Psychological & behavioural problems in school students of Morang district

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Abstract

Results of structured and semi-structured interviews of 37 school teachers from 9 different schools of Morang has been presented in relation to existence of psychological/behavioural problems in their students. Data on 3911 students have been analyzed. The study shows that 1442 (36.89%) of students had some kind of problem. The list of conditions in decreasing order of incidence are: very slow to learn, irregular school attendance, suddenly degrading school performance, not able to concentrate and running away from school. The female/male ratio of students was 1:1.47.

Keywords: slow learner; behavioural problem in school; psychological problem in school; Nepal.

Introduction

Morang District lies in Koshi Zone of the Eastern Developmental Region. It lies in the Tarai belt adjoining Jhapa and Ilam in the East, Sunsari in the West, Dhankuta and Pachthar in the North and Bihar (India) in the South. The district headquarter is in Biratnagar, which is the second largest municipality of the country. It has a total population of 6,74,823 out of which 3,43,045 are male and 3,31,778 are female. Out of this, the total of children in school-going age is 1,85775.1 It has a total of 451 schools. There is a District Education Office (DEO), which has divided these schools into 19 different clusters and each cluster is looked after by a supervisor. These supervisors are responsible for the on-the-spot supervision and monitoring of the school activities and they act as the link person between the respective school and the DEO machinery.

The majority of the school teachers have not received teacher's training; furthermore training curriculum does not contain the *normal and abnormal development of children* and psychology of learning. So cases of psychological problems are not identified until the child reaches a critical condition. The child is just labeled as stupid and/or idiot, and punished physically. This not only causes friction between teacher an student, but also seriously hamper the psychological development and may cause the student to drop studies altogether. A large proportion of student's performance would significantly improve if teachers could identify psychological problems and provide appropriate counseling or refer to health care centre. This will not only stop children being bullied and tortured but help them to perform better in school.

Objectives of the study

This study aims at:

- probing into the awareness of the teachers into the existence of psychological problems in their students;
- finding out the type of problem present in the students.

Methodology

Thirty-seven teachers from 9 schools belonging to various health post areas of Morang District were given a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire contained the symptoms of various psychological and behavioural problems. The teachers were asked if they had encountered students with such symptoms in their class and if so, how many such students were there.

The schools were randomly selected at the various villages of project area and those contacted were class teachers. All together, data on 3911 students were collected, out of which 1407 were boys and 957 were girls and with the remaining number, the teachers were not specific about the gender.

The questionnaire also contained a question on how s/he tackled the particular behaviour (symptom). However, this question was discarded later as teachers inclined to respond negatively in order to avoid this particular question.

Findings

The teachers were found to be aware of the various psychological problems in their students. Their responses are presented in the table below:

List of symptoms/behaviour	*Teachers response (n=37)*	*Students with positive response (n=3911)*	
	Yes	*Number*	*Percent*

1. restless student	21 (56.8%)	109	2.79
2. unnaturally fearful	15 (40.5%)	76	1.94
3. faints often	4 (10.8)	10	0.26
4. bites nail/sucks thumb	18 (48.6%)	74	1.89
5. sudden degrading school performance	27 (73%)	137	3.50
6. cannot concentrate on study	25 (67.6%)	127	3.25
7. irregular school attendance	23 (62.2%)	162	4.14
8. does not socialize, rather sits alone	11 (29.7%)	30	0.77
9. runs away from school	25 (67.6%)	153	3.19
10. unreasonably aggressive	20 (54.0%)	87	2.22
11. disobeys everyone	7 (18.9%)	16	0.41
12. lies to make others in difficult situation	13 (35.1%)	69	1.76
13. one who threatens everyone	5 (13.5%)	9	0.23
14. breaks things deliberately	12 (32.4%)	32	0.82
15. loses temper easily	13 (35.1%)	28	0.72
16. remains sad and cries often	5 (13.5%)	15	0.38
17. stammers, lallying	12 (32.4%)	30	0.77
18. one who is very slow to learn	28 (75.7%)	177	4.53
19. bullied by others	16 (43.2%)	71	1.82
20. inappropriate (to his/her age) behaviour	9 (24.3%)	30	0.77
TOTAL		1442	36.87

Most of the teachers replied that they had noticed various conditions mentioned in the questionnaire in some of their students. Out of 3911 students covered in the study, 1442 (36.87%) were found to be having some sort of psychological problem. "Sudden degrading school performance" was noticed in 137 (3%) students by 27 teachers. "Slow learners" was noticed in 177 (4.53%) students by 28 teachers. Similarly, inappropriate behaviour to his/her age was observed in 30 (0.8%) students by 9 teachers. 4 students were reported as suffering from fainting episodes.

There were 2 teachers who reported absence of the symptoms in their students. This is very unlikely and it is most probably due to the teacher's lack of close observation of his/her students.

In the informal interview, most the teachers reported that they do not know the normal adolescent behaviour. They did accept that they do not recognize the abnormal behaviours. So, they have no expertise to handle the adolescent behaviour psychologically.

Discussion

The government has implemented 'Basic Education Project' in 40 districts. Now there are around 22,000 primary schools in Nepal and students have to walk, in an average,
15 minutes to reach a school.[2] School enrollment is about 70 percent.[3] The school education system face[5] the problems of high dropout and repetition. One survey done by the Basic Primary Education Project points out that 23.08% of boys and 23.30% of girls in class one and 20.25% of boys and 20% of girls in classes one to five drop out of school before the completion of their respective classes.[4] Besides these, mental/ psychological illness, along with lack of teacher's knowledge on the issue, is a major cause for low enrollment and high dropout rate of school children. The Isle of Wright Study has found out that the one-year prevalence rate of significant psychiatric disorder at the age of fourteen years is about 20%. The same study mentions that in the 10-11 years age group attending state schools in the Isle of Wright, one-year prevalence rate of psychiatric disorder was about 7%, the rate in boys being twice of that in girls.[5]

The school environment also has an impact in school attendance. A survey
in South Wales, where schools differed
little in the social-class composition of their pupils, indicated considerable differences between schools in their attendance rate which persisted over several years.[6] It appeared that schools which were less
strict in enforcing rules and which tended
to involve children and their parents to a greater extent had better attendance
levels. More recent research which has considered the relative importance of school and home or community influences on what children do at school suggests that
less than 15% of effects are due to
school, that the classroom is more important than more general aspects of school life,
that schools are less stable in their influences than was once thought, that different
kinds of behaviours are more or less independently influenced by factors operating at school, and that different
groups of pupils are influenced differently.[7,8,9,10,11]

The data gathered at Morang also
carries the same message. If teachers with no training in mental health can recognize such a large number of students with problems, it is expected that the rate of recognition will definitely increase once
they are equipped with the appropriate knowledge and skill. But most of the teachers who could recognize these psychological/behavioural problem did not know how to handle them. As intervention
in most of these cases could and should
start at school, it is suggested that the teachers should be adequately trained
in first line recognition and management
of the common conditions. Some of these teachers can be picked up and further trained as student counselors, a concept which probably is still very new to Education Planners of Nepal but which has
already proved its effectiveness in the developed world. It would be a valid investment to produce a better younger generation. The Mental Health Project is working on a module, which could be used country-wide if the Ministry of Education shows any commitment.

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