

# **The relationship between the school counsellor's characteristics and students' willingness to seek help for dealing with parental violence**

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## **Abstract**

Parental violence is a widespread problem that generally requires professional intervention. Despite the benefits of help-seeking, studies indicate that the percentage of adolescents who seek help in various areas is relatively low. Moreover, adolescents prefer to seek help from informal sources such as friends and family instead of seeking formal assistance. However, studies suggest that there are contributing factors that may promote help seeking. These factors are related to the individual's situation, to the person who provides assistance, and to the person who seeks help.

The current study examined the willingness of adolescents who are victims of parental violence to seek assistance from school counselors, and actual requests for help with this problem from counselors. In addition, we examined the relationships between the willingness to seek help and gender, the type of violence (physical abuse, corporal punishment, psychological aggression, and neglect), and the characteristics of counselors (their availability, their ability to assist with the situation, and their relationship with students).

The study was based on secondary analysis of data collected in an earlier study by Yablon (not yet published). The sample consisted of 333 students in grades 8-12, who were randomly selected from 32 schools around the country (197 girls and 136 boys). The findings revealed that in general, the rate of requests for assistance in cases of parental violence is relatively low, particularly the rate of referrals to a school counselor. However, a relationship was found between the type of violence and help seeking, so that the lowest number of referrals was among pupils who had been exposed to psychological aggression, whereas the highest number was among pupils who had been exposed to corporal punishment and physical abuse. This suggests that the more serious the violence is, the higher number of requests for assistance. In addition, the findings revealed a gender difference in willingness to seek help: boys were less willing than girls to seek assistance from the school staff. However, this difference was not found with regard to actual requests for help. These contradictions are addressed in the Discussion session.

As for the characteristics of the counselor, the findings revealed a relationship between the counselor's characteristics and willingness to seek assistance as well as actual requests for help in cases of parental violence. Therefore, when the counselor was available, able to help, and had a good relationship with the students, the participants were more willing to seek help in cases of parental violence and the rate of actual requests for assistance increased. Hence, these characteristics are factors that promote help-seeking. The theoretical contribution of this study lies in the attempt to shed light on the factors that promote help-seeking from school counselors, and in the attempt to provide tools and guidelines for school counselors to help students in situations of distress.

