

Ethical behaviour among registered and non-registered counsellors



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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to identify whether or not there is a difference in the ethical behaviour of registered counsellors and non-registered counsellors. This study also seeks to identify if there is a difference between ethical behaviour based on the demographic factors of age, gender, experience and qualification of the counsellors. The study design adopted is the ex-post facto design. The study sample comprises of 355 registered counsellors and non-registered counsellors all over Malaysia. The study tool employed is Ethics Practice Survey adapted by previous research. The analyses used are the T-test and the One-Way ANOVA. The study results show that registered counsellors have more ethics if compared to their non-registered counterparts. Next, the study results also demonstrate that there is a significant difference between the ethical behaviour of counsellors according to their age, gender, experience and qualification of counsellors. The implications of the study are also elaborated.

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1. Introduction

The career as a counsellor is increasingly recognised in Malaysia with the enactment of the Counsellor Ethics Code and Counsellor Act 1998 (Act 580). There are various career opportunities as counsellor in public and private organisations such as Guidance and Counselling Teacher at schools, Psychology Officer (Counsellor) in various ministries nationwide, counsellors at higher learning institutes, defence institutes, hospitals and various private organisations.

Professional counsellors are counsellors who practise counselling in an ethical manner. They are often exposed to various ethical issues when they conduct counselling practice such as multiple relationship issues (Smith and Smith, 2001), confidentiality issues, competency and expertise, professional relationships, abuse, value conflict (Elliot, 2011) and issues concerning various cultures. Clients who are present to get the assistance of counsellors also come from various backgrounds of race, religion, socio-economy and culture. This diversity has exacerbated the situation. The

complexity and the uniqueness of every issue raised by clients in the counselling session can make counsellors act in a way that is unethical like exposing the particulars of clients to the third party without his or her consent. The unethical practice can become detrimental to the client emotionally, physically and spiritually.

2. Literature review

Counsellors in Malaysia can be divided into two categories-Counsellors who have registered with the Board of Counsellors known as Registered Counsellors (KB) and counsellors who have yet to register or better known as Non-registered Counsellors. Counsellor registration is vital so that all counsellors in Malaysia obtain the certification as Registered Counsellors. By not registering legally counsellors can be subjected to the violation of the law and they have conducted an unethical practice (Act 580). In Malaysia there are still a lot of counsellors who have yet to register with the Malaysian Board of Counsellors. Up until March 2016, only 6350 counsellors have registered and are acknowledged as "Registered Counsellors". The Board of Counsellors has been working hard to encourage counsellors all over Malaysia to register.

However, not all counsellors can register themselves as Registered Counsellors. They need to fulfil the minimum requirement at the Bachelor's

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Degree level such as having sufficient curriculum credit which is a minimum of 81 credit hours and at the Master Degree level a minimum of 48 credit hours encompassing core subjects, practical training and practicum, internship and elective subjects and research project. According to the Act, individuals violating sub-section 1 can be subjected to imprisonment for a maximum of 3 years and maximum fine of RM30 thousand or both. Thus, counsellors cannot take lightly their registration as counsellors because it is their obligation to register. Without this registration, individuals cannot call themselves counsellors and they cannot perform any services as counsellors in any public or private organisations.

According to the Deontology Theory, ethical behaviour is a behaviour done by an individual to fulfil his or her tasks based on certain standards in an orderly manner (Knapp and VandeCreek, 2007). Ethical Behaviour is also a self-reporting by a respondent whether or not he or she is involved in certain behaviour (Swenson et al., 2009). This study seeks to identify the behaviour of counsellors in the counsellors' ethical practice. The objective of this study is to identify the difference of the ethical behaviour based on age, gender and experience of counsellors. Other than that, this study also has the intention to identify the difference of ethical behaviour between registered counsellors and non-registered counsellors all across Malaysia.

3. Methodology

This study is a quantitative study that measures the difference between ethical practice among registered and non-registered counsellors all over Malaysia including Sabah and Sarawak. This study employs the Ethic Practice Questionnaire adapted by Gibson and Pope (1993). This questionnaire measures 9 constructs namely i) not becoming detrimental; ii) practice with expertise; iii) not exploiting (sexual and physical touch issues; iv) not exploiting (financial, fees and accepting gift); v) not

exploiting (multiple relationship issue, other multiple relationship also advertising and obtaining clients); vi) treating respectfully and with dignity; vii) protecting confidentiality; viii) acting only by consent; and x) encouraging equality and fairness. The study respondents were chosen through the simple random sampling method. The total number of respondents is 355. From that, there are 226 Registered Counsellors and 129 non-registered counsellors. Questionnaires were distributed to the respondents involved and they are analysed using SPSS 22.0. Researchers employ the Independent T-test and One Way ANOVA in this study.

4. Results and discussion

To determine the difference of the demographic factors (age, gender, experience and qualification) towards the dependent variable (counsellors' ethical behaviour), the analyses of Independent T-Test and One-Way ANOVA are adopted.

4.1. Ethical behaviour based on the age

Ho1 (i): There is no significant difference between age and ethical behaviour of the counsellors in Malaysia.

Table 1 and Table 2 show the summary of One-Way ANOVA of the difference of counsellors' ethical behaviour according to respondents' age. The study finding shows that the mean score for the respondents according to age is between 21 to 30 years (Mean = 52.35, SD = 4.48), 31 to 40 years (Mean = 52.34, SD = 4.15), 41 to 50 years (Mean = 50.18, SD = 5.21) and 51 years and above (Mean = 48.18, SD = 4.96). The study findings further show that the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant difference between the age of respondents and ethical behaviour where the value of $F(3,351) = 9.25, p = 0.000 (p < 0.05)$. This shows that the counsellors' ethical behaviour differs according to their age.

Table 1: Summary of difference between age and behaviour of counsellors in Malaysia

Age	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation
21 to 30	52.35	4.48
31 to 40	52.34	4.15
41 to 50	50.18	5.21
51 years ≥	48.18	4.96
Total	51.70	4.70

Table 2: Summary of difference between the ethical behaviour of counsellors based on age

	Variance Difference	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	573.36	3	191.12	9.25	0.000
Within Group	7250.57	351	20.65		
Total	7823.94	354			

Significant at confidence level $p < 0.05$

4.2. Ethical behaviour based on the gender

Ho1 (ii): There is no significant difference between ethical behaviour based on the gender of the counsellors in Malaysia (Table 3 and Table 4).

The Independent Sample T-Test is done to identify the difference between the gender of the respondents and the ethical behaviour of the counsellors in Malaysia. The study finding illustrates that there is a significant difference between the ethical behaviour of male counsellors (Mean = 50.60,

SD = 4.55) and the ethical behaviour of female counsellors (Mean = 52.20, SD = 4.69) ($t = -3.009$, $df = 353$, $p = 0.003$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 3: Summary of difference of ethical behaviour based on the gender of the counsellors

	Gender	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Ethical Behaviour	Male	111	50.60	4.55
	Female	244	52.20	4.69

Table 4: Summary of difference of ethical behaviour of counsellors based on gender

	Levene Test		t	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)
	F	Sig			
Equal variances assumed	0.012	0.914	-3.009	353	0.003
Equal variances not assumed			-3.042	218.666	0.003

Significant at confidence level $p < 0.05$

4.3. Ethical behaviour based on their experiences

Ho1 (iii): There is no significant difference between ethical behaviour based on counsellors' experiences in Malaysia.

Table 5 and Table 6 give us a summary of One-Way ANOVA on the difference of ethical behaviour of counsellors according to their experiences in the counselling field. The study finding shows that the mean score for respondents with experience between 1 and 5 years is (Mean = 52.02, SD = 4.11), 6 to 10 years (Mean = 52.58, SD = 4.21), 11 to 15 years (Mean = 51.16, SD = 4.90), 16 years and above (Mean = 47.40, SD = 6.46), and no experience (Mean = 50.92, SD = 5.88). The finding further shows that the null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant difference between the experience and ethical behaviour of counsellors in Malaysia $F(4,350) = 5.95$, $p = 0.000$ ($p < 0.05$).

Table 5: Summary of the difference of ethical behaviour based on counsellors' experience in Malaysia

Year of Experience	Mean Difference	Standard Deviation
1 day-5 years	52.02	4.11
6 Years-10 Years	52.58	4.21
11 Years-15 Years	51.16	4.90
16 Years \geq	47.40	6.46
No experience	50.92	5.88
Total	51.70	4.70

Table 6: Summary of difference between ethical behaviour based on the experience of counsellors

	Variance Difference	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Among Groups	498.47	4	124.618	5.95	0.000
In Group	7325.473	350	20.93		
Total	7823.94	354			

Significant at confidence level $p < 0.05$

Table 7: Summary of ethical behaviour between registered counsellors and non-registered counsellors

	Registration Status	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
Ethical Behaviour	Registered Counsellors	226	52.23	4.40
	Non-Registered Counsellors	129	50.77	5.06

Table 8: Summary of difference between registered counsellors and non-registered counsellors in terms of ethical behaviour

	Levene Test		t	df	Sig. (2-Tailed)
	F	Sig			
Equal variances assumed	4.385	0.037	2.841	353	0.005
Equal variances not assumed			2.735	237.175	0.007

5. Discussion and implication of study

The study finding shows that the ethical behaviour differs according to age, gender and experience. Result shows that counsellors aged 21 to 30 years are dissimilar to the counsellors aged between 41 to 50 years and 51 years and above in

4.4. Ethical behaviour of registered and non-registered counsellors

Ho5 (i): There is no significant difference between the ethical behaviour of registered and non-registered counsellors in Malaysia (Table 7 and Table 8).

The Independent Sample T-Test is done to identify the difference between the counsellors' registration status in their ethical behaviour. The finding shows that there is a statistical difference between the ethical behaviour of registered counsellors (Mean = 52.23, SD = 4.40) and non-registered counsellors (Mean = 50.77, SD = 5.06) with t value = 2.735, $df = 237.17$, $p = 0.007$, $p < 0.05$. The null hypothesis is rejected. Result shows that the ethical behaviour between the registered and non-registered counsellors has a significant difference.

terms of their ethical behaviour. Apart from that, counsellors aged between 31 to 40 years also show different ethical behaviour from counsellors aged 41 to 50 years and 51 years and above. There is a difference between male and female counsellors in their ethical behaviour. Mean score for female counsellors is higher than male counsellor. There is

also a difference between the experience of counsellors between 16 years and above and counsellors with experience between 1 day to 5 years, 6 years to 10 years and 11 years to 15 years.

Our study finding shows that there is a difference in the ethical behaviour between registered counsellors and non-registered counsellors in Malaysia. Registered counsellors have higher mean of ethical behaviour compared to their non-registered counterparts. Counsellor Registration is vital for an individual called Counsellor, at par with several functions of the Board confined under Act 580 which is monitoring and supervising the counselling service delivered by the Counsellor and supervising his or her training, at the same time determining the type and level of counselling done in Malaysia.

The counselling field in Malaysia has its own standard to be fulfilled by the practitioners like taking part in a formal training under standard curriculum endorsed by the Board of Counsellors (Malaysia). With the enactment of the Counsellors Act 1998 (Act 580), the counselling field is endorsed and acknowledged as a professional service in Malaysia.

Counsellors who have no ethics can adversely affect the clients who will be in a session with them. A study done in China by [Leung et al. \(2003\)](#) showed those Counsellors at secondary schools have committed an unethical service in regard of the confidentiality of the clients. This has led counselling teachers in Hong Kong to not have any idea about keeping the information to the clients confidential when there are issues or conflicts concerning ethics arisen. This can become detrimental physically or emotionally to the clients in the future.

There are counsellors who still have not registered with the Malaysian Board of Counsellors. Since the year 2010, only 1746 counsellors who registered as Registered Counsellors and there is an increase to 6450 counsellors in 2016. There is also the curriculum requirement that has to be fulfilled by the counsellors at both Bachelor Degree and Master levels. The requirement has to be met so the in-service counsellors have the knowledge, skills and adequate training before they can be deemed qualified as professionals.

Ethical behaviour is often observed in any organisations, whether at schools, higher learning institutions, or public and private institutions. The work by [Crall \(2011\)](#) showed that there is one third of supervisors who disobey the ethical rules and regulations. Supervisors, as experienced educated individuals in the area of counselling can also

commit ethical offences by violating the existing rules of ethics.

6. Conclusion

Ethical behaviour is indirectly a client's mandate to the customer. Clients who are seeking for a counselling service will put high hopes that the counsellor who would be able to help them is someone with good ethics. A counsellor has an ethical obligation that has to be executed so that a client's wellbeing can be safeguarded and to avoid the client from being endangered or negatively affected in any way. The Board of Counsellors has the role to observe the practice carried out by registered counsellors and by those who have certificate of practice. Should there be any conflict arising to the non-registered counsellors, for example if a client commits suicide, these non-registered counsellors will not be protected by any legal bodies or agencies because they do not have any Registered Counsellor license and certificate. Thus, as a professional counsellor, the registration as registered counsellors is crucial, not only to the client, but also to the counsellors themselves and to the counselling profession. Automatically, by registering, counsellors have performed ethical behaviour and conduct legal counselling practice.

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