



## Issues and Challenges of Experienced Counselors to Obtain Counseling Services in Malaysia

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**Abstract.** Counseling services are usually provided by counselors to specific target groups such as students, parents, and the community. However, the aim of this study is to look at the challenges of counselors themselves to obtain counseling services. This study is a qualitative study in the form of semi-structured interviews among eight counselors with more than 10 years of experience. The scope of the study revolved around exploring the challenges of obtaining counseling services. Data were analyzed by using the thematic analysis method that has been recommended by Braun and Clark (2006). The findings of the study found that the challenge for counselors to obtain counseling services is perception and stigma, the counselor's personal attitude, and the counselor's way of thinking. Discussion and implications of the study are also discussed in this study.

**Keywords:** Counselor, Perceptions, Challenges, Attitudes, and Ways of Thinking



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## Introduction

Counseling services become a major agenda when individuals are faced with psychological problems related to human behavior and psychological issues. Counselors are responsible for helping individuals to identify their goals and potential solutions to any issues or problems caused by psychological instability, improve self-concept as well as promote behavioral change and optimal mental health (American Counseling Association, 2016). However, counselors as ordinary human beings also did not escape from dealing with life issues like other human beings. So, the question is, to what extent will counselors get counseling services?

According to Vogel and Wester (2009), the attitude to seek counseling services also contributes to the challenges that individuals desire to seek help from counselors. In addition, there are also other factors such as stress and the factor of wanting to keep something secret from the knowledge of others becomes an attraction to seek counseling services (Cramer, 1999; Deane & Chamberlain, 1994; Rusnani, Loh, & Asmah, 2008). It can also contribute to the willingness of the individual or counselor to seek the help of counseling services.

Moreover, perception or stigma also causes individuals to refuse to seek counseling services (Drapalski, Lucksted, Perrin, Aakre, Brown, DeForge, & Boyd, 2013). According to Corrigan (2004), there are two types of perceptions that often cause individuals not to be interested in counseling services, namely community perception, and self-perception. The community's perception is through the community's negative interpretation of counseling services from counselors. While self-perception is a negative self-perception to seek

help from a counselor. This causes individuals to refuse to seek services from counselors and appropriate treatment which includes influencing interest and experiencing low self-concept (Faizura Rohaizad, 2014). Therefore, the objective of this study was to explore the challenges faced by experienced counselors to obtain counseling services from registered counselors.

## Method

The design of this study is a qualitative approach in the form of a case study to answer research questions that provide an explanation of what are the challenges of experienced counselors to obtain counseling services.

All study participants met the criteria set by the researcher. This study has examined a total of eight participants among experienced counselors who have a registered counselor as well as a certificate of practice and meet the criteria required by the researcher. According to Creswell (1998), a qualitative study is recommended for five to twenty-five people. Therefore, the researcher has selected four male participants and four female participants for this study. There are four participants have a Master's Degree in Counseling while four others have a Bachelor's Degree in counseling. All of them are Malay or Muslim. They are voluntarily agreed to take the time involved in this interview by using a pseudonym and meet the criteria of research ethics

## Results and Discussion

The data in this study were analyzed using the thematic analysis method that has been recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). Overall, the results of the analysis of the study have published the main themes, three sub-themes, and six categories to answer the objectives and questions of this study.

**Table. 1** Themes, Sub Themes and Categories of the Study

Themes	Sub Themes	Categories
The challenge of getting counseling services	Perception	Self Counselor Society
	The personal attitude of the counselor	Tends to give excuses Take it easy
	Way of thinking	Positive Thinking

### Challenges for Experienced Counselors to Obtain Counseling Services

The results of data analysis for the theme that has been set by the researcher have been able to produce three sub-themes and six categories as shown in table 1. For the sub-theme of perception, the researcher has obtained three categories, namely self, counselor, and society.

#### 1. Perception

There are negatives perceptions of experienced counselors to seeking counseling services. Emran stated that his own perception is also a challenge to get counseling services. This has been explained by Emran as follows;

“People who will conduct sessions with me probably will accept me as who I am but I am not open in meeting with the counselor due to my personal factors. Because there are many things that play in my mind, it is too challenging for me” (Emran, p.7, p. 58).

According to Aliah, her self-perception was she thinks that the counselor viewed her as an individual who was unable to manage her life when she seeks help for counseling services.

“It seems that the counselor is not able to manage his or her own life on the assumption of other counselors” (Aliah, b4, p.5).

Belinda, on the other hand, is worried about the community's perception of counselors who attend the counseling sessions.

"People who don't know what counseling is will have a stigma against counseling is only for people who have problems. I don't like controversy, if I want to meet the counselor, I will meet quietly and did not let other people know this" (Belinda, p 2, p. 15).

While Carolina thinks that society often looks askance at counselors who seek counseling services. From this point of view, Carolina said that there are many things that can be learned from a counselor.

"People's view of us is often negative when we seek help from a counselor, they think that we are useless or problematic counselor. For those people who see a counselor people with problems are actually many more factors a person sees a counselor" (Carolina, p. 14, p. 39).

## 2. Personal Attitudes of Counselors

The personal attitude of the counselor also plays a role in the challenge to obtain counseling services. This personal attitude has been a challenge for Aliah to seek counseling services.

"Sometimes it's busy and I don't have time to meet it. After all, we ourselves know how to solve the issue unless it is a complicated issue" (Aliah, p.20, p. 8).

Emran thinks the timing is not appropriate due to self-factors.

"The time required to see the counselor is not suitable, it may also be an individual factor. I mean myself to meet the counselor" (Emran, p.19, p. 58).

Gayah also stated the same thing that her procrastinating attitude is also a major challenge to get counseling services.

"We also sometimes feel lazy to go to counseling sessions and then want to seek help when our problem has become worsen. That's the weird thing. You should go early, don't wait for the problem become worsen" (Gayah, b1. P. 77).

## 3. Positive Thinking

The findings also show that the participants are able to apply positive thinking techniques. Din is always practicing positive-minded and assumes all problems will have a way out.

"I think all problems have a way out. Slow or fast, so we take it as a challenge that makes us grow. So the third is not to listen too much from outside, especially threats from outside and the negative words that we receive because if we take all of that, we cannot do anything" (Din, v.4, p. 46).

The same technique is performed by Gayah. Gayah also applies this technique to preserve her well-being.

"Think positive that every problem has a solution. Don't think it's too complicated. Every problem must have a way out. If we think negatively, it is negative. If we think positively, it will be positive. So every issue or problem that we encountered must have a solution" (Gayah, p.17, p. 78).

## Implications of the Study

Creative and innovative approaches as well as the use of e-counseling as a medium are used to encourage MARA counselors themselves to seek counseling services due to high commitment. Creative initiatives in the use of technology have been empirically proven to be effective through domestic and foreign studies (Barak & Bloch, 2006; Cohen & Kerr, 1998; Ramlan Hamzah, 2009; Zaida Nor Zainuddin, 2010).

In addition, the personal perceptions and attitudes of counselors also play an important role in obtaining counseling services. Counselors are often influenced by their personal attitudes and the easy-going attitude becomes their main challenge to seek counseling services and then, in the end, it has ultimately harmed themselves (Eisenberg, Golberstein, Gollust, 2007).

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has answered the research questions and objectives that have been outlined. Hopefully, the results of this study can provide a big picture and a deep impact on the universality of counseling services in Malaysia. The changes in perceptions, attitudes and thought patterns should be initiated by counselors themselves as individuals in this profession to improve personal well-being among counselors in Malaysia.

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