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DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 156 389 RC 010 580

AUTHOR LaFromboise, Teresa; And Others
TITLE A Survey of Indian Students' Perceptions of the Counseling Experience.
PUB DATE Mar 78
NOTE 20p.; Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting (Toronto, Canada, March 1978)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *American Indians; Boarding Schools; Comparative Analysis; *Counseling; Counseling Effectiveness; Counselor Characteristics; Cross Cultural Studies; Guidance; Helping Relationship; *High School Students; Interaction Process Analysis; Metropolitan Areas; Perception; Rural Youth; *Student Attitudes; *Student Problems
IDENTIFIERS *Oklahoma

ABSTRACT

The Counseling Helping Questionnaire, Forms A and B, was answered by 150 Indian and 50 non-Indian 11th and 12th grade students in Oklahoma to obtain information about the concerns seen as most important by Indian high school students, the concerns which they were most likely to talk about with a counselor or a significant other, who the significant other was likely to be, the helpfulness of talking to a counselor or significant other, important attributes or behavior of a helping person, and the culturally relevant information perceived as most important for a helpful person to know. Students were grouped into 4 categories of 50 each: Indian students attending boarding schools; Indian students attending rural high schools; Indian students attending metropolitan high schools; non-Indian students attending both rural and metropolitan high schools. The questionnaires were designed to measure the students' perceptions of their past or present counseling experiences and their attitudes toward helping persons and the helping process. Among the findings were that: students saw problems concerning their future and personal problems (i.e., money problems and a recognized attitude of not caring) as the most important concerns; while they were slightly more likely to talk to a counselor about their future, students usually talked to some significant other (usually a close friend or parent) about other concerns; being able to trust the helping person was considered the most important characteristic for a prospective helping person. (NQ)

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ED156389

A SURVEY OF INDIAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE COUNSELING EXPERIENCE

MAY 1978
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Teresa LaFromboise Paul Dauphinais Wayne Rowe

University of Oklahoma

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Presented at the American Educational Research Association annual meeting, Toronto, Canada, March, 1978.

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RC010580

Session 25.19

A SURVEY OF INDIAN STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE COUNSELING EXPERIENCE

One cannot reduce to a formula a people, culture or system of personality that has existed for over 15,000 years and survived and adapted physically, spiritually and psychologically, even during the last 500 years of colonial confrontation. Any attempt to capture the essence of Indian people is bound to fall short although certain descriptions or reports of significant patterns of behavior could well be identified. Differences in defined aspects of Indian and non-Indian behavior is a reality which can be verified (Bryde, 1971; Trimble, 1971); the essence of any noted differences is not such a reality. In other words, specified aspects of the behavior of Indian people is a reality that can be identified and compared with the behavior of non-Indians. Analysis of this behavior is generally subject to inquiry using the method of science. The meaning of Indian-ness is not.

Authors writing in the area of cross cultural counseling seldom conclude without a call for more research. In fact, lack of research in itself perpetuates racism and allows myths to go unchallenged. However, uncritical work of a research nature can cause more damage than non-empirical writings by maintaining "scientific stereotypes, i.e. all Indians have low self-concepts, are low achievers, can't think abstractly. Appropriate research must provide some potential benefit for the subjects and should work to combat the racism that is perpetuated by much endeavor in the social sciences (Sue & Sue, 1972).

In the past, an Indian person encountering trouble may have sought a Holy Man for advice, the members of the extended family to talk with, or a close friend to share a problem. But Indian students today cannot rely upon these resources because they may not be available or may be limited as to the types of help they can offer. Ideally, Indian students should have access to some useful source of

help and guidance as they progress through their school years, confronting the typical developmental problems and concerns unique to the Indian person. While it is common that students in general seek assistance informally from friends and a variety of sources, the professional delegated to provide this kind of help is the school counselor. Unfortunately, not only is there a lack of trained Indian counselors in terms of total need, but it is likely that the number of Indian counselors decreases progressively and rapidly from tribal school to boarding school to public school near a reservation to urban public schools. Other things being equal, a helper of similar race and social class is liekly to be more effective (Carkhuff & Pierce, 1967), but in this case other considerations clearly come into effect. Realistically, then, the source of help that school counselors represent to Indian students is going to have to include non-Indian counselors. However, research necessary for the training of non-Indian counselors to work with Indian students has been nonexistent in the literature.

Pedersen (1976) has provided strong support for the need of training and retraining counselors to combat racism. Cultural encapsulation, as formulated by Wren (1962), refers to a view of others that is formed in reference to ones own cultural perspective and which views counseling techniques as having general utility when applied to clients of diverse cultural backgrounds. Training and retraining hopefully can combat some of the factors that contribute to the cultural encapsulation of many counselors. Some authors have urged that training go beyond cognitive learning to include experiential contact with the Indian population (Farlow, 1971; McMahon, Hartz & Pulvino, 1973). Others have advocated that counselors of Indian students take an active role in bringing about environmental changes, acknowledging that the students' problems may not always be within (Farlow, 1971; Sue & Sue, 1972; McMahon, Hartz & Pulvino, 1973; Sillitti, 1974). There seems little doubt that the training of counselors has neglected the area

of counseling Native Americans. This may be understandable given the general lack of writings concerning Indian people which has appeared in the counseling literature, coupled with the almost total absence of specific studies providing practical information. Although handbooks explaining appraoches that have been tried in particular areas with certain tribes and communtities have been written, few have been published or are readily accessible (Poehlman, 1966; Farlow, 1971; Sillitti, 1974; Evans, 1977). But much more specific information needs to be generated to enable us to improve the training of counselors to better meet the needs of culturally different.

The need for useful research in counseling Native Americans is particularly great. The number of Native American students and adults exposed to non-Indian culture is becoming larger. The birth rate is becoming significantly higher than the rate for Anglos, mobility is increasing, and the influence of media and educational experiences is becoming more pervasive. In 1971 Spang pointed out the lack of research in areas specific to the American Indian. Today the situation does not seem to have changed significantly. While articles concerning other ethnic minorities have begun to appear in the counseling journals with some regularity, Native American concerns have not kept pace. For instance, the Journal of Non-White Concerns has tended to focus largely on issues related to the Black experience, while the most recent special issue of the Personnel and Guidance Journal devoted to counseling minority students (March, 1977) included articles on even Haitian people living in the United States and Puerto Ricans living in Puerto Rico, but did not have one article concerned with Native American people.

Our experience has been that many counselors or counselors in training seek answers to questions such as: What differences are there between the Indian and non-Indian? Are Indian students really non-verbal? What approaches generally

work in counseling with Indian students. What goals seem appropriate or inappropriate for Indian students? What kinds of problems do Indian students have? How do Indian students view a counselor? If answers to questions such as these are not explored, counselors and future counselors will rely on myths and scientific labels to explain Indian students' behaviors.

In an attempt to address this problem, a pilot study was conducted to provide information about the following:

1. What kinds of concerns are seen as most important by Indian high school students?
2. Which of these concerns are they likely to talk about with a counselor?
3. Which concerns are they likely to talk about with a significant other person?
4. Who is the significant other likely to be?
5. How helpful do they perceive their talking to a counselor or signficant other to be?
6. Which attributes or behaviors of a helping person do they perceive to be most important?
7. What culturally relevant information is perceived as most important for a helpful person to know about?

METHOD

Subjects

A total of 150 Indian and 50 non-Indian 11th and 12th grade students from schools in Oklahoma participated in the survey. Students were grouped according to the following four categories: Indian students attending boarding schools; Indian students attending rural high schools; Indian students attending metropolitan high schools; non-Indian students attending both rural and metropolitan high schools. Each of the groups included 50 subjects. The subjects were unequally divided by sex, females predominating, and the ages ranged from 15-19.

Boarding, metropolitan and rural schools were selected for sampling since they represent the major educational alternatives available to Oklahoma Indian students. The boarding school students surveyed were from two Bureau of Indian Affairs schools with enrollments of approximately 340 students. Rural school students were taken from 8 rural schools located within or near communities with populations of under 10,000. The metropolitan students were taken from four schools and an Indian Youth Organization located within two metropolitan areas with populations of 50,000 or more. A wide variety of Indian tribes were presented within the three Indian groups. The questionnaire was usually distributed during an English or history class on a volunteer basis.

Instrument

Each Indian student completed the Counseling Helping Questionnaire, Form A, devised for the purpose of this study. The Counseling Helping Questionnaire, Form A, is a 72 item self report scale designed to measure Indian students' perception of their past or present counseling experiences and their attitudes toward helping persons and the helping process. Items for this questionnaire were devised to elicit opinions concerning who provides help with various student problems, what characteristics a helpful person should possess, and what a helpful person should know about cultural aspects of Indian people. The items were developed from the basis of the authors' past experiences in counseling with Indian students.

The Counseling Helping Questionnaire, Form B, is a 51 item self report questionnaire designed to measure non-Indian students' perceptions of their past or present counseling experiences. Items for this questionnaire were devised to elicit opinions concerning student problems and what characteristics

a helpful person should possess. The cultural aspects were omitted from Form B because they would have been inappropriate for the non-Indian group.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Subjects were first asked if they had "talked to a counselor in a counseling session." The Indian students in boarding schools reported experiencing a counseling session most frequently (72%), followed by Indian students in metropolitan schools (67%). Slightly over half of the non-Indian students indicated a counseling experience, while only 40% of the rural Indian students reported having a session. These findings could reflect the structured nature of the boarding school experience and the lack of counseling resources for Indian students in the rural areas of Oklahoma. In each of the three Indian groups, the majority (53-69%) of students indicated that the counselor referred to was an Indian person. Although the evaluation of the helpfulness of the counseling session was positive in all groups, rural Indian students seemed most favorable, Indian students in boarding schools were more likely rate the talk as "of little help," while the other two groups' judgments were intermediate. Taken with the results mentioned above, it appears that the Indian students in the BIA boarding schools are more likely to have a counseling session, but more likely to feel it was of little help. Moreover, Indian students in the rural schools surveyed are less likely to have a counseling session, but rate the value of the experience higher.

Subjects were then presented with a list of 21 problems or concerns (18 for non-Indian subjects) and asked to indicate for each whether they or their friends would be likely to talk to (1) a counselor, (2) some other person, (3) either a counselor or some other person, or (4) would talk to no one. They were also

asked to indicate which were the most important or frequent problems that they or their friends would want to talk about with some helpful person. Furthermore, they were asked to identify who the other person usually was that they would talk with about the problem areas listed.

All groups, except the rural Indian group, reported that the person with whom a problem or concern was commonly shared was some friend, whereas the rural students reported they would see their parents first. A parent was the person cited next most often, except for the rural Indian group which named a friend. The non-Indian students indicated school personnel third in frequency, while the three groups of Indian students listed other close-family members. Interestingly, the Indian students in metropolitan areas and the boarding schools, along with the non-Indian students, did not often list members of the extended family and ignored ministers as a source of help. However, these categories appear more prominently in the nominations of the rural Indian students (see Table 1).

It appears that there are stronger family ties for Indian rural groups. If one looks at the concept of extended family to include family and relatives, the importance of family ties seems to decrease as Indian families move to the urban areas.

When asked to indicate the problem areas that they or their friends would like to talk about, the metropolitan Indian students most often listed problems about their future, being depressed or not caring, and personal problems. Rural Indian students listed problems about their future, personal problems, and problems about money. The most frequently expressed concerns of the boarding school students were personal problems, problems about money, and being depressed or not caring. The non-Indian students stressed problems about their future,

problems making a decision, and personal problems. Several notable features appear from this inquiry (see Table 2). For one, fewer nominations of areas to talk about were made by the Indian students in boarding schools. Secondly, an agreement appeared across groups that problems dealing with alcohol, drugs, sex, and Indian-ness are less pressing to discuss with a helpful person than a class scheduling problem.

These problems, which we may consider to be important to adolescents, do not appear to be serious problems for discussion in all our study groups. These areas of concerns may be areas that we as adults have considered problems because of their potential hazards. Adolescence is a time of experimentation in some or all of these areas, and a time for questioning of identity. It may be that we have posed a problem where there is in fact none, or it may be that students of this age have a problem in these areas, but are not inclined to talk to anyone about these areas.

Taking the results above, it appears that most pressing concerns for all groups are personal problems. Interestingly, the problem of being depressed and not caring is common to boarding and metropolitan Indian students, who, it was indicated, do not have the family ties as do the rural Indian population. It may be that the family ties provided the rural Indian student with the necessary coping skills to effectively combat the feelings of depression and not caring and provide the necessary positive stimulation for activities, family interaction, and support.

With regard to which kinds of concerns are talked about with a counselor, the most frequently mentioned topics were class schedules, problems with teachers or school personnel, and problems with grades. Indian students in rural areas and boarding school students also frequently noted problems with the BIA and the

latter group included getting in contact with their parents. Conspicuous by their low rating were such topics as problems about money or problems related to alcohol or sex. Significant others were seen to discuss problems about money, personal problems, and about the topic of marriage. Non-Indian students also tended to seek help for problems with parents or other family members, problems with friends, being depressed, problem drinking, and concerns about sex.

The most clear differences, however, were in respect to the number of problem areas which the respondents indicated they would talk to no one. Indian students in general were more reluctant than non-Indians, with the boarding school students being the least willing of all to talk about certain concerns. Notably, along with problems related to sex, the most taboo topic was the discussion of one's feelings about being an Indian person.

Analysis of the ratings of the importance of various attributes and behaviors of a helping person revealed few significant differences between views of the Indian students or between the perceptions of Indian and non-Indian students. There was agreement that a helpful person should help one decide what to do about a problem, but should not do most of the talking, nor should they tell you what you should do about your concern. An exception, however, was that female boarding school students were much more tolerant of being told what to do. All four groups indicated that it was very important that the counselor be someone they trust (see Figure 1). Males in rural boarding schools expressed this to a lesser degree. This corresponds to current counseling literature, but does not clarify how trust is established with different racial groups. The authors' past experience led them to believe that the length of time the counselor has been known and the amount of involvement with the student population would enhance trust. Indian students' responses proved differently (see Figure 2). A possible

explanation for the male boarding school preference in knowing a person for more than six months might be the incrased degree of interaction between residential living personnel and male Indian boarding school students. There are generally more informal activities, i.e., basketball games, intramurals, etc. in which the helpful person and male students can participate together. Female boarding students, on the other hand, have this opportunity of student-staff interaction to a minimal degree.

The other proposed component of student trust is attending student activities (see Figure 3). All students felt this was of little importance with male boarding school students saying that it is of more importance than others. The Indian urban male students valued this of least importance. A possible explanation for this is that in urban schools Indian students rarely participate in formal school activities, although they may participate in Indian youth organizations. Since the person they have indicated to be helpful is an Indian person, it would not be important to them that the Indian person be active and involved in school curricular activities.

An important finding was that Indian students in general placed more importance upon a helping person knowing about practically useful information (BIA applications or college grant forms, opportunities for Indian people) than personal, culturally oriented understanding (fears I learned from family stories and traditions). The importance of knowledge about non-personalized cultural information (differences among Indian people, Indian organizations) was rated in between these extremes. However, female Indian students seemed to consistently place a higher value on the importance of a helping person having this non-personal cultural knowledge.

SUMMARY

Several questions were posed for exploration through this survey. The results suggest that for 11th and 12th grade Indian students in Oklahoma the concerns seen as most important center around problems concerning their future, personal problems, and, specifically, problems related to money and a recognized attitude of not caring. While they would be slightly more likely to talk to a counselor about their future, Indian juniors and seniors in Oklahoma would usually talk to some significant other person about the other major concerns listed above. Most often this person would be a close friend or parent. Assistance received from counselors and significant others is generally perceived as quite helpful, but, understandably, informal sources of help that are chosen by the students is rated higher. Being able to trust the helping person stands out as the most important characteristic for a prospective helping person, but no behavioral attribute associated with that characteristic was discovered.

Finally, the importance of knowledge of culturally relevant information seemed equivocal, except for female students, while the knowledge of practical information of use to Indian people was considered more important.

Table 1

IDENTIFICATION OF SIGNIFICANT "OTHER" PERSON

Class	Ind. Board.	Ind. Rural	Ind. Metro.	Non-Indian
Friend, girl friend, best friend, close friend, etc	30	22	42	40
Parent, mom, father, etc.	20	31	22	32
Family, sister, brother, etc.	10	10	8	5
Relative, cousin, grandpa, etc.	2	6	3	3
Minister, Priest, pastor, etc.	0	5	0	1
School personnel, teacher, counselor, coach, cottage parent, prinipal, etc.	6	5	3	10
Other, spouse, doctor, therapist, older adult, etc.	7	3	2	3

Table 2

SUMMARY OF "THREE MOST IMPORTANT OR COMMON PROBLEMS"

PROBLEMS	IND. BOARD.	IND. RURAL	IND. METRO	NON-INDIAN
Problem about money	11-22%	17-34%	8	6
Class scheduling problem	4	4	8	9
What one's life work might be	8	8	10	9
A personal problem	12-24%	20-40%	14-28%	16-32%
Problem with teacher or school personnel	7	6	8	10
Problem making a decision	9	11	12	17-34%
Problem getting in contact with family	3	3	3	2
Whether to stay in school or not	8	8	4	3
Problem being depressed or not caring	10-20%	7	16-32%	5
Problem with parents or family members	3	10	5	10
Problem getting along with friends	3	4	2	2
Problem keeping grades up	6	12	11	14
Problem with beer or liquor	2	4	0	1
Problem about getting married	2	3	4	3
Problem with drugs or glue	1	1	0	1
Problem about sex	0	5	2	8
Problem about my future	8	18-36%	18-36%	28-56%
Social conflicts	4	5	3	3
Problem related to BIA	3	0	1	-
Feelings about being an Indian	0	3	2	-
Problem about having time to study	0	2	3	-
	104	149	134	147

*Percent of subjects listing a given problem area.

FIGURE 1

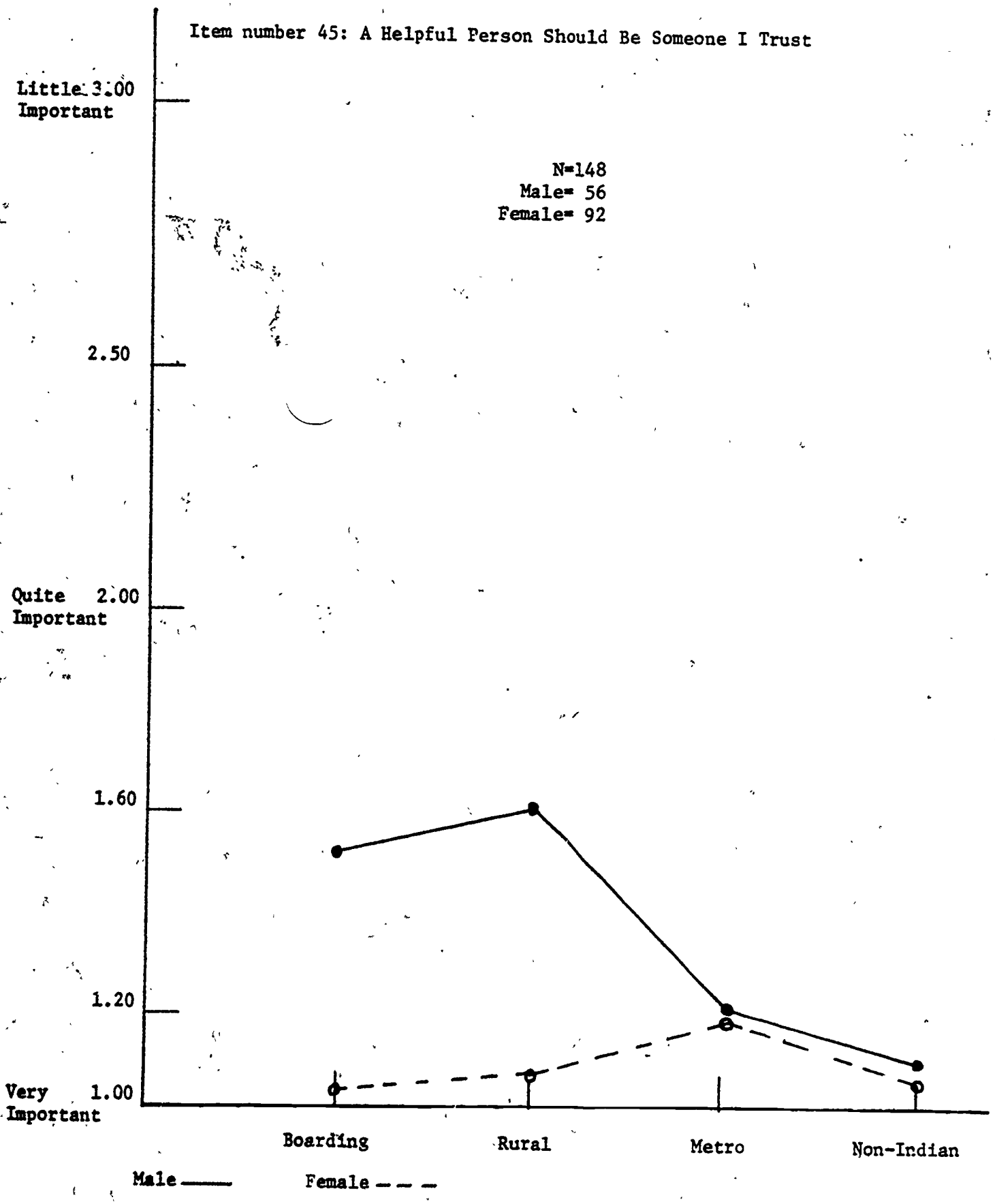

Item number 45: A Helpful Person Should Be Someone I Trust
Little Important
3.00
N=148
Male= 56
Female= 92
2.50
Quite Important
2.00
1.60
1.20
Very Important
1.00
Boarding
Rural
Metro
Non-Indian
Male
Female

FIGURE 2

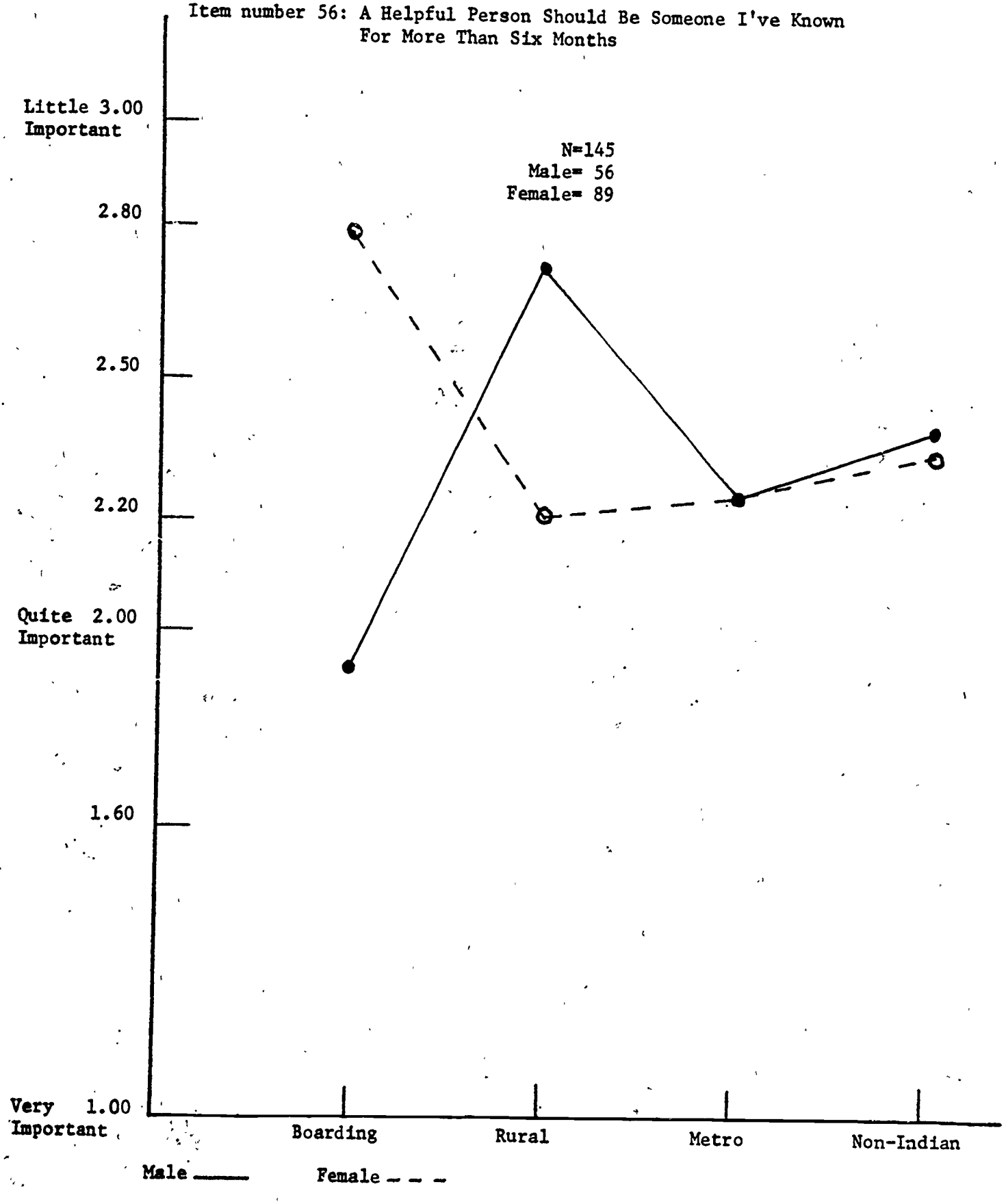
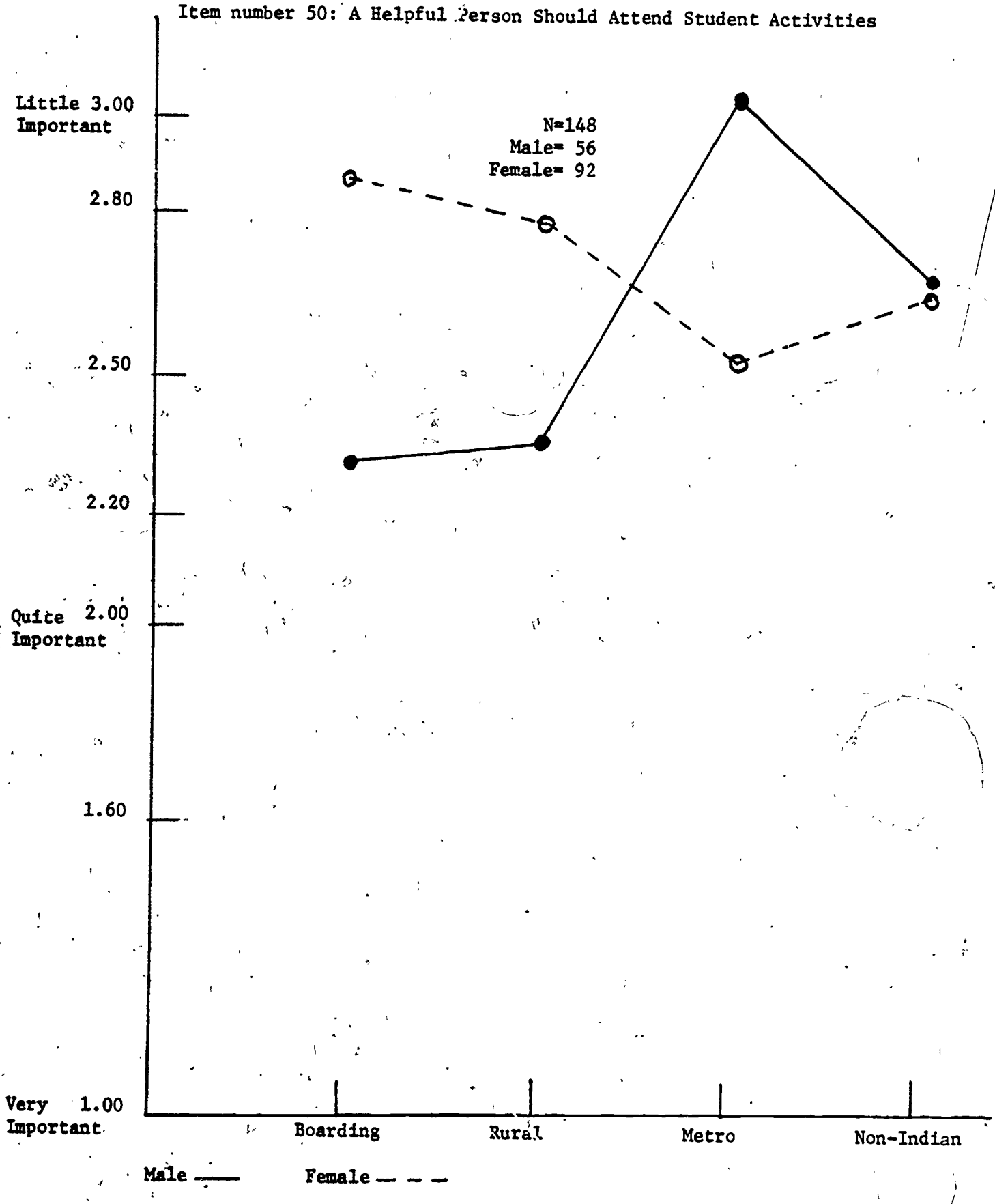

Item number 56: A Helpful Person Should Be Someone I've Known For More Than Six Months
Little 3.00 Important
2.80
2.50
2.20
Quite 2.00 Important
1.60
Very 1.00 Important
N=145
Male= 56
Female= 89
Boarding
Rural
Metro
Non-Indian
Male
Female

FIGURE 3


Item number 50: A Helpful Person Should Attend Student Activities
Little 3.00
Important
2.80
2.50
2.20
Quite 2.00
Important
1.60
Very 1.00
Important
N=148
Male= 56
Female= 92
Boarding
Rural
Metro
Non-Indian
Male
Female

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