

# Chapter 49

## The Perception of Muslim Clients Towards Non-Muslim Counselors

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### ABSTRACT

*Having a counselor with a different religious background from the client might lead to conflicting perspectives. This chapter intends to explore the perception of a Muslim client in choosing a non-Muslim counselor. The concept of helping process, which is highly respectable in the teaching of Islam, is explicated. Muslims are encouraged to help each other, especially those who are in need. Preferably, a non-Muslim counselor should have some basic understanding of the Pillars of Islam prior to conducting a counseling session with a Muslim client. The knowledge will facilitate the counselor understanding process of the clients without bias. It is anticipated that the information presented herewith would benefit non-Muslim counselors and help them in understanding their Muslim clients better. This chapter also examines the cultural issues that may influence the effectiveness of a counseling session between Muslim clients and non-Muslim counselors.*

### INTRODUCTION

The challenges in human life today are highly complex. Counselor nowadays has become a place of reference to express a problem, seek advice, and a source of motivation. In addition, they also become a place of discussion about the various human scenario and diverse problems, which are getting increasingly critical and community-specific. Consequently, they need to equip themselves with vast knowledge and various skills not only to strengthen their existing counseling skills but also to deal with diverse clients of a different background. It is essential to streamline the counseling services offered to address the

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-3432-8.ch049

growing societal complex problems. However, there are counseling methods that emphasized the Western way of thinking, which are incompatible with the culture, religion, and norms of the society in Malaysia.

A counselor with good counseling skills but lack knowledge in the field of religion, or vice versa, has limitation in offering counseling services. For instance, if a client is facing a critical religious issues, the counselor will not be able to help the client, effectively. This is because religious issues must be handled with due care, especially matter related to the legal aspect of the religion. Hence, the question; could a non-Muslim counselor provide an effective counseling service to a client, especially when it involves religion-related issues?

Counseling is a process that involves a counselor and a client in which the intention is to have a better outcome for the client. Both the client and the counselor are important to the counseling process. Having a counselor from a different religious background from the client might contribute to conflicting of perspectives between the counselor and the client. Multicultural counseling, as explained by Sue and Sue (2008), refers to the role and helping process that employed a method and a goal setting consistent with the client life experience and values. It also takes into account the client identity as an individual and a member of a society by using a strategy that is universal and specific to the client's culture when making an evaluation, diagnosis, and a treatment for the client. The cultural diversity between a counselor and the client makes the counseling process unique, which should be taken into account by the counselor. This is explained by Hays and Edford (2010) who asserted that the role of a client's cultural identity must be given due consideration during a counseling session because it has a strong influence on the client experience. A client who attends a counseling session with a counselor of a different religious belief is expected to undergo a unique experience. The limitation of understanding of the belief as well as the different values between a Muslim client and a non-Muslim counselor will somehow affect the counseling session effectiveness.

Counseling also occurs in the Islamic teaching. The concept of a helping process is highly commendable in the Islamic perspectives. It strongly indicates that Muslims are encouraged to help each other, especially towards those who are in need. The Quran and hadith also emphasize the need for a Muslim to be kind and helpful towards each other. A counselor needs to have some basic understanding of the Pillars of Islam to conduct counseling sessions with Muslim clients. The knowledge and understanding of this fundamental aspect of Islamic teaching help to ease the process of helping a client without prejudice. As a multicultural counselor, the combination of knowledge, awareness, and skills are the three main components required to conduct a counseling session, efficaciously. This paper explains counselling from the perspective of Islam, the duties of Muslim clients and issues regarding Muslim clients and non-Muslim counsellor. It is anticipated that the information offered in this paper would benefit non-Muslim counselor to have a better understanding towards their Muslim client. The non-Muslim counselor restricted understanding of the clients' belief as well as the different values between a Muslim client and a non-Muslim counselor will somehow affect the therapeutic relationship and the efficacy of the counseling process. This chapter also examines the cultural issues that may influence the effectiveness of the counseling session between a Muslim client and a non-Muslim counselor.

## **Counseling From the Perspective of Islam**

Counseling is a process of a helping relationship between a counselor, who is trained and specialized in the field of counseling, and a client who needs an assistance and guidance. The helping nature of a counseling process between a counselor and a client is a noble feat, which is commendable in the Islam

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