

## Psychological Difficulties of High-School Students in Hanoi City Nowadays

**PhD. Le Thu Trang**

Faculty of Political Theory and Social Sciences and Humanities  
People's Police Academy

**ABSTRACT:** With the development of economy, society and technology, the physical and mental health of people in general and high school students in particular are increasingly improved and focused on. Regarding mental health, many of the problems that high school students encounter are psychological difficulties, which are difficulties in studying, love, family, choosing a future career and personal problems (such as health, sex, etc.). Most students have psychological difficulties at different levels, in which emotional difficulties, family difficulties, and financial difficulties are correlated with the student's gender, family relationship status, and whether the student is currently living with his or her parents. The paper analyzes the psychological difficulties of high school students in Hanoi city today.

**KEYWORDS:** Current situation, difficulties, psychology, students, high school, Hanoi City...

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the strong development of science and technology has had a strong impact on all areas of human life, especially the young generation, whose main target is students. Many studies show that students face many psychological difficulties such as problems with learning, career orientation, emotions, behavior and relationships with teachers, family, friends and social networking communities. Psychological difficulties and barriers are not only related to students acquiring a larger and more difficult amount of knowledge, but also related to the way of learning and applying that knowledge. There are also other psychological difficulties and barriers that significantly affect the quality of students' learning, such as family circumstances, living environment, friends, and the individual student himself..... Faced with the above situation, on December 18, 2017, the Ministry of Education and Training issued Circular No. 31/2017/TT-BGDDT on guidelines for implementing psychological counseling for students in high schools. At the same time, the Ministry of Education and Training issued Decision No. 1876/QĐ-BGDDT dated May 21, 2018 promulgating the Program to foster counseling capacity for high-school teachers to provide counseling for students. With the above reality, many schools have sent teachers for training and development, and have developed plans and organized psychological counseling activities for students in schools. However, according to preliminary observations, the implementation and results of this activity still have certain limitations, so there is a need for scientific, specific measures that are suitable to the actual conditions of schools. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct surveys with scientific data and high reliability to clearly determine the current situation of psychological counseling activities for students at high schools in Hanoi. This is an important basis for educational managers and professionals to propose and implement solutions to improve the effectiveness of this work.

### 2. CONTENTS

#### 2.1. Psychological difficulties of high school students - Some theoretical issues

With the development of economy, society and technology, the physical and mental health of people in general and children in particular are increasingly improved and focused on. Regarding mental health, there are many problems that adolescents encounter such as emotional and behavioral problems, psychological difficulties related to studying, career orientation, relationships (teachers, friends, family, society...). For emotional psychological difficulties, adolescents do not experience just one disorder but often have two or more disorders.

In foreign countries: When studying the coping strategies for psychological distress, in 1970, researchers found an approach to measuring and assessing the coping, which was summarized in the work of Folkman and Lazarus. They identified eight coping strategies: facing problems, trying to escape difficult situations, seeking social support, taking responsibility, avoiding reality, planning to solve problems, and seeing the upside. Researchers believe these ways reflect two basic types of coping: focusing on the problem and focusing on the emotion. Lazarus and Folkman emphasized that aspects of an individual's coping behavior vary depending on the situation or the level of social support the individual receives. One of the measurement tools developed by the

## Psychological Difficulties of High-School Students in Hanoi City Nowadays

new perspective is CISS (Coping with stressful situations). This tool attempts to provide clues to the coping strategies people might use in difficult situations. The coping strategies suggested by this tool include task-oriented strategies, in which people aim to cope with the next problem that arises; emotion-oriented strategies, and reality-avoidance strategies (including seeking social support and seeking distraction).

In the study by Bolognini Monique, Plancherel Bernard; Halfon Olivier "Assessing the coping strategies of adolescents: are there differences by age and by gender? investigated gender-specific coping strategies, the correlation between coping strategies and mental health by gender and age. The authors have suggested ways to cope such as: social use, family, negative emotions, entertainment, humor, commitment, spending, family, school. Results confirm that adolescent girls self-adjust to hardship by engaging more in social relationships (friends, siblings, parents, and other adults). Research has shown that girls invest more in the interactive world to express their feelings openly, to receive support, advice and comfort from a confidant (friend, family). Meanwhile, the teenage boys tried harder to maintain a sense of humor and engage in vigorous physical activity. Boys are less open and less dependent on others than girls, but tend to de-escalate situations and appear optimistic, seeking relief in games and physical activities. Regarding the relationship between mental health and coping strategies, research shows that outcomes appear to differ between boys and girls. In girls, the most highly correlated coping strategy was the expression of negative emotions combined with a highest probability of mental disturbances such as depressed mood, anxiety, and sleep disturbance. In boys, there was only a correlation with anxiety.

Researcher Camus Jean in the article "Time arrangement and school difficulties. Immediate and delayed reactions" compared the psychological coping methods of children in the SES group (children in special classes, these children are called "mis-adapted students", "slow" in learning) and children in the CES group (normal secondary-school students). The results showed that when boys in the SES group encountered difficulties, they acted quickly, without evaluation, and viewed these impulsive actions as a kind of "armor" against the fear of continuous failure. Girls in this group tended to delay the time to do the work, they struggled to find suitable solutions, felt frustrated, always complained and asked for help more than girls in the CES group.

According to a study in the United States by author Cicchetti et al. (1998), depressive disorders often occur simultaneously with other disorders, especially with anxiety disorders and substance abuse. Additionally, depression is also linked to an increased risk of other mental disorders such as drug use and suicide. Epidemiological studies of mental health in adolescents have shown that there is a significant proportion that needs to be monitored. According to the World Health Organization, 20% of children and adolescents worldwide are estimated to have mental disorders or problems. Of these, about half of mental disorders begin before the age of 14. However, the areas with the highest proportion of under 19-years-old population have the poorest mental health services. In most low- and middle-income countries, the ratio of child psychiatrists to the population is 1/4,000,000 people.

In Vietnam, studies have shown alarming statistics about the rate of high-school students with mental health problems. According to a study in Ba Ria - Vung Tau province conducted by the province's psychiatric hospital for two years (2014 - 2015), 13.2% of students suffered from depression; 13% of students showed signs of anxiety disorders, mainly due to their unhappy families or pressure from studying and exams. In 2016, research by Tran Thanh Nam and colleagues showed that 33.6% of the total objects (9<sup>th</sup> grade students) had anxiety disorders, in which the issues they worried about most included: anxiety about school in general, anxiety about not meeting other people's expectations... For 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, Tran Thi Kim Hue's research showed that 38.2% of the total subjects had anxiety disorders. The research by Nguyen Thanh Tam and colleagues showed that about 18-68% of high-school students had symptoms of anxiety.

Along with that rate is the need to learn about mental disorders, accompanied by the need for advice and consultation. In Vietnam, specifically Thai Nguyen City, Dam Thi Bao Hoa and colleagues surveyed the mental health care needs of students in Thai Nguyen City. Results showed that over 80% of parents and over 90% of teachers wanted to receive mental health care materials and advice for their children/students. In 2012, Bui Thi Thoa conducted a survey of 516 high-school students in Dan Phuong district (Hanoi). The results showed that 54.5% of students "strongly wanted" to have a psychological counseling room in school. In 2014, according to research results by Bui Thi Thanh Dieu, 61.6% of total objects wanted to have psychological consultants in schools. The research results of Le Quang Son and colleagues showed that 71.1% of the total number of students in the research sample chose the level of "very necessary" when asked about the need for counseling in studying; 35.8% wanted counseling about themselves and 29.2% asked about relationships with friends... With Le Quang Son's group, when surveying the desire for the school to have a psychological counseling room, the result was that 56.7% of the total number of students chose "regularly come to consult experts about their problems".

Previous research results show that, in addition to meeting directly with support people such as psychiatrists, psychologists... students also have a need for psychological counseling through technological means such as email, letters, and telephone. The research by Bui Thi Thanh Dieu shows that consulting via email and letters is the form most chosen by students. When asked why they did not want to go directly to the counseling room, most of the students replied that if the school had a counseling room, they would really want to go but were afraid that their friends would see them, and the teacher would recognize them. The high rate of youth use of high-tech means along with the development of related services is a potential opportunity for providing information technology-based mental health services for this age group.

## 2.2. Current psychological difficulties of high school students in Hanoi city

The study surveyed 24 managers, 61 teachers and 221 students from grades 10 to 12, including 92 (41.6%) males and 129 (58.4%) females at the HNUE High School for Gifted Students.

2.2.1. The current awareness of managers, teachers and students about the importance of psychological counseling for students

Awareness plays an important role in all human activities, correct perception will direct correct activities, and thus bring more positive results. The survey results in Table 1 show that most managers, teachers and students believe that psychological counseling for students is very important, important and quite important (Table 1).

| No           | Level           | Managers, Teachers |              | Students   |              |
|--------------|-----------------|--------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|
|              |                 | Quantity           | Rate (%)     | Quantity   | Rate (%)     |
| 1            | Very important  | 12                 | 14.1         | 0          | 0.0          |
| 2            | Important       | 40                 | 47.1         | 79         | 35.7         |
| 3            | Quite important | 33                 | 38.8         | 105        | 47.5         |
| 4            | Normal          | 0                  | 0.0          | 37         | 16.7         |
| 5            | Not important   | 0                  | 0.0          | 0          | 0.0          |
| <b>Total</b> |                 | <b>85</b>          | <b>100.0</b> | <b>221</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Table 1. Awareness of managers, teachers and students about the importance of psychological counseling activities for high-school students

Specifically, at the important level, there are 119/306 opinions and at the quite important level, there are 138/306 opinions. This shows that in the process of teaching and managing managers, teachers all realize that students today encounter problems with learning, career orientation, relationships with others and emotional problems... If these problems are not supported, they will affect students' mental health. The evaluation results of managers and teachers are similar to the students' evaluation of the importance of psychological counseling in schools, in which 85.9% of managers and teachers' opinions are very important and important, while students' opinions are 83.2%. The above data shows that organizing the psychological counseling for students in schools is very necessary and plays a big role in helping students develop comprehensively in terms of personality.

2.2.2. Current situation of psychological difficulties of students in high schools

The survey results in Table 2 show that most students encounter psychological difficulties quite often with General Mean of 2.75 (Table 2).

Table 2. Students' assessment of their own psychological difficulties

| No                  | Psychological difficulties of high-school students | Opinion     |             |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
|                     |                                                    | M           | SD          |
| 1                   | Emotional difficulties                             | Table       | 0.74        |
| 2                   | Difficulty in learning methods                     | 3.29        | 0.51        |
| 3                   | Difficulty in career orientation                   | 3.23        | 0.53        |
| 4                   | Difficulty in relationships with friends           | 2.54        | 0.62        |
| 5                   | Difficulty in relationships with family            | 2.29        | 0.46        |
| 6                   | Difficulty in relationships with teachers          | 2.42        | 0.81        |
| <b>General Mean</b> |                                                    | <b>2.75</b> | <b>0.63</b> |

Note: M: Mean,  $1 \leq M \leq 4$ ; SD: Standard deviation

## Psychological Difficulties of High-School Students in Hanoi City Nowadays

Some problems that students encounter are at a high level, such as difficulty in learning with M of 3.29 and difficulty in career orientation with M of 3.23. The next difficulties that students experienced are related to emotions - feelings, relationships with friends and teachers, with M of 2.75, 2.54 and 2.42 respectively. This result is consistent with the research results of Tran Van Cong, Nguyen Thi Hoai Phuong, Tran Thanh Nam (2019) on psychological difficulties of students. If the above difficulties are not consulted and supported, students can easily fall into anxiety and stress... Therefore, these difficulties in students need advice and support from teachers and staff in charge of the school's psychological counseling room.

### 2.2.3. Current situation of psychological counseling level for students in high schools

The research results in Table 3 show that the contents of organizing counseling for students are all implemented. The evaluation levels of managers, teachers and students are similar to each other, with General Mean of managers and teachers being 2.12 and that of students being 2.23 (Table 3).

**Table 3. Assessment of the level of psychological counseling for high school students**

| No                  | Level of students' psychological counseling                   | Managers, Teachers |             | Students    |             |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                     |                                                               | M                  | SD          | M           | SD          |
| 1                   | Career orientation guidance for students                      | 2.45               | 0.53        | 2.63        | 0.49        |
| 2                   | Counseling and supporting for students in learning            | 2.31               | 0.55        | 2.49        | 0.54        |
| 3                   | Consulting on relationships with friends for students         | 2.06               | 0.65        | 2.14        | 0.97        |
| 4                   | Consulting on parent relationship for high school students    | 2.12               | 0.62        | 2.19        | 0.93        |
| 5                   | Consulting on relationships with teachers for students        | 1.92               | 0.81        | 2.13        | 0.73        |
| 6                   | Consulting on love and relationship for students              | 1.81               | 0.56        | 2.00        | 0.61        |
| 7                   | Consulting on behavior and communication for students         | 2.17               | 1.00        | 2.18        | 0.80        |
| 8                   | Consulting on resolving conflicts on the Internet with people | 2.11               | 0.65        | 2.08        | 0.93        |
| <b>General Mean</b> |                                                               | <b>2.12</b>        | <b>0.65</b> | <b>2.23</b> | <b>0.71</b> |

Among the counseling contents for students, career counseling content is carried out quite regularly with M of 2.45 among managers, teachers and 2.63 among students. This data shows that high-school students have real difficulty in orienting their future careers. Studies have shown that there were many factors that influenced the career choices of high school students (Germeijs and Verschueren, 2006), of which teachers' career orientation was one of the most important factors (Law and Arthur, 2003). Good career orientation activities also had a positive impact on the learning efforts of high school students to meet the requirements of the oriented and chosen career (Justin, Xiongyi and Yvona, 2010). The Mean of 2.49 for learning difficulties shows the importance of teachers in consulting and assisting students. Some students responded that they sometimes had difficulty in concentrating in class, difficulty in memorizing, identifying basic knowledge issues... Studies have shown the role and importance of academic counseling to help students identify, adjust methods, develop strategies, study plans and practice to improve their learning outcomes (Shaterloo & Mohammadyari, 2011; Oluwabunmi & Oredugba, 2017). When academic consultants have good skills and knowledge, the effectiveness of consulting students is improved, students can absorb the consulting content, adjust their methods in time and make specific study plans; their learning attitudes also change more positively and their learning results are also better (Oluwabunmi & Oredugba, 2017). In addition, some other difficulties that students ask for advice on are about communication and behavior, advice on online relationships and advice on relationships with friends, parents and teachers, which are rated at the occasional level. Such a level of consultation shows the need to equip teachers with knowledge and skills in counseling and providing psychological support to students. Currently, the Ministry of Education and Training is organizing training for teachers on knowledge of counseling and supporting students in teaching and education to reduce these difficulties for students.

### 2.2.4. Current situation of forms and methods of psychological counseling for students in high schools

The results in Table 4 show that the HNUE High School for Gifted Students has many forms and methods to organize the psychological counseling for students and those forms are evaluated by managers, teachers and students as being implemented quite often, with General Mean of managers and teachers being 2.16 and students being 2.28 (Table 4).

## Psychological Difficulties of High-School Students in Hanoi City Nowadays

**Table 4. Evaluation of managers, teachers and students on forms and methods of psychological counseling for students**

| No                  | Forms and methods of psychological counseling for students in high schools | Managers, Teachers |             | Students    |             |
|---------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
|                     |                                                                            | M                  | SD          | M           | SD          |
| 1                   | Phone consultation                                                         | 2.34               | 0.59        | 2.48        | 0.46        |
| 2                   | Consulting via email, Zalo ...                                             | 2.00               | 0.60        | 2.11        | 0.85        |
| 3                   | Direct consultation at the school's counseling room                        | 1.51               | 0.58        | 1.82        | 0.50        |
| 4                   | Consulting through extracurricular activities and experiential activities  | 2.69               | 0.61        | 2.71        | 0.83        |
| 5                   | Consulting with your homeroom teacher                                      | 2.54               | 0.60        | 2.53        | 0.47        |
| 6                   | Counseling through school-connected psychologists                          | 1.86               | 0.65        | 2.03        | 0.61        |
| <b>General Mean</b> |                                                                            | <b>2.16</b>        | <b>0.60</b> | <b>2.28</b> | <b>0.62</b> |

Note: **M**: Mean,  $1 \leq M \leq 4$ ; **SD**: Standard deviation

Among the forms and methods of psychological counseling for students, counseling through experiential and extracurricular activities and through homeroom teachers is the most effective with M of teachers being 2.69, 2.54 and of students being 2.71, 2.53. Thus, the consulting role of teachers is very important, especially the homeroom teacher. This result shows that it is necessary to pay attention to training counseling skills for homeroom teachers. The forms and methods that are rated low by students are counseling through the school's counseling room and counseling through psychological experts connected by the school. This result is completely consistent with the current practical situation when in high schools, new counseling rooms have been formed, the team in charge of this area in many schools has not been established, and many schools assign Youth Union officers to be in charge of this work. Besides, some schools are far from the city center so they have not connected with psychological experts or psychological counseling rooms for support. Accordingly, the solution that needs to be proposed now is that schools should send experienced staff to participate in training courses on psychological counseling to participate in counseling and supporting students, and at the same time diversify the forms and methods of psychological counseling for students.

2.2.5. Evaluation of managers and teachers on factors affecting psychological counseling activities for students in high schools

The results presented in Table 5 below show that in the survey factors, all factors affect psychological counseling activities for students in schools (Table 5).

**Table 5. Assessment of managers, teachers and students on factors affecting psychological counseling activities for students in high schools**

| No | Influencing factors                                                               | Level |      |
|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------|
|    |                                                                                   | M     | SD   |
| 1  | Principal's direction                                                             | 2.59  | 0.69 |
| 2  | Competence of teachers and staff doing psychological counseling work              | 2.68  | 0.66 |
| 3  | Facilities, equipment, etc. support psychological counseling work                 | 2.50  | 0.70 |
| 4  | Funding of support for staff doing consulting work                                | 2.42  | 0.81 |
| 5  | Coordination with parents in consulting and supporting students                   | 2.60  | 0.90 |
| 6  | Local socio-economic situation                                                    | 2.48  | 0.91 |
| 7  | Impact of living conditions of family and community where students live           | 2.35  | 0.73 |
| 8  | Education sector's policies and guidelines on psychological counseling activities | 2.59  | 0.79 |
| 9  | Management levels' attention to consultants                                       | 2.52  | 0.77 |

Note: **M**: Mean,  $1 \leq M \leq 4$ ; **SD**: Standard deviation

## Psychological Difficulties of High-School Students in Hanoi City Nowadays

Among the above factors, the factor “competence of teachers and staff doing psychological counseling” has the most influence with M of 2.68, followed by the factor “Coordination with parents” with M of 2.60 and “Direction of the principal” with M of 2.59, which has an influence on psychological counseling activities for students in schools. Next, factors such as “Policies of the education sector on psychological counseling activities” with M of 2.59 and “Management levels’ attention to people doing psychological counseling work in schools” with M of 2.52 have a significant impact on psychological counseling activities for students. The remaining factors also have an influence but to a lesser extent. With the results of this study, school leaders need to closely follow the data of these factors to have measures to improve and enhance the effectiveness of psychological counseling activities for students in schools.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Most high school students face psychological difficulties, which include difficulties in studying, love, family, finance, choosing a future career, and personal problems (such as health, sex, etc.). They have psychological difficulties at different levels, in which emotional difficulties, family difficulties, and financial difficulties are correlated with the student’s gender, family relationship status, and whether the student is currently living with his or her parents. Most high-school students who are experiencing psychological distress decide to seek help. In particular, the rate of female students who decide to seek help when facing psychological difficulties is higher than the rate of male students. Majority of high-school students seek help voluntarily. Regarding the people that high school students choose to help them when dealing with psychological difficulties at school, close friends are the first choice, followed by teachers as the second choice, and choosing school counselors as the third choice, after close friends and teachers. Analyzing the psychological difficulties of high school students is an important basis for proposing feasible and specific solutions, and implementing them is really necessary. Not only does it help students feel comfortable, creating a more favorable living and learning environment for them, but it also improves the quality of education in schools to reach out a progressive, developing educational environment in many aspects in the future.

### REFERENCES

- 1) Edward H. Fischer and John LeB. Turner (1970), Orientations to seeking professional help: Development and research utility of an attitude scale, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, Vol 35, No. 1.
- 2) Carver, C.S.Scheier, M.F., & Weintraub, J.K. (1989), Assessing coping strategies: A theoretically based approach, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 56, pp. 267 - 283.
- 3) Andrew J. Sadler and Ian J.Deary (2000), The Coping Inventory for Stressful Situations: Factorial Structure and Associations With Personality Traits and Psychological Health, *Journal of Applied Biobehavioral Research*, 5, pp. 121 - 143.
- 4) Debra Rickwood, Frank P. Deane, Coralie J. Wilson and Joseph Ciarrochi (2005), Young people’s help-seeking for mental health problems, *Australian e-Journal for the Advancement of Mental Health (AeJAMH)*, Vol.4.
- 5) Ngo Thanh Phong (2014), “Mental health of secondary school students in Ba Ria - Vung Tau province: current situation and solutions”, *Proceedings of research topics, application of science and technology*, volume IX, period 2013-2015.
- 6) Tran Thanh Nam, Hoang Thi Thu Huong (2016), “School anxiety and coping strategies for anxiety in 9<sup>th</sup> grade students”, *Proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Conference on School Psychology*, pp.440-454.
- 7) Tran Thi Kim Hue (2016), “Anxiety status of 12<sup>th</sup> grade students”, *Proceedings of the 5<sup>th</sup> International Scientific Conference on School Psychology*, pp.591-598.
- 8) Nguyen Thanh Tam, Vu Minh Phuong, Doan Thi Dien, Tran Van Cong (2016), “Anxiety situation and coping strategies of high school students”, *Journal of Science*, 21, pp.24-30.
- 9) Dam Thi Bao Hoa, Nguyen Van Tu, Tran Tuan (2013), “Research on mental health care needs for students in Thai Nguyen city”, *Journal of Practical Medicine*, 876, pp.8-11.
- 10) Bui Thi Thoa (2012), The need for psychological support of students in some high schools in Dan Phuong district - Hanoi, Master’s thesis in Clinical Psychology of children and adolescents, University of Education, Vietnam National University, Hanoi.
- 11) Bui Thi Thanh Dieu (2014), “The need for psychological counseling of students at Hoang Hoa Tham High School, Son Tra, Da Nang”, *Proceedings of the 4<sup>th</sup> School Psychological Counseling Conference*, pp.367-373.



There is an Open Access article, distributed under the term of the Creative Commons Attribution – Non Commercial 4.0 International (CC BY-NC 4.0) (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits remixing, adapting and building upon the work for non-commercial use, provided the original work is properly cited.