

Counsellor Characteristics and Ethical Decision Making: Implications for Counselling

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Abstract

The study determined the Counselor Characteristics and Ethical Decision Making: Implications for Counseling. The study employed an ex-post facto design. A sample of 80 counselors were used for the study. The researchers employed purposive sampling techniques to select respondents (only counselors) for the study. Two research questions were answered. The research instrument for this study is a questionnaire titled “Counselor Trait and Ethical Decision Making Scale” (CTEDMS). The reliability of the CTEMDS instrument was established through the Cronbach alpha method; which produced a reliability coefficient of 0.78. The data obtained was analysed using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study showed that the personal ethical traits exhibited by counselors include: empathy, resilience, integrity, confidentiality, respect and altruism. Also, counselors agreed that they faced the following ethical issues: breaching confidentiality, faithful to non-cooperating in group counseling and issues that conflict with religious belief. It was recommended that counselors should gather evidence from research to decide how best to apply professional ethical codes, values and principles in solving ethical issues.

Keywords: *Ethics, Counselor characteristics, Ethical decision making.*

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Background to the Study

Counselors in their day-to-day professional practice are confronted with questions, situations or even contexts where ethical decision making is required. These ethical issues faced by counselors are operationally termed “Ethical Dilemma”. Solving these ethical dilemmas faced by counselors will be a good achievement in the counseling profession. Therefore, the study will consider Ethical decision making as the dependent variable and counselor characteristics as the independent variable.

Ethics is defined as the study of moral and how they affect conduct. While, ethical dilemma is a position where you are confronted with taking a position of lesser injury between conflicting ethical standards. Reporting a client who might have information to further the general good society whereas you are sworn to secrecy and confidentiality to the client (Managing Partner, Ajagbawa & Associates, 2014). This is an ethical dilemma and a counselor is advised to employ ethical decision making principles in a bid to solve the problem. More so, when faced with an ethical dilemma, they must be alert to ethical and legal standards. They must be educated as to what is considered acceptable and competent counseling practice.

Ethical decision making is the practical process through which clinicians or counselors base their actions, behaviour and choices on informed, sound judgment (Davies, 2015). It draws on values, principles and standards of behaviour that inform professional practice. Ethical decision making involves gathering facts, determining whether a problem or dilemma truly exists, and whether or not there is an ethical, legal, moral, professional or clinical issue involved. Also, a counselor is advised to dialogue with professional peers for counsel and advice outside relying on his core and the principles of counselling that guides the profession.

According to the BACP *Ethical Framework for the Counseling Professions*(2015), being ethically mindful and willing to be accountable for the ethical basis of practice are essential requirements for counselors. These frameworks help practitioners to measure their behaviour, actions and choices to protect clients and maintain the integrity of the tackling ethical dilemmas will not be effectual without considering the counselors' role and personal traits or characteristics. The practitioner's personal moral qualities are of the utmost importance to clients. More so, it has been suggested that the most important element in counseling is the 'personhood' of the counselor and that the most powerful impact on the client may be that of observing what the counselor is or does (Bhargava & Sriram, 2016).

Many of the personal characteristics considered important in the provision of services have an ethical or moral component and are therefore considered as virtues or good personal qualities. Some of which include: integrity, sincerity, fairness, courage, empathy, altruism (BACP, 2010). To support the importance of counselor Characteristics, a study by Berg will be considered.

Berg, Hendricks and Bradley (2009) explored the major ethical considerations when counseling suicidal adolescents, which may also make the school counselor vulnerable to malpractice suits. (It is important to note that this is a US study). One such ethical issue is whether or not a school counselor should report the child's suicide ideation to the parents or the

school authorities. If the counselor does not report the suicide ideation and the child succeeds in taking their own life, the counselor may be sued for malpractice. In this situation, the traits of the counselor such as courage will mostly be needed to take an appropriate decision. It is against this backdrop that the researchers deemed it necessary to study “counselor characteristics and ethical decision making: Implication for counseling”.

Statement of the Problem

Licensed professional counselors obtain licensure with an understanding that, if faced with an ethical dilemma, they will take necessary steps to formulate and implement the most ethically appropriate decision (American Counseling Association [ACA], 200). This is often easier said than done, since most counselors must also abide by employer regulations and uphold client agreements and expectations; all while continuing to maintain the counseling relationship with the client.

From time to time, counselors are confronted with ethical dilemma that is difficult to resolve. Although ethical decision-making models provide guidelines as to how counselors should proceed in such matters, they do not always do so in pragmatic manner. Whatever the case, making ethical decisions is never an easy proposition and many counselors are unclear how they should proceed when ethical dilemmas confront them. The issue is even worse in developing countries like Nigeria where crime rate is very high, giving the counselor a lot to deal with.

It is against this background that researchers have decided to study “Counselor Characteristics and Ethical Decision Making: Implications for Counseling

Objectives of the Study

The aim of this study is to investigate “Counselor Characteristics and Ethical Decision Making: Implications for Counseling.” In specific terms, the objectives of this study seek to:

1. Ascertain the ethical traits exhibited by counselors during counseling.
2. Determine the ethical issues faced by counselors in secondary schools in Bayelsa State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were answered in this study;

1. To what extent do counselors exhibit ethical traits during counseling sessions in Bayelsa State?
2. What are the ethical issues faced by counselors in Bayelsa State?

Review of Literature

Ethics pertains to what constitutes appropriate conduct. The best way to think of ethics is an ideal set of principles that a professional association develops on behalf of its members (Quarto, 2009). Here, ethics represent high standards of professional behaviour to which counselors should aspire. Such associations include the American Counseling Association (ACA), American Psychological Association (APA). Although different professional organizations have established ethical guidelines that define right or proper conduct for the members of their organizations, most of them address at the same essential issues (e.g., confidentiality, informed consent, boundary issues).

Cottone and Tarvydas (2016) define an ethical dilemma as a “circumstances that stymies or confuses the counselor because (a) there are competing or conflictual ethical standards that apply, (b) there is a conflict between what is ethical and moral, (c) the situation is such that complexities make application of the ethical standards unclear, or (d) some other circumstances prevents a clear application of the standard” (p.2).

Also, an ethical dilemma is a position where you are confronted with taking a position of lesser injury between conflicting ethical standards. Reporting a client who might have information to further the general good of society whereas you are sworn to secrecy and confidentiality to the client (Managing Partner, Ajagbawa & Associates, 2014). This is an ethical dilemma and a counselor is advised to dialogue with professional peers for counsel and advice outside relying on his core and the principles of counseling that guides the profession.

The Concept Decision Making

Ethical decision making is the practical process through which clinicians or counselors base their actions, behaviour and choices on informed, sound judgement (Davies, 2015). It draws on values, principles and standards of behaviour that inform professional practice. Ethical decision making also involves consultation with peers and colleagues or with supervisors. It involves gathering evidence from research to decide how best to apply professional ethical codes, values principles in practice. It is making choices in the light of conflicting values, principles and responsibilities, and determining how best to safeguard the interests and welfare of clients.

Basic Principles in Making Ethical Decisions

Although the ACA Code of Ethics (2005) provides general guidelines as to how counselors should resolve ethical dilemmas, there are moral principles which serve as a backdrop to the code. Specifically, these principles are a reference point from which counselors operate in achieving the highest ideals of ethical and professional conduct. (Corey, Corey, & Callanan, 2007). According to Quarto (2009), the moral principles are as follows:

1. Autonomy
2. Non-maleficence
3. Fidelity
4. Beneficence
5. Justice
6. Veracity

Autonomy (Free)

One of the most important attitudes that counselors communicate to clients is freedom to make their decisions and live in accordance to their own values, attitudes and beliefs. Indeed, professionals are instructed to refrain from imposing their own values on clients so as not to interfere with autonomous decision making. However, it is important to use common sense with regard to communication to clients their ability to make their own decisions.

When counseling minors or persons unable to give voluntary consent, counselors seek the assent of clients to services, and include them in decision making as appropriate. Counselors recognize the need to balance the ethical rights of clients to make choice, their capacity to give consent or assent to receive services, and parental or familial legal rights and responsibilities to protect these clients and make decisions on their behalf.

Non-maleficence (Harmless)

Specifically, counselors should avoid engaging in behaviour that could potentially harm clients (Cottone & Tarvydas, 2007). Although most counselors understand how potentially harmful acts such as engaging in a sexual relationship with a client are inappropriate, Sperry (2007) notes that not all harm done to clients is intentional. As such, counselors should be cognizant of how they could inflict unintended harm to clients and take measures to reduce the occurrence of potentially harmful acts.

Beneficence (Helpful)

Beneficence refers to promoting the welfare of clients. Keeping the best interests of clients in mind and behaving in a manner that benefits them is the cornerstone of professional practice. This is more of an active concept than non-maleficence, which essentially involves refraining in some behaviour which risks harm to a client. Beneficence means taking active measures to promote the well-being of clients.

Justice (Fair)

The concept of justice refers to treating people fairly and making efforts to ensure they have the same opportunities and/or access to resources necessary to promote their best interests. This is addressed in Standard C.5 Non-Discrimination of the ACA Code of Ethics: Counselors do not condone or engage in discrimination based on age, culture, disability, ethnicity, race, religion/spirituality, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, marital status/partnership, language preference, socio-economic status, or any basis proscribed by law. Counselors do not discriminate against clients, students, employees, supervisees, or research participants in a manner that has a negative impact on these persons. Although the ACA is very clear in this regard, some counselors fail to live up to these standards because they are inherently biased or prejudiced.

Fidelity (Faithful)

Fidelity refers to keeping one's promises and honouring one's commitments. It is similar to wedding vows. The theme is remaining committed to one's partner through thick and thin. Counselors are likewise challenged to follow through on their promises and continue providing services to clients during good and bad. For example, in his discussions, with a female client about her marital problems, a counselor strikes that evokes an angry response from the client. In fact, the counselor feels like he is on the "hot seat" as the client speaks to him in a loud, angry and accusatory manner- a similar dynamic she enacts with her husband. Unlike normal relationships, however, the counselor does not allow the client's behaviour to alter his commitment to her because he understands that transference is a normal aspect of counseling and can be used in a way to help her make therapeutic gains.

Veracity (Honest)

The final moral principle is veracity, which means that counselors are honest and do not deceive clients. The old saying, "A man is only as good as his word" applies here. Trust is a critical element in the counseling relationship. Moreover, honesty is the foundation upon which the therapeutic relationship is built. If clients do not feel they can trust their counselor, then how effective is the process going to be?

Veracity is also implied in the informed consent process. Counselors are expected to inform clients of things such as the goals of counseling, the roles of counselors and client, the risks and benefits of counseling, and the limits of confidentiality. Clients expect counselors to honour their commitments (fidelity) by not sharing with others personal issues that are discussed in counseling sessions and to inform them when they are legally required to do so (veracity).

Counselor Characteristics

The practitioner's personal moral qualities are of the utmost importance to clients. Many of the personal qualities considered important in the provision of services have an ethical or moral component and are therefore considered as virtues or good personal qualities. It is inappropriate to prescribe that all practitioners possess these qualities, since it is fundamental that these personal qualities are deeply rooted in the person concerned and developed out of personal commitment rather than the requirement of an external authority. According to BACP (2010), personal qualities to which counselors and psychotherapists are strongly encouraged to aspire include:

1. Empathy: the ability to communicate understanding of another person's experience from that person's perspective.
2. Sincerity: a personal commitment to consistency between what is professed and what is done.
3. Integrity: commitment to being moral in dealings with others, personal straightforwardness, honesty and coherence.
4. Resilience: the capacity to work with the client's concerns without being personally diminished.
5. Respect: showing appropriate esteem to others and their understanding of themselves.
6. Humility: the ability to assess accurately and acknowledge one's own strength and weaknesses.
7. Competence: the effective deployment of the skills and knowledge needed to do what is required.
8. Fairness: the consistent application of appropriate criteria to inform decisions and actions
9. Wisdom: possession of sound judgment that informs practice
10. Courage: the capacity to act in spite of known fears, risks and uncertainty.
11. Altruism: acting for the good or benefit of others

It is unlikely that any counselor will exhibit all these ethical traits. They are meant to be aspirational and a reference point to what standard is expected in the counseling profession (Managing Partner, Ajagbawa & Associates, 2014).

Code of Ethical standards are explicit but unlikely to capture all possible circumstances or contemplations and so the counselors are expected to rely on the moral trait have manifested in their personae in interpreting and applying the standards. In the event of incompatibility of the personal traits and principles in the use and application of the code of ethical standards, the counselors are expected to resolve the difference in favour of the most apparent or persuasive moral position and or seek expert peer opinion in making such decisions. It is not uncommon to also seek legal opinion where the counselor is of the standards and the law.

The Legal Basis for Confidentiality in Counseling

Legal rights to confidentiality are enforceable by orders, for example injunctions or orders awarding damages for breach of contract, and the award of damages or compensation inactions under the law of tort (e.g. for breach of the professional duty of care etc.). the right of confidentiality according to Bond and Mitchel (2015b) can arise from:

1. Common law (decisions made by the courts), which imposes a duty of confidentiality where information is disclosed in confidence or in circumstances where a reasonable person ought to know that the information ought to be confidential. This will apply irrespective of whether a therapist comes to know personal information about a third party. It is not absolute duty but based on the balance of public interest in protecting confidences (*A-G v Guardian Newspapers Ltd. (No.2)* [1990] AC 109 [1988 3 All ER 477] as cited in Bond and Mitchel (2015).
2. Statutory provisions (e.g. Data Protection Act 1998, Freedom of Information Act 2000, Human Rights Acts 1998 Article 8 – right to private life etc.).
3. Contracts: between for example:
 - a. Therapist and client
 - b. Therapist and supervisor
 - c. Therapist and agency/organization
 - d. Therapist/ agency/statutory bodies
 - e. Trainee therapist/training organization/ placement agency/supervisor

Confidentiality is also part of a therapist's profession duty of care to a client, and enforceable in the law

Basic Rights of the Client

Some of the basic rights of clients as cited by Bond and Mitchel (2015b) by include:

- a. To know the extent and limitations of the confidentiality that they are being offered by the therapist
- b. To give explicit consent to the making and keeping of records that contain personally sensitive information – a requirement of the Data Protection Act 1998 that will apply to most records and notes written by therapists
- c. To be told the circumstances in which the therapist may wish to breach confidentiality and to have an opportunity to discuss and negotiate this with the therapist at the outset of their work together
- d. To know will make, keep and have access to their notes and records, how they will be kept, for how long, and for what purposes they may be retained/destroyed/disclosed.

- e. To be informed when the therapist may have to or is about to breach their confidentiality unless there are cogent, defensible reasons why this cannot be the case, for example in cases of terrorism, certain child protection situations (such as where it may be dangerous to a child or others to alert a person about impending disclosure, or may compromise a police investigation) or mental incapacity.

Exceptions to the Duty of Confidentiality

According to Bond and Mitchel (2015b), some of the exceptions are:

Crime

A counselor cannot be legally bound to confidentiality about a crime. Courts have concluded that it is defensible to breach confidence, in good faith in order to assist the prevention or detection of a serious crime. Good faith requires honesty and reasonable grounds for suspecting or knowing about a crime. However, there is no general duty to report crime except in specific circumstances. See the legal and statutory obligations below, subject to which there is also no general obligation to answer police questions about a client unless the client consents or the police officer has a court order or statutory authority to require the information. A police refusal on the grounds of confidentiality is sufficient if this is considered appropriate, but deliberately giving misleading information is likely to constitute an offence.

Balance of public interest

In some situations, client needs or the public interest in a specific situation may potentially outweigh the general duty of confidentiality. Murder, manslaughter, rape, treason, kidnapping, child abuse or other cases where individuals have suffered serious harm may all warrant breaching confidentiality. Serious harm to the security of the state or to the public order or crimes that involved substantial financial gain and loss will generally fall within this category. In contrast, theft, fraud or damage to property where loss or damage is less substantial would generally not warrant breach of confidence (Bond & Mitchel, 2015)

Court Order

A court may order disclosure of documents or information or order the therapist to attend court and to bring notes and records with them. Refusal to answer the questions of the court may constitute contempt of court. Death does not end the duty of confidence.

Disclosure to enhance the quality of service provided

Technically, it may constitute a breach of confidence when counselors discuss cases in counseling supervision, training and research.

Clients at risk of suicide or serious harm

Responding appropriately to suicidal clients presents one of the most challenging situations encountered by counselors. The ethical management of confidentiality is inextricably linked to decisions about when to act in order to attempt to preserve life and when to remain silent out of respect for a client's autonomy. There is no general consensus among therapists themselves about these issues or which if any, approach should predominate.

Ethical Decision Making Model

The purpose of this model is to provide counselors with an intuitive method of resolving ethical dilemmas that are grounded in best practices as outlined in the professional literature as well as the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2005). The ethical decision model as cited by Forester-Miller (1996) and supported by Gabriel (2016) have been simplified into seven practical steps. The Ethical decision making model at a glance, includes:

1. Identify the problem.
2. Apply the ACA Code of Ethics
3. Determine the nature and dimensions of the dilemma
4. Generate potential courses of action
5. Consider the potential consequences of all options, choose a course of action.
6. Evaluate the selected course of action
7. Implement the course of action

1. Identify the problem.

Stop, think and identify the situation or problem. Gather as much as information as you can that will illuminate the situation. In doing so, it is important to be as specific and objective as possible. Writing ideas on paper may help you gain clarity. Outline the facts, separating out innuendos, assumptions, hypothesis, or suspicions. There are several questions you can ask yourself:

- Is it an ethical, legal, professional or clinical problem?
- Is it a combination of more than one of these?
- If a legal question exists, seek legal advice.

2. Apply the ACA Code of Ethics

After you have clarified the problem, refer to the ACA Code of Ethics (ACA, 2005) to see if the issue is addressed there. If the problem is more complex and a resolution does not seem apparent, then you probably have a true ethical dilemma and need to proceed with further steps in the ethical decision making process.

3. Determine the nature and dimensions of the dilemma

There are several avenues to follow in order to ensure that you have examined the problem in all its various dimensions. Consider the moral principles of autonomy, nonmaleficence, beneficence, justice, and fidelity. Decide which means that it is your challenge to determine the priorities when two or more of them are in conflict. Review the relevant professional literature to ensure that you are using the most current professional colleagues and or/supervisors. As they review with you the information you have gathered, they may see other issues that are relevant or provide a perspective you have not considered. They may also be able to identify aspects of the dilemma that you are not viewing objectively. Consult your state or national professional associations to see if they can provide help with the dilemma.

4. Generate potential courses of action

Brainstorm as many possible of the action as possible. Be creative and consider all options. If possible, enlist the assistance of at least one colleague to help you generate options.

5. Consider the potential consequences of all options, choose a course of action.

Considering the information you have gathered and the priorities you have set evaluate each option and assess the potential consequences for all the parties involved. Ponder the implications of each courses of action for the client, for others who will be affected and for yourself as a counselor. Eliminate the option that does not clearly give the desired results or it may even cause more problematic consequences. Review the remaining options to determine which option or combinations of options best fits the situation and addresses the priorities you have identified.

6. Evaluate the selected course of action

Review the selected course of action to see if it presents any newethical considerations. Stadler (1986) as cited in Forester-Miller (1996) suggests applying three simple tests to the selected course of action to ensure that it is appropriate.

- a. In applying the test of justice, assess your own sense of fairness by determining whether you would treat others the same in this situation.
- b. For the test of publicity, ask yourself whether you would want your behaviour reported in the press.
- c. The test of universality asks you to assess whether you could recommend the same course of action to another counselor in the same situation.

If the course of action you have selected seems to present new ethical issues, then you will need to go back to the beginning and re-evaluate each step of the process. Perhaps you have chosen the wrong option or you might have identified the problem incorrectly. If you answer in the affirmative to each questions suggested by Stadler (thus passing the tests of justice, publicity and universality) and you are satisfied that you have selected an appropriate course of action, then, you are ready to move on to implementation.

7. Implement the course of action

Taking the appropriate action in an ethical dilemma is often difficult. The final step involves strengthening your ego to allow you to carry out your plain. After implementing your course of action, it is good practice to follow up on the situation to assess whether your actions had the anticipated effect and consequences (evaluating the outcome).

Evaluate the outcome

According to Gabriel (2016), in evaluating the outcome the following questions should be considered.

1. Was the outcome you had anticipated, or hoped for?
2. Had you considered all significant factors?
3. Did any new or surprising aspect emerge?
4. Would you take the same course of action with a similar case in the future?

Empirical studies on Ethnical concerns in School based Counseling

Crespi (2009) explored the legal, ethnical and treatment issues in group counseling in schools. The complexity of group counseling children is discussed, including the appropriate means by

which consent (from the children as well as their parents) may be obtained and the ethical challenges of providing direct services to students. This study highlights that in group counselling, sensitive information is shared by participants, which may be divulged by the participants themselves, making boundaries and confidentiality more difficult to manage.

A qualitative study by Kolay Akfert (2012) underscores that counselors working in teaching environments encounter ethical dilemmas, especially in the areas of client privacy, as a result of counselors in a teaching role having multiple relationships with clients (as teachers, mentors and counselors). It often becomes necessary for them to transfer competences and values from counseling into their teaching roles. The majority of the 40 participants in this study expressed concerns about their perceived lack of competence in resolving such ethical dilemmas.

Moyes, Sullivan and Growcock, (2012) proposed the question of when is it ethical to inform school administrators about the risk-taking behaviours of students. The research surveyed school counselors across the US, asking them if it was justified to break confidentiality and report the risk-taking behaviours of students. The responses show that when the risk-taking behaviours are directly observed, or when the behaviours occur during school hours on school grounds, then breaking confidentiality is ethical. The school counselors showed a preference for a written policy on breaking confidence to guide their actions.

McDonald (2009) observed the ethical decision making of secondary school counselors, using a qualitative research design with interpretative analysis. The data showed that the areas of work related to administrative policy issues, emotional and behavioural issues, college admission issues, graduation issues, and professional issues. In resolving ethical dilemmas, secondary school counselors used the Multiple Ethical Paradigms and The Turbulence Theory of Reasoning regarding the best interests of their students. This theory comprises the paradigms of ethics of care, ethics of profession, ethics of justice, and ethics of critique, which are applied to a problem being categorized as light, moderate or severe turbulence. By using these paradigms, the secondary school counselors in this study were guided by an ethical process rooted in the discipline of education, which allowed them to apply practical actions to solving ethical dilemmas.

Berg, Hendricks and Bradley (2009) explored the major ethical considerations when counseling suicidal adolescents, which may also make the school counselors vulnerable to malpractice suits. (It is important to note that this is a US study) One such ethical issue is whether or not a school counselor should report the child's suicide ideation to the parents or the school authorities. If the counselor does not report the suicide ideation and the child succeeds in taking his/her own life, the counselor may be sued for malpractice. Particular attention is paid to liability and malpractice information and how counselors and therapists can safely follow accepted standards of care as enunciated in their professional ethical framework while also improving patient care and decreasing the chances of a lawsuit.

Dey and Gottlieb (2011) explored the ethical issues involved in the complex practice area of court-ordered outpatient psychotherapy for juvenile offenders- minors and children who are

inherently a vulnerable population. Unique ethical considerations, such as the conflict between the rights as clients of counseling are discussed and harmonized to help practitioners address ethical issues. One right as a client, which the counselor must respect, is the right to confidentiality; however, as the counseling was ordered by the court to gather information on the juvenile offender's fitness for prosecution or the juvenile offender's mental state to determine sentencing, the right to confidentiality must necessarily be waived. With the above studies, it is clear that complex ethical issues exist in the counseling profession.

Result S

The result of the analyzed data for each research questions and its corresponding hypothesis are presented in Tables.

Research Question 1: What are the common ethical traits exhibited by counselors during counseling sessions in Bayelsa State?

Table 1: Personal moral or ethical traits of counselors

S/NO	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	DECISION
1.	Empathy	2.86	0.90	High Extent
2.	Sincerity	2.36	0.89	Low Extent
3.	Resilience	3.06	0.98	High Extent
4.	Integrity	2.67	0.97	High Extent
5.	Discrete/confidentiality	3.24	1.02	Very High
6.	Courage	2.20	0.76	Low
7.	Fairness	1.86	0.89	Low
8.	Respect	2.57	0.68	High
9.	Non-judgmental	3.40	0.77	Very High
10.	Altruism	2.42	0.78	Low
CRITERION MEAN (X) = 2.5		Grand mean = 2.66		

From the Table, based on a criterion mean of 2.5, the following personal traits were exhibited by counsellors: empathy, resilience, integrity, confidentiality, respect, and altruism, Also, the result showed that the counselors were low in the following traits: sincerity, courage, altruism and fairness.

Research Question 2: What are the ethical issues faced by counselors in Bayelsa State?

Table 2: Ethical issues faced by counselors

S/NO	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	DECISION
1.	Breaching confidentiality	3.59	0.93	Agreed
2.	Faithful to a non-cooperating client	2.68	0.89	Agreed
3.	Pressure from your boss/principal	2.57	0.98	Agreed
4.	Maintaining confidentiality in Group counseling	2.91	0.70	Agreed
5.	Career counseling	2.53	1.02	Disagreed
6.	Dedication to a client who cannot afford to pay	2.43	0.76	Disagreed
7.	Issues that conflict with religious belief such as abortion, extramarital affairs	3.40	0.68	Agreed
8.	Criterion MEAN (X) = 2.5			

From the Table, based on a criterion mean of 2.5, counselors agreed that they faced the following ethical issues: breaching confidentiality, faithful to non cooperating clients, pressure from bosses, career counseling, maintaining confidentiality in group counseling, and issues that conflict with religious belief. While, career counseling and dedication to poor clients were not considered as ethical issues that faced counselors.

Summary of Findings

Below is the summary of the findings of the study; they are as follows:

1. The following personal traits were exhibited: empathy, resilience, integrity, confidentiality, respect, and altruism.
2. The ethical issues faced by counselors include: breaching confidentiality, faithful to non-cooperating clients, pressure from bosses, maintaining confidentiality in group counseling, and issues that conflict with religious belief.

Conclusion

The challenge of working ethically means that practitioners inevitably encounter situations where there are competing obligations. In such situations it is tempting to retreat from all ethical analysis in order to escape a sense of what may appear to be irresolvable ethical tension. These ethics are intended to be of assistance in such circumstances by directing attention to the variety of ethnical factors that may need to be taken into consideration and to alternative ways of approaching ethnics that may prove more useful. No statement of ethnics can totally alleviate the difficulty of making professional judgments in circumstances that may be constantly changing and full of uncertainties. By accepting this statement of ethnics, members of the British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy are committing themselves to engaging with the challenge of striving to be ethical, even when doing so involves making difficult decisions or acting courageously.

Recommendations

In the light of the above, the following recommendations are made

1. Counselors should not make ethical decisions but should take time to think and identify the situation or problem.
2. Counselors should take pains to gather evidence from research to decide how best to apply professional ethical codes, values and principles in solving ethical issues.
3. Counselors encouraged to dialogue with professional peers for counsel and advice outside relying on their core and principles of counseling that guides the profession
4. Counselors should be courageous enough to implement the appropriate action in an ethical dilemma.

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