

Need Based Development of a School Counseling Program: Unconventional from Pakistan's Perspective

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Abstract: The aim of this study was to develop a comprehensive school counseling program which should be unconventional from the perspective of Pakistan where school counseling is not very common, while considering the needs of the school's students and later to evaluate its outcomes. The program has been developed in Army Public School – COD, Karachi, under Army Public Schools and Colleges Systems (APSACS), Rawalpindi, Pakistan. The school setting comprises of around 1900 students including teaching staff of 126. The age range of students is 3-16 years, studying from kindergarten to secondary level. The research design is descriptive in nature which comprise of naturalistic observation and questionnaire formats with convenient sampling. The survey result of teachers shows encouraging upshot. Parental rating is high for various counseling lectures designed for parents. Students' feedback for the programs arranged for them lies within high range and follow-up of the referred cases of students shows average improvement. Hence it can be concluded that through the introduction of a comprehensive counseling program along with the hiring of a trained counselor e.g. a clinical psychologist in a school setting positive changes can be expected in the form of enhanced awareness which can be practically applied for better educational, social and personal outcomes of the students in connection with teachers and parents as well.

Keywords: Awareness, counseling, school, teachers, parents & students

1. Introduction

In today's world of advancement it is becoming highly crucial to keep a check and balance on the growing perspective of youth, not just on their physical growth but also on their mental, emotional and character growth. School is a setting which provides the first roof for the over all development of youngsters and at the same time it is also the place where most of the academic, emotional, social and vocational problems arise. A student/school counselor can offer benefits not only to individual students with special needs but also to raise the working environment of the school on the whole. Such a school environment helps to cater the over all personality development of its students along with providing opportunity to the administration, teachers and parents to enhance their knowledge and skills in the areas of child and human development.

In Pakistan mostly schools do not have any counseling facility for the students and even few high schools or colleges which provide this facility mostly focus on career development only. But it is important to understand that before emphasizing on career often students' special needs have to be resolved first like anxiety, depression, shyness, stammering, aggression etc. and only then effective grooming of their individual personalities can take place. As Wasif (2010) reported in a newsletter article while interviewing the director and head of career counseling at Roots School System, Rawalpindi that psychological counseling is also required for the students apart from career counseling. A cross sectional study was conducted in US (Mason et al., 2002) to check the views of school counselors about counseling outcomes and their

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significance. Findings from the secondary school counselors of Iowa, Kentucky and Alabama revealed that those counselors who were not working under any comprehensive developmental guidance program felt the need of working as better counselors instead of being asked to focus on administrative and clerical activities which are of no importance for their area of work. Therefore it's important that the school administration itself should have a prior understanding about the significance of school counseling plan and only then such a program can achieve its realistic goals. The first step is to hire a professional counselor. Since in Pakistan no professional school counseling degree is available at the moment, therefore professional psychologist (clinical) can fulfill the need as they are trained in counseling with additional knowledge of human psyche from clinical perspective.

Schools' improvement plans mostly focus on instruction programs while sidelining the guidance programs where as both are interrelated. Instruction programs focus on specific competencies in subjects like social studies, English, math, science, languages etc. on the other hand guidance programs focus on the knowledge of self and others, career planning, personality improvement, educational-vocational development etc. although instruction programs are largest in number catering to students' competencies but they should not be more crucial than guidance programs as both should be of equal importance in terms of school reforms (Gysbers & Henderson, 2000a). Recently "South Carolina Education and Economic Development Act" was signed into a law in 2005, where it is stated that the counselors will spend time on guidance and counseling activities only and not performing administrative tasks; this enhances the fruitfulness of their jobs. The law further states that in South Carolina middle and high schools' student-to-guidance personnel ratio should be of 300-to-1 ("Bill Contains School," 2005).

According to an article of American Psychological Association (APA, 2010) Counseling Personnel contribute to school mental health in the following manner:

- For students to achieve high academic standards they help teachers to improve their class management and quality of instructions.
- Supporting students and their families in case of personal problems where the issues start affecting their academics, interpersonal relationships with peers, family and others.
- Responds to the need of sound mental health of the students, staff and families related to school violence, crime, traumatic events, natural disasters etc.
- Work with school staff and administration to implement school safety and improvement programs.
- Provide information and guidance on post-secondary options for training and careers as well as for financial assistance for further education.

As suggested by Mason (2006) an associate professor of counseling and student affairs; that in order to implement successful school counseling program there needs to be an in-charge of the whole program. The program can consist of the steering committee and school-community advisory committee. The steering committee will be headed by guidance personnel. The school-community advisory committee will be based on school and community representatives like school administration, the guidance program leader, teaching staff representative, student council representative, parent-teacher organization, mental health community, the business industry, and the media. Work groups can be formed to divide the specific tasks related to an assignment or activity.

Guidance program is vital for the students' growth as well as for the overall prospect of the staff's participation. Hence professional development activities should be organized for the whole school staff including administrators, counselors, faculty and staff. It is important to design a guidance curriculum which acts as a backbone of the whole program. Counselors can apply this curriculum in classes, counseling room or special school facilities. Personal, educational, career and social plans can be discussed either in individual or group counseling sessions. Individual planning activities helps in students' personal understanding about their growth and development and what appropriate measures should be taken.

The responsive services of the counseling program comprise of preventive responses for those students who are on the verge of taking unhealthy solutions to their problems, where as remedial interventions are for those who are already suffering from their unwise choices. Discussions can be done with the school staff, parents and students and parents can be referred to outside services and programs. The system support

component of the guidance program supports the total educational program-consultation with the faculty, to enhance the involvement of parents in school, to give input to curriculum development, community relations and professional development.

As far as distribution of time is concerned for the working of the school counselor Gysbers and Henderson (2000b) has suggested more time for guidance curriculum and responsive services in elementary school whereas more focus on individual planning and responsive services in high school.

Unfortunately the percentage of educated people in Pakistan is very low because number of school going children is also low which decreases further as one moves to higher classes. 26% of students reach higher education, 74% of them drop out because of various reasons according to a survey done by an NGO the Pole Star. A country where various problems occur in a child's life which affects his/her future prospects a comprehensive School Counseling Program (SCP) is a crucial requirement to provide holistic grooming for the students with an emphasis on both personality and career development. Apart from that such programs can benefit teachers and parents in increasing their awareness about various issues, and providing guidance for handling the problems.

2. Methodology

2.1. Sample

The sample was based on the students, teachers, administration and parents where ever required.

2.2. Materials

Specially designed forms for the referral of the students to the student counselor, forms for maintaining follow-up information, teachers' evaluation forms, presentation feedback proformas, and survey forms for teachers.

The survey questionnaire for teachers is based on 7 broad categories linked with the field of educational psychology particularly school counseling. The categories are a) awareness of teachers b) working of teachers, c) implementation by teachers, d) fields of work for counseling, e) unique aspects of SCP, f) outcome of SCP and g) suggestions.

Survey questionnaires for parents and students is based on a) liking of the program concept, b) relevance of the program to the issues concerned and c) easiness of implementation for the participants.

2.3. Procedure

The School Counseling Program (SCP) was initiated in October 2008 at Army Public School – COD, Karachi, Pakistan while considering it as an ongoing process. The whole program was designed through collaborative discussions between the student counselor (clinical psychologist) and the administrative head i.e. the Principal. Combined sittings were also ensured with the four section heads and teachers of the four school wings namely; pre, junior, middle and senior wings. The main focus was on the students with fruitful inclusion of the teachers and parents.

The program was divided into three phases:

Phase I

- Weekly visitation of the four wings of the school, based on the naturalistic observation of the students, teachers and school environment.
- Discussions and collection of information from the headmistresses and teachers of the respective wings.
- Identification of the prevailing problematic areas.
- Submission of report to the principal.

Phase II

- Planning of effective strategies to deal with the observed and reported problematic areas.
- Identification of the students in need of counseling.
- Involvement of headmistresses, teachers, and parents wherever and whenever required.
- Implementation of the designed strategies.

- Workshops/lectures for the students to enhance their educational and personality grooming.
- Recommendations for the teachers, parents and admin through workshops, lectures and seminars.

Phase III

- Termination of the on-going counseling cases.
- Effectively designed follow-ups.
- Report submission to the principal.
- Presentation of the Annual Report to the Managing Committee of the School.

3. Results

Table 1: Awareness of teachers

Question No.	Yes	No	No Response
2	89.36 %	6.38 %	4.25 %
8	59.57 %	23.40 %	17.02 %
11	95.74 %	2.12 %	2.12 %

Table 2: Working of teacher

Question No.	Yes	No	No Response
3	85.10 %	14.89 %	None
4	40.42 %	59.57 %	None

Table 3: Implementation by teachers

Question No.	Yes	No	No Response
5	89.36 %	10.63 %	None

Table 4: Outcome of Counseling Program

Question No.	Yes	To some extent	No	No Response
6 i	25.53 %	40.42 %	14.89 %	19.14 %
6 ii	40.42 %	36.17 %	14.89 %	8.51 %
10	51.06 %	29.78 %	14.89 %	4.25 %

Table 5: Fields of working for school counseling

Categories of Question No. 7	Percentage of Responses
Academic	29.78 %
Behavioural	89.36 %
Social	23.40 %
Emotional	40.42 %
Parental	34.04 %
Personality	34.04 %

Table 6: Unique features of APS-COD's Counseling Program

Question No.	Yes	No	No Response
9 i	78.72 %	17.02 %	4.25 %
9 ii	70.21 %	23.40 %	6.38 %
9 iii	80.85 %	12.76 %	6.38 %
9 iv	87.23 %	10.63 %	2.12 %

Table 7: Areas of improvement achieved

S. No.	Areas of Improvements Achieved
1	Behaviour
2	Personality
3	Academics
4	Emotional Issues
5	Social aspects of students
6	General improvement of environment
7	Enhanced teachers' awareness about various issues
8	Better Parental Guidance

Table 8: Suggestions by teachers for handling students' problems at school level

S. No.	Suggestions
1	Dealing with behaviour & academic issues
2	Teachers should try to be the problem solver
3	Personality grooming

4	Motivational activities
5	Minimizing burden of syllabus
6	No fear induction for exams & tests
7	Parental support
8	Counseling
9	Cooperation among all subject teachers
10	Extracurricular activities to provide a vent for their frustration
11	Deal with the root cause of a problem
12	Proper guidance & supervision
13	Follow-up of reported cases
14	Workshops for parents
15	Friendly environment with effective remedial measures
16	Sharing of effective ideas among teachers

Table 9: Feedback evaluation of counseling lectures for parent

S. No.	Questions	Response %
1	Did you like the program?	100 %
2	Was the lecture relevant to the topic?	97 %
3	Will the information help you?	98 %

Table 10: Students feedback about various programs

S. No.	Programs	% of Liking
1	Career Guidance Program	90 %
2	Mental Health Awareness Program	89 %
3	Lectures on personality and academic grooming of the students	92 %

Table 11: feedback about the students referred for counseling 2010-11

School Wing	Cases Reported	Superior Improvement	Average Improvement	Mediocre Improvement	No Improvement
Pre School	17	2	5	9	1
Junior School	21	1	10	9	1
Middle School	19	1	7	7	4
Senior School	25	1	16	4	4

4. Discussion

Discussion is based on the teachers' survey, feedback from parents and students about various programs designed for them and success rate of the students' follow-up results. The result of the survey conducted on teachers for gathering their knowledge and applicability of the counseling program table 1 shows that in category of awareness of teachers 95.74% of teachers think that schools should have counseling programs. 89.36% responded in affirmative that SCP enhances teachers' understanding about their students and 59.57% think that such programs are not commonly present in schools of Karachi. Table 2 shows second category which is that of working of teachers 85.10% have taken advantage of the school counseling program by referring the students to the student counselor and 40.42% of teachers have also utilized this facility for resolving their personal concerns. Table 3 is based on third category of implementation by teachers 89.36% of teachers have applied the recommendations given by the student counselor. Table 4 is for the outcome of the counseling program whether benefits have occurred for the students and teachers, it is revealed that 25.53% have replied in yes group and 40.42% in to some extent group that SCP has helped in resolving teachers' issues/problems, as far as resolving students' problems is concerned 40.42% have replied in yes group and 36.17% in to some extent group. Often teachers do not forward the students with relevant problems or as the turn over of teachers is high due to competitive market the teachers who start to understand about the resolution of the issues leave. Multicultural aspect of students with diversified socioeconomic status (SES) also creates challenging environment to deal with various problems of the students. In table 5 category of recommended fields for school counseling is shown, the highest rating of

89.36% appears to be in behavioural option whereas academic and social have 29.78% and 23.40% rating respectively, possible reason for this can be that if teachers own the responsibility of improving child's academics than they do not put the cases forward to the counselor on the other hand behavioural issues which often teachers find hard to tackle are forwarded to the counselor, however this must be understood by the teachers that academic and behavioural problems are often correlated. Sometimes teachers' own personal aspects also create behavioural issues in class for which appropriate guidance is needed. Students come to school under the shade of their social backgrounds and practices they have been practicing within their personal environments also affect their overall style of working and attitudes, such elements cannot be altered without cooperative attitude of the connecting elements. While discussing the unique features of APS-COD's counseling program in table 6, 78.72% think that it caters to holistic development of personality, 70.21% agreed that it covers teachers plus parents, 80.85% showed affirmative for focusing on low achievers, and 87.23% agreed on conveying the message of positive mental health through various activities. While discussing table 7 reference would be made to table 4 item 10 in which 51.06% teachers have replied in yes group 29.78% in to some extent group that school environment has improved after the introduction of the Counseling Program, as far as areas of improvement are concerned it comprise of general improvement of environment with enhanced teachers' awareness, better parental guidance, behavioural, academic and personality enhancement of students. In the report of the annual evaluation by the school's governing secretariat it is seen that they have acknowledged the positive application of the SCP and this year have also given Values Education Program which is integrated with the School Counseling Program. Table 8 shows suggestions by teachers which can help in handling of students.

Table 9 shows the result of the parents' feedback about the counseling lectures conducted for them, it appears that 100% liking was present for concept of the program as parents are in dire need of appropriate guidance for the healthy brought up of their children. 97% parents found the lectures related to the main topics and 98% of them felt that they can apply the gained knowledge in their personal life. As today's parents are mostly involved in the economical competition they are mostly unaware about the basic parenting required by the children of these days in order to build their social, cultural, educational and humanistic values. It is said when schools work in collaboration with families for support of learning, children are likely to succeed not just in schools, but all the way through life (Henderson & Berla, 1997). Programs planned to promote linkages between families and schools have shown effective result in compensating limited family resources and successfully altered the conventional relationship between SES and school performance (Henderson & Berla, 1997).

Table 10 shows students' feedback for the various programs and lectures arranged for them and it is seen that overall liking is quite high ranging from 89-92%. It means if various academic and behavioural grooming activities are designed students do find them informative and it can be assumed that many would also use the information in healthy practices as well. While considering table 11 the improvement percentage for 2010-11 in all the four wings of the school is mostly in average level followed by mediocre level. The reason of mediocre level improvement lies with the fact that a student counselor alone cannot work on the issues of the students whether academic, behavioural or personality as other connected elements of teachers, parents and social environment are also equally important. One fact which creates problems is that our educational system is highly knitted lacking flexibility which often does not allow enough time for counseling purpose. Apart from that result showing no improvement is based on the fact that few students had diagnosed problems like ADHD, personality problem, below average IQ or serious parenting problems, which is often directed for formal assessment and therapy. Developmental counseling programs are basically proactive and preventive in nature, helping the students to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes for normal developmental tasks. A research on school counseling effectiveness conducted by the California Department of Education showed that services of school counselor give positive impact on children, children with family problems reported being guided by the counselor; career counseling enhances the future prospects of the students.

5. Conclusion

In the light of the above mentioned results and discussion it can be concluded that through the introduction of a comprehensive counseling program in a school settings various positive changes can be expected like enhanced awareness about many social and educational issues. Guided awareness can be practically applied for better educational, social and personal outcomes of the students in connection with teachers and parents as well. In a third world country like Pakistan such programs can be designed to bring effective modification in the cognitive perceptions of the youth, because behaviour alterations always emerge from healthy mental capabilities which in turn create productive societies. In today's global environment where economic pressures have created highly capitalistic competitions which does not allow parents to give quality time to their children, thus the responsibility of grooming the youth for healthy survival has befallen on the shoulders of the school authorities.

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