



MENTAL FITNESS: IMPORTANCE OF FREQUENT COUNSELING FOR TEENAGERS

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Abstract

Teenage is the age between 13 and 19 whereas adolescence is the age between 10 and 19 years (WHO). Adolescents experience changes in body and behaviour in this age. Such confused children are in constant need for counsel. However, it comes as a surprise to parents as they are not well-equipped to handle these changes in their children. Mental health needs of teenagers is neglected by most of the parents. In this paper, we have discussed the importance of counseling for teenagers that will be helpful in identifying their problems at an early stage and to resolve them. 57 interviewees took the survey to furnish data regarding their counseling needs. The key findings and suggestions of the survey will be discussed in the presentation.

Keywords: *counseling, adolescents, psychoeducation, stigma, teenage*

INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a state of being in which a person manages his relationships as well as deals with stress in a productive way without comprising on health and functioning [1].

In contemporary age, the importance of mental fitness is rampantly verbalised in all age groups specially the adolescents. A number of literature works articulate the vitality of mental fitness in relation to educational achievements and efficiency, managing social life and performance at workplace [1]. Studies have linked poor mental health with poor grade points, lower graduation rates and weaker retention in academics [1].

In order to help students develop skills needed for psychological elasticity to influence their mental health, counseling and psychology education becomes an integral part of school life. The current age adolescents are vastly different from previous generations especially in their way of addressing mental health with their attitudes, beliefs and value systems [1]. A healthy state of body is linked with physical, mental, social and emotional well-being. The attitudes and beliefs of this generation are profoundly different from the past. In fact, this age group is considered to be at high risk because most mental health issues are triggered in adolescence or adulthood. World Health Organisation (WHO) defines adolescence as the age in life between 10-19 years. This is a transient period of life moving from dependent childhood to self-reliant adulthood. This age is combined with rapid changes in physical appearance along with biological changes. They experience a series of changes causing psychological maturation turning adult like in behaviour [2]. It is also an age of contractions, when all things seem unclearly defined, when values and beliefs undergo major changes, when all ideals and inspirations are severely analysed. This is



also an age where peer groups form an important part of the adolescents' environment. When faced with a problem, if an adolescent is not helped by the school, family or teachers, it is probable that they turn to peer groups for decision making, which may not be realistic. They enjoy being a part of a social group as they can interact with the external world and create opportunities for growth [5].

Adolescence is characterised by changes in all dimensions (physical, cognitive and behavioural), increasing expectations from parents and society, an age of uncertainties, new roles and responsibilities. They start devising their own theories and tend to be idealistic, which taking ownership of making decisions. This phase is also marked by enhancing sexuality when they become emotionally sensitive and are attracted to other people. They reduce their communication with their parents and come closer to their friends. They experience mood swings and confusion regarding their identity. It is a phase full of highs and lows marked by confusions regarding one's physical, emotional, social self and career. All these changes pose a number of challenges to them. The constant pressure to perform academically, to meet societal expectations, parents and teachers' demands. They are faced with challenges of coping with attendance, pressure of examinations, to prepare for studies abroad, to prepare for being self-reliant, to remain cool and resilient in face of adverse circumstances [5].

While some students have better coping strategies, some are unable to be resilient in the face of adversities. It leads to confusion, stress, frustration and insecurities. They become disillusioned, overwhelmed and are unable to cope. They try to reduce stress by turning towards alcohol or drug and as at a risk of developing substance abuse. In order to refrain them from falling prey to such negative strategies, counseling and psychoeducation becomes an integral part of the services provided by schools and colleges for the well-being of the students [2]

OBJECTIVES

1. To review various literature entailing the importance for counseling of teenagers.
2. To measure the level of counseling need among students.
3. To give suitable suggestions for improving mental health of adolescents.

LITERATURE REVIEW - Importance of Counseling for Teenagers

Self-harm is one of the top most causes of adolescents' death in India causing around 60,000 deaths annually in the age group of 15-24 years, a latest global study shows [6]. It becomes increasingly urgent for a country to address this issue at ground level and deal with its causes.

Professional help in the form of counseling has been available but put to limited use as young people generally prefer to seek help from their peers, causing them to stay away from professional help and seek adult counseling. Such unprofessional help in times of unexplained behaviour can cause them to make inappropriate decisions. At times, it resolves the issue superficially and does not go to the roots of the problem. However, counseling is defined as an interactive process where the counsellor is trained to give assistance to the counselee. It is a process used to help clients with their interpersonal and personal conflicts by a therapist. The aim is to bring about a voluntary change in the client by use of various counseling techniques [2].

However, counseling teenagers can be a difficult task as they show a great deal of resistance that becomes a barrier in their therapy [3]. In order to resolve this, a counsellor should be better equipped with creative techniques for expression that are therapeutic rather than stigmatising.



There are ongoing changes in an adolescents' physical and biological self. Moreover, the pressure put by the society, family and school can be overwhelming. Thus, teenage years can be difficult and confusing times of one's life. Due to this, they require to strike a balance between freedom and independence and reliance on counseling [Veach & Gladding,2007,3]

Counseling is essential to assist the adolescents in understanding their self and the changes happening around them. A counsellor must not advice, recommend or give philosophical talk. One must facilitate the teenagers in self-discovery by using creative techniques.

Counseling is significant to facilitate verbal and nonverbal expression of thoughts, feelings and emotions in young clients thereby helping them structure their thoughts and channelising them.

Adolescents have limited experience and lack of proper self-respect criteria. They need guidance to form their ideal life, polish their moral judgements and raise their level of conduct and conscience. Thus, school counseling becomes a fundamental instrument of modern society. It assists teens in forming a balance, enhances student-teacher relationship, creates a safe place for students to communicate [4].

Adolescents live in an age of rapid social changes and expectations. Traditional family values are declining, lifestyles have become lonely, there is a pressure of keeping up with social media trends, there is separation from parents for pursuit of dreams, all compounding to the stress of students. Owing to all these changes, it becomes important to provide counseling support to students on campus [1].

EXPERIMENTAL

A descriptive research design (a questionnaire) was used to systematically understand importance of counseling as perceived by teenagers. The universe of the study comprises of 57 respondents in the age group of 14 to 24 years, selected through simple random sampling.

RESULT

Table 1 Counseling awareness of the respondents

Sr. No.	Counseling awareness	Number	Percentage
1.	Awareness of benefits of counseling		
	Yes	49	86
	No	8	14
2.	Experienced unexplained behavioural changes		
	Yes	39	68.4
	No	18	31.6
3.	Sought counseling for such changes		
	Yes	16	28.1
	No	41	71.9
4.	Share problem with		



	Parent	20	35.1
	Friend	25	43.9
	Teacher	1	1.8
	Siblings	9	15.8
	Others	2	3.5
5.	Sharing problem helps you attain		
	Relief	32	56.1
	Solution	16	28.1
	Joy	1	1.8
	Acceptance	8	14
6.	Fearful of mental health stigma		
	Yes	10	17.5
	No	47	82.5
7.	Mental fitness as important as physical fitness		
	Yes	54	94.7
	No	3	5.3

Table 2 Perceived Counseling needs of the respondents

Sr. No.	Counseling needs of students	Number	Percentage
1.	School/college provides counseling		
	Yes	17	29.8
	No	40	70.2
2.	Should schools/colleges provide counseling		
	Yes	53	93
	No	4	7
3.	Counseling needs of the respondents		
	1	11	19.3
	2	3	5.3
	3	20	35.1
	4	11	19.3
	5	12	21.1

DISCUSSION

Table 1 shows that majority of the teenagers (86%) are aware about the benefits of counseling. 68.4% respondents experienced unexplained behavioral changes. However, only 28.1% respondents, i.e., 16 of them sought counseling for such changes. A huge number of respondents (43.9%) shared their problems with their friends, first. 56.1% of the respondents attained relief after sharing their problems and 28.1% attained a solution by sharing their problems. These solutions are from unprofessional sources and may not be appropriate to deal with the unexplained changes. A good thing to note is that 82.5% of the respondents are openly receptive about mental health fitness and not fearful of any stigmatization. 94.7% of the responses show that mental fitness is as important as physical fitness.

Table 2 explains the counseling needs of the respondents where 70.2% of the respondents say that their schools/colleges do not provide counseling. 93% of the respondents' demand that the



schools/colleges provide counseling to its students. 40.4% respondents fall under the category of high needs for counseling. Due to lack of counseling from educational institutes, there is a high chance that the students with high needs of counseling may go astray in absence of professional guidance.

SUGGESTIONS

Counseling plays a vital role for teenagers whilst they experience imbalance and uncertainty. Guidance in the form of counseling can help teenagers develop coping mechanisms and be flexible to change. Most of the teenagers now identify mental health as an important factor of their overall health. However, the study undertaken shows that only 28.1 % adolescents sought counseling in face of unexplained behaviour. These adolescents can be provided with therapy and counseling sessions at school/college. 'Breathing room', 'Talk meter', 'Music therapy', 'Social media models', 'The Paper bag exercise' [3] and '4-M Model' [1] (addressing the holistic health of the counselee) are techniques that can be used at school/colleges to calm them down in face of anxiety, uneasiness or unexplained behaviour. We need to promote the culture of being outspoken about mental health at schools and colleges so that teenagers do not hesitate sharing their problems.

CONCLUSION

Adolescence is an age with severe changes in the mind, body and behaviour of the people. Although it is a healthy period, there are various factors that put them at risk of adult diseases. These can be prevented by early intervention during this period. Teenagers are generally stuck between wanting freedom and still in need of guidance and counsel. In such a case, parents play an important role in guiding their children. However, there are many cultural barriers that restrict parental communication about adult talks of physical and physiological change [5]. Counseling teenagers is important as it helps them make better decisions about crucial issues of life [2]. The need is to educate parents and teachers to develop good relationship with children to ensure a safe environment for them. Educational institutions should equip themselves in order to guide, counsel, train and mould students' personalities to choose the right vocation and decision according to their capabilities and interest.

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