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Barriers to Multicultural Counselling: Cultural Bias in The Counselling

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ABSTRACT

Multicultural counselling is a process of cultural encounter between counsellors and counsees from different cultural backgrounds. Multicultural counselling finds obstacles in it because clients bring different world perspectives that are shaped by various cultural experiences, such as a different race from the counsellor so that there are obstacles in the multicultural process in the form of cultural bias. Cultural bias can affect the interaction between counsellors and clients with different cultural backgrounds, hindering the achievement of counselling goals. To overcome these barriers, it is important for counsellors to continue to develop cultural awareness, enhance cultural skills, and commit to understanding and appreciating cultural differences in the counselling context. An approach that is responsive to cultural diversity will help create an inclusive and effective counselling environment for all individuals. This article encourages counsellors to adopt a more inclusive approach in their counselling practice. By doing so, the counselling process can be more effective, responsive to the needs of diverse clients, and help realise clients' goals of optimal recovery and personal growth.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that has a variety of different cultures or also known as a multicultural society. Multicultural societies have a variety of cultures and characteristics that are different from other societies (Syahril, 2018). Intercultural relations are the biggest challenge for humans today because not all individuals accept differences and want to try to understand existing differences and to learn to accept differences (Zulfa and Suryadi, 2021). Apart from providing opportunities for the birth of multicultural understanding, it is also a challenge for each individual to understand and interpret the nature of multiculturalism (Pabbajah, 2021).

There is no denying that cultural diversity is a fact of life that affects a person's behaviour and all human activities, including counselling activities (Basit et al., 2023). Thus, a multicultural approach is needed. Counselling from a multicultural perspective is a process of cultural encounter between counsellors and counsees from different cultural backgrounds. Counselling is a cultural meeting between the counsellor and the counsee, so the counsellor must have cultural sensitivity in order to understand and help the counsee in accordance with his cultural context (Seprianto et al., 2023).

Syahril (2018) argues that counsellors should be aware that each individual has culturally different characteristics and will bring these characteristics into the counselling process. One of the challenges faced in the multicultural counselling process is cultural bias. During the counselling process counsellors interact with clients who come from various cultures and religions, counsellors tend to have cultural biases that can hinder the counselling process (Aprilianti et al., 2023).

2. METHODS

The research method carried out in this article is to use a literature study, which is carried out through a search for relevant sources (Pabbajah et al., 2021). Literature study is the process of searching and researching literature sources by reading and reviewing various journals, books, and various other published manuscripts related to topics that are in accordance with the research conducted to produce an article related to a particular topic or problem (Maharani, et al., 2022). In the literature review that the researcher will discuss this time is to find references and sources related to cultural bias as an obstacle to multicultural counselling.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Definition of Multicultural Counselling

Erford (2015) states that every counselling is multicultural counselling because each client brings a different perspective of the world shaped by various cultural experiences, such as race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, social status, age, and beliefs. Multicultural counsellors deal with different cultural backgrounds between counsellors and counsees (Zulfa & Suryadi, 2021).

According to Nuzliah (2016), the purpose of multicultural counselling involves assisting clients in developing their potential to be optimally independent, providing support in problem solving and self-adjustment, and ensuring happiness in life according to their culture. In addition, counselling also aims to help clients to live harmoniously in a multicultural society and introduce the values of other cultures as a consideration for better planning and decision-making in the future.

In the context of multicultural counselling, a high level of involvement between the counsellor and the counsellor is required, as well as the counsellor's ability or creativity which includes understanding the physical sensations and psychological state of the counsellor. The counsellor is also expected to be able to respect the attitudes, religious and cultural values of the counselee, show a flexible and positive attitude, and ensure the subject's psychological satisfaction. In addition, the counsellor's ability to present self-existence and facilitate self-expression is also an important aspect in carrying out this multicultural counselling (Manurung and Rahmi, 2022).

3.2. Definition of Cultural Bias

Cultural bias refers to tendencies or views that arise as a result of one's cultural influences. This can include preferences, perceptions, and judgements shaped by one's cultural background. Cultural biases have a significant impact on the way a person processes information, responds to feelings, and takes action in various contexts. These biases arise due to differences in interpretation of truth or cultural values that differ between individuals. It is important to recognise that every individual has a subjective understanding of culture, and this is a potential source of cultural bias in various aspects of life (Oktavida, 2019).

An important factor underlying cultural bias is the process of forming a view or judgement on a matter, there is a high likelihood of resulting in misunderstanding or unobjectivity due to a predisposition to reduce the value or significance of certain aspects related to culture. Awareness of this factor is important in overcoming cultural bias and promoting a more holistic and inclusive understanding (Hasugian, 2023).

It is important for counsellors to have a deep understanding of the cultural background of the counselee in order to overcome cultural differences that may exist between the counsellor and the counselee (Mashudi, 2013). Attitudes such as understanding, acceptance, and appreciation of cultural differences are considered by Muslihati (2013) to be key in creating rapport, which is an important prerequisite for effective counselling. Counsellors' awareness of cultural differences, acceptance, and respect for diversity can strengthen the therapeutic relationship. Conversely, a lack of awareness of cultural differences can be an obstacle in creating an effective therapeutic relationship.

3.3. Cultural bias in the counselling process

Cases of cultural bias in the context of multicultural counselling often involve issues of incomprehension between the counsellor and the counsellor regarding their cultures. One of the problematic forms is the counsellor's lack of understanding of the counsellor's culture, as well as the counsellor not knowing and understanding the counsellor's culture. Factors that can cause this include inconsistencies, differences in assumptions, views, judgements, and stereotypes between the counsellor and the counselee group regarding the culture adopted by both (Maharani et al., 2022).

Background differences between counsellors and counsellors, especially those related to culture, often trigger miscommunication in the counselling process. Incomprehension of the counselee's culture can pose a risk of cultural bias in counselling services, especially if the counsellor has no understanding or is indifferent to the counselee's cultural background. The counsellor's lack of understanding or ignorance of the counselee's culture can lead to mismatches in perceptions, interpretations, and responses to issues discussed during counselling sessions. This becomes even more complex when the counsellor not only does not know, but also does not attempt to understand or share the cultural beliefs and convictions of the counsellor. The unwillingness to know, understand, and share cultural values can worsen the situation, creating distance between the counsellor and the counsellor. Therefore, it is important for counsellors to actively build an understanding of the counselee's

culture, create an inclusive counselling environment, and open space for open dialogue regarding cultural differences. Thus, miscommunication can be minimised, and the counselling process can become more effective and meaningful for the counsellor (Maharani, et al., 2022).

Maharani et al. (2022) emphasised the urgency of mutual trust between counsellors and counselees as a foundation for sharing cultural elements. This involves a deep understanding of each party's cultural beliefs, as well as an openness to sharing the experiences and values that make up their cultural identity. This approach is geared towards creating an inclusive counselling environment, where cultural diversity is respected and acknowledged. Thus, the environment becomes a conducive place for open dialogue and mutual understanding between counsellor and counselee. The successful achievement of positive and effective counselling goals depends on a strong foundation of mutual trust and respect for cultural diversity.

3.4. Factors causing cultural bias in counselling

A phenomenon that can lead to failure in the counselling process is the mismatch of perceptions between the counsellor and the counselee, which is caused by differences in the cultural backgrounds of both. These different perceptions can arise due to differences in interpretations, values, norms, and life experiences that are influenced by each individual's cultural background. Differences in cultural background can create barriers to communication and understanding, which in turn can affect the effectiveness of the counselling process. Counsellors and counselees may have different views on certain issues, and if not addressed with an in-depth understanding of cultural differences, this can hinder the establishment of an effective relationship and affect the achievement of counselling goals (Basit et al., 2023).

In a social context, especially in a multicultural social environment, individuals interact with various groups who have different backgrounds, such as religion, ethnicity, social conditions, customs, and economics. This kind of condition can cause a variety of problems faced by individuals. Widespread human growth and development factors can also result in competition for opportunities in various aspects of life, becoming one of the problems that need to be addressed by counsellors (Mubit, 2016).

This diversity, while it can be a source of wealth, can also pose challenges in counselling sessions. One of the causes of unsuccessful counselling sessions is the different perceptions of the world between counsellors and clients. Counsellors and clients having different views of the world can hinder the counselling process and create gaps that are difficult to overcome (Elizar, 2018).

3.5. The impact of cultural bias in the counselling process

Counselling processes involving counsellors and clients with different cultural and religious backgrounds are prone to cultural biases on the part of counsellors. This phenomenon can lead to ineffectiveness in the counselling process (Arsih et al., 2023). Sue et al. (1990) stated that multicultural counselling involves relationships between counsellors and counselees who come from different cultural and religious backgrounds, and the presence of cultural biases on the part of counsellors can hinder the counselling process from running optimally.

In this context, ignorance or insensitivity to cultural and religious differences between counsellors and counselees can affect the quality of interactions in counselling sessions. It is important for counsellors to actively raise their cultural awareness, overcome cultural biases, and build a deep understanding of the client's cultural and religious background. This is key in creating an inclusive and effective counselling environment, where counsellors and counselees can work together to achieve counselling goals (Ridho and Wahyudi, 2021).

According to [Supriadi \(2001\)](#), the involvement of counsellors and counsees with different cultural backgrounds in multicultural counselling can have a negative impact. The counselling process becomes vulnerable and can be less effective, as well as the potential for visible cultural biases in the counsellor. Therefore, it is important for counsellors to have sensitivity to cultural aspects, in order to avoid biases that may arise in the cultural context. Counsellors are expected to have a good understanding, mastery, and appreciation of cultural diversity. Culturally responsive skills are also considered important so that the counselling process can run effectively. Multicultural counselling, according to [Supriadi \(2001\)](#), can be considered as a form of 'cultural encounter' that occurs between the counsellor and the counselee.

The counselling process is important to pay attention to the presence of cultural bias so that counselling does not lose its effectiveness. To achieve effectiveness in the counselling process, a counsellor must be sensitive to the possibility of cultural bias, understand, and appreciate cultural diversity. The presence of cultural bias can result in decreased client participation in counselling sessions, due to fear of the counsellor and negative perceptions of the outcome of interactions with the counsellor. The tendency to limit oneself during the counselling process can also lead to rejection from the client, which is often considered an obstacle to the effectiveness of multicultural counselling ([Wahyu et al., 2023](#)).

3.6. Multicultural competence as a solution

A counsellor should maintain good mental health, be flexible, and avoid ethnocentric beliefs of cultural, religious, and lifestyle superiority. Counsellors who have the ability to distract and integrate cross-cultural issues through clinical methods will be able to provide effective counselling services ([Wolfgang, 2011](#)). By applying an attitude of multiculturalism, counsellors can create an environment where the counselee feels accepted without any cultural or social discrimination, so that the focus of the counselling process can be focused on solving the counselee's problems and developing the potential strengths possessed by the counselee himself ([Rifani, 2022](#)).

In an environmental situation full of cultural diversity, it is important for a counsellor to have an understanding and appreciation of the cultural diversity of students. Providing students with an understanding of various cultures is crucial, so that they can have in-depth knowledge of cultural differences ([Mufrihah, 2014](#)).

According to [Sue \(2003\)](#), the success of a counsellor in providing intercultural counselling is highly dependent on the development of three main dimensions of ability. These dimensions include beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills appropriate to the needs of the intercultural clients to be served. Counsellors who want to be successful in the context of intercultural counselling must have a deep understanding of these aspects.

Sue highlighted that counsellors who are fixated on their own culture should not work with intercultural clients, as this can affect the objectivity and effectiveness of counselling. Furthermore, multicultural counsellors are also expected to understand the counsellor's professional code of ethics. This aims to increase the accountability and integrity of the counselling professional organisation, so that the implementation of counselling services can run more effectively ([Nirwana, 2021](#)).

Some things that need to be considered by a counsellor in an effort to understand the culture of the counselee include first, the understanding that human behaviour can be understood by looking at the origin of the behaviour. This concept illustrates that a person's behaviour cannot be separated from the individual's habitual patterns that come from his or her background. Therefore, understanding and providing services to counsees requires a deep understanding of the counselee's background. Secondly, culture plays a role in the learning process, indicating that the understanding and comprehension of the counsellor is

also influenced by the origin of the counsellor's background. Counsellors need to avoid imposing their will on counsellors without considering their cultural background, as culture plays an important role in how individuals digest information around them. Third, there is a close relationship between social behaviour and personality. An individual's personality can be reflected in the form of his or her social behaviour, and certain behaviours can form a personality that is influenced by the individual's habits reflected in his or her culture. Fourth, culture has a dynamic and changeable nature. Interaction between one culture and another can be a factor of change in the culture itself. Counselling studies, which initially originated from Western culture, are now beginning to adapt to local cultures, according to the needs and context of the local culture concerned (Sujadi, 2018).

Understanding other people or groups is a critical aspect for counsellors, especially in a multicultural student environment. Conflicts often arise due to a lack of understanding of others, which can worsen the situation and affect relationships between individuals or between groups (Rohman and Ningsih, 2018).

According to Gumilang (2015), there are several important aspects that counsellors must have in a cultural context, namely: 1) Cultural Sensitivity: A counsellor should be aware of the importance of sensitivity to the diverse cultures that exist around him/her. This awareness allows the counsellor to accommodate and understand other cultural perspectives; 2) Deep Understanding: A skilled counsellor has a deep understanding of the cultural background, experiences, attitudes, and values of an individual or group. This enables the counsellor to recognise and address psychological biases that may affect their interactions and views; 3) Competence Limits: An effective counsellor must recognise the limits of his/her competence. Recognising and understanding what one knows and does not know, as well as his/her abilities and limitations, is an important step towards providing quality services; and 4) Creating a Sense of Comfort: A cultured counsellor should be able to create a supportive and comfortable environment for clients. This includes avoiding discrimination based on race, ethnicity, culture, or creed, and ensuring that each individual or group is fully accepted and valued. By considering the above aspects, counsellors can build positive and productive relationships with clients or students from various cultural backgrounds, and provide counselling services that are effective and relevant to their cultural context (Gumilang, 2015).

Within the scope of culture Pedersen, Crether and Carlson (in Nugraha, 2012) explain as follows 'cultural empathy is therefore the learned ability of counsellors to accurately understand and respond appropriately to each culturally different client.' It can be understood that cultural empathy is the ability of counsellors to accurately understand and respond appropriately to the cultural differences of counselees. This implies that empathy is an ability for a counsellor to understand and feel the background of life brought by the counselee and affects the state of the counselee during the counselling process.

4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Barriers to multicultural counselling often arise due to cultural bias in the counselling process. Cultural bias can affect interactions between counsellors and clients with different cultural backgrounds, hindering the achievement of counselling goals. To overcome these barriers, it is important that counsellors continue to develop cultural awareness, enhance cultural skills, and commit to understanding and valuing cultural differences in the counselling context. An approach that is responsive to cultural diversity will help create an inclusive and effective counselling environment for all individuals. With the importance of addressing cultural bias, this article encourages counsellors to adopt a more inclusive approach in their

counselling practice. By doing so, the counselling process can be more effective, responsive to the needs of diverse clients, and help realise the goals of optimal client recovery and personal growth.

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