



Review paper

Emerging area of Counselling in Schools in India

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Abstract

The changing family structure and the evolving social trends with a breakdown in the traditional support system has created a gap for fulfilling the physical, psychological and social needs of the child stressing the need for an alternative support system to meet the needs of the child. Counselling in schools is definitely the bridge that might fill this gap. The area of school counselling in India is very young and needs to spread and establish itself. The norms for its practice have to be laid down, the need for school counselling 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 school children. The present paper seeks to review an emerging area of counselling in schools in India. The objectives of the paper are, to stress the need for counselling in schools in India, to trace the history of school counselling in India, to scrutinize the current position of counselling in the Indian schools, to analyse the norms to be laid down for the practice of counselling in the schools in India. The method adopted is a review of literature.

Keywords: School counselling, career guidance, psychosocial problems, stress and strain.

Introduction

Counselling as a profession is definitely a child of the western countries. The Indian society with its strong family bonds and a warm community feeling and spiritual essence has been providing the shock absorbers in times of crisis and a support system to deal with the various psychosocial issues. Perhaps, this is one reason for the slow growth of the profession of counselling in India.

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. School counsellors seem to have appeared like a blessing to the students and the parents to cope with the increased stress and strain and contribute towards maintaining the mental health of the younger generation.

What is School Counselling?

Following are a few definitions of school counselling.

As per Education Trust: "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. School counsellors foster educational equity, access, and academic success in a rigorous curriculum to

ensure that all students graduate from high school ready to succeed in college and careers.

The trained school counsellor must be an assertive advocate creating opportunities for all students to pursue dreams of high aspirations. The counsellor assists students in their academic, career, social, and personal development and helps them follow the path to success. The school counsellor serves as a leader as well as an effective team member working with teachers, administrators, and other school personnel to help each student succeed. The school counsellor as consultant empowers families to act on behalf of their children by helping parents and guardians identify student needs and interests, and access available resources¹."

According to "The American School Counsellors' Association": "A comprehensive school counselling 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 counselling 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 counselling 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. At the foundation of the school counseling program is the delivery of counseling, consultation,

coordination and advocacy services to all students, parents and the school community. Individual and group counselling, 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 programs²."

Indian Institute of School Psychology has given the following definition of school counseling: School counselling is a unique and specialized profession worldwide with M. Sc /PG Diploma in school counseling, who work in schools and because of this they are considered professional school counselors and educators. They develop and implement a comprehensive, developmental program to facilitate the academic/learning skills, personal/social developmental skills competencies, spiritual care and understanding, and career options counselling tasks, appropriate to the needs of pre-K-12 students. School counsellors have specialized training which includes knowledge of human development, cultural diversity, counselling and consultation and techniques, appraisal and assessment, career development, besides adequate tools to identify, assess, evaluate behavior, social, emotional, learning difficulties and when needed make referrals of severe cases, of mental health to clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, neurologists for treatment³.

School counselling is a profession which: i. aims primarily to improve the academic performances of the students. ii. provides vocational guidance. iii. helps in social and personal development of the students. iv. provides the much needed bridge between parents and students. v. functions in preventive, remedial and developmental modes. vi. functions to remove barriers to development if any, in the individual or in the environment. vii. works to identify, assess, evaluate, solve or refer, if necessary, problems of students which may be behavioural, emotional, social, academic or psychological. viii. Involves the team efforts of the teachers, the parents and other school staff.

History of School Counseling in India

School counselling in India is a relatively young profession. An attempt is made here to trace the history of school counselling in India.

As per an interview of Dr. BMC Shetty with Sudeshna Chatterjee in Indian Express entitled, 'Schools are neglecting counselling', i. The first Child Guidance Clinic was started by Tata Institute of Social Sciences at Wadia hospital in 1938. ii. The Wadia hospital started a school health unit in the same year, which referred children with behavioural problems to the hospital. iii. The first school mental health clinic was set up at Nair hospital in 1979⁴.

Asha K. Kinra also gives some of the important milestones in the development of school counseling in India. i. The Ministry

of Education, Government of India, established the Central Bureau of Educational and Vocational Guidance in 1954. ii. After the third five year Plan (1961), guidance services were initiated in schools by the trained counsellors and career masters with assistance from school teachers. iii. By the end of the third five year plan (1966), the number of schools providing guidance service in one form or the other was 3000. But these schools housed only a career master whose job was simply to provide vocational information. iv. With effect from the year 2000 the Central Bureau of Educational and Vocational Guidance has delegated the work of guidance professionals' training to the Regional institutes of Guidance at Ajmer, Bhopal, Bhuvaneshwar and Mysore. v. The main objective of the State Educational and Vocational Guidance Bureaus is to assist students in the choice of suitable educational curricula and career options⁵.

Recent Developments

As per an article in Times of India, Hyderabad edition: 'The secondary education department is expected to issue a government order making counselling centres manned by clinical psychologists mandatory in government and private schools⁶.

As per an article by Gauree Malkarnekar published in The Times of India, Goa edition: 'The career counselling 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 country⁷.'

As per an article by Preetu Venugopalan Nair in Times of India / 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 counsellor. The counsellors shall have the responsibility of dealing with low achieving, under achieving and high achieving students apart from counselling students to face examinations without fear and help to instill 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 counsellor." iii. It shall also be the responsibility of the counsellors 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 counselling too may be taken up by the teachers as far as possible⁸.

A Special Report by Mitra Neelanjana, Yasmeen Summiya, Roy Swati, Patil Anupama, T. Varoodhini in 'Education World: The Human Development Magazine' throws ample light on the various issues related to counseling in Indian schools.

Some of the alarming facts and issues raised in the article are reproduced here: i. The shocking suicide of Rouvanjit Rawla studying in class VIII of La Martiniere for Boys, Kolkata reportedly because he couldn't bear the humiliation of corporal punishment and a spate of student suicides have been widely reported in India's commercial capital Mumbai. ii. The present generation has to cope with the increasing social networking websites, 21st century steel and glass malls and speed dating, the heavy burden of excelling in school-leaving and entrance exams has piled mountainous pressure on the nation's 260 million youth under 21 years. iii. The students have to adjust with rampant consumerism, increasing use of drugs, sexual abuse along with possible single parent families as a result of higher rates of divorce. iv. As per the majority of school counselors 'Education World' correspondents spoke with across the country, student strain and anxiety is mainly caused by the overwhelming unrealistic parental expectations and pressure to score high grades in annual examinations. Millions of well-meaning parents are pushing children into a continuous round of private tuitions, intensive study sessions and cram schools. The outcome is pervasive fear of failure, paranoia and chronic depression among children. According to one estimate, in 2006-07 there were 5,857 exam-related suicides countrywide. And in nine out of ten cases, the cause of this final act of desperation was fear of parental wrath over sub-optimal academic performance. v. Counselling services have also been extended to the parents in certain cases as a result of the pushy parent phenomenon. vi. Majority of the parents are reluctant to acknowledge that their children might need counselling. vii. Counsellors give advice to the students to handle problems such as bullying, poor self-esteem, confrontation of parents about socialisation, loneliness and academic pressure. viii. The method of one-on-one counselling is adopted for disturbed children and the method of self-awareness workshops is adopted for the students in general. ix. Counselling is tacitly acknowledged as critical to delivering a stable and well-balanced educational experience in the boarding and international schools of India. With students living away from home and the comforting presence of parents, pastoral care assumes greater importance in residential schools. x. However, whereas the country's 188,000 private day, boarding and international primary-secondary schools are showing an awareness of the need to service the emotional well-being of students, there's little awareness about the value of counselling within the government school network. India's 135 million children enrolled in 1.09 million government schools countrywide — despite having to bear with a plethora of problems including teacher shortages and truancy, inadequate infrastructure and poor learning outcomes — seldom have recourse to any form of counselling services or advice. xi. A sharp contrast can be seen in the higher education institutions of

India and the West, especially the US where it is mandatory to provide professional counselling services, even in the public and private schools. The IITs/IIMs are an exception to this. xii. In India, there is also a dearth of institutions (NIMHANS, Bangalore and Bharathiar University, Coimbatore) offering postgraduate and doctoral study programmes in student counselling. Usually, it is studied as only a subject in the Master of psychology degree programme of universities. xiii. Career guidance and planning have been acknowledged only recently as important to enhance the potential of the students and maximise their contribution to society. It is also important that a career counsellor should work in a scientific and culture-resonant manner. However, the training facilities are quite inadequate. xiv. There is an urgent need to provide counselling services to the 1,000,000-plus government schools, 509 universities and 31,000 colleges of the country⁹.

Findings

Need for counselling in schools in India: 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 first finding of the study is 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.

Types of counselling 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 counselling in the following areas:

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.

Career and vocational guidance: i. School counsellors can help by providing information on the various career and vocational options available. ii. School counsellors can guide the students in choosing the right career based on suitable aptitude tests.

Personal and Social development: i. The school counsellor helps to identify talents of the students and helps to nurture

these talents. ii. The school counsellor helps in improving the communication and interpersonal skills of the students.

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 counsellor. ii. In extreme cases, the counsellor may refer the students to a psychologist, psychiatrist or other specialized personnel.

Counselling for the parents: A very important revelation is that the parents also need to be counselled. The student counsellor may provide counselling 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 counselling.

Counselling for the teachers and the school staff: The teachers and the school staff also need counselling to deal effectively with the huge number of students coming from diverse backgrounds and holding unique individualities. The counsellor 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.

Counsellor as an individual and as a team member: The school counsellor 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.

Training for the school counsellors in India: This is one area which needs to be strengthened as there are very few institutes in India offering courses on school counselling.

Counselling in private and government schools in India: It is found that counselling 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 counsellors.

The Preventive, Remedial and Developmental functions of school counseling: A school counsellor helps in early identification of problem behaviours and takes suitable steps to prevent the onset of psychosocial problems. i. In case of psychosocial problems detected after their onset, the school

counsellor works towards finding suitable remedies. ii. The school counselor also engages in individual and group developmental activities.

Conclusion

The area of school counselling in India is here to stay. Though 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 students and to provide a holistic development to the students.

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