

## **SYMPOSIUM XII**

### **ETHICS IN COUNSELLING & MENTAL HEALTH**

**Co-ordinator – Ms Aparna Joshi**

**Authors:** Ms Aparna Joshi, Ms Ketaki Natekar, Ms Shivangi Gupta, Ms Tanisha Singh, Ms Tanuja Babre

**Organizational Affiliations:**

Aparna Joshi, serves as Centre Chairperson & Assistant Professor at the School of Human Ecology, TISS, Mumbai. She is the founder and Project Director of two field action projects in TISS, One of which is iCALL- A National level Psychosocial telephonic and email based counseling service.

Tanuja Babre is counselling psychologist by training. She has worked as a counsellor with diverse population groups in community as well as over technology assisted mediums. Presently, she works in the capacity of a Programme Coordinator at iCALL Psychosocial Helpline, which is a field action project of Tata institute of Social Sciences.

Tanisha Singh, a counseling psychologist, has worked in the area of Child and adolescent mental health, trauma, & child sexual abuse in school as well as community settings. Presently, she serves as a research assistant at iCALL Psychosocial Helpline under a state government project in partnership with UNFPA.

Ketaki Natekar, too is a counseling psychologist and currently works as a School counselor, with Podar International School, Pune.

Shivangi Gupta has completed her Masters in psychology with clinical specialization. She has two years of experience as a researcher and a therapist. Currently, she is working as a research assistant with an ICMR sponsored research project with the Department of Social Work at Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi

**Abstract:**

**Objective:**

Ethics in counseling and mental health interventions is a newly burgeoning research area in India. The symposium brings together research papers that throw light on ethical dilemmas faced by counselors and mental health practitioners working with different participant groups and issues in India and the process of ethical decision making and challenges related to the same.

**Method:**

The symposium consists of five papers that respectively address ethical dilemmas faced by practitioners providing technology assisted mental health services, counselors working in different settings in a metro city, mental health practitioners in Odisha, practitioners working with children and lastly practitioners addressing issues of sexuality. Four out of the five papers are products of Masters level dissertations which involved use of quantitative and qualitative methodology to collect data from the counselors and practitioners who were already working in the field. The fifth paper is based on proceedings of a national level consultation on good practices in helpline counseling attended by leading helplines in the country and organized by iCALL a psycho-social helpline run by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences.

**Results and Conclusion:**

Each paper begins with a description of ethical dilemmas faced by counselors working with each of these issues and/or participant groups and then goes on to elaborate upon ways in which the process of resolution of these dilemmas is carried out. The symposium highlights the need for greater inclusion of ethics as an important component in counselors' and mental health practitioners' training. It also advocates for strengthening a movement towards establishing ethical guidelines for counselling and mental health practice in India.

**Key words:** Counseling, mental health, ethical dilemmas, ethical framework

## **ABSTRACT 1**

**Title of the paper:** Ethics and Ethical Decision making in India: Exploring Narratives of Novice Counsellors

**Authors Details:** Tanuja Babre

**Organizational Affiliation:** Programme Coordinator, iCALL Psychosocial Helpline, TISS, Mumbai

**Email:** [tanujababre@gmail.com](mailto:tanujababre@gmail.com)

### **Abstract:**

Ethics and ethical decision making in the field of Indian psychotherapy is an under-researched area. The lacuna of training and knowledge of ethics and ethical codes has direct implications for counseling and psychotherapy practice.

**Objective:** In order to respond to this perceived gap in the field of ethics in counselling, the current paper 'Ethics and Ethical Decision Making in India: Exploring Narratives of Novice Counsellors' aimed to explore novice counsellors' understanding of ethics in counselling and the process of resolution of ethical dilemmas.

**Method:** A qualitative research design was used to develop a comprehensive and detailed understanding of ethics and ethical decision making in practice. In depth interviews were conducted with 10 novice counsellor and the data was analysed using thematic analysis.

**Results:** The findings revealed that the counsellors' training in ethics at their master's level was uneven and inadequate ranging from full-fledged courses in ethics to being exposed a single chapter. Counsellors defined ethics as codes or rules, which helped them, decide what the right course of action was. Ethical dilemma was understood as a context in which there was ambiguity in the counselors' role and a concern of causing harm to the client. Most commonly cited ethical dilemmas were related to confidentiality, followed by issues of client autonomy, boundaries and dual relationships. The process of ethical decision making is not a step wise, well delineated process. Counsellors often relied heavily on their personal and professional values for resolution of dilemmas. These findings point out to a dire need to integrate issues of ethics in the

counseling curriculum, to carry out extensive research in this area and develop culturally relevant ethical codes and monitoring mechanisms for counseling practice in India.

**Key words:** counseling, ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making

## **ABSTRACT 2**

### **Title of the paper: “Ethics and Ethical Decision Making among Mental Health Professionals working with children”**

Author’s Details: Ketaki S. Natekar

Organisational affiliations: School Counselor, Podar International School, Chinchwad, Pune

Email: ketakisnatekar@gmail.com

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Objective:**

This study was aimed at exploring the meaning of ethics, perception of ethical dilemmas and their resolution by mental health practitioners working with minors.

### **Method:**

Quantitative exploratory research design was used for the study. A self developed questionnaire was administered to 30 mental health practitioners who worked with children in the city of Pune. The questionnaire consisted of two parts: A frequency and severity scale (Cronbach Alpha reliability of .778) and a Likert scale (Cronbach Alpha reliability .936) evaluating mental health practitioners’ responses to various ethical dilemmas.

### **Results:**

Results revealed that ethics with children was deemed important by almost all of the participants. Ethical dilemmas explored were broadly divided within domains of Confidentiality, Boundary and Autonomy. In the domain of confidentiality, participants showed greater agreement in breaching confidentiality in situations that involved self harm, situations where the minor was a victim of bullying or other forms of abuse and situations where parents explicitly demanded disclosure. The Frequency and Severity scale showed that there was greater willingness to breach confidentiality at the lowest frequency and severity, when the minor engaged in risk taking behaviours related to issues of Suicidality, Sexuality and Drugs. Participants showed greater willingness to cross boundaries in matters related to giving gifts, lending money and therapeutic use of touch, particularly in cases where it was perceived to be beneficial to the client. In the domain of Autonomy, results showed that majority of the participants showed greater willingness to decide for their clients and forgo autonomy in matters where they could be held accountable by parents and authorities for the consequences of minor’s actions. The study indicates that there is a need for developing ethical guidelines for mental health practice with children in the Indian context, along with training and supervision.

**Key Words:** Mental health practitioners, children, ethics, ethical decision making

## **ABSTRACT 3**

**Title of the paper:** Ethics in Mental Health Practice in Odisha

**Author's Details:** Tanisha Singh

**Organizational affiliation:** Research Assistant, iCALL Psychosocial Helpline

**Email:** tanishasingh.16@gmail.com

## **ABSTRACT**

### **Objective:**

Ethics in the field of mental health is important for safeguarding the interests of the clients as well as that of the practitioners. Existing literature on ethics in the profession of mental health is focussed in the Western context. There is a dearth of research on Indian perspectives on ethics in mental health practice. The study “Ethics in Mental Health Practice in Odisha” aims to explore mental health professionals’ understanding of ethics and ethical dilemmas in Odisha and to gain insight into their ethical decision making processes.

### **Method:**

This study uses qualitative research design to gain a comprehensive perspective of mental health professionals’ understanding of ethics in their respective fields of mental health. The study analyses results of in depth interviews with 13 mental health professionals (3 psychiatrists, 3 clinical psychologists, 3 counsellors, 2 school counsellors and 2 HIV/ AIDS counsellors) practising in Odisha.

**Results:**

One of the major findings of this exploratory study was that there was a lack of academic training on ethics. Participants faced many ethical dilemmas, particularly issues surrounding the right to confidentiality of minors and boundary violations in therapy. However many found it difficult to conceptualize or articulate ideas related to ethical dilemmas and decision making process. Ethical decisions made by these participants were not necessarily results of a deliberate process and were often affected by factors like age, years of experience, profession, culture, etc.

**Conclusion:**

The major implication of this study is a need for formal training on ethics. There is also a need to provide supervision to mental health professionals.

**Key words:** Mental health, ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making

### **ABSTRACT 3**

**Title of the paper:** Guiding principles and Ethical dilemmas while working on issues of sexuality

**Organisational affiliation:** *Research assistant, Department of social work, Jamia Millia Islamia, New Delhi*

**Email Id:** [shivangi.workmail@gmail.com](mailto:shivangi.workmail@gmail.com)

#### **Objective:**

The present study was undertaken to explore Indian counsellors' guiding principles and interventions with issues of sexuality.

#### **Methodology:**

For this exploratory research study, data was collected by administering self-constructed questionnaire to 31 counsellors from Delhi NCR with a post graduation degree in psychology and at least 1 year experience as counsellors. Counsellors were presented with a few open ended questions pertaining to the guiding principles that informed their practice. They were given 10 case vignettes covering diverse issues of sexuality and were asked to provide three interventions they would undertake.

#### **Results:**

Some of the common ethical dilemmas faced by counsellors when working with issues of sexuality pertained to confidentiality, autonomy and value conflicts. These dilemmas were faced while dealing with issues of adolescent sexuality, HIV related concerns, teenage pregnancy and so on. The counsellors varied in their engagement with and resolution of these dilemmas. The counsellors mentioned adopting varied guiding principles which ranged from principles influenced by models of psychotherapy (e.g. empathy, unconditional positive regard) to principles of the human rights framework (e.g. social justice) to principles from the public health discourse (e.g. prevention).

#### **Conclusion:**

Counsellors are guided by varied guiding principles which can help or hinder their work to varying degrees. While working with issues of sexuality, counsellors may encounter a range of ethical dilemmas. Given the dearth of discussion on issues of sexuality as well as on ethical concerns within psychotherapy, this study highlights the need for greater engagement on ethical dilemmas encountered by therapists while working on sexuality related concerns. The study emphasized need for specialized training in sexuality in graduate training programs and necessity of training programs to delve into ethical dilemmas. Further, it necessitates availability of supervision to ensure ethical decision making.

**Key words:** Sexuality counselling, ethical dilemmas, guiding principles

## **ABSTRACT 5**

**Title of the paper:** Ethical dilemmas and their resolution in telephone counseling in India

**Author's Details:** Aparna Joshi

**Organizational Affiliation:** Assistant Professor, Center Chairperson, School of Human Ecology, Tata Institute of Social Sciences

**Email:** [aparna.joshi@tiss.edu](mailto:aparna.joshi@tiss.edu)

### **Objective:**

Telephone counseling is gaining popularity in India as it offers services that are accessible, affordable, anonymous, and hence less stigmatizing. Ethical decision making is an important process of counseling interventions; telephone counseling being no exception to the same. The paper looks at ethical dilemmas faced by counselors and organizations offering telephone counseling services in India, and strategies adopted to resolve the same. In the end it highlights the need to develop and apply ethical frameworks to the practice of telephone counseling in India.

### **Method:**

The paper draws from the findings of a country level consultation held by iCALL, a National level psycho-social helpline run by the Tata Institute of Social Sciences. The consultation aimed at discussing good practices in telephone counseling and was attended counselors from 12 organisations who offer telephone counseling services in different parts of the country. The proceedings of the consultation were documented with prior consent of the participants. Data was also collected through administration of questionnaires that explored counseling and supervision practices within these organizations.

### **Results:**

Results showed that counselors faced ethical dilemmas related to confidentiality, anonymity, client dependence and also those related to maintaining client autonomy particularly during crisis situations. Issues of counselor competence and self care further added to the existing ethical challenges. There was a great variability in the ethical decision making processes adopted by the

organizations. Some of the organizations were not able to articulate these ethical dilemmas and also invest in developing frameworks to address the same. Organisational values often served as guiding frameworks in the absence of ethical guidelines.

**Conclusion:**

Telephone counseling offers a promising direction towards the growth of mental health service delivery. However this growth also poses serious questions related to ethical and quality practices. The paper points out to an urgent need for discussions around good practices and also for creating ethical awareness and frameworks for telephone counseling in India. In the end, the paper highlights the need for close supervision and monitoring of telephone counseling practices.

**Key words:** Telephone counseling, ethical dilemmas, ethical decision making