

## Characteristics of students receiving counseling compared with students in general.

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*Analyses of personal histories, including age, sex, religion, family status, attitude towards school, sexual problems, anxiety and socio-economic status, of 387 students (72.2%) out of a group of 534 students receiving counseling were compared with those of 9,907 general students (30.83%) from 10 schools in Bangkok Metropolis. Students who received counseling had a higher rate of family problems such as divorce, separation and polygamy. These students had more relationship problems with neighbors, members of the in family, teachers and classmates than the general student body and received less support from their parents. The counseled students tended to have a more negative self-image and were slightly more fearful about growing up than students in general. There were no statistically significant differences between the two groups in terms of self-confidence, interest in the opposite sex and sexual relations.*

*Key words: Counseled students.*

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ผลการวิเคราะห์ประวัติส่วนตัวของนักเรียนที่รับบริการแนะแนว จำนวน 387 คน (ร้อยละ 72.20) จากจำนวน 534 คน เปรียบเทียบกับนักเรียนทั่วไป จำนวน 9,907 คน ซึ่งคิดเป็นร้อยละ 30.83 ของนักเรียนทั้งหมดจาก 10 โรงเรียน ข้อมูลที่วิเคราะห์ ได้แก่ อายุ เพศ ศาสนา สภาพครอบครัว ทิศนคติต่อโรงเรียน เพศ ความวิตกกังวล และฐานะอาชีพของบิดามารดา เป็นต้น ได้ผลว่านักเรียนหญิง อายุ 15 ปีขึ้นไป ซึ่งเป็นประชากรกลุ่มน้อยที่สุด (ร้อยละ 17.62) รับบริการแนะแนวมากที่สุดคิดเป็นร้อยละ 46.25 มากกว่านักเรียนชายถึง 3 เท่า นักเรียนที่รับบริการแนะแนวมีบิดามารดาที่สภาพสมรส หย่าร้าง แยกกันอยู่ บิดามีภรรยาหลายคน หรือ ไม่ได้อาศัยอยู่กับบิดามารดาในอัตราสูงกว่านักเรียนทั่วไป

ด้านความสัมพันธ์ของนักเรียนกับผู้อื่น ไม่ว่าจะเป็นเพื่อนบ้าน สมาชิกครอบครัว หรือการร่วมกิจกรรมกับครอบครัว ระดับความพอใจที่มีต่อโรงเรียนหรือต่อครูอาจารย์ และการสนับสนุนของบิดามารดาต่อการศึกษาในกลุ่มที่รับบริการแนะแนวนั้นน้อยกว่านักเรียนกลุ่มทั่วไป

นอกจากนี้นักเรียนที่รับบริการแนะแนวรู้สึกไม่เป็นที่รักของครอบครัว ไม่เป็นที่ยอมรับในกลุ่มเพื่อนฝูง มีความวิตกกังวลค่อนข้างมากมากกว่านักเรียนกลุ่มทั่วไป โดยมักจะวิตกกังวลเกี่ยวกับการเรียน การเงิน ครอบครัว และความสัมพันธ์กับเพื่อน ข้อที่ไม่มีความแตกต่างอย่างมีนัยสำคัญทางสถิติของนักเรียนสองกลุ่มคือ บุคลิกลักษณะ ความมั่นใจในตนเอง ความรู้สึกต่อการเติบโตเป็นผู้ใหญ่ ความรู้สึกต่ออนาคต คำอธิษฐานและความสนใจเพื่อนต่างเพศ

It is generally accepted that the social and family environment can affect children's mental health. Usually school counselors are the persons who encounter problematic students but who can provide some support and guidance to them. The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of counseled students (CS) compared with general students (GS) as part of a training program for school counselors<sup>(1,2)</sup>

### Materials and method

Twenty school counselors from 10 schools in Bangkok Metropolis who participated in the training program were asked to distribute questionnaires to students concerning their personal, familial and social environment as well as their attitudes. These questionnaires were to be completed in the classroom of each school by all students who were requested to provide only their identification (I.D.) numbers. A total of 9,907 records (30.83% of all students) were randomly selected from each classroom. Their questionnaires were analyzed and used to prepare baseline data for the general students. These data were also used to compare the students in general with the counseled students who were seen by the school counselors; the statistical significance of differences computed using the Chi-square test. A number of the counseled students' personal history records were gathered through I.D numbers, i.e. 387 (out of 534), or 70.8%. Counseled students who did not submit completed questionnaires or did not provide their I.D. numbers were excluded.

The record data on the counseling services included age, sex, class, source of referral, family situation, types of problems, interventions, and number of sessions. The school counselors were asked to rate the overall severity of the problems for which counseling was sought. These were then categorized into nine types of problem including academic financial, physical (health), behavioral, emotional, sexual, problem as well as those including self-confidence, relations with peers and family. The level of severity was rated on a scale of 0 to 4: 0 being no problem; 1, minimal problem; 2, moderate problem; 3, severe problem; i.e. severe enough to require to specialists; and 4, very severe problem such as suicidal tendencies or self-injurious behavior requiring referral to specialists.

### Results

The counseling service records of 547 students (1.7% of the total student population) surveyed from 10 participating schools were analyzed.

There were 161 males (29.4%) and 386 females (70.6%), the female to male ratio being 2.4: 1. A total of 219 students (40.0%) were in the age group 11-15 years and 328 (60%) in the age group 16-20 years. The majority of students (362 or 66.2%) who had been seen by the counselors were in senior high-school. Most (28.9%) were twelfth grade students, followed by those in the eleventh, ninth and tenth grades. The problems encountered by these students were mainly academic, with educational and vocational planning being the most frequent issues (38.2%). Other areas, including conduct disorders (14%), family relationships (10.8%), financial difficulties (10%), emotional problems (7.7%), relationships with peers (6.4%), sexual adjustment (4.4%), physical health (4%), and lack of self-confidence (1.3%), were encountered with decreasing frequency. The average level of severity of problems among students from each school varied from 1.2 to 2.5 (0 = no problems, 4 = very severe) with a mean of 1.8. Among these students, 25 (4.57%) were referred for psychiatric evaluation. The clinical presentations were emotional disorders: five anxiety-depressive disorders, three suicide attempts, one case of hysterical conversion and one case of self-injurious behavior. There were four instances of conduct disorders, three psychotic cases, two of adjustment disorder and one each of the following cases: psychosomatic, elective mutism, incest, learning disability, homosexuality and mixed emotional and conduct disorder. A student with severe conduct disorder and one who attempted suicide were hospitalized.

Regarding referral, the majority of students (63.4%) who sought educational or vocational counseling (classified as an academic problem) sought counseling at their own initiative while others (33.6%) who had disruptive behavior were referred mainly by teacher advisers. Only 16 students (2.9%) were referred by their parents and peers. The number of sessions for each student seen by counselors varied from one to five. More than half of the students (60.2%) came for only one session. Few students were seen for more than three sessions.

There were eight types of interventions including individual counseling (86.11%), group counseling (16.3%) interviewing teacher colleagues (12.3%) and school principals (0.9%), meeting parents (9.1%), home visits (3.1%), referral to professional services (4.6%) and others (3.1%).

With regard to the student personal history records, the data analyzed included age, sex, religion, family and living situations, parental status, student's social and school life, students' wishes and concerns,

etc. Data on the counseled students were compared with those of the general students. Ninety-six percent of both groups of students are Bhuddist, with approximately 75% of them being from Bangkok. Most parents were alive (93% father, 97% mother for the general students and 91% father and 96% mother for the counseled students). The analysis of the data with statistically significant differences revealed that female students aged 16 years or older (46.25%) consulted with guidance counselors more often than younger one did, although they represented only 17.62% of the students in this study (Table 1) Females used the services 3.5 times more often than males of the same age. Concerning their parents' marital status, students who had parents living together were less likely to use counseling services, and students with problems were less likely to live with

both parents. The counseled students appeared to have more step-siblings than the general students (19% vs 13%). About one-fourth of both groups (23% of the general students and 24% of the general students) had no one with whom to discuss personal problems. However, the students appeared to talk more to both of their parents than the counseled students (17.6% vs. 11.6%; ( $p < 0.02$ ) (Table 2). Family health of the counseled students poorer and the feeling of being loved by their family was significantly lower in the counseled group than the general student group (Table 2). Degree of satisfaction with schooling and teachers was also lower among the counseled students whose parents tended to approve of schooling less than the parents of the general population (Table 3).

**Table 1.** Data concerning grade, age, sex and parents' marital status.

Items	General students		Counseled students		p-value
	n	percent	n	percent	
Grade 7	2167	21.87	48	12.40	
Grade 8	2042	20.61	40	10.34	
Grade 9	2076	20.95	42	10.85	
Grade 10	1310	13.22	72	18.60	
Grade 11	1194	12.05	107	27.65	
Grade 12	1105	11.15	77	19.90	
Grade not stated	13	0.13	1	0.26	
Total	9907	100.00	387	100.00	
Age > 16 (Older Group)	2973	30.01	231	59.69	
Age ≤ 15 (Younger Group)	6934	69.99	156	40.31	p < .001
Sex: male age ≤ 15	3033	30.61	41	10.59	
age > 16	1221	12.32	52	13.44	
female age ≤ 15	3893	39.30	115	29.72	p < .01
age > 16	1746	17.62	179	46.25	
not stated	14	0.14	—	—	
Total	9907	100.00	387	100.00	
Parents' marital status:					
Live together	7999	80.74	282	72.87	p < .005
Father with	218	2.20	13	3.36	
Widower	531	5.36	23	5.94	
Separated/divorced	626	6.32	31	8.01	
Father remarried	152	1.53	10	2.58	
Mother remarried	97	0.98	10	2.58	
Both parents remarried	172	1.74	11	2.84	
Others	2	0.02	—	—	
Not stated	110	1.11	7	1.81	
Total	9907	100.00	387	100.00	

**Table 2.** Data concerning personal problems and health of family members.

Items	General students		Counseled students		p-value
	n	percent	n	percent	
Discuss personal problem with:					
No one	2266	22.87	94	24.29	
Father	336	3.39	12	3.10	
Mother	2383	24.05	90	23.26	
Bother parents	1740	17.56	45	11.63	p < .02
Siblings	1995	20.14	78	20.16	
Friends	1028	10.38	50	12.92	
Teacher	133	1.34	18	4.65	
Relative	705	7.12	31	8.01	
Others	22	0.22	—	—	
Not stated	318	3.21	15	3.88	
Total	9907	100.00	387	100.00	
Loved by family					
Younger group : yes	4776	68.89	77	49.36	
no	210	3.03	9	5.77	p < .01
unsure	1893	27.30	68	43.59	
not stated	54	0.78	2	1.28	
Older group : yes	2164	72.79	152	65.80	
no	98	2.99	1	0.43	p < .01
unsure	696	23.41	76	32.90	
not stated	24	0.81	2	0.87	
Total	9907	100.00	387	100.00	
Health of family members					
Father : good	6304	63.63	206	53.23	
fair	2197	22.18	104	26.87	
poor	530	5.35	36	9.30	p < .01
not stated	876	8.84	41	10.59	
Mother : good	5945	60.01	190	49.10	
fair	2946	29.74	129	33.33	
poor	604	6.10	44	11.37	p < .01
not stated	412	4.16	24	6.20	
Student : good	6735	67.98	225	58.14	
fair	2553	25.77	133	34.37	
poor	374	3.78	21	5.47	p < .01
not stated	254	2.47	8	2.07	
Siblings : good	7216	72.84	256	66.15	
fair	1865	18.83	91	23.51	p < .01
poor	161	1.63	14	3.62	
not stated	665	6.71	26	6.72	
Total	9907	100.00	387	100.00	

**Table 3.** Students' feelings toward school and teachers.

Items	General students		Counseled students		p-value
	n	percent	n	percent	
Feelings toward school:					
satisfied	6188	62.46	189	48.84	p < .005
indifferent	3132	31.61	159	41.09	
dissatisfied	446	4.50	30	7.75	
not stated	141	1.42	9	2.33	
Feelings toward teachers:					
Satisfied	5946	60.02	205	52.97	p < .05
indifferent	3503	35.36	155	40.05	
dissatisfied	321	3.24	18	4.65	
not stated	135	1.36	9	2.33	
Total	9907	100.00	387	100.00	

Concerning relationships with fellow students, the number of close friends and grades, there were no statistically significant differences between the two groups except that the general students had a higher rate of grade 3 or above (16% vs 7% at  $p < 0.01$ ). The counseled student tended to have a

more negative self-image (personality) and were slightly more fearful about growing up than the general students (Table 4). Regardless of age, the counseled students had levels of worries greater than their counterparts particularly in areas of schooling, finances, family and peers (Table 5).

Table 4. Data concerning personality and self - confidence.

Items	General students		Counseled students		p-value
	n	percent	n	percent	
<b>Personality:</b>					
Younger group:					
good	560	8.08	14	8.97	
rather good	1510	21.78	28	17.95	
fair	4130	59.57	57	55.77	
rather bad	496	71.15	12	7.69	
bad	138	1.99	10	6.41	
not stated	99	1.43	5	3.21	
Total	6934	100.00	156	100.00	
Older group:					
age > 15					
good	204	6.86	17	7.36	
rather good	682	22.94	50	21.65	
fair	1756	59.06	125	54.11	
rather bad	261	7.78	27	1.69	
bad	54	1.51	5	2.16	
not stated	25	0.84	7	3.03	
Total	2973	100.00	231	100.00	
<b>Self-confidence:</b>					
Younger group:					
very high	854	12.32	24	15.38	
high	1742	25.12	35	22.44	
moderate	3614	52.12	69	44.23	
low	522	7.53	17	10.90	
very low	87	1.25	9	5.77	
not stated	115	1.66	2	1.28	
Total	6934	100.00	156	100.00	
Older group:					
very high	284	9.55	12	5.19	
high	839	28.22	82	35.50	
moderate	1477	47.68	105	54.54	
low	304	10.23	25	10.82	
very low	42	1.41	3	1.30	
not stated	27	0.91	4	1.73	
Total	2973	100.00	231	100.00	

Table 5. Areas and levels of worry.

Items	General students		Counseled students		p-value
	n	percent	n	percent	
<b>Worries:</b>					
Younger group: no	1098	15.84	15	9.62	p < 0.02
yes, some	5056	72.91	103	66.03	
yes, much	712	10.27	33	21.15	
not stated	68	0.98	5	3.28	
Total	6934	100.00	156	100.00	
if yes, areas*	school	3053	60.41	76	73.79
	finances	1225	24.24	44	42.72
	family	1201	23.76	45	43.69
	peers	964	19.07	34	33.01
	health	108	2.14	1	0.97
	personality	3	0.06	—	—
	boy/girl friend	8	0.16	1	0.97
	other	30	0.59	—	—
	not stated	1732	34.27	30	29.31
Older group: no	193	6.49	10	4.33	p < .06
yes, some	2278	76.62	168	72.73	
yes, much	472	15.88	51	22.08	
not stated	30	1.01	2	0.87	
Total	2973	100.00	231	100.00	
if yes, areas*	school	1608	70.62	127	75.60
	finances	742	32.59	72	47.86
	family	691	30.35	66	39.29
	peers	604	26.53	58	34.52
	health	58	2.11	4	2.38
	personality	4	0.18	1	0.60
	boy/girl friend	8	0.35	3	1.79
	other	24	1.05	—	—
	not stated	744	32.67	62	36.90

Although there were no statistically significant difference between the two groups in terms of self-confidence, interest in the opposite sex and sexual relations, the younger counseled students appeared

to have less self-confidence than the general students (Table 4). The former group also felt more sexually aroused by those of the same sex (homosexual feeling) than the latter (Table 6).



Table 6. Data concerning sexuality.

Items	General students		Counseled students		p-value
	n	percent	n	percent	
Interest in opposite sex:					
Younger group: age = < 15					
no	3687	53.17	82	52.56	
yes	3247	46.83	74	47.44	
Total	6934	100.00	156	100.00	
Behavior with boy/girl friend					
holding hands	211	6.50	3	4.51	
kissing	18	0.55	2	2.70	
sexual intercourse	19	0.59	—	—	
other	414	12.75	18	24.32	
no boy/girl friend	2538	78.16	50	67.57	
not stated	47	1.45	1	1.35	
Total	3247	100.00	74	100.00	
Older group: age > 15					
no	790	26.75	76	32.90	
yes	2183	73.43	155	67.10	
Total	2973	100.00	231	100.00	
Behavior with boy/girl friend					
holding hands	136	6.23	15	9.68	
kissing	20	0.92	2	1.29	
sexual intercourse	34	1.56	2	1.29	
other	253	11.59	12	7.74	
no boy/girl friend	1726	79.07	119	76.77	
not stated	14	0.64	5	3.23	
Total	2183	100.00	155	100.00	
Homosexual feelings:					
Younger group: age = < 15					
yes	177	2.55	7	4.49	
no	6069	87.53	128	82.05	
unsure	533	7.68	16	10.26	
not stated	155	2.24	5	3.21	
Total	6934	100.00	156	100.00	
Older group: age > 15					
yes	89	2.99	5	2.16	
no	2592	87.18	196	84.85	
unsure	246	8.27	24	10.39	
not stated	46	1.55	6	2.06	
Total	2973	100.00	231	100.00	

## Discussion

This study disclosed that adolescent females sought counseling more often than males which suggests that females may have more problems or are more open to their school counselors than males.

Older student (age 16-20 years) approached the counselors more frequently than the younger group, the latter usually being negative toward counselors and tending to deny their problems. Middle

adolescents (age 14-16 years) often blame parents or adults for their difficulties while late adolescents (age 17 years or older) admit their problems and seek help voluntarily.<sup>(3)</sup> The main difficulties we encountered among the counseled students were academic and vocational planning. Others including personal and general adjustment to school life as well as family, financial and peer problems were typical because of the students' main environment. Generally about 10% of all students suffered from emotional problems which were served and required counseling or professional help. Kashani<sup>(4)</sup> reported that 8% of 150 adolescent students had depressive disorders. In our survey, 25 cases (4.5%) among 547 counseled students needed psychiatric referral because of emotional, conduct and adjustment disorders. In the United States, suicidal tendencies and ideation are the most common psychiatric emergencies in childhood and adolescence.<sup>(5)</sup> In suicide is currently the second leading cause of death for people aged 10-24 years. In our study there were only three cases of attempted suicide. The number of counseled students in our series, however, is small. It should be noted that the wish to avoid the social stigma associated with suicide may lead to the under-reporting of suicidal tendencies.

Most teenagers who showed disruptive behavior were referred to school counselors by teacher advisors. These students usually denied their problems and often refused professional help. Dedicated teacher counselors who devote their time to such students and who are empathetic to these will gain the love and respect of rebellious students, who are usually defensive in their dealings with adult authorities; such authority figures are often associated with parents who mistreat their children.

Parents marital status (divorced, separated or paternal parent having multiple wives), poorer education and lack of finances may cause students problems.<sup>(6,7)</sup> The present data support this view. Additionally, the health of students and family

members among those in the counseled student group can cause such emotional and school problems.

About 20 percent of both groups had no one with whom to discuss personal problems. This could be a group of lonely, shy and withdrawn students who may be among the quietly unhappy adolescents, or those facing difficulties silently. It is generally accepted that adolescence is the stage in life when adult guidance and support is needed to help young people to overcome anxiety resulting from physical, social and cognitive alterations. Moreover, teenage students may have mixed feelings about how much they want to be left alone or looked after. This is reciprocated by parental uncertainty about being underprotective or overprotective.

According to the Isle of Wight epidemiological study<sup>(8)</sup> a third to half of non-clinical younger adolescents (age around 14 years) often experienced sad and anxious moods. Therefore, distress feelings were quite common among this normal population. Over 40 percent reported feelings of misery, 30 percent ideas of reference, 20 percent feelings of self-deprecation and just under 8 percent suicidal thoughts. But clinical depression was reported in less than 10 percent of the samples. In this series, 22% of the counseled students and 16% of the general students experienced high level of worry. However, the former group had a higher degree of worry than the latter one. Generally, the adults in contact with these young people tended not to know about these feelings. Preventive intervention should be directed toward potentially modifying variables such as the adolescents social adjustment and social supports provided by family, peers and school.

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