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Counselling Strategies to reduce aggressive behaviors in Early Adolescents

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Abstract

Aggressive behaviors among early adolescents have become a growing concern educational settings affecting not only the emotional well-being of students but also the overall school climate. Early adolescence typically between the ages of 10 to 14. This stage is a critical developmental stage marked by emotional instability, peer pressure, and identity formation factors that can lead to increased aggression if not properly managed. This study explores the effectiveness of counseling strategies in reducing aggressive behaviors among early adolescents, focusing on the Sri Lankan school context. Counseling strategies such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), anger management techniques, emotional regulation training and peer mediation are examined for their impact on modifying negative behavior patterns.

Key words:

Counseling strategies, Aggressive behavior, Early adolescence

Introduction

Early adolescence refers to the developmental stage between approximately 10 to 14 years of age, characterized by rapid physical, cognitive, emotional, and social changes marking the transition from childhood to adolescence. Then Adolescence is a period characterized by anxieties, uncertainties, expectations and experimentations. Issues like sexual risk-taking behavior, homicide and aggression are rife in this period. Violence, quite often, is a major means of expression by the adolescents either among peers, siblings or often against adults' dominance. So can identify adolescence is a period that is characterized by major transformations in the lives of young people. At this stage the changes occur physically,

mentally and socially. These changes are manifest through their abilities to form interpersonal relationships. As well adolescence is a period filled with new experiences, new responsibilities and new relationship between adults and the young people themselves. This period comes with its dangers, stress, frustration, anxiety and behavioral problems. In some cases, these challenges may lead to maladaptive behaviors, poor academic performance, and even mental health problems. While some individuals deal with the challenges of adolescence successfully. Early adolescence period from about age 10 to 14, during which puberty begins and is marked by rapid physical growth, sexual maturation, and significant brain development, particularly in areas related to emotion and social processing. Since decisions made during this interval can affect subsequent life and career outcomes, it is important that youth are given the proper support during this time. This paper explores the literature on early adolescence to identify key issues and challenges that youngsters and their parents confront during this difficult developmental period. In additionally Early adolescence typically refers to the developmental stage between 10 to 14 years of age. It is a transitional period from childhood to adolescence marked by rapid physical, emotional, cognitive, and social changes. (World Health Organization. (2014). _Health for the world's adolescents: A second chance in the second decade_ (pp. 10-11). https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241509598) There are several Key Characteristics of early adolescence. Among them Physical changes, Emotional development, Cognitive changes and social changes are important. This stage is critical for shaping behavioral difficulties in managing emotions can lead to aggressive behaviors if not addressed. Early intervention through counseling strategies helps adolescents cope with stress, peer pressure, and emotional conflicts in a healthy way.

In early adolescence, kids move from concrete thinking to abstract thinking (Piaget, 1958). This means they can now solve problems, think logically, and imagine “what if” situations in their mind without touching real objects.

Aggressive behaviors are actions intended to cause harm or discomfort to others, either physically, verbally, or emotionally. (Berk, L. E. (2018). Development through the lifespan (7th ed.). Pearson.) Not only that Self Harming is one of aggressive behavior. These behaviors can be hitting, shouting, gossiping and excluding others. Hitting, kicking, pushing, or damaging property are belong to Physical aggression. Name-calling, threats, yelling, or teasing are example for Verbal aggression. Spreading rumors, excluding peers, or manipulating friendships are belong to relational or social aggression. Ignoring, silent treatment or indirect resistance are example for Passive aggression. Emotional frustration or lack of coping skills,

Family conflicts or violence at home, Peer pressure and bullying, Poor teacher-student relationships, Exposure to violent media or environments are Causes of Aggression in Adolescents. We can identify the main types of aggressive behaviors, Physical Aggression, verbal Aggression, Social aggression are important. Involves bodily harm or the threat of it is belong to physical aggression. Hitting, kicking, pushing, slapping, throwing objects are example for that. In Verbal Aggression use of words to cause harm. Insulting, threatening, name-calling, shouting is example for that. Under relational (Social) Aggression Damaging someone's social relationships or status. Spreading rumors, exclusion from groups, silent treatment some of example for that. In additionally can identify Reactive Aggression, Proactive Aggression, Overt Aggression and Covert Aggression are other types of aggressive behaviors among early adolescents. These types can appear alone or in combination and vary in intensity. Understanding them helps in applying the right counseling strategies to manage aggressive behavior effectively. (World Health Organization. (2014). Health for the world's adolescents: A second chance in the second decade (pp. 14-16). https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241509598)

Most acts of violence behaviors among adolescents can be traced to aggressive behaviors which are learnt possibly from childhood and lingered on till the adolescence stage. Although, the term aggression is difficult to define in concrete term, there is a general consensus among researchers that it is an action intended and aimed at deliberately harming others. It exists in various forms which brings about its classification into physical and verbal aggression, anger and hostility. aggression as an antisocial and undesirable behavior which is a part of human life and manifests in different forms by individuals. This phenomenon is a serious problem among human beings and could be influenced by many factors ranging from social, cultural, personal to situational factors. Social factors that influence aggression in human beings include frustration, provocation and heightened arousal which could be as a result of exposure to media violence. Aggression may also result when important goals are frustrated by others (Anderson, C. A., & Bushman, B. J. (2002). Human aggression. Annual Review of Psychology, 53, 27-51. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.53.100901.135231)

The ability to manage anger requires a variety of resources, including the cognitive and behavioral capacities of adolescents (Folkman & Lazarus; in Jankowska, 2016). Adolescents who have below average intelligence have limited capacities, and therefore tend to experience

more difficulty managing their anger. Adolescents with below average intelligence especially borderline intelligence, have intellectual limitations and poor awareness of themselves. Most rarely develop the ability to deal with difficult emotions such as anger (van Nieuwenhuijzen & Vriens; in Jankowska, 2016). If reduce or manage aggressive behaviors in early adolescent can be used counseling strategies such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), anger management and emotional regulation techniques. These are used within the Sri Lankan education system to address aggressive behavior among early adolescents, highlighting the role of school counseling and psychosocial interventions in improving student behavior.

In Ancient times Forms of guidance existed in religious, philosophical, and tribal systems. Priests, elders, and philosophers like Socrates and Confucius offered moral and life guidance. Then when it comes to Middle Ages Guidance was mostly spiritual, provided by religious leaders. After that in Early 20th Century, (Parsons, F. (1909). Choosing a vocation. Houghton Mifflin.) Known as the "Father of Vocational Guidance", he founded the Boston Vocational Bureau. His work marked the formal beginning of career counselling. Carl Rogers (1940s–50s) Introduced person-centered therapy which emphasized empathy, unconditional positive regard and active listening. Sigmund Freud (Sigmund Freud (Early 1900s) laid the foundation for psychoanalysis influencing therapeutic practices worldwide) Laid the foundation for psychoanalysis influencing therapeutic practices worldwide. In 1950s–1970s Growth of multiple counseling theories such as behavioral, cognitive, humanistic, and existential. Counseling began to address mental health, relationships, school issues, etc. As well Development of school counseling programs in the U.S. and Europe. Soo now Late 20th Century is developing Global Recognition.

Early Developments is one of stage of Counselling in Sri Lanka. Psychological counselling was not formally established in Sri Lankan schools or health services before the 1990s. After In Emergence in the Education Sector (1990s–2000s) Counselling began gaining attention in schools due to rising concerns about student behavioral problems, exam-related stress, and social issues. The Ministry of Education introduced a School Guidance and Counselling Program. It aiming to support students' emotional and social well-being. In 2004 Post-Tsunami Mental Health Focus. After the 2004 tsunami the need for psychological support increased. In 2010 priority for Institutional Recognition and Expansion. The Ministry of Education formalized School Counselling Units in secondary schools. And teachers were trained as teacher-counsellors, though shortages of professional counsellors remained a challenge. As well Universities began offering diploma and degree programs in counselling psychology.

When consider about Current Framework of counselling in 2024, the official Handbook on School Counselling and Career Guidance Units was released and providing structured guidelines for counsellors. Counsellors are expected to address issues like aggression, bullying, exam anxiety, and emotional regulation. Guidance and counselling focus more on the individual, be it problems, meanings, experiences, behaviors or goals (Myrick, 2011). In school settings the counsellor most trained to prevent, intervene and restore student behavior is usually the school advisor (Stone & Dahir, 2016). Counsellors support students directly in their academic life to foster, promote and enhance interpersonal competence and academic achievement (Shaterloo & Mohammadyari, 2011). School counsellors recognize and embrace the important parts they play in the education team through teaching and interpersonal behavior with trainees, clients and colleagues (Dahir, 2004; Barnett & Johnson, 2015). Counsellors are trained to identify students who are at risk or with special needs, to facilitate career development, for academic counselling, and to interfere with attendance and behavior problems (Shelton & Muller-Ackerman, 2005).

Counselling strategies help to reduce aggressive behaviors in early adolescents. Under Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) helps students identify negative thoughts and behaviors, then replace them with positive, constructive ones. It teaches self-control, anger management, and problem-solving skills. Anger Management Training is one of counselling strategy used in counselling. Under that it teaches adolescents how to recognize early signs of anger and apply calming techniques like deep breathing, counting, or walking away before reacting aggressively. According to Social Skills Training it focuses on improving communication, empathy, and conflict resolution. It helps students handle peer pressure and respond to challenges without aggression. Under Peer Mediation trained student mediators help resolve conflicts among peers peacefully. It encourages responsibility and reduces teacher involvement in minor disputes. Under Individual Counseling One-on-one sessions with a counselor help students explore personal triggers, emotional struggles and develop coping strategies tailored to their needs. Group counselling also one of counselling strategy available in world. Small groups of students with similar behavioral issues meet regularly. They share experiences, practice new behaviors, and support one another in managing aggression. Behavior Modification Plans involve setting clear behavior goals, giving rewards for positive behavior, and applying consequences for aggression. Used in collaboration with teachers and parents. Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques is one of important counselling strategy. It like meditation, deep breathing, or visualization support students manage stress and reduce

impulsive reactions. Under Parental Involvement Counseling Counselors work with parents to ensure consistent behavior management at home and school improving overall effectiveness. But Each of these strategies can be adapted based on the student's age, cultural background, and level of aggression. (Sukhodolsky, D. G., Kassinove, H., & Gorman, B. S. (2004). Cognitive-behavioral therapy for anger in children and adolescents: A meta-analysis. Aggression and Violent Behavior, 9(3), 247-269. https://doi.org/10.1016/S1359-1789(03)00013-5)

Counseling is a multidisciplinary field used to address diverse issues such as mental health, education, relationships, trauma, and career development across all age groups globally. It is now backed by ethical codes, training standards, and psychological research. In Sri Lanka the current reality regarding aggressive behaviors among early adolescents and school counseling is changeable depend on different conditions. Increasing Behavioral Issues in Schools is one of example for that. Reports from teachers and principals indicate a rise in student aggression including verbal abuse, defiance and physical fights, particularly among adolescents (Ministry of Education, 2023). Social media, family issues and lack of emotional regulation are contributing factors. In present School Counseling Programs are conducted. The Ministry of Education has implemented a school guidance and counseling program supported by the School Counseling and Career Guidance Handbook (2024). But in many schools trained counselors are limited and counseling is often handled by teachers with minimal training. As well not all schools have full-time professional counselors. There's a lack of proper infrastructure, private space or materials for effective counseling. Awareness among students and parents about counseling remains low leading to underutilization of services. National Education Policy (2023) recognizes the need for strengthening psychosocial support in schools. Efforts are ongoing to train more school counselors and integrate mental health and behavior management into the curriculum. These realities show the need for improved and accessible counseling strategies to reduce aggressive behaviors among early adolescents in Sri Lanka.

we can identify Understanding and applying counseling strategies help for managing aggressive behaviors among early adolescents. As well It helps as different way such as reduce long-term negative effects on academic performance, relationships, and mental health. This article shows that effective counseling strategies play a key role in reducing aggressive behaviors among early adolescents. Approaches like cognitive-behavioral techniques, anger management and school-based counseling help students manage their emotions, improve peer relationships, and reduce disruptive behavior. The involvement of teachers, counselors, and

parents is essential for lasting change. By implementing well-structured and supportive counseling programs in schools. we can create safer and more positive learning environments for all students.

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