

A Mental Health Approach to Counselling Intervention
in the School Setting
(A Study of pilot programmes implemented
in the city of Colombo and its suburbs)

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By

VINITHAMALI WICKRAMARATNE

B.A., Diploma in Education
University of Ceylon, Peradeniya
M.A. in Education
University of Colombo, Sri Lanka

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the programme of counselling intervention initiated by the Yovun Mithuro School Counselling Service in the city of Colombo and its suburbs. The major objectives of the study are two fold. The study attempts to ascertain the need for counselling intervention in the school setting in respect of the secondary school students studying in Colombo and the suburbs. It also attempts to evaluate the effectiveness of the programme of counselling intervention undertaken by the Yovun Mithuro School Counsellor in Colombo and the suburbs.

The survey method and the experimental method are the two approaches adopted in the study. A total of 166 students (males and females) constitute the main sample of this study. The students were selected from among those studying in grades nine, ten and eleven at six schools in the education regions of Colombo South, Gampaha and Homagama, who were receiving the services of the school counsellor. The age range of students included in the sample corresponds to the age range generally related to adolescence.

The survey method was made use of to obtain data to ascertain the need for counselling intervention in the school setting in Colombo and the suburbs.

Recorded data maintained at counselling centres and information collected through the student questionnaire, the teacher questionnaire and the counsellor questionnaire and through interviews with principals, counsellors and a few clients constitute the main sources of data.

Two hypotheses were formulated, based on changes in the client in respect of psychological problems and scholastic problems; and the study habits of the clients. These were tested using chi-square test of significance to ascertain the effectiveness of the programme of counselling intervention. The effectiveness of the programme in respect of academic performance of students is tested by difference in means using marks obtained by students at school half yearly tests.

The present study reveals that situational influences and determinants affect the life of adolescent students. This in turn could cause frustration and conflict in them, which necessitate them to seek support in the school setting. The need for counselling intervention in the school setting in Colombo and its suburbs is thus emphasised. This need is psychological as well as scholastic, as revealed by the two major types of problems encountered by students seeking counselling intervention. Based on the psychological and behavioural make up of

adolescents; the psychological problems of students fall into five major categories namely,

- a) Problems related to family relationships,
- b) Problems related to behaviour disorders, poor social skills and poor habits,
- c) Problems related to body changes,
- d) Problems related to emotions and
- e) Problems related to adolescent love.

The scholastic need for counselling intervention is identified in the light of the following problems,

- a) lack of motivation for studies,
- b) inability to concentrate on studies,
- c) inability to organise studies,
- d) backwardness in studies,

- e) poor memory and
- f) examination anxiety.

Each 'type' of scholastic problem is interrelated with other types of problems and the study makes it evident that the scholastic problems that tend to create a need for counselling intervention are much more complex than they appear to be. Infact these problems affect students not only in their studies but in all aspects of development (Chapter 5).

Factual and statistical information related to the investigation reveals that Yovun Mithuro programme of counselling intervention in schools in Colombo and its suburbs has performed an effective service. The programme of counselling intervention has been effective in bringing about a desirable change in students in respect of psychological and scholastic problems, and also in the cultivation of favourable study habits in them. However the findings did not show a significant difference in the academic performance of students consequent to counselling intervention (Chapter 5).

In addition to research findings the thesis brings into focus theoretical considerations relevant for a meaningful understanding of the need for counselling intervention. A review of literature on different appoa-

ches to counselling intervention and programmes of counselling intervention is also presented. This provides a conceptual basis and an overview of theory and the nature of strategy in counselling, effective in the school setting. Further the historical background to counselling intervention in the school setting in Sri Lanka and the strategies and framework of the programme of counselling intervention adopted by the Yovun Mithuro School Counselling Service is reviewed (Chapter 3).

Strengths and limitations of the programme are also brought to light (Chapters 5 and 6). Suggestions for enrichment of the programme are made in the light of the present study (Chapter 6).

The study highlights the implications of its findings for the enrichment of counselling intervention in the school setting and for further research in this field.