

## **SCHOOL COUNSELLING IN CHENNAI A QUALITATIVE STUDY**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The objectives were to understand the effectiveness of school counselling programme, their approaches, common problems of school children, roles and responsibilities of school counsellors and challenges faced by the counsellors.

As per CBSE guidelines circulated in schools in July 2002, the Board had made it mandatory for all senior secondary schools to appoint a full-time counsellor to look into students' problems. The Board had also instructed schools to hold at least twenty psychological counselling sessions for every student per academic year at the secondary and senior secondary stage. An article published in the Hindu- Chennai Edition says city schools take counselling for students seriously. The schools are using their teachers and principals, part-time counsellors who teach other subjects, external counsellors, and occasionally full-time counsellors. It also acknowledges that there needs to be a confidential dialogue between the student and the counsellor, and the student must be able to trust the counselor. Until schools can enforce this, the usefulness of counselling is questionable.

### **RESEARCH METHOD**

An in-depth interview guide was prepared for data collection. Counsellors working in schools were included in the study (n=10), using purposive sampling method. The researchers went to the schools and did interviews. The data was analysed using grounded theory approach.

### **FINDINGS**

#### **Category 1: Demography of School Counsellors**

Most of them have PG in Psychology or in Social Work. There was one counselor who is a teacher by profession. She has done a certificate Course in Counselling. Their Experience ranges from 2 years to 12 years. When it comes to Gender, Except one, everybody is female. Most of them are Part-time Counsellors, Spending 4 – 15 hours per week.

The following suggestions are given. Gender Disparity may be minimized. More Full Time Counsellors may be appointed. A Regulating Authority may be introduced by the Government

## Category 2: Roles and Responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Counsellor	Providing Counselling & Guidance to Students, Teachers and Parents  Doing Assessments and Reporting
Life Skills Trainer	Trainings on Communication skills, leadership, motivation, goal setting, sex education etc. for Students and Teachers.  Parenting Skills for Parents
Substitute Special Educator	Observing students to find whether there is a special need
Value Educator/Substitute for teachers	Teaching the Syllabus prescribed

### Quotes

- “I am given a book for Value Education and I need to complete the portions then and there. I make use of this opportunity to interact with students”
- “ My responsibilities are providing guidance, counselling, suggestions to students, Helping parents in the parenting style, Helping teachers in identifying LD, understand children's emotions, Career Guidance-Aptitude Tests”

The following suggestions are given. Role Conflict-Teacher or Counsellor may be avoided. The time and energy can be utilized in other productive ways.

## Category 3: Relationship with others in the school

Students are generally open. If you take Teachers, they are generally not very friendly. Parents are generally not favourable. Heads of the Institution and Management are generally co-operative.

### Quotes

“Teachers are lacking knowledge and awareness about our work...Because of that, they conveniently think its not their problem..its all because of parents or bad company...”

“Parents think it is school’s duty to correct the behavior of the child”

The following suggestions are given. Extra efforts have to be taken to have good relationship with parents and teachers. Team Building Activities can be done with teachers and parents.

#### **Category 4: Challenges with others in the school**

With Students , Explaining Confidentiality and building trust are two big challenges. Teachers send students for second-hand counseling. When their strategies do not work out, they refer the child to the counselor. They also lack awareness and have many misunderstanding about counseling. Parents are not liked to be called by counsellor and are defensive. With respect to Head of the Institution and management , Confidentiality issues, maintaining professional identity and not allocating enough funds are the problems.

#### *Quotes*

“Some teachers belong to the old school of thought which says that if you understand the children, then you are losing your control on them. Some of them feel counseling is a waste. And some of them expect instant result from counseling. For e.g. ‘Hey, I sent you that boy the other day, he is still like that.’ They want to know what happened.”

“Parents they are very defensive. To an extent that I am learning to let go. I am in the course of learning. I do feel very bad about it. Those are the times, I feel burnout. But, I am learning that there are some cases we can’t do anything. By and large once the parents see the changes in the child happening, they are little more receptive”

“It is very difficult to do counseling as a teacher who has full time classes.”

“Basically there is no separate room for counselling. There is no budget allotted for the counselling services.”

“They have given me the opportunities in setting up system, every support what I wanted, being very flexible as far as timings are concerned.”

The following are suggested to face the challenges better. School Counselling Centre has to be made as an autonomous body. School Counsellors should not be a part of managerial hierarchy. Separate Funds are to be allotted for its yearly activities. A Team of Counsellors would yield better results.

#### **Category 5: Range of Issues**

The issues in Pre-school and Primary School are academic difficulties/Slow learning, Learning DisabilityADHD, Borderline Intelligence and Autism Spectrum Disorders. If you take Middle schools Behaviour issues like stealing, telling lies, typical fights with peers, lots of hatred, Disciplinary issues like bullying, victimizing and teasing, Less emotional attachment with the parents and tendency to run away from family are very common. For, High school students, they are career and parental pressure on them to do well in their examinations, the lack of interest in the subjects chosen, severe bout of emotional problems, Infatuation/Love Affairs, Misconceptions in the matter of sex and Smoking.

The suggestions can be the following. Behaviour checklists and Youth Problem Inventories can be used to understand the range of issues in the beginning of each academic year. Preventive measures can be taken to avoid students getting into such issues.

### **Category 6: Counselling Theories Used**

For smaller kids, Art Therapy & Play Therapy are used as counseling will not work out for them. Erickson's Developmental Stages, Eclectic Approach in Counselling based on Jearald Eagen's skilled helper model are very useful. They also use the approaches like Logo Therapy, Adlerian Approach, Maslow's theory of needs, Cognitive Behavioral therapy, Life Skills Approach, Client centered/Rogerian Approach and Gestalt therapy.

#### *Quotes*

"It ends up being eclectic but of course everybody has one preferred approach. I use a lot of cognitive and RET and I believe that in most of the age spectrums, it works. Whether it is the child, parent or whole family."

"I forgot all the theories. I don't remember any theory. It is all on the job training and what comes instinctively. And I find that is what works. CBT & RET, social skills, peer group interaction, self esteem..."

The suggestions given are the following. Refresher Courses have to be conducted by the associations. Schools have to send the Counsellors to further trainings.

### **Category 7: Assessments**

Not many assessments are used in Schools . The counsellors have some checklists. They are like Behaviour checklist by Achenbach and Vineland's checklist. They also possess personal copies of the questionnaires measuring Parenting, Self Esteem, Study Skills and Stress. Referrals to Clinical Psychologists or MDA take place because government does not accept Counsellors' assessments.

#### *Quotes*

"I use behaviour checklist by Achenbach, Vineland's checklist when parents want to know if the child is developmentally normal... for parents – parenting styles questionnaire...then for basic intelligence, I use Standard Raven's Progressive Matrices...in school I also use Self-esteem questionnaire by Karunanidhi Sir, Adjustment inventory and study skills from the internet"

"Though the school has set up this well equipped LD cell But still our assessments are not enough to justify. The government wants the certification from institutes like MDA, Ramachandra University to assess."

I mostly refer them for psychometry. I have my own checklist for all kinds of problems, but if the child scores high on the checklist I prefer to send them out for assessment.

To improve the current scenario pertaining to assessments, schools should allot fund to buy basic assessment tools like Intelligence Tests, The parents would feel better if they do not have to approach many professionals. School Counsellors must be trained to administer tests.

### **Category 8: Documentation and Reporting**

No standard procedure is followed by the counselors. Many have a detailed case study records. They submit a term wise report or half yearly reports to the head of the institution/in-charge. The report contains only general information to protect confidentiality. However some heads ask for detailed report

#### *Quotes*

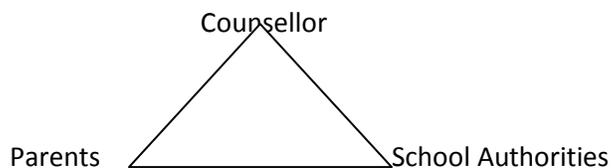
“I spend half of my time in writing the detailed case studies to submit to the correspondent”

“I need to inform the principal then and there verbally because she is answerable to the parents. I do not tell everything. I strike a balance. I tell very generally if probed”

If the following suggestions are taken into consideration, school counseling will be better. Ethics for School Counsellors have to be standardized. Heads of the schools should be informed about the ethical principles more importantly confidentiality. Researches have to be done to find effectiveness of the services

### **Category 9: Some Insightful Quotes**

“I always say, the child carries two bags to school. One is the books; the other is the emotional baggage. so the child is letting go of his emotional feelings in the school what we term as misbehavior. Actually, the child is trying to convey some emotional need to you.”



“That is how I see school counseling, where equal input of all three is very important. I focus on the child, related to teachers, parents, reports from teachers and parents.”

“When I started in that school, I went to each class, spoke to them. Some of them when I asked what is the role of the school counselor, one said, it is maintaining public garden. That is the lack of awareness”

“School counsellor’s role largely depends on how she projects herself during the interview. Her input determines what school counselling is meant to the management”

“School counselor is a feeling teacher”, that is how I tell the smaller kids.

“In a democratic country, we have autocratic parenting. Either it becomes too permissive or too authoritative. Democratic parenting is a new concept for everybody. “

“Initially when I approached three schools for internship, I was sent away and they said they don't believe in it. In the Fourth school only, I had better luck. They usually treat you like an insurance agent, you know..not now, not now..come back later like that...it is very disappointing you know...it spoils your whole day.”

### **Summary and Conclusion**

Effectiveness of School Counselling is not well proven by the documents they have. Lack of Counsellors in the field of School Counselling. No Regulating Authority is available. Much less importance to counselling when considering the real need. Lack of Awareness exists among public and also teaching community. Counsellor's relationship with others especially parents and teachers need to be improved. Very few managements are co-operative for the Counselling Services. Lack of Professionalism and No standard procedures exist. Much more efforts have to be taken by the Managements to deliver well equipped counselling services.

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