

Influence of Virtue Ethics on Counselling Morale Application among Counselling Interns

Nor Mazlina Ghazali, Nor Aisha Mustafa, Wan Marzuki Wan Jaafar, Azzahrah Anuar, and Lee May Fern

Abstract -- The nature of virtue ethics is important in counselling process. The investigation on the virtue ethics (benevolence and respectfulness) involves counselling morale application among trainee counsellors. The purposes of the research include: (i) to investigate the relationship between the “benevolence” and cultural awareness of the trainee counsellors, (ii) to investigate the relationship between the “respectfulness” and cultural awareness of the trainee counsellors, (iii) to investigate the relationship between the cultural awareness and morale application among trainee counsellors, (iv) to investigate the use of “benevolence” in the morale application among trainee counsellors, and (v) to investigate the use of “respectfulness” in the morale application among trainee counsellors. The instruments used to measure the variables in the study are the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS), Multicultural Attitude Scale (MAS), and Vision of Morality Scale (VMS). Findings have shown that the virtue ethics (benevolence and respectfulness) had influences on the counselling morale application. In summary, the virtue ethics is essential for counsellor’s decision making in the counselling process.

Keywords -- Virtue ethics, Benevolence, Respectfulness, Counselling morale application, Culture

I. INTRODUCTION

The counselling profession has developed gradually along with the state of trust and confidence by the community members toward this noble occupation. It is vital for the professional counsellors to practise their ethical obligations while serving the clients (Wilczenski & Cook, 2005). Virtue ethics is one of the ethical components that should be emphasised and followed through by the professional counsellors in the counselling relationship (Abdul Rahman, 2011).

According to Fry (2005), the ethical standards serves as a guideline in the counseling process especially in making decisions. Apart from the principle ethics, virtue ethics is another method that can be applied for making ethical decision. In fact, professional counsellors are advised to integrate both principle and virtue ethics to reach better ethical decisions when working with clients (Corey et al., 2015).

Moreover, the ethical behavior of counsellors can promote and enhance the counselling services (Gribov,

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2000). Counsellors with ethical behaviors will perform better in order to maintain the dynamics that occur in the counselling process. The virtue ethics compliment the ethical behavior displayed by the counsellors which result in the cohesiveness and effectiveness of the counselling relationship between the counsellor and client.

Beauchamp and Childress (1994) defined a moral virtue as an acquired habit or disposition to do what is morally right or praiseworthy’ (p. 261). Interestingly, a psychologist’s display of benevolence and respectfulness (as defined by Meara et al., 1996) are the other entities that are selected to be the foundation upon which virtue ethics is constructed within the field of psychology. These two virtues, along with the virtues of prudence and integrity, are paramount to the process of psychologists acting on moral ideals (Meara et al., 1996).

The principles of virtue ethics embrace respect as a provision of special attention, deference, or regard to individuals and communities on and in the terms that they themselves define (Meara et al., 1996).

Individuals possessing benevolence are distinguished by wanting to do good, despite the fact that they are not obligated to do so. The virtue of benevolence is implicitly esteemed with high regard in the American Psychological Association Code of Ethics (2002). Counsellors with benevolence attributes tend to be more conscious of their ethical behavior and the caring attitude becomes their second nature because they believe that it is crucial in making ethical decision. Principle E (Concern for Others’ Welfare) and Principle F (Social Responsibility) in the APA Code of Ethics of 2002 have also outlined the importance of the psychology professionals to engage in the benevolent acts in their practice.

Aristotle has highlighted that the characteristics of an individual is an important element in understanding the morale of the individual (Gribov, 2000). Therefore, virtue ethics can be a crucial method to understand the moral application among counsellors because virtue ethics focuses on the character traits of the counsellors and how the counselors use their nonprescribed principles in solving ethical dilemmas.

Objectives of Research

The purposes of the study were to:

- a) investigate the relationship between “benevolence” and cultural awareness of the trainee counsellors,

- b) investigate the relationship between the “respectfulness” and cultural awareness of the trainee counsellors,
- c) investigate the relationship between the cultural awareness and morale application among trainee counsellors
- d) investigate the use of “benevolence” in the morale application among trainee counsellors.
- e) investigate the use of “respectfulness” in the morale application among trainee counsellors.

Research Questions

- a) Is there any significant relationship between the “benevolence” and cultural awareness of the trainee counsellors?
- b) Is there any significant relationship between “respectfulness” and cultural awareness of the trainee counsellors?
- c) Is there any significant relationship between the cultural awareness and morale application among trainee counsellors?
- d) Is there any significant usage of “benevolence” in the morale application among trainee counsellors?
- e) Is there any significant usage of “respectfulness” and morale application among trainee counsellors?

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Research by Borders (as cited in Lee & Cashwell, 2002) has stated that the ethical issues were oftenly discussed in the supervision process. Though the importance of ethical obedience in the counselling process was highlighted in numerous counselling literatures, some counsellors have failed to implement this obligation. It can be inferred that some counsellors may lack of awareness and conscience in the legal and ethical aspect of counselling. When counsellors fail to follow the rules and regulations set in the code of ethics, it may jeopardize the way they solve specific ethical problems in counselling practice (Norazani Ahmad, 2006).

The unethical behaviors that are demonstrated by the trainee counsellors during the training process has an influence on the actual ethical practice in the future (Wagner, 1981). Hence, the trainee counsellors must be supervised and encourage to apply their ethics knowledge and skills to avoid malpractice in their counselling training. One of the key factors that might have led to unethical practices among professional counsellors was the lack of understanding in the legal and ethical aspects in counseling and its implementation during their practical/internship training (Asuwad Abdullah, 2014).

According to Kitchener (1996), the use of “*virtue ethics*” is influenced by the action of counselors when they encounter an ethical dilemma, and they react accordingly to their morale

consideration. Counsellors with “*virtue ethics*” often questioned by other professional counsellors because they typically use the nonobligatory principles and values in solving ethical issues. On the other hand, the ethical action and decision made based on the culture serves different meaning (Sue, 2001). This scenario might create ambivalence in the counsellor-client relationship. Therefore, a study on the influence of “*virtue ethics*” on the morale application among trainee counselors has been conducted.

III. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ethical guidance serves as foundation for individuals to solve problems and making decision when they encounter ethical dilemma (Tännsjö, 2002). Most philosophy scholars display their morale through “*virtue ethics*” through doing good deeds towards others and avoiding bad deeds. Aristotle expresses the “*virtue ethics*” promotes good character development of individuals (as cited in Freeman, 2000).

Counselors with virtue ethics ask questions such as “what do you want to be?” in assisting clients to make choices and take action in certain situations (Keenan, 1992). Virtue ethics is a concept that can be utilized by the community to determine the wisdom and morale of certain group in categorizing the “good behavior”. Although virtue ethics focuses on the individual’s character development for the basis of professional judgments and actions, Jordan and Meara (1990) hypothesized that it is the exercise of the other-regarding virtues of respectfulness and benevolence that were likely to lead persons to demonstrate behaviors that illustrate competence to serving the common good and a sensitivity to multiculturalism. The current study sought to examine their hypothesis, and provide empirical support that psychologists possessing virtues of benevolence and respectfulness are more likely to take action in pursuit of these values.

Respect is conceptualized as a dynamic concept that is dependent upon a culture or society for its definition. The critical question for professionals to consider is how others want to be respected. Therefore, until a community or individual defines how or what it would like to have respected, there is no simple guidelines for professionals to determine what constitutes ethical behaviors. While a small number of existing studies have examined the concepts related to respect such as social justice, equality, broad-mindedness, and unity with nature, virtually no research has empirically measured the respectfulness as defined herein. With such a paucity of relevant research existing on the construct of respectfulness, Schwartz’ conception of the universalism value which encompasses understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature, makes it the definition of respect most akin to that used in the current study. Schwartz’s use of the words ‘understanding, appreciation, and tolerance’ reiterate the core notion that respect is a dynamic concept, that is dependent upon a culture or society for its definition. It is not a simply awareness of a preconceived set of beliefs, but

rather, a provision of special attention, deference or regard to individuals and communities on and in the terms that they themselves define. The focus on both the enhancement of others and transcendence of selfish interests makes the Universalism scale of the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS) (1992) a complimentary measure of respectfulness to include in the current replication of Fry (2002).

Benevolence often integrates the components of social responsibility and public interest through its practice, and thereby serves as a vehicle through which professionals achieve the goal of contributing to the common good. The benevolent professional knows what is good or best for those they serve, and regardless of their own views, set about to do good (Meara et al., 1996). Likewise, the concern for virtue ethics to examine “*What ought I to be?*” rather than “*What ought I to do?*” further clarifies the nature of benevolence to influence individuals to act in morally appropriate ways when moral requirements and self-interests conflict (DuBose, 1994). Similar to its other-regarding counterpart of respectfulness, benevolence is a construct that is virtually absent from the empirical literature in psychology. Although a small number of studies have measured related constructs such as helpfulness, forgiveness, honesty, and loyalty as individual variables, only a paucity of research has examined the virtue of benevolence as an empirical construct. Schwartz’ (1992) definition of benevolence encompasses the related aforementioned values, along with values of responsibility, true friendship, a spiritual life, mature love, and meaning in life. It is the inclusivity of this definition and validity of the value items both cross-culturally and within a given culture that lend the Benevolence scale of the SVS as an ideal secondary measure of benevolence to compliment the Self-Report Altruism Scale, the primary measure used both in the current replication study and originally in Fry (2002). Given that virtue ethics rest on the belief that motivation, emotion, character, ideals, and moral habits situated within the tradition and practice of a culture or group, their function within a profession is to present a more complete account of the moral life than actions based on the prescribed rules or principles of practice that can be detached from individuals and their communities. Virtue ethics call upon the individuals to develop traits of character that enable person to achieve these ideals and serve as the inextricable link between who and what we are and what we do that defines the ethical character of psychology as a profession.

Multicultural understanding is a universal component in counseling. Trusty et al. (2002) referred multicultural counseling as to as the readiness and application of cultural awareness, knowledge, and skill in counseling. Factors that have forced the trainee counselors and professional counselors to focus on the importance of knowledge, skills, and awareness in multicultural counseling practice varied (Nurul ‘Ain Mohd Daud et al., 2015). Nurul ‘Ain Mohd Daud et al. (2015) described that the cultural differences might be the hindrance for the trainee counselors in conducting counseling sessions. Thus, it is vital to consider the

multicultural competency to ensure the effectiveness of counseling relationships.

IV. METHOD

Research Design

This is a quantitative and correlational research design. Quantitative research uses tangible data, through measurable instruments such as questionnaires and tests (Kamarul Azmi Jasmi, 2012).

Subject and Selection

160 trainee counsellors participated in the study that consists of second, third, and final year students. The stratified random sampling was utilized in the study based on the differences in the number of trainee counsellors on each year. Refer Table I for the number of respondents according to respective universities.

TABLE I: RESPONDENTS ACCORDING TO RESPECTIVE UNIVERSITIES

Year of Study	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
Total	38	35	32

Instrumentation

The demographic form includes questions such as age, gender, race, religion, programme of study/faculty, and year of study. The Schwartz Value Survey (SVS) is used to measure the differences of values in trainee counsellors (Schwartz, 2012). There are 56 items in the SVS but only items related to benevolence and respectfulness have been selected. The Multicultural Attitude Scale (MAS) is used to measure the awareness trainee counsellors in the multicultural aspects. This instrument consists of 20 items with three subscales such as awareness, appreciation, and tolerance. The Vision of Morality Scale (VMS) is used to measure the morality and behaviour of trainee counsellors. The VMS items cover 45 simple dimensions.

TABLE II: RELIABILITY OF INSTRUMENTS

Research Instruments	Cronbach’s Alpha (α) of Instrument	Cronbach’s Alpha Instrument in Research
Schwartz Value Survey (SVS)	0.74	0.87
Benevolence	0.84	0.85
Respectfulness	0.80	0.75
Multicultural Attitude Scale (MAS)	0.88	0.88
Vision of Morality Scale (VMS)		

Statistical Analysis

Mean, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages (descriptive analysis), correlation, and regression analysis (inferential analysis) were used to measure the influence of virtue ethics on the moral counselling application.

V. FINDINGS

Demographic

The demographic data of participants were reported in the study including gender, race, age, degree, course of study, and year of study. The mean scores and standard deviations were also outline in the study.

TABLE III : RESPONDENTS BASED ON GENDER

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	20	19.0
Female	85	81.0

N = 105

TABLE IV : RESPONDENTS BASED ON RACES

Race	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Malay	65	61.9
Chinese	11	10.5
Indian	1	1.0
Iban	10	9.5
Bidayuh	4	3.8
Melanau	2	1.9
Others	12	11.4

N = 105

TABLE V : YEAR OF STUDY

Year of Study	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Year 2	49	46.7
Year 3	35	33.3
Year 4	21	20.0

N = 105 the finding showed the mean = 4.55 and standard deviation = 0.75 and showed lower score compared to previous research at M = 4.83, SD = 0.60.

TABLE VI: AGE OF RESPONDENTS

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
21 – 23	68	64.8
24 – 26	35	33.3
27 – 29	2	1.9

N = 105

Mean and Standard Deviation

All the means and standard deviations for all instruments were illustrated in Table VII. “Benevolence” and “Respectfulness” were evaluated using the Schwartz Value Survey (SVS). SVS is a 9-point (9) likert scale questionnaire. The mean scores of SVS have indicated that the respondents have a high value of benevolence and respectfulness.

In this study, Benevolence value was M= 6.91 and SD = 0.86. Such finding was contradicted with the previous

research by Fry (2005) [M = 4.08, SD = 2.46, n = 190]. The differences might be due to the different number of sample involved in the research. The Respectfulness value was also different from the previous research at (M = 4.91, SD = 1.43, n = 190). Both Benevolence and Respectfulness mean scores for this study were higher than the previous findings.

The mean score for the cultural awareness among respondents were the lowest among other scores (virtue ethics and morality) [M = 3.70, SD = 0.37, n = 105]. The mean score of the cultural awareness was higher than the findings in the previous research (M = 2.64; SD = 1.03).

The mean score for morality among trainee counsellors was also slightly lower than the virtue ethics mean scores in this study (M = 4.55, SD = 0.75). This variable was measured using the Vision Morality Scale (VMS). The current finding was lower compared to the previous research (M = 4.83, SD = 0.60).

TABLE VII: MEAN AND STANDARD DEVIATION OF BENEVOLENCE (SVS), RESPECTFULNESS (SVS), AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES (MAS) AND MORALITY (VMS)

Instruments	Mean	Standard Deviation
SVS		
Benevolence	6.91	.86
Respectfulness	6.58	.94
MAS	3.70	.37
VMS	4.55	.75

N = 105

Correlation

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient has been used to measure the relationship between the benevolence and respectfulness and cultural awareness among trainee counsellors. Refer Table VIII for the results.

a) **Is there any significant relationship between the benevolence and cultural awareness among trainee counsellors?**

There was a significant relationship between the benevolence and cultural awareness among trainee counsellors at r = .256, p = .008, n=105. It could be inferred that when the trainee counselors adapted benevolence in the ethical practice, they would be more likely to demonstrate some cultural awareness when working with clients.

b) **Is there any significant relationship between the respectfulness and cultural awareness among trainee counsellors?**

There was a significant relationship between the respectfulness and cultural awareness among trainee counsellors at $r = .254$, $p = .009$, $n=105$. It could be inferred that when the trainee counselors adapted respectfulness in the ethical practice, they would be more likely to demonstrate some cultural awareness.

c) Is there any significant relationship between cultural awareness and counselling morale application amongst trainee counsellors?

There was a significant relationship between the cultural awareness and counselling morale application among trainee counsellors at, $r = .335$, $p = .000$, $n=105$. The relationship between the cultural awareness and counselling morale application was moderate.

d) Is trainee counsellors using the benevolence in counselling morale application in counselling?

There was a significant usage of benevolence in the counselling morale application in counselling among trainee counsellors at $r = .281$, $p = .004$, $n=105$. The result showed that the trainee counsellors have moderately used the benevolence in their counselling morale application.

e) Are the trainee counsellors using the respectfulness in the counselling morale application in counselling?

There was a significant usage of respectfulness in the counselling morale application in counselling among trainee counsellors at $r = .298$, $p = .002$, $n=105$. The result reported that the trainee counsellors have moderately used the respectfulness in the counselling moral application in counselling.

TABLE VIII: CORRELATION ON BENEVOLENCE, RESPECTFULNES, CULTURAL DIFFERENCES (MAS) AND COUNSELLING MORALE APPLICATION AMONGST TRAINEE COUNSELLORS (VMS)

Measures	SVS (B)	SVS (R)	MAS	VMS
SVS				
Benevolence	---	.000	.008	.004
Respectfulness	.000	---	.009	.002
MAS	.008	.009	---	.000
VMS	.004	.002	.000	---

N = 105
P < .05

Standard Regression

The analysis of standard regression has been used to investigate the influence of virtue ethics (benevolence and respectfulness) on the counselling morale application among trainee counsellors. The results have shown that the influence of virtue ethics including the benevolence and respectfulness on the counselling morale application were significant [F (1, 103) = 8.81, $p = .01$, Adjusted R2 = .07] and [F (1, 103) = 10.05, $p = .00$, Adjusted R2 = .08]. Refer Table IX: Regression Analysis.

TABLE IX: REGRESSION ANALYSIS

Variables	Adjusted R	R ²	B	SE	β	t
SVS						
Benevolence	.070	.079	.245	.083	.281	2.968
Respectfulness	.080	.089	.238	.075	.298	3.170
MAS	.103	.112	.673	.187	.335	3.606

N = 105
P < .05

VI. DISCUSSION

According to the professional ethical code of standards, counsellors that practice the virtue ethics put less emphasis on the rules that they should follow. However, counsellors who embrace the virtue ethics are more focused on the important values that should be adapted by the counsellors when making decision. As a result, the counsellors will perform better in terms of their counselling morale application in the counselling process. The findings of the study have revealed a significant importance of the use of virtue ethics particularly the benevolence and respectfulness attributes by the counselling practitioners in their counselling morale application. The new findings from the study were consistent with the research conducted by Fry (2005) in which the benevolence and respectfulness attributes had a meaningful impact on trainee counsellors in developing their good morale.

VII. CONCLUSION

In summary, the professional counsellors should embed the virtue ethics in the practice to improve the effectiveness of counselling relationship. A full understanding on the concept of virtue ethics plays a huge role in empowering themselves as professional counsellors. It should be viewed as an added value skill that can elevate the counsellor's competency level especially in solving complex ethical issues and problems in counselling.

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