

# Behavioral problems in school children as recognized by untrained teachers

Sharma N<sup>1</sup>, Sharma VD<sup>2</sup>

1. Associate Prof, Central Department of Psychology, TU, Kathmandu 2. Professor, , Department of Psychiatry, TUTH, Kathmandu, Nepal

Email Corresponding Author: [sharmanandita@yahoo.com](mailto:sharmanandita@yahoo.com)

---

## Abstract

**Introduction:** Behavior problems in a student at school interfere with his lessons and may disturb other students. In spite of teacher's best effort, not all children rise up to the expectations. Behavioral problems are a major challenge for teachers. This study was undertaken with the aim of looking into the awareness of teachers into the existence of psychological problems in their students and to find out the type of problem present in the student.

**Materials and Method:** This study was conducted in various districts of western region when the primary author was conducting teachers training for mental health project during the period of 2001 to 2003. Questionnaire developed during the first stage of research was used in the second part. Semi-structured interview was done with 212 teachers (from Eastern Terai, Western Terai and the mid hills) dealing with 23,320 students to find the different symptoms suggesting emotional and behavioural problem.

### Results:

Out of the total 23320 students indirectly covered in the study, 8999 (38.58%) were found to have some sort of psychological problem. 'Slow learners' was reported to be present by 77.83% of teachers in 4.98% of their students, suddenly degrading school performance was reported by 75% of teachers in 3.65% of students.

**Conclusion:** An average school teacher in Nepalese government schools can identify behavioural problems in their classroom.

**Key Words:** Behavioural problem, School Children, Nepal

---

## INTRODUCTION

A child's behavioral problem represent a conflict between his developing personality and that of his parents, teachers and siblings and of other children with whom he comes into contact. The teachers, who are young, relatively inexperienced, bachelors coming from broken homes, unsatisfied in themselves may make a child more vulnerable to psychological maldevelopment.<sup>1</sup> To fulfill the psychological needs of a child, the average number of students per class should not be more than twenty. Children who are secure and emotionally satisfied in their home relationships are not usually affected by unstable teachers while teachers can be of help to emotionally upset, make them oversensitive or overprotect a child.

Behavior problems in a student at school interfere with his lessons and may disturb other students. Behavior problems often overwhelm teachers, particularly novices, and some consider this to represent the most difficult aspect of a teacher's

work day. Children who exhibit behavioral problems invariably require extra attention, which places strain on teachers and slows the pace at which lessons are offered and completed.

Teachers are not merely the machines by which educative experiences are made available to children but they are part of the active environment of the child. Children desire affection from them, status with them and recognition from them.

A teacher puts in the best of her efforts to help every child achieve optimal academic performance. In spite of this, not all children rise up to the expectations of the teachers or parents, these underachievers are 'Scholastically Backward'. The reasons or causes for this scholastic backwardness has several reasons like some of them are actually bright, but cannot get marks in spite of effort, some of them have behavioral problems and may not be keen to make an effort to get good marks and some cannot make adequate efforts because of their physical or neurological handicaps.

In a study done in the Child Guidance Clinic of Tribhuvan University teaching hospital over 33 months period, majority (74.3%) in the age range 9-12 years were found to be suffering from mental and behavioral emotional problems.<sup>2</sup> Behavioral problems are a major challenge for teachers. Developing a structured plan for addressing behavioural problems can assist teachers in dealing with issues within the classroom and improve general behaviour which leads to an increase in academic success. But the basic question remains – can untrained teachers recognize behavioural problems in children?

**OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

To look into the awareness of teachers into the existence of psychological problems in their students  
 To find out the type of problem present in the student.

**METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted in various districts of western region when the primary author was conducting teachers training for mental health project during the period of 2001 to 2003.

This was a follow up of a similar small scale research done in Morang by one of the co-author.<sup>3</sup>

During the first training conducted at Parbat where 24 teachers had participated, they were told to list 15 common psychological / behavioural problem they commonly encountered in their students. This list was compiled and 20 most commonly encountered symptom were picked up for the questionnaire. This questionnaire was later used in all the trainings done for the project by the author – a total of 8 trainings (3 in the eastern terai, 2 in the Western Terai and 3 in the mid hills). A total of 212 teachers were interviewed indirectly covering a total of 23,320 students.

**RESEARCH TOOL**

Questionnaire developed during the first stage if research was used in the second part.

**RESULTS**

Details of the results are shown in the table.

List of symptoms/ problem behavior	Teachers 'yes' responses (n=212)		Total number of students where the condition existed (n=23320)	
	Frequency	Percentage(%)	Frequency	Percentage(%)
One who is very slow to learn	165	77.83	1162	4.98
Suddenly degrading school performance	159	75	852	3.65
Cannot concentrate on study	148	69.81	772	3.31
Runs away from school	148	69.81	768	3.29
Irregular school performance	136	64.15	751	3.22
Restless student	125	58.96	673	2.89
Unreasonably aggressive	119	56.13	659	2.83
Nail biting/ thumb sucking	107	50.47	483	2.07
Bullied by others	96	45.28	461	1.98
Unnaturally fearful	90	42.45	458	1.96
Tells lies to make others in difficult position	79	37.26	402	1.72
Loses temper easily	79	37.26	386	1.66
Stammers	73	34.43	202	0.87
Breaks things deliberately	73	34.43	199	0.85
Does not socialize rather sits alone	67	31.60	191	0.82
Inappropriate (to his /her age) behaviour	56	26.42	188	0.81
Disobeys everything	44	20.75	164	0.70
One who threatens everybody	33	15.57	80	0.34
Remains sad and cries often	33	15.57	78	0.33
Faints often	27	12.74	70	0.30
<b>TOTAL</b>			8999	38.59

Most of the teachers replied that they had noticed various conditions mentioned in the questionnaire in some of the students. When the teacher gave a 'yes' response to any of the problem, they were asked 'in how many students they had seen that particular problem. This generated the figure seen in the third column. Out of the total of 23320 students indirectly covered in the study, 8999 (38.58%) were found to have some sort of psychological problem. 'Slow learners' were reported to be present by 77.83% of teachers in 4.98% of their students. Suddenly degrading school performance was reported by 75% of teachers in 3.65% of students. In a similar way the condition reported in decreasing frequency were "cannot concentrate in studies, running away from school, irregular school performance, restless student and unusually aggressiveness.

## DISCUSSION

With the free education implemented by the government, school enrolment in the country is increasing but the education system has been bogged down by a high dropout rate. One old survey done by the basic primary education project points out that 23.08% of boys and 23.3% 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 the class.<sup>4</sup> Besides other reasons, psychological/behavioural problems along with the teachers' lack of knowledge on the issue, is a major cause.

The Isles 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 year age group attending state schools in the Isle of Wright, one-year prevalence rate of psychiatric disorders was about 7%, the rate in boys being twice that in girls.<sup>5</sup>

In another study in Pakistan, in 7 private and 8 community schools, assessment of children's mental health was conducted using Strength and

Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ). Parents rated 34.4% of children as falling under the "abnormal category on SDQ, slightly higher estimates 35.8% were reported by the teacher. The findings suggest a striking difference between parents and teachers ratings in prevalence of common child mental health problems.<sup>6</sup>

The present study has shown that even the teachers who have had no basic training in mental health issues of children can recognize the presence of symptoms that point towards behavioural problem in children in their classroom.

## CONCLUSION

An average school teacher in Nepalese government schools can identify behavioural problems in their classroom. If they are given a little more orientation they could also help in decreasing stress level in the students and decrease stress in other 'normal' children.

## REFERENCES

1. Bhatia, M S, & Singhal. *Problem in children and adolescents*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. In: Jain S K, editor. New Delhi: CBS Publishers & distributors; 2006. p. 13.
2. Regmi SK; Nepal MK; Khalid A; Sinna UK; Kiljunen R; Pokharel A; Sharma SC. *A study of children and adolescents attending the Child guidance clinic of a general hospital, NEPAS Journal 2000; 19: 76*
3. Sharma, V.D. (1998). *Psychological problems in school children of Morang district, Journal of Institute of Medicine, 57: 133-136.*
4. Editorial, *Gorkhapatra*; 2053 Mangsir 30; 2.
5. Rutter, M., Tizard, J., Yule, W., Grahm. P., and Whitmore, K. *Isle of Write Studies 1964-1974. Psychological Medicine 1976; 6: 313-3.*
6. Syed EU, Hussein SA, Haidry SE. *Prevalence of emotional and behavioural problems among primary school children in Karachi, Pakistan--multi informant survey. Indian J Pediatr 2009; 76(6): 623-7.*