

Counselling in Degree Colleges in India: A brief Review

T.Sujatha

Government Degree College, Rajahmundry, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Received on 8th July 2024; Revised on 10th November 2024; Accepted on 14 December 2024;

Abstract

India's higher education environment is rapidly evolving, bringing with it a set of complex challenges for students—ranging from academic stress to mental health concerns and career uncertainties. Guidance and counselling services serve as essential mechanisms to assist students in navigating these challenges. This paper offers an in-depth analysis of the role of counselling in Indian degree colleges by reviewing existing policies, current practices, and institutional models. It highlights the significant gaps in the availability and effectiveness of these services and offers practical recommendations to make guidance and counselling a foundational aspect of undergraduate education in India.

1. Introduction

India's higher education sector accommodates millions of students from diverse cultural, economic, and educational backgrounds. The shift from school to college presents various challenges that may overwhelm students, such as increased academic expectations, unclear career prospects, and emotional pressures. Guidance and counselling can play a transformative role by offering structured support during this transitional period. However, these services are inconsistently implemented and often underutilized due to a lack of infrastructure, trained personnel, and social awareness. This study aims to consolidate insights from a broad range of literature to evaluate the role and current state of counselling in Indian degree colleges.

2. Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

- Review the development and policy framework for counselling in Indian higher education.
- Analyze the present status and scope of counselling services in degree colleges.
- Evaluate the influence of these services on academic, personal, and professional student growth.
- Identify barriers to effective implementation.
- Offer evidence-based recommendations for enhancing the provision of guidance and counselling.

3. Methodology

This paper adopts a qualitative approach grounded in a thorough review of academic articles, policy reports, and institutional case studies published between 2005 and 2024. Sources were identified through databases available on Internet, using search terms like "student counselling India," "college mental health support," and "career guidance higher education." Thematic analysis was used to organize findings into key domains, including academic, career, psychological, and social counselling.

4. Evolution and Policy Landscape

Efforts to formalize guidance and counselling within Indian education began with the Kothari Commission (1964–66), which stressed the need for psychological and career support services at all levels of education. The National Policy on Education (1986) and subsequent action plans further supported the inclusion of counselling in educational institutions. In recent years, the University Grants Commission (UGC) and Ministry of Education have issued guidelines for establishing student counselling cells. The National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 introduces a more student-centric vision and recommends integrating mental health and career services in every institution. Despite these policy initiatives, execution at the ground level remains limited and sporadic.

The National Education Policy 2020, introduced by the Government of India, seeks to overhaul the existing education system to make it more flexible, holistic, and student-friendly. One of the central themes of NEP 2020 is the mental and emotional well-being of students, recognizing that education must cater to the overall development of learners.

Some key provisions of NEP 2020 related to student counselling include:

1. **Holistic Education Framework:** The policy promotes the development of cognitive, emotional, and moral capacities through education. It emphasizes the role of counselling in nurturing values, empathy, and emotional resilience.
2. **Dedicated Counselling Services:** NEP 2020 recommends the establishment of trained counsellors in schools and higher education institutions. These professionals will provide academic, career, and psychological guidance tailored to individual needs.
3. **Well-being and Support Systems:** The policy calls for the integration of wellness centres and peer support mechanisms within educational institutions to create a safe and inclusive environment.
4. **Flexible Curriculum and Assessment:** By moving away from rote learning and high-stakes examinations, NEP 2020 reduces academic stress—a major source of student anxiety—thus complementing the efforts of counselling.
5. **Equity and Inclusion:** The policy stresses the need to address the emotional and psychological needs of marginalized and disadvantaged students, including those from rural backgrounds, first-generation learners, and students with disabilities.

5. Core Areas of Counselling Services

Student counselling refers to a range of support services aimed at helping students cope with academic stress, personal problems, career planning, and emotional difficulties. In a highly competitive academic environment, students often experience anxiety, depression, confusion about career paths, peer pressure, and other socio-emotional challenges. Counselling provides them with a safe and confidential space to express themselves and receive professional guidance.

Studies have shown that well-implemented counselling services contribute to improved academic performance, better interpersonal relationships, and enhanced decision-making abilities. Counselling also plays a crucial role in identifying and supporting students with special needs or those at risk of dropping out, making it indispensable in modern educational institutions.

5.1 Academic Support

Academic counselling includes advising students on course selection, study habits, time management, and coping with examination stress. Studies by **Patel & Kumari (2017)** and **Agarwal (2022)** show that regular academic mentoring improves students' retention and academic performance, particularly among

first-generation learners. Cross-reference with **Mehta & Singh (2018)** reveals that students who regularly engage with academic counsellors report improved confidence and clarity in subject choices.

Academic counselling provides students with strategies to improve their study habits, manage time, and choose appropriate courses. Research suggests that students who receive targeted academic support tend to achieve better academic outcomes and are less likely to discontinue their studies. Such services are especially important for students from disadvantaged or rural backgrounds who may not have access to academic role models or guidance.

5.2 Career Guidance

With India's job market becoming increasingly complex, career counselling has become indispensable. According to **Kumar & Rani (2019)**, over 65% of college students are unaware of career paths related to their degree. Career guidance helps bridge this gap, providing information on internships, postgraduate options, and competitive exams.

In a survey conducted across 15 colleges in Karnataka, **Thomas & Joseph (2021)** observed that institutions with structured career counselling services had higher placement rates and student satisfaction.

In an increasingly dynamic employment landscape, students need informed guidance to navigate their career options. Career counselling helps bridge the information gap regarding job opportunities, industry requirements, and higher education paths. Programs at institutions such as Bharathiar University have shown that structured career guidance can positively influence students' confidence in their career choices.

5.3 Psychological Well-being

Students in higher education often experience emotional strain stemming from academic stress, personal issues, and peer pressure. Psychological counselling provides a space for students to address these issues with trained professionals. Kerala's Jeevani program is a noteworthy example, providing mental health support to thousands of college students, thereby demonstrating how state-level interventions can significantly improve access to such services.

Mental health concerns are growing among college students due to academic stress, peer pressure, and familial expectations. According to **NIMHANS (2019)**, nearly 23% of college-going youth in India experience psychological distress.

Counselling services, when accessible, can address issues like anxiety, depression, substance use, and suicidal ideation (Das et al., 2020). **Raj & Menon (2021)** found that students attending regular psychological counselling sessions demonstrated reduced stress levels and improved interpersonal skills.

5.4 Life Skills and Social Development

Beyond academic success, students need to develop soft skills such as communication, emotional intelligence, and decision-making. Counselling can assist students in building these competencies, which are crucial for both personal growth and professional readiness. Mentor-mentee programs in colleges like Vellalar College for Women have demonstrated how structured support can enhance students' interpersonal skills and adaptability.

6. Key Challenges and Barriers

6.1 Shortage of Qualified Counsellors

Many institutions appoint faculty members to handle counselling responsibilities without providing them the necessary training. This compromises the quality and ethical standards of the services provided. The absence of certified professionals remains one of the primary obstacles.

6.2 Infrastructure Limitations

In most colleges, especially in government and rural institutions, there are no dedicated counselling rooms or facilities. Confidentiality and accessibility are major concerns, which dissuade students from seeking help.

6.3 Cultural and Social Stigma

Despite increasing awareness, mental health remains a taboo subject in many parts of India. This stigma discourages students from utilizing counselling services even when they are available. Public education campaigns and student engagement activities are required to shift perceptions.

6.4 Urban-Rural Disparity

While some private or urban colleges have established robust counselling services, many rural and government-run institutions lack even the basic infrastructure and trained staff. This disparity needs to be addressed to ensure equal support across all student populations.

7. Effective Models and Case Studies

- **Jeevani Mental Health Program (Kerala):** Provides trained psychologists to colleges, offering free and confidential mental health services.
- **Mentor-Mentee Initiatives (e.g., Vellalar College):** Facilitates one-on-one interactions between faculty and students, enhancing communication and trust.
- **Career Development Cells (Bharathiar University):** Offers structured career counselling sessions, aptitude tests, and alumni mentorship to guide students in their career journey.
- **Manodarpan (Ministry of Education):** A national platform launched during the COVID-19 pandemic to offer psychological counselling via tele-services.

8. Recommendations

1. **Policy Enforcement:** The government and UGC must move from advisory to mandatory provisions for the establishment of counselling services in all degree colleges.
2. **Professional Training:** Institutions should offer certification courses for faculty and staff involved in student counselling to ensure professional standards.
3. **Digital Platforms:** Tele-counselling and online platforms should be scaled up, especially to support students in remote or under-resourced areas.
4. **Awareness Building:** Conduct workshops, seminars, and peer mentoring programs to educate students about the benefits of counselling.
5. **Regular Audits:** Implement feedback and assessment mechanisms to track the performance and accessibility of counselling services in colleges.

9. Conclusion

Guidance and counselling are essential services that support the overall development of students in higher education. While Indian policy frameworks acknowledge their importance, implementation remains fragmented. By addressing infrastructural, personnel, and societal challenges, and learning from successful models, India can develop a more inclusive, supportive, and effective educational environment. Integrating these services into the mainstream education system will not only improve student outcomes but also contribute to building a more emotionally resilient and career-ready workforce.

References

1. Mehta, M., & Singh, R. (2018). *Guidance and Counselling in Higher Education*. University Press.
2. Government of India. (2020). *National Education Policy 2020*. Ministry of Education.
3. NIMHANS. (2019). *Status of Youth Mental Health in India*.
4. Wikipedia. (2024). *Jeevani Mental Health Program*.
5. Kumar, S., & Rani, P. (2019). *Career Guidance and Employability*. South Asian Journal of Career Development.
6. Patel, H., & Kumari, R. (2017). *Enhancing Academic Performance through Counselling*. Indian Educational Review.
7. Thomas, A., & Joseph, L. (2021). *Career Guidance for College Students in Karnataka*.
8. Banerjee, R. (2020). *Understanding Mental Health Awareness among Indian Youth*.
9. Bhattacharya, M. (2018). *Limitations in Counselling Service Delivery*.
10. Mukherjee, R. (2016). *The Role of Life Skills in Higher Education*. NCERT.
11. WHO. (1997). *Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents*. Geneva.
12. UGC. (2016). *Guidelines for Student Counselling Centres in Higher Education Institutions*.
13. Joshi, V., & Thakur, D. (2018). *Infrastructure Gaps in Student Support Services*.
14. Sharma, A., & Rao, P. (2020). *Evaluating NEP 2020 Implementation*.
15. Indian Express. (2025). *Career Counselling Access in Indian Colleges*.
16. Vellalar College for Women. (2023). *Annual Mentor-Mentee Program Report*.
17. Reddy, B., & Sinha, M. (2006). *The Evolution of Counselling in Indian Education Policy*.