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## THE ROLE OF COUNSELING SERVICES IN EMPOWERING WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

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### Abstract:

Women nowadays face various problems, especially in adjusting to new jobs and obligations. One of the consequences of adversity is mental health problems. As a result, one of the methods to help women's emotional support is to provide counseling services to increase their level of well-being. Therefore, the objectives of this study include: i) identifying the components of empowerment that are applied in the implementation of counseling sessions, especially those involving mental health handled by counselors; and ii) identifying mental health issues that counselors always handle when dealing with clients involving women. This study involves a qualitative technique, which is a single-case study conducted by interview with counselors who are trained and responsible for dealing with issues related to mental health and women. Interview findings will be classified using a verbatim approach, particularly those related to women's empowerment and therapies to improve mental health among women. The results of this study found that there are five sub-themes that are known for sure to empower mental health in the implementation of counseling sessions, which involve Perspective on Human Nature, Problem Clarification, Power Relationship between Client and Counselor, Power Analysis, and Skill Development. In addition, the results of the interview also show that counselors who conduct counseling sessions with female clients are always faced with issues related to depression, stress, problems at work, abuse, and relationship problems.

**Keywords:**

Empowerment, Women, Mental Health, Counseling

**Introduction**

Women now face a significant role and responsibility in a variety of areas, including the economic and social development (Hatta & Mohamed, 2005). Gender bias issues, socialization process issues, a lack or absence of role models, low expectations of success, beliefs about women's competence in non-traditional careers, role conflicts, sexual harassment, women's image, a lack of support, and workplace discrimination are some of the challenges women frequently face in their career development. Furthermore, the development of industrialization and urbanization has had the greatest influence on the position and role of women (Ma, Shao & Li, 2019). Both practices have resulted in more women working outside the house. This circumstance clearly demonstrates that available work options have shifted women from the home to the public sphere, where they hold a variety of jobs in numerous industries.

This scenario is seen because the situation or ability of women's energy must meet the workforce's needs in the existing labor market. Women's energy began to flow out of the home environment and into the work sphere, which was separate from the family, which was formerly the world for women (Katau, 2019). Women, as the family's energy, are shown to produce a significant shift in the job distribution process in the development of a family. Women's roles and duties in the domestic sphere, particularly at home, are not diminished or altered as a result of the changes they have undergone. Working women are obliged to integrate their conventional duties as spouses and mothers with their jobs as employees in this environment. Women who combine both the family function and the position of an employee will encounter a role conflict as a consequence of the contradiction between the commitments to the family and the obligations to the job. The demands on these women's time, energy, and emotions from both their families and their employers are sometimes paradoxical.

Regarding the mental well-being of women, it is important to recognize that possessing a superficial understanding of a certain culture is insufficient. It is essential to consider several factors such as the roles and position of women in society, their access to education and employment possibilities, as well as their religious views and practices. Although there may be variations within cultures based on socioeconomic class or other divides, it is crucial to consider the gender viewpoint when seeking this information. Failure to do so may result in the inability to get this information via conventional sources. In a therapeutic scenario characterized by cultural complexity, the most effective mode of communication is the direct exchange of information between the doctor and the client, facilitated by the asking of questions (Rousseau, 1990). In the presence of language-related challenges, using the services of professional interpreters can effectively mitigate circumstances when spouses or other family members are called upon to provide translation, so potentially obfuscating the woman's perspective. Cultural advisors possessing intimate understanding of a certain culture can furthermore offer valuable supplementary information.

### **Counseling and Mental Health**

Counseling is an organised and systematic procedure carried out by counselors who are registered in accordance with the counseling ethics code in order to assist individuals in achieving common sense in accordance with the authorised method. This is to provide individuals with greater progress and then make improvements to achieve the desired success (Othman Mohamed, 2000). Furthermore, there are numerous perspectives on the term counseling. "Counseling, for example, entails a close and friendly relationship between a skilled counselor and his client" (Kottler & Shepard, 2011). This implies that therapy seeks to assist individuals in managing difficulties by more methodically describing the desired life, creating positive adjustments sought by individuals to attain goals, and resolving emotional issues. This service can also provide individuals with the awareness they need to make good changes in their lives in the future. This service is also a method of assisting individuals in seeing their own potential, patterns in their surroundings, and how to advance their jobs and relationships (Hansen, Rossberg, & Cramer, 2000). According to Liley Afzani et al. (2023), mental health counseling are situations in which counselors give counseling and psychological services to clients in order for them to get insight in order to controlling cognitive, emotions and behaviours.

Mental health, on the other hand, is a state of mind in which a person can effectively utilize his or her capabilities by demonstrating psychological resilience in making personal and social adjustments to fit the dynamic environment in which he or she coexists with other people (Mullen, 2010). It also represents a person's capacity to adapt to internal and external environmental stressors. Successful adaptation to a variety of demands is characterized by thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that are consistent with age, local, and cultural norms or expectations (United Nations Children Fund and World Health Organization, 2009). Mental illness refers to a psychological condition that results in aberrant behavior that interferes with daily functioning. Genetics, environment-mental stressors, psychological factors, brain defects, and substance addiction, among other factors, have been linked to mental health issues (Schmidt, 2007).

People who have normal cognitive processes might benefit from the assistance provided by mental health counselors while attempting to cope with challenging life events such as physical sickness, the loss of a loved one, difficulties in relationships, or divorce. Others provide assistance to patients in the management of significant mental diseases such as bipolar disorder. Some professional counselors choose to specialize in a certain population and deal with that group exclusively, such as the elderly. Counselors in the field of mental health may find employment in a wide range of settings, including individual and family services, hospitals, as well as inpatient and outpatient mental health institutions. A few of them work in private practice. A licensed mental health counselor can function as a mental health practitioner and provide services directly to clients without the need for referral. The majority of the time, clinical counselors are employed as members of a larger health care team. Other members of this team may include physicians, nurse specialists, psychologists, and even social workers.

### **Women and Mental Health**

Being physically ill is a part of the human condition, and as a result, the implications of being physically ill for women frequently manifest themselves in quite different ways than they do for males (Smith & Weikel, 2016). Recovery from physical sickness might be hampered by treatment systems and medical practitioners who are oblivious to gender differences. In their

study on gender and help-seeking for mental health disorders, Judd et al. explore the gender difficulties that are involved in seeking treatment, the stigma that is associated with this, as well as the gender disparities in levels of stoicism. It's possible for women and men to have quite different experiences of the same thing. Numerous individuals are negatively impacted in a variety of ways by traumatic events, including personal aggression, assault, and sexual abuse. Large numbers of women are affected directly by the cumulative stressors of mortality, losses, demoralization, powerlessness, and other factors, as well as indirectly by the care that they provide for their children and other loved ones (Reavley. et. al, (2012) . The article written by Raphael and her co-authors investigates the often hidden or unrecognized effects that natural disasters have on women, who frequently experience long-lasting effects. This research serves as a timely reminder of the diverse and often contradictory statuses that women are accorded in different parts of the world.

According to the findings of Drapalski, Youman, Stuewig, and Tangney (2009), who conducted a study to determine if there are gender differences in the symptoms of mental illness, past treatment history, and treatment seeking behavior, women reported a much higher number of clinically relevant symptoms of mental illness than their male counterpart. According to the World Health Organization, the likelihood of women developing certain mental health issues such as depression, eating disorders, and panic disorders is two times higher than the likelihood of males developing these conditions. Because the symptoms might also be different for men and women, it is essential to have a good understanding of the many elements that can contribute to the development of each condition. Depression, panic disorders, agoraphobia, eating disorders, anxiety, stress, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), obsessive-compulsive disorder, and obsessive-compulsive disorder are some of the frequent mental health conditions that have become a burden for our women in today's society.

### **Method**

This study uses an approach to qualitative research, especially one case study technique using a single case study. The sample for this study is a counselor who specialized in the field of counseling and has also performed counseling sessions on matters concerning women's mental health. The purposive sampling strategy is used in this study to choose samples. Purposive sampling relates to the following societies:

- i. A counselor who is a member of the Malaysian Board of Counselors;
- ii. Have at least one year of experience delivering counseling sessions for women on mental health concerns;
- iii. Uncompelled voluntary involvement in this study; and
- iv. Has the ability to share information with the researcher based on the questions answered throughout the interview process

The interviews with the counselors were taped, and the counselors involved in this study were given an explanation of the research ethics stipulated involving confidentiality in research, in addition to the ethics bound by a counselor in the Malaysian Counselor Board's Code of Ethics for Counselors. All information supplied by respondents in this study, including the names and demographic information of clients who have had counseling sessions from respondents, does not need to be discussed in detail.

The duration of the interview with the respondents in this study was one hour and 30 minutes, and the sort of questions asked were semi-structured, involving questions; i) does counseling include a component of women's empowerment and what are the most common issues that women who seek counseling session. Following the interview with the responder, the audio recording of the interview session is subjected to a verbatim process in which each question asked is themed according to the question asked. The notions are expressed in the created analysis table.

## Result

There are numerous conclusions that may be examined when looking at the notion of women's empowerment and mental health in the context of counseling services based on the analysis completed based on verbatim interviews conducted.

Based on the analysis of verbatim interviews, there are numerous conclusions that may be highlighted when looking at the notion of women's empowerment and mental health in the context of counseling services. The following is the outcome of the researcher's verbatim interview as well as the results of the discussion.

### *Women's Empowerment in the Counseling Process*

Based on the interviews and transcript analysis. Counselors emphasize several things in the context of women's empowerment in counseling services. First, the counselor presents the definition of counseling as well as the concept of empowerment, which is;

*"Counseling is a systematic helping relationship process based on psychological principles carried out by professional counselors in accordance with the counseling ethics code to produce holistic, good, and voluntary change, progress, and adaptation in the client so that change, development, and adaptation will continue throughout life."*

*"Empowerment refers to specific groups in a social context that can or must develop and improve skills in an intra and interpersonal context in a social role."*

Based on the notion, the counselor also highlighted that counseling and empowerment are quite similar in terms of assisting the client, particularly in the process of acquiring common sense, self-adjustment, and decision-making. Based on the basic concept of empowerment, the process of implementing women's empowerment counseling can be interpreted as follows:

- i. Become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context.
- ii. Develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives.
- iii. Exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others.
- iv. Support the empowerment of others in their community.

In the interviews conducted, the researcher identified five main themes in the empowerment component of the counseling process, as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Empowerment in Counseling Process**

| Component                             | Theme   | Description  |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Empowerment In The Counseling Process | Perspective on Human Nature                     | Counseling will be most powerful when issue definition and therapeutic goal formation are collaborative processes in which both the counselor and the client participate. This should be especially true when working with minority clients, who may feel disempowered if their cultural beliefs conflict with therapeutic aims. |
|                                       | Problem Clarification                           | The empowering counselor must be prepared to assist clients in genuinely assessing the impact of important forces in their life, such as socialization, prejudice, and economic stratification. It is also necessary for the counselor to affirm the client's subjective experience.   |
|                                       | Power Relationship between Client and Counselor | Empowerment necessitates that the client have a critical understanding of systemic power dynamics.   |
|                                       | Power Analysis                                  | An empowered counselor will enhance client understanding with information about social activities to change harmful components of the system.  |
|                                       | Skill Development                               | Decision-making, assertiveness, and social skills training are clear examples of counselor that can help clients gain more control over their surroundings.  |

### ***Women, Mental Health and Counseling***

According to the interviews, the counselors covered a variety of topics, including those concerning mental health, women, and counseling services. The counselor believes that the problem of mental disease cannot be founded exclusively on the notion of gender, nonetheless, the counselor believes that there are four major aspects that might cause an individual to develop a mental illness.

The first is caused by hereditary factors, which might lead to mental health issues. However, while this aspect might create mental illness difficulties, the therapist concedes that prior research show that it is not the primary component in an individual's mental illness problem. The second component is associated with an individual's release of unstable hormones, which will eventually disrupt the individual's mood and emotions. The third component is connected to the environment, which can be impacted by prior events such as abuse, neglect, and bullying, as well as difficulties relating to the work environment, family, economic problems, or financial concerns. These elements have a significant impact on individuals, particularly women, since they face numerous obstacles that are perceived to be developing as a result of the present trend that requires diverse tasks. While the last element is connected to lifestyle,

this lifestyle is defined as the use of forbidden substances such as drugs, a lack of sleep, or excessive dietary difficulties.

According to the counselor, this condition might lead to issues that contribute to the problem of mental illness in women. However, it cannot be ignored that elements associated to a lack of social support, such as trauma experienced during an incident, can also be linked to mental illness. The counselor also explained that in the context of counseling, the counselor will function as a social support in assisting the client, particularly in the problem-solving process, giving the client insight into the issues faced, and assisting the client in matters such as career selection.

**Table 2: Prevalence of Mental Health Disorders among Women**

| <b>Issue</b>              | <b>Explanation</b>   |
|---------------------------|--|
| Depression                | Depression is characterized by melancholy, anxious, empty, despondent, impotent, worthless, guilty, irritable, furious, or restless feelings.  |
| Stress                    | Work-related stress is not a disease, but it can lead to severe conditions such as melancholy, hypertension, and aches and pains. Existing mental health problems can be exacerbated by stressful and unsupportive work experiences.   |
| Problems in the workplace | In addition to gender-based discrimination, the wage disparity, pregnancy and childbirth, and caregiving responsibilities, women face unique stresses and obstacles throughout their lifetimes that have a direct impact on their careers.   |
| Violence and Abuse        | Violence, assault, and emotional, physical, and sexual abuse have devastating effects on the health and well-being of women. Include depression and anxiety, substance abuse, suicidal ideation or attempts, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Women often remain in relationships that cause them significant anguish and distress due to fear and the perception that they have no other options. It is essential for individuals to remember that they are not culpable for the abusive actions of others and that assistance is available.     |
| Relationship problems     | Women who are bereaved, separated, or divorced are more likely to struggle with mental health problems including sadness or anxiety. Experiencing emotional distress or a diminished sense of enjoyment in customary activities is a common response subsequent to the dissolution of a partnership. When the enduring presence of these emotions begins to exert an influence on one's everyday functioning, it becomes imperative to engage in dialogue with an individual and seek assistance in order to address and alleviate these sentiments. |

## Conclusion

The primary objective of counseling for women is to assist in the growth of women by providing them with an awareness of the gender, social/economic, and cultural implications of being a woman in today's world. Counseling for mental health can be utilised to help bring some people out of the mental noise that they are experiencing. Counseling, support, and direction are all services that are provided by professionals in this sector to those who are having mental or emotional difficulties in coping. Counselors in the field of mental health may, during the course of their work, come across clients struggling with a variety of mental issues, ranging from individuals coping with the stresses of daily life to those diagnosed with mental diseases and disorders.

There are a variety of counseling procedures that have been shown to be beneficial in giving a treatment for typical women's mental health issues. Some of these treatments are supported by more evidence than others, although comprehensive research studies on many women-specific therapy techniques are still missing. A mix of behavioural, cognitive, dynamic, and systems-based treatments are required for therapy programmes to properly meet the needs of women. These interventions must be used in order for the programmes to be effective.

Despite the fact that this study was carried out in the manner of a single case study, which means that its findings cannot be extrapolated to all topics linked to counseling cases, mental health, and women, it may still serve as a guide for counselors, particularly when it comes to being ready to deal with mental health cases that include women. Although there are many factors that might lead to mental illness, a counselor's primary focus should be on developing a knowledge of how to work with clients who have issues related to their mental health. Aside from that, the manner in which mental illness is treated varies from patient to patient, and this holds true for the counseling process as well. Counselors recognise the need to be attentive to the treatment techniques employed in accordance with the case management approach. This is done to ensure that the client does not sustain any emotional harm that is not in accordance with the criteria that have been established by the Code of Ethics for Counselors, which has been released by the Malaysian Counselor Board.

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