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Awareness of Professional Skill Requirement among School Counsellors

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Abstract:

Today's fluctuating and composite world places increasingly superior demands on students in schools. Not only do students have academic pressures, they also face cultural, social, economic and family pressures. These pressures lead to different manifestations such as drug abuse, alcohol abuse, suicide, anti-social behaviours, dropping out of schools etc. A group of well trained counsellors with a good understand of professional skill requirement is increasingly becoming the need of the hour for Indian schools. But as far as India is concerned there are no authentic associations for school counsellors. This makes the process of identifying emerging skill requirements, enhancing these skills and monitoring the performance of counsellors very difficult. The article gives a detailed description of skills essential for the school counsellors. school counsellor's understanding about the skill requirement in counselling. The study was conducted in schools under Central Board of Secondary Education and Kerala State Education Board in Ernakulum district, Kerala. Descriptive research design was used. Only trained counsellors in the field of social work and psychology were included in the study. It was a Census study using a sampling frame consisted of counsellors in high schools and higher secondary non-residential schools within Ernakulum district in Kerala. The population consisted of 118 school counsellors.

Keywords: School counsellor, skills

1. Introduction

Today's fluctuating and composite world places increasingly superior demands on students in schools. Not only do students have academic pressures, they also face cultural, social, economic and family pressures. These pressures lead to different manifestations such as drug abuse, alcohol abuse, suicide, anti-social behaviours, dropping out of schools etc. Subsequently, the plea for school counsellors to attend to these students has amplified in frequency and density. A group of well trained counsellors with a good understand of professional skill requirement is increasingly becoming the need of the hour for Indian schools

School counselling is given high value in the western countries. Most of these countries have associations and councils for the school counsellors for example the American School Counsellors Association (ASCA). But as far as India is concerned there are no authentic associations for school counsellors. This makes the process of identifying emerging skill requirements, enhancing these skills and monitoring the performance of counsellors very difficult.

2. Skills in School Counselling

Most of the school counsellors consider an array of skills including non-counselling skills as necessary for their work. This is a result of demands made on them to engage in non-counselling rather than counselling activities. Gysbers and Henderson in 2006 classify non-guidance undertakings of counsellors as typically fitting into four categories; student supervision, instruction, clerical and administrative. Considering the tasks assigned to school counsellors, this seems to reflect the job demands made on counsellors in India.

The school counsellors need skills to work with both individuals and small groups of students. They have to sometimes provide consultation to the problems and concerns related to teachers, management and parents. They are required to be trained in developmental, preventive and remedial counselling skills. The school counsellors should also know about the resources and the agencies available in the community. Moreover, the counsellors need to have crisis intervention skills and should be familiar with a variety of assessment and evaluation techniques. Carstensen and Melnychuk, (1990) suggests that the counsellors need support from other helping professionals to mentor them about the important skills essential for school counselling.

Many school counsellors are forced to do non-counselling activities. Their non-counselling skills are developed better compared to their counselling skills. The school counsellors themselves have confusions regarding the comprehensive set of skills he or she should possess as a school counsellor. Amatea and Clark (2005) found that, the school administrators were with a viewpoint that the school counsellors' main role was as a member in the administration. Mason (2010) established in that the school counselling programmes

can be executed more successfully if the counsellor possesses some leadership skills. Bell, E (2006) mentioned in her article that the counsellors need to have a complete understanding of all the skills including competence in skills like general and information management, advising, advocacy training etc. Though these are found in majority of the cases, there are people who believe in the primacy of only counselling skills for counsellors.

3. Skills Identified by the Researchers

This research article specifies the following skills as essential for a school counsellor: The list is based on the work of several researchers and experts including publications of ASCA, Bell,E (2006), Mason (2010). The researchers conducted in-depth interviews with a few counsellors who have been working in the field of school counselling in order to finalise a list of skills school counsellors should possess. The researcher finalised 19 skills, which were necessary for a school counsellor. Following are the skills finalised by the researchers which counsellors have to be aware of as being essential for their effective job performance.

- *Empathy*: Skill in understanding the feelings, emotions and thinking from the client's view point or not being too much or too less concerned.
- *Listening*: Skill which includes hearing and understanding what exactly the client is saying and how he /she is saying it.
- *Communication*: Skill which includes both verbal and non-verbal communication. An appropriate vocabulary has to be used right from the beginning of a counsellor's career. The non-verbal cues help to better understand the situation.
- *Observation*: Skill of not just the act of watching but to make an inference from the things we experience or see.
- *Problem solving*: Skill related to finding a solution to a problem.
- *Planning*: Skill which includes the ability to look forward to the future including avoiding the hardships that may come in between.
- *Organising*: Skill related to the ability to channelize energy and time fruitfully.
- *Implementation*: Skill related the ability to convert a plan into action.
- *Collaboration*: Skill to function as a member of a team which includes the teachers, parents, management and the community and along with whom he/she defines and finds solution to a problem
- *Evaluation*: Skill to systematically assess the process of counselling followed in a particular case/s
- *Use of technology*: Skill in the use of machines and other modern devices in order to ease the school counsellor's duties. Examples like using computers to keep record of the students, use of voice recorders etc. are included.
- *Leadership skill*: Skill in inspiring and motivating people.
- *Advocacy skill*: Skill of working with the teachers, parents and students to increase their awareness about counselling services.
- *Monitoring*: Skill related to observation and noting down of activities or sessions in a regular basis and assessing their appropriateness.
- *Time management*: Skill in effective use of the available time to solve a problem.
- *Consultation*: Skill related to collaborative process for getting information from the client or family or teachers and also for giving information as well counselling to them.
- *Analytical*: Skill related to the ability to articulate and conceptualize the problem and to find solutions for it.
- *Skill to work in a group*: Skill related to the ability to work in a team consisting of students, teachers, parents, community
- *Self-evaluation skill*: This is the continuous process of assessing professional growth of a counsellor (self).

This paper studied school counsellor's understanding about the skill requirement in counselling. The study was conducted in schools under Central Board of Secondary Education and Kerala State Education Board in Ernakulum district, Kerala. Descriptive research design was used. Only trained counsellors in the field of social work and psychology were included in the study. It was a Census study using a sampling frame consisted of counsellors in high schools and higher secondary non-residential schools within Ernakulum district in Kerala. The population consisted of 118 school counsellors. The self-structured questionnaire was distributed among all the 118 school counsellors both offline and online. The questionnaire included all 19 skills, which the researcher identified as necessary for a school counsellor.

Age	CBSE		KSEB		Total F (%)
	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)	
20-24	27	(43.54)	39	(69.64)	66(55.93)
25-29	33	(53.22)	16	(28.57)	49(41.52)
30-34	2	(3.22)	1	(1.78)	3 (2.54)

Table 1: Age of the research participants

Table 1 specifies the age range of the research participants of CBSE and Kerala State Education Board Schools. Almost all of the respondents belong in the group of 20 -24 years. At the same time, 3 out of the total 118 counsellors were above 30 years of age and most of the research participants were relatively young. Most of the counsellors employed by the schools seem to be young and inexperienced. There are no senior counsellors in these schools. This makes the understanding of the requirement of skills among this population very important.

Academic qualification	CBSE		KSEB		Total	
	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)	Frequency	(%)
MSW	37	(59.67)	39	(69.64)	76	(64.4)
MA/MscPsy	25	(40.32)	17	(30.35)	42	(35.59)
Total	62	(100)	56	(100)	118	(100)

Table 2: Academic qualification of the Participants

The above table shows the academic qualification of the research participants working in schools under both boards. Majority of the participants are Master of Social Work (MSW) degree holders with state government schools having MSW degree holding counsellors twice the number compared to those holding MA/MSc Psychology degrees. The social workers mainly deal with the bio psychosocial aspect of the problem while psychologists give emphasis to the behaviour and cognition of the individuals. Compared to students of Masters in Arts in Psychology, the Master in science in Psychology students focus on researches and the science of brain and the psychological processes. Importantly these are both professional courses which include counselling skills as part of their curriculum.

Level of Understanding	No. of Respondents (N)	Percentage (%)
Very High	108	91.52
High	10	8.47
Average	-	-
Low	-	-
Very low	-	-

Table 3: The level of understanding of school counsellors about the skills requirements

N	Mean	SD	Minimum Score	Maximum score	%
118	68.27	5.54	53	76	89%

Table 4: The counsellor understands about the skills of school counselling.
Maximum possible score-76

Table 3 shows the school counsellor's level of understanding about the skills they should possess as a school counsellor. Out of the total 118 respondents, 91.52 % of the counsellors have very high understanding and 8.47 % of the counsellors have high level of understanding about the skills of a school counsellor.

Table 4 indicates that the mean value of counsellor's awareness about the skills of school counselling is 68.27 and the SD is 5.54. It shows that the school counsellors have very high level of awareness about the skills of counselling. This proves that though the school counsellors employed in the sampled schools are very young professional, they have a high level of understanding of the skills required by school counsellors.

4. Conclusion

In India, many school counsellors are professional social workers as well as those trained in psychology. Counselling is a subject under the curriculum of both these disciplines. The main finding of the study is that all of them have a high awareness of the skill requirement of professional counsellors attached to schools. This is a welcome observation as the differences of trained counsellors and other offering counselling can be easily distinguished. This can prove to be useful to advocate the appointment of only trained professionals for this position in schools. The findings of this paper can also help administrators understand the skills required by counsellors and help them in enhancing these skills. Additional training can be imparted to enhance these skills in case of any gaps in the awareness levels,

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