

Role of School Counselling in India

Opportunities and Challenges

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Abstract

The liberalised economy, growing market pressure, change in curriculum, unpredictable future, etc., has made it really tough for Indian school children to perform. The role of schools in channelising energy of their wards and preparing them to face the competitive world, besides contributing productively in the society are crucial. Unfortunately, the growth of school counselling in India is not properly addressed. Indeed, the services are rendered only on demand basis, and for the remaining time, school counsellors' services are utilised for inconsequential purposes. Sensitisation of counselling at the school level is not great as evident from the case study of schools in Delhi-NCR. This is because the services offered by school counsellors are restricted to vocational counselling and to some extent with behavioural issues. However, the school policy is being reviewed in order to make counselling 'compulsory sessions' in schools. This move will bring in a healthy atmosphere and confidence in school children to face the competitive world. This study is aimed at addressing the aforesaid issues in detail in order to deliberate on the unrelenting challenges posed by various groups and how to handle them meaningfully.

INTRODUCTION

Counselling plays an important role in contemporary India. School counselling is a relatively young

profession. The history of counselling in India can be traced to the establishment of the Central Bureau of Educational and Vocational

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Guidance in 1954 by the Ministry of Education. In 1961, during the third Five Year Plan, guidance services were initiated in schools by trained counsellors and career masters with assistance from teachers. And, by the end of the third Five Year Plan (1966), there were 3,000 schools in the country that started providing guidance services in one form or the other. But they mostly focussed on providing vocational information.

Commissions that focussed on the need to provide counselling services to students date back to as early as 1948–49 when the Radhakrishnan University Education Commission realised the need for providing student services in schools and colleges. Similarly, the Kothari Education Commission in 1966, which emphasised on guidance and counselling programme for assisting students in their choice of courses, indicated that remedial action and help in dealing with emotional and psychological problems should be an integral part of educational facilities provided in institutions of higher education. They believed that there should be one counsellor per thousand students.

In 1984, the National Commission of School Teachers met a group of 150 meritorious students who had secured top positions in higher secondary education in different states of India to know what they thought about their teachers. One of their important suggestions to the commission was that an informal atmosphere should

be created to discuss various options about their future. Whenever asked, students have voiced the need for guidance and counselling services.

POLICY-MAKERS' VIEW ON COUNSELLING IN INDIA

Commissions such as Education Commission (1964–66), National Policy of Education (NPE, 1986) and Programme of Action (POA, 1992), National Curriculum Framework (NCF, 2005), and Rashtriya Madhyamik Shiksha Abhiyan (RMSA, 2012) — all focused on having a trained counsellor in school and believed that this would help students to cope with the increasing academic and social pressures.

Moreover, in the last few years, different committees have also realised the need and made it mandatory to have school counsellors. The Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM) Health Committee Chairman, Dr. B.K. Rao, highlights that making counselling available to every secondary school child will lead to a dramatic reduction in his/her stress level and improve his/her behaviour. He believed that the most common problems children face nowadays are scholastic performance pressure, lack of inter-personal communication, nuclear families and failure in relationships. The ASSOCHAM conducted a survey, in which it found that only 3 per cent of private schools in Delhi- NCR have counsellors. In 2012, the R.K. Raghavan Committee

was constituted, following the orders of the Supreme Court of India and the Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India. It also highlighted the need of counsellors in secondary and senior secondary schools. The Committee mandated the arrangement of a specified number of regular and periodic psychological counselling sessions per year for every student till they exit school with the involvement of parents and teachers during each exercise. The Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE), under the Ministry of Human Resource Development, has passed rules year after year to mandate the appointment of a full-time counsellor for secondary and senior secondary schools. Even the Council of Indian School Certificate Examinations — India's other exam board which has 1,571 premier affiliated schools — has also issued a directive to its schools to offer counselling facilities to students.

The need for counselling was addressed by different states, which is evident from an article in the *Times of India* in 2013, such as secondary education department in Hyderabad proposed to make it compulsory from 2014 onwards. The Goa Education Development Corporation (GEDC) also said that it would be training one teacher in each government and government-aided school and higher secondary school, who will guide students on courses of their interests. The Board of Governors of

Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan Kochi, Kerala, ordered that secondary and senior secondary classes of all central schools should be equipped with a counsellor.

NEED OF COUNSELLING IN SCHOOLS IN INDIA

Nowadays, there is a growing need for counsellors in schools because of an increase in the pressure that students face due to the expectations of parents and teachers. Other reasons can be stress, loneliness, bullying, ragging, peer adjustment problems that they face in and around school premises. Now, adding up some facts and statistics that are forcing schools and universities in India to make counselling services mandatory is a report by the World Health Organisation (WHO).

India has the highest suicide rate in the world in the age group of 15 to 29 years. It stands at 35.5 per 100,000 people for 2012. A report by the Indian Council of Medical Research says around 12 to 13 per cent of the students suffer from emotional, behavioural and learning problems. Another report by the Counselling and Psychological Science (CAPS) in 2006 states that 5,857 students committed suicide due to exam stress. In 2014, 11 per cent college students and 7-8 per cent high school students tried to kill themselves.

According to the National Crime Records Bureau, the number of students who committed suicide increased 26.58 per cent between

2012 and 2013 from 6,654 to 8,423. It reports that the common cause of concern is the pressure from parents to do well in the board examinations, especially for Class XII. As scores in these exams determine college admissions and subsequent employment opportunities, students aged 16-18 years are often subjected to undue pressure at home to succeed. When they don't, suicide becomes a way out. As evident from 2013 statistics, 2,471 students committed suicide because of "failure in examination".

MISMATCH IN COUNSELLING SERVICES ABROAD AND IN INDIA

In India, the term 'counselling' is misunderstood by many school authorities. For example, some still see counselling as a stigma. On the other side of the spectrum, there are some schools and parents who define counselling as an academic coaching. Although the actual role of a counsellor is to focus on the all-round and healthy development of children and adolescents, the focus is also shifted to their academic success by helping them realise their full potential, guide them in choosing the right career based on suitable aptitude tests, improving their communication and interpersonal skills and help them deal with problems such as stress, loneliness, bullying, ragging, peer adjustment, parental and teacher pressure. Ironically, in the current scenario, many schools and parents have a different notion on the role

of a counsellor i.e., they expect that a counsellor should not only focus on students' problems but should also act as a channel for the flow of information among teachers, handle parent/student registration queries, advance students in academics, and substitute a class in the absence of a teacher.

Sydow and Reimer (1998) analysed 60 studies that were published regarding attitudes toward psychotherapists, psychologists, psychiatrists and psychoanalysts. The results indicated that the relative status of psychologists, psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, and counsellors was ambiguous. They also found that psychologists were considered to be involved with research, diagnostics, counselling and work with children. Psychiatrists were perceived as clinical practitioners, who tried to cure mental disorders by psychoanalysis, psychotherapy, hypnosis, medication and electro-convulsive therapy. Counsellors were found to be preferred for the treatment of marital problems.

A recent study has indicated that teachers felt that higher secondary school students needed counselling support to tackle behavioural and emotional problems, to be understood, loved and for belongingness. They also need it for security, approval, achievement, freedom and vocation (P.V.A. Abdul, and Sumangala, V. 2015). Yet the question arises: is this need actually taken into consideration by school teachers or school

authorities; or is it just felt and abandoned, thinking that other school staff can take care of it?

In recent years, the Indian society seems to have undergone a metamorphosis with the changing roles of women, a breakdown of the joint family system, increased competitiveness in schools, increased sociability of children, immense technological advances, peer and parental pressures, resulting in an environment laden with stress and strain for children. School counsellor is like a blessing to students and parents to cope with the increased stress and strain of the younger generation. But unfortunately, after repeated circulars from the CBSE, there are many schools in India that are unaware of counselling services and thus, lack a full-time counsellor. Shockingly, in the country's 1,073 Central government-promoted Kendriya Vidyalayas, student counselling is an unknown concept. India's 135 million children enrolled in 1.09 million government schools despite having to bear with a plethora of problems, including teacher shortage and truancy, inadequate infrastructure and poor learning outcomes, seldom have recourse to any form of counselling services or advice.

But fortunately, a change can be seen in India's 188,000 private school managements, which are getting ready to implement the Right to Education (RTE) Act, which mandates induction of children from

underprivileged background into elite private schools and demand a professional counsellor in order to deal with the issues of students' integration, adjustment and diversity. The country's 1,000,000+ plus government schools, 509 universities and 31,000 colleges have realised the need to provide counselling services. The schools and university authorities have realised that the problems faced by students are diverse in nature and can't be dealt with a causal teacher-student interaction. It calls for active intervention of a full-time counsellor.

Although the need for counsellors is fast increasing, unfortunately, in India, only a handful of higher educational institutions (NIMHANS, Bangalore Bharathiar University, Christ University) offer post-graduate and doctoral study programmes in student counselling. Mostly, it is studied as a subject in Masters of Psychology in universities. Thus, leaving the Government of India with a question: how this demand for counsellors should be met. In other words, the government should focus on higher educational institutes and colleges that can provide exclusive degree in counselling, thereby, meeting the need of school authorities for the betterment of students. Although there are some institutes such as the Indian Institute of Counselling in New Delhi, Indian Institute of School Psychology, School Counselling and Guidance in Secunderabad; yet some more institutes need to be set up, focussing on students.

The government should focus on micro-level management of counselling, which means that students should be provided with regular counselling services, so that it helps them improve their performance and deal with the problems they face on a regular basis. A school counsellor should also try to provide one-to-one counselling to students, so that the issues which can't be discussed in a group can be resolved. At times, a counsellor should arrange workshops for parents as well as teachers, making them understand the undue pressure they put on children and the impact that it can have on their mental as well as physical health. Moreover, the micro-level management of counselling will help the government understand the utilisation of resources available in the country and their shortage as well as and how they can reduce the gap that persists.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The need for counselling in today's era has been further reiterated by the review of literature. Vogel et. al. (2005) in a study found that there are positive relationships between fear of social stigma and help-seeking behaviour, demonstrating that social stigma can predict attitudes towards approaching a counsellor.

It is also believed and proved by various researches that whether a person approaches or avoids professional help depends on his

or her willingness to express an emotion openly (Vogel and Wester, 2003). Succinctly, another research, which showed that those who were more comfortable with disclosing information to a counsellor also had more positive attitude and intention towards seeking help (Hinson and Swanson, 1993).

In 2001, a study by Andrews, Issakidis and Carter found that approximately only one-third of the people facing emotional and psychological distress consulted professionals.

Gender differences are also evident when we talk about likelihood to access counselling services. One such study is by Henderson and Lyddon (1997), who sought to examine the effects of counsellor gender, client gender, and client gender role attitude on clients' perceptions of counsellors. They found that female clients rated their counsellors significantly more positively than males. It was also noted that gender role attitude of a client influences the perception of female counsellors, therefore, indicating that they may need to spend more time establishing rapport and credibility with clients who have a stereotypical view of women. Another study is a 13-year comparative study of attitudes towards counselling conducted by Rule and Gandy (1994). They found that females were more likely to seek a counsellor's help.

Ketaki and Shivangi (2014), from India, in a study, focussed on investigating the awareness levels and attitude towards professional

counselling in urban undergraduates in Mumbai. They found that undergraduates show high awareness levels and a positive attitude while seeking help from a counsellor. They also found that 58 per cent of the sample had approached a counsellor before, 75 per cent of subject's friends had approached a counsellor and 61 per cent of the subject's families had also approached a counsellor.

However, another study by Manjot Kaur Parhar, Khushwinder Kaur and Pushpinder Kaur (2013) found that there was no significant difference between guidance needs (physical, social, psychological, educational and vocational) of male and female secondary school students.

Das and Panda (2012), investigated the impact of individual counselling on the academic achievement of students. Thirty-six adolescents of Bhubaneswar from KIIT International School were randomly selected as sample for the study. Of these, individual counselling was provided to only 21. Cognitive behaviour therapy was used in individual counselling session for reducing academic stress and anxiety. Twenty-one students in the experimental group improved their academic performance after counselling was provided to them compared with the 15 in the control group who did not turn up for the session.

Further research done by Kumari and Chhikara (1997) demonstrated that psychological intervention was effective in enhancing their cognitive

development and functioning. Dogra and Veeraraghavan (1994) in a study found that eight weeks of play therapy and parental counselling was effective in reducing aggressive conduct and improving the overall adjustment in children aged 8-12 years.

CASE STUDY OF COUNSELLING IN DELHI

A Delhi-based school managed by a defence organisation claims to have professional counsellors on its payroll. Further, the counsellors reported that "their main role is to counsel students, parents and teachers, testing students, liaising with clinical psychologists, special educators and psychiatrists, and arranging workshops. However, school authorities ask them to do other inconsequential tasks such as substitutions, invigilation during exams, taking students for external competitions. Students seek help whenever they face behavioural, emotional, career, family-related concerns. It was also reported that they find it difficult to counsel with students and teachers because of time constraints. They also reported that both girls and boys seek help". The trend was observed in other leading public schools.

A senior faculty member from India's leading educational research institute reported that while interacting with one of the researchers of the present study, it was found that "it is the teacher who should be trained in counselling skills. As students spend most of

their developmental age in schools and with teachers, they should try to resolve the issues of students without discriminating among them. If teachers feel that they can't resolve students' issues, then professional counsellors should be approached. School counselling is the part and parcel of every school teacher's role. She believes that students' problems should be looked into by teachers. She also conducted a counselling programme for principals of Navodaya Vidyalaya in 2015, where they were taught skills necessary for counselling. She believed that one should focus on social, contextual and environmental areas, in which the problem or issues are operating and should use the standard methods that can help them solve their problems".

In a nutshell, all educational institutional heads and teachers, in general, are advised to acquire counselling skills from professional counsellors so as to relate to students' problems and issues and address the same.

DISCUSSION

In this millennium age, the average age of an Indian is 27 years as reported by the Indian Demographic Profile 2014, which shows that young Indians might be aspiring for a quality and healthy lifestyle, besides aspiring for better job opportunities. Globalisation, which started in India in the 1990s, also put pressure on youths, besides making

them strive for equal opportunities in employment, human rights and sustainable democratic process, which must be followed in all their endeavours.

Having said this, the expectations of youths and opportunities given to them by the Government of India have certainly seen a void. The expectations of educational institutions, societal and peer pressure as well as individual expectations are mounting pressure on the youths. In order to face this crisis, they are looking for advice, guidance and counselling from authentic sources such as schools, colleges and universities.

Although the Government of India has taken steps since early 1950s in establishing counselling and guidance centres in educational institutions across the country, the work is not yet complete. Thus, most youths are still looking for proper guidance and counselling services from different sources.

If the trend continues, five years down the line, we would be crossing the average age of 29 years, which would lead to further complications not only in schools, colleges and university life, but would also penetrate into the society, in general. In order to avoid this scenario, it's better to provide counselling services at an earlier stage in life.

FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

- An educational policy should focus on ensuring that each school and university has a full-

time counsellor whom students can approach whenever they face any problem, which is outside their control.

- The schools that already have a counsellor should give him/her opportunities to interact with students, so that he/she can make them aware of counselling and when they should approach the counsellor.
- A school counsellor should try to organise workshops not only for students but also for teachers, parents and school management.
- Government institutes such as NCERT, DIET, etc., should

frequently organise workshops and seminars for training teachers and other school staff in counselling. They should also organise refresher programmes for counsellors.

- Counselling students is not the only the role of a counsellor, rather it is the collective role of the counsellor, teachers and school authorities. School authorities and teachers should be trained in necessary counselling skills, so that they can deal with students' problems and issues.

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