

Emerging Area of Counseling among Adolescent School Children

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Abstract

The purpose of any education system to promote optimum development of students in all spheres – educational, vocational, personal, social, moral, physical etc. so as to make them productive and useful citizens. Counseling in harmony with the goals of education, aims to facilitate maximum personal development of children in all spheres of life. Adolescence is the most decisive period in a man's life and that no stone should be left unturned in creating a congenial atmosphere to help enable the adolescents to make a smooth journey through this stormy and turbulent phase of life. The task ahead is herculean and could be accomplished only through the concerted efforts of all the agencies and at different levels - the family, the school and the Government. Academic stress, violence including bullying, sexual permissiveness, easy drug availability and abuse, social rift are some of the major issues which a youth has to contend with, in this rapidly changing Indian social scenario. The need for school counseling requires a proper recognition and all efforts need to be put together to utilize this very important psychological skill in preventing and in responding to the various psychosocial needs of the adolescent school children. The present paper seeks to review the importance of adolescent counseling in school setting in India. The objectives of the paper are, to stress the need for adolescent counseling in schools, to scrutinize the current position of counseling in the Indian schools, to analyse the role of a school counselor in dealing with adolescents.

Keywords: School Counseling, Adolescents, Psychosocial Problems, Stress and Strain

1. Introduction

In the recent years the Indian society seems to have undergone a total metamorphosis with changing roles of women, a breakdown of the joint family system, increased competitiveness in schools, increased sociability of the children, immense technological advances, peer and parental pressures resulting in an environment laden with stress and strain for the children. Technological changes have made a major impact on people's lives and work. Industrialization has resulted in social and vocational mobility. It has affected child-rearing practices too. Technological advancements and the changing socio-economic and political situation in the country shape adolescents and transition to adult roles and responsibilities. It is the adolescents group which is highly and negatively influenced by these changes. Educational and occupational scene is fast changing here, there and everywhere. Curriculum and co-curriculum offering have tremendously expanded during the past few years. It is becoming extremely difficult for the educational generalists to prepare the youth for education, for occupation, for life in this rapidly changing world. This is very much evident in today's society as we find intellectual and highly qualified youth involving into anti-social activities. High school life is to some extent felt stressful by the adolescents and their parents as the curricular and extra-curricular activities along with family life and school life cause stress among them; the importance of school counseling is very much felt by the school authorities. Some of the states have made it mandatory to appoint a school counselor. Yet school counseling is at the experimental stage in India. Hence the present paper seeks to review the importance of adolescent counseling in school setting in India.

1.1. What is School Counseling?

School counseling is a profession that focuses on the relations and interactions between students and their school environment to reduce the effects of environmental and institutional barriers that impede student academic success. According to "The American School Counselors' Association": "A comprehensive school counseling program is developmental and systematic in nature, sequential, clearly defined, and accountable. It is jointly founded upon developmental psychology, educational philosophy, and counseling methodology (ASCA, 1994).

The school counseling program is integral to the educational enterprise. The program is proactive and preventive in its focus. It assists all students in acquiring and using life-long learning skills. More specifically, school counseling programs employ strategies to enhance academics, provide career awareness, develop employment readiness, encourage self-awareness, foster interpersonal communication skills, and impart life success skills for all students. Individual and group counseling, classroom guidance, consultation, including meeting with parents, teachers, administrators, staff and community members, and coordination of special programs and initiatives are integral parts of all school counseling programs. The school counselor as consultant empowers families to act on behalf of their children by helping parents and guardians identify student needs and interests, and access available resources.

1.1.1 Recent Developments

As per an article in Times of India, Hyderabad edition: ‘The secondary education department is expected to issue a government order making counseling centres manned by clinical psychologists mandatory in government and private schools. As per an article by Gauree Malkarnekar published in The Times of India, Goa edition: ‘The career counseling needs of students will now be taken care of in their schools itself. Training shall be provided to one teacher each in all the government and government aided schools by the ‘Goa Education Development Corporation (GEDC)’ who will in turn give guidance to the students about the courses of their interests and the institutes offering them in Goa and across the country.’

As per an article by Preetu Venugopalan Nair in Timesofindia / Education, Kochi edition: i. ‘As per a decision taken by the ‘Board of Governors’ of ‘Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan’, the secondary and senior secondary classes of all the Central Schools shall be equipped with an education counselor. The counselors shall have the responsibility of dealing with low achieving, under achieving and high achieving students apart from counseling students to face examinations without fear and help to instil in the students skills related to study habits, time management, communication skills and stress management. ii. As per a principal of a Kendriya Vidyalaya “Conducting class surveys to know the career choice of students and providing career guidance to students based on the results of an aptitude test and interest inventory is another major work that has been assigned to the counselor.” iii. It shall also be the responsibility of the counselors to organise career related conferences and exhibitions, programmes entitled “meet the professional” and to set up “career guidance corners” in schools. iv. Group guidance activities shall be carried out at least once a week. v. As per the circular, individual counseling too may be taken up by the teachers as far as possible.

1.1.2 Adolescence

Adolescence, the transitional stage of development between childhood and adulthood, represents the period of time during which a person experiences a variety of biological changes and encounters a number of emotional issues. The period which is considered to be part of adolescence varies from culture to culture, and ranges from preteens to nineteen. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), adolescence covers the period of life between 10 and 20 years of age. Adolescence is often divided by psychologists into three distinct phases: early, mid and late adolescence.

Adolescence is considered as the most important period in the life span of an individual. They are experiencing many physical and psychological problems in this period. Adolescents are more prone to quarrels and impulsivity. It is also considered as an emotionally unstable period. So, a helping hand is needed for the pupils to ventilate their problems. The problems of adolescents are increasing day by day, because of the changing family situations from joint family to nuclear family they are not able to express their feelings. These suppressed feelings may cause the problem more badly. The maladaptive behaviour patterns of the children may be due to family disputes, substance abuse, peer group pressure, infatuations towards other sex, physical and psychological changes and learning disability etc. Here comes the role of a school counselor because the child spends most of his time in school than his family members. A good counselor can find out the exact problems of pupils and thereby lead them to a successful life.

In the post-modern era, in India, the Government, voluntary organizations, religious workers, teachers and parents are not giving high importance to the professional school counselors. Hence, the paper examines the significance of school counseling as well as how adolescent school children can be benefited through such counseling services.

1.1.3 Need for Adolescent counseling in Indian schools:

The big question in the minds of educators, policy makers and parents is whether there is a real need for counseling in Indian schools. Are we just trying to ape the American mores and norms? Given the vast differences in the cultural and family structures of the Indian society we need to assess whether there really is room for a professional school counselor. Also, it is important to assess whether the Indian society is ready to accept the services of a counselor or is burdened with stigma towards this service.

- i. The findings of various adolescent research studies prove that there is definitely a need for counseling in schools in India.
- ii. This is evident with the increasing number of suicide cases in the school students.
- iii. Changing family trends such as working mothers, divorces, single parent families have reduced the emotional cushioning provided so far by most of the Indian families.
- iv. Also, the immense technological advances, the increased social life and issues such as drug abuse have contributed to stress and strain on the students.

1.1.4 Common Problems of Adolescence

Adolescence is the age of change. It is a vulnerable time when kids can develop unhealthy habits that grow into

problems in their adult life. The major problems of adolescence are.

1. Physical changes – happen due to change in the teenager's hormone levels.
2. Emotional changes - Hormones affect the teenager not only physically but also emotionally.
3. Behavioral changes -Overwhelming emotions can lead to impulsive behaviour.
4. Substance Use and Abuse - Teenagers can be easily swayed to the wrong side. Substance abuse is one of the biggest problems that parents of adolescents around the world have to deal with.
5. Educational challenges - High school is not all about fashion, friends, and parties. Kids also have a lot of educational activities on their plate.
6. Health problems - Adolescents are vulnerable emotionally and physically. Without proper nutrition and healthcare, they are susceptible to illnesses
8. Social problems – dating and relationships
10. Addiction to cyberspace - The advent of social media has changed the way we interact with each other. It has affected teenage lifestyles the most.
11. Aggression and violence -Young boys start to develop muscles, grow tall and have a coarser, manly voice. In addition to that, they are moody and vulnerable and can let others get under their skin.

1.1.5 Types of Adolescent counseling needs

The educational field is a vast area with huge potential for counseling. The needs of the students are varied. There is an imminent need for counseling the adolescents in the following areas:

1. Academic success: i. The school counselors can help the students in realizing their highest potential. ii. They can help in removing blocks to academic success, if any.
2. Career and vocational guidance: i. School counselors can help by providing information on the various career and vocational options available. ii. They can guide the students in choosing the right career based on suitable aptitude tests.
3. Personal and Social development: i. The school counselor helps to identify talents of the students and helps to nurture these talents. ii. They help in improving the communication and interpersonal skills of the students.
4. Resolving psychosocial problems: i. Stress, loneliness, bullying, ragging, peer adjustments, parental and teacher pressure are some of the possible psychosocial problems of students which can be resolved by a school counselor. ii. In extreme cases, the counselor may refer the students to a psychologist, psychiatrist or other specialized personnel.
5. Counseling for the parents: A very important revelation is that the parents also need to be counselled. The student counselor may provide counseling to the parents on the following issues: i. The necessity to accept the child as he is with his strengths and weaknesses. ii. The ill effects of undue pressure and stress on the child to excel academically. iii. The interests and aptitude of the child and his suitability and choice of career. iv. Learning disabilities of the child, if any and the coping strategies. v. The psychosocial problems of the child, if any and the coping strategies. vi. Removing the stigma attached to counseling.
6. Counseling for the teachers and the school staff: The teachers and the school staff also need counseling to deal effectively with the huge number of students coming from diverse backgrounds and holding unique individualities. The counselor should focus on the following issues: i. An understanding of the futility of the Corporal Punishment. ii. Understanding that each child is unique and accepting every student as he is. iii. Identifying learning disabilities of the students. iv. Identifying psychosocial / adjustment problems of the child. v. Ways to bring the best out of each student. vi. Overall development of the students.
7. Counselor as an individual and as a team member: The school counselor works individually with the students as well as in the capacity of a team member, the team comprising of the teachers, the school staff and the parents.
8. Training for the school counselors in India: This is one area which needs to be strengthened as there are very few institutes in India offering courses on school counseling.
9. Counseling in private and government schools in India: It is found that counseling as a profession has made a place in most of the high profile private schools of India. However, it is yet to establish itself in government schools, though there is news of a Government Order to be issued for appointment of school counselors.
10. The Preventive, Remedial and Developmental functions of school counseling: A school counselor helps in early identification of problem behaviours and takes suitable steps to prevent the onset of psychosocial problems. i. In case of counselor works towards finding suitable remedies. ii. The school counselor also engages in individual and group developmental activities.

1.1.6 Functions of an Adolescent Counselor

The functions of adolescent counseling personnel commonly pertain to the following:

1. Planning, co-ordination and supervision of guidance services within the boundary.
2. Training of guidance personnel such as career teachers' training programmes.
3. Preparation, development or translation of tests and tools of assessment.
4. Conducting research on various problems in the field of counseling.
5. Collection, classification, production and dissemination of career information.
6. Publication of suitable guidance materials in the regional language for the use of students, parents and teachers.

In addition the counselor should be a - Listening Ear, Voice of Reasoning, Cheerleader, Shoulder to cry on, Parent, Friend and a Teacher

2. Conclusion

Children are considered as the valuable asset of our country. So we should take adequate measures to protect their physical, social and psychological well-being. This is achieved through family, school and the society. The present paper points out the relevance of a school counselor to handle the problems of these students. A school counselor can work for the all-round development of a child. If conducive environment is provided in the schools, it would go a long way in promoting the mental health of children and adolescents, preventing several emotional problems, and offering timely intervention for their psychosocial problems through appropriate psychosocial care by the counselors. The role of a counselor varies widely according to the goal, purpose and the requirement of education system of a particular school system. Though the area of school counseling is still in its infancy, it has great potential for growth. It can cater to the emerging needs of the student community with globalization, drastic changes in family structures, changing social values leading to immense stress and strain on the students. The specialized skills of the school counselor need to be tapped to prevent, and treat increasing psychosocial problems of the adolescent students and to provide a holistic development to the students.

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