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## Problem Fields That Psychological Counselors Experience While Working With Children

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### Abstract

Aim of this study is to determine how often psychological counselors who work in preschools and primary schools face various problem fields. This research is made by using descriptive survey model. The data obtained by the survey was analyzed and interpreted upon using the SPSS program with the percentage, frequency. Total 244 psychological counselors consisting 183 female, 61 male participated in this study. 73 of participants work in preschool, 171 of them work in primary school. As the results show, 145 of psychological counselors experienced school adjustment problems, 117 of them experienced peer relation, 84 of them experienced conflict with parents, 74 of them faced anger management, 73 of them faced oppositional defiant disorder at least six and more times in the last six months while working with children. Also results showed that 229 of psychological counselors haven't experienced alcohol addiction, 208 of them haven't experienced drug dependence, 193 of them haven't experienced smoking dependence 192 of them haven't experienced risky sexual behaviors, 188 of them haven't experienced sexual identity indicate in last six months while working with children. Implications for and frequency of problem fields are discussed.

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### 1. Introduction

Preschool and primary school education is very important to determine, prevent and intervene in behavioral problems besides being the first step of education. It is clear to reduce levels of childhood mental illness,

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interventions need to begin earlier (Greenberg, Domitrovich & Bumbarger, 2001). Children who are in this stage usually separated for the first time from the family which is their first social environment and they meet a new social environment, school. Entering the new social environment means that new behaviors and rules have been learned for children and they could face some problems in this process. As obtaining new life experiences children could exhibit problem behavior patterns. Also, behavior problems which don't recognize in the family could be noticed in schools and some interventions for these behaviors could make by teachers or counselors. For this reason it is important to determine problems in school settings.

Even though there is not much literature about problem fields which faced in school by counselors, there is some research about statistics of problems fields which applied in child and adolescence clinics. For example; the study results which were conducted by Akdemir & Çuhadaroğlu-Çetin (2008) show that the most three common problem between 12 – 19 years old boys are ADHD, academic failure and anger; but for girls psychical complains, anger and academic failure are the most common problems. In another research findings show that the most common problems in between 12 – 18 years old were nervousness, school failure, nail biting, anxiety, introversion, not getting along well with peers and siblings rivalry (Görker, Korkmazlar, Durukan & Aydoğdu, 2004). Similarly, Aras, Ünlü & Tas (2007) indicated that the most common problems among boys between 1 – 18 years old who applied to clinic are hyperactivity, attention disorders and academic failure and girls complain about attention disorders, academic failure, family relationship problems and unhappiness, pessimism.

Akman, Baydemir, Akyol, Arslan & Kükütçü, (2011) were studying thoughts of 110 preschool teachers who work with 5-6 years old child about problem behaviors. They found that preschool teachers defined aggression and its categories (hit, obstinacy, bite and split), violence and its categories (damage, hair pulling, and throwing objects), communication problems and its categories (family, peer and teacher communication, listening problems, eye-contact, inability to express feelings, lack of self esteem) as problem behaviors. 61,8% of teachers experienced this behaviors occasionally. Huaqing & Kaiser (2003) were examined 30 studies which had been published in peer-reviewed journal between 1991 and 2002 by quantitative data's analysis. They found out that the percentages of children with externalizing problems range from 16% to 30% and percentages of children with internalizing problems range from 7% to 31% in preschools. Zima, Bussing, Freeman, Yang, Belin & Forness (2000) reported that the most common problems in 6 – 12 years old children are social competence, internalizing and externalizing and academic failure.

There are studies that show prevalence of specific behavior problems such as eating disorders (Curtin, Anderson, Must & Bandini, 2010; Nicholls, Lynn & Viner, 2011), ADHD (Oortmerssen, Glind, Brink, Smit, Crunelle, Swets & Schoevers, 2012) besides general behavior problems. For example; in a study it was find out that 55,6% of the students' body weights are within normal ranges, 14,2% of the students' body weights are malnutrition, 14,2% of the students' body weights are overweight, 16% of the students' has obesity (Andiran, Mete & Alagöz, 2007). Kaya, Bölükbaşı Macit & Siyez (2012), were studying about demographic characteristics of students applied/referred to the elementary school guidance and counseling services. Some of these students admitted to school guidance and counselig service themselves, the others were referred to school guidance and counselig service by their parent of teachers. The results show that peer relations, learning disabilities and school adjustment are most common problems in elementary school.

In Turkey, most of people who graduated from Psychological Counseling and Guidance Programs (PCG) work in schools. A standard program which determined by YOK is carried out during undergraduate studies of psychological counselors who work on entire education stages; preschool to university. Absence of variety of lessons particularly in the field of child counseling can pose a problem from the point of psychological counselors work in this field. For this reason, counselors tend to post-graduation education. Consequently, determination offrequency of problem fields that psychological counselors can experience in preschool and primary school level can help to determine education needs of psychological counselors. Also by determining the problem fields which is more likely to face in schools, counselors and researchers could able to develop preventive and intervention programs. Aim of this study is to determine how often psychological counselors who work in preschools and primary schools face various problem fields.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Participants

244 volunteer counselors who work in preschool and primary school participated in the present study. The sample was comprised of 183 female, and 61 male. 73 of participants work in preschool, 171 of them work in primary school. The study was conducted during 2013-2014 educational year.

### 2.2. Instruments

Data was collected by means of an online survey developed by the researchers. The survey consisted of two sections. In the first section there are questions for determining demographic characteristics of counselors. The second section was consisted of items related to problem fields of students which they working with. That problem fields which counselors work on with children were determined by scanning books and articles about child psychology and counseling. Questionnaire items that includes 28 determinate problem fields are entered the online questionnaire system and this questionnaire conveyed to counselors by making announcements via e-mail groups and social media.

### 2.3. Data Analysis

Data was collected using the developed questionnaire. The data obtained by the survey was analyzed and interpreted upon using the SPSS program with the percentage and frequency.

## 3. Findings and Results:

Distribution of problems fields which counselors experienced while working with children during the last six months has given at Table 1.

Table 1. Prevalence of problems fields which counselors experienced

	Frequencies				
	6 and more	4-6 times	2-4 times	1 time	None
School adjustment	143	45	39	13	4
Peer relations	117	50	45	20	12
Conflict with parents	84	38	82	17	23
Anger management	74	49	63	31	27
Oppositional defiant disorder	73	45	63	33	30
Learning disabilities	72	41	76	35	20
Divorce	67	31	72	34	40
Separation Anxiety	61	41	52	41	49
Bullying	61	38	67	33	45
Neglect	56	29	64	34	61
ADHD	53	43	78	52	18
Emotional abuse	45	30	60	41	68
Internet/game addiction	43	29	45	45	82
Eating disorders	33	16	46	46	103
Psychical abuse	29	15	46	42	122
Nail biting	27	27	55	54	81
School truant	20	19	44	53	108
Social anxiety	20	20	72	58	74
Night fears	20	28	64	60	72
Enuresis	18	26	72	57	71
School dropout	9	11	28	38	158
Grief/lost	7	12	61	65	99
Smoking	7	7	18	19	193
Drug dependence	3	4	12	17	208

Sexual abuse	2	1	8	23	180
Risk sexual behaviours	1	4	13	34	192
Gender identity disorders	0	2	7	47	188
Alcohol dependence	0	1	5	9	229

It was examined that 145 of psychological counselors experienced school adjustment problems, 117 of them experienced peer relation problems, 84 of them experienced conflict with parents, 74 of them faced anger management, 73 of them faced oppositional defiant disorder at least six and more times in the last six months while working with children.

Also results showed that 229 of psychological counselors haven't experienced alcohol addiction, 208 of them haven't experienced drug dependence, 193 of them haven't experienced smoking dependence 192 of them haven't experienced risky sexual behaviors, 188 of them haven't experienced gender identity disorders indicate in last six months while working with children.

#### 4. Conclusions

The studies which were conducted among adolescence (Akdemir & Çuhadaroğlu-Çetin, 2008; Aras, Ünlü & Taş 2007; Görker, Korkmazlar, Durukan & Aydoğdu, 2004) showed that academic failure is one of the most common problems. It was thought that the reason behind this is the unresolved school adjustment issues on early childhood and its effects on academic success. For this reason it is important making intervention and preventive studies on early childhood. Because of the entering the new social environment, children at that stage could have some difficulties to adjust. They need to learn how to communicate with peers as well as sharing the space with them. In this process it is expected for them to have conflict and relationship problems with their peers. Similarly, Kaya, Bölükbaşı Macit & Siyez (2012) found that peer relations one of the most common problem fields that experienced by counselor in school.

Results showed that it is unlikely to experience alcohol addiction, drug dependence, smoking dependence, risky sexual behaviors, gender identity disorders in preschool and primary school. The study which was made by Yurtsever (2011) to determine risk behaviors among university students showed that students mostly start to smoke after 15 years old and 21.8 percent of students start to drink alcohol at 15 – 16 years old. According to this it is expected result to find less alcohol dependence, drug use and smoking in 5 – 12 years old students. In-service training about problem fields which counselors experience most and revision of undergraduate programs can help to provide more healthy mental health services. It is also needed to determine how counselors see their competencies to work with these problems. Future research could focus on that topic.

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