical, social and information handling skills for competent digital education. Furthermore, smartphone use is having an increasing impact on the everyday lives of young people, and electronic communication is considered by many adolescents as essential for their social interaction (Cross *et al.*, 2009; Kowalski *et al.* 2012; Ofcom 2014).

Furthermore, the moral role of the guidance counsellor is necessary today more than ever and guidance counselling is central in meeting the pastoral care needs of all students (Hargreaves and Fullan 1998; IGC 1998; 2012). The Guidance

Counsellor can inform teenagers of the moral and ethical issues which are emerging as a result of digital culture amongst 'Generation Z' (current generation), and support their social, moral and emotional development and implement appropriate early and preventative interventions when required (Cotter and McGilloway 2011). Accordingly, Cantor (2004 p.18) argues the key is 'to educate socially responsible citizens who will not be complacent in the face of entrenched societal norms'.

2.2 Anti-Bullying Policy and Practice in Post-Primary Education

The DES (1993; 2013b) state it is a requirement for all post-primary schools to have an anti-bullying policy in place. This section will consider this in the context of smartphone usage and cyberspace. In Ireland, school management are obliged to protect pupils with regard to bullying (Corcoran and McGuckin 2014).

2.2.1 Cyberbullying

Bullying in schools has received attention in research since the 1970's with Olweus (1978). His definition of traditional bullying defines it as aggressive acts carried out against an undefended person in order to cause intentional and repeated harm (Olweus 1993). Today, bullying through electronic means including smartphones has emerged and been labelled 'cyberbullying'. This new phenomena has been given a global definition by Tokunaga (2010 p.278) which characterises cyberbullying as;

“...any behaviour performed through electronic or digital media by individuals or groups that repeatedly communicates hostile or aggressive messages intended to inflict harm or discomfort on others”.

(Tokunaga 2010, p.278)

This fast developing behavioural issue of cyberbullying includes some differences from traditional bullying including concealment of identity, the availability of a very large audience and that the victim can be targeted at any time of the night or day (O'Higgins and McGuire 2016; O'Moore and Minton 2009; Vandebosch *et al.* 2009; Yilmaz 2011). O'Moore (2012) states there are different subcategories of

cyber-bullying (text message bullying, pictures and video clips, threatening calls, emails, instant messages and abuse via social networking sites and chat rooms) all of which can be disseminated through the smartphone. In relation to bullying (traditional and cyber), Purdy and McGuckin (2015) observe there is difficulty surrounding the legal responsibilities of post-primary schools and suggest there is a need for guidance in dealing with the 'blurred' distinction between home and school, should issues arise outside of school hours.

Guidelines issued by the DCYA (2011) integrate key areas of policy and provision for children and young people. These provide direction to organisations on how to implement child protection policy and practice (DCYA 2011) and cyberbullying is included within these guidelines. However, Purdy and McGuckin (2015) note specific legislation does not exist to deal with cyberbullying in Ireland. The DCYA (2011, pg.61) state that;

'it is imperative that school management boards should have a policy in place to deal with bullying and that teachers are aware of this policy and of procedural guidelines to deal with it'.

(DCYA 2011, pg.61)

The most recent policy from the DES places responsibility on schools, including guidance counsellors, to adopt, implement and revise the anti-bullying policy annually for the whole school community. It is worth noting revised guidance for schools (DES 2013b) now includes the term cyberbullying. Furthermore, the Report on Harmful Communications and Digital Safety by the Law Commission (2016 p.5) has advised the implementation of "guidance material for young people and schools on what it means to be a safe and responsible digital citizen". Livingstone (2001) states a holistic approach whereby schools, communities and homes are all involved in supporting safe internet use is required.

2.2.2 Parental Responsibility

This section will consider parental responsibility around adolescents smartphone usage and the role of the parent. Purdy and McGuckin (2015) observe the home-school divide and highlight the need for the DES to provide clear guidance

in relation to the circumstances in which the school must share responsibility with the students' families. They also note that lack of monitoring and ignorance in relation to cyber communication highlights a need for education of parents to the potential benefits and risks associated with its use on smartphones. Moreover, O'Higgins and McGuire (2016) found a low percentage of frequent parental supervision with regard to smartphone use. Their study also highlighted a comparative lack of use of basic preventative measures by parents in terms of online safety. Some adolescents operated without a parental filter on their computer and others had access to a networked computer in a private place. Hence, an educative school or community-based approach to educating parents on keeping up-to-date with the fast changing cyber world may be more effective (McEwen 2009; Ofcom 2014). Equally, effective child-parent communication encourages adolescents to develop a positive self-concept (Noller 1995). Accordingly, the guidance counsellor can ensure that coordinated training and resource development is available to the whole school community, and the implementation of the European Union wide initiative 'Safer Internet Day' which promotes positive school culture within a cyber context (DES 2013c).

2.3 Theoretical Perspectives on Adolescent Development and Identity Formation

This section will deal with the developmental transition between childhood and adulthood and the theories which underpin this. Adolescents are children ranging in age from 10 to 19 years (Geckle 2016). In understanding the developmental issues that may present to a guidance counsellor, one must question what is 'normal' development as each child's situation is unique to them. Developmental issues of identity are paramount to any discussion of childhood development and understanding the theoretical origins of theorists can be useful if they provide solutions to the individuals conflict (NCCA 2007a; 2007b). Adolescence can present many challenges for the young person due to biological, cognitive, psychological, social and moral changes that occur during this developmental state (Boyd and Bee 2012).

One's identity is a selection of beliefs about oneself, which include gender

roles, sexuality, racial identity, disability or ability (DCYA 2006). Erikson's (1959) organismic world view based his primary theory on the uniqueness and individuality that makes the individual distinct from others. Many young people struggle with aspects of their sexual identity and Erikson (1959) referred to this as an identity crisis which follows a period of conscious questioning and the struggle to form an articulate identity. Furthermore, Marcia (1966) characterised Identity Crises as a period of identity development during which the adolescent is choosing various alternatives on a single aspect of personality. Marcia's (1966) identity diffusion status theory suggests that the young person will have conflict with low self-esteem, anxiety and concerns about vocational identity (Gordon, 1998). These issues could be intensified by the use of smartphones in adolescence, as contemporary society and the rise of social media facilitates a certain level of experimentation with lifestyles and social relationships that was not possible heretofore (Lenhart 2015).

Equally, there are some aspects of identity that cannot be taken for granted, including sexual and gender identity. Gender questioning is becoming more acceptable and the DES (2016c) has published guidelines on the schools role in supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex [LGBTI] students. Bond (2010; 2014) considers that smartphones offer a new space in the adolescents life for exploring their sexuality. Additionally, sexting and nude selfies are part of the courtship ritual amongst adolescents, and the literature states that porn addiction is having an effect adolescent development (Aiken 2016; Scott 2015; Sifferlin 2013; Zimbardo and Coulombe 2015).

2.3.1 Adolescent Development

Developmental theorists such as Bronfenbrenner and Erikson agree that establishing an identity is an important part of development and begins early in life. Bronfenbrenner (1979) holds the view that the organism is active and reactive, with holistic development influenced by biological, psychological, and social factors and as such is a contextual worldview (Kallio and Marchand 2012). Bronfenbrenner viewed the developing young person as influencing, and being influenced by the environment (Rosa and Tudge 2013). Lenhart (2015)

argues that social media represents another ecosystem in the teenagers life, and (Bronfenbrenner 1995) notes this could have an effect on the social and physical contextual influences of mental health. However, Nichols and Swartz (2001) question the hypothesis of developmental psychology and attest that individuals are born with innate qualities of ego strength they did not obtain from their environment. Bronfenbrenner (1979) writes that family plays a key role in this development. However, this is at odds with the young person in contemporary society, as parents and siblings are often no longer the dominant influence (NCCA 2007a). Equally, traditional authority figures and gatekeepers which were connected sociologically in our schools, clubs and churches are not as visible as they once were (Galvin *et al.* 2009).

As Carl Rogers (1959) highlighted there are three components needed for developing self-concept in adolescence; self-image, self-esteem and the ideal self. Likewise, Maslow's (1962) 'hierarchy of needs' depicts the stages of human development as a pyramid. Zimbardo and Coulombe, (2015) posit the question whether the top three needs in Maslow's hierarchy - belongingness, love and esteem and self-actualisation; can be met in cyberspace. They contend that a lack of intimacy creates a distorted sense of potential and actualisation that is not based in any social reality. Conversely, Suler (2002) argues adolescents strive to attain new idealised ways of being and cyberspace could be an opportunity to recognise their positive attributes, or develop new ones in a self-actualising process. However, Suler (2015a) notes that our intrinsic human need to self-actualise and our subconscious reactions to on-line experiences may affect this.

According to Aiken (2016) adolescence is an age for experimentation and risk-taking, however, in cyberspace the adolescents' real-world instincts are not present. Suler (2005) concurs and states that face-to-face cues are absent and teenagers can alter self-boundaries in cyberspace and it has become a stage where teenagers are merely players. Despite cognitive improvements in adolescence, risk-taking, curiosity and reckless behaviour is connected with young people, and they gravitate towards erratic and emotionally influenced behaviour

(Dahl, 2004, Dooley and Fitzgerald 2012; Gavin *et al.*, 2015). Suler (2005) observes that online adolescents self-disclose more intensely than they would in person. This risky behaviour includes sexting, creates negative effects on the psychological, emotional or social state of adolescence (Freed 2015; Gradinger *et al.* 2012; Patchin and Hinduja 2010; Ybarra *et al.* 2007). In cyberpsychology (the study of the impact of technology on human behaviour) this emboldened behaviour is known as *online disinhibition effect* (Suler 2005).

Conversely, for an awkward adolescent it may be easier to avoid painful experiences performed on the stage of real life and explore their identity in cyberspace (Aiken 2016). These perspectives are given weight by Gabriel (2014) who suggests the conflicting expectations of adolescence can sometimes seem at odds with its own developmental boundaries. Hence, failing to form an identity in real life as well as cyber life could lead to what Erikson (1963; 1968) termed 'role confusion'. Likewise, developmental theorists such as Piaget (1969) and Erikson (1968) stated adolescent development marked a shift in reasoning ability, and a period in which identity role confusion is resolved. More recently, Zimbardo (2011) suggests that adolescents are in crisis due to excessive use of smartphones and that the digital self becomes less like the real-life operator.

To summarise, whilst the smartphone is a physical device and a means of communication for the adolescent, it goes beyond the practical function and holds specific meaning in relation to identity (Stald 2008). Consequently, the guidance counsellor can help educate teenagers to adapt real-world thinking when they are online and understand that cyberspace is another dimension which should be used with caution (Anderson and Raine 2012). The next thematic area addresses smartphone usage and cyberspace in adolescence.

2.4 Smartphone Usage and Cyberspace

This section will outline the uses of smartphone in adolescence and address the value adolescents place on their smartphones. Smartphones are a primary adventure zone where teenagers interact, play, socialise, learn, experiment, take risks and eventually figure out who they are (Aiken 2016; Scott 2015). The major

aspects of a teenagers life - self-construct, friendships, social interactions, civic enterprise - are now negotiated by smartphone and our digital natives (a term coined by educational consultant Marc Prensky in 2001) have known no other way (Palfrey and Gasser 2008). Accordingly, the focus of this research is to have a greater understanding of the impact of smartphones on adolescents. Thirty years ago, the notion of a 24/7 digitally networked society was a fantasy of science fiction writers (Sheth and Solomon 2014; Solomon 1983) and the World Wide Web did not come into existence until 1989, invented as a social project by Tim Berners-Lee.

Additionally, Greenfield (2016) suggests that smartphones are a two-dimensional zone and the mindlessness and enhanced dopamine brain levels engaging in screen time could have permanent effects on the young person. Worryingly, smartphones stand out as the most used device for internet access on a daily basis by 9-16 year olds in all contexts (O'Neill and Dinh 2015). Merchant (2017) argues the smartphone has fostered internet addiction and the cult of busy. 'Generation Z' are digital natives (a person born or brought up during the age of digital technology and so familiar with computers and the Internet from an early age) who are constantly connected (Bennett and Maton 2010). Everything an adolescent does, says or looks at, however transitory, contributes to a virtual self that may one day have consequences for its real-life counterpart (Scott 2015).

Nonetheless, the smartphone is flexible with everything on it the adolescent requires. It is argued that smartphone technologies could have potential with regard to learning as an educational medium, by providing teenagers with opportunities for creativity and opportunity, thus developing their self-awareness (Aarsand 2007; Barnwell 2016). However, Greenfield (2016) posits that increased time on smartphones are decreasing connectivity to the brain in adolescence. Rambitan (2015) and Barnwell (2016) agree and claim student's skills in critical thinking and analysis have declined with the advent of smartphone technology and schools must adapt to the realities of a hyper-connected world.

2.4.1 Construct of Friendship in Adolescence

Friendships in adolescence become more important and involve constant social interactions (DeGoede *et al.* 2009). The peer group is a fundamental institution of adolescence, and participation within social media can empower the teenager (Ling and Donner 2009). Stald (2009) highlights the smartphone aids the adolescent in establishing social norms and rules in testing one's own position in relation to the peer group. Equally, a number of writers hold the view that it facilitates the development of teen culture (Goggin and Crawford 2011; Ito *et al.*, 2009). Ling *et al.* (2014) concur, and identify peer groups within social media structures could inadvertently give the teenager a chance to experience self-esteem, gendered identity, and emotional support. Similarly, Palfrey and Gasser (2008) state teens are connected by a common culture and this peer group could be a safe place where the teenager can seek support. However, Greenfield (2016) argues the experience of 'presence' during smartphone communication and the experience of social presence in public space is now invaded by ongoing smartphone communication within the peer group.

As such, research has shown that social media plays a role in the maintenance of friendship online which is important for self-esteem (Brandes and Levin 2013). Suler (2015a) suggests that social media gives the adolescent insights into the positive as well as negative aspects of human nature. However, Barry and Murphy (2014) state social media is not a space where time is given for self-reflection and it permits the young person's boundaries to be further eroded, therefore allowing their lives to be commodified without the full realisation or understanding of this. Moreover, Fortune (2016) notes as the teenagers consume each others lives, they do not interact in a meaningful way and it is a further performance of their social lives. As a result, this may require a new understanding of the concept of friendship, and despite social media providing more breadth, it does not have depth that human relationships require (Atler 2017; Lenhart *et al.* 2010; Marche 2012).

Currently, having a large number of friends online is perceived as indicative of social status which is key to the adolescents' social approval (Dobson and

Ringrose 2016). Equally, a study of 10-21 year olds conducted by the DCYA (2012) 82% of girls and 70% of boys reported the smartphone as very important in their lives.

2.4.2 Privacy and Safety in Smartphone Usage

The developmental stage of adolescents demands that young people grow up and engage with the world, and as such, an expectation that teenagers will take risks, push boundaries and make mistakes when maturing into adulthood (Wyn and White 1996). Therefore, the act of sharing mobile content in public and private spaces and in shared social situations, voluntary or not, must be included in our understanding of teenagers and their smartphone usage (Ericsson 2015; Stald 2008). Furthermore, those who operate the internet and its applications have an ethical responsibility to protect users from harm (Cohen-Almagor 2015). The concept of 'open privacy' (a different concept from 'privacy' as teenagers have a contrasting view of what is appropriate to share with friends, some of whom are strangers) should be fully understood by adolescents (Aiken 2016).

A report by The United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] (2015) on Children's Rights in the Digital Age writes about the complexity of balancing children's participation with their protection, and it should not be overlooked as a source of meeting the challenge (Third *et al.* 2015). Nevertheless, Wallace (2015) states that as cyberspace promotes disinhibition amongst adolescents these risks could lead to negative outcomes in their adult life if the material goes viral, whether deliberately or accidentally. Gabriel (2014) concurs and implies that young people should be educated on ethical conduct as they are potentially at risk from unique issues presented by smartphone usage, such as, consent, privacy, and online predators.

Legislatively, the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences) Bill 2015 is a landmark bill for the protection of children and young people in Ireland. It states that 82 per cent of teenagers and 35 per cent of 9-12 year olds have social networking profiles. Irish adolescents use the smartphone technology more than their European counterparts and this Bill gives legislators the opportunity to close gaps and

loopholes in current legislation, which leave adolescents exposed to abuse, in particular through grooming and solicitation for the purpose of sexual abuse (Children's Right Alliance 2016).

2.4.3 Issues associated with Smartphone Usage

Accessing the internet by smartphone, is considered an essential platform through which adolescents can learn effectively, and engage in a broad range of human activities (Fu *et al.* 2014). Moreover, Ling *et al.*, (2012) reason cyberspace could provide opportunities for social interaction and affiliation. Hence, Suler (2015b) contends that cyberspace is replete with social opportunities, relationships, groups and communities of all shapes and sizes for the adolescent. Equally, competent digital skills are necessary to navigate cyberspace as what is seen cannot be unseen (Aiken 2016; Collier 2012).

Recent studies by Lemola *et al.* (2015) have shown that the increased usage of smartphones lead to sleep disturbances which could have an adverse effect on mental wellbeing and physical health (DES 2016a). Other effects include social anxiety, depression, self-esteem/identity deficits and stress (Lee *et al.* 2015). Therefore, as smartphone usage is emerging as a factor which interferes in both sleep quality and quantity (Adams *et al.* 2013) these disturbances could affect cognitive functioning which have been linked to short-term memory loss. Additionally, the time spent on the device is closely related to smartphone addiction as giving up the smartphone does not seem a realistic possibility for the adolescent (Lin *et al.*, 2015). Excessive smartphone usage may also result in diminished social skills and engagement of critical thinking skills which ultimately may affect educational outcomes for the adolescent (Kuznekoff and Titswort 2013). Instant gratification and rewards for digital natives is also adding to continuous and excessive usage (LaRose 2007; Lee *et al.* 2015).

Finally, Seay and Kraut (2007) discovered that self-regulation is needed to control addictive behaviours which are linked to the frequent checking of updates on Facebook, Snapchats and Whatsapp. A more recent study by Lee *et al.* (2015)

concur that addiction was associated with frequency *use* rather than *duration*. Furthermore, Fortune (2016) states the need to feel real is enacted in the form of self-harm or eating disorders and these incidences are a result of the teenager struggling to cope in an increasingly virtual world with the day-to-day highs and lows of life in the real world. Suler (2015b) concurs and states the adolescents wellbeing and self-esteem is impacted by the rating system of likes and shares on social media.

Finally, the contemporary landscape of the adolescent in 2017 is transient, fluid and immediate which seems to equal that of a smartphone device. Kavanagh and O'Rourke (2016) note that fluidity is the norm in the teenager's life and a key element in understanding smartphone traits. (O'Brien 2008, p. 121) points out, 'it should also be acknowledged that youth identity and selfhood is increasingly being reconstructed through media'. Patchin and Hinduja (2010 p. 615) observe "as technology evolves, so do many of the problems faced by those who have access to it". As such, adolescence is a critical time to access the guidance counsellor, who can offer support with issues such as conflicts of identity, loss of self-esteem, anxiety, cyberbullying and cyberspace safety (Bimrose *et al.* 2010; Dooley and Fitzgerald, 2012).

2.5 Summary and Conclusion

The environment in contemporary post-primary education is multi-faceted and challenging with the added pressures fuelled by unpredictable world politics and rapidly evolving technology. This literature review highlights the importance of guidance counselling as a statutory requirement for schools under the Irish Education Act (1998). Guidance counselling is a specialist area and its role encompasses a broad range of activities to support students' personal, educational and career needs (DES 2005a). Due to the constant emergent technologies and applications on smartphones, there is a need for up-to-date research regarding the implementation of specific cyber safety policies in post-primary schools in the context of smartphone usage by students.

The aim of this research is to consider how the guidance counsellor can support the adolescent in the current landscape of smartphone usage and develop their emotional intelligence to support the fast-changing cyber context of 'always on' generation. There is a need to gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the effects of cyber technology and especially smartphones, and also its meaning in their lives. Technology per se is not the problem. The aim of the study is to explore how the adolescent can live intelligently in both worlds with the support of significant adults such as the guidance counsellor. Chapter 3 presents the methodology and methods adopted to explore this issue.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.0 Introduction

This chapter aims to discuss the philosophy, methodology and methods used in the research. It opens by outlining the research aim and research questions. A description of the methodological approach, and rationale for the chosen methods of data collection and analysis is provided. The chapter also outlines the challenges in undertaking the research and how the author ensured that the research was conducted in an ethical manner. It will consider issues of validity, reliability and reflexivity in a reflective manner.

3.1 Identification of Research Questions

As stated in Chapter 1, the aim of this research was to explore the Guidance Counsellor's perspective of smartphone use by students. Bryman (2012) states that the formulation of research questions can be a challenging aspect of research design but is critical to the selection of an appropriate methodology. Notwithstanding this, Merriam (2001) observes that prior to an appropriate research methodology being selected, it is necessary to select a number of key questions to address the phenomena being researched. Research questions are in essence the core of the research to guide the researcher (Marczyk 2005; Mertens 2010; White 2008).

3.1.1 Primary Research Question

According to Hogan *et al.*, (2007) ascertaining the primary question can be a writing challenge which can only be achieved after relevant literature has been examined and summarised. In exploring the research and literature the researcher identified the primary research question as "*what are the guidance counsellors perceptions of smartphone usage by students in post-primary schools?*". The phenomena of smartphone use encompasses many facets of the adolescent's life and a number of secondary questions were identified to address this.

3.1.2 Secondary Research Questions

The secondary research questions sought to investigate the issues being

presented to guidance counsellor's and post-primary schools with the advent of smartphone technology and how their use may be impacting the school teaching environment, the school and the work of the guidance counsellor.

1. *What is role of the guidance counsellor?*
2. *How can the work of the guidance counsellor support student well-being around smartphone usage?*
3. *How do post-primary schools address cyber-safety?*
4. *Are guidance counsellors undertaking professional practice in the area of digital literacy?*
5. *What role and responsibilities have parents in supporting their children?*

As such, in choosing the research design and to consider the research questions, careful consideration was given to the appropriate research paradigm (Blaikie 2007; Van Manen 1990).

3.2 Research Methodology

Research methodology goes beyond looking at the research method to be used by examining the reasons for the selection of a particular research method and how it will support the researchers work (Oakley 2000; Thomas 2013). As such, methodology is the researchers "strategy or plan of action" and to "justify our chosen methodology" the researcher wants outcomes from methods used Crotty (1998, p.7-13). The research methodology chosen for the current study took account of the information required by the researcher, the environment in which the researcher was working and the research paradigm to be used.

3.2.1 Research Paradigm

In undertaking this study a consideration of the two key paradigms was considered (Positivist and Interpretivist) A paradigm is a belief system that shapes how an individual views the issue, topic and their worldview (Kuhn 1970). In life, one has their own belief system, theories and school of thought as to how the world works and the nature of humanity. In research, a paradigm refers to the way in which the researcher carries out their investigation and uses the

data to explain the phenomena (Thomas 2013). This is often characterised by ontology and epistemology.

Crotty, (1998, p.10). describes ontology as “the study of being”. Therefore, ontological assumptions are concerned with what constitutes reality, in other words, what is. On the other hand, epistemology is concerned with “the nature and forms of knowledge” (Cohen *et al.*, 2013, p.7). These assumptions are concerned with how knowledge can be created, acquired and communicated, in other words, what it means to know. There are two principal research paradigms namely quantitative (positivism) and qualitative (interpretivism). Each paradigm has its own unique and distinctive ‘worldview’ regarding research (Creswell 2009; Strauss and Corbin 1990).

Hence, these factors explain how researcher views knowledge, and how they view themselves in relation to this knowledge and the methods of collection they find appropriate to obtain the knowledge (Thomas 2013). In the context of this study the researcher believes there is more than one truth to this phenomenon and there is more than the positivist and that knowledge can be generated through mean-making and inductive methods.

3.2.2 Research Paradigm: Positivist (Quantitative)

The positivist approach is based on the idea that the world around us can be observed, measured and analysed scientifically and necessitates the researcher taking a detached and neutral view of an issue (Alastalo 2008; Morrow 2007; Walliman and Buckler 2008). In contrast to the positivist worldview, Thomas (2013, p.107) considers positivism a social science which can be studied in a similar objective way to the study of natural science, in that “knowledge about the social world can be obtained objectively”. According to Braun and Clarke (2013), positivism is based on the assumption that reality does exist. It assumes that researchers can remain detached by using a positivist approach which requires the researcher to carry out research through experiments and questionnaires (Creswell 2009). Hence, Winterbottom (2009) defines a quantitative paradigm as a way of using measurements and numbers to formulate and inform test ideas.

Creswell (2009) states due to the nature of positivism, it can be used on a large sampling group enabling the researcher to collect data over a period of time which can be analysed using statistics. Hence, Winterbottom (2009) defines a quantitative paradigm as a way of using measurements and numbers to formulate and inform test ideas. However, the positivist approach has been criticised for being concerned with the accumulation of “brute data” (Gray 2014, p.21) and for being “reductionist in character” in that less measurable sciences are reduced to more measurable ones (Walliman 2011, p.21). It has also been criticised for its inadequate view of the nature of social reality and its failure to take account of how social reality is formed and maintained by people (Blaikie 2007).

Equally, Cohen *et al.*, (2013, p.15) posit that the limitation with this approach is that it regards “human behaviour as static and in essence controlled”. Furthermore, Cohen *et al.*, (2013) argue that the paradigm does not take into account the complexity of human nature. Accordingly, (Merriam 2001) states that qualitative research may be more worthwhile in uncovering the phenomena for those undertaking the research.

3.2.3 Research Paradigm: Interpretivism (Qualitative)

An interpretivist paradigm underpinned this research project as it is about guidance counsellors, their experiences, perceptions, feelings and how they construct the narratives of smartphone usage in adolescence (McMahon and Patton 2006). An interpretivist approach to research has the intention of understanding “the world of human experience” (Cohen and Manion 1994, p.36). As such, interpretive methods in counselling and guidance research is advocated for as traditionally these disciplines have been largely positivist (Kidd 2006; McLeod 2011; Thorpe 2013).

The researcher is interested in people and how their world is constructed and how they make sense of it (Crotty 1998). Furthermore, the researcher hoped to enhance the depth, quality and openness of the material shared by participants to further develop meta-communication micro-skills, which were taught across the programme, which are also pertinent to qualitative research. Gair (2012)

and Wertz (1986) state there is agreement in the qualitative literature that the researcher needs to engage in empathic immersion in the participant's world by listening intently to understand their lived reality. Equally, (Stead *et al.*, 2012, p.107) state that qualitative methodologies can "open avenues for new understandings of the world of work".

The researcher hoped that the narratives of the research participants could provide insight into the practices of smartphone usage in adolescence. Hence, the researcher believes the strength of the interpretivist paradigm is in the rich data collected through words, images and social structures (Cohen *et al.*, 2013; Thomas 2013) The researcher believes that a gap for such interpretivist research exists as there appears to be limited research on smartphone usage in adolescence thus far in post-primary education.

However, the human instrument has shortcomings and biases which could impact the study (Merriman 2001). It is imperative the researcher identifies and monitors their own biases and how it could affect the collection and interpretation of the data (Merriman 2001). It is argued that the researcher is seeing what they wish to see which could lead to subjectivity (Denscombe 2008; Sikes and Potts 2008). Additionally, Bryman (2012) attests that critiques of qualitative research include prejudice by the researcher resultant upon relationships, difficulty in replication of research and that quality can often be dependent upon the ingenuity and creativity of the researcher. Equally, Denscombe (2008) notes the lack of lucidity in the research with respect to sampling and data analysis that is experienced in qualitative research is considered a disadvantage of the qualitative approach in research.

3.3 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

This section will address how the researcher accessed the sample participants and will explore the data collection used, ending with an explanation of the analysis technique employed by the researcher. Bryman (2012) posits a research method is a technique or tool used for collecting data.

Furthermore, Brannen *et al.* (1994) observes the importance of willingness of participants to take part in social fieldwork studies.

3.3.1. Access and Sampling

Following institutional ethical approval from the University of Limerick in February, 2017, the researcher accessed qualified post-primary guidance counsellors through the gatekeeper. A Branch Secretary (the “Gate Keeper”) of one of the branches of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors was contacted (Mautner *et al.* 2002, p.67). The Gate Keeper disseminated subject information letters and consent forms to guidance counsellors (Appendix A-D). The dates and times for the interviews were negotiated with the interested volunteer participants. The interviewees were contacted the day prior to the interview as a reminder and to adhere to research time parameters. At the beginning of the interview, respondents were reminded of the context of the study and the purpose of the data collection.

The sample population for this research comprised of seven qualified guidance counsellors (three male and four female) with varying levels of experience in one region of Ireland. Additionally, McLeod (2011) defines sampling as the process of how participants are chosen to take part in a study from the total research population. Sampling can be devised using convenience sampling or purposive sampling or by using random sampling (Bryman 2004; Thomas 2013). Cohen *et al.*, (2013) describe *purposive sampling* as a means of including representations that may allow focus on a case. They further state that this variant of sampling can be viewed as selective and biased and does not represent the entire research population (*ibid*). *Convenience sampling*, involves selecting respondents whom are most convenient to the researcher (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). *Random sampling* selects participants at random from a list of the population, in this case qualified guidance practitioners who are members of the Institute of Guidance Counsellors (Cohen *et al.*, 2013).

Due to the time constraints of the study the researcher deduced purposive sampling was the most appropriate method, allowing for data to be collected

from qualified guidance counsellors accessed from one particular branch. The field work took place between 1st May 2017 and the 30th May 2017.

3.3.2. Semi-Structured Interviews

The research method used to collect the data was face to face semi-structured interviews. Berg (2007, p.96) stated individual interviews build a holistic snapshot, analyses words and reports detailed views of informants; they also enable interviewees to “speak in their own voice and express their own thoughts and feelings”. Kvale (1996) and Weiss (1994) suggest that interviewing individuals in their natural setting is a key factor in research design. Furthermore, Kvale (1996) points out an interview is a conversation with meaning and talking to people is one of the more effective methods to probe into any emerging topics.

Watts (2008) speaks of a shared narrative space when conducting semi-structured interviews as qualitative research and the research method was informed by the qualitative paradigm. Qualitative research aims to sample broadly enough and to interview deeply enough that all the important aspects and variations of the studied phenomenon are captured in the sample (Elliott and Timulak 2005). This facilitates depth, complexity and richness of the data gathered (Cowles 1988; Grafanaki 1996).

Nevertheless, interviews may be subject to biases from the human interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee and was an important consideration in this study (Cohen *et al.*, 2013; Kvale 1996). Furthermore, Cohen *et al.*, (2013) argue that relevant topics could be missed due to the interview structure. Thomas (2013) states interviews can suffer from interviewer/interviewee bias in the process due to the fact that “interviewers are human beings and not machines” (Bell 1999, p.139). Equally, Cohen *et al.*, (2013) advises the researcher to recognise and control these biases to minimise any adverse impact on the data collection. Additionally, transcription and analysis of complex qualitative data collected may take time (Opdenakker 2006). As such, the researcher found the scheduling, conducting and transcribing of the interviews to be time-consuming.

Thomas (2013) and Cohen *et al.*, (2013) state the time required to conduct interviews and transcription of data needs to be taken into account at the outset. Due to a technological error with interview number seven, transcription could not be completed and the researcher drew data analysis from the annotations taken at time of interview (Appendix J).

An interview framework was devised to undertake the research arising from the issues identified in the literature review. Frameworks used during interviews can vary between tightly scripted and rather loose (Qu and Dumay 2011). However, all frameworks serve the same purpose; to ensure the same thematic approach is applied during the interview. The interview framework included an adequate number of open ended questions to allow the participants to share their own experiences, feelings and opinions and unique realities (Merriam, 2001). The framework of questions covered four areas of exploration which the researcher wanted to examine (Appendix E). These were;

1. The role of the Guidance Counsellor
2. Student well-being and smartphone usage
3. Cyber-safety
4. Professional practice within guidance counselling

The seven interviews were conducted in various locations and lasted approximately one hour long. When the interview was complete, the researcher noted any body language from the participants, nuances in language and behaviour in the research diary. The participants were mixed gender and from a variety of post-primary school settings in a region of Ireland. Four of these were face-to-face and three interviews took place over the telephone due to the time constraints of the participants. Carr and Worth (2001, p.521) state that telephone interviews can be a “versatile” data collection tool, and qualitative telephone data have been judged to be rich, vivid, detailed, and of high quality (Chapple 1999; Novick 2008; Sturges and Hanrahan 2004).

Thomas (2013) asserts the personal contact of the face-to-face interview encourages engagement from the participants. Cohen *et al.*, (2013) posit semi-structured interviews provide structure and guidance whilst allowing flexibility to probe further in order to elicit more elaborate responses (Qu and Dumay 2011). The researcher hoped that this would result in deep insights and findings relating to the research questions. Equally, Lindolf and Taylor (2011) state interviews can be carried out in almost any setting and the scope of topics which can be explored is unlimited. This aids the development of thick descriptions when a topic yields engaging comments and insights (Thomas 2013). The researcher believes the strength of this approach was that it supported the collection of rich data through words, thoughts and images from participants (Cohen *et al.*, 2013; Thomas 2013).

However, the increasing popularity of the telephone interview as a research method may be a reflection of broader social change, technological advances and the pace of modern life (Carr and Worth 2001). Novik (2008) asserts that phonecalls may allow respondents to feel relaxed and able to disclose sensitive information, and evidence is lacking that they produce lower quality data. Based on the researchers experience there was little or no difference in the number of responses to questions asked.

3.3.3 Data Analysis Methods

The process of data analysis is described by Cohen *et al.*, (2013, p.183) as “making sense of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities”. It is through the analysis of data that the researcher makes sense of the data collected (Cohen *et al.*, 2013).

In this study thematic analysis on the transcribed interviews was carried out. Bryman (2012) asserts the researcher use ‘thematic analysis’ on the interview transcripts. However, Cohen *et al.*, (2013) argue that the transcript of an interview is already interpreted data. The constant comparison method was used which involved the researcher immersing herself in the data, comparing each aspect with all other aspects (Thomas 2013). The thematic content analysis of the

qualitative data enabled the researcher to identify emerging themes and patterns (Leedy and Ormrod 2005). Grouping of the themes was conducted using the main headings relating to the research topic. The researcher searched through the transcripts for quotations that related and contrasted to these themes. According to Bryman (2012) connections can be made between the themes by mapping out and allowing for interpretation of the primary findings in the context of the literature. However, a technical fault with interview number seven did not allow for transcription. The researcher conducted data analysis on the annotations taken at the time of the interview and noted “patterns, themes, and categories” as they emerged (Cohen *et al.*, 2013, p.183).

3.4 Validity and Reliability in Interpretive Research

This section will outline the validity and reliability from the perspective of this study. The term validity pertains to certain requirements with which research has to conform. When choosing a paradigm and methodology, the researcher must give sufficient consideration to which approach and tools is suitable for the study, whilst preserving validity and reliability within the research (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). Furthermore, Cohen *et al.*, (2013) state when using an interpretivist approach the researcher is aware of specific design stage threats (*ibid*). *Internal validity* refers to the internal logic and consistency of the research (Punch and Oancea 2014), and reflects how closely the findings represent and faithfully reflect what was studied in this research (Denzin and Lincoln 2011). In essence this means how closely the findings represent and conscientiously reflect what is being studied. Punch and Oancea (2014) describes this as having internal consistency. Bell (2014, p.104) defines validity as “whether an item measures or describes what is supposed to measure or describe”. As such, how truthful the research results are (Savin-Baden and Howell-Major 2013).

The researcher aspired to abide by the guiding principles associated with validity in qualitative research which included the researcher being part of the researched work. A number of approaches were used to support rigour and validity in this qualitative research. Respondent validity with the entire interview participants was used to enhance qualitative credibility. Participants were forwarded their

interview transcripts to check for accuracy between May 25th and May 31st (Lindlof and Taylor, 2002).

Quantitative research assumes that studies can be replicated using the same measurement tools and generate the same results (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). Nevertheless, because of the nature of interpretative research, the uniqueness of the situation cannot be replicated, however, reliability can be encouraged through credibility, neutrality, consistency and dependability (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). The researcher addressed reliability in this study by recording honestly and comprehensively events as they happened in the field. The close proximity between the event and the audio-recording of the data related to that event will support the reliability of data (Bengtsson 2016). The depth of the researcher's experience as well as recording observations before and after interviews added to the reliability of this study.

Thomas (2013, p.138) defines reliability as the "extent to which a test will give the same result on different occasions". Reliability relates to the ability of a research method to consistently provide similar outcomes on different occasions (Thomas 2013). In qualitative research, reliability can be regarded as a fit between what researchers record as data and "what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched" (Cohen *et al.*, 2013, p.119). Whilst reliability is applicable to quantitative research, some theorists question its relevance and suitability for qualitative research (Cohen *et al.*, 2013; Thomas 2013). In this study, research interviews are non-repeatable in nature, and participants' meanings, realities and worlds are ever-changing. Therefore, the researcher's understandings may also change, thereby rendering replications of results neither practical nor possible (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Lindolf and Taylor 2011).

3.5 Ethical Issues in Research Study

Bell (2014, p.46) argues that "research ethics is about being clear about the nature of the agreement you have entered into with your research subjects or contacts". Equally, McLeod (1994) states that ethics address morals, beliefs and values within society. As a trainee-practitioner, the researcher, abided by a

set of principles that guided her conduct. Notwithstanding, Cohen *et al.*, (2013) state that ethical regulation exists on three levels; *legislative, professional and personal*. The researcher was granted ethical approval by the University of Limerick Faculty of Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee on the 13th of February 2017.

In terms of a professional code of ethics, the researcher adhered to the ethical principles laid down by the NCGE (2008) Research Code of Ethics; IGC (2012b) Code of Ethics; and The Psychological Society of Ireland [PSI] (2011) to protect the integrity of the research; from planning stage, to implementation, to reporting of findings; namely respect for the rights and dignity of the person, competence, responsibility and integrity (Hearne 2013; Mauthner *et al.* 2002). These professional principles are in tandem with McLeod's (2011) proposal of five ethical principles of research; non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy, fidelity and justice. Use of further appropriate documentation such as letters of access to gatekeepers, adhering to confidentiality of information, protecting identity by use of pseudonyms, and assuring participants of the right to withdraw at any time further enhanced the ethical practices in this study (McNiff and Whitehead 2011).

The cost/benefit ratio is also a "fundamental concept expressing the primary ethical dilemma in social research" (Cohen *et al.*, 2013, p.75). The cost to participants in this study may have been revelations about personal issues; embarrassment; loss of personal time or a challenge to their professional role. Potential benefits from the research could verify relevant and important issues and how practitioners are coping with the changes smartphone technology is bringing to their practice. Other benefits could include implementation of further specific training to guidance counsellors relating to smartphone technology.

Hearne (2013) notes the researcher has a duty of care towards participants, and should ensure the informed consent of participants and protection of their confidentiality. Cohen *et al.*, (2013) and Thomas (2013) state it is important to inform participants on storage of information and the limitations of confidentiality.

Furthermore, Etherington (2007) suggests ethical behaviour should include respecting the autonomy, dignity and privacy of participants.

Similarly, Hearne (2013) notes that guidance research needs to be clear as to the context, motivation for the research, methodology and ethical issues arising in order for the research findings to be viewed as credible, trustworthy and scholarly. Whilst ethical issues are determined based on the nature of the topic being researched and the methodology being used, there remains three main ethical considerations linked with interview based research which will be considered in this study; *consequences of the interviews, informed consent and confidentiality* (Cohen *et al.*, 2013).

Furthermore, Cohen *et al.*, (2013) recommend a number of key aspects to be considered when undertaking research. In this study the following elements were adopted:

1. The participants were made aware of the purpose and benefit of the research
2. All participants volunteered for the research and were advised of their rights
3. Informed permission was acquired from all participants
4. Anonymity was guaranteed
5. The interviewees were informed about an opt out clause prior to participation
6. The interviews were transcribed and interviewees invited to check same
7. All interviews were transcribed and data analysed by the researcher
8. A commitment to the secure location of research data has been adhered to.

Hence, the researcher aimed to strike a balance between collecting meaningful and reliable data whilst protecting dignity, rights and values (Cohen *et al.*, 2013). A key element of the rigorous aspect of this study will be discussed in the next section.

3.6 Reflexivity

The researcher employed critical reflexivity throughout the study which was challenging but helped the professional conduct of the researcher (Haverkamp 2005). The researcher demonstrated this reflexivity throughout her research by recognising that “research cannot be value free” (Bryman 2004, p. 22). Whilst I was an outsider in the sense that I do not work in guidance counselling at present, I was aware of entering the participants’ lives and experiences. Equally, I was an outsider to their personal experiences, their work and the services they provided.

As such, reflexivity is the self-appraisal in research (Berger 2015). It refers to the process of self-examination of the criterion of one’s professional role and its implications for ethical practice (Haverkamp 2005). Reflexivity has been increasingly recognized as a crucial strategy in the process of generating knowledge by means of qualitative research (Ahmed Dunya *et al.* 2011; Blaxter *et al.* 2010; D’Cruz *et al.* 2007). Thorpe (2013) points out that qualitative researchers engage in an ongoing process of reflexivity - before, during and after the completion of findings from the research. To be reflexive is to have an ongoing conversation about experience whilst simultaneously living in the moment (Hertz 1997). Furthermore, Hertz (1997) states that a reflexive researcher does not report facts or truths but constructs interpretations of her experiences in the field, and then questions how these interpretations came about.

Berger (2015) notes the researcher needs to be aware of the potential effects on reflexivity of their social position (e.g. race, age, gender, sexual orientation) personal experiences and political or spiritual beliefs. Reflexivity is a tool whereby the researcher can include ‘herself’ at any stage and it supports transparency and dialogue that is required for forming and sustaining ethical research relationships (Etherington 2007). During the research process she kept a research diary, reflecting on each of the interviews conducted and had discussions with her supervisor. The researcher found this process of journaling encouraged reflection of her explication and interpretation of the findings (Proghoff 1977).

Furthermore, Schön (1983) regards the capacity to reflect on action as to engage in a process of continuous reflexivity.

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the methodology which underpins this study. Chapter 4 will explain the data analysis strategy adopted and present the data findings from the semi-structured interviews.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

4.0 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to present the research findings from seven semi-structured interviews. It will also outline the data analysis strategy used in this investigation that explores the perceptions of guidance counsellors in post-primary schools concerning smartphone usage in adolescence. To preserve anonymity of participants, pseudonyms will be used and the specific locations will not be disclosed. It will identify the key themes that emanated in the research data.

4.1 Data Analysis Strategy

Thomas (2013) states there are many ways to analyse data and the researcher must select the method which best suits their individual research approach. The analysis of the qualitative data involved organising, ordering, clarifying and analysing the information gathered in the research data collection phase (Braun and Clark 2012; Cohen *et al.*, 2011; Lindolf and Taylor 2011).

The researcher used the six steps as prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2012) to carry out a thematic analysis. Firstly, prior to beginning the analysis, the researcher listened to each of the taped semi-structured interview recordings a number of times to re-familiarise herself with the narratives. The constant comparative method of data analysis was selected and during the process the researcher used the split-page method for analysing and coding transcripts as well as writing notes. She became fully immersed and engaged in the data by transcribing, comparing comments, responses and narrative content from all participants (Thomas 2013).

Secondly, once the researcher was familiar with the data this allowed for the generation of codes. These codes are the features that appear interesting and meaningful (Braun and Clarke 2012). Thirdly, the researcher was able to make connections between the themes identified (Bryman 2012) which allowed for interpretation of the primary findings of the data. This helped to identify key

elements and overarching themes which became the building blocks in the analysis. Next, a deeper review of the identified themes were clarified and a thematic map was generated (Appendix I) . Following this, the researcher refined and defined the overarching themes and sub-themes from the data to enable her to present the primary findings (Appendix F).

4.2 Participant Profile

Each participant answered initial questions to their age, guidance counselling experience and the type of school they were employed in. The background data on the seven participants is included below (*fig. 4.1*).

Figure 4.1 Profile of Study Population

Participant Pseudonym	Gender	Age Range	Years Experience as G.C.	Interview Length	Type of School	Approximate Population of school
Lisa	F	36-45	5+	48 min	All Girls	510
David	M	45-55	15+	51min	Co-Ed	790
Tom	M	56+	15+	58 min	All Boys	450
Brian	M	36-45	14+	39 min	All Boys	750
Claire	F	36-45	3+	40min	Co-Ed	1020
Cathal	M	45-55	10+	38 min	Co-Ed (DEIS)	420
Anne	F	30-35	5+	42min	Co-Ed	470

4.3 Themes

Four overarching themes emerged in the qualitative findings highlighting a range of issues on the topic.

1. Effects of smartphone usage on students lives and the school environment
2. Role of Post-Primary Schools
3. Role of Guidance Counsellor
4. Role of Parents

Direct quotations from the transcribed interviews will provide clarity and credence to the emergence of each theme which originated from the data.

4.3.1 Effects of smartphone usage on students lives and the school environment

The first overarching theme reflects the perceived adverse effects of smartphone usage on students. All participants agreed that adolescents are spending the majority of time on smartphones “*consuming*,” social media or watching YouTube videos, whilst very little or no time is spent “*creating*” on screens (Anne). Cathal noted it was important as a guidance counsellor to be aware of the benefits of smartphone technology and that “*you need to be on the ball to make students aware of the benefits because the technology is everywhere*”.

The issue of friendships was reported by all of the participants. All participants considered the meaning of friendship in adolescence was distorted as they are increasingly lived online. “*They are not able to talk to each other.... and they are missing facial cues and human interaction*” (Claire). Many participants considered much is being lost in translation with issues presenting to the guidance counsellor concerning what was misconstrued by friends on messaging apps (applications). Several participants highlighted that messaging apps lead to isolation when one friend is left out of a group chat.

There was unanimous consensus from the participants that students consider online friendships as real as any personal relationship offline. Furthermore, despite students being connected at all times, guidance counsellors acknowledged social isolation has increased dramatically and that issues within friendships are played out on social media. Many of the participants spoke of students having relationships online with people living in other countries. All of them agreed that students consider these are meaningful relationships despite not having met the person. Tom and Claire referred to the importance of human interaction and described how students are missing important eye contact and are not aware of others feelings.

A key issue that emerged was of the prevalent practice of cyberbullying. All participants agreed this concerning practice is more difficult to detect with smartphones as it can be anonymous and hidden, and there is no respite for a student as they can be targeted all of the time:

There's fights being recorded, bullying, setting up false Facebook accounts... on a weekly basis we're hearing about stuff that has happened... they just seem to be causing more problems.

(Cathal)

Furthermore, all participants considered that smartphones have blurred the lines between the students real life and virtual life. For example Tom stated that students were saying:

"Oh, but I'd like to know what people are saying about me....." They don't see connections. They can't make connections that if I do this, then I would be making life easier for myself.

(Tom)

Cathal appeared exasperated:

The time spent by management dealing with the fallout from smartphone issues gives less scope to develop the positive aspects we just don't have the time or the resources to be trying to develop these other aspects.

(Cathal)

The participants agreed that many social media apps used by adolescents are image focused and appear to exacerbate feelings of low self-esteem and anxiety in young people. The majority of participants agreed a student's self-identity is based on comments made online by other individuals. Some participants agreed that whilst the smartphone gives the student unlimited access to information it also can have a negative effect. Tom explained:

I had a guy in fifth year... who was on forums on self-harming, and sharing all the stuff that was going on with total strangers, and even learning new ways to self-harm.

(Tom)

Equally, the participants agreed that students are accessing information for medical and other concerns they have, and are attributing medical and other conditions to their perceived symptoms. *“They self-diagnose..... so it makes them more anxious”* (Lisa). There was unanimous agreement amongst the participants that the practice of selfies and the attainment of the perfect self-image was leading to low self-esteem amongst teenagers. They also agreed this practice was an extension of their self-absorption with the smartphone, and the sharing of selfies on social media was putting a value system on the number of ‘likes’, ‘shares’, ‘snaps’ the student receives. Furthermore, all participants considered the constant checking of the smartphone was affecting self-regulation amongst adolescents and this could impact a student’s emotional intelligence.

All of the participants agreed on the value the adolescent places on their smartphone. Tom stated *“they smile at me as if I’m from another planet. Do you not realise how important my phone is?”*. Additionally, the issue of sleep deprivation amongst students was a common theme in the narratives. The majority of participants spoke of students being exhausted and stating that students are spending until the small hours of the morning on the smartphone. This they felt was affecting academic performance and educational outcomes for the student. Brian added *“sleep deprivation in turn leads to poor grades... it’s a vicious cycle..... their grades get worse and worse”*.

Nonetheless, many of the participants agreed that smartphones are beneficial to students who may be questioning their sexual identity. Participants spoke of students using the smartphone effectively in accessing and contacting support groups in their local area. However, all participants expressed frustration that sexting amongst adolescents has become normalised behaviour and that *“it’s almost an expectation”* amongst teenagers. Tom commented on sexting practices and observed *“they are not within a million miles of seeing the dangers of sending inappropriate photos of themselves”* and that *“legality means nothing to them”*. Brian added *“from what I gather it’s pretty prevalent”* and Anne stated *“they have become desensitised to a lot of stuff”*.

It also emerged that an adolescent's gender or age was not an influential factor in sexting. David noted that a 1st year girl was as likely to share inappropriate images as a 4th year boy. He expressed frustration and stated that young females were sharing "*just as much*" as older male students. Tom added "*it's spur of the moment.... coming from instant gratification. "If it feels good, I'm going to do it, and to hell with the consequences after it"*". There was unanimous agreement amongst participants that change in smartphone sexting behaviour would only occur if more serious consequences were implemented.

Eating disorders, anxiety and panic attacks were all identified as worrying behavioural changes amongst young people by the participants. Brian noted a huge increase in young people presenting with social anxiety "*it's certainly adding to it in terms of social interaction being online as opposed to being in person*". All participants noted that these issues may be mitigated or augmented by the adolescents coping behaviours. Tom added that he uses CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) strategies with students to help them alleviate anxiety and stress associated with smartphone usage. He also noted that more boys are presenting with eating disorders and large numbers are taking creatine as a supplement. He attributed this to the narcissistic element of selfies on social media where images of six-packs are regular postings.

Another adverse effect of smartphone usage relates to students engagement in learning. Cognitive behavioural changes amongst post-primary students were also highlighted by the participants. They attributed these to the excessive time spent on smartphones and noted "*they are not paying attention to what they need to be*" (Cathal). Despite smartphones not being allowed on school premises participants were aware of regular teachers reporting smartphone alerts reverberating in class repeatedly. Equally, regular teachers were reporting that at times they have to spend classtime diffusing situations that have occurred related to social media. Overall, this was having a significant impact on the delivery of teaching and learning, and affecting other students in the classroom.

A short attention span caused by spending too much time on the screen was described by the majority of participants. Tom endorsed this view by stating that students are *“spending till three and four in the morning.... so they are coming in exhausted and not benefitting educationally”*. Interestingly, the majority of participants considered students lack of resilience is prevalent in adolescence today. Tom stated *“they will expect you to deliver everything to them..... that if they get any little knock at all... they just give up*. Claire added *“they think that the problem can be solved on the screen”*. Additionally, David added that adolescents have retreated into their smartphones instead of facing the challenges of life.

Participants considered that students are not engaging with content on the smartphone and the practice of scrolling is disengaging them further from what they are reading and experiencing. Six out of seven participants believed this was contributing to passive students in the classroom. Additionally, participants considered whilst students have the skill of accessing content on smartphones *“but in terms of critically analysing what it being said, they’re gullible”* (Tom). Furthermore, all participants believed that the skill of reasoning and logical thinking cannot be taught through a screen, as believed by students.

4.3.2 Role of Post-Primary Schools

The next overarching theme relates to the role of post-primary schools with regards to the usage of smartphones by students. The participants referred to the ICT Policies and the Code of Behaviour in their schools, whereby the majority of smartphones are allowed at lunchtime but not within the school building. The Code of Behaviour in the majority of schools means smartphones are confiscated for the day should a student be caught using it and parents have to collect it from the office. Some participants spoke of students’ increasing resistance to handing over the smartphone *“they would prefer to lose an arm than lose the phone in certain cases”* (Lisa).

Additionally, all participants reported that due to lack of facilities in computer rooms *“it’s just handy”* for the students to use their smartphones. The participants spoke about the difficulty in policing smartphone usage during the school day.

All participants concurred that effective application of ICT policies was dependent on the culture of the post-primary school. Equally, they believed, there was a visible and hidden culture and attitude in schools in relation to this issue. They spoke of regular teachers requesting students to use smartphones as part of the teaching and learning within classrooms and they considered this was leading to a disjointed implementation of the Code of Behaviour. Several participants considered role modelling from teachers using the smartphone in a personal capacity in a classroom situation was not a positive practice, and presented another inconsistent message to the student. In one of the participant's schools there is a serious consideration of an outright ban of smartphones on the premises.

Furthermore, all participants agreed they and regular teachers were in a vulnerable position in the classroom, as recording or photographing within the classroom could be done unknown to a class teacher. David added *"at all times you're in danger of being recorded..... and if they gain popularity, you're screwed"*. He believed this led to a lack of freedom of expression in communication which could impinge on teaching styles. Tom added *"we're not fools, we know exactly that these things are happening"*.

A key theme that emerged in the findings was the issue of CPD and training for participants, school staff, parents and students. The majority of participants stated that they had not attended any training in the area of smartphone usage and concurred it should be available annually as technology is changing so rapidly. Tom noted that he had attended an in-service some five years ago in the area of social media and the dark web *"but what came of it.... nothing"*. Claire added that it is important for the guidance counsellor to be aware of the latest social media and messaging apps to remain relevant to the generation they are working with. Many participants added that the DES should set clear guidelines to post-primary schools in relation to dealing with negative smartphone practices. Equally, participants considered having an extensive network of other guidance counsellors to communicate with was vital support to them when issues arose.

Accordingly, there was a consensus amongst the participants that the new Wellbeing Module being introduced at Junior Cycle would support training of safe smartphone usage (NCCA 2016a; 2017). *“I think its an idea now that we’re going to look at.....we’re hoping to make it part of the new Wellbeing module”* (Cathal). Another area that emerged was supporting safe use on devices and helping students to understand the digital footprint they are originating when using smartphones. Claire suggested a member of the Gardaí should be present at information talks for students to highlight the dangers of certain smartphone practices such as sexting. Additionally, all participants considered training around smartphone usage should begin in primary school as students were being exposed to their use and content at a much younger age.

Finally, seven participants believed that parents should engage in training which encouraged them and their children to participate in co-learning of safe smartphone usage. In general, they believed that there was a lack of interest from parents attending information evenings and that the same parents always show up. David stated that less than 5% of parents turn up to information evenings on internet safety, despite reminders being sent from the school. This was attributed in part to the busyness of life on the part of some parents and families and lack of interest from others.

4.3.3 Role of the Guidance Counsellor

Concerning the third theme there was consensus amongst the seven participants that the delivery of guidance counselling involved personal, educational, and vocational counselling to students, and there is a whole school approach to guidance counselling in their schools. All of the participants were members of a pastoral care team which met weekly, and liased with SPHE co-ordinators and year heads. According to all of the participants personal counselling within schools is now taking up most of their hours. *“It’s absolutely flipped completely, most of my time is in counselling and not a huge amount in career guidance”* (Tom). Cathal endorsed this view by articulating he *“is trying to focus on the vocational side of things”* but that he is *“dealing with a lot of personal issues”* on a one-to-one basis. Anne echoed these sentiments and stated she is dealing

with “*panic attacks*” on a daily basis. All participants spoke about trying to find a balance when delivering all aspects of guidance counselling within their schools. Equally, participants believed that smartphone usage and the issues emerging from them has exacerbated the need for personal counselling. For example Cathal stated:

Every week there’s some issue related to someone put something up on Facebook or Snapchat or whatever, it’s tied in with the technology. It’s tied in with the smartphones.

(Cathal)

David concurred that it is like firefighting, dealing with problems as they come and attempting to keep abreast of the latest messaging and social media apps.

The findings support the view that the altruistic ‘nature’ of guidance counsellors and the pastoral care team is linked to students life experiences and relationships in their school life. Participants felt that their ‘duty of care’ was an intrinsic responsibility of their role. However, many participants reported that pastoral care meetings are being absorbed with issues concerning smartphone usage. All participants believed that they had a role to provide support to students and that they should have a “*safe place to say it*” (Anne).

Additionally, all participants articulated that there has been significant change in the delivery of guidance counselling in the last number of years. Six out of seven participants have a Facebook guidance page to engage with students. Four out of seven stated they have an open door policy within school hours and the other three participants are willing to reply to email and Facebook messages in relation to career guidance enquiries outside of school hours. David stated Facebook is “*a great way to send out notifications*” and that students “*can contact you immediately*”. However, all participants concurred that there is an expectation from students for immediate delivery of careers information to their smartphones although students “*expect bite sized information*” (Brian) and “*you have be cognisant of the fact that too much information is no good*” (David).

Tom concurred and stated students *“don’t read important details/dates unless they are being entertained”*. Claire added *“all they’re worried about is how many streaks they have”*.

In terms of engaging with the career guidance material the majority of participants recommended apps to students to download. These included Careers Portal and a Leaving Certificate Points Calculator. All participants have recommended Mindfulness apps to use as a resource to help alleviate stress and anxiety and they noted that students were open to these suggestions. Some participants noted that boys were seeking more help with fact-finding courses and not being autonomous in sourcing the information for themselves on smartphones.

4.3.4 Role of Parents

The final overarching theme relates to the role of parents concerning their children’s usage of smartphones. The data illuminated parental responsibility, role modelling and setting boundaries around smartphone usage. The majority of participants articulated that there is a perception from parents that many of the personal and societal issues are expected to be solved by post-primary schools Brian observed *“we have a lot of parents complaining about the late at night texting and messaging”*. The majority of participants believed that parents were not implementing boundaries or restricting smartphone usage by their children outside of school hours.

Many of the participants queried the meaning of familial relationships for the young person. Several of the participants believed that students have created an abstract world which does not include their parents. The majority of participants shared anecdotes of students being on the phone at dinner time and engaging with social media during this communal family time. *“They are heedless to the surroundings and the people around them”* (Tom). Participants considered these practices are altering family relationships as there is less face-to-face human interaction.

The issue of 'duty of care' by parents was articulated by the participants and they agreed boundaries around usage should be set, and considered that children were not seeing consequences of their actions. *"It's the parents responsibility, it's a care issue to put boundaries in place"* (Claire). In addition Tom stated:

They're in their bedroom, so the parents know where they are. They don't know what they're on or don't know the effects it's having on their children.

(Tom)

Brian reflected these sentiments and stated *"parents should be informing themselves in getting an education for themselves on what is proper use of smartphones and limiting the amount of time"*. Cathal added *"for the most part I would say there's very few boundaries relating to smartphones"*. The majority of participants noted that parents give their children smartphones without parental controls and do not monitor the content on the phone.

Lisa and Anne highlighted that although parents realise their children are spending too much time on their smartphone device, they may be lacking the parenting skills to implement boundaries limiting the amount of time they can access the smartphone. However, it is worth noting, that some participants had knowledge of some children using the smartphone as a means of distraction from difficult family situations when they arrived home from school. Furthermore, Claire observed *"parents have not the time to engage with their children, parents are so busy with two people working"*. All participants highlighted the fact that life is busier than it was a generation ago and the smartphone was a way of occupying the young person.

There was consensus amongst the participants about the way parents role modelled their own behaviour and the amount of time they spent on smartphones. Cathal suggested *"I think it's probably a lot to do with parenting as well"*.

The majority of participants noted that teenagers are seeing what their parents share on social media and are modelling these practices. David added that in the

past parents lived by certain moral standards and expected the same from their children. He expressed frustration and stated:

When I was young, the men wore plain old clothes. The teenagers tried to be cool. Now the parents are trying to be teenagers. And the parents are doing the same things as the young person so this is a problem there is a role modelling fall down there.

(David)

4.4 Summary of findings

In this study, the participants concurred that at present the negative aspects of smartphone usage were outweighing the positive. Equally, as the issues associated with these negative aspects are affecting the school guidance service there is little time to explore or develop more positive outcomes in relation to smartphone usage. Concerning the increase in personal counselling all seven participants agreed it was taking up a lot of the guidance allocation, and many of the issues presenting could be attributed to the negative impacts of smartphone practices by students.

The welfare of the students was a common thread in the participants narratives. The participants felt a strong duty of care to the student, however, all participants referred to parents lack of responsibility by setting parental controls on smartphones and role modelling their own behaviour when using them. The participants articulated the need for CPD for themselves and other school staff. Equally, they believed that the whole school community including all stakeholders, should partake in specific training in safe smartphone usage using a whole school approach.

Overall, a key issue identified was the lack of computer facilities which was affecting rigorous ICT policy implementation. The majority of participants considered more available computers were needed to eliminate the culture of using smartphones for teaching purposes in regular classes and career guidance classes. Policies seem to be in place but there appears to be an ad-hoc approach to their implementation in some schools in this study.

In analysing the data from the participants' interviews, a common thread of exasperation was evident. Practitioners are struggling to keep abreast of the latest messaging apps, social media and smartphone practices, and most believed that CPD in the area was necessary and relevant. Moreover, the findings highlight the nature of their concerns with regard to the challenges of smartphone use in adolescence.

4.5 Conclusion

This chapter presented findings from interviews with seven participants who are practicing guidance counsellors in the post-primary sector by examining the lived experiences and multiple realities (Thomas 2013). The data was presented under themes and sub-themes. Chapter 5 will discuss the research findings in the context of the secondary data explored in the literature review.

Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to synthesise the research findings in the context of the original research questions, primary findings and literature review (Thomas 2013). It will discuss the overarching themes that emerged in the research findings. Primarily, the findings elucidate the perceptions of post-primary guidance counsellors on the central issues concerning smartphone usage in adolescence.

5.1 Overview of Research Findings

The primary research question of this investigation asked “What are the perceptions guidance counsellors hold of smartphone usage amongst post-primary students?”. The findings elucidated the views and opinions of guidance counsellors on the central issues relating to smartphone usage in adolescence. The secondary questions related to how the issues of smartphone usage were affecting the everyday landscape within secondary schools, and the perceived impact in the school teaching environment. They also addressed whether the use of smartphones has any bearing on policies related to cyber-bullying, privacy issues and ethical guidelines for both students and staff members.

To summarise, the findings in this exploratory study identify a number of issues central to the research topic. Significant cognitive and emotional changes associated with smartphone usage were reported by all seven participants in post-primary schools. The smartphone practices of adolescents and the subsequent repercussions appear to be having an adverse effect on the resources of the guidance department and pastoral care teams. Equally, the findings appear to suggest that students do not understand the consequences of the digital presence they are creating by their smartphone usage. There is an expressed concern that students are not linking their online life to their offline life.

The findings will now be considered through the following key issues through the two overarching themes that emerged in the study:

1. Perceived Effects of Smartphone Usage on Students Lives and the School Environment
2. Responsibilities of Stakeholders Regarding Smartphone Usage by Students

5.2 Perceived effects of Smartphone Usage on Students Lives and the School Environment

This section will address the perceived effects of smartphone usage on students' wellbeing. It will also consider the effects on the school teaching environment and the work of the guidance counsellor. Some of the perceived effects of smartphone usage on the students' personal wellbeing have been highlighted by the participants of this study.

5.2.1 Student Wellbeing

In 2014 a study by the World Health Organisation (WHO) found the incidence of anxiety represented the most common mental health problem among adolescents. Other physical effects such as sleep disturbance, stress, body image issues and eating disorders have been specifically attributed to smartphone usage and have been uncovered in the findings. A national survey revealed that 43% of 10-21 year olds are dissatisfied with their body image (DCYA 2012). Smartphone practices such as teasing, constant criticism and possible exclusion are among the factors noted by a 2014 Health Behaviour in School Aged Children [HBSC] survey conducted in Ireland, which have peer influence on negative body image in adolescents. Furthermore, Barry and Murphy (2014) attest that students are dealing with anxiety by self diagnosing using the smartphone. This view was supported by one of the participants (Lisa) who stated that adolescents practice of self-diagnosis was leading to increased anxiety in adolescence. This concurs with Noctor (2016) who attests there is a hum of anxiety around the experience of being online.

The manner in which adolescents share inappropriate images and their lack of awareness about privacy and ownership of data was another key finding of the research. It has been identified also that the issue of sexualisation of young

adulthood has been exacerbated by new norms of sexting and nude selfies (Aiken 2016; Ging and O'Higgins Norman 2016; Merchant 2017; Zimbardo and Coulombe 2015). One of the participants (Pat) observed "*they are not within a million miles of seeing the dangers of sending inappropriate photos of themselves*" and that "*legality means nothing to them*". Aiken (2016) argues that this acceptability of sexualisation of young adulthood was unacceptable just a decade ago, and the new norms of sexting and nude selfies could lead to narcissistic behaviour. However, Fu *et al.*, (2014) contend that an opposite view is held by social scientists who contend that concern over harmful consequences of online risk is merely 'moral panic'.

All of the participants in this study agreed that online behaviour would require real world consequences for the young person to fully understand the implications of certain smartphone practices. Furthermore, the issue of desensitisation was articulated by one of the participants (Anne) who stated that adolescents have become "*desensitised to a lot of stuff*". This issue had been identified by Adler (2017) who states due to the advent of smartphones, children are being introduced to an adult world at an earlier stage. As a result, they are open to risks such as malicious online messages and grown ups masquerading as peers, therefore compromising personal safety. In terms of policy, Linehan (2017) states that there are proposed safety measures being discussed by the Minister of Communications Denis Naughten and Children's Minister Katherine Zappone. The ministers plan to introduce a 'Code of Practice' and temporary measures to encourage social media sites to remove abusive material while laws are drawn up for the Digital Safety Commissioner (Children's Rights Alliance 2016; Law Reform commission 2016).

The findings of this study indicate that smartphone usage in students lives is having a perceived effect in their everyday lives and their close relationships with others. It has been identified that in adolescence the peer group and friendships become more important and involve constant social interactions (DeGoede *et al.* 2009; Goggin and Crawford 2011; Ling *et al.* 2012; 2014). The findings support the view that the construct of friendships in adolescence has altered with the use

of the smartphone. All participants in this study agreed the meaning of friendship in adolescence was distorted as they are lived online and the boundaries are becoming blurred between online and offline.

The findings appear to suggest the contradictions of connectivity are the real challenges for adolescents. This view is supported by Lenhart *et al.* (2010) and Marche (2012) who argue that connectivity is disconnecting adolescents from real friendships and the opportunity to spend their time together. The smartphone paradoxically disconnects adolescents from each other, thereby reducing their ability to form meaningful relationships (Alter 2017). Przybylski and Weinstein (2013) argue smartphones hold the potential to facilitate as well as to disrupt human bonding and intimacy, and a key issue is setting boundaries relating to their usage. All of the participants in the current study suggest that smartphone use contributes to '*isolation*' amongst adolescents and that they tend to retreat into the screen rather than hold face-to-face conversations. This is an issue identified by Zimbardo (2011) who states that isolation can have lifelong consequences on the brain and relationships and an adolescent's ability to make sense of the real world.

Students interaction on social media using smartphones emerged as another issue in post-primary schools. This study identified that apps are affecting adolescent's poor perception of their own body image. Bronfenbrenner (1995) and Lenhart (2015) argue that social media represents another ecosystem in the adolescent's life and this could have an effect on the social, physical and wellbeing aspects of their lives. The DCYA (2009) states poor self-image is the leading contributing factor negatively impacting the mental health of adolescents aged 12-18 years in Ireland. Consequently, adolescents now have a digital shadow and an online identity which bears little resemblance to their own sense of self. (Aiken 2016) and Merchant (2017) note social media encourages aspects of a performing identity and social posturing. The findings in this study support this view with many social media apps used by adolescents are image focused and appear to exacerbate feelings of low self-image and self-esteem in young people.

Equally, the cultural phenomenon of the selfie has taken many forms, whether detailing events of an adolescents daily life by sharing it on social media, or sending nude or suggestive selfies messaging apps (Peek 2014; Sifferlin 2012). The participants in this study agreed the practice of selfies and the attainment of the perfect self-image was contributing to low self-worth which was affecting the students wellbeing. However, Letamendi (2013) posits that adolescents live in a digital world and these self-portraits provide a way of participating in this world thus allowing adolescents to express their mood and experiences.

Furthermore, the findings validate previous research (Haug *et al.*, 2015; Lemola *et al.* 2015; Lin *et al.*, 2015;) conveying the profound effect that smartphones can have on adolescent's behavioural, cognitive and emotional well-being. Boyd and Bee (2012) state the cognitive, psychological, social and moral changes during puberty can result in adolescence being a challenging stage of development for the individual. The findings suggest this is compounded by smartphone usage as the developing adolescent brain is constantly switched on with constant alerts and notifications from a 24/7 digitally networked society as attested by Sheth and Solomon (2014). This is supported by a major survey undertaken in 2017 by Studyclix which reported that 60% of adolescents are worried that they use their smartphones too much and 45% say they are 'addicted' to them. Furthermore, participants in this study spoke of adolescents accessing the smartphone during the night leading to sleep deprivation resulting in poor academic performance. Kuznekoff and Titsworth (2013) postulate that texting and other smartphone behaviours diminish key social skills such as effective listening, communication and engagement of critical thinking skills which ultimately may affect educational outcomes for the student.

5.2.2 School Environment

Another key issue that emerged in the findings was the prevalence of cyberbullying in post-primary education. School management are obliged to protect pupils with regard to cyberbullying (Corcoran and McGuckin 2014). However, Purdy and McGuckin (2015) observe there is difficulty surrounding the legal responsibilities of post-primary schools and suggest there is a need for

guidance in dealing with the 'blurred' distinction between home and school, should issues arise outside of school hours. Cathal in his narrative, spoke of fights being recorded and students setting up fake Facebook accounts. He also referred to smartphones causing issues and taking up time and affecting the work of the guidance counsellor. It emerged in the current findings that clearer guidelines from the Department of Education and Skills are required in post-primary schools. The findings of this study support the view that cyberbullying has become a central focus for the guidance counsellor and school management with one participant (Fergal) stating there was a real consideration of an outright ban of student's smartphones on school premises.

Another key issue that emerged in the findings was the impact of smartphone usage on students' learning and engagement in school. The findings of the research study along with the literature, support the view that smartphone usage is decreasing connectivity to the adolescents' brain (Aiken 2016; Greenfield 2016). Rambitan (2015) argues that skills in critical thinking and analysis have declined with the advent of smartphone technology and is impacting students learning outcomes. Additionally, it was identified by a participant (Tom) in this study who stated students' expect everything handed to them, and give up if they encounter any problem. However, there may be positive aspects to a broader implication of smartphone usage by adapting classroom instruction to the modern world and designing collaborative learning to engage students' in the global classroom (Lock 2015).

5.2.3 Work of the Guidance Counsellor

The role of the guidance counsellor is a specialist area in the post-primary sector, encompassing a broad range of activities to support a student's personal, educational and vocational needs (DES 2005a). The IGC (1998; 2008) and the NCGE (2007) define guidance provision as three interlinked tasks including personal/social, educational and career counselling. Effective guidance also promotes social inclusion and equality and encourages the students' educational endeavours in achieving self fulfilment. Hearne and Galvin (2014) note that student wellbeing support is a core element of the role of guidance counsellor.

The recent 'Well-being in Post-Primary Schools' policy (DES 2013c) states it is important to strengthen students' resilience as it increases their ability to cope with life's stressors by developing their life-skills. A key issue identified by participants in this study is lack of resilience amongst post primary students in contemporary society. For example one guidance counsellor (Claire) stated "they think that the problem can be solved on the screen". Seligman (2011) argues that teaching young people resilience reduces their conduct problems and significantly lessens their anxiety. This can be achieved through the guidance service using a whole-school approach. Young people have a valuable role to play in society today and the work of the guidance counsellor is to give them the tools to enhance student well-being (Burke and Minton 2015). Furthermore, the subject of philosophy which is being introduced at Junior Cycle may support students development of critical thinking skills and create a reflective atmosphere in the classroom (NCCA 2015).

Additionally, the work of the guidance counsellor contributes to students fostering critical self-knowledge (IGC 2017). Accordingly, Kuznekoff and Titswort (2013) argue that critical reasoning and ethical enquiry need to be engaged in adolescence. However, some of the participants in the current study considered students are lacking the skill of critical reasoning. The findings highlighted that students are not engaging with the content they view on their smartphones. Furthermore, Merchant (2017) posits the emergence of digital echo chambers (a metaphorical description of a situation in which information, ideas, or beliefs are amplified by communication and repetition inside a defined system such as social media) are not allowing adolescents to express their beliefs. Therefore, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD] (2015) aims to develop global policies focused on improving social wellbeing. As part of the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment [Pisa] Schleicher (2016) argues that students need to exchange ideas beyond the social media echo chamber and develop critical judgement.

The findings in the study highlight that whilst students are digital natives they lack emotional intelligence to interpret messages and content they are receiving

on their smartphone device. The DES (2013c) policy on Wellbeing has direct relevance to the work of the guidance counsellor by using a whole school approach, and implementation of these guidelines will enhance the students wellbeing (IGC 1998; Kavanagh and O'Rourke 2016; NCGE 2017). Furthermore, a Wellbeing Module being introduced in 2017 to Junior Cycle students aims to offer a continuum model of support to adolescents and develop wellbeing as a "process of 'wellbecoming' across the lifespan" (DES 2017, p.14; NCCA 2017). This module aims to support a students capacity to develop emotional intelligence and give them further access to the guidance counsellor (DES 2017).

The findings of this study support the view that access to the guidance counsellor is fundamental to promote the student's holistic education in the student's increasingly virtual world (Bond 2014). Furthermore, the prevalent issue of under-resourcing of the school guidance service since Budget 2012 has brought the validity of the whole school approach to guidance counselling into much sharper focus (ASTI 2013; Hearne *et al.* 2016; IGC 2012a; 2013, 2014, 2016; NCGE 2013). One of the outcomes of this policy change has seen guidance counsellors having a dual role involving both guidance counselling and subject specialist classroom teaching thus compromising the professional boundaries of both roles (Hearne *et al.* 2016; Hearne and Galvin 2014; IGC 2016).

These findings support the Irish model of the holistic whole school approach to the delivery of guidance counselling which involves the entire school community (Hearne *et al.* 2016; IGC 2008; NCGE 2004; 2017). The findings further indicate that guidance counsellors consider CPD as beneficial for all stakeholders (guidance counsellors, school management, school principal, deputy principal, teachers, resource staff, Board of Management, ancillary staff, parents and students and any interested parties) to keep them informed of the latest social media and messaging apps being used/abused by students (Vuorinen and Kettunen 2011).

Finally, all participants in this study noted the prevalent practice of cyberbullying amongst adolescents. This concerning issue is more difficult to detect with

smartphones as it can be anonymous and hidden, and there is no respite for the student as they can be targeted constantly. Therefore, it is necessary for the guidance service in post-primary schools to be equipped with the requisite classic and contemporary knowledge to understand how to address this new manifestation of bullying (NCGE 2014). As such, the guidance counsellor can provide support to students in their hyper-connected world in a balanced educational environment to reach their full potential make them aware of the realities of smartphone usage (Bond 2016; NCGE 2014).

5.3 Responsibilities of Stakeholders Regarding Smartphone Usage by Students

This study considers the reality of smartphone usage by adolescents and duty of care within post-primary schools and how it can be integrated into school policy. The NCCA (2007a) offers a framework of curricular experiences and highlights the responsibility of the whole school community in providing appropriate guidance. This section will address the responsibilities of key school stakeholders in delivering whole-school guidance, and the implications of the availability of resources and appropriate training for stakeholders.

5.3.1. Responsibilities of Schools

The findings of the study explicate some disconnect in relation to the implementation of ICT policies within post-primary schools. A prevalent issue was a lack of appropriate facilities and the study highlights that whilst ICT usage is embedded in teaching and learning, provision of necessary hardware is still lacking in post-primary education. All participants reported that due to lack of facilities in computer rooms *“it’s just handy”* for the students to use their smartphones (Anne). The findings suggest this ad-hoc delivery of ICT contradicts the investment of €253 million in 2007 which was allocated by the then Minister of Education and Skills (DES 2007). Furthermore, the Irish ICT Census 2013 identified the ratio as 8.8:1 (Cosgrove et al., 2014). Such figures indicate that the question of adequacy of ICT infrastructure for students has not progressed and highlights a shortage of computing devices for use by students Therefore, the lack of necessary hardware to ensure all students have access

to computers for embedded teaching and learning in career guidance classes, is leading to ineffective implementation of ICT policies and Code of Behaviours which address the use of smartphones on school premises (McGarr 2009). Additionally, the findings indicate that regular teachers were found to be using students smartphone hardware as part of the teaching and learning, thus leading to a disjointed implementation and contradictory messages of ICT policies and confused students.

Post-primary schools have a duty of care and must ensure that they are able to safeguard students and staff alike (Becta 2009). However, the findings suggest that due to the uncontrolled use of smartphone technology in some schools, guidance counsellors and regular teachers are in a vulnerable position in the classroom. David, in his narrative spoke of the danger of 'being recorded' at all times. Some of the participants in the current study referred to the unethical behaviour of students in classrooms. Additionally, it is worth noting that a 2017 Studyclix Student Survey conducted with post-primary students, revealed that 55% of students reported using their smartphone in the classroom. The covert engagement on smartphones within classrooms can lead to a student's attention being divided, which distracts attention from on-task behaviour (Kuznekoff and Titsworth 2013). Likewise, all participants noted it is especially challenging in a classroom situation to keep students focused on a task when using smartphones as part of the teaching and learning.

The NCCA (2007, p.3) states the 'general aim of education is to contribute to the full development of the individual'. All participants in this study believed that post-primary schools should support a student's emotional and psychological needs in order to provide a holistic education. The findings indicate that students need to be further educated in the area safe smartphone usage and being safe online. The participants felt that this awareness could help young people comprehend their actions around potentially problematic smartphone practices that have become commonplace in adolescence (Aiken 2016; Greenfield 2016). Another issue that was highlighted in the study concerned making students aware of the consequences of their own digital footprint in the use of smartphones, and

how potentially this may affect their employability in the future (Dacre Pool and Sewell 2007). One guidance counsellor Claire suggested a member of the Gardaí should be present at information talks for students to highlight the dangers of certain smartphone practices such as sexting. Furthermore, the Digital Media Literacy course being introduced at Junior Cycle aims to support responsible behaviour using digital technology which could include smartphone devices (NCCA 2016b). All participants considered training around smartphone usage should begin in primary school as students were being exposed to their use and content at a much younger age. Additionally in 2016 the Government agreed that the ‘digital age of consent’ for children to sign up to online services without parental approval should be set at thirteen (Department of Justice and Equality 2016).

5.3.2 Responsibilities of the Guidance Service

Guidance provision in post-primary education encompasses three separate but interlinked areas of personal and social development, educational guidance and career guidance” (DES 2005a, p.4). Overall the findings in this study somewhat contradict this assertion. The findings suggest that the delivery of a holistic guidance service which incorporates personal and social, education and career guidance is out of balance (Hearne and Galvin 2014; NCGE 2004; Seed 1992). The seven participants in this study reported that personal counselling is now taking up most of their allocated hours. Equally, they spoke of trying to find a balance in the delivery of all aspects of guidance counselling within their schools. They articulated that the area of personal guidance was exacerbated by issues arising from smartphone usage. For example in his narrative Cathal spoke of issues with smartphone technology having to be resolved on a weekly basis.

Supporting student wellbeing is a core element of the role of the guidance counsellor but is an aspect that entails a significant time commitment and levels of understanding (DES 2005b; Hearne and Galvin 2014; IGC 2017; NCGE 2007). Watts and Kidd (2000) posit personal counselling is a critical part of guidance provision and counselling skills underpin good practice within the guidance

service. They argue it empowers the student to develop coping strategies to resolve issues in their own lives (Watts and Kidd 2000). Walsh (2015) supports this supposition and states young people who do well in life will have had at least one stable and committed relationship with a supportive parent, caregiver or other adult. The findings indicate that issues typically presenting to the guidance counsellors include anxiety, eating disorders, cyberbullying, self-harm and isolation from peers associated with smartphone usage. One of the research participants (Anne) supported this assertion by suggesting that personal counselling contributed to the 'well being of the student' and it was important that when providing support, students should have a 'safe place to say it'. The guidance service should offer a safe place where the adolescent can discuss their anxieties or troubles (DES 2005b; Reid and Westergaard 2011; NCGE 2011).

Worryingly, with regards to guidance counsellors' self-responsibility and self-care the findings illustrate that some guidance counsellors may not have adequate boundaries around their work and their autonomous role. Students' expectations of immediate delivery of information has increased contact with guidance counsellors through the social media app Facebook messenger. The general consensus in the literature is that the needs of the practitioner should be given attention in this high touch work (Bimrose and Hearne 2012; Skovolt and Trotter-Mathison 2011). Since the re-allocation of guidance counselling in 2012, guidance counsellors are also teaching curriculum subjects together with their guidance work (Hearne and Galvin 2014, IGC 2016). In the context of this challenging work environment, guidance counsellors may also have a dual role, and need to pay careful attention to their own well-being and engage in a range of self-care activities and CPD (IGC 2017).

This study also found that contemporary guidance delivery is a blended service. In this study six out of seven schools have Facebook pages and use this forum as a means to communicate with students on important dates and events. This is validated by the literature which indicates that young people expect guidance delivery through the medium of ICT including smartphone devices

(Bimrose *et al.* 2015). Appropriate use of technology in classroom guidance delivery could support self-directed learning, research and encourage the development of self-management skills (DES 2005b). Nonetheless, some of the participants considered that there was an expectation from students for immediate delivery of careers information to their smartphones and the student was not taking responsibility over their own career decision making. Furthermore, some guidance counsellors disclosed that students were emailing them outside school hours seeking careers information, despite having smartphone with internet access in their hands.

Conversely, Lock (2015) posits, it is in this living field of knowledge creation that digital technologies can be integrated to foster new opportunities for students to move learning beyond the physical classroom and into the global digital classroom. Darling-Hammond (2008) support this supposition and state effective education for students must meet the demands of changing information, technologies, jobs and social conditions. Furthermore, the guidance counsellor can make students aware of the career opportunities that exist in the evolving technology industry. The concept of a 'career for life' no longer exists in a world of rapid economic and social changes (Sharf 2010). Equally, students expect to be able to work, learn and study whenever and wherever they want to and the smartphone can contribute to this hypothesis (Johnson *et al.* 2011).

The findings of the study also support the view that a decrease in academic performance is also associated with adolescents and their use of smartphones. Lock (2015) suggests the challenge is how to design and facilitate authentic collaborative learning in the global classroom that engages the young person using this technology. Consequently, Friesen and Lock (2010) argue that with greater emphasis on contemporary learning, technology and smartphone devices play a critical role in the delivery of education. The challenges facing the guidance service include integrating the learning experiences for the student using a blended guidance delivery, by accessing digital technologies to support the developmental continuance of the student (Hayes and Morgan 2011).

5.3.3 Responsibilities of Students

As technology advances, behaviour in adolescence is further evolving. The findings indicate that students are indeed 'digital natives' as described by educational consultant Marc Prensky in 2001. The issue of personal self-regulation by students in their smartphone usage has emerged in the findings of the study. Furthermore, Seay and Kraut (2007) discovered that self-regulation is needed to control addictive compulsive behaviours which are linked to the frequent checking of updates on social media apps such as Facebook, Snapchat, Instagram and Whatsapp. It is possible that lack of self-regulation as identified in the study, combined with the autonomy afforded to teenagers by smartphone devices places them at risk for engaging in risky behaviours such as sexting and pornography (Greenfield 2016). The effect of self-regulation on smartphone addiction and the frequent checking, scrolling and clicking is negative and significant and could impact a student's educational outcomes (Gökçearsan *et al.* 2016). The absence of self-education about impact on relationships also emerged in the findings of the study.

5.3.4 Responsibilities of Parents

Another key issue that emerged in the findings was the role of parents in their children's usage of smartphones. Interestingly, the consensus which emerged from the participants in this study was that parents may not be setting adequate boundaries on smartphone usage for their children. Equally, participants believed that content on smartphones was not monitored and parental controls were not implemented on smartphone devices, thereby allowing adolescents to bypass traditional gatekeepers. Nonetheless, the literature argues that as caregivers, parents' attention is also being monopolised by their own smartphone technology (Aiken 2016; Fillucci 2013). Social pressure to respond to calls and messages increases the potential for parents' smartphone use to disrupt parent-child interactions (Hetter 2011; Kildare and Middlemiss 2017). Another important finding in the study found is what parents share on social media sets a precedent for their children modelling parental smartphone practices.

Guest (2002) posits that a work-life imbalance in this generation has negative consequences for family wellbeing and functioning. The findings of the study illuminate the busyness of contemporary life for parents and families. For example, Claire referred to both parents working and struggling to manage daily life and find a work-life balance. All participants highlighted life is busier than a generation ago and the smartphone was a way of occupying the young person as parents struggle to find time to engage with their children. However, it is argued that it is the responsibility of the parents to monitor their adolescents online behaviour on smartphone devices (Khurana *et al.* 2015; Kildare and Middlemiss 2017). Worryingly, O'Higgins Norman and McGuire (2016) found a low percentage of frequent parental supervision with regard to smartphone use. Furthermore, parents should maintain strong relationships with their children, as these parent-child connections make an important contribution to their children having positive smartphone experiences (Gentile *et al.* 2012; Khurana *et al.* 2015; Williams and Merten 2011).

A key issue in family relationships is the need for the education of parents and children, and to keep open channels of communication with their children regarding their experiences on smartphones (Roe 2010). Participants in this study considered it is vital for parents to educate themselves on safe smartphone usage which can alert them to the potential dangers their adolescents are exposed to. As suggested by Hwang *et al.* (2017) parental mediation is a type of behavior that could protect children against the negative uses and effects of smartphones. Whilst the current study revealed that school is a common place for parents to engage in some forms of training related to student engagement, all participants acknowledged that the turnout for information evenings is low despite being heavily advertised by the guidance department.

Interestingly, ten years after the launch of the smartphone, this is the first generation of parents dealing with issues concerning smartphone usage. Lenhart (2015) stresses that parents should make adolescents aware of the amount of time spent on the device, as evolving behaviour brought on by smartphone technology still needs to be assessed. In the current study, participants referred

to the amount of unsupervised time adolescents are spending on their devices and that boundaries should be set by parents to limit the amount of time spent on smartphones. O'Neill and Dinh (2015, p.4) found that 63% of adolescents report using the internet several times a day and smartphones are the most used device for this access. Worryingly, an iKydz Internet Usage Index (IIU Index 2017) study showed that Irish children spend an average of 5.5 hours online every day. The WHO (2015) recommended guideline is of no more than two hours per day of recreational screen time.

Finally, the findings illuminate the possible disconnect between adolescents and parents. Adolescents are retreating further into their own private worlds and there is a need to address their relationship with social media (Lenhart 2015). Nonetheless, Ling and Donner (2009) argue the peer group is a fundamental institution of adolescence, and participation within social media can empower the teenager. Adolescents use their device to disconnect from their parents and connect with their friends (Ling *et al.* 2012; 2014). Conversely, McNicol and Thorsteinsson (2017) suggest smartphone use can be viewed as a coping response to emotional difficulties, however alternate means of coping responses are diminished when the device is used to cope with negative states. The findings revealed all of the participants had knowledge of adolescents using the smartphone as a means of distraction from difficult family situations when they arrived home from school. One of the participants (Tom) stated he uses CBT strategies with students to teach students coping skills. Furthermore, smartphones could offer an opportunity to guidance practitioners to make students aware of apps which support health behavior changes as a means of coping with emotional difficulties (Dennison *et al.* 2013).

5.4 Conclusion

This chapter discussed the two overarching themes that emerged in relation to the exploration of guidance counsellors' perception of smartphone usage in adolescence. Through a critical engagement with the literature and the primary findings, it provides a number of important insights. Key issues emerged including the perceived effects of smartphone usage

on student's lives and the school environment and the reality of smartphone usage by adolescents. Equally, post-primary schools, the role of the guidance counsellor and responsibility of parents in supporting students with their usage of smartphones has been discussed. Chapter 6 will conclude the research study by proposing recommendations which have emerged from it.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

6.0 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a conclusion within the context of the aim and objectives of this study. It presents the strengths and limitations of the study, and addresses a number of implications for policy, practice and research. In addition, this chapter proposes a number of recommendations informed by the overall findings. Finally, a reflexive examination is presented of the study from the researcher's perspective.

6.1 Overview of the Findings

The overall aim of this exploratory study was to explore the perceptions of guidance counsellors on the smartphone usage in adolescence amongst qualified Guidance Counsellors in Ireland. The secondary aim was to investigate whether smartphone usage was having any effects on adolescents and indeed the school environment within the contemporary landscape of Irish secondary schools. The objectives were to gain an understanding of how the school community including the Guidance Counsellor can support the wellbeing of students as they navigate this proverbial global village through smartphones.

Whilst the literature reveals that some research has been done with adolescents on their views of smartphone usage, relatively little is known about the perceptions of the Guidance Counsellor within the contemporary landscape of an Irish secondary schools' (DCYA 2015; O'Neill and Dihn 2015). Overall the findings of this study identify the perceived effects articulated by a sample of guidance counsellors of smartphone usage on adolescents and the school teaching environment. The analysis illuminates a number of issues central to the research topic. In summary, significant behavioural, cognitive and emotional changes associated with smartphone usage were reported by all seven Guidance Counsellors in post-primary schools. Consequently, the smartphone practices of adolescents and the subsequent repercussions appear to be having an impact on the resources of the guidance department and pastoral care teams (Ging and O'Higgins Norman 2016; NCGE 2007).

Personal counselling is a key part of the school guidance programme (DES 2005). It has emerged in this study that much of the guidance allocation, and many of the issues presenting can be attributed to the negative impacts of smartphone practices by students (DES 2005; IGC 2017). This correlates with recent findings that appear to suggest that students do not understand the consequences of the digital presence they are creating by their smartphone usage (Aiken 2016; Greenfield 2016). This needs to be recognised in future policy and guidelines to help all stakeholders identify the signs of problematic smartphone behaviours. McNichol and Thorsteinsson (2017) suggest early intervention could prevent the development of maladaptive coping responses and addictive behaviour, thereby preventing any future psychosocial consequences when using smartphones in adolescence.

The participants of this study concurred that at present the negative aspects of smartphone usage were outweighing the positive ones. Equally, the issues associated with these negative elements are affecting the school guidance service. Current policy identifies the guidance counsellor as a fundamental figure in promoting positive mental health within schools as part of student support structures (DES 2013). However, participants in this study believed there is little time to explore or develop more positive outcomes in relation to smartphone usage (Hallissy *et al.* 2013). This highlights possible opportunities for the DES in delivering the new Wellbeing and Digital Media Literacy modules at Junior Cycle level (NCCA 2017). Moreover, Chen *et al.* (2015) underline the importance of interpersonal relations and skills for interpersonal interaction, which are paramount to human interaction as is the ability to continue face-to-face communication in this digital age. This study revealed the construct of relationships in adolescence has altered with the use of smartphones, therefore, the support of the Guidance Counsellor in developing interpersonal skills to support the overall wellbeing of the student is necessary (DES 2005b; Goggin and Crawford 2011; Hearne and Galvin 2014; Ling *et al.* 2014).

The widening gap of digital disconnect between students and schools has been highlighted in the literature (Bennet and Mahon 2010). Smartphone usage is the

norm for today's 'digital natives' and students are more technologically literate than their educators (Walker 2014). The literature argues digital natives speak and breathe the language of smartphones and the culture of the web into which they were born, while digital immigrants (a person born or brought up before the widespread use of digital technology) will never deal with technology as naturally as those who grew up with it (Zur and Zur 2009). The findings from the study highlight that schools, Guidance Counsellors, and more than likely parents, are struggling to keep abreast of the latest messaging apps, social media and smartphone practices, and most believed that CPD in the area was necessary and relevant.

The Teaching Council Act (2001 7(2) (b)) highlights that one of its main functions is 'the professional conduct of teachers and promotion of 'Continuing Professional Development' (CPD)'. However, this study elucidates that there is an absence in digital literacy training for Guidance Counsellors and all stakeholders, including parents, in the post-primary sector. This illuminates a possible fault line that exists between Guidance Counsellors, stakeholders, students and governmental policy. Walker (2014) posits providing teachers with professional development and mentoring opportunities which are embedded throughout the school day is essential to bridge the technological gap between students and educators.

Nevertheless, there is a responsibility on Guidance Counsellors to manage and participate in regular CPD as technology is constantly evolving (Vuorinen and Kettunen 2011). Bimrose *et al.* (2015) highlight the familiarity and engagement of students with social media apps in their everyday lives. Therefore, guidance practitioners need to respond by keeping informed of current social media services to further engage, interact and communicate with adolescents (Bimrose *et al.* 2015). Equally, the findings support the supposition that the whole school community should partake in specific training to support safe smartphone usage in adolescence.

One of the key issues that emerged in this study is the lack of facilities in computer rooms and the disconnect between ICT policies and on the ground practice in

post-primary schools. This contradicts the ICT policies as set down by DES (2012) and the ACCS *et al.* (2012) which promote the use of ICT in guidance services. Participants stated that more available computers were needed for students so that the culture of using smartphones for teaching purposes in regular classes and career guidance could be controlled.

Finally, given the limitations and exploratory nature of the research, it is worth noting that it can generate useful research questions for future study in the Irish post-primary sector to assess if smartphone usage is having a universal impact on adolescents' well-being. Further research can address how the smartphone can support students creativity, discovery and learning in their increasingly virtual world. Due to the nature of the small sample used in this study, it is clear that more research is required to explore the guidance counsellor's perspectives on how adolescents use their smartphones and cyberspace, and the implications their behaviour and smartphone practices may have on their development (Aiken 2016; Haug *et al.*, 2015; Ito *et al.*, 2009;).

The smartphone device is now ten years old and the research on the effects of its use is still in its infancy. The device is the most vivid example available of how technology can be simultaneously both good and bad, enabling and disabling, inspiring and disillusioning (O'Hagan 2017). If future research finds some form of risk and negative effects associated with smartphone usage and cyberspace, or should it highlight positive experiences, it could guide policy making efforts and legislation to protect adolescents online safety and wellbeing whilst using smartphones.

6.2 Strengths and Limitations of the Research Study

6.2.1 Strengths

A key strength of this study was the interpretivist paradigm which underpinned the research and enabled the collection of narratives appropriate to address the research questions. This interpretive researcher assumes the individualistic nature of human beings, thereby prompting the researcher to gain an Irish

perspective of Guidance Counsellors in the post-primary sector (Cohen *et al.*, 2013; Kidd 2006).

Furthermore, by entering the lived reality of seven qualified practicing guidance counsellors, the researcher could develop thick descriptions of their perceptions of smartphone usage amongst adolescence (Bryman 2012; Thomas 2013). These descriptions contributed to the development of participants' stories and broadened the researcher's understanding of their experiences (Thomas 2013). By adopting a semi-structured framework, it provided the researcher with scope to follow up on different points where necessary (Cohen *et al.* 2013; Thomas 2013).

Furthermore, the narratives contribute to the area of guidance counselling research base concerning the Irish post-primary sector. Another strength of this study was exploring a research topic under-researched at the moment but of vital importance to understanding the wellbeing of young people and how they can be supported in contemporary society.

6.2.2. Limitations

This study was conducted using the interpretive paradigm, therefore it assumes the experience of lived events is different for each individual, thereby making it difficult to generalise the findings outside the boundaries of the study (Thomas 2013).

Another limitation of the study is the small sample size of seven Guidance Counsellors, therefore the scale and scope of the research study is open to critique. The researcher realises that a more comprehensive study with a larger population size would generate a more extensive exploration of the perceptions of Guidance Counsellors on the topic. The researcher gained only the perceptions of qualified Guidance Counsellors and not those of adolescents or their parents.

The researcher adopted rigorous and sustained data analysis procedures throughout the study, however, the issue of personal bias and misinterpretation

can present during the process, due to the fact that “interviewers are human beings and not machines” (Bell 1999, p.139). In light of this, the researcher engaged in a reflexive process throughout the research process (Byram 2004; Hertz 1997). The researcher kept a diary which included details of interactions with participants along with opinions on responses and comments from all participants (Thomas 2013).

6.3 Recommendations

Arising from the overall findings of the study, the following recommendations with regard to policy, practice and research can be made:

1. Although the Government has given a commitment to restore ring-fenced guidance counselling hours, they may still be inadequate and need to be increased by the DES.
2. The DES should consider the need for future investment in providing adequate ICT resources within post-primary schools to accommodate blended learning and further investigate how to design learning to engage students in the global classroom.
3. The DES should ensure the short course on Digital Media Literacy in Junior Cycle is a compulsory module in all post-primary schools. This course will teach students how to create, collaborate and communicate effectively when using smartphone devices. It will also inform students of the proper and safe use of smartphones including personal safety.
4. More concrete opportunities need to be made available to educate Guidance Counsellors. All stakeholders should attend CPD which brings together educationalists from both the state and independent sectors along with leading experts in the field of adolescent development. The world we live in today is ever changing; behaviour patterns, social technology and advancements in smartphones all have an impact on the personal

development of our young people. This training could be offered through the DES and IGC branch workshops.

5. Parents should set aside specific times for smartphone use, set parental controls on the device, and limits should be set and established around family time. The emergence of 'digital detoxing' (digital detoxing refers to a period of time during which an individual refrains from using electronic connecting devices such as smartphones) is regarded as an opportunity to reduce stress or focus on social interaction in the physical world.
6. Resources should be allocated by the DES to fund and support intervention research and relevant studies focusing on policy and legal frameworks concerning smartphone usage. Furthermore, the DES should engage in current research findings on smartphone usage and their implications on the developing adolescent. This will inform policy makers with regards to what can be done within the school teaching environment to support the healthy development and wellbeing of our students.

6.4 Reflexivity and Personal Learning

A key aspect of this study was my personal and professional reflexivity. Throughout the research study a reflexive approach was applied to help provide a greater understanding of the phenomenon keeping in mind my personal, social and cultural context as a researcher (Etherington 2004). At the initial stage of the research I had a number of preconceptions about the topic formulated around my own experiences as a mother and a Special Needs Assistant. I was aware of my own biases, disposition and assumptions regarding smartphone usage in adolescence, and my reflexive practice consisted of self-questioning, journaling, note taking and a research diary throughout the full involvement of the research (Progoff 1977).

This research study has provided me with an insight into my own qualities as a researcher and as a practitioner. I aim to broaden my understanding of reflexive practice employed during the research study to help develop my professional

learning as a beginning Guidance Counsellor. This research study has further developed my skills of attentive listening and meta-communication micro-skills. Furthermore, I recognise I should give self-care attention in the context of this high-touch work as a beginning Guidance Counsellor (Bimrose and Hearne 2012; Skovolt and Trotter-Mathison 2011). It has been advocated that in the context of this challenging work environment, Guidance Counsellors need to pay careful attention to their own well-being and engage in self-care and continual professional development (IGC 2017).

Thomas (2013) states undertaking research may enhance the practice of practitioners. The trainee-practitioner researcher process has further developed my skills in research and discovering and framing questions, collecting and analysing the data to answer the questions. Furthermore, over the course of the research, I have acquired a substantial amount of knowledge in relation to smartphone usage in adolescence. This insight will be of significant benefit to me when I begin working with adolescents as a Guidance Counsellor.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter concludes the research study by presenting a summary of the findings in the context of the original aim and objectives. Additionally, it describes the strengths and limitations of the study, provides recommendations and identifies personal learning for the researcher.

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Appendix A: Subject Information Letter (Gatekeeper)

EHS REC no. 2017_02_13

Date: March 27th, 2017

Research title: “An exploration of the Guidance Counsellor’s perspective of smartphone usage amongst adolescents in post-primary schools”.

Dear Branch Secretary,

I am currently a student of the MA Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development course with the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Hearne. As part of my studies I have to complete a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling.

In my research I aim to explore the topic of smartphone usage by adolescents in the post-primary setting with a sample of qualified guidance counsellors. In order to gather this information, and provide insights on the topic, I would appreciate if you would support me in accessing participants for the study through the Galway Branch membership.

This would involve dissemination by you of the Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form to members of the Branch via their emails. All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Interviews will be audio tape recorded at a neutral location and there is also the option of Skype or telephone interviews. All the data will be destroyed after analysis according to UL guidelines.

Participation in the study is voluntary. I am very thankful to any participants who complete the study as I am aware of the time constraints they work under.

Participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis

stage. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences. The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that the school's name and the name of the individual participants will not be used in the research and the organisation will not be identifiable to anyone other than those directly involved.

If you have any queries or require further any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Úna Howley

Email address: una@unahowley.com

Supervisor: Dr. Lucy Hearne

Phone Number: 061-202931

Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (need to insert EHSREC no. here when approved). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:

**Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee
EHS Faculty Office, University of Limerick Tel (061) 234101 or email:
ehsresearchethics@ul.ie.**

I look forward to hearing from you,

Yours sincerely,

Úna Howley

(Researcher)



Appendix B: Consent Form (Gatekeeper)

EHS REC no. 2017_02_13

Date: March 27th, 2017

Research title: “An exploration of the Guidance Counsellor’s perspective of smartphone usage amongst adolescents in post-primary schools”.

I have read the project Information Sheet and understand in detail the particulars of the research project. I understand that the identity of the participants and their schools will not be revealed in the reporting of this research study. The conditions involved in the research which are designed to protect the privacy of participants and respect their contribution are:

1. Participation is entirely voluntary.
2. Participants are free to withdraw at any time prior to the data analysis stage and any contribution made will be subsequently destroyed.
3. The interviews will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the researcher and the supervisor. Excerpts from the interviews may be part of the final research dissertation but under no circumstances will names or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

I hereby give my consent for Úna Howley to carry out this research in the Galway IGC Branch membership:

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____



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OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Appendix C: Subject Information Letter (Volunteer Participant)

EHS REC no. 2017_02_13

Date : 27th March, 2017

Research title: “An exploration of the Guidance Counsellor’s perspective of smartphone usage amongst adolescents in post-primary schools”.

Dear Volunteer,

I am currently a student of the MA Guidance Counselling and Lifespan Development course with the School of Education, University of Limerick, under the supervision of Dr. Lucy Hearne. As part of my studies I have to complete a research dissertation on a topic related to guidance counselling.

In my research I aim to explore the topic of smart-phone usage amongst adolescents in post-primary schools. As a trainee-practitioner I am interested in the possible implications of smartphone usage during adolescence. Consequently, this research aims to gather information from the guidance counsellors on the issue, with regards to the potential benefits for students, school, staff and parents. The results may discover if there are any additional measures which should be put in place within a whole-school approach (WSA). It will also consider if teenagers are aware of the responsibility attached to themselves when using smartphones, and the relationship between technology and the adolescents management of self-identity and the blurring of public/private boundaries in the practice of sexting and use of social media.

In order to gather information on the topic, I would appreciate if you would agree to participate in a face-to-face audiotaped interview which will take approximately 50-60 minutes and be held in a neutral location agreeable to you. Alternatively, the interview can take place over telephone or Skype if this is a more convenient option for you.

All information gathered will be held in the strictest of confidence and pseudonyms will be used to ensure anonymity. Interviews will be audio tape recorded and the data will be destroyed after the analysis process. Participation in the study is voluntary and participants can withdraw from the research at any time prior to the data analysis stage. The results from this research study will be reported in my thesis and may be disseminated through other professional publications and conferences. The collected data will be stored in a secure location approved by the University of Limerick. It is important to note that your name or the name of the school will not be used in the reporting of the research. If you have any queries or require further any further information on the research study, please contact me or my supervisor:

Researcher: Úna Howley
Email address: una@unahowley.com

Supervisor: Dr. Lucy Hearne
Phone Number: 061-202931
Email address: lucy.hearne@ul.ie

I greatly appreciate your time in taking part in this study and should you agree to be interviewed, please confirm to me by (insert date). This research has received Ethical approval from the Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee (need to insert EHSREC no. here when approved). If you have any concerns about this study and wish to contact someone independent you may contact:

**Chairman Education and Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee EHS
Faculty Office, University of Limerick Tel (061) 234101 or email: ehsresearchethics@ul.ie.**

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Yours sincerely,

Úna Howley
(Researcher)



UNIVERSITY of LIMERICK
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

Appendix D: Consent Form (Volunteer Participant)

EHS REC no. 2017_02_13

Research title: “An exploration of the Guidance Counsellor’s perspective of smartphone usage amongst adolescents in post-primary schools”.

- I understand what this research project is about, and what the results will be used for.
- I am fully aware of the procedures and of the risks and the benefits of the study.
- I am fully aware that the recording of the interview and the data generated from it will be kept confidential.
- I am aware that my identity will remain anonymous.
- I know that my participation in the research study is voluntary and I can withdraw my involvement at any time prior to the data analysis stage.

I hereby agree to take part in this study:

Signature: _____

Printed name: _____

Signature of Researcher: _____

Date: _____



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Appendix E: Interview Schedule

Length of interview 50mins - 1 hour

Guidance Counsellor Role

What do you see is your role in providing Guidance Counselling to students in post-primary?

Tell me about your experience of adolescents and smartphone usage.

Do you consider smart-phone usage to have any positive impact on the student and in what way does it manifest itself?

In your opinion do adolescents use smartphones to access information to support educational and career outcomes?

Can you tell me what information and technology (ICT) policies are in place in your school around the use of smartphones?

What perceptions do you believe young people have of balancing risks and opportunity when using smartphones?

In your opinion could smartphones and social media be a useful tool in enabling new ways of delivering guidance counselling?

What is your opinion of smartphones enabling new ways of learning amongst adolescents?

In your opinion has smartphone usage impaired critical thinking skills in adolescents?

What are your views on smartphones being used to build meaningful social capital in terms of career development?

Student well-being and smartphone usage

Do you believe smartphone usage is having an impact on student wellbeing?

Can you tell me what is emerging?

What are your views on smartphones and social media contributing to social isolation amongst students?

What are your views on the students use of smartphones in forming self-identity?

What role do you think guidance counsellors should play in providing support to a student who has had a negative experience of smart-phones?

In your opinion should parents have training in this area to ensure safety of their children?

What is your view on this being a role for the guidance counsellor in co-ordinating such training?

Have you come across an increase in gender and multi-cultural issues related to smartphone usage amongst adolescents?

In your experience are smartphones and their technology having an impact on students educational outcomes?

Cyber-safety

Are you aware of any incidences of cyber-bullying from a student against a member of school staff?

Have you encountered vulnerable students or those with SEN being affected by behaviours on smartphones either by another individual or accessing inappropriate material?

In your opinion has the practice of sexting become normalised behaviour in adolescence?

In your opinion what is working and not working to safeguard adolescents in relation to the practice of underage-sexting?

Professional practice within guidance counselling

Since qualifying as a guidance counsellor have you taken part in any training in this area?

What interventions would you use if an issue arises and is it implemented using a whole-school approach?

Are there educational programs within your school which promote digital literacy, resilience and cyber-safety skills?

Are you aware of the 2016 Harmful Communications and Digital Safety Report from the Law Reform Commission 2016?

Do you have any opinions on how this might impact future practice or policy making within your school?

Appendix F: Themes and Issues

Effects of smartphone usage on students lives and the school environment	Role of Post-Primary Schools	Role of Guidance Counsellors	Role of Parents
Value of smartphone in adolescents life	Disjointed use of ICT policy in schools	Guidance counsellors providing more personal counselling	Lack of boundaries set by parents
Meaning of Friendships and Relationships Sleep deprivation	Convenience of using smartphone in classroom	Delivery of guidance using Facebook account, Qualifax, Careers Portal and Reach Plus	Role modelling from parents
Cyberbullying	Lack of facilities in computer rooms	Smartphone issues taking up pastoral care time	No communal meeting of families
Isolation	Culture (hidden and visible) of post-primary schools	Guidance counsellors dealing with increase in anxiety, body image issues, meaningful relationships	Tools needed to navigate smartphone
Real Life V Virtual Life	Little awareness of digital presence	Guidance counsellors dealing with increase in anxiety, body image issues, meaningful relationships	Parents fearful of checking phone
Body Image	School staff are vulnerable	Guidance counsellors dealing with increase in anxiety, body image issues, meaningful relationships	Busyness of contemporary life
Passive Students	Parents not engaging with information evenings	Guidance counsellors dealing with increase in anxiety, body image issues, meaningful relationships	Busyness of contemporary life
Social Anxiety	CPD for all staff/parents/students	Guidance counsellors dealing with increase in anxiety, body image issues, meaningful relationships	Busyness of contemporary life
Panic Attacks	CPD for all staff/parents/students	Guidance counsellors dealing with increase in anxiety, body image issues, meaningful relationships	Busyness of contemporary life
Low emotional intelligence/resilience	CPD for all staff/parents/students	Guidance counsellors dealing with increase in anxiety, body image issues, meaningful relationships	Busyness of contemporary life
Lack of concentration	CPD for all staff/parents/students	Guidance counsellors dealing with increase in anxiety, body image issues, meaningful relationships	Busyness of contemporary life
Distraction	CPD for all staff/parents/students	Guidance counsellors dealing with increase in anxiety, body image issues, meaningful relationships	Busyness of contemporary life

Appendix G: Extract from Interview Analysis

Interviewer: Úna

Interviewee: Tom

The Researcher: Do you have any contact with SPHE/RSE classes?

Tom: I don't teach it, but I would liaise with the coordinator of the SPHE on it, and they would make sure they are following the syllabus part of it.

The Researcher: Okay.

Tom: So, that careers, when I started off first careers is the major part of my role on role career guidance on it, very little counseling. Now, it's absolutely flipped completely. Most of my time is in counseling, and not a huge amount in career guidance. We have formal career guidance classes in fifth year, and leaving cert in it. And, we take them on a rotation basis on it for maybe seven weeks with four different groups. So, I'd see them for seven weeks for an hour class, it's seven hours on it.

The Researcher: Okay.

ROLE OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR - VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

Tom: There would be the individual interviews then with them in relation to their careers, and the administrations of the DATS, aptitude test to them in it. So, I would use combination in terms of careers looking at what are their interests and passions, how are they performing academically to date, and then looking at what their passion is and interest is about.

The Researcher: Of course, yes.

Tom: So, those kinds of things, the three things: the aptitude test, the interests, passions on it and academic performance.

ROLE OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR - VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

The Researcher: Okay.

Tom: So, that would be again, the careers area and bringing them to careers events on it, and that sort of – and the major part now has gone into the social aspect of it, because of more and more we're finding we have a huge disadvantaged cohort coming in it, and they are bringing all the ills of society in with it. There would be a significant amount of time in respect of counseling, and then refer agencies involved except the part.

ROLE OF GUIDANCE COUNSELLOR - VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE

The Researcher: Tom, would you have much experience here of adolescence and smartphone usage?

Tom: Well, you see them every day. It tends to be, I see this in two on it. Number one hugely beneficial, and also hugely detrimental in it, whereas a lot of the kids who are coming in it is now more and more sleep problems. They are not sleeping at night, and the reason they are not sleeping is because they're on their phones until 3:00, 4:00 in the morning.

EFFECTS OF SMARTPHONE USAGE

The Researcher: Yes.

Tom: And, they're accessing all websites in it, and the social media etcetera. So, they are then exhausted coming into schools and not benefitting educationally from where they're in it. In terms of the detrimental side, I suppose there is also the isolation, I mean more and more kids who are savvy in everything that is out there, but they have no real friendships. Meaning at least four of the lads have relationships – I say, “Oh God, that's great,” but it's with people in the States, with people in Russia. This is their virtual world, so it's becoming a virtual world for them in it. Real relationships are non-existent, even when they go home in the evening, they grab the dinner, they bring it upstairs. There is no communing, sitting down. I know there was one student who told me they don't have a table. They have got a breakfast bar and that's it. They don't have a table so there is no sitting down on it, and they're becoming more and more kind of in their own world in it.

CONSTRUCTS OF FRIENDSHIP

Tom: That's the downside probably of it. The upside certainly on it is they are now much more able to access careers information. At the flick of a button, they can go in and they can go in in-depth to find out what they need to know. So, there are some who are coming in who are really savvy about it, and they have absolutely specific questions, there are three kind of guys who come into me in terms of careers anyway. The first ones would be, they know exactly what they want to do, they know exactly what they have to do to do it on it, and they are just looking for confirmation from me that they are on the right track.

Appendix H – Extracts from Research Diary

Interview 1: Lisa

Date: 03.05.2017

I was nervous before my first interview with Lisa. I had not conducted research previously and was apprehensive of the way I would come across. Also this was conducted on the phone as the participant was too busy with work commitments to meet up in person. I had spent time beforehand going over the questions, reflecting on my own self and did a short meditation to allow myself to get into the space. At the beginning of the interview I did find myself relaxing into the narrative and found it challenging at the start to note down all the nuances and silences. I was also apprehensive of recording the interview. Although I had done a trial run it was my first time to record an interview using my smartphone. At times I interjected and perhaps interrupted the flow so I need to be aware of this in the future interviews. I was aware of using the counselling skills taught across the module. The micro-communication skills of listening, paraphrasing to draw out the information from Lisa and overall I was pleased with how the interview went and the thick descriptions I received. I noted that I was relieved when I had finished and was happy to have begun the process of interviewing for the research study. Immediately after the interview I sent the file to myself by email to ensure it was safe.

Interview 2: David

Date: 05.05.2017

I found myself a lot less nervous for this interview than with Lisa. I felt I had gained some confidence from my first interview. From the start I felt that the interviewee was very knowledgeable about the topic and very passionate about his role as Guidance Counsellor. I felt that I relaxed into the interview and because David was so willing to give the interview. Also, I found that I was reacting to his enthusiasm and interest in the topic. However, there were two occasions where the bell for lunch sounded which caused me some concern as I was apprehensive about the quality of the recording. It was hard to hear the responses during these times and I was conscious that I was not in the moment as I should have been. At time I felt my own assumptions on the topic came into my head and this was challenging and distracting. However, once I became aware of this, I came back to the present and re-focused. David was very open and honest in his interview and again I found this humbling and was grateful for this. I felt I closed the interview well and had established a good rapport with him throughout. At the end of the interview, David felt he had been very vocal on the

topic and hoped that it would be useful for the research study. I thanked him for his time and told him how grateful I was for his thick descriptions.

Interview 3: Tom

Date: 08.05.2017

On meeting Tom in his office I immediately felt at ease in his presence. We established a really easy rapport early on He so welcoming and accommodating to me and very open in his responses. The interview took place early in the morning and I felt this was a benefit to both of us. Overall, he made the process very comfortable and was honest throughout and there was some humour throughout the interview. He was an older guidance counsellor and I would say very energetic in his role. During the interview my own thoughts did come into it but I was not as taken up with them as I was previously. I came away from the interview feeling very positive about the role of guidance counsellor. Tom exuded such passion and energy about his role and the work of the guidance counsellor I felt excited about beginning my own career as in the role. At the end of the interview I was feeling motivated by my research study and looking forward to transcribing the interview.

Interview 4: Brian

Date: 08.05.2017

This interview took place about a half an hour after Tom's. I had to wait for about fifteen minutes for Brian to show up despite having made an appointment. Overall, the school was very busy and noisy and when we moved to his office it continued to be very busy as it was break time. There were a few interruptions by knocks on the door which interrupted the flow of the interview. I knew from the outset that the responses would not be as rich as the previous interview and I found it hard to stay focused and upbeat. At times the responses were one word and I have to coax out a more concrete response. I used some basic counselling skills to help develop ideas and to explore the topic further. After the interview finished I took some time to note my disappointment that it had not been as rich as the earlier interview .

Interview 5: Claire

Date: 17.05.2017

Clare was a very willing participant and welcoming from the start. The interview took place at the end of the school day and I did not her tiredness and indeed I was feeling tired myself. Claire had been through a similar MA programme some years previously and was full of encouragement as she had a similar family situation to my and recognised the difficulties of balancing family, work and

college. Once again, rapport was established early and she was very open and honest about her positive and negative experiences, beliefs and opinions which I found humbling. Again, there were two interruptions to the office which altered the flow of the interview. At times I felt her tiredness coming through when she was trying to articulate various points. At this point I felt that the previous of having done three previous interviews helped the interview process. Following the end of the interview, she offered any assistance to me in my studies when I found very encouraging.

Interview 6: Cathal

Date: 18.05.2017

This was a telephone interview and there was a problem with Cathal's phone in his room and he had to use the office. Straight away I felt this put a time pressure on the interview as I was aware of a secretary in the background and I felt this stunted some of the responses from Cathal. However, he was very honest and forthcoming in his responses and had a lot to say on the topic. At times his exasperation was clear when he spoke of issues with the topic. He spoke about the difficulties of the Guidance Role in a DEIS school and spoke positively about the pastoral care team in the school. Overall, I felt the interview went well and I felt that at this stage of the interviewing I had become more comfortable with the interview process.

Interview 7: Anne

Date: 26.05.2017

This is my final interview and also took place over the telephone and the participant was very willing to engage in the topic. Before beginning we spoke about career and life as I could hear her children in the background. Again, Anne was very encouraging of me pursuing a Masters as we had similar family situations. I felt she was very knowledgeable about the topic and I felt the interview was comfortable and relaxed. Overall, I was glad this was the last interview and was keen to get transcribing as I was very interested in unearthing the findings as this was the first research study I had undertaken.

Appendix I: Mapping of Emerging Overarching Themes

Older students need to collaborate with better able to communicate

low wellbeing module could raise awareness

can't handle pressure / effect

phenomenal - Marshall test - delayed gratification

postnatal

see effects and get this out of it - some may get 6 months behind the curve

social + personal

using parents' social care

to understand create dialogue

post modernist (France) 1990's - identification for groups

SAT department to take over at Junior

Messages from teacher / students

Medical team at RS Centre students counsel waiting with individual care

Parents

Morality - right/wrong

Reconstruction of family

lack of meaning structures

Societal norms change rapidly

Useful for CB1's Technology changes (behind 6 months)

Massive Potential

for students

Parental Boundaries

Specific training for parents

Sleep deprivation

Passive students

Low emotional intelligence

Lack of resilience

Convenience in classroom

Disjointed use of ICT policy

Lack of facilities in computer rooms

Reckless behaviour - sexting the norm

Lack of interest from parents

Guidance Counsellors providing more personal counselling

Fear from parents, students and guidance counsellors

Rise of obesity - Eating Disorders - Body Image

Qualifax, Careers Portal, Reach Plus, Facebook Guidance account

Isolation

Staff are vulnerable

Culture of the school

Role modeling from parents on smartphones

Smartphones filling a moral vacuum

Relationships non-existent

No communal meeting of families

Tools needs to navigate smartphone

Impact on delivery of class teaching

Importance/value of smartphone in adolescents life

Eating disorders

Narcissistic society

No awareness of digital footprint

Absence of parental responsibility

Lack of concentration

Real life v Virtual life

Increase in anxiety

Awareness of needs to begin at earlier age

Issues around smartphones taking up management time

More serious consequences could lead to a change in behaviour patterns

Quality of language

Ability to read body language lacking

Cyberbullying hidden

Boundaries becoming blurred

Panic Attacks

Excessive Social Media Usage/Exposure

Lack of critical thinking skills

Overarching themes

- ① **Policy**
- ② **Parents**
- ③ **Role of Guidance Counsellor**
- ④ **CPD - Training**
- ⑤ **Effects**
- ⑥ **Learning Outcomes**

Appendix J: Annotations from Interview No.7

INTERVIEW NO.7

Friday May 26th

UNIVERSITY OF LIMERICK

Interview Schedule - 6-4-470 Students

Length of interview 50mins - 1 hour

Self-manage skills
Ambitions
Decision Making

Study skills
Career exploration

Students have no filters

Wellbeing/Counseling

Guidance Counsellor Role

What do you see in your role in providing Guidance Counseling to students at post-primary? *facilitator, help students, listen, give peer counseling (personal)*

Tell me about your experience of adolescents and smartphone usage? *Virtual world, friend ships, dynamics - negatives (bullying), increased in adolescence, social bullying, increase in society*

Do you consider smart-phone usage to have any positive impact on the student and in what way does it manifest itself? *Teachers - Support, support more substantially, some teachers use technology*

In your opinion do adolescents use smartphones to access information to support educational and career outcomes? *Benefits + negatives - Technology is a tool, problem is human*

Can you tell me what information and technology (ICT) policies are in place in your school around the use of smartphones? *No support to give guidance booklet, resistance going up phone - in classroom sometimes*

What perceptions do you believe young people have of balancing risks and opportunity when using smartphones? *No risk - Virus highly toxic, Bandwidth - Cyber safety, lack of time to engage - students not aware @ risks - decision behaviour*

In your opinion could smartphones and social media be a useful tool in enabling new ways of delivering guidance counselling? *Yes, yes, yes, only access for*

What is your opinion of smartphones enabling new ways of learning amongst adolescents? *Facial tool - easier to explain - easier to engage in classroom*

In your opinion has smartphone usage impaired critical thinking skills in adolescents? *Definitely, yes - students not engaging with content an affective knowledge*

What are your views on smartphones being used to build meaningful social capital in terms of career development? *No - but put information - LCP -*

Student well-being and smartphone usage

Do you believe smartphone usage is having an impact on student wellbeing? *Not speak - streaks + likes - on the bullying, Social Media dependent*

Can you tell me what is emerging? *Negative - Sleep Deprivation, watching at night - source of anxiety, Being @ evaluated by app*

Positive - Social Space (emotional), apps

Emotional Intelligence? *Virtual friends, Social isolation, technology, Parents not getting any technology*

Appendix J: Annotations from Interview No.7

Cognitive functions
 Negative impact on interaction *High amount of time on social media* / *Body Image*
Apps - filters - aesthetics / *Depression anxiety*
 What are your views on smartphones and social media contributing to social isolation amongst students?
Meaning of relationships - online / *Eating disorders*
 What are your views on the students use of smartphones in forming self-identity?
Perceived self / *Pressure to plan* / *Conforming to the crowd*

What role do you think guidance counsellors should play in providing support to a student who has had a negative experience of smart-phones?
Parental responsibility / *Safe place to say it*

In your opinion should parents have training in this area to ensure safety of their children?
We are the target audience / *Yes* / *Specific training*

What is your view on this being a role for the guidance counsellor in co-ordinating such training?
Parents cannot be involved / *Parental care involved* / *Wellbeing*

Have you come across an increase in gender and multi-cultural issues related to smartphone usage amongst adolescents?
No / *Gay straight alliances* / *Rotix* / *Spirit groups* / *Gender blindness*

In your experience are smartphones and their technology having an impact on students educational outcomes?
Yes - *Academic Monitoring* / *60-70%* / *Early morning*
lock of self discipline / *No limits* / *Self justification* / *Have nothing to stress for staff also* / *always constructive*

Cyber-safety

Are you aware of any incidences of cyber-bullying from a student against a member of school staff?
Yes / *Does not frequent twitter* / *Cyber Bully - offensive*

Have you encountered vulnerable students or those with SEN being affected by behaviours on smartphones either by another individual or accessing inappropriate material?
No / *Parents to feel pressure - normalised - expectations - naturally*

In your opinion has the practice of sexting become normalised behaviour in adolescence?
Yes / *Students who pressure from peer group* / *negative comments* / *praise*

In your opinion what is working and not working to safeguard adolescents in relation to the practice of underage-sexting?
emotional dangers / *Loyalty* / *Give students + staff more information - maybe OES*

Professional practice within guidance counselling

Since qualifying as a guidance counsellor have you taken part in any training in this area?
No

What interventions would you use if an issue arises and is it implemented using a whole-school approach?
Self guidance counselling / *Twitter cyber bullying* / *Management* / *Social skills teaching* / *parental care*

Are there educational programs within your school which promote digital literacy/resilience and cyber-safety skills?
Aspiriting class / *How wellbeing module* / *quite frightening* / *Reason of laptop*

Are you aware of the 2016 Harmful Communications and Digital Safety Report from the Law Reform Commission 2016?
Conscience - actions / *Ability to reward*

Do you have any opinions on how this might impact future practice or policy making within your school?
Yes / *70% issues taking more control* / *Dealing with relationships* / *Helicopter parent* / *panic attacks widespread* / *far pace of life* / *result immediately* / *Student don't understand situation*