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Society's Requirements for Counseling Psychologists' Professionalism

Tetiana KANIVETS¹

Abstract

The relatively young age of the profession means that its mission, objectives, standards and social role are still in the process of development. Due to the fact that each human is unique, counselors should help their clients live their lives and fully enjoy living, thus helping them to remain in good physical and mental health. We conducted a sociological survey among students to find out their requirements for the professional level of modern counseling psychologists. Because of numerous social and economic challenges, modern society is in great need of counselors who, in their turn, should meet the unique needs of their clients. Being aware of the general laws of human functioning, counselors teach clients to live and enjoy living, as there is a strong link between individuals' physical and mental health. However, to be efficient counselors need to know and meet the social requirements for modern psychologists. The author discusses the requirements of society for counselors' professionalism which should be developed during their university training.

Keywords: students, education, diagnosing, social role.

Introduction

More and more people seek help when they cannot cope with the problems of today. These include difficulties relevant to work or unemployment, marriage and family, health, education, communication, etc. Thus, counselors can be helpful in different areas of human life.

The relatively young age of the profession means that its mission, objectives, standards and social role are still in the process of development. Despite the fact that counseling as a profession is quite young and still under development, its social impact is immense.

Analysis of latest research and publications

Different aspects of practicing psychologists' training and work have been studied by a number of Ukrainian researchers, among whom are

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O. Bondarenko, L.F. Burlachuk, T.V. Zaychykova, T.B. Ilyina, S.D. Maksymenko, VG Panok, E.O. Pomytkin, N.V. Prorok, L.M. Karamushka, O.V. Kyrychuk, V.V. Rybalka, V.P. Romanenko, V. Fedorchuk, I.I. Tsushko, N.V. Chepeleva, S.K. Shandruk, M.V. Shaplavsky, N.F. Shevchenko, O. Shynkarenko et al.

Today counselors are doing a wide range of activities aimed at promoting harmonious development of personality. Psychologists promote clients' mental health and positively affect their emotional and physical conditions. While social workers focus on individual aspects of social life and clinical psychologists deal mainly with diagnosing and treatment of people with a variety of emotional and psychological problems, counseling psychologists handle the whole of individual's life, which includes family, work, leisure, intellectual development, spirituality and emotional well-being. The role of counseling psychologists has changed in many ways in recent years. The practice of counseling used to be limited exclusively to schools and career guidance, but since 1950-1960s the understanding of subject, functions and objectives of psychological counseling have changed radically. Counseling is increasingly focusing on the individual aid to integrate the person and harmonize their economic, social and personal interests, to promote their personal development and self-realization, to assist them in choosing and changing professions, to improve their interpersonal communication; to help them resolve their problems of life as well as to develop their appropriate behaviors in different situations (Panok, 2002, p.31).

Objective

Being aware of the general laws of human functioning, counselors teach clients to live and enjoy living, as there is a strong link between individuals' physical and mental health. However, to be efficient counselors need to know and meet the social requirements for modern psychologists.

Results and discussion

We conducted a sociological survey among students to find out their requirements for the professional level of modern counseling psychologists. The sample included 2500 students, aged 19 to 22 years, from Chernivtsi National University named after Yuri Fedkovych and Ternopil Experimental Institute of Teacher Education. The key question in the proposed questionnaire was: "In which areas of psychological help should

the consulting psychologist be competent?" The following possible answers to this question were suggested by O.F.Bondarenko (Braun & Krystensen, 2001, pp. 14-16).

1. Mental (and spiritual) development of children.
2. Existential and personal problems of adolescents.
3. Marriage and family.
4. Mental and physical health.
5. Psychological help to the dying and their relatives.
6. Old-age problems.
7. Prison, hospital, barrack, campus.
8. Psychological assistance and support in crisis situations: sudden death, attempted suicide, rape, betrayal, loss of love, work, etc.
9. School counseling.
10. Career counseling.
11. Psychological assistance relating to cross-cultural issues, barriers in adaptation, ethnic prejudices and stereotypes overcoming, etc.
12. Management counseling (organizational counseling).

The respondents were allowed to make 1 to 12 choices from the answers.

Having analyzed the respondents' answers, we obtained the following results:

1. 60% of the respondents made 10 to 12 choices, arguing in an interview that followed, that all these problems constantly arise or may arise at any time during each individual's life.

2. 35% of the respondents made 6 to 9 choices, explaining that each of these areas of psychological help are intertwined, so a professional psychologist would not be able to help in one area without being good at another area.

3. Only 5% of the respondents made 2 to 5 choices, arguing that it was these problems that they were facing at that time or recurred on a regular basis.

The most popular psychological support areas included marriage and family; psychological problems and personal care, psychological assistance and support in crisis situations: sudden death, attempted suicide, rape, betrayal, loss of love, work, etc.; school counseling; career counseling; psychological assistance relating to cross-cultural issues, barriers to adaptation, ethnic prejudices and stereotypes overcoming, etc.; management counseling (organizational counseling).

In the second place were mental (and spiritual) development of children; existential and personal problems of adolescents.

In the third place were psychological help to the dying and their relatives; problems of the elderly; prisons, hospitals, barracks, campus.

As can be seen from the analysis results, students' requirements for psychologists and counselors are very high and constantly increasing. Thus, future professionals must be highly competent in all areas of psychological counseling: school counseling, university counseling, substance abuse counseling, rehabilitation counseling, mental health counseling, physical health and health promotion counseling, career and management counseling, family counseling. In addition, counseling psychologists have to master all aspects of applied psychology. In other words, the role of counseling psychologists in today's society is truly unique, because they should be able to use in their work an individual approach to each client and assess the counseling outcomes according to the following criteria: counseling objectives should be determined individually for each client; the client's objectives should be compatible with the values of a specific counselor, although they may not coincide with them; the degree of achievement of counseling objectives should be tangible for every customer.

Since knowledge shapes professional efficiency, such activities analysis can be done by counselors only if they are competent in the following areas (Panok, 2011, pp. 25-26).

1. Human development – understanding of the nature and needs of the individual at all levels of development; normal and abnormal human behaviors; theories of personality; theories of learning in the context of culture.

2. Social and cultural foundations – understanding of social changes and trends, human roles, social subgroups, social principles and behaviors, life styles.

3. Helping relationships – understanding of the philosophical foundations of the assistance process, counseling theories and their applications, assistance to clients in gaining self-knowledge and giving self-help, help in personal change making.

4. Group dynamics, process and counseling – theory and group types, description of group dynamics, work areas and methods of group facilitators, including supervising.

5. The life style and career development – theories of career choice, the relationship between career choice and life style, information about the professional activities and education, approaches to career decision-making, career development research methods.

6. Personality assessment – the development of understanding of personality structures, including methods of data collection and

interpretation, individual and group testing, case-studies, the study of individual differences, including ethnic, cultural and gender characteristics.

7. Research and results interpretation – statistical methods, research design, research development and formulation of proposals.

8. Career guidance – aims and intentions of professional organizations, ethical principles, regulations, standards of training, certification, licensing, role identification of counselors and other specialists in this area.

Thus, the basic provisions that determine the positive impact of psychological knowledge on counselors' performance include (Panok, 2002, pp. 25-26).

- counselors' efficiency is affected by a specific combination of their beliefs, knowledge and skills;

- professional knowledge can not only be scientific in nature: the accumulation of empirical experience can significantly outpace its conceptualization;

- knowledge gaining is a spiral-like process that consists of other interrelated processes – experience gaining, information gathering, conceptualization, testing (verification), specification and communication;

- the criterion for professionalism in the specific area is the degree of professional experience integration;

- in creating a system theory of professionalism, theoreticians and practitioners may use different theories, hypotheses, concepts, constructs, models and analogies on condition that new theories are in line with professional values and ethics; the boundaries and limitations of specific theories, hypotheses, concepts, constructs and models used or created are understood, as the nature of metaphors or analogies used.

Thus, counseling is the art, where different practices rely on different existing, or perhaps not yet formulated theories.

The next stage of counselors' training is their development of general skills in all areas of counseling and more special skills in one or two areas of counseling. Students should have all possibilities to do an internship (George, & Krystiani, 2002, pp. 22). The priority of fundamental scientific knowledge and thorough research training of students of counseling should be preserved.

Conclusion

Higher education institutions that train counselors should pay much attention to the development of professional efficiency of their students

focusing on the professional values which are of great importance in building positive therapeutic relations with clients. Future counselors should be encouraged to gain deep knowledge of themselves because it can help them be successful in their work.

Thus, modern counselors are universal professionals who can assess and make conclusions about their professionalism by the predetermined criteria. Only those skills may be considered professional which, although not mastery, ensure maximum consistency between counselors' actions, intentions and goals. In other words, counselors' knowledge in a particular field of practice should agree with their professional skills, which they demonstrate in counseling and therapeutic work, and their ability to achieve desirable changes in clients.

Counselors' self-analysis followed by adequate conclusions about their professionalism will always motivate them for further professional training, development of professional skills and personal growth.

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