

Challenges Faced by Counsellors in Higher Education: An Insight into Real-World Experiences

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Abstract

Counsellors in higher education institutions such as colleges and universities perform an important role in their students' lives by assisting and supporting their academic, personal, and emotional well-being. This research paper explores the complex challenges encountered by counsellors in higher educational institutions based on both the author's personal experience and experience as a counsellor with over six years of practice in the same institution as well as certain insights shared by a peer counsellor. The study is centred on a reflective approach from personal experience and the analyses of recurrent situations confronted in daily counselling situations. It tries to analyse and describe the primary challenges counsellors have to deal with in higher education, such as high student-to-counsellor ratios, increasing mental health issues among students, and the stigma attached to seeking psychological help from the counsellor. The shifting nature of student problems with the advancement of technology, along with changes in cultural norms, emotional burnouts and certain institutional constraints are also highlighted in this paper as it may affect counselling sessions. The paper highlights the emotional toll on the counsellors and their need for self-care, professional development and peer support to sustain their efficiency. By compounding the experiences in the professional life this research provides an inclusive understanding of the counselling professional's challenges which emphasize the need for structured reforms, resources, and training programs to safeguard counsellors in higher educational institutions for the support and well-being of students as well as the counsellors.

Keywords: *Counsellors, Well-being, Caseload, Challenges*

1. Introduction

1.1 Importance of counselling in colleges

With growing numbers of students facing mental health conditions, and the increasing social acceptance of counselling as a beneficial intervention for those working in the mental

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health field , developmental, and life issues, counsellors in colleges are experiencing a significant rise in the number of students seeking campus counselling services. It is crucial to recognize how counsellors in college campuses operate and the challenges they have to encounter in delivering best-practice counselling and support to ensure the well-being of the student community.

In India, the University Grants Commission (UGC) formed an Expert Committee to thoroughly examine issues related to the mental, physical, psychological, and emotional well-being of students on higher education campuses and to frame appropriate guidelines. The guidelines recommended by the Committee for implementation by all higher educational institutions (HEIs) under UGC.

The Commission highlighted the shortage of trained and competent mental health professionals in the country, with demand outstripping the supply of professionals recognized by the Rehabilitation Council of India (RCI). Consequently, HEIs are encouraged to introduce special courses to train mental health professionals who can be educated in line with the UGC/AICTE/MCI guidelines.

The "Manodarpan" initiative should be leveraged to provide psychosocial support for students, teachers, and families, ensuring mental health and emotional well-being. A dedicated web page named 'Manodarpan-Psychosocial Support for Mental Health & Well-being' has been established on the Ministry of Education (MoE) website. This page includes advisory content, practical tips, posters, videos, guidelines for psychosocial support, FAQs, and an online query system. This is another essential guideline provided by the UGC for supporting students' mental health.

1.2 Purpose of the Study:

This research explores some of the tough issues that counsellors encounter in higher learning institutions, especially concerning issues of mental health, academic pressures, and institutional limits. The researcher, with over six years of work in the Counselling Department, has witnessed a remarkable surge in the student's request for help not only with emotional but also academic problems in a resource-constrained environment with lingering stigma against mental health disorders. This study, therefore, aims to bring into focus these current issues, outline the impact of institutional policies and structural barriers on the effectiveness of counselling, and give recommendations that can support the welfare of students and provisions made therein. This will be important in devising strategies that will provide more support to the students and ensure that counselling services are effective.

1.3 Scope of the Study:

It is a study of the challenges that counsellors of higher education face, based on experience and observation gathered in the Department of Counselling at a college over six years. This covers the increasing incidence of mental health issues among students, academic pressures impacting their welfare, and institutional and personal constraints that affect the delivery of effective counselling services. The study is a reflective and thematic analysis of counselling cases. It, therefore, intends to emphasize the recurring problems and standard recommendations toward better counselling practices and institutional support. This study will not cover experiences from other institutions or external comparisons since it focusses on insights gathered from one college environment.

2. Review of Literature

Expanding Role of Counsellors in Higher Educational Institutions (HEI):

Counsellors in HEIs are no longer confined to merely providing course suggestions. They now assist students in setting career goals, planning practical experiences, and developing vocational skills. Students expect comprehensive support in addressing academic pressures, interpersonal relationships, and mental health challenges. This includes mental health consultations, conflict resolution, academic assistance, and crisis intervention.

The transition from high school to the immediate post-high school years is considered one of the most stressful life phases, characterized by social, emotional, and economic uncertainty. (Frey et al., 2006) identified stressors like coping with academic demands, separation of family, relatives, and friends, and navigating new relationships in college. Risky and healthy experimentation is common during this time, with increases in alcohol use, drug abuse, and sexual activity (Fromme et al., 2008).

College counsellors often find it challenging to maintain proper boundaries with students due to their numerous roles and responsibilities. Additionally, the culturally diverse, dynamic, and rapidly changing college environment requires quick adaptations to meet the unique needs of each incoming generation of students. Research shows that this complex role can lead to role ambiguity and stress.

Increasing Mental Health Issues Among College Students: The prevalence of mental health issues in higher education institutions like colleges has been extensively recognised. A longitudinal study by (Zivin et al., 2009) found that approximately 33% of college students had a mental health

problem at baseline and that these problems continued for 60% of the identified students over the next two years.

Academic Pressures and Their Impact on Counselling: Today academic pressure has become a growing problem among students. Academic stress can lower motivation, hold back academic achievement, and increase college dropout rates (Barbayannis et al., 2022). However, students who have continued to experience academic problems feel discouraged from visiting support sources because they fear social rejection (Karabenick, 2003). Issues on mental health particularly affect youth in higher educational institutions. Successful adaptation to these conditions becomes a pivotal factor for academic advancement as well as for overall well-being of the students (Shamionov et al., 2020). Counsellors provide a safe space for students to express their anxieties and work towards developing coping strategies.

Stigma around Counselling and Help-Seeking Behaviour: Researchers consistently indicated that stigma is a significant barrier to seeking mental health. (Shamionov et al., 2020) argued that lack of help-seeking was linked with a lack of awareness about mental illness, prejudice against people with mental illness, and stigma associated with mental illness. (Shim et al., 2022) found that mental health awareness campaigns show the potential to reduce college student stigma and increase help-seeking behaviour.

Research has highlighted that only a few young people will request professional emotional help as the majority will seek help from friends and family -because of a higher comfort level in disclosing personal problems (Nguyen et al., 2024) . Though their positive attitude towards help-seeking from informal support is to be emphasised, the fact that young people do not receive the level of ‘professional help’ required from friends and family is to be stressed (O’Neill et al., 2023). All these outcomes

remind us that the mental health education program is a promising method to improve help-seeking attitudes and reduce the negative view of mental illness.

Burnout and Emotional Fatigue among Counsellors: The counselling profession needs to continue to engage in research about burnout among counsellors and build a more beneficial information base concerning the prevalence, causes, and effects of burnout in the field of counselling (McCormack et al., 2018). (Wurm et al., 2016) states that, persons who experience burnout may not be aware of this phenomenon that is occurring and may think that they are experiencing depression since burnout and depression are symptomatically similar. Qualities that make a counsellor effective such as empathy, compassion, and caring are values that may also make them susceptible to compassion fatigue, stress, and burnout (Thompson et al., 2014). All these issues can lead to accelerating burnout for the counsellor.

The Impact of Technology and social media: The rapid development of science and technology has changed the educational environment, and counsellors in higher educational institutions need to adapt to emerging technologies such as online learning and virtual consultation to encounter the requirements of students better. Counsellors can use interactive online self-help resources also, “well suited for students who may not be ready to fully engage in the change process but are ready to explore what might be involved in making small changes” (Cooper, 2024; Oper, 2024b) stressed the essentiality of providing training and implementation support to college counselling centre staff who want to adopt this model to their setting.

Best Practices and Support Mechanisms: Counsellors in college have often experienced isolation in their work because of being the sole counsellor in a college, and consequently have received insufficient mentorship and supervision in carrying out their

various professional roles as mentioned in the ASCA National Model (Wilczenski, Schumacher, & Cook, 2010). Despite this known reality, there is a scarcity of studies on the support needs of counsellors in managing such demands (Diab & Andrews, 2024) leaving counsellors, particularly those employed in student support services, with a chronic lack of clarity on how to effectively cope with these negative impacts.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Method

The current study employs a reflective approach supported by a qualitative methodology, as personal experiences developed during six consecutive years of professional practice as a counsellor in the Counselling Department were considered. Employing observation methods and reflective records of numerous sessions were made to identify the main trends and challenges that frequently appear. The thematic analysis allowed the researcher to go through the common concerns shared by students, like mental health problems, academic stress, and institutional barriers. Also, this reflection made the researcher consider how these challenges impinge on the capacity of the research counsellor to offer effective support. This will, in perspective, enable an in-depth understanding of the complexities and categories of counselling in higher education; in fact, insights into real-world experiences.

3.2 Data collection

Data for this research are based on records from the Department of Counselling at the college for the last six years. These include confidential unidentified summaries of students that capture the nature and characteristics of the issues presented at these sessions, patterns of emotional, personal, and academic stress, and strategies employed in trying to resolve these challenges.

These session notes also highlight the themes that related to academic stress mental health issues, personal problems, experienced by the students, institutional policy limitations, and both personal and professional problems. The data analysis benefits this study in providing an indication of the challenges faced by both students and counsellors while maintaining confidentiality in each case regarding the management of information collected.

3.3 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted to identify and explore the recurring themes and challenges from confidential counselling records and session notes accumulated for six years. First, the unidentifiable counselling cases were reviewed to identify common patterns in the issues students faced, like mental health problems, including anxiety and depression, academic pressures, and institutional constraints such as high counsellor-to-student ratios. Key themes were coded and categorized by their frequency and importance across cases. This qualitative approach thus helped further to clarify those key challenges and how those issues affect the students and the counselling process. Such an analysis was done aiming at practical insights that would be useful in bringing about change to the counselling procedures.

4. Major Findings of the Study

4.1 Key Challenges Faced by the Counsellor

4.1.1 Personal Issues

a) Learning challenges: Everyone suffers from learning difficulties at one time or another and to one degree or another. Each student has or knows of someone who has problems managing academic workload. Sometimes it will be demanding to manage coursework, exam preparation, assignments, and

reading. Some students are lazy and are not interested because their career plans are indefinite, their studies are unexciting, or they are struggling with personal problems. Potential obstacles to success are conditions such as ADHD, dyslexia, or other learning disabilities. First-year students mostly have to get used to the transition from high school to college, with heavier academic loads and increased freedom. Tuition, living expenses, and part-time jobs constitute also a great distraction. The counsellors help students in finding available financial aid and coping with stress and their studies while at some moments they cannot help either. Students may also battle with addiction, poverty, abuse, parental neglect from either parent, relationship problems, death, discrimination, harassment, and chronic illness. All of these obstacles do not impede the counsellors from trying to make their services and further counselling available. Yet again, timely exposure to such diverse and demanding roles increases the chances of counsellor burnout.

b) Social Struggles: The struggles a student goes through in college—from feelings of isolation and peer pressure to troubled relationships and identity conflicts—might carry considerable emotional resonance to the anxiety of adjusting to new social settings. These issues disturb students, disengage them, and make them anxious. When all these issues arise, they go to the counsellor for help, and sometimes they are an emotional burden to them. It is very well possible that observing students fight with daily emotional burdens can stimulate the growth of feelings of empathy and concern, ending in a need for the counsellor to balance between the need to be composed and normal. Often these can lead to exhaustion and imbalance of emotions as they work to provide support and care and to find out solutions to the student's issues. At the same time, they also have to look after their well-being themselves without much support.

4.2 Mental Health Conditions among Students:

a) Increased demand for mental health support: Students seeking counselling frequently struggled with depression and anxiety, which were the most prevalent mental health disorders they experienced. Many exhibited symptoms such as difficulty concentrating in class, poor sleep and eating habits, high-stress levels, and visible signs of distress, including tearfulness and sadness. At times, they felt overwhelmed to the point of wanting to drop out of their courses. Beyond depression and anxiety, other common mental health challenges included attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bipolar disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Learning disabilities (LD) often went undiagnosed during earlier schooling due to a lack of awareness, insufficient resources, or the development of coping mechanisms that concealed these difficulties. However, as academic expectations increased in college, these learning challenges became more noticeable, leading to serious consequences like academic underperformance, mental health problems, dropout intentions, stigmatization, and concerns about future career opportunities. Counsellors frequently encountered students dealing with grief and loss, domestic violence, the trauma of various forms of abuse, and complicated family dynamics.

b) Lack of awareness about mental health conditions: Often students refuse to recognise that they have a mental health condition, regardless of their symptoms, behaviours, and attitudes being identifiable and difficult to others in the institution. This became a challenge for the counsellors as they had to help students who lacked the awareness to recognize their problems and seek treatment.

c) Reluctance to disclose mental health issues: Another challenge arose because some students purposefully hid their mental health diagnoses from the college faculty and the counsellor. When the student does not disclose, the counsellor cannot provide timely assistance and proper support, which can deter the student's academic performance.

d) Resistance to seeking help: Counsellors do not have the authority to compel students experiencing mental health challenges to seek help on campus. Many students may feel uncomfortable or fearful about utilizing campus counselling services, often due to concerns that others might learn about their mental health struggles. In these cases, counsellors should focus on educating students about the potential benefits of seeking timely support to prevent a decline in their functioning and provide referrals to trusted external mental health professionals when needed. Counsellors must also consider and communicate the possible consequences of delaying or avoiding treatment, always balancing concern for the student's well-being with respect for their autonomy.

e) Lack of understanding of the impact of mental disorders: Another challenge is that many students and their caregivers often underestimate how mental health conditions can impact academic performance, future goals, and motivation. They may seek quick fixes for academic issues without realizing the time needed to address mental health. Some students also decline follow-up counselling, and counsellors must respect their choice unless there is a concern about the risk of harm to themselves or others.

f) Resistance to medication: The counsellor noted an overall resistance to taking psychotropic medications on the part of students. It can be due to stigma, concerns about their side effects, and lack of understanding of how these drugs could work on them. Often, students fail to recognize their role in their

well-being. However, sometimes the counsellor was effective in showing students the advantages of taking medicine.

Another important aspect is that they wanted immediate relief from their condition. After taking medicines for one or two days, they often complain about the lack of change in their health condition. Additionally, initial side effects like drowsiness or lethargy further discourage students, as they impact daily activities such as attending classes. So, they discontinue the medication without completing the regime prescribed by the mental health practitioners. Also, often the counsellor face resistance when they try to explain that psychotropic drugs require time for the body to adapt before showing benefits.

g) Mental Health Stigma: The students were referred to the session by faculties during class hours. Or the student comes to the counsellor voluntarily to discuss issues. But at times when they need to be called by the counsellors for follow-up, they feel reluctant to approach us. They fear the comments of his/her peers. These students don't want their peers to know that they are with a counsellor.

h) Challenges with parental involvement: The acceptance of parents is very challenging. Sometimes parents can be very sensitive and aggressive. They don't accept feedback about their children. They resist even visiting an external higher mental health expert for their children. Some of them accept behavioural problems and insist that it is the sole responsibility of the counsellor to tackle them. They expect an immediate result after a session with the counsellor. Hence, many times a lot of effort is needed to convince parents in some matters. Managing parent expectations is another challenge for the counsellors. Often parents believe their child is the best and they insist on applying to top-heavy colleges. Giving them a reality check without demotivating them can be a major challenge.

Sometimes parents, driven by fear and conflicting advice, may constantly question the college counsellor's guidance.

4.3 Lack of Resources:

Inability to Provide Adequate Care: The counsellor feels that time constraints and immense caseloads frequently hinder her ability to give her pupils the degree of help needed. As a result, the counsellor is sometimes forced to utilize short-term solution-focused techniques despite knowing that they may not be effective in addressing the students' complicated concerns.

Sometimes it was inadequate because these students required more in-depth, long-term therapy.

It is sometimes considered that time constraints limit the capacity to deliver the necessary level of service. Often, an absence of skilled knowledge and abilities prevents the kind of assistance required by these students from being offered. Due to these reasons, the counsellor tends to avoid plunging deeply into students' trauma concerns and instead directs them to higher-level professionals in the field outside the institution.

When the trauma was accidentally identified during counselling sessions, the counsellor was torn between addressing the trauma and providing standard short-term solution-focused treatment. Counsellor frequently hears and assist students in venting their feelings, but sometimes in certain situations, they were incapable to recognise or work out any answers due to their uniqueness and the problem needs the support and willingness of people and resources outside the institutional boundaries.

Counsellors' ability to provide support is heavily reliant on the resources available at their campus. However, this did not imply that counsellor restricted student visits to a few sessions. They permitted emergency visits and drop-ins, and in some situations, they even provided specialist assistance to the students, their parents, and their relatives.

Insufficient technological and organizational resources contribute to burnout among college counsellors. Manual processes consume copious amounts of valuable time and energy. certain tasks are automated, many still rely on old-fashioned methods, placing undue strain on the counsellor.

4.4 Role Confusion and Overload

Managing Multiple Roles: The Counsellor plays different roles in an educational institution, by providing academic support, assisting with standardized testing, giving classroom presentations, running orientation programs for new students at the beginning of every academic year, and hold seminars on study skills, time management, wellness, mental health, and related topics. Motivational classes are also taken by the counsellor and organize surveys to understand different student needs as well as faculty requirements.

Counselling sessions are provided for faculty and staff when needed. The counsellor is often part of clubs and activity groups in the institution, which involves attending meetings and organizing events. The counsellor will help plan and manage national and international seminars and major events held by the institution. often act as intermediaries between students and their parents, who may have differing expectations and goals. This role requires balancing support and assertiveness.

4.5 Burnout, Stress, and Fatigue

Burnout among college counsellors is widespread, commencing from various factors that impact their mental, emotional, and physical well-being. The challenging background of college counselling can be noteworthy, even for the most experienced professionals.

Let's explore the intricacies of these factors and understand how they contribute to burnout:

Heavy Caseloads: In many educational institutions, the counsellor-to-student ratio is unbalanced, with each college counsellor responsible for many students. Moreover, they are tasked with additional responsibilities like attending university fairs and information sessions, compiling placement reports, and occasionally even teaching a subject. Along with this, most of the time will be needed for documentation and other administrative tasks. Many administrative and clerical duties are to be completed based on various college accreditation formalities. This overwhelming workload leaves the counsellor with little time for self-care and can contribute to burnout. Professional supervision is very inadequate also:

b) Lack of Work-Life Balance: Due to the heavy volume of duties and responsibilities, many times one has to bring work home. About 38 hours per week are being worked by the counsellor leading to exhaustion. Maintaining boundaries, as clients may demand meetings, and attending to telephone calls from guardians at unreasonable hours or excessive sessions may also cause stress. Muddling restrictions between work and personal life intensify burnout among the counsellor.

c) Limited Autonomy and Recognition: The rigid hierarchical structure of educational institutions limits the counsellor's freedom and curbs advancement. Counsellor is often undervalued or constrained in implementing new ideas. These may end up in demotivation and burnout. A rift in recognition for their additional efforts aggravates disappointment and disengagement.

4.6 Difficulty Refusing Unpaid Work

Counsellor often fails to decline requests for “free work” from friends, family, and acquaintances, driven by their innate desire to empathise with people. While such situations often result in personal satisfaction and networking benefits, they come at the

expense of the counsellor's well-being and time with their families.

4.7 Other Challenges

From time to time, the counsellor may be required to interact with the legal and healthcare systems. This is especially so when students or clients are involved in crime or 'at risk' behaviours or require mental health assistance. The Counsellor may find interacting with such systems challenging, as she may not be up-to-date on vital procedures and information due to their typical everyday separation from these institutions. Overall, the counsellor has to deal with the distinctive requirements of various systems as well as the inconsistencies that exist among these systems. The main challenge is to confirm that the counsellor is adequately familiar with and able to work with varied systems so that their clients and other stakeholders can benefit from the opportunities, services and resources available.

5. Discussion & Analysis

The challenges identified in this study have significant implications for both counselling practices and student outcomes in higher education.

5.1 Impact on Counselling Practices

The range of challenges students face is extensive, covering academic pressure, struggles with addiction, poverty, abuse, unsupportive home environments, financial difficulties, relationship breakdowns, grief, discrimination, harassment, and chronic health conditions. Addressing these complex issues daily often leads to counsellor burnout. The emotional weight is intensified by the social struggles students' experience, such as isolation, lack of friendships, identity crises, and bullying. This heavy emotional burden can make the counsellor feel exhausted as they strive to provide care and solutions while also in need of attention to their own well-being.

Another major challenge involves the increase in mental health concerns among students, especially anxiety, depression, and stress. Academic pressures, like meeting deadlines and maintaining grades, often worsen these issues. This situation has a dual effect: students suffer emotionally, while the counsellor is stretched thin with the growing demand on their time and resources, making it difficult to provide the in-depth support that high caseloads require. Additional stress comes from dealing with parents who are often sensitive and defensive, expecting quick improvements in their children's behaviour, which adds to the pressure on the counsellor.

High student-to-counsellor ratios, paired with rising needs for mental health support, frequently result in burnout of the counsellor. Limited time means the counsellor often cannot offer the depth of care each student deserves, affecting the overall quality of counselling and hindering long-term interventions.

Due to the high number of students seeking counselling, counsellors often have to prioritize urgent cases and work within institutional limits on available hours. This results in shorter, sessions rather than a proactive, comprehensive approach to well-being, leaving students without the full support they need for both academic and emotional challenges.

As the number of students seeking counselling support is high counsellor is often forced to prioritize urgent cases needing help and institutional limits on available counselling hours. This leads to shorter, reactive sessions rather than a proactive, comprehensive approach to well-being. As a result, students may not receive the full support they deserve for both academic and emotional struggles.

Mental health stigma in some academic settings further complicates matters. Many students delay seeking help until their problems have become severe, which reduces the effectiveness of early intervention and preventive counselling

efforts. These barriers can limit the overall impact of the support the counsellor can offer.

Balancing numerous roles, heavy caseloads, and a lack of autonomy and recognition lead to counsellor burnout. Often, there is confusion about how to maintain a work-life balance. The desire to empathize with and help can make it hard for the counsellor to refuse unpaid responsibilities, whether they come from friends, family, or students, often culminating in crises and feelings of disappointment.

This issue is even more pronounced in single-counsellor departments. College counselling is known to be a highly demanding field, with universities reflected as 'fulfilling centres' of students' and their family's dreams and aspirations. Most college counsellors engage in highly emotionally exhausting work, given the significant focus on students' well-being. People drawn to helping/caring professions are often characterized as sensitive, compassionate, and empathetic, making burnout almost inevitable.

Moreover, unlike teaching or therapy, there is no well-defined path or mandatory training for becoming a college counsellor. This lack of structure leaves the counsellor feeling lost in their roles. Boundaries around the level of support they should provide to each student are also unclear. Without these guidelines, emotionally invested counsellors may end up spending an excessive amount of time on individual cases. Often, they must juggle many roles simultaneously.

5.2 Impact on Student Outcomes

Academic pressures combined with stress and anxiety, and insufficient support, can lead to a significant drop in students' academic performance. They may find it difficult to concentrate, lose motivation, and experience an overall decline in their grades. This creates a vicious cycle in which mental health

struggles worsen, further impacting their ability to succeed academically.

Without timely and effective counselling, students' mental health can deteriorate, leading to more serious conditions like depression or anxiety. These challenges can have lasting effects on their emotional well-being, overall quality of life, and even impact their social relationships and personal development.

Students who do not receive the emotional support they need are at a higher risk of withdrawing from courses or leaving the institution altogether. The inability to manage academic demands while maintaining emotional health, especially when counselling resources are limited, leads to higher dropout rates. This situation underscores the critical importance of comprehensive mental health support.

Overall, these issues create significant pressure for both students and counsellors, leading to negative outcomes in academic performance and mental health. Improving counselling services, overcoming institutional constraints, and addressing the stigma surrounding mental health are essential for enhancing student well-being and ensuring their success in higher education.

6. Recommendations

Some recommendations based on the challenges identified in the study are outlined below:

6.1 Increase Counselling Resources:

Expand the Counselling Team: With a tremendous student-to-counsellor ratio, institutions should increase the number of additional counsellors to try and reduce that workload and allow for more direct time with the students. This would guarantee that counsellors could pay attention to quality care without feeling exhausted.

6.2 Increase Awareness of Mental Health to Reduce Stigma

Awareness Campaigns: Creating a generalized atmosphere or environment of mental health awareness on campuses may normalize help-seeking. This is done by conducting workshops on peer group conduct, guest faculty lectures, and awareness programs that help bring down the stigma attached to mental health problems, thus facilitating early help-seeking behaviour on the part of students.

Mental Health Education: The UGC also states that mental health education should be included in the orientation programs, continuous student support services, and college outreach programs which can help the students to seek help and reduce their resistance towards counselling.

6.3 Implement Preventive Programs

Stress Management and Coping Skills: Proactive counselling programs in colleges and other higher educational institutions, focusing on stress management, time management, and building resilience and thereby increasing tolerance levels, help in handling these pressures. Workshops about mental well-being should be inducted into the curriculum or provided as supplementary support throughout college.

Early Identification and Intervention: Develop systems to identify at-risk students experiencing mental health challenges early on, using methods like faculty or peer reports. This allows for timely intervention and support before issues become more serious.

6.4 Professional Training for Counsellors

The government could undertake this at the state level. Another suggestion indicates that the inclusion of statutory posts of mental health experts/counsellors in all colleges, whether private or government institutions, would go a long way toward improving the mental health condition of students on campuses.

6.5 Use of Technology to Promote Accessibility

Online Counselling Options: Virtual counselling sessions will facilitate services for students who may feel uneasy with personal counselling or those with time constraints. This also accommodates students who may need support during off-hours.

6.6 Self-Help Resources

Every institution should create a web page where self-help resources can be placed, such as mental health tests, relaxation techniques, and self-help workshops that one may do at his or her own pace.

6.7 Enhance Relationship with Academic Departments

Academic Support and Counselling Orientation: Increase the level of interaction between counselling services and academic departments to lessen the adverse impact of the causal link between academic stress and mental health. This can include faculty training on identifying symptoms of mental health aspects and principles of early referral to counselling services.

6.8 Flexibility in Academic Policies

Academic policies and guidelines should allow flexibility for students facing mental health issues, such as assignment deadline extensions or facilities for taking leave without penalties.

6.9 Improve Institutional Support and Funding

Increased Budget for Counselling Services: Institutions should earmark more funds towards counselling services for the purpose of making available adequate resources for professional development of counsellors, access to mental health tools and support materials for students.

6.10 Regular Professional Supervision

Supervision will ensure that services evolve in line with students' needs and challenges. Case discussions with professionals will help improve functionality and reduce stress and burnout for counsellors. Supervisors can also arrange training and lifelong developmental programs.

These suggestions may further provide an additional robust supporting network for students, reduce counsellor burnout, and ultimately improve mental health along with academic success.

7. Conclusion

This study has emphasized several key challenges faced by counsellors in higher education, particularly the rising mental health concerns among students, the intense academic pressures they experience, the institutional constraints limiting the effectiveness of counselling services, and the lack of career development. The findings emphasize the critical need for a holistic approach to addressing student well-being, one that integrates mental health support with academic resources and institutional policies. The implications listed herein significantly impact not only the counselling practices but the students' outcomes as well; hence, systemic changes must be initiated without delay to ensure that students get the timely and effective support required for student well-being to avert unnecessary stress and burnout for the counsellors to achieve this.

Future strategies for research should focus on exploring the long-term effects of counselling interventions on student success and well-being, along with the use of innovative counselling models, such as online therapy or peer counselling programs. Further studies could also examine how institutional policies and academic pressures can be restructured to better support students' mental health needs.

For counselling practices, future efforts should prioritize expanding resources, reducing stigma, and enhancing early intervention strategies. By strengthening the support network for both counsellors and students, higher education institutions can adopt an atmosphere where students thrive academically and emotionally.

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