CHAPTER

5

CONCLUSIONS

AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

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Counseling needs to be shaped within a given cultural paradigm that reflects the values and practices of the culture. However, this may raise the question of 'good' versus 'best' practices. For example, advice giving practice may seem appropriate and effective in the Indian context, but to what extent is labeling and judging clients appropriate, even though it may facilitate the counselors in identifying the background of the client? It is difficult to judge whether existing counseling practices should be primarily accepted based on the acceptability and effectiveness in a given cultural context, thereby raising the issue of the form and extent to which existing (predominantly Western) professional standards should be adhered to. In such a context what would constitute the best practices or strategies of counseling? A related issue that emerges is the balance between culturally sensitive practices and ethically appropriate practices of counseling. It is thus necessary to create a framework that is not only sensitive to cultural sensibilities, but also ensures that the process does not violate ethical principles.

Another important aspect to be considered is the notion of expertise. Ground level practitioners bring in their local cultural expertise, and it is crucial to know and to document their views and practices. Counseling should thus encompass a judicious combination of core counseling skills and principles along with counseling strategies that are practiced effectively in a given cultural context. Importantly, the counseling training modules (for TI counselors) must advance from clear philosophical and theoretical orientations, rather than a mere amalgamation of a set of skills that are

essentially based on Western perspectives. The theoretical frameworks that have emerged from the study represent an attempt to embrace such aspects so as to unravel counseling practices that are culturally grounded.

Recommendations

This section presents recommendations for counseling practice in the Indian cultural context, TI counselors' training module, and recommendations for future research.

    Recommendations for counseling practice in the Indian cultural context. Firstly, the difference between Western and Indian counseling is that, under the influence of the humanistic perspective, Western counseling views the counselor as a normal human being with weaknesses like other people. However, a counselor who practices in the Indian cultural context may be subject to different expectations because of the social values. Counselors are viewed as authority figures, more knowledgeable and respectful. Therefore, clients expect advice or direct suggestions to their problems from counselors. This means that if counselors show wisdom, knowledge and provide advice or direct suggestion to clients, counselors could gain respect, confidence, and trust from clients, and also could give credibility to the counseling progress. Clients may therefore have an inherent faith that the helping process will benefit them. In this sense, the counselor needs to demonstrate a role model to the client. A successful counselor in the Indian cultural context should give clients appropriate behavioral guidance as it represents the counselor's intellect and knowledge. Secondly, when clients ask for guidance to solve their immediate problem, it is important to clarify underlying problems. There may be many contradictory issues before the underlying problem emerges. It is hence suggested that

a counselor may offer some guidance to the client to solve the presented problem first before the underlying problem is clarified. This is because the clarification process may last for a long time. This helps the client release the immediate pressure, and contributes to the establishment of the counseling relationship at the beginning. Thirdly, as Indian clients emphasize the importance of social relationship, a practical point must be noted. Most people seek counseling to solve problems in relation to significant others. For the benefit of the client, it is necessary to question whether the client, after making a decision, may become more distressed. Counselors should always bear in mind that "balance" (avoid too much direct suggestions or advice) and "solution" (solve client's problems) are two important goals in the counseling process. Fourth, counselors' should know about the community with which they are working and should be sensitive to clients' needs.

Recommendations to enhance TI counselors' training module. Based on the findings of the study, the following suggestions are recommended to suit TI counselors' needs and improve the quality of TI counselors' training module developed by the NACO:

Sharing update knowledge on program and HIV/AIDS. Training should impart updated information about HIV/AIDS, ethical and legal issues, culture specific counseling skills, culturally informed HIV counseling process and behavior change theory and best practices in the field. It should also provide information about key characteristics of most-at-risk populations, such as FSW, MSM, IDUs TG and hijra, and strategies or best practices to address them.

Culture specific strategies and techniques. The training should include culture specific counseling strategies and techniques such as demonstration, storytelling, giving examples etc. Counselors' also require training on taking sexual

history, suicide risk assessment and maintaining the data. Further they should be trained to write (story of success and failure cases) case studies. They should be provided checklists of case history, suicide risk-assessment, and case study format so as to facilitate the process.

In addition, counselors must be trained to make a distinction between their own moral or belief systems (what they think about clients), and how they interact with clients. Counselors could at least be alerted in their training to the potential impact of judgments on counseling even if they do not think they are communicating judgments to their clients.

Analyzing counseling data. Counselors should be trained to analyze counseling data and develop outreach as well as communication plan accordingly. Tracking sheet –list of clients who availed as well as did not avail services, can be very useful in planning counselors' field visits, group educational sessions in specific field area and group counseling sessions at DIC or office.

Empanelling counselors as resource persons. Experienced and good performing counselors should be empanelled as resource person from each region. This will enhance the confidence of the counselor and will also create a healthy competitive environment. In addition, this will enable counselors' to exchange their experiences and best practices.

Supportive supervision and mentoring. Counselors' require supportive supervision and on-the-field mentoring to enhance competency, practice culture specific counseling skills and clarify any doubts related to counseling. Region wise mentors can be empanelled who can provide on-field training. These mentors should be first trained and should serve as resource persons for the counseling trainings.

Continuing education program. It is important to provide opportunities to enhance professional and personal development. Counselors come from various academic backgrounds, such as psychology, sociology, social work and non-graduates, as well as diverse competency levels. Therefore continuing education is required where counselors get training inputs in regular intervals using different modalities such as classroom, web-based, satellite based, and on-field trainings. Continuous education system should have increasing levels of competency (from basic training to advanced training) and provide certificates of participation in the training.

Promote experience sharing and developing personal theory in the training. Counselors should be allowed to share their counseling practices and their personal theory (one's own approach, strategies to counseling) in the training. Developing a personal theory of counseling is an essential part of the effective counseling practice. Providing a structured and developmentally appropriate approach to theory building in counselor training programs may increase their competency, confidence and reinforce theory building as an important and ongoing part of professional development. Integrating key strategies such as experience sharing workshops, selecting counselors as resource persons, building their analytic and documentation skills, continuous education program, into counselor training may have the potential to intentionally move counselors toward creating a strong personal theoretical foundation on which counselors can build relationships and interventions with clients.

Developing professional identity. Training should equip counselors with relevant theoretical foundation and practical skills to counsel clients. The training can be graded in levels, starting from level 1, basic counseling skills to more advanced counseling skills. This would create a positive identity among counselor. In addition,

training should include a session on examining counselors' professional development levels from joining the TI until the beginning professional counselor (ability to deal with counseling challenges). One approach would be to develop methods to monitor and evaluate counselors' progress. In this way, counselors' developmental progress could be quantified and training and supervision would be more goals oriented. Stage-specific activities, participatory training methods, and interventions could be developed and compared with more traditional approaches to determine effectiveness.

      Recommendations for future research. The present research generated research questions that should be answered by future researches. The theoretical frameworks that have emerged from the study require to be empirically tested. Future research should focus on both counselors and clients to understand efficacy of HIV counseling intervention within TI framework. A study should be initiated to understand counselor and client communication to understand communication styles and identify cultural elements that reflected in the communication. Another important area of research is to understand key features of religion and spirituality that work or do not work in bringing desired behavior change among clients. India has very little literature on professional identity. Future research should address how professional identity of counselors are developed and nurtured. Specifically, research is needed to examine counselors' development levels from beginning of the career as TI counselor. Attention is also needed to identify barriers to counselor development and interventions to overcome them.