

## **COUNSELLING INTERVENTION IN THE SCHOOL SETTING IN SRI LANKA - ITS NEED**

VINITHA WICKRAMARATNE

### **1.0 Introduction**

Education both as a concept and as a process is very susceptible to time and place. Throughout history it has been influenced by social, economic, political and other pressures, but it has been considerably moulded in the last few decades by accelerated changes in intellectual and social dimensions. There had essentially been a swing away from emphasis on 'subject' and 'curriculum' towards 'learning' and 'needs'. In fact over the years education has come to mean more than mere instruction. It entails providing for the adequate personality development of pupils by satisfying their basic psychological needs. It is recognised that if the school is to help children achieve their highest potential it must feel concerned when emotional disturbances in pupils hinder the fulfilment of this purpose. The current situation in education demands specific planned effort of the school to meet the needs of the student who seeks to escape from an emotional harassment and those who expect to learn adjustive attitudes or behaviour. Therefore counselling is so rapidly becoming a necessary part of the educational structure the world over.

The purpose of a counselling and guidance service in a school setting is to help the individual student to discover one's needs, to assess potentialities gradually, to develop life goals that are individually satisfying and socially desirable, to formulate plans of action and to proceed to their realisation. The counselling process is the medium through which all guidance services are brought to bear upon and serve the individual. A person to person contact characterises the counselling process and effective counselling is definitely structured and provides for a permissive interpersonal relationship. This allows the client to gain an understanding of himself/herself to a degree which enables him/her to take positive steps in the light of his/her orientation.

A simple illustration will help to clarify further the concept of counselling as is interpreted today.

Miss 'X' a girl studying in Year twelve in a government school in Sri Lanka may be feeling bewildered and hurt because her mother has married again. She cannot accept her stepfather in her deceased father's role. As a result she feels dull at home and is unable to concentrate on her studies. She is not developing interests with friends of her age. She is doing nothing to pull herself out of this despondency and she is rejecting her mother's efforts to help her. Attempts on the part of her elders to tell her to pull herself together have not met with any degree of success. She will not be able to pull herself together, until she has come to terms with her feelings, understood what has happened, realised that no invisible force is going to alter the situation and accept that no one is trying to hurt her. Besides it is necessary that she understands that it is in her power to make the best or the worst of this situation. A

sense of perspective will not come until Miss 'X' feels secure in herself and in the people she needs. This security may not come until she has expressed her pent up emotions, anger and frustration. The counsellor's role is to provide the conditions in which Miss 'X' can begin to express her real self. The counsellor does not tell her to be sensible. The counsellor shall not try to repair an inability to make relationships with people, because Miss 'X' has never found this difficult. The counsellor shall try to help Miss 'X' release and use her own resources for coping with life and take some constructive action on her own behalf. Miss 'X' does have resources of her own and she is capable of taking action. By taking responsibility herself Miss 'X' develops and strengthens her ability to cope with difficult situations, an ability which will stand her in good stead when she is an adult. She has not had her problem solved by someone else, which will prevent her learning how to solve problems. Through her relationship with the person counselling Miss 'X' has faced her problem, she has worked through her feelings and she has learnt something useful about herself and the world. The goal of counselling as is clearly illustrated therefore is to bring about a change in the behaviour of a counsellee, so as to help the counsellee to lead a more productive and fulfilling life within the constraints and limitations of the society in which one lives. The setting in which such change becomes necessary and desirable is essentially in interpersonal relating situations such as the family or the academic setting - the school.

The need for counselling intervention in the school setting is emphasised today in the context of changes taking place in the socio-economic structures of many nations especially in relation to the family setting.

So many children at school particularly in the developing countries seem to battle against many odds such as a single parent, unemployment, chronic ill-health, over crowded and inadequate housing, poverty, lack of care and understanding.

In fact the pace of social change and the loss of traditional support and signposts for conduct have led to increased confusion and conflict of values in many countries including Sri Lanka. Besides changes in the structure and organisation of the school have created a need for counselling in the school setting. Especially with the rapid increase in school enrolments and the necessity for educating all the children of all the people, the need for providing in the school an atmosphere in which the problems of the individual child must be met, has become very important. The fact that there has been a shift of emphasis from the subject to the child has necessitated the introduction of a new spirit into school practice. The need to promote subjects and develop children is essentially recognised today. In fact the demand for counselling intervention in the school setting is based on the firm conviction that the school should effectively provide for individual differences in abilities, aptitudes, interests and needs. This implies that all aspects of a student's development - physical, social, emotional, intellectual, vocational and recreational must be considered. Society needs more men and women who are not only masters in their specialised fields but also human beings who know how to be wise and how to live lives that are satisfying and self-rewarding.

Moreover the scientific movement in education that has brought about techniques for various types of educational measurement has made it possible to focus attention on the individual student. The acceptance of the educational philosophy which has attempted to develop an awareness of pupils as unique individuals has necessarily contributed to the demand for intelligent guidance for all children. While recognising that there is a growing need to counsel all children at school, preparation for later life in the world outside the school is considered within the range of activities of the schools. All these factors have made it necessary for schools in Sri Lanka as well, to give due attention to the matter of preparing the pupils to make a satisfactory adjustment to the world in which they live and will live.

The earliest indication of an organised attempt to introduce guidance services in relation to the school setting in Sri Lanka is in 1957. Circular No. 10 of 1957 issued by the Director of Education laid down the general pattern of the guidance programme in schools. It emphasised vocational guidance as the focal point of the school guidance programme. However this programme came almost to a standstill in early 1970's. There is no evidence of guidance services being provided in the school setting until the 1980's.

The Evaluation, Guidance and Research Unit of the Ministry of Education was formed in July 1983 and the Guidance and Counselling Programme of the Ministry was to be carried out by this unit. However when Evaluation and Research activities were handed over to the National Institute of Education, this unit became essentially responsible to implement the Guidance and Counselling programme of the Ministry. Educational Guidance and Counselling is the major concern of this unit. At the start however sufficient funds were not available to the Ministry to launch an ambitious programme in counselling. Hence the Ministry decided to collaborate with the National Youth Services Council in inaugurating a counselling service. A programme of counselling intervention in the school setting was inaugurated by the National Youth Services Council in the year 1984. At the beginning this service was confined to a few schools in Colombo and its suburbs. The number of students seeking assistance at these centres and the type of problems these students faced brought into focus the need to expand the counselling services of the Ministry. Hence, while the counselling services planned and organised by the National Youth Services Council continued to expand, the Ministry of Education too decided to introduce a counselling service to selected schools in the Bandarawela, Colombo, Galle, Kandy and Ratnapura education regions, as a separate parallel service.

The need for a programme of counselling intervention in the school setting was indeed a long felt necessity in Sri Lanka. Hence the programme of counselling intervention in the school setting inaugurated by the NYSC constituted a landmark in the history of guidance and counselling. However this plan of action was not initiated consequent to experimental action or research. In fact research in the field of counselling in Sri Lanka seems negligible. Taking into consideration the growing recognition of the need to obtain maximum returns from money invested in fields

related to education; research in the field of counselling in Sri Lanka is of critical significance. In the light of these considerations therefore it is clear that the nature of the need for counselling intervention and the intensity of this need be clearly identified, so that systems and techniques relevant to the needs be adopted and adequate provision of facilities be made. An analysis of the need for counselling in the school setting thus constitutes an important base in a comprehensive study of school counselling.

## 2.0 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to ascertain the nature and the degree of the need for counselling intervention in Colombo and the suburbs. The need for counselling intervention in the school setting is ascertained in the light of the problems encountered by students in the sample who had sought the assistance of the school counsellor. It should be noted that identification of the need for counselling intervention in general is not attempted in this study. Further an attempt is made through this study to disclose the factors that have been responsible in bringing about these problems.

## 3.0 Sample and the Methodology

The study is based on a sample of 166 students (males and females). The students were selected from among those students studying in grades nine, ten, and eleven at six schools in the Education regions of Colombo South, Gampaha and Homagama and who were receiving the services of the Yovun Mithuro School Counsellor of the respective school. It was in these schools that the Yovun Mithuro School Counselling Service was inaugurated at the initial stage in the year 1984. The study was confined to these schools essentially with the objective of maintaining some form of homogeneity in the sample.

The sample includes self-referrals as well as non self-referrals. The age range of the students included in the sample is 13-19 years and the mean age of students in the sample is found to be 15.9 years. It is important to note that this age range coincides with the age range generally considered as that of adolescence.

The sample is analysed according to sex, age and grade in Tables 1,2 and 3 respectively.

**Table 1 : Number in the sample by sex**

Sex	Number	per cent
Boys	79	47.6
Girls	87	52.4
Total	166	100.0

**Table 2: Number in the sample by age**

Age in years	Number	per cent
13	2	1.2
14	15	9.0
15	47	28.3
16	47	28.3
17	44	26.5
18	9	5.5
19	21	.2
Total	166	100.0

**Table 3 : Number in the sample by grade**

Grade	Number	Per cent
9	55	33.1
10	63	38.0
11	48	28.9
9,10,11	166	100.0

The survey method was made use of essentially, to obtain data relevant to analyse the need for counselling intervention in the school setting in Colombo and the suburbs. First hand information about the problems and difficulties of the clients was obtained by the researcher, from data sheets maintained at the counselling centres in respect of the clients who obtained the services of the school counsellor. Besides relevant information was collected through a student questionnaire, teacher questionnaire, counsellor questionnaire and interviews with principals, school counsellors and a few clients.

#### 4.0 Discussion of Results

The study reveals that situational influences and determinants affect the life of adolescent students. This in turn 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. Of the problems encountered by clients 51.87 per cent are psychological and 48.13 per cent are scholastic. Psychological problems outnumber scholastic problems by only 3.74 per cent. Both types of problems are thus seen important from the point of view of students studying in the grades nine, ten and eleven.

##### 4.1 The Psychological need

On the psychological and behavioural make up of students 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.

Table 4 gives the rank order (from 1 - the highest number of problems to 5 - the least number of problems) of the five categories of psychological problems as determined in terms of number of persons in percentages reporting each category of psychological problem.

The issues associated with each category of psychological problems discussed in the following pages further elucidates the nature of the problems and needs of students seeking the services of school counselling centres.

##### (a) Problems related to family relationships

According to Table 4 it is evident that the psychological need for counselling intervention in the school setting in Coloombo and the suburbs has to a considerable extent arisen due to problems related to family relationships. Of the psychological problems 25.6 per cent of the problems of all students and 33.3 per cent of the problems of female students is the result of issues associated with family relationships. These issues while being related to family dynamics on the one hand are also related to important aspects of adolescent development.

**Table 4 : Rank order of categories of psychological problems of students receiving counselling intervention**

Problem categories	All students			Male			Female		
	Rank	N	%	Rank	N	%	Rank	N	%
Problems related to body changes.	5	20	16.0	2	15	24.2	5	5	7.8
Problems related to emotions	3.5	24	19.2	4.5	10	16.1	2.5	14	22.3
Problems related to adolescent love.	3.5	24	19.2	4.5	10	16.1	2.5	14	22.3
Problems related to behaviour disorders, poor social skills, and poor habits.	2	25	20.0	1	16	25.8	4	9	14.3
Problems related to family relationships	1	32	25.6	3	11	17.8	1	21	33.3
All categories		125	100.0		62	100.0		63	100.0

It is recognised that one of the central themes of adolescent development is the attainment of independence. The adolescent who moves towards physical and social maturity tends to resist strict control and interference by parents. The inability on the part of parents to recognise the importance of a child's growing psychological needs, tend to make the parents very strict in their relations with their children and this invariably cause difficulties that tend to create a need to seek the assistance of a counsellor. The findings of the study indicate that strict control, constant nagging and interference on the part of parents tend to create a parent-adolescent cleavage and this brings about problems and difficulties, for the young adolescent. This factor seems to have a greater impact upon the male students in the sample than upon the female students. This may probably be so because the desire to break off home ties is greater among adolescent boys than among adolescent girls.

Other issues associated with problems related to family relationships could be summarised as follows:

- (i) family disputes and strained relations among parents and siblings due to undesirable relationships maintained by parents and due to financial difficulties at home,
- (ii) separation of parents,
- (iii) lack of understanding between mother and child
- (iv) lack of adequate love and affection to child from home
- (v) departure of mother for employment abroad

It is revealed that such factors as separation of parents, lack of understanding between mother and child and lack of adequate love and affection to child from home, have created a need for intervention by the school counsellor more particularly among girls, apparently because of the relatively closer link the adolescent girls maintain with their families.

The data further reveals that distress caused by problems arising from departure of mother for employment is also essentially a problem affecting female students. In the absence of the mother the adolescent girl is made to shoulder the responsibilities of the family which leaves her with very little time to devote to her studies. Sometimes the father takes to liquor and in fact undesirable living patterns are created in the home. Sometimes the adolescent girl is kept outside the family with a close relative but problems are created for her that makes her most unhappy. In the face of the circumstances explained a much felt need is created for intervention by the school counsellor.

In the opinion of the teachers the following factors are indicated to be very important in creating a need for counselling intervention outside the family setting.

- (i) parents - especially the mother, being employed abroad.
- (ii) lack of time for parents to spare, to solve children's problems.
- (iii) lack of sufficient attention on the part of parents regarding their children.
- (iv) absence of a close relationship between parents and children.

Further the presence of such factors as

- (i) very low socio-economic conditions in the family; deplorable living conditions due essentially to financial difficulties and unsatisfactory nature of living patterns,

- (ii) presence of considerable complexities in the family setting leading to vulnerable situations,
- (iii) family problems - especially mother father conflicts,

indicate that the socio-economic conditions of some of the families living in Colombo and the suburbs appear least favourable to the inculcation of positive attitudes towards life in adolescent students. In the context of these circumstances the adolescent students attending school need a favourable arrangement in the school setting to help them out of the difficulties as and when they are unable to resolve their problems by themselves. Although the background factors that tend to create a need for counselling intervention in the school setting represent the view points of only 36 teachers working in the schools of the sample it should be noted that this data is in keeping with the general trends in socio-economic conditions related to the family setting in Sri Lanka.

Observations of the researcher, information given by teachers working in the schools of the sample and also the ideas expressed by the counsellors thus emphasise the importance of issues related to the family as being important to a great extent in creating a need for counselling intervention in the school setting. The study however reveals that there is a lack of adequate provision in the family setting to look after the interests of adolescent students. In fact in the opinion of experienced teachers and practicing school counsellors the immediate environment of the students far from lending support to the adolescent students studying in the secondary school in Colombo and the suburbs to resolve his/her difficulties; appear to complicate them. The principals of schools in the sample express the opinion that the parents themselves are much engrossed with their own problems<sup>2</sup>. These factors necessarily emphasise the need for intervention by a counsellor in the school setting. In fact Lindsay recognises the importance of counselling intervention in the school setting and points out that problems of young people could often be alleviated by the action of the school.<sup>1</sup>

- (b) Problems related to behaviour disorders, poor social skills and poor habits

Table 4 shows that problems related to this category affect students as a group and more particularly the male students.

The important issues associated with problems related to behaviour disorders; as revealed in the study are as follows:

the tendency to roam about elsewhere and go home late after school.

- \* stammering
- \* taking drugs
- \* heavy smoking

- \* feeling shy and being unable to interact with society

The low impact of church/temple upon pupils and unfavourable relationships with peer groups are two important social forces that appear to be responsible for the development of unfavourable behaviour patterns among adolescent students in Colombo and the suburbs.

However the study reveals, that with necessary guidance and counselling children could be made to develop social skills, that are socially acceptable and personally or mutually beneficial.

Mager and Pipe suggest that problem behaviour or lack of social skill in some areas may exist because the desired behaviour is not known or has not been taught, because the reinforcing conditions are not sufficient to encourage the behaviours, or because there is reinforcement for the undesirable problem behaviour<sup>2</sup>. A social skill may thus be missing because the child lacks information or the ability to perform the behaviour, because the environment does not provide sufficient encouragement for the behaviour even though he may know how to do it.

The general trends in socio-economic conditions in Sri Lanka in fact highlight the need to develop programmes to meet new social problems facing children and young people. It is recorded that the emerging social problems such as drug abuse and maternal deprivation are not being given sufficient attention. Hence the social environment far from supporting the development of desirable behaviour patterns seem to discourage it. The need to provide opportunities for students to learn desirable behaviour to help them to overcome deficits in social skills is increasingly recognised in Sri Lanka as well as elsewhere. In the face of these circumstances the need for intervention on the part of a counsellor in the school setting both as a curative as well as a preventive measure is necessarily emphasised.

#### (c) Problems related to body changes

It is generally agreed that the body changes associated with adolescence inevitably exercise a profound effect upon the individual. Male students in the sample appear to be affected to a greater extent by problems related to body changes than female students. Of the psychological problems of male students 24.2 per cent is the result of problems related to body changes whereas among female students only 7.8 per cent of the psychological problems are related to body changes. (see Table 4). Both male students as well as female students in the sample appear to be disturbed by being different from age mates in physical appearance. The students in this category are worried for being either too fat or too thin or they feel sad for being too short or for being bullied by friends for having feminine features. In fact 50 per cent of the problems that occur in this category are related to physical appearance and these problems concern both males as well as female students.

Homosexuality in adolescence is another important feature associated with changes in growth. However according to the findings of the present investigation the

frequency in occurrence of this type of issue is very low (only one of 20 problems in this category) and is confined to male students. It may be that the transient homosexual interests of most of the adolescent students in the sample are not much distressing so as to seek the assistance of a school counsellor. But since there is the probability of occurrence of this issue in five out of every hundred a counsellor in the school setting could serve a worthy function.

Being worried about masturbation is another important issue associated with problems related to body changes. Twenty five per cent of the cases that occur in this category are essentially related to this issue and is confined to male students. The researcher observes that male students who indulge in this habit have regarded this as a terrible and shameful act. These students seem to have been further confused by the information given in books and other printed material. In fact these boys seem to have been obsessed with the idea that they have done themselves some grievous harm and this has increased their guilt in doing what they had known to be 'wrong'. Although they were worried they did not dare to ask anyone because of their sense of guilt and also because they did not want to have their worst fears confirmed. They appear to have spent their lives in unnecessary misery. Observations of the researcher reveal that it had been the school counsellor who had relieved the boys of this misery. These findings show the importance of the need for intervention by a counsellor in the school setting in circumstances as described above.

Difficulties caused by being unable to control sexual feelings is also an important issue related to adolescent development. Of course in this particular sample it is an issue with which only two male students were concerned. But this suggests that the probability of occurrence of this type of issue is always there. Generally it is not the common practice in our society to discuss this type of issue with our elders. Nor do the elders recognise the importance of enlightening the youth regarding such issues. Hence the necessity for provision of facilities in the school setting to counsel those students who may be faced with this type of problem. Counselling intervention in the school setting could also be useful in such situations when students are faced with problems that arise due to lack of knowledge of physical changes associated with growth. The frequency in occurrence of this type of issue too is however low according to findings of the present investigation. But the need to counsel those students who may be faced with problems that arise due to lack of knowledge of physical changes associated with growth need to be recognised. In fact it is revealed that the development of a negative attitude in adolescent students towards the opposite sex is due to a lack of basic sexual information. Bell has pointed out that many boys and girls especially in the early years of adolescence do not gain proper instruction from parents, school or peers and torture themselves with unnecessary fears for being not properly aware of physical changes associated with growth.<sup>3</sup> In order to wave off such fears among adolescent students intervention by a school counsellor appears indispensable.

Fear, worry, anger and anxiety are the dominant emotions that have resulted in depression and feelings of inadequacy in students who have been prompted to seek the assistance of the school counsellor. The issues related to this category of problems appear to differ considerably from one individual to another. But a gender related variation appears to be evident. Issues related to girls are more about feelings of inadequacy caused by rejection, by fear of being rejected, feelings of absence of security and lack of recognition. Such tendencies however do not appear to affect male students. In fact since there is so much of variation in the different types of issues related to this category of problems it is difficult to come to a conclusion about the specific nature of the issues associated with problems related to emotions of adolescent students for whom the intervention of a school counsellor is needed. But the findings indicate that the need for intervention by a counsellor in the school setting to help students to face problems related to emotions and grow to greater maturity is an important consideration to be recognised.

#### (e) Problems related to adolescent love

Forty five point eight percent of the issues in this category of problems have cropped up because the person with whom one is in love does not reciprocate. It is evident that this is an issue with both sexes. Besides the investigation reveals that deprivation of the opportunity to meet the needs of expressing heterosexual love or fear of this opportunity being deprived brings about despair and difficulty to young adolescents. It is revealed that incidence of such issues are higher among female students than among male students.

Of the problems related to adolescent love 58.3% of the problems are with female students. Nevertheless findings of the study do not reveal that adolescent students either males or females in the sample have experienced psychological damage from more advanced expression of love especially petting and pre marital intercourse that could have severe and long lasting consequences. Of course with the available evidence it is not possible to conclude whether such problematic situations do arise or do not arise in the secondary school setting in Colombo and the suburbs. It may be that such situations are not revealed at school counselling centres. But the need to counsel students who may be faced with problematic situations associated with adolescent love should not be overlooked. In fact with reference to adolescent love, neither adolescents nor their parents need to wait until their problems reach a crisis stage and the problems are insoluble. Counselling intervention in the school setting could be considered both a means of solving problems and also a means of preventing them or at least preventing them from reaching a critical stage that could have a damaging impact upon the society.

#### 4.2 The scholastic need

The scholastic need for counselling intervention in the school setting is also to be identified in the light of the problems encountered by students who have sought the assistance of the school counsellor. These problems are classified as follows:

The scholastic need for counselling intervention in the school setting is also to be identified in the light of the problems encountered by students who have sought the assistance of the school counsellor. These problems are classified as follows:

- (i) Lack of motivation for studies
- (ii) Inability to concentrate on studies
- (iii) Inability to organise studies
- (iv) Backwardness in studies
- (v) Poor memory
- (vi) Examination anxiety

The rank order of categories of scholastic problems of students receiving counselling intervention as determined in terms of number of persons (percentage) reporting each category of scholastic problem is given in Table 5.

**Table 5 : Rank order of categories of scholastic problems of Students receiving counselling intervention**

Problem category	All students			Male			Female		
	Rank	N	%	Rank	N	%	Rank	N	%
Lack of motivation for studies	5	16	13.8	2	13	20.3	5.5	3	5.8
Inability to concentrate on studies	4	19	16.4	4	9	14.1	3	10	19.2
Inability to organise studies	6	7	6.0	6	4	6.3	5.5	3	5.8
Poor Memory	1	28	24.2	3	11	17.2	1	17	32.7
Backwardness in studies	2	25	21.6	1	21	32.8	4	4	7.7
Examination anxiety	3	21	18.0	5	6	9.3	2	15	28.8
All categories		116	100.0		64	100.0		52	100.0

The available data is not adequate to determine whether there is a gender related pattern in the incidence of different categories of scholastic problems. Taking the group of students in totality however the three most important scholastic problems encountered by students receiving counselling intervention are

- i. Poor memory
- ii. Backwardness in studies
- iii. Examination anxiety.

The inability to organise studies is in fact a scholastic problem among both male and female students of the sample although the percentage of persons reporting this category of scholastic problem is relatively low when compared with the number reporting other types of problems (see Table 5). However the observations of the researcher point to the fact that although the percentage reporting this category of scholastic problems is relatively low, the inability to organise studies is one of the fundamental factors responsible for all other categories of scholastic problems. In fact although the scholastic problems are clustered into different categories it is important to note that each type of problem is interrelated with another type of problem. For example it was revealed that,

- (i) three students who lacked motivation in studies were also unable to concentrate on studies,
- (ii) three students who lacked motivation in studies were also backward in studies
- (iii) four students who were unable to concentrate on studies had also poor memory
- (iv) five students who were unable to concentrate on studies were also backward in studies
- (v) five students who had poor memory also encountered the problem of examination anxiety.

Further the researcher sometimes observed situations where problems classified as scholastic were the result of emotional disturbances. For example the immediate problem that prompted one of the boys in the sample to see the counselor was that he could not concentrate on his studies. But the two major problems that plagued his consciousness were essentially psychological. Hence it could be seen that scholastic problems are much more complex than they appear to be and these problems affect students not only in their studies but in all aspects of development.

In the eyes of practicing teachers the competitive nature of the educational system of the country tends to create stress and anxiety in students. The researcher observed six situations in the sample where stress and anxiety in parents related to

academic activities was in turn transmitted to the students. The secondary school system as it operates in Sri Lanka today places much emphasis upon examination performance and anticipates high achievement levels. This necessarily generates a high degree of stress and fear in adolescent students. School life which generates stress in students has not only an undesirable impact upon performance of students but it is also psychologically damaging. Commenting on the effects of anxiety on the academic achievements of college students Spielberger points out that students who sought help during examination periods complained that anxiety made it difficult to study and interfered with their thought process during tests. Many students said they often 'knew' the answers to test questions but were not able to remember them because they 'blocked' or 'choked up' during examinations. The level of achievement of these students did not reflect their intellectual ability and it was apparent that test anxiety seriously interfered with their academic performance.<sup>4</sup> Intervention on the part of a school counsellor constitutes a well established means of communication for the student, thus helping him to relax and overcome stress. A school counsellor could also help parents to realise that it is far better to have a happy and well adjusted child who fits into the field that best matches his potential, than a frustrated, failing and miserable child who cannot live up to unrealistically high hopes of parents.

In the opinion of teachers the increase in attendance of students at private tuition classes and consequent lack of leisure for them has made life difficult and problematic for students. The absence of systematic assistance for slow learners in the class room, as pointed out by practicing school counsellors, is an important factor responsible for backwardness in studies. A programme of intervention by a counsellor in the school setting appears most appropriate not only to diagnose and rectify such problems but also to prevent the occurrence of similar problems.

### **5.0 Relevance of the findings**

'Adolescence is generally considered a time when we look for disorders.'<sup>5</sup> It is generally recognised that adolescence is a time when disorders are more liable to happen than in earlier years of life due to reasons both physiological and psychological. Where individuals are lacking in self confidence uncertain of their capabilities and having to adjust to major changes, there is likely to be a strong need especially among adolescents for support. The study being based on a sample of students (males and females) of the adolescent age group has brought to light many important issues relevant in respect of their age group, who need support in the school setting. The nature and the intensity of the problems of adolescent boys and girls in the city of Colombo and the suburbs are revealed. Besides, the factors that have been responsible in bringing about these problems are also disclosed.

The multiplicity and the complexity of the problems experienced by students seeking the services of the school counsellor point to the fact that there is in Colombo and the suburbs, a much felt need for counselling intervention in the school setting. It is important to note that this need is both psychological as well as scholastic. The information disclosed in this connection is useful not only in organising and expanding the programme of counselling intervention in the school setting, but also in

making overall provision in the school setting to assist adolescent boys and girls to live a full and effective life. It is recognised today that schools are institutions on which both remedial and also preventive efforts can be hopefully centered.<sup>6</sup>

The Yovun Mithuro School Counsellor largely serves the needs of pupils whose difficulties require adjustive or therapeutic treatment through a series of counselling interviews. The counsellor is in most cases interpreting his/her suggestions as that of a curative worker.

Although adolescents may not often be confronted with major difficulties or problems of complexity, it is important that their needs and problems be properly identified and met. A great majority of the adolescents do cope well with the problems of adjustment inherent in adolescence. But the present study has revealed that situational influences and determinants affect the life of the adolescent student and this could cause frustration and conflict in them. Literary evidence in relation to Sri Lanka as well as the survey of the problems of the clients who have seen the school counsellor reveal the nature of the gaps that ought to be filled in order to protect and promote the psycho-social well being of adolescent students in Colombo and the suburbs. As is revealed through the findings of the study the gaps are to be found both within and outside the school system. Of course further research in this connection could provide adequate direction for long term action. But findings of the present study reveal that immediate action should be taken at least to keep in check the growth in intensity of the problems that tend to obstruct the psycho-social well being of adolescent students in Colombo and the suburbs. In fact according to the special study - report UNICEF - Colombo 1985 it is revealed that preventive measures for growing social problems are not adequately pursued in Sri Lanka.<sup>7</sup> Taking into consideration these factors it is important that provision is made within the school setting not only to counsel students after personal difficulties are experienced by them, but also to assist students to make choices, plans and adjustments, before frustrations and conflicts lead them to unresolved difficulties. Further the services of a counsellor to enlighten students especially in respect of physical and emotional changes associated with growth and development of secondary school students is also considered important in the light of the findings of the present investigation. "The so called 'normal' boy and girl deserve much more attention from the counsellor than they usually receive".<sup>8</sup> According to Caplan the most effective manner of dealing with the emotional problems of children and adults is to develop preventive approaches which will diminish the probability that emotional disorders will occur at all.<sup>9</sup> Jones too is in agreement with this view and she advocates the establishment of a normal healthy 'preventive' counselling service.<sup>10</sup>

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