

The Role of School Counseling Services in Addressing Psychosocial Problems Among Adolescents: A Sociological Study

Jayarathne S. D. Y.^{1*}; Wijethunga W. T. D.²; Fernando M. J. R. S.³;
Dassanayake D. M. P. P.⁴

¹Faculty of Medicine, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

²Department of Sociology, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, Sri Lanka.

^{3,4}Sri Lanka Institute of Advanced Technological Education, Sri Lanka.

Corresponding Author: Jayarathne S. D. Y.^{1*}

Publication Date: 2026/04/04

Abstract: Adolescence is a critical stage of human development characterized by significant psychological, social, and emotional changes that often expose individuals to a range of psychosocial challenges. This study examines the role of school counseling services in addressing psychosocial problems among adolescents in rural and urban school contexts in Sri Lanka, adopting a sociological perspective. A quantitative research design was employed, and data were collected from a sample of 70 students (Grades 9–12) selected through simple random sampling from two purposively chosen schools in the Galle District one rural and one urban. Data were gathered using a structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages. The findings reveal that adolescents experience a wide range of psychosocial problems influenced by family background, economic conditions, school environment, peer relationships, and academic pressures. Family-related factors, such as parental absence, limited emotional support, and household conflicts, were found to significantly contribute to students' psychological distress. Economic hardship, particularly among rural students, further intensified these challenges, although psychosocial problems were also observed among urban students from higher-income families, indicating the multidimensional nature of adolescent vulnerability. Academic stress, especially examination anxiety and fear of failure, emerged as one of the most prominent issues across both contexts. Peer relationships played a dual role by providing emotional support while also exposing students to risks such as substance use and sexual influences. Physical symptoms such as headaches and sleep disturbances were also reported, highlighting the link between psychological stress and physical well-being. School-related factors, including disciplinary practices and teacher–student relationships, contributed to students' dissatisfaction and discomfort within the learning environment. The study further reveals that school counseling services play a significant role in supporting adolescents, with a majority of students reporting positive outcomes such as improved academic performance and emotional well-being. However, the effectiveness of these services is constrained by limitations such as lack of privacy, insufficient resources, limited professional training, and low awareness among students. The findings emphasize the need for strengthening school counseling services through improved infrastructure, professional development, increased awareness, and enhanced parental and institutional support. Overall, the study highlights the importance of a holistic and multi-level approach in addressing adolescents' psychosocial challenges within the Sri Lankan education system.

Keywords: School Counseling Services, Psychosocial Problems, Adolescents, Rural and Urban Schools, Sri Lanka.

How to Cite: Jayarathne S. D. Y.; Wijethunga W. T. D.; Fernando M. J. R. S.; Dassanayake D. M. P. P. (2026) The Role of School Counseling Services in Addressing Psychosocial Problems Among Adolescents: A Sociological Study. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 11(3), 3092-3097. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/26mar1373>

I. INTRODUCTION

Adolescence is a critical stage of human development characterized by significant physical, psychological, and social changes. During this period, young people often experience various psychosocial challenges that affect their

emotional well-being, social relationships, and academic performance. Common issues include examination stress, peer pressure, identity conflicts, family tensions, and exposure to social risks, all of which may lead to emotional or behavioral problems if not properly addressed. In this context, educational institutions play an important role not

only in academic development but also in supporting students' mental and social well-being. School counseling services have emerged as a key institutional mechanism to assist students in managing personal, academic, and social difficulties by promoting coping skills, decision-making abilities, and psychological resilience through professional guidance (Jayasekara, 2024).

In Sri Lanka, the importance of school counseling services has gained increasing attention over recent decades. The introduction of counseling units in schools reflects a growing recognition of the psychological and social pressures faced by students. These services aim to provide a supportive environment where students can discuss personal issues and receive guidance from trained personnel. However, despite these initiatives, the effectiveness of counseling services remains limited due to structural constraints such as insufficient trained counselors, lack of resources, and inadequate institutional support (Jayawardena, 2022).

Empirical studies in Sri Lanka indicate that adolescents commonly experience psychosocial problems related to academic competition, family expectations, and social transitions, often manifesting as stress, anxiety, and interpersonal difficulties. Although school counseling services attempt to address these challenges, their effectiveness is often hindered by limited awareness among students and broader socio-cultural factors. In particular, stigma surrounding mental health and cultural norms may discourage students from seeking professional support, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive counseling approaches (Jayasekara, 2024; Wedisinghe, 2025). Furthermore, recent research emphasizes the importance of strengthening adolescent mental health services within schools to ensure comprehensive support systems (Rajapakshe et al., 2023).

Despite the growing recognition of these issues, there remains a lack of sociological research examining how school counseling services function within the broader social context of Sri Lankan schools. Existing studies tend to focus on psychological or educational perspectives, with limited attention to the social factors influencing students' experiences and the effectiveness of counseling services. Therefore, this study aims to examine the contribution of school counseling services in addressing psychosocial problems among adolescents in Sri Lanka. By adopting a sociological perspective, the study explores the nature of adolescents' psychosocial challenges, the role of counseling services in addressing these issues, and the institutional and social factors influencing their effectiveness. The findings are expected to contribute to improving counseling practices and strengthening student support systems within the Sri Lankan education sector.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a quantitative research design to examine the role of school counseling services in addressing the psychosocial problems of adolescents within the Sri Lankan school context. The research was conducted in the

Galle District, incorporating both rural and urban settings to enable comparative analysis. Two schools were purposively selected: Olcott Maha Vidyalaya as the urban school under provincial administration and Polpagoda Dharmapala Maha Vidyalaya in the Udugama educational zone as the rural school. These schools were selected based on the presence of active counseling services and a relatively high number of students who had received counseling. The study population consisted of 140 students from Grades 9 to 12 who had participated in counseling services, with 70 students from each school. From this population, a sample of 70 students (50%) was selected using a simple random sampling method to ensure representation from both contexts. Primary data were collected using a structured questionnaire comprising both closed-ended and Likert-scale questions, focusing on demographic characteristics, family background, psychosocial issues, awareness of counseling services, and perceptions of their effectiveness. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequencies and percentages, and were presented through tables and graphical representations to facilitate comparison between rural and urban groups. Ethical considerations were maintained throughout the study by ensuring voluntary participation, obtaining informed consent, and guaranteeing the confidentiality and anonymity of respondents.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

➤ *Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics*

The study sample consisted of 70 adolescents, including 39 females (55.7%) and 31 males (44.3%), indicating a slightly higher engagement of female students in school counseling services. The sample was equally distributed between rural ($n = 35$) and urban ($n = 35$) schools, allowing for comparative analysis. Family structure data revealed that the majority of respondents belonged to nuclear families ($n = 32$), with the most common family size being three to four members (22.86%). Smaller families (1–2 members) accounted for only 4.29%, while families with five to six members represented 18.57%. These findings suggest that adolescents in both rural and urban contexts are primarily socialized within nuclear family environments, which may influence the availability of emotional and social support. Parental survival status showed that most students had both parents alive (mothers: 94.3%, fathers: 91.4%). However, a small proportion had experienced parental loss (mother: 5.7%, father: 8.57%), which may contribute to increased vulnerability to psychosocial challenges. Even among students with living parents, qualitative patterns suggest that limited parental involvement may influence adolescents' emotional well-being. Socioeconomic conditions varied significantly. A notable proportion of students (18.57%) reported low household income (LKR 10,000–20,000), particularly in rural areas. In contrast, only 5.71% of urban students belonged to high-income households (> LKR 100,000). These findings indicate that financial constraints, especially in rural settings, may contribute to stress related to educational resources and daily needs. This aligns with sociological perspectives that link economic disadvantage with increased psychosocial vulnerability among adolescents (Figure 1).

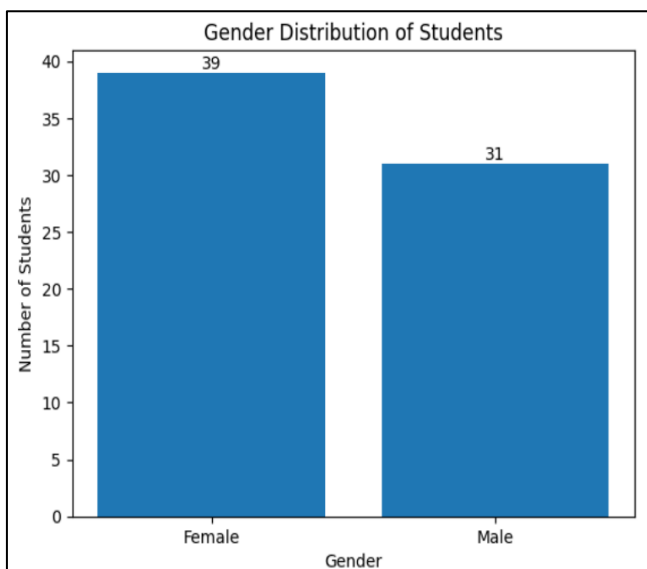


Fig 1 Gender Distribution of Students

➤ *Educational Characteristics and Counseling Utilization*

The highest proportion of students seeking counseling services were in Grade 12, with 9 rural students (12.8%) and 12 urban students (17.14%). This pattern suggests that academic pressure intensifies at higher grade levels, particularly due to examination-related stress. Lower participation was observed in lower grades, especially in urban Grade 8. This indicates that students may seek counseling more frequently when academic demands and future uncertainties become more pronounced. These findings support existing literature that identifies examination pressure as a major stressor in secondary education.

➤ *Peer Relationships and Social Influences*

Peer relationships were nearly universal, with 90% of students (n = 63) reporting having friends, while 10% (n = 7) lacked close peer associations. Peer networks play a critical role in adolescent socialization, providing emotional support as well as exposure to new experiences. However, 61% of students (n = 43) reported exposure to sexual influences, compared to 39% (n = 27) who did not. Sources of influence included peers, neighbors, and, in a few cases, teachers. Rural students reported higher peer-based influence (17%) compared to urban students (7%), while urban students reported more exposure from neighbors. These findings highlight the complex social environments adolescents navigate, where peer interactions can both support and challenge their development. The presence of sexual influence across multiple social contexts suggests the need for structured guidance through counseling services (Figure 2).

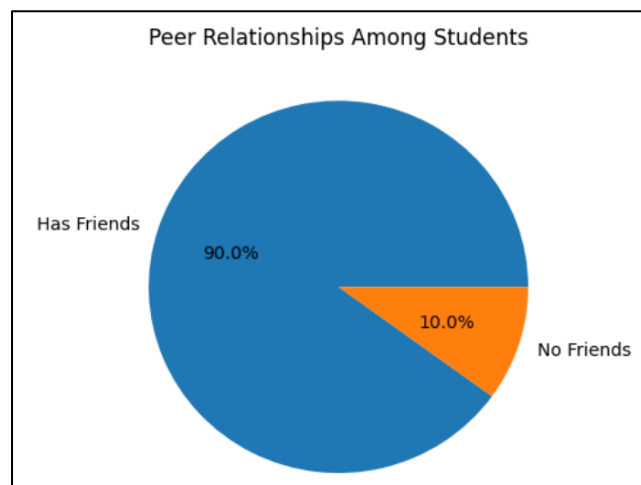


Fig 2 Peer Relationships Among Students

➤ *Substance Use*

A relatively small proportion of students (11.4%, n = 8) reported alcohol use, while the majority (88.6%) did not engage in substance use. Among those who reported usage, reasons included personal satisfaction (7.14%), peer pressure, and curiosity. Although the prevalence is low, the presence of substance use among adolescents indicates exposure to risk behaviors, which are often linked to peer influence and psychosocial stress. This finding reinforces the importance of early intervention through school counseling (Figure 3).

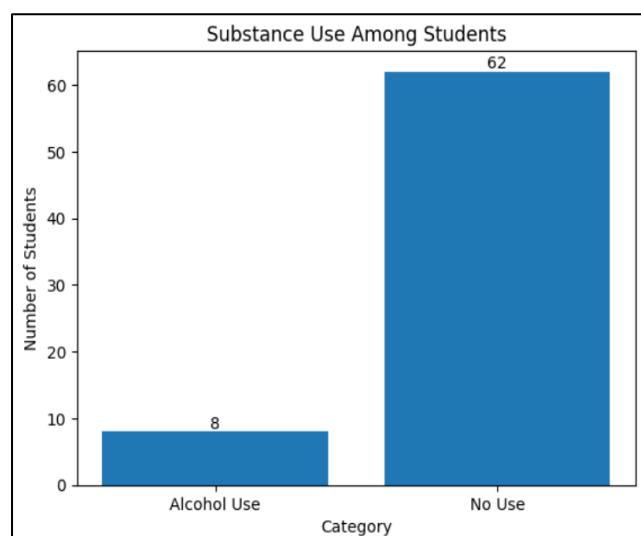


Fig 3 Substance Use Among Students

➤ *School Environment and Institutional Factors*

Students expressed dissatisfaction with several school practices. Uniform inspections were disliked by 17% of rural students and 9% of urban students, while 19 urban students reported dissatisfaction with public punishment. Hair inspections were also negatively perceived by both groups. These findings suggest that certain disciplinary practices may create discomfort, particularly among economically disadvantaged students who may struggle to meet institutional expectations. This reflects how structural inequalities can manifest within school environments, potentially affecting students' sense of belonging and engagement.

➤ *Psychosocial and Academic Challenges*

A range of psychosocial problems related to education was identified. Examination anxiety emerged as a key issue, reported by 13 rural students (18.57%) and 11 urban students (15.71%). Additionally, students reported difficulties in memory retention, intrusive thoughts, and lack of academic achievement despite effort. Mathematics-related anxiety was also prominent, with 9 students each in rural and urban settings expressing negative perceptions toward the subject. Notably, even some academically capable students reported similar concerns, indicating that perceived difficulty and fear of failure play a significant role. These findings suggest that academic stress is a major contributor to psychosocial challenges, particularly in high-stakes examination contexts.

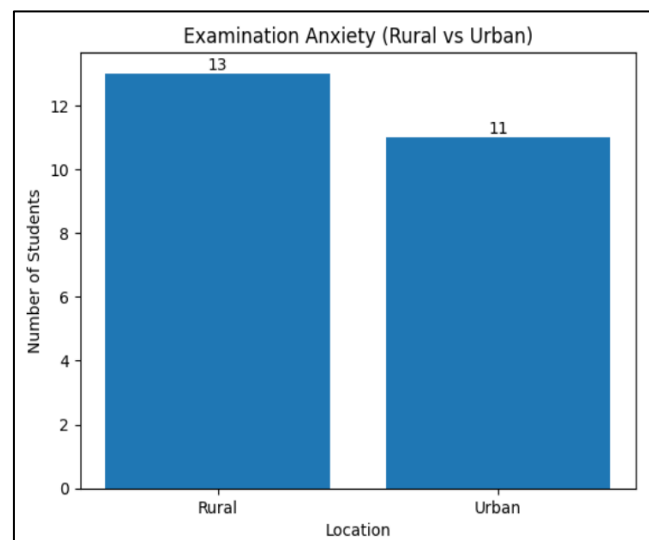


Fig Examination Anxiety (Rural vs Urban)

➤ *Self-Perception and Emotional Well-Being*

Students reported several issues related to self-perception, including lack of autonomy, lack of recognition of abilities, and concerns related to romantic relationships. For example, 5 rural and 9 urban students reported that they were not allowed to make independent decisions. Romantic relationships were identified as both a source of emotional engagement and stress, with 10 rural students (14%) and 9 urban students (13%) reporting that such relationships negatively affected their education. These findings reflect the developmental complexities of adolescence, where identity formation, emotional attachment, and social expectations intersect.

➤ *Physical and Psychological Symptoms*

Students reported physical symptoms associated with stress, including headaches and sleep disturbances. Headaches were reported by 13 urban students (19%) and 11 rural students, while sleep disturbances were reported by 8 rural and 10 urban students. Additionally, a small proportion of students reported concerns related to delayed physical development (10% rural, 7% urban), which may contribute to social anxiety and reduced self-esteem. These findings indicate a clear link between psychological stress and physical health among adolescents.

➤ *Awareness, Access, and Participation in Counseling*

Awareness of counseling services was primarily obtained through teachers and school assemblies (14% each), followed by notice boards and parents. Referral patterns varied, with teachers playing a larger role in rural areas (16%) and principals being more influential in urban schools (20%). Participation rates were slightly higher in rural areas (29%) compared to urban areas (27%), suggesting differences in accessibility or referral practices.

➤ *Perceived Effectiveness of Counseling Services*

Most students perceived counseling services positively. 46% of rural students and 43% of urban students believed counseling was effective, while only a small proportion expressed dissatisfaction. Academic improvement was reported by 73% of students, indicating that counseling may contribute to better educational outcomes. Overall, 77% of students reported that counseling helped them manage their problems, while 23% reported limited effectiveness. These findings demonstrate that school counseling services play a significant role in addressing adolescents' psychosocial issues. However, variations in satisfaction indicate the need for improvements in service delivery, accessibility, and confidentiality.

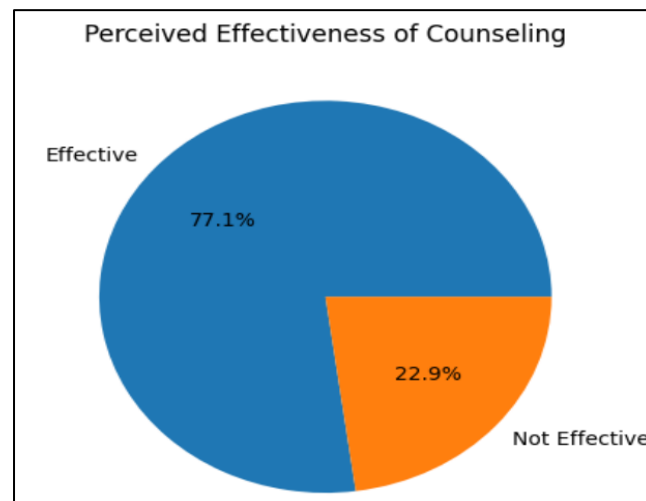


Fig 5 Perceived Effectiveness of Counseling

➤ *Perceived Importance of Counseling Services*

A majority of students recognized the importance of counseling services. 40% considered its absence a major loss, while 44% viewed it as a moderate loss. Only 16% believed it would not make a difference. This highlights that, despite some limitations, counseling services are within schools.

IV. CONCLUSION

This study examined the role of school counseling services in addressing psychosocial problems among adolescents in rural and urban school contexts in Sri Lanka. Adolescence is widely recognized as a critical developmental stage characterized by significant psychological, social, and emotional changes, which often expose young individuals to various forms of stress and vulnerability (Jayasekara, 2024). The findings of this study confirm that adolescents experience a wide range of psychosocial challenges

influenced by family dynamics, school environments, peer interactions, and broader socio-economic conditions.

The results indicate that a slightly higher proportion of female students accessed counseling services, suggesting either a greater vulnerability to psychosocial stressors or a higher tendency to seek support compared to male students. Family background emerged as a key determinant of adolescents' psychosocial well-being. Factors such as parental presence, family size, economic conditions, and the quality of parent-child relationships significantly influenced students' emotional experiences. Consistent with existing literature, the family serves as a primary agent of socialization, and limited parental involvement or emotional support can contribute to increased psychological distress among adolescents (Jayawardena, 2022). In this study, parental absence and weak communication were associated with feelings of isolation and reduced coping capacity.

Economic conditions were also found to play a significant role, particularly among rural students from low-income households. Financial constraints limited access to educational resources and contributed to stress and insecurity. However, psychosocial problems were not confined to economically disadvantaged groups, as some urban students from relatively higher-income families also reported emotional and psychological challenges. This finding supports previous research indicating that adolescent well-being is shaped not only by economic factors but also by social and relational dynamics (Rajapakshe et al., 2023).

Family conflicts were identified as a major source of psychosocial stress. Issues such as financial difficulties, substance use, and interpersonal disputes within the household negatively affected students' mental health and academic engagement. These findings are consistent with prior studies demonstrating that family instability can significantly impact adolescents' emotional well-being (Jayasekara, 2024). In addition, school-related factors, including strict disciplinary practices, lack of supportive teacher-student relationships, and unsatisfactory learning environments, contributed to students' dissatisfaction and psychological discomfort.

Academic pressure emerged as one of the most prominent psychosocial challenges. Examination anxiety, fear of failure, difficulties in memory retention, and negative attitudes toward subjects such as mathematics were commonly reported across both rural and urban contexts. These findings align with previous research highlighting the strong relationship between academic stress and adolescent mental health (Wedisinghe, 2025). Such pressures not only affect academic performance but also contribute to broader emotional and psychological difficulties.

Peer relationships and social influences also played a critical role in shaping adolescents' experiences. While friendships provided important sources of support, some students experienced loneliness, peer pressure, and exposure to negative influences, including romantic and sexual experiences. A small proportion of students reported

substance use, indicating the influence of peer dynamics and social environments. Furthermore, the presence of physical symptoms such as headaches and sleep disturbances suggests a strong connection between psychological stress and physical health outcomes (Rajapakshe et al., 2023).

The study further reveals that school counseling services play a significant role in supporting adolescents. The majority of students perceived counseling as beneficial, reporting improvements in academic performance and emotional well-being. However, the effectiveness of these services was constrained by several institutional and structural limitations, including lack of privacy, insufficient facilities, limited professional training, and low levels of awareness among students. Cultural stigma associated with mental health and counseling services also influenced students' willingness to seek support, emphasizing the importance of culturally sensitive and accessible counseling approaches (Wedisinghe, 2025).

Given these findings, strengthening school counseling services requires a comprehensive and multi-level approach. At the family level, enhancing parental involvement and communication is essential to support adolescents' emotional development. At the school level, improving counseling infrastructure, ensuring confidentiality, and implementing structured psychosocial support programs are critical. Teachers should be trained to identify early signs of psychosocial distress and facilitate appropriate referrals. Additionally, promoting positive teacher-student relationships and supportive learning environments can contribute to improved student well-being. At the policy level, increased investment in counseling services, professional training, and collaboration with mental health professionals is necessary to enhance the effectiveness of school-based interventions (Rajapakshe et al., 2023).

In conclusion, while school counseling services in Sri Lanka make a meaningful contribution to addressing adolescents' psychosocial problems, their full potential has not yet been realized. Psychosocial challenges among adolescents are complex and multifaceted, requiring coordinated efforts across family, school, and policy domains. Strengthening counseling services and adopting a holistic approach to adolescent well-being are essential steps toward creating a supportive and inclusive educational environment that promotes both academic success and psychosocial development.

REFERENCES

- [1]. American School Counselor Association. (2019). *ASCA national model: A framework for school counseling programs* (4th ed.). American School Counselor Association. <https://www.schoolcounselor.org>
- [2]. Eccles, J. S., & Roeser, R. W. (2011). Schools as developmental contexts during adolescence. *Journal of Research on Adolescence*, 21(1), 225–241. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1532-7795.2010.00725.x>

- [3]. Jayasekara, P. (2024). *School counseling services and adolescent psychosocial well-being in Sri Lanka*. Journal of Educational Psychology, 12(2), 45–62.
- [4]. Jayawardena, S. (2022). *Challenges in implementing school counseling services in Sri Lanka*. Sri Lanka Journal of Education, 8(1), 23–38.
- [5]. Patton, G. C., Sawyer, S. M., Santelli, J. S., Ross, D. A., Afifi, R., Allen, N. B., Arora, M., Azzopardi, P., Baldwin, W., Bonell, C., Kakuma, R., Kennedy, E., Mahon, J., McGovern, T., Mokdad, A. H., Patel, V., Petroni, S., Reavley, N., Taiwo, K., ... Viner, R. M. (2016). Our future: A Lancet commission on adolescent health and wellbeing. *The Lancet*, 387(10036), 2423–2478. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(16\)00579-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(16)00579-1)
- [6]. Rajapakshe, R., Perera, D., & Silva, M. (2023). *Adolescent mental health and school-based support systems in Sri Lanka*. Asian Journal of Social Science, 15(3), 101–118.
- [7]. Reinke, W. M., Stormont, M., Herman, K. C., Puri, R., & Goel, N. (2011). Supporting children's mental health in schools: Teacher perceptions of needs, roles, and barriers. *School Psychology Quarterly*, 26(1), 1–13. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0022714>
- [8]. Wedisinghe, K. (2025). *Cultural perspectives on adolescent mental health and counseling practices in Sri Lanka*. International Journal of Sociology and Education, 10(1), 55–72.