

Introduction assist a
person or family with
a



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The basic understanding of the helping profession revolves around the idea of giving assistance. Under the overarching umbrella of "helping professions", it is easy enough to mistake one with the other. However, while they all work towards the same goal, they are fundamentally different professions. In this paper we will evaluate the similarities and differences between these 3 professions in the following aspects: (i) the primary mission and purpose of the professional, (ii) values and ethics, (iii) knowledge base about human behaviour, and (iv) practice skills and planned change process. While bearing in mind that psychologists and counsellors have roots in the same discipline (Brady-Amoon & Keefe-Cooperman, 2017).

i) The primary mission and purpose of the professional

The general perception of these 3 helping professions is to help individuals identify problem areas in their lives and develop skills to overcome those problems.

The differences lie in how they are carried out.

Counselling

According to the Singapore Association for Counselling, counselling cover processes of interviewing, assessment, testing, guiding, and helping individuals to cope, manage or solve problems and plan for the future (Kuna, 2015). A counsellor's position would serve to assist a person or family with a specific problem, develop positive coping strategies within themselves and build capabilities to enable them to adapt to their environments.

Psychology

Psychology, on the other hand, brings to mind a more "scientific" structure to the helping domain. According to the American Psychological Association, (American Psychological Association, n. d.) psychologists assess

behavioural, mental function and well-being, while studying how human beings relate to each other work to improve these relationships.

Mental health and behaviour are assessed through psychological testing to describe, explain, predict, and reshape behaviour. Social Work The most “involved” would seem to be social work as it goes beyond the individual and delves into the community the individual is immersed in. The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty (National Association of Social Workers, n.

d.). Probably the most extraordinary aspect that differentiates social work from the rest would be the aspect of advocacy, in the sense of developing and improving social policy. The advocacy role, from a social context, includes the redistribution of power and recourse to an individual or group, guarding their rights and preserving their values, conserving their best interests and overcoming the sense of powerlessness (Pardeck, 1996). Where counselling and psychology serve to empower individuals to problem solve on their own in order to adapt to their environments.

Social work serves to connect these individuals or families with resources, services and opportunities while also influencing the environment to form an infrastructure to support the individual. ii) Values and Ethics Values refer to our conviction and attitude that provide guidance in our day to day life while ethics refer to conducting ourselves in a morally upright manner (Corey, 2003). The two are usually used interchangeably but they are not identical.

Similarities As social workers, counsellors or psychologists, our professional relationships with our clients exist for their benefit. According to National Association of Social Workers (NASW) (2017), the following are the broad ethical principles based on social work core values of services: dignity and worth of person, integrity, importance of human relationship, competence, and justice. These values being humanistic in nature are common to not just counsellors, psychologists and social workers but are values that can be threaded through all helping professions.

Dignity and worth of person is concerned with treating individuals with respect and compassion, regardless of the individual's differences, cultural norms and ethnic diversity (NASW, 2017). Integrity compels one to be honest and righteous, it is a core ethical principle for all helping professions who are entrusted with much responsibility in the rehabilitation of their clients (Corey, 2003). All three professions require the cooperation of their clients, and human relationship is a vehicle that can be leveraged on to facilitate positive change. The three professions also must be knowledgeable within their areas of competence including the different legislations affecting their different groups of clients – for example children, women, disabled, vulnerable adults, etc. (NASW, 2017). Extrinsic resource-based vs intrinsic value-based Social work is about “person in environment” which means it links an individual with sets of system that provide the individual with resources, services and opportunities (Higham, 2006). Thus, in social work, the values and ethics are basically characterized as derivatives in the interaction between the collaborative parties involved in the life of the individual. For example, in helping an individual to develop and adjust to

changes, the focus will be on the extrinsic relationship between the individual with the environment.

Whereas, in the profession of counselling and psychology. Focus is on the governing of interpersonal values and rights of the individual which is an intrinsic value-based. iii) Knowledge base about human behaviour Psychologists, counsellors and social workers share an interest in the study of human behaviours. Theories of human behaviour have postulated over two millennia. Collectively, they emphasized the importance of biological, learning, cognitive, psychological and environmental factors. Biological Perspective The biological viewpoint posits that human behaviour is influenced by organic factors.

Genetic defects, constitutional liabilities, brain dysfunction, etc., play significant roles in shaping human behaviour (Coleman, Butcher, & Carson, 1984). Damage to the frontal areas of the brain through trauma, is associated with either passivity and apathy or impulsivity and a lack of ethical restraint (Crockett, Clark, & Klonoff, 1981). Social Behaviourist

Perspective Behaviourists and social learning theorists focused on how people learn by acting on their environment. Ivan Pavlov's seminal research on classical conditioning showed that behaviour can be shaped and conditioned (Pavlov, 1927). In addition to conditioning, Bandura and Walters (1963) emphasized the importance of observational learning or imitation.

Ellis (1970) believed that core irrational beliefs were the cause of most maladaptive human behaviour. Psychodynamic Perspective Freud (1946) introduced the idea of three subsystems within an individual's personality –

the id, ego and superego. The ego mediates between individuals and their environment, protecting them from becoming overwhelmed by impulses. Freud theorized that internalized experience shaped personality development and functioning. Erikson (1950) provided a psychosocial development perspective, charting human behaviour and development through stages, with each stage marked by specific tasks and challenges. Psychology, Counselling and Social Work – Convergence and Divergence Psychologists employ scientific methods to study human behaviour, emotions and mental processes to derive theories, while counsellors apply these theories in therapies. Both share an overlapping focus on human behaviour, albeit one that tends to focus largely on the individual, often in a clinical setting.

Like psychology and counselling, social work shares a kindred interest in human behaviour, and subscribes to the theoretical perspectives outlined in preceding paragraphs. However, unlike psychologists and counsellors, social workers are by contrast directly involved with individuals, families and communities to effect change. This difference is significant, and accounts for a divergent approach to understanding human behaviour. Social work emphasizes knowledge of human behaviour from a “person-in-environment” (PIE) perspective that focuses on both the individual and their environments (Mattaini & Meyer, 2002). This is not a new approach; the General Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1969) considers how interrelated components within a system interact, and are both affected by, and exert influence on the environment.

From a human behaviour perspective, the social worker is concerned about the individual’s bio-psychosocial-spiritual make-up, their role and place within

society, and how they strive for equilibrium. This approach makes for a more holistic understanding of human behaviour and clearer insights to how change can be facilitated.

iv) Practice skills and planned change process

As defined by Sheafor and Horejsi (2008), planned change concerns itself with the deliberate design of a plan for which to modify “some specified condition, pattern of behaviour, or set of circumstances in an effort to improve a client’s social functioning or well-being”. Process suggests that this includes a logical sequence of phases. Practice skills are techniques employed by the practitioners in these processes. For the purpose of this discussion, this planned change process will take the form of the Problem-Solving model (Compton, Galaway and Cournoyer, 2005) which consists of 4 phases: engagement, assessment, intervention and evaluation.

Engagement Phase

In the engagement phase, all 3 professions faced similar difficulty in getting clients to adopt a collaborative partnership.

This is attributed towards the power imbalance which is brought on due to the association between helping professionals and the larger powerful networks which they are often apart of; these networks usually have connotations of judgement, punitive measures and control (Compton et al., 2005). It bears to note that current social work discourse displays increasing sensitivity towards this power imbalance and acknowledges the need to minimise this disparity (Sheedy, 2012).

Assessment Phase

In the assessment phase, counsellors and psychologists traditionally utilise a cognitive behavioural approach to assess the individuals’ mental state, thought process and attitude. These are done in clinical sessions between the counsellors/psychologists and client. Guided by

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the PIE principle which perceives the individual in relations to his environments and its elements (Kondrat, 2013), social workers' assessment goes beyond the individual to assess his environment.

An assessment of the environment would look at the capacity of the environment to support the client and his systems. An example could be an assessment of the housing authorities' policies to determine eligibility or barrier of service for the client's access to public housing. Another difference is the pathological approach that often follows practices such as cognitive behavioural therapy which is often employed by counsellors/psychologists. This placed an emphasis on the problems and what understandably follows is the fixation to "fix what is wrong" (Magyar-Moe, Owens, & Conoley, 2015). Governed by the strength based approach which place emphasis on a person's strength and inherent capabilities as opposed to the problems, this is done in practice through strength based conversations where your questions can be reframed in a bid to uncover strengths of the client. An example shared by Compton et al.

(2005) is by asking the client to describe exceptions to their current issues and subsequently analyzing these exceptions to uncover strengths.

Intervention and Evaluation Phase Similarly, in the intervention and evaluation phase, the PIE principle guides the social work practitioner to work with and evaluate the person and his interconnected systems in a broader perspective as opposed to interventions and evaluation targeted at the individual in his entirety. Through its advocacy function, contemporary social work has progressed beyond an individual to wider social issues such as "power, culture, social and economic injustices" (McLaughlin, 2009). By

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linking individuals' symptoms with the social root causes, social workers also facilitate the rise of social capital. This achieves a more sustainable outcome as it prevents members of the community from being disenfranchised due to similar social root causes. Social capital primes the ground for collective actions to rectify problems faced by the collective (Coleman, 1988). Conclusion By evaluating the differences between the 3 professions, we can identify uniquely defining principles and approach such as PIE and strengths approach that inform social workers and their practice.

Through this paper, we can see that these principles permeate and influence every aspects of social work such that the profession is able to distinguish itself from other helping professions such as counsellors and psychologists. By developing its own theories and drawing on the theories that originated from other disciplines. Social workers are able to develop a holistic approach in looking at an issue and resolving them with a more sustainable outcome.

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