

Counseling Practicum

Lecture 3

Counselor Self-Assessment

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Introduction

When a student is preparing to go for practicum, a lot is required of them in terms of counseling competencies, interpersonal communication skills, personal needs, and motivation as well as openness to experience the world outside of theory class. Self-awareness and self-assessment therefore become very significant undertakings.

Expected Learning Outcomes

At the end of this lecture, you will be able to:

- (i) Enhance your self-awareness
- (ii) Identify signs and symptoms of burn out
- (iii) Practice self-care during internship

Enhancing Your Self-awareness

Many interns have loads of questions about who they are and how they can relate this with their practicum/internship expectations and demands. The following areas discussed in this lecture are helpful to analyze.

The Self Concept

This refers to how you view yourself in many aspects including your physical traits (body image), health, self-image, self-esteem, ideal self, and personal locus of evaluation.

Body Image

How you know your physical traits is quite important. This refers to your physical wellbeing, physical traits among others. Some practicum sites will require you to stand for long hours, sit for long hours, work for long hours, or use your physical muscles.

Self-Image

This will focus on your interests, hobbies, skills competences, aptitude areas, attitude, gifts and talents. You will realize lack of certain required competencies for your practicum may cause you a lot of anxiety and therefore working on the same may help reduce these anxieties. (Corey, 2009).

Ideal Self

The person you wish to become in future to give you the ideal counselor can push you to either reinforce some of the attributes you already have or start developing those that you do have and /or are weak in. This may relate to area(s) of expertise, where you want to practice, how you want to practice (private or public) and the influence you wish to give to the counseling profession. The counselor is ever becoming so don't give up on developing your capacity (McLeod, 2013).

Self Esteem

This refers to the value you attach to yourself, your sense of value. If you do not have a well-developed self-esteem system within, you are likely to be brought down by certain experiences from the field. Clients may let you down in many ways like missing therapies, premature termination, arrogance among others. Self-compassion is a powerful self-care practice especially when we feel let down or guilty about our practice or when things do not go our way (Germer, 2009).

Locus of evaluation

How, who and what you use to judge yourself in many aspects determine how you progress to your desired counselor in practice during practicum and in future. If you rely more external factors and people, you are likely to have less self-worth and confidence.

Stress and Burn Out During Internship

Counselor practice calls for a lot of energy and commitment. This journey begins when a counselor student is in micro practice. Many a times: the counselor experiences stress and burn out and this situation can be so overwhelming that a counselor can break down. People who work in highly demanding and risky environments sometimes show signs of psychological distress, at times showing symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), mainly because of either primary or secondary traumatization. Continuing to work without adequate social support or care leads to burn-out, declining functioning and risk of mental health problems. For intern, self-care is key to consider after assessment o personal needs in this area (Hodges, 2019)

What is Burn Out?

Burn out is a state of physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion caused by long term involvement in emotionally demanding situations and adversely affects health, relationships, and productivity. This is one of the most challenging experiences for interns just like it is for seasoned counselors.

Signs and Symptoms of Burn Out

- Heavy responsibilities /work overloaded
- Inadequate resources

- Lack of support (administration, peer, social, spiritual)
- Vicarious trauma
- Ignoring own feelings and needs
- Neglecting family interactions
- Unfair treatment of workers i.e. evaluation, promotions, benefits not applied fairly

Physiological

- Changes in appetite
- Weight loss or gain
- Decreased immunity
- Sleep disturbance
- Lethargy
- Chronic fatigue
- Pains (physiological or somatic)

Psychological/Emotional

- Compulsive worrying
- Paranoid thoughts
- Inability to solve problems/indecisiveness
- Forgetfulness
- Volatile moods/depression
- Sense of helplessness/hopelessness

- Anger toward the “system”
- Disillusionment

Behavioral

- Loss of enthusiasm/commitment to work
- Lateness and absenteeism
- Decline in work performance
- Prone to accidents
- Irritation/ intolerance with others
- Temperamental/harshness in dealing with colleagues
- Detachment from family or co-workers
- Increased consumption of substances

Spiritual

- Loss of faith, trust, and hope
- Loss of life’s meaning and direction
- Despair and alienation
- Feelings of emptiness
- Meaninglessness/loss of interest
- Joylessness
- Questioning a lot about life, God and meaning of all man and his existence

Effects of Burn Out

- Chronic exhaustion
- Cynicism and detachment from one's work
- Declining performance and ineffectiveness
- Loss of purpose, loss of meaning, loss of self
- Loss of morale
- Deterioration in relationships
- Deterioration of health; increased sick leave
- Irritability and blame
- Shaken belief system

Prevention and Management
Positive coping, self-care, and social support from:
✓ Friends, family members, or significant others outside the work environment
✓ Coworkers and supervisors within the work environment.
✓ Terms of service well explained
✓ Workload/scheduling
✓ Ongoing support
✓ Rest and relaxation breaks
✓ Supportive work atmosphere
✓ Friendly communication channels
✓ spiritual nourishment

Enhancing Physical Wellbeing

- Regular exercise
- Adequate sleep
- Healthy nutrition
- Drinking enough water
- Laughter/smiling
- Sports and games

Psychosocial Self Care
▪ Nurturing relationships
▪ Interaction with family/friends
▪ Talking/laughter/smiling
▪ Ongoing support group(s)/peer support
▪ Reflection: journaling, writing, meditating, poetry
▪ Setting boundaries and limits; assertiveness
▪ Creative activity such as drawing, sculpting, cooking, painting, and photography
▪ Movies, books, music
▪ Having balanced priorities; use of vacations and breaks from work
▪ Understanding what your stresses are
▪ Keeping expectations realistic
▪ Counseling
▪ Participating in a group or project of meaning and purpose
▪ Regular times of prayer, reading, meditation
▪ Singing or listening to meaningful music

▪ Fellowship, contact with religious mentors or inspiring individuals
▪ Time with art, nature, or music
▪ Solitude

Developing a Self-Care Plan

- Have a commitment to self-care
- Have a positive attitude to relaxation
- Plan a daily plan to care for yourself
- Tailor the self-care plan to your interests
- Remember that new habits need practice
- Have an accountability partner
- Just “DO IT” –for your sake, family, friends, and productivity at work

Conclusion

Persons in psychosocial services can be so immersed in their work and forget to look after themselves physically and emotionally. Lack of self-care can lead to loss of enthusiasm and of meaning in one’s work, raising the risk of harm to self and others. Organizations may have some policies and practices for their workers’ care, but ultimately it is the individual’s responsibility to ensure their self-care for own health and effective performance

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