

COUNSELLING FOR SUSTAINABLE FAMILY WELLBEING: IMPLICATION FOR MORAL AND LEGAL ISSUES

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Abstract

This paper presents the family as the first and basic unit in human society and explicitly explains that the strength and goodness of society depends on the strength and goodness of the family. It also explicates that Marriage is thus basic institution around which the acceptable identity of human race, individuals, family, cities and nation resolve. It expounds Marriage as an institution that is recognized, practiced and fully utilized by different communities on earth. It is importance in the scheme of societal development and operation cannot be over emphasized. In any human union, there are bound to be disputes, quarrel misunderstanding and squabbles here and there more particularly when it comes to union of man and women in the name of marriage, which is normally entered into with idea of permanence as a result of fulfilling some cultural, religious or constructional procedures. Moral and legal issues that form the basis of counselling as a professional practice, the moral and legal issue involved in couple counselling for sustainable family wellbeing vis-à-vis the client welfare, the competency of the counsellor, and the client's rights to privacy in the counselling process as well as legal consideration of the counsellors are brought to lime light in this paper. It also acquaints the reader with some important legal issues in couple counselling for sustainable family wellbeing and how to handle them professionally for greater Counselling upshot.

Keywords: Family, Marriage, Counselling, Wellbeing Moral, Legal issues

Introduction

Family is the first and basic unit in human society and the strength and goodness of society depends on the strength and goodness of the family. Marriage is thus basic institution around which the acceptable identity of human race, individuals, family, cities and nation resolve. Marriage is an important relationship not only in our physical life but in our normal and spiritual life and its effect extended not only to the parties themselves but to children, in-laws, maids, neighbours and future generation. A number of special problems arise according to special circumstances. Sometimes the partners seriously consider all sides of problem doing their best to rectify anomalies. However, the inability of the partners in marriage to appropriately understand their differences and reconcile, an expert's assistance is sought to help dictate the cause of marital crisis and assist the couples to arrest the situation and bring it back to sanity.

Counselling setting is a place where people go to get support because sometimes the world can seem pretty "crazy" counselling is not something that attended only to challenges regarded as major problems, and dismissing things some may regard as less important problems, but Counselling attends

to issues that people/client bring in whatever they feel the distress is getting in the way of living life with satisfaction. Until the late 20th century, the work of relationship counselling was informally fulfilled by close friends, family members, or local religious leaders. Historically, it was in the 1950s that therapists began treating psychological problems in the context of the family, such that relationship Counselling as a discrete, professional service becomes of psychologists counselors, and social workers. Sholevar, (2003). With increasing modernization, in many parts of the world, and the continuous shift towards isolated nuclear families, the trend is towards trained and accredited relationship counselors or couple therapists. Many couples prefer consulting professional counselors when there is the need for them to discuss their problems relating to their marital lives

Basic Principle in Couple Counselling

Before a relationship between individuals can begin to be understood, it is important to recognize and acknowledge that each person has a unique personality, perception and set of values, and history. Individuals in the relationship may adhere to different and unexamined value systems, institutional and societal variables (like the social religious, group and other collective factors) which shape a person's nature and behavior are considered in the process of counselling and therapy especially couple counselling . Encyclopedia Britannica (2009), defines guidance and counselling as the process of helping individual discover and develop their psychological potentialities, and there by achieve an optimal level of personal happiness and social usefulness. The concept of counselling is essentially democratic in that the assumptions underlying its theory and practice are, first, that each individual has the right to shape his/her own destiny and, second, that the relatively mature and experienced members of the community are responsible for ensuring that each person's choice shall serve both his own interest and those of the society.

Counselling process is geared at providing orientation for individual toward those opportunities afforded by his environment that can best guarantee the fulfillment of his personal needs and aspirations. Part of guidance services involves giving of information about person's own abilities and interests as determined by psychological tests. Counsellors are not to attempt to solve people's problems for them; however, counselor's tries to clarify the person's own thinking. Paul, (2006) Notes that before any counselling session begins a counselor should establish and discuss ground rules and legality involving couples counselling. In some countries, the law requires that counselor reports certain information such as spousal abuse or child abuse if it comes up in a counselling setting. Initial meeting with the couple serves as the prime time to establish basic rules of Counselling that may need to come into effect such as prohibiting name calling or physical acts of aggression, counselors are also expected to establish their leadership roles in forthcoming sessions.

- Counselling simply helps show those who come to counselling that they possess the strength and abilities to manage their challenges.
- Counselling is an activity or interpersonal relationship where counselor and client work as a team to make positive changes in the clients approach to life.

Counselling is a unique relationship in which the counselors' job is to hold up a mirror for the client to see himself or herself in. Lifeshop, (2003) illustrates Counselling like a mirror in this way:

“We all have experiences in which we cannot see things about ourselves without a mirror. Whether we have something stuck in our teeth or whether we have a wound in a hard to see place, we often need mirrors to see these things well enough to do something about them. And sometimes, we need someone

to hold the mirror so we can see these things that are at more hidden angles. Counselors are professionally trained to understand that sometimes it takes a while for clients to see what they need to see, especially if they are more subtle things needing the clients recognitions. In addition, counselors know what angles to hold the mirror from. Again, because most people tend to be hard on them, the counselors know how to hold the mirror in such a way that the client can see himself or herself from a caring, supportive and sympathetic perspective individual.”

Key Skills for a Couple Counsellor

There are several things that the couple therapist must keep in mind, as with individuals, the therapist must be someone with whom both people in the couple feel emotionally “Safe’ and trustworthy (Marlene, 2010).

1. Couple therapist needs to make sure that both partners get the space they need in Counselling session to express themselves.
2. The therapist/must never takes sides, neither be judgmental, nor gender bias or make assumptions about either person.
3. The therapist must never allow the couple to slide into a “fight” in the therapy session.
4. The therapist need to allow the couple the opportunity to look at how their individual personal issues impact upon the couple relationship, as well as allow each person identify and process these unconscious issues in the context of the relationship.
5. Couple counselors need to offer clients some suggestions as to ways in which they can communicate more effectively and help them come up with ways to negotiate more effectively and create or developing, ‘live relationship which fit in with their particular lifestyle and preferences other professional techniques requires of couple counselors are:-
 1. Introduction and set up: - Couple counselor needs the ability to set up a powerful motivator for couples in achieving the therapeutic goals.
 2. Definitions of the problems in clear behavioural terms.
 3. Estimation of the behavior, as well as identification of factor between the couples that is maintaining the problem
 4. Setting realistic therapeutic goals.
 5. Selecting and making interventions, such
 - Reframing as providing the couple with rational for treatment, Counselling /therapy
 - Out positioning- by having someone take the role of each couple place on their relationship
 - Paradoxical intervention- this is compliance based, simply to get the couple to change their negative behavior by complying with a directive or defiance based, in the hopes that the couples will defy the directive and improve.
 - Symptom prescription or an exposure based paradox to expose the couples or spouse’s hidden relationships.
 - Restraining technique: This involves telling the couple they cannot move very fast, and telling them the reason for such statement.
 - Termination – It requires special skills on the part of the counselor to bring counselling session into a close or terminating Counselling session.

The counselor is expected to bring the counselling session into conclusion with professional skills and in interactive manners as possible, usually, the therapy begins by:

- i. Social stage where everyone is greeted and spoken to in order to make everyone feel more relaxed and less defensive.
- ii. Problem stage where couple/individual introduces him/her and repeats what he/she knows, feel or hope for.
- iii. Interaction stage when couples talk about differing perspectives on the problem.

Similarly terminating couple counselling session should be handled in a professional way. The counselor needs to bring to the notice of the couple that the Counselling session that has been going on for the past few weeks/months will soon come to its end, brief summary of how the counselling session began such as on the 30th January 2023, Mr. Iliya, indicated himself and his wife's need for couple/marital counselling. So far we were able to identify the following problem areas in their relationship. Following application of various counselling techniques and suggestion, it is good to note that there had been significant improvement in their relationship for the past three weeks/ months. The following highlighted tips will assist you both further in your future relationship. However, if at any point in time in the future, there is any other reason(s) for you to call for counselling services I will be available.

The therapist may also give room for the couple, wife/husband each at a time in turn to give a brief summary as a way of feed-back of their experiences in the counselling session. Couples should be encouraged to explore not just their conscious negative beliefs about themselves and about one another but about the relationship itself. The therapist gently guides the couples in disengaging from a defensive and stuck position. The therapist or guidance-counselor does well to provide the following tips for improving couple's relationship.

1. Remember that you are two individuals with a different set of experiences, beliefs and world views. How you were brought up will largely define a great deal of your attitude to relationship.
2. The other person is not likely to be perfect. Issues big and small in a successful relationship need to be negotiated: remember, don't ASSUME - Assume makes an ASS out of U and ME!
3. If you are conflicting over money there might be underlying problems which are being displaced. Relationships should not be about money, yet issues over finance destroy a lot of partnerships.
4. If you want to improve communications then the best time to talk is when things are going well and you are relaxed. No issue ever gets resolved during a row because anger and raised voices bring up defences which prevent resolution. Try to always tell the truth no matter how afraid you are. Remember, your partner is supposed to be on your side. He or she is not a judging or punishing parental figure.
5. This may be bad news given the culture in which we live right now, but for most people, sexual infidelity, including persistent flirting, is unacceptable in a long term relationship. Rebuilding trust is very difficult indeed. Infatuation or sexual feelings for others is common but it does not need to be acted upon. Most adults are attracted to other people from time to time. If this is happening too frequently the relationship probably needs work.
6. Addictions destroy many relationships: alcohol, drugs, gambling, pornography, hobbies and even work prioritised over the relationship is a very frequent cause of couple breakdown.

7. Many people fall in love then forget to negotiate very basic issues like whether they are going to have children, religious or political preferences or preferred geographical location. If you are planning to take a relationship to the next level, while it isn't very romantic being adult enough to begin sharing major likes, dislikes, plans and beliefs will pay dividends further along if you are clear about these issues. Don't 'fit in' with someone while you are infatuated: it may not be a decision you would make otherwise.
1. Nothing corrodes a good relationship like resentment. Resentments often occur because of things unsaid, a series of misunderstandings, and outside interference. These issues can easily be avoided by promoting honest, on-going communication.
2. Wouldn't it be great if we could all fall in love with the perfect person and live happily ever after? I guess some people do this with minimum effort, for the rest of us, we have to put in a little effort. Hard work at times but, there it is.
3. Relatives and friends often well meaning, sometimes interfering for their own purposes, can really put pressure on a relationship. The truth is that while we often seek advice from people with whom we are close, they may have a conscious or unconscious agenda. We cannot rely on their advice.

Advice usually involves revealing personal information about your relationship. People can be judgmental, so while they might want to support you just because you are their relative or friend, they may disapprove, or not maintain confidentiality. Their advice isn't always fair or appropriate. Advice is usually not of much use. We all know what we should do. We don't really want advice, or really expect others to be able to fix it for us. Don't let other people get involved in your relationship, it seldom helps and in some cases can actually destroyed relationships, (Paul, 2006). You don't have to give out private information to anyone and you really do have the right to set boundaries against curious or manipulative people.

Counselor's effectiveness in handling couples cases in a unique way as well as according to particular couples need will lead to effective/successful counselling outcome. Marriage counselors should ask the following questions.

1. Does the preparation for counselling include an assessment inventory to help you or the couple to understand you? Are there area of compatibility and strength, as well as areas you need to address?
2. How many couples will attend the session? (For how long?)

Note that:

- i. A small group setting is higher quality and more engaging and individualized than larger groups.
- ii. On the other hand, large group could be more comprehensive, systematic and skill-based than small groups.
- iii. Group (rather than individualized) counselling could be more involving and stimulating than individual counselling .
- iv. Does the counselling program focus especially on the needs of engaged couples, or newlyweds or old timer?
- v. Marriage counselors should not mix troubled couples from later stages of marriage in the same group with newlywed. This can detract from the experience for engaged couples and newlyweds.

- vi. The content and amount of counselling service do depend on the orientation of the counselor and what the client/couple ask for.
- vii. Couples need counselling on the skills, habits, attitude, and relationship enrichment techniques as well as normal issues and challenge that couple's face in the course of their marriage.

Here is a concise list of seven relationship skills and knowledge areas that research has shown to contribute to the success and endurance of marriage (Seligman, 2004).

- Compatibility
- Expectations
- Personalities and families of origin
- Communication
- Conflict resolution
- Intimacy and sexuality
- Long term goals.

Symptoms that often signals the need for marital counselling

According to Seligman, (2004) Symptoms that often signal the need for marital counselling are as follows;

- Communication breaks down
- Sex has ended or causes problems
- Arguments continue without resolution
- Violence erupts
- Depression or other health problems recur
- The bond of trust is eroded or broken

It is normal for relationships to suffer as the pressure and strains of everyday life mount. Love may disappear, replaced by resentment and anger. Each partner can view this differently depending on their own experience of family life. One may despair, while the other may view it as a temporary blip.

Where a couple has attached hastily - in response to a passion, pregnancy or other need, disappointments can surface and fester when the excitement subsides. Renegotiating, with a skilled counsellor, can help build a more realistic and deeper relationship.

The right time for Couple Counselling

Couples often seek counselling when:

- There has been a betrayal of trust; an affair, debt or secret.
- Talking causes confusion or unbearable anger
- Separation or Divorce seem like the only option
- Desire has gone or sex is no fun
- Arguments and bickering go on and on.

Couples are encouraged if possible; attend counselling together unless there is domestic violence or fear. Counselling can be undertaken with one partner if that feels more comfortable (Smith, 2007).

Being able to manage conflict, arguments and rows is the foundation stone to a good relationship. It is unrealistic to hope that arguments can be avoided.

Two people come with their own values and beliefs and both must feel heard in order to thrive. This may mean developing new skills.

Differences need to be acknowledged; otherwise we merge or one partner is unheard. Then one partner may dominate and the other 'disappears'.

Arguments are a healthy and essential part of any relationship and can energise it if carried out skilfully. Indirect anger and domestic violence are destructive.

Counselling can help with understanding the messages about conflict that we may have inherited from our family and offer new skills.

Causes of Distress

1. Lack of negotiation can shatter expectations
2. Stress can fracture a relationship
3. Illness can deplete both partners
4. Birth of a child can leave a partner feeling abandoned
5. Depression can leave a partner feeling deserted
6. External pressures can sever the couple bond
7. Disappointment can lead to anger and hostility
8. Life changes
9. Children leaving home can allow resentments to resurface

Relationships need solid foundations; two unhappy people with unresolved issues rarely make a long-term happy relationship. It may be tempting to feel that our partner or colleague can compensate for earlier pain and loss, but this hope often leads to further disappointment.

Enter a relationship as healthily as possible for the best chance of long-term happiness. The pleasure is in wanting to be with someone rather than the tension of feeling needy and dependent. Self-respect and liking oneself are the important ingredients for a good relationship. If they are in short supply you may consider counselling to address them.

How can Couple Counselling help?

1. Destructive patterns of relating can be recognised and addressed
2. Conflict and communication can be improved
3. New relationship skills can be learned
4. The impact of change and loss can be examined
5. Relationships can be more successful

Abusive relationships and domestic violence can be acknowledged. Communicating and staying connected during difficult times will go a long way to help solving couple crisis. A new depth of understanding can be reached with the help of family/couple therapists.

How counsellors react to couples (clients) during couple Counselling and how clients communicate their feelings are of critical importance in counselling. When clients including couples come for counselling. They bring to the counsellor confused feelings, ideas, fears and hopes, with which they are struggling. The counsellor's attitudes towards these clients determine to in large measure the extent to which clients will cope constructively with their problems and undertake positive actions. It is therefore necessary for counsellor to display, sensitivity, tact, acceptance, maintain confidentiality, accept accountability and as well display expertise quality based on outward evidence of his/her professional competence. If the counsellor demonstrates a genuine acceptance of clients, then client will feel that they are received. Fundamentally, acceptance means that the counsellor is willing to let individuals be themselves, the counsellors does not explicitly or implicitly hold forth conditions that the client must meet gain the counsellors respect. Acceptance is based on the ideal that the individual has infinite worth and dignity understanding marks the counsellors behavior toward the client understanding means that the counsellor grasps clearly and completely, intellectually and emotionally, what the individual is attempting to convey. Understanding involves a sharing process in which the counsellor obtains from the client's expression that sense of meaning communicated. The clients words do not always clearly convey meaning some times, meanings are hidden, either intentionally, a unintentionally, it is the counsellors role to understand the feelings and ideas beneath the surface of the words.

Empathy or sensitivity is often cited as a trait or skill necessarily possessed by counsellors it is sometimes defined as the capacity to be aware of what is happening in the Counselling process from the clients verbal and non-verbal behaviour. Sensitive counsellor perceives, respond to, and communicate the emotional tones, the moods and the conflicts of the clients. This cloud is shown in the way the counsellor responds to clients through reflection of feeling. Reflecting back to the client that he or she is being heard and providing them an opportunity to hear themselves. Often hearing one's own thoughts and feelings in another person's words add a clarity and support that is difficult to grasp. Communication/interview skills are very significance to Counselling practices, and especially in marital Counselling . Basic communication skills are those that all individual must use on a daily basis whenever they endeavour to interact with others in the society. It is true that society is rapidly changing, people essentially remain the same; people continue to interact, react, and respond to myriad of issues on many interpersonal levels. As a result of these, the need for counselors to develop communication skills/interview skills should be perceived as being innate to the practice of counselling, especially since counselling process consists of interactions between individuals. Interview skills are very crucial component of communication process for the development of counselling relationship.

Moral and Legal Issues

The counselor, having been a part of the community in which he works, he is Morally and Legally bound to show respect for the communist, its laws, values, norms, customs, philosophies and ideologies. If he violates these codes of the society, he may place himself, his profession, clients and the institution which he represents in a serious difficulty.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The development and use of these skills by counselor will permit clients to share their views and feelings openly. Couple therapy requires extra skills, such as holding good boundaries and been able

to control the session so that while strong emotions come they are not allowed developing into conflict. A therapist should be non-judgmental and non-violent but should be honest and courageous. Courage as requires on the part of the therapist for him or her to be able to help couples identify their patterns of relating which limit them and keep the relationship 'stuck' in a negative way.

As counselors we must be sensitive to the cultural, ethical, legal, religious, gender, and philosophical differences among people of diverse backgrounds, all of whom operate by rules, values, and customs that may not be familiar to us. We must be ready to make ethically, morally and legally sound decisions in anticipation of some possible dilemmas and to think through alternatives and preferred responses in an objective and analytical manner within ethical and legal framework. These resolutions must be congruent with professional standards, state and federal laws and institutional policies. It is recommended that we have to maintain an open, questioning attitude toward morally and legally ethical decision making, recognizing the need to challenge and question decisions, values and attitudes. It is also recommended that professionals should acknowledge the fact that professional issues are the standards that must be adhered to in any professional practice.

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