

## Knowledge, Attitude and Practice of Secondary Schools Teachers Toward Psychological Support to Their Students: Sample from Baghdad

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### ABSTRACT:

#### BACKGROUND:

There are obvious effects of war trauma on students' life performance causing long lasting impact when occur before adulthood. Early recognition and treatment are vital.

#### AIM:

To assess knowledge, attitude and practice of secondary school teachers' toward psychological support to their student and the factors that affect them.

#### METHODS:

Cross sectional study conducted in Baghdad 2018 by using a structured questionnaire developed upon WHO guidelines and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies guideline for psychological support. A total of 235 teachers completed the questionnaire.

#### RESULT:

Mean age of participants was 44.51±9.17 years, 75.7% were female, 70.2% college graduate, 72.8% married, 80.1% had 1-3 children, and 30.2% had 26 and above years of experience. Only 8.5% of participants had training on psychological support. Good knowledge was found in 66.8% of participants. Accepted attitude toward positive- adaptive behavior was found in 80.0%, discovering students' weak points in 70.2% of them. Indeed, 83.0 % of teachers had good practice about students' psychological- support. The association between teachers' knowledge, attitude and practice and their psychological- support-training were statistically not significant, while significant association was found between teachers' knowledge about Supporter-teacher stress relive points with their psychological support providing, significant association was found between teachers' attitude about discovering weak points with their psychological- support- providing.

#### CONCLUSION:

Most of the teachers had good knowledge but only nearly one-tenth of them had training on psychological support, also nearly one-third of participants said that Psychological Support guideline is available in their school.

**KEYWORD:** psychological-support, knowledge, attitude, practice, personal session.

### INTRODUCTION:

Iraqi people had been exposed to many violent traumas in the last fifteenth years. <sup>(1)</sup> Education is fast becoming a casualty of these conflicts, despite extraordinary determination on the part of government and families. <sup>(2)</sup>

The universal access to education and completion of primary education is an important goal highlighted in the MDGs (Millennium Development Goals) and the WFFC (World Fit for Children) for poverty reduction, women empowerment, and protection of children from the harsh effects of child labor and sexual violence. <sup>(3)</sup> For disaster survivors, Psychological first aid (PFA) is the flagship early intervention with

recent adaptations for disaster responders. <sup>(4)</sup> Every year, approximately 20% of adolescent's experience mental health problems, most commonly depression and anxiety. <sup>(5)</sup> The risk of mental health problems among them was increased by the experience of violence among other factors such as devaluation, humiliation, and poverty. <sup>(6)</sup>

The support for them could be internal or external. Internal support: refers to personal resources (e.g., self-efficacy, professional development, etc.). External support: comes from the workplace (e.g., administrative, social, didactic resources, etc.). Administrative support comes from the school administrators e.g. Teacher, school manager, etc., Social support may come from either inside the school e.g., principal, colleagues, speech therapist, psychologist, etc. or outside the school e.g., friends, family, etc. <sup>(7)</sup>

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School-based prevention and intervention practices have become essential for reducing the incidence of mental health problems,<sup>(8)</sup> it provides excellent settings for targeting children's mental health, their academic performance, and the important connection between them,<sup>(9)</sup> that's why understanding the needs for training and current knowledge of teachers regarding school-based mental health will provide insights into how we train and support current and future teachers within the schools.<sup>(8)</sup>

There is an increasing amount of evidence that enhancing children's mental and physical health in schools will improve their ability to learn and to achieve academically and socially.<sup>(10)</sup> In Iraq, the Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) is a four-year framework that outlines how UNICEF and the Government of Iraq will work together to improve the situation of Iraqi children.<sup>(11,12)</sup>

### **THE AIM OF THIS STUDY:**

- To assess the knowledge, attitude and practice of secondary school teachers toward psychological support to their student.
- To identify factors that affect their knowledge, attitude and practice.

### **SUBJECTS AND METHODS:**

A cross sectional study was conducted in which a sample of secondary school teachers from Baghdad city during the period from 1<sup>st</sup> January - 30 July 2018 were included in the study. The sample size [n=235] consisted equal number of boys' and girls' schools. Twelve governmental schools (6 for boys and 6 for girls) had been chosen randomly by stratified sampling technique (one boys' school and one girls' school for each Directorate).

More than 300 questionnaire paper had been distributed, 235 Teachers were included in the study and the remaining were excluded due to incomplete response, some teachers were busy by school work or lack of motivation to participate in the study, with response rate 78.34%.

### **Instruments:**

a structured questionnaire was used to assess knowledge, attitude, and practice of secondary school teachers toward students' psychological support; formulated by researcher and mostly based upon WHO guidelines for psychological first Aid 2009<sup>(12)</sup> and 2012<sup>(13)</sup>, and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies guideline for psychological support.<sup>(14)</sup>

The questionnaire content was validated by 8 experts (two psychologists, two sociologists, two community physicians, and two family medicine) and eight of Iraqi Red Crescent Society/psychologist support personal. A pilot study was done with 24 teachers [10%] and they were not included in the study.

A verbal and written consent was obtained before introducing the questionnaire to each teacher. The questionnaire is divided into four sections; Demographic, psychological support information, the Beliefs and the opinions, the Behaviors and the activities.

### **Ethical consideration**

After obtaining the approval of the Ministry of Health and Education Directorate, each teacher was interviewed by using the structured questionnaire in the administration room. Then, the directions about answering the questionnaire were read loud and the teacher informed about the purpose of the study and indicated their rights as participants.

### **Data analysis**

The questionnaire answers were coded as 3 for correct answer, 2 for I don't know and 1 for incorrect answer in the knowledge section, so the knowledge score will be divided into 3 groups: (33-54) poor knowledge, (55-77) accepted knowledge, (78-99) good knowledge

The section of attitude was coded as 4 for strongly agree, 3 for agree, 2 for disagree, 1 for strongly disagree, the score about the positive adaptive behavior divided into three groups:

(8 -16) low attitude, (17-24) accepted attitude, (25-32) high attitude.

The attitude score about the discovering weak points was divided into three group:

(5 -9) low attitude, (10-15) accepted attitude, (16-20) high attitude.

The answers in the practice were coded as 1 for always, 2 for most time, 3 for some time, and 4 for rarely. So the score was divided into:

(58-76) poor practice, (39-57) accepted practice, (19-38) good practice.

The score was calculated according to the number of questions in each section and we subtract the lowest possible score from the highest one then the resulting is divided by three according to the number of groups (good, accepted and poor), and the result illustrates the gap in each group.

Variables need to be illustrated:

Supporter teacher stress relieve mean to reduce pressure on teachers through (teacher should get guidance and support from other teacher, teacher meet regularly and exchange psychological support indirectly)

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Positive adaptive behavior means response of students exposed to psychological trauma. Student weak points mean diagnosing weakness and choosing the most appropriate among many options to overcome his own difficulties.

The Statistical Package for social Science (SPSS) version 23 was used for data entry and analysis. Frequency and percentage were used to describe the data, and suitable statistical tests were used accordingly. Chi-Square test and Fisher's Exact Probability test were used to test association between dependent and independent variable. Statistical significance was pre-determined as  $p < 0.05$ .

### Limitations;

Some teachers refuse the interview and others did not complete it.

And the time to complete questionnaire is 15-20 min, while the teachers didn't have enough time to complete answering the questionnaire.

### THE RESULTS:

**Table (1)** showed, total of 235 teachers were enrolled in this study, 92 (39.1%) of them were aged 40 - 49 years. **Regarding gender**, the majority of them 178 (75.7%) of the study sample were female. **Regarding Educational level**, the majority of teachers 165(70.2%) had completed college.

**Table 1: Distribution of teachers according to their demographic feature.**

		Frequency	Percent
Age [year] Mean [44.51±9.17]	40-49	92	39.1
Gender	Female	178	75.7
Educational level	complete college	165	70.2
Marital status	Married	171	72.8
<b>Children number Total [201]</b>	1-3 child	161	80.1
Experience years	26 and above	71	30.2
Total		235	100.0

**Regarding marital status**, three quarters of teachers 171(72.8%) were married. **Regarding children no.**, from the current /or previously married (201 teachers), 161(80.1%) teachers

have 1-3 children. **Regarding Experience years**, 71(30.2%) of the study sample had 26 and above experience years, all above shown in Table (1).

**Table 2: Distribution of teachers according to their involvement in Psychological training course and availability of psychological support guideline.**

		Frequency		Percent
Training on Psychological Support	No	215	187	79.6
	I don't remember		28	11.9
	Yes	20		8.5
Psychological support	not provide psychological support	68	56	23.8
	I don't remember		12	5.1
	provide psychological support	167		71.1
Available Psychological Support guideline in school	no	103		43.8
	I don't know	65		27.7
	yes	67		28.5
Total		235		100.0
Times / employment years	1-3 times provide support for student	111		66.5
	4-7 times provide support for student	16		9.6
	8-x provide support for student & more	40		23.9
Total		167		100.0

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Majority of teachers 187(79.6%) had **no Psychological Support training** and 28 (11.9%) did not remember such training, while the remaining 20 (8.5%) had training on Psychological Support. The most of the participants 167 (71.1%) were providing psychological support, and 56 (23.8%) did not provide psychological support and small portion 12 (5.1%) did not remember. Those who provide, 111(66.5%) provide (1-3 times/employment years), 40 (23.9%) of them

provide (eight times and more/employment years), while the remaining 16 (9.6%) provide (4-7 times/employment years).

Regarding the availability of the psychological support guideline, 67(28.5%) of the teachers were sure that the guideline was available at their schools,103(43.8%) stated that the guideline was not available and 65(27.7%) were not aware about the guideline.

**Table 3: Distribution of the teachers according to their knowledge about supporter teacher presentation if exposed to stress, supporter teacher stress relieves, student's reaction to trauma and total knowledge.**

	poor	accepted	good	total
Total knowledge	zero	78(33.2%)	157(66.85%)	235
Teacher knowledge about supporter teacher presentation if exposed to stress	72(30.7%)	95(40.4%)	68(28.9%)	235
Teacher knowledge about supporter teacher stress relive	18(7.7%)	39(16.6%)	178(75.7%)	235
Teacher knowledge about student reaction to trauma	12(5.1%)	37(15.7%)	186(79.2%)	235

**Table (3)** talks about teachers' knowledge about supporter teacher presentation if exposed to stress, (40.4%) 95 of them had accepted knowledge, (30.7%) 72 of them had poor knowledge and (28.9%) 68 of them had good knowledge.

Regarding teachers' knowledge about supporter teacher stress relive, (75.7%) 178 of teachers had good knowledge, (16.6%) 39 of teachers had

accepted knowledge and (7.7%) 18 of teachers had poor knowledge.

Regarding teachers' knowledge about student's reaction to trauma, (79.2%) 186 of study sample had good knowledge, (15.7%) 37 of them had accepted knowledge and (5.1%) 12 of them had poor knowledge.

While total knowledge (66.8%) 157 had good knowledge, (33.2%) 78 had accepted knowledge, as shown in **table (3)**.

**Table 4: Distribution of teachers according to their knowledge about indicator of teachers' exposure to psychological pressure.**

Q18-12	Indicator of Teachers' exposure to psychological pressure	Frequency	%	
1	Aversion or negative consideration of work	No	107	45.5
		I don't know	21	9.0
		Yes	107	45.5
2	Morale decline and loss of motivation to continue to work	No	96	40.9
		I don't know	16	6.8
		yes	123	52.3
3	Sleep disturbances	No	84	35.7
		I don't know	30	12.8
		yes	121	51.5
4	Slow performance and efficiency	No	122	51.9
		I don't know	25	10.7
		yes	88	37.4
	Total	235	100.0	

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As it shown in table no. (4), the majority of teachers 107(45.5%) said that aversion or negative consideration of work is an indicator of teacher exposure to psychological pressure. Near half of teachers 123(52.3%) explained that Morale decline and loss of motivation is one indicator of teacher's exposure.

In addition, 121(51.5%) of the study sample said that Sleep disturbances is an indicator of teachers' psychological pressure. Also, Slow performance and efficiency, 122(51.9%) of teachers explained that it is not an indicator.

**Table no 5: Distribution of teachers according to their knowledge about student reaction to psychological trauma.**

Q18		F	%
10-1	Decrease in studying level and lack of concentration	no	7.2
		I don't know	3.9
		yes	88.9
10-2	Insubordination, disobedience, disrespectful order and deviant behavior	no	17.0
		I don't know	6.4
		yes	76.6
10-3	Boredom and loss of energy	no	12.3
		I don't know	6.4
		yes	81.3
10-4	Loss of hope and feeling of inferiority	no	18.3
		I don't know	8.5
		yes	73.2
10-5	Depression and sadness	no	14.5
		I don't know	8.9
		yes	76.6
10-6	Loss of social and recreational interests	no	10.2
		I don't know	12.3
		yes	77.5
	Total	235	100.0

The majority 209(88.9%) of the study sample said that decrease in studying level and lack of concentration is one of the student's reactions to psychological trauma.

Most of the study participants 180(76.6%) said that Insubordination, disobedience and deviant behavior are student's reactions. Also the majority of teachers 191 (81.3%) said that Boredom and loss of energy are student's

reactions to psychological trauma. Near three quarters (73.2%) of teachers said that loss of hope and feeling of inferiority are among student's reactions to psychological trauma.

The majority of teachers said that Depression and Sadness, Loss of social and recreational interests, are among student's reactions to psychological trauma all above shown in table (5).

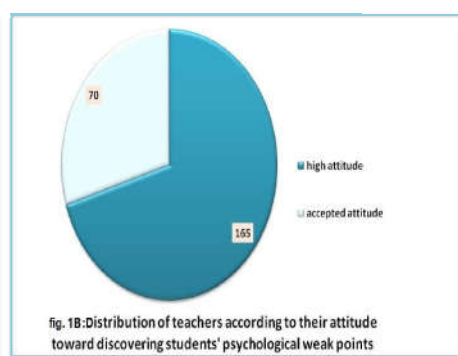
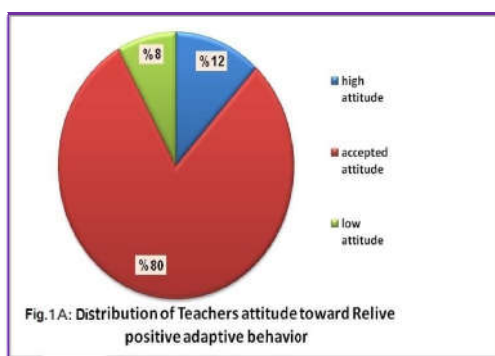
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**Table 6: Distribution of teachers according to their knowledge about stress relieves points.**

Q18-13	In case teachers are exposed to stress, it is necessary to provide the following points	Freq.	%	
1	Teachers should get guidance from other teachers	no	41	17.4
		I don't know	18	7.7
		yes	176	74.9
2	Teachers meet regularly and exchange support indirectly	no	34	14.5
		I don't know	17	7.2
		yes	184	78.3
Total		235	100.0	

As it shown in table no. (4), highest percentage of teachers 176(74.9%) said that "in case of teachers are exposed to stress, they should get guidance and support from other teachers".

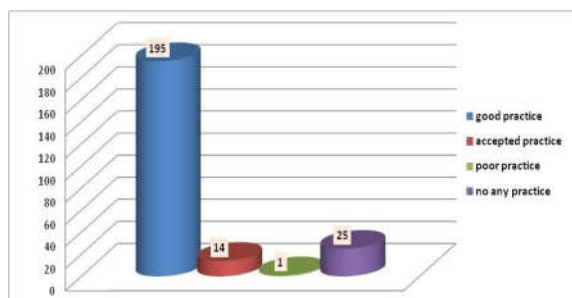
Most of teachers 184(78.3%) explained that in case teachers exposed to stress, they should meet regularly and exchange support indirectly.



**Figure (1A)** below, reveals that the majority of teachers 188(80.0%) of the study sample have accepted attitude toward the positive adaptive behavior while 28 (11.9%) of teachers have high attitude and the remaining minority 19(8.1%) of

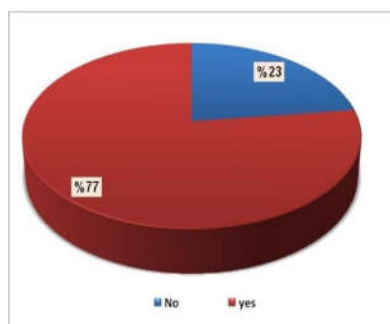
the study sample have low attitude toward the positive adaptive behavior.

**Figure (1B)** shows that the majority 165(70.2%) of teachers have high attitude toward discovering students' weak points while only 70(29.8%) of them have accepted attitude.



**Figure 2: Frequencies of teacher's psychological support practice.**

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**Figure 3: Distribution of teacher's need for psychological support training courses**

The study reveals that 195 (83%) of teachers have good psychological support practice, 25 (10.6%) have no practice at all, 14 (6%) have accepted practice and one (0.4%) have poor practice, this is shown in **fig (2)**

**Figure (3)** shows what teachers said about their need for training courses of psychological support; 54 (23%) said that they do not need training while 181 (77%) need.

**Table no. 7:** Frequencies of teacher's psychological support practice in-group.

		Frequency	%
1	Students discussion session on psycho-social problems faced	always	45.2
		most time	35.6
		some time	7.5
		rarely	11.7
2	Use the help of experts in Psychological Support	always	43.8
		most time	28.1
		some time	11.7
		rarely	16.4
Total		146	100.0

Table (7) talking about those who do group psychological support sessions; Sixty-six teachers (45.2%) had always organize students' discussion. We notice that 64 (43.8%) of teachers are always using help of experts in Psychological Support.

The result of current study revealed that the association between teachers' knowledge about

supporter teacher stress relive and their providing psychological support ( $p=0.000$ ) was statistically significant. While the result, as shown in this table, revealed that the association between teachers' knowledge about supporter teacher stress relive and their training on psychological support was statistically not significant, as  $p$  value= 0.060. (**Table 8**)

**Table 8: Relationship of teacher's knowledge about supporter teacher stress relive with training and providing Psychological support.**

		Teachers knowledge about Supporter teacher stress <u>relive</u>			Total	P value
		Good	accepted	weak		
Training on Psychological Support	yes	11	7	2	20(8.5%)	0.060
	no	149	25	13	187(79.5%)	
	I don't remember	18	7	3	28(11.9%)	
Provide Psychological Support	Yes	136	25	6	167(71.0%)	0.000
	No	34	10	12	56(23.8%)	
	I don't remember	8	4	0	12(5.1%)	
Total		178	39	18	235	

Note: good knowledge (15-12), accepted knowledge (11-9), weak knowledge (8-5).

### DISCUSSION:

The sample taken in this study showed that the mean age of participants was 44 years, this is because in Iraq middle aged teachers are more preferred than old age group, and this agrees with a study in Australia, 2016<sup>(15)</sup> as most of the sample were middle age group (44.7) years.

Also more than two thirds of participants were female, completed college, married and had children. This disagrees with a study in Istanbul, 2000<sup>(16)</sup> as most of the sample were male.

Working Experience years in teaching field were ranging (1-40) which agrees with study in University of Missouri, Columbia 2011<sup>(8)</sup> as the experience years ranging (1-37). In this study, most of the teachers (79.6%) had no training on psychological support and this agrees with study in University of Missouri, Columbia 2011<sup>(8)</sup>, Loyola University Chicago, 2016<sup>(17)</sup>, and Humboldt State University, California 2009<sup>(18)</sup>.

In this study, regarding psychological- support activity, most of the study participants were providing psychological- support but had little training about psychological support and this disagrees with a study in Monash University, Australia.2012<sup>(19)</sup>; in Iraq, there is a high need for psychosocial support since 2003<sup>(1)</sup> which agrees with study in University of Missouri, Columbia 2011<sup>(8)</sup>.

Teachers who provide psychosocial support, near one-third of them provide 8-and more session of psychosocial support/ working life. This is because poor training and shortness in time and suitable place (classroom, administrative room), which lack to privacy<sup>(20)</sup>.

Near half of the sample didn't have psychosocial support guidelines in their school, this agreed with a study in Monash University, Australia 2012,<sup>(19)</sup>

This study revealed that the majority of the study sample said that decrease in studying level and lack of concentration, Insubordination, disobedience and deviant behavior, Boredom and loss of energy, loss of hope and feeling of inferiority; all are students' reactions to psychological trauma and they are causes of poor school achievement.

Most of teachers said that Depression and Sadness, Loss of social and recreational interests are other student's reactions to psychological trauma and according to study in Baghdad Iraq, 2010<sup>(21)</sup> the direct and indirect exposure to violent traumas resulted from 2003 war increased the risk depression and anxiety among school children.

In general, the majority of teachers had good knowledge about students' reaction to trauma.

This agrees with a study in Australia Queensland University of Technology, 2013<sup>(22)</sup>.

Near half of sample said that negative consideration of work, Morale decline and loss of motivation are indicators of teacher exposure to psychological pressure; this result goes with WHO guideline;<sup>(12)</sup> while the other half said that they are not. This is similar to a study in Marmara University in Istanbul, 2000<sup>(16)</sup>.

In addition, half of the study sample said that Sleep disturbances is an indicator of teachers' psychological pressure and this disagrees with a study in Marmara University in Istanbul, 2000<sup>(16)</sup> may be due to psychological pressure on both teachers and student's long period in Iraq while the Turkish teachers did not expose to long period of pressure.

Regarding Slow performance and efficiency, half of teachers explained that it is not an indicator while a third of them said that it is an indicator, this disagrees with a study in Marmara University in Istanbul, 2000<sup>(16)</sup>.

The study found that the majority of the study sample said that in case of teacher is exposed to stress, he/she should get guidance and support from other teachers. This agrees with a study in East Carolina University, 2011<sup>(23)</sup> and a study in Australia, 2016<sup>(15)</sup>.

Most of teachers explained that in case teacher exposed to stress, he/she should meet regularly and exchange support from other teachers and colleague indirectly; this agrees with Australia study, 2016<sup>(15)</sup>.

Regarding teachers' attitude toward diagnosing weaknesses and choosing the most appropriate options to overcome the difficulties, two-thirds of teachers have high attitude toward discovering students' weak points. It's similar to a study in Unitec Institute of Technology 2013<sup>(24)</sup> and Robertson, 1996<sup>(25)</sup>.

Regarding group psychological- support sessions: near half of teachers always organize Students discussion session similar to a study in Humboldt State University California,<sup>(18)</sup> 2009.

We notice that near half of teachers are always using help of experts in Psychological Support, and near a third of them are mostly using, like a study in Humboldt State University California, 2009<sup>(18)</sup>.

### CONCLUSION:

1. About two thirds of the teachers had good knowledge and most of them had good practice about the psychological support toward their students. The majority of the teachers had acceptable attitude toward the positive adaptive behavior in addition, most



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- of them had the high attitude toward discovering students' psychological weak points.
2. Only near tenth of the study participants had training on psychological support, while the most of the teachers providing psychological support to their students.
  3. Only near one-third of participants said Availability of Psychological Support guideline in their school and one quarter of those had not seen this guideline.
  4. There was no significant association between teachers' knowledge, attitude and practice with their training in psychological support
  5. There was significant association between teachers' knowledge about Supporter-teacher stress relive points with their psychological support providing.
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