

## Public Perception of Counselling Psychology in Region Six, Guyana

Article by Sherena A Persaud  
University of Guyana, Guyana  
E-mail: amela198824@yahoo.com

### Abstract

*On a global scale, there has been a significant increase in mental health issues. Over the past years, Guyana has seen a 1.9% increase in suicide between the years 2010-2015. One approach to fighting this pandemic is through the field of counselling psychology. This field of study provides advice, guidance, coping methods, et cetera, on how to deal with difficult circumstances or just everyday life situations. The objective of this research was to find out the public perception of counselling psychology, which in turn gives us an idea of the issues the country is facing in relation to this field of study. Subsequently, aiding the country in fighting suicide and other mental health issues. A survey was conducted in Region 6, Guyana. A questionnaire was designed and used for the survey and was administered to 383 persons. The SPSS software was used for data analysis. Based on the survey done, there were 216 female and 167 male respondents. 78.1% of the respondents said they think counselling is important while 1.3% said it was not important and 20.4% did not know or have never heard of the term counselling/counseling psychology. 58.7% of the respondents found no stigma/shame in counselling while 17.8% said there is stigma/shame in counselling. Also, 41.5% stated that there are no counselling centers in Guyana while 36.6% said that there are. By analysing the data, the realization obtained from this research was that the public believes that counselling is important, however, persons are not aware of this field of study and the counselling facilities and services available in the country.*

**Keywords:** Guyana, counselling, counselling psychology, suicide.

### Introduction

Over the past years, there has been an increased rate of psychological issues within our communities. This is due to the competitive world that we live in and the difficulty in balancing work and personal life. Thus, the demand for specialization in the field of counselling psychology has increased.

BAC (1979) cited in McLeod (2003) defined the term “counselling” as a “professional relationship between a trained counsellor and a client. This relationship is usually person-to-person, although it may sometimes involve more than two people. It is designed to help clients to understand and clarify their views of their life space, and to learn to reach their self-determined goals through meaningful, well-informed choices and through resolution of problems of an emotional or interpersonal nature”.

Basically, counselling is defined as a field of study that is designed to help and teach clients how to deal and cope with situations of daily life. However, we all know that counselling is much more than that, as counselling is not only for people going through a difficult path in life. Counselling, such as career counselling, provides guidance for clients. Other people use counselling as a forum to express themselves in a positive light, thus, confidentiality.

### Aim of the study

The aim of the study was to understand the public perception of counselling and the counselling process in Region 6, Guyana. The research was conducted due to a lack of knowledge and information on the topic in Guyana, particularly in Region 6. The research entails detail knowledge of person’s concept of counselling and the counselling process.

### Background of the study

Counselling is an important field of study in Guyana and around the world. Over the past years, the suicide rate in Guyana has continued to increase along with mental health issues, even though some amount of counselling is available to citizens, both free and paid for. In majority of the suicide cases, counselling if done could have been a preventative method. So the question is why people are not

utilising the counselling services offered in Guyana. This paper was designed to investigate these concerns.

## **Literature review**

Counselling is a process or activity that is used to work with people “experiencing developmental or adjustment problems. It is multidimensional dealing with human beings feelings, thoughts, and behaviors as well as the past, present, and future” (Kolter & Shepard, 2008). Counselling is important and everyone at some point in their lives have a need for this practice, whether they acknowledge it, receive it, or not.

### **Aspects of counselling**

Pietrofesa et al. (1984) identified seven aspects of counselling to help give a worldwide view and understanding of counselling. They are;

Counselling is a professional service offered by a competent counsellor - Counselling should be offered by a professional or trained person who has the knowledge and experience to deal with and handle issues expressed by the client.

Counselling is a process in which the counsellor-client relationship is basic - Trust between the counsellor and client is one of the most important elements in the counselling process. Without trust, the clients are unable to truly express themselves and their issues, hindering their rate of recovery.

Counselling is concerned with decision-making skills and problem resolution -Counselling teaches and equip the client with coping methods and techniques to help them deal and cope with difficult situations.

Counselling involves the client learning new behaviour or formulating new attitudes -Counsellor tries to replace clients’ old behaviours with new behaviours that are positive and productive.

Counselling is a mutual enterprise on the part of counsellor and counselee and, as such, is based on respect for the individual – Successful counselling relies on mutual respect between the counsellor and client. They should understand they are both human beings and acknowledge each other as such.

Counselling cannot be specifically defined since it is a changing entity, but there are skills common to all such facilitative relationships – Even though counselling has evolved over the years, basic concepts of counselling such as the importance of counsellor-client relationship, should be facilitated by a professional or trained individual, et cetera, are the fundamentals for effective counselling.

Counselling is a way of life – Counselling is not only for persons going through difficult times, counselling is a process that allows you to express yourself, aid in self-development et cetera.

### **Counsellor and their roles**

Since counselling is considered to be an intimate form of learning, it requires persons (counsellors) that are willing to shed any stereotypes or biasness and be an authentic person in the therapeutic relationship (Corey, 2009). A counsellor cannot truly be of assistance or help if they are biased towards their client and their background, gender, race, social class, et cetera.

According to Guy (1887) cited in Gladding (1996), the skills that effective counsellor have are;

Curiosity and inquisitiveness

Ability to listen

Comfort with conversation

Empathy and understanding

Emotional insightfulness

Capacity for self-denial

Tolerance of intimacy

Comfort with power

Ability to laugh

Gladding (1996) also highlighted qualities of effective counsellors and they are;

Intellectual competence – Counsellors should be well trained in coping practices and theories to help their clients.

Energy – The process of counselling is physically and emotionally demanding and it requires counsellors that have the ability to handle that pressure.

Flexibility – Counsellors must have the ability to adapt to whatever the situation requires to be able to meet the needs and requirements of their clients.

Support – Counsellors must have the ability to help the client makes positive changes in their life by offering support and guidance.

Goodwill – Counsellors must be very constructive and instrumental in helping the client learn and gain independence in their lives.

Self-awareness – Counsellors must be aware of their knowledge, behaviours, attitude, and all the factors and issues that affect them.

Awareness of cultural experiences – Counsellors should be comfortable with clients of different cultures to avoid biasness.

According to Guy and Gladding, these skills and qualities are best suited for a profession in counselling and makes effective and efficient counsellors.

### **Ethics in counselling**

Ethics in counselling can be described as “the systemic study of value concepts such as right and wrong and the broader principles justifying application of rules of conduct” (Swenson, 1997, cited in Hill, 2004). According to Francis & Dugger (2014), the main purpose of practicing and having a code of ethics is to establish norms and expectations for the counsellors in order to minimize the risk of harm to clients and the general public.

Counsellors must follow and adhere to ethical practices in their field. Lack of ethical practices results in clients being uncomfortable with their counsellors, which in turn leads to clients not trusting the counsellor enough to fully express themselves or terminating the counselling sessions altogether. In addition, this distrust can prevent clients from trusting the counselling process and seeking future help.

### **Suicide in Guyana**

One of the major issues in Guyana due to the lack of proper counselling programmes and institutions is suicide. Suicide can be defined as the act or an instance of taking one’s own life voluntarily and intentional (Merriam-Webster, 2017). Suicide has become one the leading causes of death in Guyana. The suicide rate in Guyana has increased from 28.7 % in 2010 to 30.6 % in 2015, resulting in a 1.9% increase over the five years recorded (WHO, 2017).

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study is to understand the public perception of counselling in Region 6. This research is important because of the lack of information and knowledge in this field of study in Region 6, Guyana.

Data for this research was collected from the following sources:

- 1) Secondary data: data was collected from journals and books.
- 2) Primary data: a questionnaire was created to conduct this research. The questionnaire contained a mixture of pre-coded and open-ended questions. The questionnaire reflects residents’ bio-data, their understanding of the term counselling, their past personal experience with counselling, trust scale for the counsellor, knowledge on counselling centers, et cetera.

Using the Raosoft software (Confidence Interval of 95% and Error of 5 %), a population size of 383 respondents for Region 6 was determined and used.

Self-administering of the questionnaire was done for respondents who needed it.

In addition, all data collected was analysed using the SPSS software.

### **Limitation**

This research was conducted in Region 6 and does not reflect the views of the other 9 Regions in Guyana and other countries.

## Results

Chart showing results obtained from the survey carried out.

**Code:** F = Frequency, P = Percent (%), NA = Not Applicable (Respondents do not have to answer this question, as it does not apply to them)

n=383			n=383		
1. Gender	F	P	4. Is counselling important?	F	P
Female	216	56.4	Yes	299	78.1
Male	167	43.6	No	4	1.3
			Missing	80	20.9
2. Age group	F	P	5. Have you ever had counselling?	F	P
< 20 years	72	18.8	Yes	80	20.9
20-30 years	197	51.4	No	225	58.7
31-40 years	60	15.7	Missing	78	20.4
41-50 years	28	7.3	6. Counselling session duration	F	P
> 50 years	25	6.5	Not Applicable	227	59.3
Missing	1	.3	Completed	49	12.8
3. Define counselling	F	P	Termination	15	3.9
Advice	93	24.3	Missing	92	24.0
Advice, help	9	2.3	7. Was your counselling session effective?	F	P
Advice, someone to talk to	4	1.0	Not applicable	227	59.3
Advice, support	1	.3	Yes	65	17.0
Brainwashing	1	.3	No	6	1.6
Guidance	22	5.7	Missing	85	22.2
Help	90	23.5	8. Would you ever go or back to counselling?	F	P
Help, guidance	3	.8	Yes	222	58.0
Mental issues	1	.3	No	72	18.8
Psychological speciality	20	5.2	Missing	89	23.2
Psychological speciality, Advice	1	.3	10. How much do you trust a counsellor?	F	P
Self-development	22	5.7	Not Applicable	66	17.2
Someone to talk to	37	9.7	No trust	6	1.6
Someone to talk to, guidance	1	.3	2	15	3.9
Missing	78	20.4	3	98	25.6
9. Reasons for going to or back to counselling	F	P	4	67	17.5
Advice	22	5.7	Complete trust	51	13.3
Advice, someone to talk to	2	.5	Missing	80	20.9
Become a better person	7	1.8			
Can handle my problems	16	4.2			
Confidentiality	1	.3			

Depends on situation	4	1.0	11. Reasons for trusting or not trusting a counsellor	F	P																							
Good	1	.3		Become a better person	3	.8																						
Guidance	1	.3			Confidentiality	50	13.1																					
Have family	5	1.3				Counselling is important	1	.3																				
Healthy	1	.3					Counsellor can lie	3	.8																			
Help others also	1	.3						Depends on counsellor	39	10.2																		
Helpful	96	25.1							Depends on situation	16	4.2																	
Helpful, advice	1	.3								Depends what the counsellor say	1	.3																
If needed	24	6.3									Express oneself	3	.8															
Important	1	.3										Guidance	1	.3														
Ineffective counsellor	3	.8											Have friend	1	.3													
Internet for help, do not have the time	1	.3												Helpful	8	2.1												
Learn	37	9.7													It is confident	5	1.3											
Never had counselling before	1	.3														Learn	3	.8										
No confidentiality	1	.3															NA	66	17.2									
No counsellor	1	.3																Neutral	1	.3								
No problem	13	3.4																	No confidentiality	7	1.8							
No reason	1	.3																		Not all counsellor are helpful	7	1.8						
Not important	1	.3																			Pastor	1	.3					
Not needed	2	.5																				Positive advise	7	1.8				
Solve the problem	5	1.3																					Self esteem	1	.3			
Someone to talk to	17	4.4																						They are people too	9	2.3		
Stress	1	.3																							They are trained	49	12.8	
Trust issue	2	.5																								To express oneself	1	.3
Waste of time	1	.3																									Missing	100
Missing	113	29.5	14. Whom do you take advice from?																									F
12. Would you ever take advice from a counsellor?	F	P		No one																								47
Not applicable	66	17.2			Spouse																							50
Yes	230	60.1				Parents																						144
No	7	1.8					Other relatives																					48
Missing	80	20.9	Friends					76																				19.8
13. Reasons for taking or not taking advice from a counsellor	F	P		Religious leader				67	17.5																			
Become a better person	17	4.4			Other			24	6.3																			
Become a better person, get advice	1	.3				Missing		79	20.6																			
Depends on counsellor	4	1.0					15. Responses to "Other"	F	P																			
Depends on situation	10	2.6	Anime					1	.3																			
Get advice	31	8.1		Bible				2	.5																			
Get advice, helpful	1	.3			Books			1	.3																			
						Boss		1	.3																			
							Boyfriend	1	.3																			

Helpful	32	8.4	Counsellor	3	.8
I do what i think is right	1	.3	Elders	2	.5
If counsellor seems reasonable	19	5.0	Girlfriend	2	.5
If needed	2	.5	God	4	1.0
If they have similar experiences	2	.5	Myself	1	.3
Learn	6	1.6	NA	280	73.1
NA	66	17.2	Strangers	1	.3
No trust	1	.3	Missing	84	21.9
Not all counsellor are helpful	1	.3			
Pastor	1	.3	16. Do you trust the people you confide in?	F	P
Someone to talk to	1	.3	Not applicable	45	11.7
They are people too	1	.3	Yes	219	57.2
They are trained	93	24.3	No	34	8.9
To solve problems	2	.5	Missing	85	22.2
Trust family more	1	.3			
Missing	90	23.5	17. Reasons for confiding in people	F	P
			I do not confide in people	1	.3
19. Is there any stigma/shame against counselling?	F	P	I do not	1	.3
Yes	68	17.8	NA	264	68.9
No	225	58.7	No confidentiality	1	.3
Missing	90	23.5	Someone to talk to	22	5.7
			To socialize	2	.5
20. Reasons for or no stigma/shame against counselling?	F	P	Missing	92	24.0
Confidentiality	10	2.6			
Counselling may not be effective	1	.3	18. Are there any counselling centers in Guyana?	F	P
Depends on situation	4	1.0	Yes	140	36.6
Depends on the person	1	.3	No	159	41.5
Health & safety	1	.3	Missing	84	21.9
Important	6	1.6			
Learn	5	1.3	21. What more can be done to educate people about the importance of counselling?	F	P
Learn from others	11	2.9	Awareness	99	25.8
Need confidentiality	6	1.6	Awareness, counselling centers	3	.8
No reasons	1	.3	Awareness, counselling seminars	7	1.8
No shame	50	13.1	Awareness, workshop	3	.8
Not aware of counselling services	1	.3	Call in program	1	.3
People need help	92	24.0	Church	1	.3
People need help, learn	1	.3	Counselling centers	21	5.5
Release your burden	2	.5	Counselling centers, counselling seminars	2	.5
Shame	42	11.0			

Society thinks you are weak	4	1.0	Counselling centers, counsellors	1	.3
To express oneself	2	.5	Counselling seminars	66	17.2
To think positive	4	1.0	Counselling seminars, workshop	6	1.6
Missing	139	36.3	Important	1	.3
			More sports	1	.3
			Need counsellor	1	.3
			Parents need to advise their children	1	.3
			Social Protection need to do awareness	1	.3
			Survey	1	.3
			Survey, awareness, counselling seminars	1	.3
			Workplace, counselling seminars	1	.3
			Workshop	20	5.2
			Missing	145	37.9

## Discussions

For this research, a survey of 383 respondents living in Region 6 was done, of which 216 were females and 167 were males. In addition, out of the 383 respondents, 72 were below 20 years of age, 197 were 20-30 years, 60 were 31-40 years, 28 were 41-50 years, and 25 were above 50 years of age.

When asked to define counselling/counseling psychology, it was found that 20.4% of the persons surveyed did not know what the word counselling meant or have ever heard of the word. This results said a lot in terms of the education and awareness aspect of counselling in Region 6. If people are not aware of what counselling is, how can they seek assistance when they need it or advise others to seek counselling services when required? Respondents that answered that question stated that counselling/counseling psychology offers people advice (24.3%) and help (23.5%) on how to deal and cope with situations that they are facing. 9.7% stated that counselling/counseling psychology is about having someone to talk to, as counsellors jobs are to listen to their clients as they express themselves on various issues. Others stated that this field of study offers guidance (5.7%) to their clients and help their clients attain self-development (5.7%) and counselling/counseling psychology is a psychological speciality (5.2%) that offers professional help on people dealing with mental issues such as depression, anxiety, suicide, et cetera.

78.1 % of the respondents stated that counselling was important while 1.3% did not consider this field of study to be so. In addition, out of the 383 respondents, 20.9% had counselling before, with 12.8% completing and 15% terminated their sessions. However, 17.0% of the respondents stated that their counselling experience was positive and effective for them as it helped them become a better person, solved problems that were affecting their lives, and helped in various situations. Also, they received good advice and it was useful for marriage preparation and issues faced, et cetera. On the other hand, 1.6% said they did not find the counselling experience effective as it did not help solve issues in their lives.

When asked if they would ever go or return to counselling, 58.0% of the respondents said yes. According to the respondents, some of the reasons for going to counselling are it is helpful, they learn how to deal with people and situations, effective advice on how to deal and cope with issues, they have someone to talk to, they become a better person as a result of counselling, they would only go if needed and depends on the situation they are facing. In contrast, 18.8% stated they would not go to counselling because they can handle their own problems and do not need outsiders help, they have family to talk to and seek advice from, counselling was not important or needed and was a waste of time, they had trust issues with people and did not believe counselling was confidential, et cetera.

With reference to the question on how much the respondent trust a counsellor, 1.6% has no trust, 3.9% has a trust level of 2, 25.6% has a trust level of 3, 17.5% has a trust level of 4 and 13.3% completely trust the counsellor. Respondents trust levels were based on reasons such as; confidentiality, professionalism of the counsellors, the situation they were facing and if the counsellor was helpful or not.

Persons seek counselling for advice and it is important during the counselling process that clients are able to take and implement advice offered by the counsellors. With regards to client's willingness to accept advice from their counsellors, 60.1% of the respondents stated they would take advice while 1.8 stated they would not. The respondents stated they either would or would not accept advice from counsellors because counsellors are trained to offer assistance to their clients (24.3%), they are helpful (8.4%), and they get advice that is useful in dealing and coping with issues (8.1%), if the counsellor advice seems reasonable (5.0%). It is important to understand that not all advice offered by counsellors can be implemented due to the client's background, priorities, and circumstances. Other reasons outlined are; they would accept advice from counsellors depending on the situation and counsellors, they do what they think is right and do not need to take advice from others, not all counsellors are helpful, they prefer family over outsiders, et cetera.

Besides learning about the respondents' perception of counselling and the counselling process, the survey also inquired about whom the respondents normally seek advice from. 12.3% of the respondents seek advice from no one and handle and keep issues and problems to themselves, while 37.6% seek advice from their parents, friends (19.8%), religious leaders (17.5%), spouse (13.1%), other relatives (12.5%), and others (6.3%). Other places that the respondents seek advice from are god, elders, their boss, anime, Bible and other religious books, counsellors, boyfriend/girlfriend, talk to themselves, and strangers. However, 8.9% of the respondents stated that they did not trust the people they confided in and they confide in people because they need someone to talk to when necessary and it is a means of socialization, et cetera.

One of the major issues that can help in explaining the rising suicide rate in Guyana is the public's awareness of counselling centers available in Guyana. 41.5% of the respondents stated they there are no counselling centers in Guyana. This is a significant result in this research because if people are not aware of counselling centers (services) in Guyana, then they are unable to seek help when they are in need of it.

Another potential issue in counselling in Guyana is stigma/shame against counselling. 58.7% of the respondents stated they are no stigma/shame against counselling while 17.8% stated yes. Also, 24.0% of the respondents stated people need help in making decisions and addressing mental issues such as suicide, they are no shame in counselling (13.1%), there is shame in counselling (11.0%), you learn from others through counselling (2.9%), et cetera.

In addition, the respondents believed that in order to educate the public about the importance of counselling the following needs to be done. They are; awareness (25.8%) through advertisement, both traditional and modern means of communication, counselling seminars (17.2%), setting up counselling centers around the country (5.5%) and planning and implementing workshops (5.0%). Some other means of educating the public about counselling are call-in programs, counsellors, and parents advice to their children.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the research done in region 6, Guyana, the following can be concluded;

People are not aware of what counselling means and comprises. Thus, they are not able to seek help and advice when they have problems

Majority of the public believed counselling is important and necessary

Majority of the public trust and are willing to take advices from counsellors

Majority of the public are not aware of counselling centres in Guyana

Majority of the public do not see or believe there is or should be any shame in receiving counselling services

The issue of confidentiality is a major issue for some people.

## Recommendations

Based on the survey carried out, the following suggestions were derived; People are not aware of the term “counselling”. Counselling agencies need to do more awareness campaigns, utilising both traditional and modern means of communication.

Region 6 needs counselling programmes, which need to be implemented at the primary education level.

Clients are scared that their sessions are not confidential, therefore counselling agencies need to address this issue by outlining counsellors roles and duties and their ethical guidelines.

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