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THE IMPORTANCE OF MULTICULTURAL COUNSELING FOR CHILDREN
WITH SPECIAL NEEDS

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ABSTRACT

Multicultural counseling plays an important role in providing effective support to children with special needs in overcoming social and cultural challenges. In a time of increasingly complex globalization, counselors need to have the ability to interact with children from different cultural backgrounds to provide quality mental health services. Cooperation between parents and counselors is key in creating an inclusive environment for children with special needs. This study aims to determine the effectiveness of multicultural counseling in providing mental health services for children with special needs in Indonesia using the literature review research method. Data were obtained from secondary sources such as journals and papers indexed by SINTA or Scopus. The analysis shows that multicultural counseling plays an important role in overcoming cultural and social barriers and improving the well-being of children with special needs. The emphasis on approaches that suit the needs of children in their own cultural context is key in the counseling process. Therefore, multicultural counseling can be effectively used to help children with special needs face cultural and social challenges in an increasingly diverse society.

Keywords: multicultural counseling, children with special needs

INTRODUCTION

Counseling according to the 1956 division of counseling psychology of the American Psychological Association is an interaction between the counselor and the client to provide assistance by solving problems that can hinder the process of optimal growth and development of their personal resources (Thompson, Rudolph, & Henderson, 2004). In the counseling process, culture plays an important role in building trust and positive relationships. Counselors who have an understanding of the client's culture can create an atmosphere or environment that supports the client in the context of being valued and understood. The diversity of religions, cultures, and ethnicities in Indonesia is an important factor that intercultural understanding becomes a counselor's effort to determine effective interventions (Miskanik, 2018). Because culture has a significant role in the recovery and development process of clients. This is a new challenge in the field of counseling, where counselors must be able to interact with clients from various cultural backgrounds efficiently. From this explanation, it can be interpreted that multicultural counseling is an effective way to overcome the complexity of intercultural interactions, so it can be recognized that multicultural counseling has an important role in counseling. So that counselors can more effectively understand, respect, and respond to the verbal and non-verbal needs of clients who come from diverse cultural backgrounds.

The increase in migration, urbanization, and globalization has a major impact on the composition of society, therefore, the need for multicultural counseling is increasingly important and unavoidable. Mismatches in counseling sessions and negative impacts on the well-being of clients become a serious problem due to counselors who are unable to understand the cultural background of clients (Nguyen et al, 2020). From previous research, counselors can have adverse counseling effects due to a lack of cultural understanding by counselors. According to Smith and Trimble's (2019) article, counselors need to have a deep understanding of various cultures because not understanding cultural aspects such as communication norms, values, and life experiences of the client can interfere with the counseling process, resulting in ineffective service delivery and less positive impact.

Cultural aspects of mental health evaluation and diagnosis have been the focus of emphasis and consideration in several studies. Multicultural counseling has significance not only at the therapeutic stage, but also at the initial evaluation and diagnosis stage. As evaluation without considering the cultural context may result in inappropriate diagnosis and inappropriate treatment (Kim et al, 2018). Inequality of access to mental health services is also an important part of multicultural counseling. As stated by Wang et al. (2021), improvements in access and quality of mental health services for underserved communities due to effective communication relationships between counselors and clients from different cultural backgrounds can increase clients' trust and engagement in counseling sessions.

One of the principles of counseling is that every individual should be served regardless of factors such as age, status, ethnicity/race, religion, and so on, including the group of children with special needs. As a group with problems and uniqueness, children with special needs also need specific treatment. Therefore, counselors need to understand these uniquenesses as part of the culture or subculture in providing their services (Miskanik, 2018). Children with special needs require special attention when undergoing counseling. In a recent study by Alasuutari et al. (2019), it was mentioned that counselors need

to understand and adapt their methods according to the needs and uniqueness of each child, including cultural factors that could affect their reactions to therapy. According to Lee and Chiu (2021), the attention given to children with special needs not only focuses on diverse mental health, but also considers various cultural backgrounds in counseling.

So that the main obstacles in providing counseling to children with special needs can be overcome by using an approach that is sensitive to cultural diversity. According to research by Robinson et al. (2019), the way children perceive and respond to counseling sessions is influenced by cultures such as language, religious beliefs, and social norms. Thus, in the process of providing services to children with special needs to be relevant and meaningful, a deep understanding of various cultures is needed by the counselor. In addition, children with special needs are still stigmatized with mental health problems and are a major barrier to seeking counseling assistance. Based on a study conducted by Garcia and Lopez (2020), children from certain cultural groups have a fear of being excluded or considered unnatural by society which makes them hide or refuse to face and solve health problems. This shows that multicultural counseling is needed for the community so that they are not bound by cultural stigmas that tend to be negative towards children with special needs who need mental health services.

Children with special needs who live in an environment that is culturally different from their parents, in certain situations can face conflicting cultural identities if. Therefore, the role of parents is very influential and has a big role in the process of forming children's identity. According to research conducted by Ahmad et al. (2020), counselors must work closely with parents to provide effective and continuous counseling services for children from various cultural backgrounds. Because the role of parents is very significant in shaping their children's cultural identity. As mentioned by Nguyen et al. (2020), differences between family culture and neighborhood culture can create internal tensions that can affect children's mental health. Therefore, to better understand the complexity of their cultural identity, multicultural counseling is the solution.

Ethical and professional obligations in providing good mental health services for culturally diverse people are an important part of multicultural counseling as a mental health service delivery strategy in the era of globalization. Multicultural counseling is increasingly gaining importance in providing effective and inclusive mental health services for children with special needs (Miskanik, 2018). Recognizing cultural plurality is essential so that children can be provided with appropriate support as needed, so that they can grow and develop to their full potential.

The purpose of this study is to investigate how effective multicultural counseling is in providing mental health services for children with special needs in Indonesia with a literature review. How the multicultural counseling approach helps children with special needs face cultural and social challenges and understand the role of parents and families in the multicultural counseling process. The focus of this research is on children with special needs in Indonesia in the context of multicultural counseling. While many studies have been conducted on multicultural counseling and children with special needs separately, our research aims to integrate the two fields to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the application of multicultural counseling in supporting children with special needs. Therefore, it is hoped that

this research can provide valuable insights and more targeted solutions to improve the quality of counseling services for children with special needs in Indonesia.

METHOD

This research utilizes a literature review method based on previous findings, employing a qualitative descriptive approach. It focuses on examining recent literature (published within the last five years) concerning the significance of multicultural counseling for children with special needs. According to Cresswell (2012), There are 5 steps to conduct literature review, 1. Identify key terms. 2. Locate literature about a topic by consulting several types of materials and databases, including those available at an academic library and on the Internet. 3. Critically evaluate and select the literature for your review. 4. Organize the literature you have selected by abstracting or taking notes on the literature and developing a visual diagram of it. 5. Write a literature review that reports summaries of the literature for inclusion in your research report. Data were sourced primarily from secondary materials such as books, journals, and papers indexed by SINTA or Scopus. To identify key findings and emerging patterns, as well as to understand the influence of multicultural counseling on the well-being of children with special needs, a literature review was conducted, the results of which were later analyzed qualitatively. An explanation of the importance of multicultural counseling for children with special needs will be presented in the form of a descriptive narrative. This research is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the importance of multicultural counseling to the situation of children with special needs.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

It is undeniable that effective support for children with special needs can be through multicultural counseling as a curative measure. In an increasingly connected and diverse era of globalization, the provision of quality mental health services must pay attention to the ability to communicate with individuals from diverse backgrounds, especially with children with special needs. To do their job well, multicultural counselors must have an in-depth understanding of the various cultural aspects, especially in Indonesia, that affect children with special needs. This involves understanding communication standards, beliefs, as well as religious and cultural values that can affect the way children interact with their environment. According to D'Andrea et al. (2019), counselors who understand culture well can be more sensitive to the needs of these children, thus increasing the success of counseling interventions. According to Creswell (2012) First, we identify the key terms used in every source, then find topics that used for this article aim at inclusive and multicultural counseling. Then evaluate and select the literature and finally write the review report summaries

Research conducted by (Rahmawati, 2021) entitled "Self-development of children with special needs through a multicultural counseling approach" was conducted at the Special Needs Children's Therapy House in Kudus City. Researchers made direct observations regarding the type and how the process of applying multicultural counseling is applied to children with special needs. The result is that most of the children with special needs who are in the therapy house are not accepted in inclusive schools or special schools because they are included in the category of multiples who usually require intensive assistance and

additional time every day. For this reason, volunteers cared about establishing Darul Fathonah Special Needs Children's Therapy Center since 2016.

With the support of sincere psychologists offering assistance at no cost, and guided by a senior psychologist from the Kudus Regional General Hospital who acts as a consultant and aids in diagnosing children with special needs, the Darul Fathonah Special Needs Children's Therapy House provides tailored assistance to a diverse range of children with special needs. The approach to assistance is customized based on each child's needs identified during the initial diagnosis. Additionally, the utilization of direct psychological tests in diagnosis is endorsed by an official certificate from the Kudus Regional General Hospital.

This is in line with other research conducted (Firdaus et al, 2023) with the research title "Multicultural Counseling as an Approach to Self-Development of Children With Special Needs" at the Special Needs Children's Therapy House in Baitul Aziz located in Blitar City which was founded in 2010. The therapy house is provided for children with special needs with multiple disabilities who are not accepted in inclusive schools or special schools because they need intensive assistance and additional time every day. Rumah Terapi Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus was also established by volunteers who care about it. Baitul Aziz Special Needs Children Therapy Center has therapists with academic backgrounds in psychology, counseling, health and other fields to provide assistance. After knowing the results of the diagnosis, the therapist will decide on the approach to be taken. Darul Fathonah Special Needs Children's Therapy Home and Baitul Aziz Special Needs Children's Therapy Home have almost the same types of special needs children, so counseling assistance for children with special needs is generally carried out with the appropriate approach.

The types of special needs children include autism (addressed through applied behavior analysis - ABA), Down syndrome (involving occupational therapy), hearing impairment, speech delay, cerebral palsy, mental retardation, and dyslexia. It is imperative to adopt a proper and suitable approach through multicultural counseling, as each child possesses unique potential levels. At the Darul Fathonah and Baitul Aziz Special Needs Children's Therapy Centers, children with special needs undergo detailed identification and classification based on their specific types. Therefore, even if two children share the same condition, such as deafness or autism, the applied approach may vary, as it takes into account the level of specificity and individual potential.

Multicultural counseling can also be implemented within schools, even though specific guidelines and examples of guidance and counseling services for children with special needs are currently unavailable in the guidance and counseling manual (Khoirunnisa, 2018). Moreover, parental involvement in supporting multicultural counseling for children with special needs holds significant importance to ensure the success and effectiveness of counseling interventions (Davis, 2019). As pivotal figures in their children's lives, parents wield substantial influence over their growth and well-being, particularly concerning mental health and counseling services.

CONCLUSION

From the discussion that has been described, it can be concluded that multicultural counseling is very important in providing effective support to children with special needs in facing social and cultural challenges. In an increasingly complex era of globalization, counselors need to have the ability to understand and interact with children from diverse cultural backgrounds in order to provide quality mental health services. Cooperation between parents and counselors is necessary to create an inclusive environment for children with special needs with parents providing an understanding of the family culture and helping counselors understand family values and norms. Thus, multicultural counseling not only pays attention to the needs of individuals as a whole or holistically, but also considers cultural aspects that affect children's experiences and responses in counseling.

In addition, the need for improvement in multicultural counseling assistance for children with special needs can be done through the development of institutions such as Rumah Terapi Anak Berkebutuhan Khusus and also through collaboration between parents, counselors, and other related parties. More in-depth attention should be paid to approaches that suit the needs of children with special needs in their own cultural context in the counseling process. Therefore, multicultural counseling can be effectively used to help children with special needs overcome cultural and social barriers and improve their well-being in an increasingly diverse society.

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The Importance of Multicultural Counseling for Children With Special Needs

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