



Research Paper

Intercultural Counseling with a Gender Perspective and Counseling Skills

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ABSTRACT: In this paper, the features of counselling, and especially the required skills of the counselor, are presented and discussed in an intercultural context with a gender perspective. Both the contemporary social mobility and the refugee crisis have made the intercultural and gendered approaches in counseling necessary. Modern and sensitized counselors have to overcome any inhibitory obstacle, such as language, in order to effectively offer their services to people in need.

KEYWORDS: Intercultural Counseling, Gender Studies, Counseling Skills

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I. INTRODUCTION

Counseling is a method of approach, intervention and assistance. It is an organized process, during which the counselor helps anyone involved to understand and clarify his / her views. During the process of interaction, the consulted person learns to achieve goals, develop skills and face problems [1]. There are many types of counseling, such as psychosocial counseling, legal counseling, gender counseling, employment counseling, etc., while in recent years, professional and intercultural counseling have been developed in the school field, which particularly concern the herein study.

More specifically, when referring to vocational rehabilitation and career, for example, the terms "vocational counseling" or "vocational guidance or vocational orientation" are used. In this framework, certain techniques are developed to overcome the obstacles that are set in the pursuit of career goals and forms of interventions are deployed, which lead to the understanding of professional values. Consequently, each person can proceed freely and effortlessly to wise and effective choices of educational experiences and professional directions [2][3] and, in the future, to feel satisfaction in his/her working environment. The main purpose of the institution of Counseling and School Vocational Guidance (SVG) is to provide assistance to young people and adults, in order to dynamically deal with the various problems related to either their educational development or their professional career. From this aspect, the SVG functions as a mediator between the individual and society with the educational and professional opportunities it provides, between individual aspirations and reality. Therefore, it is inextricably linked to the pervading economic, social, cultural and political conditions, under which it is formed and implemented [4][5].

II. COUNSELING SKILLS

The counselor is a guide, contributes to the investigation of possible solutions and decisions and helps the consulted person to approach action him/herself, since the final decision is made by him/her. The counselor is the expert who, under certain conditions, discusses with an individual (or some individuals) issues and problems that concern the individual (or individuals) and facilitates their solution [6][7].

Under no circumstances will the counselor make specific decisions on behalf of the consulted person. During the counseling process, people communicate gradually forming a relationship of trust, which facilitates the change of their personality structure and behavior and achieves the personal development of the individual. The counselor should take into account all aspects of the personality of the consulted person by adopting a holistic approach, to have enthusiasm, warmth, interest, to show authenticity, creativity, critical thinking, rationalism, open-mindedness, endurance in difficulties, "unconditional" respect for the client, understanding of

his/her thoughts and feelings, love for fellow human beings, and dignity, sense of humor, "active listening", in order to receive the exact message of the consulted person. Cooperation with experts from different scientific fields is considered necessary [8].

In addition to the aforementioned counseling skills, knowledge of the theories and techniques used in Counseling Psychology, professional development theories and decision-making models are considered crucial. The counselor needs to utilize and interpret reliable and scientifically correct psychometric tools [9], to formulate specific, open and clarifying questions [10], abided by the rules of the Code of Ethics [11].

III. INTERCULTURAL COUNSELING AND GENDER

Intercultural counseling (or multicultural/cross-cultural counseling) is the counseling that focuses on culture as a key feature of the personality of the consulted person [12]. It is addressed to people with different cultural or language characteristics from those of the dominant culture.

In intercultural counseling, the counselor and the consulted person come from different cultural contexts and have different perceptions [21]. Gender-based intercultural counseling focuses on women belonging to minority cultural groups, refugees and immigrants. They often face multiple discriminations, not only of gender, race, religion, nationality and class, but also others, such as physical and/or mental disabilities. They are always confronted with sexism and racism. Counseling needs to contribute to the fight against social exclusion. The needs of the minority populations, but also of the vulnerable social groups in general, are particularly increased regarding the professional development, since they need the appropriate knowledge, which will lead their members to the search for educational opportunities, social participation opportunities, vocational rehabilitation, but also to the clarification of professional goals [13].

It is found that culturally diverse people face the main problems that they are called upon to solve, while the rest of the consulted persons seek self-knowledge, information and they are called upon to make decisions. They want to be supported for their entry into the labor market, to ensure the best possible development and promote themselves [7], to overcome stereotypes in the upbringing of their children, but also to face modern acute problems, such as homelessness, stigmatism, trafficking in women and gender-based violence [14].

In this case, the counselor is required to have the characteristics that will allow him/her to work fruitfully and creatively, with people of various ethnic, cultural and religious backgrounds, in order to achieve their empowerment. A basic condition for the successful performance of duties is "intercultural awareness", since the counselor comes into systematic contact with the "different", that is, with the "multidimensional" identity [15]. The adoption of a culturally sensitive approach-empathy, which acts as a catalytic tool in the acceptance of the served person regardless of his/her diversity, contributes to the achievement of effective communication-therapeutic cooperation, which in turn contributes to the effectiveness of the counseling process. In particular, the effectiveness of the counselor in matters of intercultural counseling is based on the following axes, according to Mastoraki [16] and Kosmidou-Hardy [17]:

1. Intercultural awareness, which means that he/she has his/her own cultural background, but also that he/she has the necessary cultural awareness in order to accept the cultural differences between a counselor and the consulted person, realizing that no theory is not politically and morally neutral.
2. Intercultural skills, which enable him/her to accept and respect the culture of the consulted persons, not to have stereotypes and to seek equal opportunities, to support those whose daily life is marked by discrimination, hostility and exploitation on the part of the ruling majority; at the same time by applying active listening [18], the counselor trusts women's experiences, recognizes their needs and qualifications [19].
3. Intercultural knowledge and information, i.e., to be culturally informed and to have realized his/her own cultural behavior, in order to function comfortably in the existing differences, to have cultural respect and to accept education that does not strengthen ethnocentric ways of thinking and acting, that is, education aimed at cultural internationalism.

IV. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, it is pointed out that the counselor must find a way to overcome any inhibitory obstacles, such as language, since his/her insufficient knowledge makes it difficult to communicate with the consulted persons. But the most important thing is that what needs to be understood is that counseling cannot be practiced in a monocultural direction, as was to some extent until recently, but must be turned to methods of multicultural thought and action, which today the social mobility and the refugee crisis make necessary [20].

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