

Ethics in Group Counseling Analytical Essay

Introduction

Ethical issues are at the heart of the counseling process and practice. This essay discusses the issue of ethics with close consideration of professional practice of counseling and therapy. The paper narrows down to the complexity of ethical issues that counselors face in group settings in comparison to individual therapy. It further discusses the issue of leadership and leadership challenges in group therapy. The paper concludes by shedding light on the reason behind preference of group counseling to individual counseling by counselors.

Ethical issues in Counseling

Ethics can be defined in various ways depending on one's profession and context. It refers to the code of conduct that is supposed to be followed by a person or a group of persons especially in regards to their duties. Ethics demands the observance of high levels of moral values. According to Hill (2004, p. 131), in counseling, the issue of legal principles is considered depending on the impacts of the counseling case being handled. In addition, Pan et al. (2012, p. 349) add that the cultural norms of the society from which the victim comes are also considered in the process.

Freeman et al. (2004, p. 163) also reveal that the codes of conduct in counseling are closely intertwined with the values that counselors have to follow. Ethics guides the counselor and the client on the 'do's and don'ts' that they have to abide by throughout the counseling process. It enhances the efficiency and effectiveness of therapy sessions. In addition, the ethical code of conduct in counseling enables the counselor to gain trust from the client. However, counselors differ in their levels of commitment to the ethical conduct and moral values. In fact, Freeman et al. (2004, p. 163) argue that some counselors underrate the actual intensity of the moral values in counseling. It is not enough to abide by the set standards in the counseling process. However, the beliefs and relationships that one has gained in life should enable him or her to make a sound interpretation of the case. It is therefore important for the counselor to strike a balance in all the cases that he or she handles.

According to Crespi (2009, p. 273), it is important for the counselor and learners to learn the legal principles that guide the process of counseling by governing the standards to be observed by the counselor and the client. Moreover, Hill (2004, p. 131) affirms that legal principles also set up the punishments to be followed by the offenders in a counseling case. They also stipulate the consequences of violating the counseling conduct by either the client or the therapist. Legal doctrines therefore ensure that no one violates, abuses, or neglects the counseling ethics. In addition, the ideologies control and regulate the licensing process. Licenses ensure that only the vetted and recommended counselors are involved in a professional counseling.

Such a move eliminates quarks hence ensuring high professional standards in the process. The licensing bodies control the renewal of such licenses. Such guidelines also elaborate how and when a client can claim liability from a therapist who fails to meet the terms of the agreement. Malott, Paone, Humphreys, and Martinez (2010, p. 257) argue that ethics in counseling are also

regulated by the cultural norms of the society. Every profession has its norms on what is right and wrong. Professional bodies have the responsibility of setting specific standards that stakeholders have to uphold.

For example, in America, the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs set the counseling standards to be adhered to by counseling stakeholders. In psychological counseling, the counselor and the client are guided by a set of psychological counseling ethics as set by their regulating bodies.

With counseling standards in place, both the counselor and the client are protected hence making the procedure professional. In addition, the professional bodies set the academic qualification standards that the counselors must present before being admitted as professionals. The level of education, experience, and dedication that the counselor must have is also stipulated.

Such vetting and professional authentication is done to ensure professionalism in dealing with clients of diverse backgrounds. Professional counselors will not rush for trial and error, but will only administer remedies after a clear analysis of the case and having gathered substantial evidence. In every profession, ethical issues are hard to abide by, even becoming more challenging when one is dealing with several human beings. Stephens (2010, p. 509) add that a counselor must be well equipped in group skills for him or her to handle a group in counseling. Every group has its own dynamic complexities. In fact, conflicts increase with an increase in the number of group members. It is ethically required that every counselor should therefore have the necessary skills required in handling group dynamics.

Every member of the group should get a different screening procedure besides being understood according to his or her behavior and character. Such close evaluation should also be done on potential group members. Other personal qualities like and economic background should also been factored. For example, it would be difficult for university graduates to appreciate counseling when they are placed in groups of primary school dropouts. The counselor should have skills to interpret the mental status. Emotional stability of a client to withstand the truth should also be measured accordingly. According to Wade (2012, p. 329), religious beliefs and spiritual foundations of every individual in a group should also be appreciated. For example, Christians have respect for Jesus Christ as the son of God and strict adherence to the Ten Commandments. On the other hand, Muslims have strict adherence to the Quran and the words of Prophet Mohammed.

In most cases, spiritual foundations of individuals dictate what their values are and or whether they observe them or not. A counselor may forever labor for years in unearthing and treating certain cases of mental and psychological sicknesses if they continue with the counseling process without initial personal screening. It is from a deep understanding of the client that guides the counselor in the therapy process. Counselors cannot gain wisdom through the process of academic training: God gives wisdom. In fact, wisdom seems to be naturally occurring in some people. Complexity of some group cases requires the counselor to have enough wisdom on top of his or her professional training.

Good judgment also enables the therapist to forecast the implications of certain cases in the future. Some effects of counseling may go far ahead to determining how individuals make decisions in the future. Therapists must be able to withstand the morality test of the society that goes beyond what they do with their life in and outside the office. Counselors must have high ethical standards that enable them avoid compromise. For instance, a counselor ought to avoid doing wrong even when every other person says it is right to do so. Counselors should be guided by what is right in the eyes of God and the law. When one is compromised, their moral and ethical standings are highly affected. In counseling, one faces different personalities. Therapists who are not strong in their moral standing may even fall prey of the evils that their clients commit. A counselor may easily be enjoined in drug abuse legal case, firearm handling, and sexual immorality cases amongst others.

Although, a fee is paid for therapy, counselors should not be money minded. Money is a factor in most instances of the failure of counselors to observe moral and ethical principles. It is wrong for a counselor to forfeit his or her ethical guidelines in order to gain more money. Counselors should therefore adopt ethical means of earning their livelihood to avoid compromise. After counseling, clients assumed to have gained the necessary skills in handling life on their own. It is not enough for the counselor to give verbal and written guidelines to clients and leave them to their own devices in life. Effective counseling should bear visible fruits. According Jen der pan (2011, p. 779), the counselor should give the clients some life skills that will enable them to live well by interacting with others comfortably in the society. At the end of the counseling session, clients should appreciate the undertaking. They should be able to move forward and forget their past unproductive lives to adopting a beneficial life.

Counseling should reduce human suffering. Therapy should eliminate or reduce mental and emotional suffering that the client suffered before counseling to minimal levels. According to Wade (2012, p. 329), clients should handle the condition that faced them before counseling without any assistance. By extension, they should assist other victims of similar situations. The sustainability of the effects of counseling depends on experience, academic qualifications, and commitment of the counselor. The remedy to counseling cases should have a permanent or long lasting effect.

Issues Unique to Group Therapy

Group counseling is different from individual counseling. Although group counseling is similar to individual counseling in some ways, there are many differences between the two. In a group counseling, the counselor must understand that each individual in the group is unique in some ways. Unlike individual counseling, various personality traits are brought together in group therapy. The confidentiality of every individual client must be maintained even when clients are grouped together for therapy unless the clients agree on disclosure. The counselor has to understand the specific problems that each client faces. Although there may be similarities in the cases, there are unique differences in individual cases that the counselor must differentiate. Every member of the group would want to hear his or her individual problems being addressed by the counselor. The counseling program must touch on the problems that they face. If the

whole counseling process does not address the challenges that they face, they will not appreciate the need for attending the counseling sessions.

Group counseling involves dynamics such as advising members not to share information concerning the counseling sessions when they are out of class. To the counselors, it is likely to become very hard for them to control their clients once they leave the counseling halls. However, it is their discretion to advise the client against it and to ensure that the rules of counseling are upheld. When individuals are in groups, they are likely to form social alignments before, during, or after the session. Since man is a social animal, it is likely to be difficult for such individuals to refrain from sharing their experiences in the sessions. However, Der Pan et al. (20012, p. 731) argue that it is upon the counselor to train the clients on how to mark certain boundaries in their communication. When the clients in groups understand what can be disclosed to others and or what is private, it becomes easier even for the entire counseling process. Issues that are disclosed by each individual during the groups are not to be discussed by other members outside the session.

Information that individual clients disclose to the counselor or to the group for example personal experiences should not be discussed with other people outside the conference. Crespi (2009, p. 273) affirms that the counselor is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that all group members understand the rules, regulations, and legal principles concerning counseling.

In a group counseling setting, the counselor must ensure that he or she gains trust from the clients. It is also imperative that the group members begin to trust each other with information. Conviction is important since it speeds up the rate of information disclosure. According to Piper (2007, p. 130), without personal disclosure, counseling becomes almost unfruitful. Each client must begin by owning his or her individual situations before seeking advice on what to do about it. After owning the process, the same client should be ready to make it known to a trusted therapist. According to Yildirim (2012, p. 130), the level of disclosure determines the kind of treatment and professional counseling that the client receives. However, most of the counselors are tempted to ignore the need for confidentiality.

Such ignorance can result in dangerous impacts. For example, when counseling a woman who has been unable to get out of lesbianism, it may be very dangerous to disclose such information to the public or to her friends. It would even be worse to divulge information about a man who joins the group for counseling after a long struggle with impotence.

Such revelation can amount to soiling of personal demeanor. Other people can even begin to disregard the person. No client can unveil such information to a therapist whom he or she believes or has evidence that the therapist cannot keep confidential information. Trust and confidentiality are therefore crucial in a group counseling.

Every group should have strict adherence to ethical control. The counselor has the greatest responsibility in controlling what happens in the group. Individual clients in a group setting have little or no control of what happens during the session. The kind of communication that majorly happens in a group setting can be both beneficial and detrimental to the group.

Sharing of individual experiences and the content of learning can be valuable to the individual clients. The counselor is therefore charged with the duty to monitor and control the group members when they are on the session and when they finish the sessions. In a group setting, members are also bound to influence one another into various acts. Every member of the group is therefore bound to learn and emulate certain traits from the other members. The danger involved in this process is that a client can join the group with a need to be counseled on a certain issue but end up being predisposed to learning other awful traits. Every member learns from one another. Luke and Hackney (2007, p. 287), argue that leaning is a continuous activity. Members interact in the group, a lot of exchange happens. The counselor should therefore be very keen to monitor the level of communication that is entailed in the group. It is also important that professional ethos be observed when assigning counseling groups to individuals. For instance, a client may come for the counseling session due to family conflicts.

Another client may also come for the session with a similar problem. Hence, the counselor will be tempted to put them under one class. However, one client may be an alcoholic in addition to being in family wrangles. Such a person may influence the other into alcoholism within the several days that they interact in the therapy. Such dynamics are majorly out of peer pressure. Disclosure of information in a group setting may also take a lot of time. In fact, some clients may never divulge information about their problems in a group setting. In such cases, there is a strong bond of peer influence or fear in the group. A member of the group may fear what others may say about him, or worse still what they can believe about him or her after the disclosure. In many instances, clients are forced to lie in order to save their face from the group. The counselor should therefore be very vigilant in order to identify such dynamics and react to them before they become a major problem. In some cases, peer pressure in group counseling becomes very hard to disengage.

The group members can also agree not to conceal any information to the counselor. Such actions make the counseling process very difficult.

It is against the counseling ethics to coerce members of the group to change behavior. In a group setting, members can force others to behave in a particular way against their will by making some members appear foolish in the presence of others. Such members are therefore forced to change their behavior even when they are on the right. Coercion from the therapist himself or herself is also unethical. In fact, intimidation from the group leaders and the counselor makes the victim lie or refuse to reveal the truth. According to Banks (2005, p. 17), if the client does not disclose the correct information to the counselor, the process is likely to experience many hurdles and fail to be successful. It is therefore imperative for the counselor to ensure that none of the clients is coerced from any corner especially in giving information and changing of behavior. The counselor should be vigilant to ensure that no one compels the other into acting in a strange way. Good behavior should be cultivated in a sensible way. The clients should be at liberty to change their bad behavior to reap the benefits of good conduct.

In a group setting, diversity cannot be underrated. It may result in stereotyping. PAN (2012, p. 139) affirms that members of a group may come from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, they may be different in the way they do things or even believe. Every member should

therefore be taught to respect each other's beliefs and diversity. No tribe or ethnic community is better relative to the other. According to Luke and Hackney (2007, p. 287), members of the group may have variations in educational levels, economic levels, and even social status. The counselor must ensure that each member appreciates this multiplicity. In fact, Yildirim (2012, p. 129) affirms that group members should be encouraged to learn from one another and to enquire more in confirmation of facts and biases. It is against the counseling ethics to prejudice and or stereotype others. It is the role of the counselor and the group leader to ensure that every group is properly integrated to represent the image of a wider group. Malott, Paone, Humphreys, and Martinez (2010, p. 257) are for the opinion that the counselor should ensure that members of a similar cultural orientation are not placed in a similar group unless the prevailing circumstances dictate so. Failure of members to condone and embrace diversity is likely to indicate the weakness of the counselor.

Counseling skills, experience, and education should make the counselor an authority in the field. It should therefore be easy for him or her to make the members tolerant to other people's beliefs and cultural stands. Cultural beliefs are deeply entrenched into people's lives. Any contravention of it may result in conflicts. It is ethically wrong for group members to be dishonest. Without the truth, the whole group may not benefit from the counseling process. Dishonesty is even likely to make the counselor unprofessional. The moment various clients visit the counselor and undergo the full counseling program but fail not change from their past unbecoming behavior, the counselor is compromised. He or she is seen as a quack or a non-performer. Counseling in a group setting should be result oriented. If all members of the group are insincere in their confessions and discussions, the group cannot progress. It will reach a point where the fabrication will require sophisticated deception to cover the initial ones. Members who are misleading live in tension and cannot trust each other. Yildirim (2012, p. 129) argues that dishonesty among members is likely to result in interpersonal conflicts among the associates of the group. No one would like to be embittered. In such circumstances, group members cannot even feel free to discuss their experiences and thoughts with the rest of the group members.

Others will immediately or slowly withdraw from active participation in the group activities the moment they realize that the rest are deceitful. Gumpert and Black (2006, p. 61) affirm that the counselor is therefore charged with the responsibility of cultivating integrity among various members of the group. All these ethical dynamics of group counseling discussed above can result in the breaking of the group. When counselors form psychotherapy groups, they always have plans and objectives to achieve through them. When a group breaks out of the above ethical problems, the members and the counselor have to lose the mutual benefit. According to Hong et al. (2012, p. 180), it is unethical for a group to be terminated immaturely in the presence of a trained counselor. This case is likely to indicate failure and incompetence. The counselor is blamed for not being able to exercise expertise and leadership skills. The members are also blamed for having no sense of direction and purpose in their undertaking. The honest, truthful, and rule-abiding clients may never join such groups again hence making it unwelcoming to the therapist and the whole idea of counseling. People may begin to lose interest in counseling or even fail to value it. Out of group break ups, the societal issues of uncouth acts will remain unsolved. The idea of counseling is underrated when clients cannot trust the therapists. The

counselor is undermined, with his or her work being seen as unfruitful while the society continues experiencing difficulties in dealing with psychotherapy cases.

The result is that unqualified persons who may not have the knowhow of conducting such activities will be left to do the counseling. By the end of it all, members of the society may result into violent means of solving differences among them hence harming each other. The society may not understand those that are psychologically sick. It may even treat them badly resulting in the worsening of their situation. Counseling is therefore imperative in the society. Hong et al. (2012, p. 179) affirm that therapists should also be keen to ensure that all members of the group respect the ethical guidelines of the counseling process. With good ethical guidelines and adherence, both the counselor and clients will benefit.

Reasons as to why Therapists choose Group over Individual Counseling

Experiences in individual counseling are completely different from group counseling. In counseling, both individual and group counseling are important. However, most of the counseling therapists prefer counseling groups than an individual. There are various reasons for counselors to engage group counseling than individual counseling.

One of the reasons for preferring on group counseling is that members in groups develop a feeling of being equal to one another. A counseling group is just like a class or a school situation where all members are equal. Crits-Christoph et al. (2013, p. 24) observe that, when members are in a group, they begin to appreciate that the problems that they experience are not unique to them only. Others also experience it.

The gap and the tension that the client experiences when he or she is alone with the counselor is eliminated. Group therapy is therefore important for the people that appreciate being with others. Such people can even divulge more information to the counselor relative to when they are alone. Therapists would therefore prefer dealing with such groups than individuals.

Group therapy is also better than individual counseling since it is more lively and encouraging than when one is faced with a single individual alone. Pan et al. (2012, p. 349) add that, when clients are in a group, they appreciate the words and directions of the counselor than when they are just alone.

Groups are also better because when one member becomes dull or decides not to share information, others remain vigorous hence encouraging the therapist to carry on with the process of counseling. In such a situation, the counselor is also encouraged to perform better in order to keep those that are keen in better positions.

In a group setting, members also discuss with others about the areas where they may not have understood during the process. It is also important to note that, in some instances, the counselor may not be able to clearly articulate a certain point in the course of counseling. In such circumstances, a group member can assist those that did not understand.

Such an opportunity to learn from each other is not present in individual counseling. Members that prefer being appreciated also benefit from group counseling since there are many people to compliment them. Compliments raise their level of self-esteem, with such members making the work of the therapist easier.

Piper (2007, p.130) affirms that the counselor in a group setting is also likely to face more questions than when he or she is counseling an individual. Questions are an indication of openness and the need to know. The counselor will therefore achieve his goals more easily when the members are active. Questions are a source of feedback for the counselor to evaluate himself.

In a group therapy, members are able to appreciate the fact they do not face the circumstance alone. According to Banks (2005, p. 17), when clients meet in a group and share information on personal experiences, they realize that problems are universal and not personal.

Such an appreciation makes the work of the counselor even easier since members will be ready for therapy. Group therapy also indicates to the counselor whether the individuals will be able to reintegrate into the society after the session.

Personal Leadership qualities in a Group Therapy

Leadership is at the heart of group therapy. It is therefore important to have experienced counselors who can manage leadership in the group. Leadership is power. Power on the other hand can corrupt leaders. The feeling of pride and authority may lead to the disintegration of the counseling group. This case is especially common when group leaders devolve powers to subgroups and then appoint subgroup leaders.

Although such groups enable the group leaders to achieve efficiency and quick coordination, they may result in conflicts of interest. Other members of the group may begin to feel that they are doing better in relation to others, or that they are in charge of others. Group leaders should therefore be cautious while appointing other leaders or sub-leaders.

Crits-Christoph et al. (2013, p. 23) observe that it is important to screen the leaders before assigning them various duties. It is imperative to evaluate whether they meet the educational standards for the position, their levels of emotional stability, and their cultural foundations. Such factors are likely to impact on their performance as leaders in the groups.

The ability to lead should also be evaluated before such appointments are made. Some people may have good humiliating traits. However, they may show no leadership abilities. Worse still, they may have the necessary skills in leadership but have no desire for it. Appointment of bad leaders in the group can be the beginning of failure or success of the group.

A good leader can cultivate a good relationship among members of the group. It is also possible for an efficient leader to control the group during disputes and even solve cases of conflicts

among the group members. Ability to solve cases is important in delivering quality counseling to the group.

Leadership should avoid differences among leaders themselves and the rest of the group members. Respect between group leaders creates cohesion between members. Members cannot believe in divided leaders. In fact, the groups may disintegrate if leaders portray their conflicts openly.

Openness and admission should also be encouraged between leaders. Der Pan et al. (20012, p. 731) argue that leaders should cultivate a good and open communication within the group. Communication is power. Proper communication enables people to gain information that is necessary for them to tackle the problems that life poses. It is unethical for leaders to fail to articulate themselves properly.

Leaders should share information about group dynamics, leadership hurdles, and the best strategies that can enable the group to leap the best benefits from counseling. Leaders should ensure that every member of the group is empowered through adequate provision of information. There should also be avenues for members of the particular group to give their feedback.

Leaders should keep on updating each other with the right information during the therapy process. Sharing of information is important for uniformity and good performance. Proper communication channels should be made public for all leaders and members to know.

It is out of poor communication that leaders get into conflicts among themselves and with their members. Ethical guidelines in counseling emphasize the power of communication. Leaders should therefore ensure that they gain the necessary communication skills and put in place proper communication mechanisms.

Conflicts among leaders should be avoided at all cost. Every group leader is a role model to his or her members and to other leaders. Gumpert and Black (2006, p. 61) assert that, whenever members witness open conflicts between group leaders, they become tensed about the relationships. They may even become completely disengaged in the group affairs.

Conflicts with other leaders may result in loss of trust from the members. In fact, tension begins at the point where members experience open or hidden conflict between their leaders. Worse still, members can rebel against such leaders. Such a situation can result in complete disintegration of the group.

The group leader is charged with the responsibility of ensuring that conflicts among leaders of subgroups are eliminated or ironed out on time. Competition among members and even among groups is important. However, only healthy competition among leaders can help other members of the counseling group.

It is worth noting that unregulated competition can result in actual conflicts among the leaders and the individual members. Health competition among groups enhances learning. In the process of competing, members and group leaders can perfect their skills. Group and subgroup leaders should therefore enhance proper communication among them to ensure that their individual groups reap the benefits of communication.

Competition has rules and guidelines, which must be followed properly in the process of competition. Pan et al. (2012, p. 349) reveals that the major goal of setting up groups should not be forgotten in the process of the group and leadership competition. It is therefore important for every member of the group to realize the importance of competition and be ready to play by the rules.

With good leadership, competition among members can result in better performance of the groups. Leaders who work together are able to solve conflicts among themselves. During the moments of conflicts among members of the group, leaders have to show authority and competence. It is even better when leaders come together and work in unity when solving conflicts arising from members.

My Leadership Qualities and Approach to Group Therapy

As a counselor, one of the leadership qualities that I possess is the ability to communicate well. Good communication skills are important in leadership. Proper communication involves being clear, concise, correct, and complete. Communication breakdown results in clashes among members of a group. In fact, a counselor who does not communicate well is likely to face opposition from clients.

A leader who does not communicate correctly can drive people into disagreement. It is therefore important for one to have good communication skills. I am also a good planner and time manager. These skills have enabled me to be consistent in my endeavors. Before engaging with my followers into any program, I begin by having a good arrangement. Planning is essential when dealing with groups.

Crits-Christoph et al. (2013, p. 24) insists that one requires a pre-planning of what to cover at a certain time together with the expected results of the session. My plans also have alternatives for eventualities. I am a good time manager. Discipline in time management enables me to be organized and timely in completion of assignments and projects. It is always good to honor promises to other leaders, to the followers, or even clients.

The tight schedules that are common in a group counseling must be upheld. In order to keep abreast with such schedules, time management became a necessary skill that I have developed. I also have a wide range of skills and experience in counseling.

Training and experience enable me to be professional on how I approach various issues. Professionalism also enables me to abide by ethical guidelines and codes of conduct in

counseling. When one is professional, it is hard to contravene the law or even ethics of his or her profession.

Challenges in Leadership

In leadership, one must expect to face various obstacles occasionally. I have faced many challenges in leadership. Such challenges range from conflicts among members, poor cooperation by members, incitement of members, interference from external forces, and competition for leadership positions. Leadership involves dealing with a variety of people, guiding them, and directing them towards success.

However, people come from different backgrounds with different beliefs. They view things from a multiplicity of dimensions. Having the ability to communicate in a manner that creates mutual understanding enables me to quell conflicts among my students. Communication is a solution to most of the problems that people face.

In fact, Der Pan et al. (2012, p. 739) affirm that most of conflicts in the world are out of poor communication and hence misunderstanding. Incitement of learners from among themselves and from other external forces is another major hurdle that I have been able to overcome. Learners may feel over bombarded with learning and the tight schedules of counseling sessions.

Others may just want to cause havoc and render the process unsuccessful. In such situations, I apply professional counseling skills that enable me to manage people. People's skills and human resource management skills are crucial parts of therapy.

Conclusion

In conclusion, ethics is inherent in every profession. Professional ethics in a group counseling is supposed to be adhered to by both the counselor and the client. These guidelines enable the process of counseling to be professional, consistent, and to run smoothly. When therapists observe the ethical guidelines of their profession, they are less likely to contravene the laws of God, man, and their nation.

Group counseling differs from individual counseling due to various dynamics of group management. As the paper has revealed, most of the therapists prefer group counseling to individual counseling. Leadership qualities are important for group leaders for them to manage and influence the group. Good communication can enable leaders to overcome most of the challenges that are likely to emerge in a group therapy.

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