

The Transformational Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Guidance and Counseling

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ABSTRACT

Guidance and Counseling services have always been very crucial in a student's life. The importance of guidance and counseling in the present scenario of COVID-19 pandemic has augmented. In the current time, the uncertainty in every aspect has taken a toll on students' mental well-being. Thus, this has further added to the responsibilities of teachers to take care of the students' mental health and render guidance and counseling services simultaneously with the teaching-learning process. This article is an attempt to highlight the importance of guidance and counseling services in the current pandemic situation, especially, online counseling services as well as their challenges. It also discusses some techniques that can be adopted by the teachers and parents to help students remain calm and positive. Further, teachers can provide psychological first aid to the students. RAPID model of John's Hopkins is one such model for psychological first aid that can be used by the teachers to assist students in dealing with the emotional challenges.

Keywords: *Guidance, Counseling, COVID-19, Pandemic, Psychological First Aid, RAPID Model*

1. INTRODUCTION

Guidance and Counselling are among the essential aspects of every human life. Guidance and Counselling start right from the very beginning of childhood. Although both guidance and counselling are used interchangeably, both the terms have slight differences.

“Guidance is a process of helping individuals through their own efforts to discover and develop their potentialities both for personal happiness and social usefulness” (Rwechoka). Counselling, on the other hand, is the soul of the guidance programme and the wheel upon which guidance rotates (Egbo, 2015).

Guidance is a more comprehensive term. It is the assistance provided to an individual to manage her/his life's activities. Counseling is a more specific service. It is provided by an expert to an individual facing some kind of trouble in her/his life. Guidance can be provided by many agencies and organizations like parents, teachers, family members, community or society as a whole. Counseling is provided by some expert in the field. Guidance is preventive while counseling is curative. “The former refers to helping students' whole-person development, while the latter is frequently targeted at helping students with problems” (Lai-Yeung, 2013).

2. IMPORTANCE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING

Guidance and Counseling are needed at every stage of life. It is one of the crucial aspects of human life. Guidance and counseling help individual in various ways. Especially, during the learning phase, it plays an

important part in a person's life. The importance of guidance and counseling services can be understood with the help of the following points:

- **Adjustment** - Through guidance and counseling, pupils find it easy to get adjusted in a better way with their peers, in their school surroundings and in the society as a whole. Various maladjustment problems that may be faced by them can be identified and removed at an appropriate time through proper guidance and counseling services.
- **Self-analysis** - Pupils start analyzing their own personality through proper guidance and counseling and can work upon themselves to remove various flaws from their personality.
- **Decision making** – Guidance and counseling help in making proper choices in life by analyzing the situation as a whole.
- **Problem solving** – Individual can be assisted in solving the problems in a better way through proper guidance and counseling.
- **Career Planning** – Guidance and counseling are critical in career planning as the students can make career choices as per their interest and aptitude.

Apart from these primary functions, the list of importance of guidance and counseling is endless.

Importance of Guidance and Counseling in the present scenario

Although guidance and counseling services are vital for everyone in every situation, however, its importance got multifold in the present scenario of COVID-19 pandemic. The world is going through a crisis. The student community is facing some real challenges in continuing education from home. The uncertainty prevailed in the education and employment sector is leading to higher and higher cases of depression and suicides among youth. Among different professions, students and healthcare professionals were found to experience stress, anxiety, and depression more than others (Rehman et. al. 2020). In such situations, guidance and counseling can be of great help for the students of every grade level to overcome those challenges of education. However, during this crisis time, face to face or real-time guidance and counseling services are almost impossible to avail, so the virtual or online guidance and counseling programs came into being. The importance of guidance and counseling during a pandemic is discussed in the following paragraphs.

Firstly, and most importantly, the students are under depression due to the uncertainty prevailed in every aspect of life. They are unsure about their education, employment opportunities, etc. due to the disruption in their studies. In such a situation, the cases of depression at the global level are on a high rise. According to a survey published in The Economic Times (12 Aug 2020), conducted by International Labor Organization, 50% of young people across the world are possibly subject to anxiety or depression, while 17% are probably affected by it. Also, there is a sharp decline in employment opportunities due to the pandemic, which is resulting in increasing depression and suicides among teens and youths. In such an ongoing crisis, there is a need to keep a check on the mental well-being of youth. By providing counseling sessions, the stress, anxiety and depression of the students can be managed to some extent, if not completely removed.

Secondly, with the ongoing shutdown of academic institutions, schools and colleges are forced to switch to technology in order to not affect the education of the students. Those students who are from the lower socio-economic background are new to it and find it difficult to keep pace with the technology. In such cases, there is a kind of disruption in their education, which ultimately is leading to anxiety and depression. According to the same ILO survey report published in The Economic Times (12 Aug 2020), young people whose education or work has either disrupted or stopped completely are almost twice as likely to be affected by depression and anxiety as compared to those whose work or education has not affected. The report also added that about 73% of youths who were either studying or combining study and work before the onset of the crisis, experienced school closures though all of them were not able to transition into online and distance learning. Thus, in such a situation, it is important to

acquaint such students with the use of various software and applications used in online education by providing guidance and counseling services.

Lastly, the pandemic has brought the world to a halt. People are stuck in their places. In such circumstances, the students' exposure to the outside world has also been affected. They are skeptical about their future with respect to the opportunities available in furthering their education and getting employment. So, the responsibility of making them aware of the opportunities available in the education as well as the employment sector has been shifted to the guidance and counselling programs. They need to be kept up-to-date with the latest developments in the education and job market in order to keep them away from the shadows of hopelessness and pessimism.

3. CHALLENGES OF ONLINE COUNSELING

Although, in the present scenario, online counseling is getting more importance. However, it has its own challenges. Some of these challenges are discussed below:

- In the online counseling, there is a lack of non-verbal communication. Sometimes, the therapist might miss some non-verbal cues, therefore, there might be miscommunication between the counsellor and the counsellee.
- In online counselling, some serious psychological disorders may not be attended by the counsellors due to lack of proper physical counseling environment.
- There may also be threat of breach of confidentiality regarding the personal information of the counsellee as there may be some fake websites that can hack the data.
- Online counseling might be difficult to avail in the emergency or critical situations or for the patients with severe clinical conditions.
- The use of technology in online counseling might be another concern for some people. The counsellor as well as the counsellee both need to be competent enough for online counseling. Also, technological glitches during the counseling sessions might also be frustrating.
- There are no regulatory guidelines and codes of conduct for practice for online counseling which may lead to ethical issues.
- There may be issue of getting aid strictly from a professional counsellor. Anyone from anywhere can treat anybody without any validation.

4. GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHERS

In the normal routine, teachers mostly focus upon their teaching-learning process, although they also perform many other functions. But these many other functions have got manifold in the current scenario. During COVID-19 pandemic, guidance and counseling have emerged to be the essential function of teachers besides teaching. The responsibilities of a teacher have become multifarious. Although the techniques for providing guidance and counseling may sound to be general. But each level has a diverse set of students with different age groups and requirements. So, the techniques for each level are discussed separately.

For Primary Level:

At this level, students are quite young, and teachers need to assist them in every aspect, especially during these times when there is no face to face mode for classes and teachers cannot meet them in person. Some of the techniques that can help teachers in providing guidance and counseling at this level are discussed below:

- First of all, teachers need to create a comfortable and cordial environment where young children do not feel any pressure of learning in this new situation. For this, there is a need for regular communication between the teacher and the learners.

- Teachers should not burden the students with a plethora of assignments and extensive learning hours. As students are new to this teaching-learning environment, they should not feel overburdened in the initial phase. Otherwise, they would start feeling disengaged and would not be able to keep up with the new trend.
- At this age, students are relatively new to the use of technology, and they need to be guided in this direction. Teachers should help them in making efficient use of technology. They can also share videos that can help students in learning the same.
- Teachers need to create a safe and caring online learning environment where learners can discuss their issues personally with the teacher through mail, messages or any other mode.
- Teachers should also stay connected with the parents/guardians of the learners so that if the students are going through any problem, then they can work with the parents in resolving that issue.
- Teachers can also collect feedback from the parents regarding teaching methods, study materials, assignments, etc. and can also get information regarding students' involvement by conducting surveys through google forms, emails, etc. As per the data collected through those surveys, teachers can perform the required remedial work.
- For those students who are disengaged and do not attend the classes, teachers should contact personally with their parent/guardians and try to resolve their issues by providing them with a comfortable environment.
- A teacher should also be in contact with the school counsellors and can take their help for those who require professional counselling for their issues.

For Secondary Level:

At this level, students enter into their teenage, and they already go through developmental and identity crisis. The inexplicable and perplexing pandemic has worsened the situation for them as there are facing new changes which are being made in the education system. They may find themselves unable to adjust and adapt to this new lifestyle. Thus, the role of teachers become much more crucial in this situation. Some of the techniques that can be used by the teachers for this age level are discussed below:

- The foremost thing for a teacher to do is to be in regular communication with the students and maintain a healthy relationship with them so that they do not feel detached from the teaching-learning process.
- Apart from the group class meeting, the teacher should also be able to identify those who are not engaged in the class due to numerous reasons and should contact them personally. This will help them to identify the problem student might be going through and provide the necessary assistance. The teacher should be available for the students so that if any student tries to approach the teacher to discuss any issue(s), then he can easily do that.
- At this age, students are already in a dilemma due to the transition from childhood to adolescence, on top of that, due to this pandemic they may find themselves unable to cope up with the current situation. In such circumstances, they may slip into depression. Thus, teachers need to make them comfortable with this new situation. Apart from just teaching, they may also talk to them informally to reduce their stress and give the advice to remain optimistic about the future. They may also give them suggestions like performing yoga, physical exercises, etc. that may help them stay optimistic and hopeful by sharing their experience and anecdotes. Everyone loves a storytime.
- During these challenging times of pandemic if the adolescents are not given proper guidance and counseling to cope up with the changes, then they may indulge in unethical practices like substance abuse, drug addiction, misuse of technology, etc. to escape from the situation and deal with their stress and anxiety. Thus, there is a need to guide and counsel them appropriately and make them optimistic towards a better tomorrow. Teachers in this regard can give a shot of motivational talks in between. She can ask the students to share a motivational quote with the rest of the students in the online class; this will make the class interactive as well. Students can be coaxed to follow their hobbies in free time and unleash their hidden talents.

- Teachers also need to be in touch with the parents so that both can work in coordination to help the students deal with problems of adolescence and the pandemic simultaneously. Suppose any student who seems to be disoriented, then parents and teachers should try to resolve that problem. And if required a professional counsellor or the school counsellor can also be approached to resolve the issue. Thus, teachers should also be in contact with the professional counsellor.
- There may be some, especially from the lower socio-economic background who find themselves handicapped in handling the mobile devices. A teacher should identify those and personally contact them to give assistance and help them with the use of technology.

For Higher Level:

Students of higher education are facing the wrath of the pandemic as it is the turning point of their career, but the world has come to a standstill, as if everything is suspended in limbo. There seems to be no hope for them as there are no career opportunities currently. Thus, teachers need to play a role of guide and counsellor as well to bring them out from this gloomy dubious phase. Some suggestions for the teachers are discussed below:

- Generally, at this level, most students are not engaged with the classroom activities or with the teachers much. But, as traditional education has transformed into online education, the teachers need to get involved with every student and should provide them with personal assistance if the need arises. This is the best time to make the online classroom interactive.
- To keep the students involved in the teaching-learning process, the teacher should encourage them to prepare their study material, assignments, projects, notes, etc.
- Most of the students are disillusioned because of the shutdown. During this time, teachers need to play the role of a counsellor as well. Teachers can conduct group or individual counselling sessions for those in need and can also take the help of a professional counsellor if the situation demands.
- Teachers should take up the role of academic advisor for the students by giving them advice related to their career and further educational opportunities. They should also keep them updated with the current opportunities in the employment sector.
- Teachers should be in constant touch with the parents/guardians of the students for regular update of their academic performance and also their mental well-being.
- Teachers should help the students in keeping their knowledge up-to-date by referring them to different webinars, e-workshops, etc. organized by various institutions.
- Teachers should invariably motivate the students to see this period as an opportunity to uncover and put an edge on their talent. Stimulate them to develop the necessary skills, boost up their personality and prepare themselves to enter into the professional world.

5. GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING TECHNIQUES FOR PARENTS

During this time of pandemic, when staying at home most of the time is the new normal, parents can play a crucial role in taking care of their children's mental well-being. Parents should provide necessary assistance to their children in coping up with the new lifestyle of the pandemic and at the same time keeping their education unaffected from the impact of this new lifestyle. Here are some techniques for the parents by using which they can help their children manage the stress and overcome problems:

- Parents should stay in touch with their children. They should talk to their children regularly. Children should know that parents are available to discuss any issues, problems, or anything, be it personal or related to their education and career.
- Parents should listen to their children patiently, without being judgmental or immediately jumping to any conclusion. If the children trust that they can be heard patiently without being judged, then only they will be comfortable in pouring their hearts out to the parents.

- Parents should encourage younger children and teenagers to spend some time on their hobbies and do some stress-reducing exercises like writing, painting, crafting, playing indoor games, etc.
- They should talk about the ongoing situation and help them understand that the situation is not so bad, and it can be handled with some appropriate measures.
- For younger children, parents should maintain a routine for their studies so that they are in touch with their education because it is easy for young children to get distracted from their studies.
- For children studying in secondary and higher secondary classes, parents should help them in providing career guidance and counseling services and also ask them about their choices and interests.
- They should also be observant regarding any subtle changes in the emotional state of their child. They should notice their behavioural patterns, and if some disorientation from the normal behaviour is suspected, they should talk to the child and contact their teachers and professional counselors if required.
- For grown-up and college-going students, parents should give them space and at the same time maintain a cordial relationship with them so that they do not feel intruded and also feel comfortable in talking about their issues with them.
- Parents should encourage the children to stay connected with their classmates so that they do not feel isolated from their class and can maintain healthy relations with their classmates in this new normal also.
- For younger children and teenagers, parents should have a check on the use of technology as those age groups are more prone to the misuse of technology. Parents should guide them for the same and discuss with them about the use and misuse of technology.

6. TEACHER AS A PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID (RAPID Model)

In the present time of COVID pandemic, the role of teachers become crucial in pulling out students from the depths of anxiety and stress. Teachers can act as psychological first aid for those facing any emotional challenges. Although, psychological first aid is generally provided by the professional counsellors, in the present precarious circumstances, teachers need to take up this responsibility also to help the students in taking care of their mental well-being.

Psychological First Aid is the early intervention approach used during or after any event that creates a negative impact on the mental well-being of an individual. It aims at providing psychological assistance to a person in need to cope up with the emotional turmoil and reduce the traumatic effects in the aftermath of that incident. Historically, Psychological First Aid is a concept that can be traced to an article published by the American Psychiatric Association in 1954 which acknowledged the need for an acute intervention to alleviate human stress “of severity and quality not generally encountered due to the ‘forces of nature or from enemy attack’” (Wong, 2020). Thus, psychological first aid attempts to bring out an individual from the mental trauma that she/he might be facing during or after an undesirable event.

RAPID PFA model is one such attempt that provides psychological assistance to individuals going through some emotional turmoil by following proper steps. This model was developed by George S. Everly Jr. at Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health. It is an empirical-based approach to psychological first aid. The steps of the RAPID model are discussed below in detail:

Reflective Listening: First of all, establish rapport with the person in need of psychological first aid by asking questions and showing empathy towards that person. The person should not feel intruded by the questions; instead, the questions should be asked to build a rapport and to make the person feel comfortable. After building the rapport, the person will feel comfortable in opening up his/her situation to the person providing assistance. This requires the ability to listen actively.

Assessment: After listening patiently to the survivor/counselee, there is a need to assess the situation. There may be a different kind of survivors/counselee like those who are resilient enough to deal with the trauma by their own; there may be some who are distressed at the current situation but are resilient and can deal with the

situation with little assistance. There may be some who are really in a bad state and need the help urgently. In this way, listening helps to identify the degree of assistance to be given based on the category of the survivor, and in this case, the students/counselee.

Prioritization: After assessing the category of the survivor/counselee, priority is set depending upon who requires the help urgently, who is at the higher risk of mental trauma.

Intervention: During the intervention, the survivor/counselee should be provided assurance that things will get better. There may be task orientation for the survivor/counselee, (s)he can be educated, normalized regarding the event or incident so that the things can be prevented from getting worse.

Disposition: After the intervention, if the survivor/counselee seems to be able to handle the situation her/himself, then the task of the psychological first aid is complete. The aid can meet the survivor/counselee for a follow-up to know about the situation after the intervention. Sometimes, a second follow-up may also be required.

RAPID model of psychological first aid can be used by the teachers for those students who are facing some emotional challenges. Teachers can organize personal counseling sessions for such students and follow the steps of the given model. As students may find it easy to open up to their teachers rather than to a professional counsellor who is a complete stranger to them and also teachers are in regular contact with the students. Thus, teachers can be the best counsellors for them.

7. CONCLUSION

Guidance and counseling services have emerged as the much required in the current scenario. For helping students deal with the problems of education, employment, etc. during these trying times of COVID-19 pandemic, teachers need to don the hat of a counselor too. They should provide psychological first aid to the students in case of any emergency. Parents should also help the children and coordinate with the teachers in maintaining the optimism around them and maintain a cordial relationship with their children. In this challenging time, there is a need to provide emotional support to the students so that they can come out of this challenge triumphantly without harming their mental well-being. And that is the most significant achievement for a teacher to bring back the class, after the pandemic, mentally healthy and sound.

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