A STUDY OF COUNSELLING PROGRAMMES IN CBSE AFFILIATED SCHOOLS AND THEIR SUCCESS FOR STUDENT SUPPORT

ABSTRACT

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Abstract

This study has made an attempt to gain insight into the existing school counselling services as it is being carried out in public schools of Haryana. Four schools each from seven districts of Haryana were taken in the sample and four types of respondents were selected. A descriptive research design (survey method) was considered appropriate for the study in which counsellors’, students’, principals’ and teachers’ perspective were assessed. On the basis of the findings of this study, suggestions have been given for counselling services that the researcher felt would be suitable for the schools and policy makers.

Statement of the Problem

A Study of Counselling Programmes in CBSE Affiliated Schools and their Success for Student Support

Objectives

- To study the counselling needs of the students.
- To study the counselling facilities available in CBSE affiliated schools of Haryana.
- To study the problems of students related to their personal, social and educational aspect.
- To study the profile of the counsellors, their training and nature of work undertaken by them in a school set up.
- To examine the roles of counsellors as perceived by themselves, the principals, teachers, and the students.
- To explore the nature of problems dealt by the counsellors.
- To study the counselling procedures and other related activities undertaken by the counsellors for students and teachers.
Population

All the public schools affiliated to CBSE, employing counsellors in twenty two districts of Haryana constituted the population for this study.

Sampling Method

Random and Purposive sampling was used to collect the data.

Sample

The final sample consisted of 28 Counsellors, 28 Principals, 112 Teachers and 280 students from the selected schools, thus making a total of 448 respondents.

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<tr>
<th>S. No.</th>
<th>Respondents</th>
<th>No. Selected as Sample</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Counsellors</td>
<td>28</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Principals</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Students</td>
<td>280</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>448</td>
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Tools

- Two interview schedules were prepared for counsellors and principals to know the various aspects of counselling programmes.
- Investigator developed two questionnaires for the teachers and students to identify the counselling programmes as carried out in their schools.

Data Collection

Data collection has been done from the four stakeholders (Counsellors, Students, Principals and Teachers) with the help of interview schedules and questionnaires.

Major Findings of the Study

Before seeking employment in the schools, the counsellors are required to receive training in their respective fields to acquire special expertise in dealing with the problems of the students. In most schools the functionaries have received training to take up counselling work. For guidance counsellors, the most common qualification is a Master’s degree in Psychology followed by a course in educational and vocational guidance being conducted by the NCERT and its state branches.
Almost 50 percent functionaries found the training inadequate and not entirely useful to them. They mentioned that usually topics related to career guidance are taken up in these training programmes. It was also observed that only half the counselling functionaries were part of any professional/ study group.

A few organizations which are engaged in counselling of students like ‘Samvad’, ‘Sanjeevani’, ‘Sandarshan’, ‘NIPCCD’ and ‘Educare’ have taken the initiative to add to the professional expertise of the school counselling functionaries in private schools. This has helped them gain more knowledge in the areas of counselling skills, transactional analysis, special education, parenting skills and family life education.

It is the principals who play an important role in defining their roles. Hence there is more flexibility in organizing activities whereas on the flip side they have to prioritize their work in accordance with that of the school where they work.

The counselling functionaries perform activities in their respective schools which can be broadly categorized into three parts – counselling functions, preventive work and non-counselling functions. Among the three functions, it was seen that preventive work is being done to a much lesser extent by nearly all the counsellors. A number of non-counselling functions were also being performed by the functionaries. These include substitution, invigilation, extension services and teaching. Some functionaries perform these activities reluctantly while some others were more forthcoming. Differences were observed in the nature of activities taken up by the functionaries. A few schools have initiated special programmes for the disadvantaged students like slow learners and economically disadvantaged students. Home-school liaison, which is supposed to be one of their expertise, is not being taken up by them sufficiently and actively.

Counsellors engage themselves with problems related to academics and choice of subjects and vocation/career. Career counselling forms an important part of their work. They also take up aptitude testing for students to help them make a choice of careers. Counsellors are providing developmental guidance to students on a regular basis. They visit all classes (VI upwards) and hold class talks for them on topics relevant for each age group. Very limited work is being undertaken by the counsellors for staff development and home-school liaison, which is a cause of concern.

It was also found that there is no sufficient interaction among the functionaries on a professional level. They work almost in isolation, with no opportunities to interact with
each other. Sharing of ideas on platform meant for fruitful purpose can bring out a remarkable change in the perspectives of the practicing counsellors. However, in reality, it was found that sufficient opportunities were not being provided to the counsellors and whatever little was done, was being done in an un-coordinated and unstructured manner.

There is no specific time allocated for counselling in schools. The students meet the counselling functionaries at whatever time that is convenient or available to them – in their free periods, break time, before and after school hours and even during the teaching hours. Time spent on counselling work varied from school to school although most of the functionaries said that they were devoting very little time for counselling.

Within the time available for counselling work, the number of referrals varied vastly. Whereas in one school the counselling functionary had counseled only six students in a year, in others as many as 200 students had been counseled. The average number of cases handled by the counsellors each year is 80. The referrals are mostly made by the teachers followed by self-referrals by the students themselves. The mode of referrals was, by and large, uniform in all schools. It was mostly decentralized. Anyone in school can approach the counsellor and make referrals. Some schools had organized the system in a better way by printing referral performas and circulating among teachers. If teachers find some student in their class or otherwise, who needs counselling, they refer the case to the counsellor. Sometimes they even ask the parents to go and meet the counselling functionary. The counsellors themselves can also identify students in need of counselling, but it was observed that very few of them are able to do so.

The most common type of problems handled by the counselling functionaries is related to academics and behavior of the students. There is a tendency among parents also to oversimplify the issue and think that their wards may feel the need to see the counsellors mainly for academic problems. On the other hand, according to the perception of principals, most problem stem from home. Lack of time on part of the parents and family members lead to problems which are a major stresses for students. Most referrals are made for ‘tangible’ problems and severe ones like emotional problems tend to get sidelined. This was contrary to what the students feel. The students felt that they required more assistance for handling their personal problems than anything else. In reality, the parents tend to generalize their wards problems in the area of academic whereas schools have a tendency to think that most problems emerge from home.
Among the behavioural problems, the most infrequently handled cases by the counsellors are related to sexual problems and health of the students. Although studies have shown that sexual problems are on the rise but schools are not prepared to handle these. A few counsellors had mentioned that they had made genuine attempt of organize camp in their school for screening students with ENT and speech problems, but this was not a regular practice in most schools unless the problem emerged by itself.

Use of tests is being made by about 70% counselling functionaries. It was found that although psychometry is not an essential part of the curriculum; about half of the respondents included in the study were making use of tests. The most common tests used by the functionaries are the Aptitude, I.Q., and Personality. Other tests that are being used are Raven’s progressive matrices test and interest inventories. This helps them in career guidance and gives more credibility to them. Other tests are not being used very frequently. This is in keeping with the general trend of non-reliance on psychometric tests. They are used only when found necessary.

A significant finding was that despite the difference in their trainings, all counsellors are well accepted in their schools especially by the students. It appears that it is the communication between the counsellors and the students that creates an impact on them. Majority of the students in the schools mentioned that they found the counselling sessions useful for them.

Both counsellors and teachers work with students but have a different orientation by virtue of their training. While teachers are more concerned about the academic pursuits of students, counsellors look at them more holistically, irrespective of their academic achievements. The principals, as executive heads of schools, have to keep a balance between the two. Whatever differences exist, he/she tries to sort it out amicably. However, there are indications that some subtle differences do exist between the counsellor and the teachers. Strangely, this is not admitted by either of the functionaries. The differences come alive to the forefront when students are asked to meet the counsellors in their study periods. Less than half of the students were of the opinion that teachers value the work of the counsellors. Students mentioned that teachers often pass sarcastic remarks that reflect their disapproval or lack of confidence in the counselling services. Perhaps there is a need to involve the staff members more actively on part of the counsellors.
Every professional does have (and should have) an idea as to how much the users value their work. There are several tangible and intangible indicators, which help him/her determine the worth. But this is possible only if he/she is an acute observant. These indicators may range from body language, initiative taken to interact with the functionaries and feedback given to them by other stakeholders. An effort was made to ascertain how realistic the perception of the counsellors was. The functionaries had been asked as to what extent, according to their perception, other stakeholders value their work. Later, the stakeholders were also asked as to how much they valued the work of the counsellors. The two responses were compared. It was seen that most counsellors thought that their work was more valued by others, than it actually was. This was especially true for the students. Therefore, it is time the counsellors did some introspection about their services, especially for students, who are the main users of these services.

An important finding of the study was that the perception of the role of the counsellors themselves is different from what the principals think their role is. This gains significance because principals are the chief functionaries in the schools and much depends on their understanding of the roles of the counsellors. This difference in perception has somewhat diluted their work. The principals are the executive heads in schools and the counsellors must comply with the arrangements made by them. In certain cases, despite clear directives given to the principals by the management, the counsellors can do little if the principals ask them to do administrative work or even convert their room into a staff room. On the contrary, the principal can do a lot of damage if the counsellor decides not to follow the school rules. Therefore, an effort is needed to bridge this gap between the perception of counsellors and the principals.

It is very clear from this study that the training of the counsellor does not contribute much in their preparation to take up counselling work. Their training and subsequent in-service training (which is equally important if not more important) does not provide the necessary skills required by the counsellors. The theoretical concepts and skills imparted at the pre-service and in-service stages need to be linked with the role the practitioners have to play. A three-way communication among the teachers, researchers and practitioners is required to make the training more relevant and suited to the needs of schools and the society.
It was also found that counsellors get very little time for effective individual counselling work because of their involvement in so many activities and the high pupil-functionary ratio. A problem takes much less time to sort out if intervention takes place at an early stage. All students do face problems of varying intensities, all of which may not be serious enough to warrant individual intervention. If all the students are counseled about these, it would be taken in the normal course and the stigma, which is still attached to these services, would be minimized. At present, the counsellors are engaged more in individual counselling than preventive mental health interventions. Within the time and other constraints, preventive work by the counsellors seems a good option.

The present state of documentation of the work of counsellors leaves much scope for improvement. For want of suitable record of their work, they are unable to let others in school see the efficacy of what they are doing. Most counsellors feel that they do not get sufficient time for counselling work whereas the principals and even teachers do not think so. This clearly shows that the counsellors have not been able to project their work so as to make the school staff realizes the need to spare them from taking up other miscellaneous work and give more time to counselling. Besides, a large amount of useful information is lost if there is a change of functionary in the school. The new person has to start from scratch, which can be very frustrating for the new counsellor. Most of the counsellors simply make jottings in diaries and the rest is all in their minds, which is a very bad practice. This affects continuity of their work. Therefore documentation of the work taken up by the counsellors ought to be spot on and with more vigour if these services are to make an impact.

Suggestions

Services to suit the demand: The first step in market research usually involves conducting a comprehensive assessment of the client’s needs and demands for the product or service. If school counselling services are to consolidate their position, they must be receptive to the needs of the youth. They should find out from the students as well as the parents the perceived problems and nature of services required instead of designing the counselling services from what they have learnt as part of their training.

Help the students face the challenges: The students today face several challenges due to the fast paced society. Some of these are the increasing inequality, rise in
consumerism, changes in family structures with no suitable systems to support them, rise in urbanization leading to problems for the migrants, increased violence. Counselling services should be sensitive to these larger social issues and recognize that they have an important role to play in enabling the children adapt appropriately.

**Common specialized training for the counsellors:** This would be useful. The components of this course should incorporate the strengths of each of the disciplines from which the graduates come and make it open for students from different educational backgrounds.

**Exchange of information:** In order to maintain the quality and enable a growth of these services, it is important that ideas are exchanged and skills are regularly updated. Study groups can help in updating the skills of the school counsellors. At present, specific study groups for school counsellors do not exist in private schools. For this, support is required from the teaching faculties of the universities and other professionals working in the area of mental health.

**Create a positive image:** The counsellors are associated with failing students academically or socially. This creates their negative image. It is quite obvious from this study that there is a stigma attached to counselling services in schools. Only children with problems are expected to meet the counsellors. The counsellors need to give a positive image to counselling services.

**Increase visibility of work:** Much of what the counsellors do is confidential. Others do not get to know about their results. They need to develop a system of reporting their work by way of documenting their work and bringing out reports of how many students were counseled, how many hours spent on counselling work and other activities, and what have been the results. Documentation of work leads to growth of a profession. This should be taken up by both the practitioners and the academicians. At present there is insufficient contribution from both, specially the former.

**Involvement of staff members:** The school counsellors try to work directly with all concerned, often spreading themselves too thin to be effective. Within the constraints of working in a school, they ought to involve others in school more actively to be able to reach out to all students. The staff members can be of immense help if suitable training is given to sensitize them towards problems of the students.
Networking: It is a very weak aspect of school counselling services. The work is usually done in isolation from each other in the private schools. It is also seen that the training institutes are working almost in isolation with each other. Making use of the available community resources will help in the growth of counselling services.

Professional association for growth: Counselling services in schools are gaining importance all over the world. Even in the Asian region, countries like Japan, Singapore, Hong Kong are introducing counselling services in their schools. India, where these services were introduced almost half a century ago, has not made significant progress. Lack of associations, linkages with the universities and other agencies which can provide expertise and lack of stocktaking and assessments by the functionaries have been responsible for the limited growth.

Home school liaison: There are several fronts on which the home and school can work together. Besides working as a team to help the child with problems, group work can also be undertaken. Forming support groups from among the parents who have the willingness and the time to devote to the problems of students is one way of strengthening the liaison.

It was found that the schools in Haryana were employing the counsellors because they are expected to help the students cope with the increasing stresses in life and help in the right choice of subjects and career. The focus of their work is on problems rather than on personality development and capacity building to deal with the increasing social problems. It is true that schools gear their activities towards recognizing the individual talents and helping the students realize these talents. This enables personality development. However, there is another aspect to personality development and that would entail dealing with feelings of anger, sexuality, recognizing their strengths and weaknesses, handling relationships and so on. While schools are increasingly playing their role of organizing school activities, the other perspective is not being taken care of either by the school or the counsellors, as reflected in the findings. Moreover, the schools do not even consider this to be a role of the counsellor. If counselling functionaries are to make their role relevant for the changing tunes, they will need to make the schools see the importance of developing this aspect of developing positive mental health.
The existing counsellors in schools have certain strengths and weaknesses. There is a possibility and also a need to gain from the strengths of each of these so that the weaknesses can be minimized. The learning of the study also suggests that the basic strategy of school counselling services should be to develop need based programmes involving all the children rather than focus on a few after their specific problems have been identified. Preventive work in schools should take priority instead of crises intervention.

An important learning from the study was that the role of counsellors is not adequately understood for which the functionaries are to be blamed themselves to some extent. The practitioners must increase the visibility level of their work for others to appreciate their contributions. In the absence of a proper understanding of their roles, they are engaged in a variety of activities in schools leaving them little time for counselling. It would also be worthwhile to do benchmarking of the school counselling services against which assessments can be done in future and improvements made. Most of the counsellors are engaged in dealing with immediate problems. A vision for expanding these services and making them more relevant to the changing times needs to be developed. Preventive work in the schools must take priority, taking into account the problems students are facing otherwise the whole exercise will be a futile one, consuming a lot of precious time of the counsellors. It is also apparent that schools and parents are not working as effective partners in ensuring wholesome development of students. They need to do so and counsellors can have a major role to play in this.