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## Psychosocial problems of students: Implications for counselling in schools

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### Abstract

Students display a wide range of psychosocial problems in school, and if not addressed at the right time, these issues can aggravate as age advances. This paper outlines the implications for counselling in schools in relation to the 90 cases handled by the school counsellor, during an academic year, in one of the reputed CBSE Schools in Trivandrum City. Content analysis of the data revealed the prevalence of 14 psychosocial issues the students faced; out of which the following five owns the major share: family crisis/relationship issues (20%), lack of self esteem/confidence (18%), peer pressure (10%), sexual problems (10%), and emotional instability (10%). Students, both boys (N=58) and girls (N = 32), from class II to class XII availed counselling services and benefits were reported in terms of emotional and social wellbeing along with improved academic performance. Approximately 1694 hours were used for counselling service over a span of 11 months. Results are discussed in the light of available theoretical and empirical literature, and the implication for counselling in school settings is highlighted.

**Key words:-** Counseling, Psychosocial problems, Schools, Students.

### Introduction

School counseling as a profession is in its infancy in India. Historical trends in education and counseling in India are highlighted and set the context for contemporary, culturally relevant practice in school counseling. Counselling must have existed in one form or another since the very beginning of human civilization. Man must have sought comfort and help, to solve problems from family and close associates. However, it is only in the recent past that counselling emerged as a distinct branch of psychology. Modern counselling is a product of the educational system. It has deep roots in the concerns for an individual's freedom, rights, dignity, and worth as a human being. One's view of the self and the world whether accurate or inaccurate is a primary determinant of behaviour. Coping with personal and social problems and carving out a good future is not simply a matter of acquiring information and developing competence.

A comprehensive value system guides a person's choices and leads to adjustive behaviour. Human suffering can be mitigated if timely assistance is provided to individuals to help adjust themselves better and resolve their problems before they reach explosive proportions. Counselling therefore has a role to perform and should start early in school and should continue in order to enable individuals to meet vocational and personal problems of adjustment in later life. The major objective of all counselling is to help individuals become self-

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sufficient, self dependent, self directed and to adjust themselves efficiently to the demands of a better and meaningful life. Students are provided assistance to enhance the personal, social, emotional and intellectual development. Therefore, the counsellor's services are: preventive, developmental and therapeutic in nature.

School counselling entails providing guidance and counselling services to school children catering to their personal/emotional, academic and social needs. It is primarily preventive, proactive, developmental and comprehensive in nature. It is preventive and proactive as it provides opportunities to all to learn specific skills and competencies, it is developmental and comprehensive as it caters to psychological/academics/personal needs of all students (Maya, 2012).

In India not many studies have been conducted on the implications for counselling in school settings; or the nature of cases reported. School works as a catalyst in moulding and shaping a child's life. A school witnesses students belonging to different sectors of the society thereby increasing the chances of cultivating students with a variety of problems too. Any behavioural issues that results in pathology has had its origin somewhere during the early years of one's life and gradually advanced with age. Therefore addressing these problems at the right time by a counsellor trained in psychology becomes the need of the hour.

Many surveys on school going children and adolescents have reported a wide variation (20-33%) in the prevalence of psychosocial problems (Khalique & Khan,2007). Individual studies illustrated the prevalence of psychosocial problems ranging between 10-40% (Gaur,Vohra, Khurana,2003; Jellinek,Murphy, Feins & Fenton, 1988; Gupta, Dabral, Mehrotra & Maheshwari,1997) In India, where a psychological problem and visit to the psychiatrist is considered a stigma, it becomes even more necessary to create awareness amongst parents and health care providers about the extent of these psychological problems as many common chronic and mental health conditions arise during childhood. These ensuing psychosocial problems are known to lead to various learning and emotional difficulties in children which then have an impact on their psychological wellbeing (Sawant & More,2011).

The objective of present study was to screen school going children at risk of psychosocial problems and also to determine the implications for counselling in schools in relation to the 90 cases handled by the school counsellor, during an academic year, in one of the reputed CBSE Schools in Trivandrum City.

## Method

### Sample and procedure

Out of 2000 students from a reputed CBSE school located in Trivandrum city, 90 students - i.e., 4.5% of the total population- availed counselling service over a span of 11 months. The students who sought counselling ranged from class II to class XII in which there were 58 boys and 32 girls. The cases came in the form of reference by teachers, peer referred cases, volunteered cases and self identified cases by the investigator/author.

The data was collected through formal and informal assessments and was later content analysed. Students were called from class with permission of teachers during allotted hours for counselling

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or any hour which was comfortable for the counsellor. Each session lasted for around 45-50 minutes. The approach used was eclectic (e.g. CBT, Behaviourism, Client Centred etc). The slot given for counselling service was 7 hours a day; six days per week for 11 months.

### Results & Discussion

The investigator was able to identify the prevalence of 14 psychosocial problems. The total number of students availed counselling service was 90, out of which total number of boys (N=58) outnumbered girls (N = 32) that is, 64% were boys and 36% were girls. The number of cases reported to benefit from the service was 74%, out of which 64% were boys and 26% were girls. The number of cases referred came around 26% of the total, out of which 65% were boys and 35% were girls. The referred cases were related to learning difficulties, Autistic Spectrum Disorder, Attention deficit and hyper activity, mood issues, addiction and family crisis. Following are the cases given in the order of highest to lowest occurrence. Family crisis/relationship issues (20.4%), lack of self esteem/confidence (18.8%), peer pressure (10%), sexual problems (10%), emotional instability (10%), exam stress (8.8%), ADHD (6.6%), Learning difficulties (4.4%), Conduct issues (4.4%), Mild mood problems (2.2%), ASD (1.1%), Somatic issues (1.1%), Cross dressing (1.1%) and Body image issues (1.1%).

Table 1 shows the 14 types of cases handled by the counsellor/author during an academic year in students ranging from class II to XII. From the table it can be understood that the highest occurrence is for family crisis and relationship issues followed by issues pertaining to low self esteem and confidence which came up to 20.4% and 18.8% respectively of the total cases handled. The reason for this could be that almost all the students belonging to this category hailed from broken families, with domestic violence and low socio economic background. According to the study by Peterson & Zill (1986); disruption in the family cord was associated with a higher incidence of several behavioural problems, negative effects being greatest with multiple marital transitions. The negative effects are lower if the child lives with the same-sex parent following divorce/separation or maintains good relationship with one or both parents. High, persistent conflict in intact families is also related to behaviour problems. Therefore it becomes quintessential to address these problems through counselling. However, addressing students' problems and helping them cope with it is only a temporary solution unless and until the parents of these students are addressed and given counselling too.

Peer Pressure/bullying/addiction (10%), Sexual problem (10%) and Emotional instability (10%) shared the second major share of the total percentage of cases. Around 8.8% of students faced exam stress and related anxiety issues; whereas the cases related to attention deficit and hyper activity came up to 6.6% of the total number of cases. Conduct problems such as norm violation, aggression towards others etc and learning difficulties such as mirror writing and inability to perform simple calculation came up to 4.4%. Only 2.2% of the total case had mild mood issues. However ASD, Somatic complaints without medical conditions, Body image conflict and Cross dressing and identity issues contributed 1.1% each respectively. The present study indicated marked difference in cases reported by girls than boys pertaining to sexual problems, conduct issues, addiction and bullying. According to Dhillon & Babu (2015), boy's conflicts tend to be more visible because they are more boisterous (Malloy and Mcurray 1996; Younger, Warrington & Williams, 1999) and physically aggressive. Girls are likely to rely on covert form of aggression that is less amenable to observation (Crick and Grotpeter 1995). It can also be noted that the nature of problems are age appropriate. The lower classes students faced issues pertaining to



learning, attention, and conduct whereas as older students faced problems related to relationships, self esteem, sexuality and body image.

Table 2 depicts the percentage of cases benefitted through counselling service. From the table it can be seen that 67 students (74% cases) benefitted out of 90 students who availed counselling service. Out of which 43 (64%) were boys and 24 (26%) were girls. The maximum type of case benefitted was problems related with low self esteem and low confidence level (25%). It should be noted that all the students in this category reported to benefit from counselling. Family crisis and exam stress shared 12% of the total cases benefitted whereas emotional stability occupied 13% of the cases benefitted. Improvement in performance was reported by teachers, classmates, parents. Self evaluation of students' pre and post performance was also taken into account to draw inference about the implication of counselling service. Peer pressure/bullying/addiction and sexual problem secured 10% and 9% respectively. Conduct issues and attention deficit problems came around 4% each; while Mild mood problems, ASD, Somatic issues, Cross dressing, and Body image issues occupied 1% each.

From the table it can be interpreted that the number of boys who availed and benefitted from counselling service were higher than girls. This could be due to the internalizing nature of girls which is considered to be less problematic by parents, teachers and other caregivers (Tandon et al. 2009). According to Glenda MacNaughton (2003), children learn gender role and gender identity from their parents and the society they live in. They value gender appropriate behaviours because they are rewarded and to devalue gender inappropriate behaviours because they are punished or ignored. Perhaps the fear of getting punished or dejected by significant others might be another reason for the girls, that inhibits them from seeking professional help even while they are tormented by problems. Yet another reason could be the higher emotional needs of girl children who need more attention and prolonged period of/ more frequent counselling sessions to disclose their issues and resolve their problems. The total percentage of cases referred was 26%. Out of which 65% were boys and 35% were girls. Majority of the cases belonged to classes X to XII. The types of cases referred were Family crisis, addiction, sexual problems, ADHD, Mild mood disturbances and cross dressing. When students experience emotions or engage in behaviours that interfere with their happiness and ability to thrive, it is always beneficial to seek help from the right source; a mental health professional such as a therapist or counsellor can help the students overcome these hassles and equip them to lead a better life.

### **Conclusion**

The present study was an attempt to identify the types and prevalence of psychosocial and behavioural issues seen in schools and the implications of counselling on the same. From the reports obtained through students, teachers, peers and parents it can be established that counselling in schools has a positive implication on students' overall development and wellbeing. Timely intervention definitely helps students to overcome problems and have a positive outlook about one's own life. Counselling helped students to cater their psychological/academics/personal needs and live a better life.



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**Table1**  
**Showing the types of cases, frequency, list of male and female students, class details and the percentages**

Sl No.	Types of cases	Frequency	Male	Female	Class & total %
1.	Family Crisis/relationship issues	18	13	5	VIII-XII (20.4%)
2.	Self Esteem/confidence	17	8	9	VII-XII (18.8%),
3.	Peer Pressure/bullying/addiction	9	6	3	VI-XII (10%)
4.	Sexual problem	9	9	-	IX,X&XI (10%)
5.	Emotional instability	9	3	6	IX, X, XII (10%)
6.	Exam Stress	8	2	6	IX, X, XII (8.8%)
7.	Attention deficit/hyper activity	6	6	-	III, VI, X (6.6%)
8.	Learning difficulty	4	3	1	II, V (4.4%),
9.	Conduct issues	4	4	-	VIII, XI, XII (4.4%),
10.	Mild mood issues	2	1	1	XI (2.2%)
11.	Autism spectrum disorder	1	1	-	X (1.1%)
12.	Somatic complaints without medical conditions	1	1	-	VI (1.1%)
13.	Cross dressing and identity issues	1	1	-	IX (1.1%)
14.	Body image conflict	1	-	1	X (1.1%)



**Table 2**  
**Showing the type of cases benefitted, frequency, and percentage list of male and female students**

Sl..No.	Type of cases benefitted	Frequency 67 (%)	Male 43(%)	Female 24(%)
1.	Self Esteem/confidence	17 (25%)	9(21. %)	8(33%)
2.	Family Crisis/relationship issues	8 (12%)	3 (7%)	5 (21%)
3.	Emotional instability	9 (13%)	6 (15%)	3 (12.5%)
4.	Exam Stress	8 (12%)	2 (5%)	6 (25%)
5.	Peer Pressure/bullying/addiction	7 (10%)	7 (16%)	0
6.	Sexual problem	6 (9%)	6 (14%)	0
7.	Conduct issues	4 (3%)	4 (9%)	0
8.	Attention deficit/hyper activity	4 (3%)	4 (9%)	0
9.	Mild mood issues	1 (1%)	0	1 (4%)
10.	Body image conflict	1 (1%)	0	1 (4%)
11.	Cross dressing and identity issues (R*)	1 (1%)	1 (2%)	0
12.	Autism spectrum disorder	1 (1%)	1 (2%)	0

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