

Extended Abstract

Determining the Profession's Ethical Requirements in School Psychological Counseling Services*

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to determine school psychological counselors' perspectives on professional ethics knowledge and skills, the requirements, and their opinions related to ethical problems encountered in the profession and ways of solving them. The research has been formed using the phenomenological design, a qualitative research design, and uses a semi-structured open-ended interview form. Categorical analysis, a type of content analysis, has been used in analyzing the data. Interviews have been conducted with 40 school counselors working in different educational institutions. The results reveal school psychologists' ethical knowledge and skills to be important in terms of the effective functioning of psychological counseling services. Helping the psychological counseling and guidance (PCG) specialist to be able to apply ethical principles and being competent in providing ethical service in the PCG specialist's field have been determined as requirements for the training managers. The most frequently experienced ethical problem appears as confidentiality: In other words, this has been experienced on the topic of ensuring client's privacy and in showing unconditional acceptance towards different cultures. The main ethical principle that should be applied has emerged as the need to provide confidentiality. Collegial assistance has been sought after in dealing with ethical problems. According to the results, the requirement of receiving education on how to regulate the ethical principles that need to be followed in school PCG services as well as how to deal with the ethical principles and problems of educational administrators' psychological counseling services by using school PCG specialists is recommended.

Keywords

School counselor • Counseling • Ethics • Ethical problem • Vocational ethics

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The counseling profession's ethical guidelines have been determined by the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014), which is the first professional scientific organization to study and standardize the scope and principles of this profession. Occupational ethical values and guidelines regarding the profession of psychological counseling and guidance in Turkey are documented by the Turkish Psychological Counseling and Guidance Association (TPCGA, 2011). The profession's commonly held definition emphasizes that counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to achieve mental health, wellness, education, and career goals. The counseling profession's core professional values are to enhance human development over one's life span; honor diversity and embrace a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their own social and cultural contexts; promote social justice; safeguard the integrity of the counselor–client relationship; and practice in a competent and ethical manner. These professional values provide a conceptual basis for ethical principles. The fundamental principles of professional ethical behavior according to the ACA are *autonomy* (fostering the right to control the direction of one's life), *non-maleficence* (avoiding actions that cause harm), *beneficence* (working for individual and societal good by promoting mental health and well-being), *justice* (treating individuals equitably and fostering fairness and equality), *fidelity* (honoring commitments and keeping promises, including fulfilling one's responsibilities of trust in professional relationships), and *veracity* (dealing truthfully with individuals whom counselors encounter professionally). The ethical guidelines for Turkish counselors were established based on the ethical guidelines developed by the ACA. Additionally, the TPCGA listed the main ethical principles in 2011 as follows: competency; honesty; sensitivity and respect; sensitivity to individual and cultural diversity; and social, vocational, and scientific responsibility. These principles should establish the foundation in Turkey for counselors' ethical behaviors and decision-making processes. Most counselors in Turkey work in schools. Therefore, school counseling covers a great part of the profession. The purpose of this research is to determine school counselors' views on their knowledge and competences regarding vocational ethics, their ethical requirements, vocational ethical problems, and solution strategies.

Method

The research is based on the qualitative model and has been conducted using the phenomenological design. Data have been collected using a semi-structured interview form that the researchers established based on a literature review. The following questions were asked: What is the importance of ethical knowledge and competency in psychological counseling and guidance services? What basic ethical principles do you have to obey when working in the field? What are your most recent ethical problems? How have you overcome these ethical problems? Where have you

gotten help from when faced with ethical problems? Are you aware of legal issues regarding the ethical problem you've faced? What can be done to more effectively overcome ethical problems?

Qualitative interviews have been conducted with 40 volunteer school counselors, 25 males (62.5%) and 15 females (37.5%). The participants' average age is 29.85. Only two hold a master's degree (5%). Of the participants, 19 indicated five years (47.5%), thirteen (32.5%) indicated 6-11 years, and eight indicated more than 11 years (20%) of experience as school counselors. Of the participants, 31 indicated having had vocational ethics training (77.5%). The data has been analyzed using categorical content analysis.

Results

The results indicate vocational ethical knowledge and competency to be very important for school counselors in order to provide more effective services towards clients. The most important professional ethic principle has been found to be confidentiality, and, congruent with this result, the most important ethical problem has been determined as establishing and maintaining confidentiality due to school principals', teachers', and families' overlooked approaches. According to the results, Turkish ethical principles have been identified as confidentiality, unconditional positive regard, vocational competency, equality and fairness, sensitivity to different cultural characteristics, and adherence to legal processes, respectively. The results show that when school counselors need help in terms of ethical problems, they should communicate with colleagues.

Discussion

As a consequence, school counselors need ethics education in order to manage legal issues and need to find a balance between personal and vocational ethics in order to provide more accurate decisions. Moreover, school counselors should have unconditional positive regard towards cultural diversity. According to the results, Turkish ethical guidelines are suggested to be revisable in accordance with school counselors' experiences and needs. From school counselors' points of view, school principals must be educated on the counseling profession's ethical guidelines and responsibilities. Additionally, both teachers and families are recommended to receive training on the counseling profession's ethical guidelines and responsibilities. The results of this study are limited to the phenomenological views of the school counselors who volunteered in this study.

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