

Counseling Psychology in the Service of Society

Abstract

This article ascertains principal topics and debates in Counseling Psychology in Pakistan. They were delineated through panel discussions, focus groups, and dialogues held with psychological researchers, practicing mental health practitioners, pedagogical psychologists, student body from undergraduate and postgraduate programs. This article describes an inquiry process conducted with three cognate investigatory processes. First, a summary of study reports by working experts in the field was formed. Themes established from the summary were: ideational process, personal improvement, completion purpose of professional counseling psychology, training requisite, pedagogical apprehensions, pragmatic action research, counseling services to rural and urban areas, and disseminate awareness about counseling psychology to society. Second, further the generated themes were explored through focus groups with student-body and teaching faculty of counseling psychology. The needs recognized were: course contents' upgrading, creative pedagogy, specialized training in counseling psychology, obscure research methods (laboratory experiments, neuropsychological research), the feasibility of research in a developing country, and cross-cultural framework in the theory-practice discrepancy. The third study was conducted to analyze the requirement and adequacy of counseling psychology services, specialization and training programs in Pakistan. The preliminary analysis indicated the discrepancy in counseling psychology in terms of specialization, needs, and availability of counseling psychologists and therapists. Currently, there is a serious absence of specialization in counseling psychology in Pakistan's academic programs. Few propositions towards addressing the issues are discussed.

Keywords:

Counseling Psychology, Need of Specialization, Cultural Studies, Participatory Research, Service Development, Social Policy

Introduction

Counseling psychology is one of the popular disciplines, second to clinical psychology, for Pakistan's students at intermediate and undergraduate programs at colleges and universities respectively. Given the fact that Pakistan's academic programs offer specific specializations including mainly clinical and health psychology whence counseling psychology receives partial attention with no postgraduate opportunities for academic degree programs. Some evidence suggests

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that students select Psychology degree program with realistic and perceived expectations and preconceived notions about the discipline of Psychology (Suheyl, 2012). Society too at large has high expectations from this discipline. A counseling psychologist is expected of not only comprehending mental health phenomenon both theoretically and empirically but also practical implication of this understanding towards the societal issues (Mummendey, 1984; Lai-Yeung, 2011; Suheyl, 2012).

In view of students' preconceived notions and societal role expectations, counseling psychology has faced the challenge to strive, burgeon and endeavor to gain recognition. To assess whether the role expectations are justified, evaluation of academic pedagogy and curriculum, student competencies, specialization programs, training, skills, aptitude, and professional achievements are needed. Inopportunely, this perspective of comprehending counseling psychology and action research has been overlooked in the vehemence of identifying connections between pathological stated or mental health disorders in the clinical setting. However, the counseling psychology has been germinating for years and rooted in gradually into the research body. This undervalued sub-field of psychology's gaining recognition is the product of years of indigenous research and community-based involvement and need-based relevance.

Formal and informal information was gathered from various resources to enrich the significance of key issues related to counseling psychology services provision in Pakistani society. This systematic qualitative study has been able to synthesize all feedback into a scientific inquisition. The purpose of this paper is to insulate actual and perceived incongruities and scarcities in academic and professional settings of Counseling Psychology and extract an action and interventional remedial path for the provision of services. The introductory chapter describes the rationale and then identifies research questions for qualitative inquiry.

Counseling Psychology in Pakistan

The discipline of Psychology in Pakistan, at large, has been distributed into Clinical Psychology and Psychology and the two domains had marginally diverse pedagogy approaches and curriculum. Psychology concentrated more on the application of elementary science topics and emphasis on broad-spectrum sub-fields of Psychology disciplines such as Clinical, Counseling, Industrial and Organizational, Health Psychology and attempt to deliver all at once. Clinical Psychology is considered one and the foremost academic program and specialization for professional success and academic accomplishments. However, a Clinical Psychologist who is specialized in assessment and treatment of psychological illness and severe psychopathology found a non-clinical occupation specifically designed for a Counseling Psychologist's specialty. These sub-fields of Psychology discipline stressed practical training and research advancements. Many academic institutes have established and certified the courses to create uniformity across many Psychology institutions in the region and somehow this overall progress has higher success in Clinical Psychology domain than Counseling Psychology. In order to develop and establish Counseling Psychology program, continuous process of consultation and need assessment of the nomenclature is required in all departments that are called Psychology or Clinical Psychology or Applied Psychology.

Over the years, Counseling Psychology (marginally at graduate level) discipline has evolved in terms of program modules, course content, and creative curriculum, interactive pedagogy, advanced training, action research, assessment and evaluation system, and theory-empirical interaction in standard accordance with the progress of Psychology discipline around the globe. It has been observed that this process has ascended awareness in public and policy-making bodies about the demand and certainty of Counseling Psychology discipline, relevance in the job market, response from the student community, the urgency of availability of foreign qualified Counseling Psychologists whose contribution can meet all needs. However, at the same, the discipline of Counseling Psychology at developed countries has support and development from its society, by its training and researches and delivers its psychological awareness and knowledge for the services of the community. The occupation of practically employing scientific psychological understanding towards social problems' resolution requires readdressing of conceptual and empirical models proposed by researchers beyond the scope of merely Clinical Psychology discipline. In order to evaluate whether these models have validity in diverse counseling-related issues at cross-cultural context and not only the experimental setting where they were conceived and settled. It involves soliciting goals of academic Counseling Psychology, practice, and research, but above all providing services to a larger community for the betterment of society. Previous researches has indicated that objectives of instructing a particular curriculum may not be perspicuous to the tutor especially due to lack of specialization in a particular subject (Shavelson et al, 2008) such as Counseling Psychology discipline where instructor's lack of professional degree and specialization hindered the learning process for students in many psychology departments in the region. It has been observed that the inconsistency between supposed objectives of academic Counseling Psychology within tutors, teachers, and students and perceived accomplishment in achieving these goals contrasts greatly with the harmony that existing Counseling Psychology programs, especially for postgraduate studies, are behind in delivering the actual goals. There is a scarcity of studies that have addressed the Counseling Psychology discipline in Pakistan, its objectives and its community services. Definitely, there is a requirement to establish this in a qualitative inquiry. Given this the purpose of the current study was to:

- a) Organize a framework of the primary need sectors of the subject of Counseling Psychology in Pakistan
- b) Present expectations and requirements specified by instructors, students, professionals and community from the subject of Counseling Psychology

Following the same process, additional ancillary objectives were developed as the work progressed:

- a. Enumerate and elucidate objectives of academic Counseling Psychology in Pakistan
- b. Itemize principal requirements of professional Counseling Psychology
- c. List key goals in the provision of Counseling Psychology services to Pakistani society

- c) Assessment of successful accomplishments of the objectives and to reduce the discrepancy between perceived and actual services provided to community and society

Method

Planning

The nature of the investigation required multiple procedures and an innovative methodology. During the discussions and interviews conducted with students, teachers, researchers, mental health practitioners and community members that were held with specific goals and investigations. They expressed their views about the state of Counseling Psychology discipline in Pakistan, from a global perspective and its future directions. Students were specifically articulate to express their dissatisfaction and disquiet. This directed towards the establishment of a working group for this exploration. The aim of the working group was to build a framework of inquiry for assessing the state of Counseling Psychology subject in Pakistan and then establish future plans for improvement. The working group was consists of six academic psychologists (teaching Counseling Psychology with basic training), two undergraduate students (intends to choose Counseling Psychology major), four graduate students (major Counseling Psychology), and three practicing professional psychologist.

Procedure and Analyses

Group members attended a meeting thrice a month and offered their individual assessment in their particular settings including a review of current research. Furthermore, they discuss their distinct outcomes and appropriate researches they had an encounter. Information was recurrently exchanged including the updates on the analysis through emails. The discussions were transcribed and qualitative researcher content analyzed the meeting records. Through the process of consensual qualitative examination, core theme was generated. They had proven enough to be present some working suggestions for establishing and endorsing the resolution to strengthen Counseling Psychology discipline on many grounds. This article reported the initial outcomes of the working group and testing phase of further studies.

Ethical Considerations

To conduct this research, ethical considerations were strictly followed including identifying, addressing and briefing the study participants, and reassurance of anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality. Ethical subjects related to the anonymity and privacy of the research participants' data were handled in a way which ensures the confidentiality and privacy of study participants. All participant of the research acknowledged information about the study and consented for their willful participation. Ethical consideration includes the appropriate method and prevention of the incorrect use of information. The biases of the researcher were controlled by the process of random sampling in which each participant get the equal chance to be the part of the study.

Identified Areas

These were the identified key area to focus for further direction:

1. Ideational Process
2. Completion Purpose of Professional Counseling Psychology
3. Training Requisite
4. Pedagogical Apprehensions
5. Pragmatic Action Research
6. Counseling Services to Rural and Urban Areas
7. Personal Improvement
8. Disseminate Awareness about Counseling Psychology to Society

Discussion

The article concentrated on views of Counseling Psychology instructors, mental health practitioners and students about both questions of the discipline Counseling Psychology – academic Counseling Psychology and professional services towards society. The data analyzed and précised in this paper was not only comprised of the outlooks of the working group but the qualitative data as well. In this process, the study was managed to extend afar instant specialized and academic grounds and acquire data from broader and more diverse sources in Pakistan. Below are given the principal themes that emerged and elaborated on them further.

Ideational Process

Research methods are endorsed as a style of progression in learning skills that guides on procedural learning. Ideational process in modern psychology is way beyond its method. Beginner learners in Psychology conveyed minimum attentiveness and found the slight significance of research methods (Lai-Yeung, 2011). Researches methods cannot be fully comprehended unless researchers are fortified with academic reasoning, empirical understanding, and conceptual coherence. This point was stressed many times during the meetings. The senior researchers and academic psychologists expressed that theoretical reasoning which is the foreground of a high feature research can enhance among research students because Counseling Psychology has action based research potential. Professional and practicing psychologists added that deficit was the lack of ideational thinking among senior researchers especially from those who advocate other than Counseling Psychology discipline.

Completion Purpose of Professional Counseling Psychology

The specific and specialized goals of a Counseling Psychology program may be documented but not properly reinforced by policymakers, program implementers, and academic body. Counseling Psychology still has not earned its place to have a doctoral program purely in Counseling Psychology because somehow it is listed below in priority than Clinical, Applied or Health psychology departments. Every department from every university followed almost the same coursed designed for a long time and what other departments from other local universities have planned.

The explicit or implied wide-ranging goal that group participants assumed were “carrying understanding of mind and behavior in terms of Counseling Psychology”, “in-depth comprehension of individuals apart from pathological illness models”, “training in action research”, “theoretical and empirical knowledge by foreign qualified Counseling Psychologists”, “supervisors trained and specialized in Counseling Psychology”, “skills incorporated needed for a job market”. Upon asking if those goals were fulfilled, 85% of participants (in further individual interviews) responded that since no academic program offers specialization distinctively in Counseling Psychology, hence, the answer was in negation.

Training Requisite

The participants expressed that high expertise, specialization, professional training, knowledge, and practice in professional services and area should be urgency for two central reasons: employment and services for society. Instead of the instigating theory-driven course curriculum, acquisition of skills and expert supervised training should be a priority which is a pre-requisite for a profession like Counseling Psychology. Furthermore, specific Counseling Psychology areas like youth counseling, family counseling, drug counseling, career counseling, couple counseling, group counseling, specific psychosocial problems like grief and bereavement counseling, and psychotherapy are needed.

Pedagogical Apprehensions

Both course curriculum content and curriculum pedagogy was expressed by participants as constantly evolving domains in Counseling Psychology. Counseling Psychology taught at graduate level seemed barely according to international standards which needs to constantly improve and reviewed. However, the current theme in the discussion was a requirement for creative pedagogical methods which instead of instigating apprehensions towards instructor, instructor’s teaching style and the course itself but create more discussions, brainstorming activities, creative explanation, engaging classroom and creative pedagogical methods for the active learning environment. This led to raising the question that who is a good teacher or good teachers can also be good researchers. Suggestions were given for training methods in teaching, supervision, updated research methods, contemporary curriculum, and minimum student-teacher communication gap.

Pragmatic Action Research

The utility, feasibility, and expediency of research in a developing country were questioned comparing cross-cultural context, East-West individualistic and collectivistic culture difference, and role of indigenous research in the betterment of locality (Author 1 & Author 2). Furthermore, the focus of research on social issues, the practical implication of research, exploratory domains and integrating research findings to construct the practicality of Counseling Psychology research implications in the society. Many other Psychology disciplines have diverse research methods, Counseling Psychology, however, advocates specifically action research. More research methods like laboratory research, neuroscience, neuropsychological research methods, experimental designs, qualitative studies, and meta-analysis and review articles should be part of the research as well.

Counseling Services to Rural and Urban Areas/ Disseminate Awareness about Counseling Psychology to Society

It is assumed that psychological knowledge and expertise should be available at large and all service should be disseminated to the society. However, how to deliver these services and what are the interferences in this process is a key element. Various methods and modes of application were suggested by the participants. Many small towns, villages, and countryside residents were found to be unaware of the psychological process as a whole and Counseling Psychology in particular. For that need-based training and crisis-management training should be incorporated. More knowledgeable professionals in specialized areas should visit these areas to communicate with people and disseminate awareness about counseling services. Policy makers and government's role in making them accessible is required. It was general agreement that counseling psychology services in rural areas should be a priority and for which small and effective videos, documentaries, television shows and easy reading material on various psychological themes, problems, mental health, and parental child-rearing styles, neuropsychological problems, and underlying causes of these problems can be highlighted through awareness based approaches.

Personal Improvement

The foremost significant and most neglected element in Counseling Psychology discipline, in fact, all academic programs was seen as personal growth, character building, and socialization reflected in civility, indulgence towards self, life skills and understanding of transcendence and meaningfulness. It was also expressed that diverse situations, learning experiences, exposure, and variation of procedures can help accomplish these goals, character building goals in education, workshops and groups on interpersonal approaches, public service, pro-social activities, reading wide range of material from literature to fiction, reflection and inclusion of cross-cultural experience through acquisition of other languages and watching diverse genres from movie to television shows, and interacting with nature can help to acquire positivity, humaneness, and personal growth.

Summary

This study would help in implementing interventions to promote the consolidation or increment of resources that constitute a framework based on concrete and feasible actions. Service providers, recipients and beneficiaries' views were explored which help in a comprehensive understanding of the key theme related to counseling psychology services. This project was a brainchild of a major study. The members are working on elaborating the advanced qualitative analyses and expanding the project. The last phase of the study was evaluating the state of counseling psychology and its services and achieving the matching goals. The experience of making a working group was proven to be very rewarding. The research was motivated by a larger goal to identify, acquire and implement means of provision of counseling psychology services to the society.

Ethical Standards and Informed Consent All procedures followed were in accordance with the ethical standards of the responsible committee on human experimentation [institutional and national]. Informed consent was obtained from all participants for being included in the study.

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