

# Influence of Knowledge, Belief and Principles Orientation on Ethical Behavior of Malaysian Counsellor

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**Abstract**— Ethical behavior is important in counselling services. Ethical knowledge, ethical belief and ethical principle orientation will impact the ethical behavior of counsellors when conducting counselling services. This study was to investigate the influence of ethical knowledge, ethical beliefs, ethical principle orientation on ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia. The correlational research design was used. The sample size was 355 counsellors all over Malaysia. Pearson correlation, linear regression and multiple regression analysis were used in this study. Correlation analysis showed a significant relationship between ethical knowledge and ethical behavior of counsellors. Results showed that there was a significant relationship between ethical beliefs and ethical behavior of counsellors. However, there was no significant relationship between ethical principle orientation and ethical behavior of counsellor. The result of multiple regression analysis showed that only the ethical knowledge and ethical beliefs is a predictor of ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia. In addition, the study showed that the ethical principle orientation is not a predictor of ethical behavior of counsellors in Malaysia. The findings of this study can provide guideline to counsellors improve their ethical behavior, particularly in terms of ethical knowledge, ethical beliefs and ethical principle orientation to practice ethically. Overall results of this study imply that

very useful in the counselling profession, especially in the field of ethics counselling, counselling curriculum and research in Malaysia.

**Keywords**—*ethics, counselling, ethical knowledge, ethical behavior, principle orientation.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

In 1996, full-time counselling teachers were appointed to fulfilled the needs of guidance and counselling teachers at secondary schools [15]. Counselling career is not just limited in school setting, but it is increasingly accepted by the Malaysian community and this can

be proven by the existence of counsellors, psychologist, guidance and counselling teachers as well as student advisors in public and private organizations. Every counsellor who wants to conduct counselling practices and qualified to do so need to register with the Board of Counsellors as Registered Counsellor (K.B) and obtain a certificate of practice or (P.A).

## II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Ethical knowledge is important to ensure counsellors behave ethically when conducting counselling services [7]; [9]; [12];

[18]. Research shows that ethical knowledge have association with counsellors' ethical behavior. In Malaysia, there are some of the counsellors serving mainly in schools and they did not have intensive training at the degree level in the field of counselling [9]. Also, there are some counsellors appointed by the State Education Department to be teachers of guidance and counselling in schools based on Professional Circular Letter No. 3/1996 [15].

When there is no four years intensive training in the field of counselling, it can cause counsellors or guidance and counselling teachers having insufficient knowledges and skills in counselling, but also lack of ethical knowledge. In addition, there are post-graduate courses at teachers' educational institutions that only have a short period of time and counselling components can not be given at full emphasis [9].

Inadequate knowledge may affect the actions taken by the counsellor when they faces an ethical conflict. Study by Lambie

Hagedorn and Ieva [12] demonstrates ethical and legislative knowledge over a 13-week course of ethics courses can improve ethical decisions that provide guidance on what action should be taken by trainee counsellor. This study shows how much importance of ethical knowledge to a counsellor so that any action taken is appropriate and ethical which does not harm any party. There are many studies founded involving ethical dilemmas because there is a conflict between ethical counsellors beliefs about what counsellors need to do with what counsellors should do [2]; [13]; [19]; [20]. Conflict of ethical beliefs bring harm to clients in counselling sessions [13].

In Alabama, their ethical practitioners suggest counsellors who do not comply with ethical guidelines to leave counselling careers [2]; [6]; [17]. There are several cases in overseas that involve client's belief in ethical behavior that has occurred which are the case of Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley [11] and Ward v. Wilbanks Case [21], [22]. So this study is important to know the relationship between counsellors' ethical belief and counsellors' ethical behavior in Malaysia.

When there is an unclear ethical guide, counsellors tend to rely on the value system and the understanding of existing ethical codes [19]; [23]. Counsellors need to be careful in making ethical decisions. Ethical considerations in making decisions involving ethical dilemmas are important because wrong consideration can lead to a major negative impact in client's life and the parties involved, as example causing death [16].

The researcher wanted to conduct this study because the principle orientation was very important in the counselling service. If a counsellor is wrong in making a decision (eg, case of Keeton v. Anderson-Wiley [22] and Ward v. Wilbanks [23]) it is likely to cause harm to the client, life-threatening clients, counsellors and other individuals who involved. The harm is not just about physical and emotional harm, but can be the cause of the death to the parties who involved. So the study of the effect of the ethical principles orientation on the ethical behavior of the counsellor is very important and needs to be conducted especially in Malaysia.

There are only few numbers of study conducted in Malaysia to determined the influence of principles orientation on ethical behavior among counsellors and it should be increase. The behavior of counsellors in Malaysia is also not fully monitored by the Counsellors Board as many Malaysian counsellors are still unregistered and have no practice certificate. Until January 2014, the total number of registered counsellors is 5668 [14]. Board of Counsellors can not fully monitored ethical behavior of counsellor who did not registered with them.

Generally, this study aims to identify the knowledge, beliefs, principles orientation and ethical behavior among Malaysian counsellors.

The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

- (i) Identify the relationship between ethical knowledge, ethical beliefs, principles orientation on ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia.
- (ii) Identify the influence of ethical knowledge, ethical beliefs, principles orientation on ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia.

### III. METHODOLOGY

This study is a quantitative study by using survey design. The population of this study was all counsellors in Malaysia and a total of 355 counsellors were selected as samples of respondents.

The instrument used in this study consists of 4 sections which were part A (Demographic Section), part B (Ethical and Legal Issues in Counselling Questionnaire-Revised (ELICQ-R) [12] to measure ethical knowledge, part C (Ethics of Practice Survey) [4], to measure Ethical Belief and Behavior and part D (Ethical Decision Making Scale-Revised (EDMS-R) ([1] to measure the ethical principles orientation.

Type of analysis that use in this study were descriptive analysis by using frequency and percentage, and inferential analysis by using Pearson correlation, Linear and Multiple regression.

### IV. RESULTS

H<sub>01</sub>: There is no significant relationship between ethical knowledge and ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia.

Through Pearson correlation analysis that had been conducted (Table I), result shows that there is significant weak, positive relationship between ethical knowledge and ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia ( $r = .262, p < .05$ ). It's mean that counsellor who have high level of ethical knowledge are associated with high ethical counsellor. So, it can be conclude that counsellor who have high level of ethical knowledge shows high ethical behavior.

TABLE I.

Variable	Relationship between Ethical Knowledge and Ethical Behavior			
	Mean	S.D	r	p
Ethical Behavior	51.70	4.70	.262**	.000
Ethical Knowledge	19.45	3.75		

\*significant level at  $p < .05$

H<sub>02</sub>: There is no significant relationship between ethical belief and ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia.

Table II shows the result of Pearson correlation analysis that had been conducted to determine the association between ethical belief and ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia. Outcome of the analysis revealed that there is

Model	Coefficients Estimated Ethical Behavior Models			
	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.297 <sup>a</sup>	.088	.080	4.50

significant weak, positive correlation between ethical belief and ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia ( $r = .16, p < .05$ ). So, the null hypothesis was rejected. It's shows that counsellor who have high level of ethical belief shows high ethical behavior.

TABLE II.

Variable	Relationship between Ethical Belief and Ethical Behavior			
	Mean	S.D	r	p
Ethical Behavior	51.70	4.70	.160**	.002
Ethical Belief	510.37	116.81		

\*significant level at  $p < .05$

H<sub>03</sub>: There is no significant relationship between principle orientation and ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia.

Table III shows the result of Pearson correlation analysis that had been conducted to determine the association between principle orientation and ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia. Result from the analysis revealed that there is no significant correlation between principle orientation and ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia ( $r = -.065, p < .05$ ). So, the null hypothesis was accepted. It's shows that principle orientation have no association with ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia.

TABLE III

Variable	Relationship between Principle Orientation and Ethical Behavior			
	Mean	S.D	r	p
Ethical Behavior	51.70	4.70	-.065	.220
Principle Orientation	14.72	8.36		

\*significant level at  $p < .05$

H<sub>04</sub>: Ethical knowledge, ethical belief, principle orientation are not significant predictor of ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia.

A multiple regression was run to predict ethical behavior among counsellors in Malaysia from ethical knowledge, ethical belief and principle orientation. Table IV explain about the summary of the model. The results of the multiple regression indicated that the predictors (ethical knowledge and ethical belief) explained 8.8% ( $R^2=.088$ ) the variance of counsellors' ethical behavior. It was found that only two factors can predict counsellors' ethical behavior which are ethical knowledge ( $p = .00, p < .05$ ) and ethical belief ( $p = .02, p < .05$ ). So, the null hypothesis was rejected.

TABLE IV

In Table V, among the significant predictors, we can see that ethical knowledge is the most significant predictor to counsellors' ethical behavior compare to ethical belief as the ethical knowledge recording the higher beta value ( $\beta = .241, p < .001$ ) and ethical belief ( $\beta = -.126, p < .001$ ).

The equation of multiple regression as below:

$$Y' = a + b_1X_1 + b_2X_2$$

$$Y' = 43.83 + -.302 + .005$$

Explanation:

Y' = ethical behavior

X<sub>1</sub> and X<sub>2</sub> = (X<sub>1</sub>) ethical knowledge, (X<sub>2</sub>) ethical belief

a = constant

b<sub>1</sub> and b<sub>2</sub> = regression coefficient

Y' = 43.83 + (-.302) ethical knowledge + (.005) ethical belief.

Regression coefficient value of ethical knowledge is -.302 and it shows that if there is no independent variables (ethical knowledge and ethical belief), the ethical behavior value is -.302. Next, regression coefficient value of .005 shows that if there is increasing in ethical knowledge by 1, the ethical behavior value will increase by .005. Besides, regression coefficient value of -.041 shows that if there is increasing in ethical belief by 1, the ethical behavior value will increase by -.041.

TABLE V

Model	Multiple Regression Coefficients					
	Unstandardized Coefficients		Beta	p	Collinearity Statistics	
	B	Std. Error			Tolerance	VIF
Constant	43.83	1.57		.000		
Ethical Knowledge	-.302	.065	.241	.000	.973	1.028
Ethical Belief	.005	.002	-.126	.015	.968	1.033
Principle Orientation	-.041	.029	-.073	-1.43	.995	1.005

## V. DISCUSSIONS AND CONCLUSION

Knowledge of the code of ethics can reduces unethical behavior committed by the counsellor in the aspects of bilateral relations and various relationships. Research conducted by Jing Deng, Mingyi Qian, Yiqun Gan, Sherlyn Hu, Jun Gao, Zheng Huang and Lili Zhang [8] found that the counsellor's knowledge of the code of ethics introduced by the China Psychological Association in 2007 able to reduces their ethical misconduct and ethical dilemma.

Outcome from the research by Jing Deng et al. [8] and Gao and Zhao [3] also show that ethical knowledge can help to improve the counsellors' ethical behavior. Both studies relate

that ethical education can have a positive impact in promoting ethics in psychotherapy and counselling.

If we compare the data of Jing Deng et al. [8] during year 2006, counsellors in China did not receive ethical-related training except counsellors who had received counselling education in the west. It shows that ethical education have a good effect in increasing counsellors' ethical knowledge regarding to the various relationship and reduces violations or ethical misconduct among them.

The finding from this research shows that there is a significant relationship between ethical belief and ethical behavior of counsellors in Malaysia. The finding of this study is supported by Elliot [2] and Kaplan [10] which explain that there are counsellors who have beliefs and values that are contrary to the ACA Code of Ethics, the American Counselling Association 2014. When a counsellor's belief related to the code of ethics is low, the counsellor rejected clients who need the counselling services offered by them. If the counsellor rejected clients who have different sexual orientation (homosexual), this is the example of improper act and the counsellor has done an unethical behavior.

The findings also show the importance of counsellors having high ethical beliefs because with good ethical beliefs, counsellors will tend to have high ethical behavior. Good ethical beliefs are important so that counsellors are clear with their belief and acting ethically. If the counsellor's belief is right, he or she tends to do the right and ethical behavior.

The findings show that there is no significant relationship between the principles orientation and counsellor's ethical behavior. This study finding is contradict to Sperry [19] which found that there are counsellors who make false judgments and it leads to ethical misconduct.

Hayman and Covert [5] states that counsellors also have the tendency to make ethical decisions by involving public opinion. If the public opinion taken into account is ethical, then the action is ethical. But if the wrong opinion is taken into account as a solution to the ethical dilemma faced, the counsellor has directly carried out unethical behavior. If the decision is taken in a serious situation for example involving a student who wants to commit suicide, then the safety and life of the student is threatened. This situation will become more complicated if such unethical action taken and causing the client's life to be threatened.

As a conclusion, counsellors must enhance their ethical knowledge in order to guide them dealing with ethical dilemmas. Counsellors should have good ethical belief to helps them make effective ethical decision making in dealing with ethical dilemmas. Ethical knowledge and ethical beliefs leads to high ethical behaviors and it will helps counsellor in their counselling practices. As a professional helper, counsellors has a big duty to promoting ethical behaviors to their clients and maintaining the good impression of the community to the counselling profession.

## VI. IMPLICATIONS

The implications of this study are counselling programs in order to apply a deeper and more ethical knowledge to future counsellors who one day will become a professional counsellor. In addition, continuous education in ethical counselling courses is important to ensure counsellors are always aware of the ethical behavior that they should practice. Furthermore, the role of the authorities such as the Board of Counsellors (Malaysia) in the enforcement of the CPD (Continuous Professional Development) system in the aspect of ethical is importance to make sure that counsellors regularly update their ethical knowledge and avoid unethical behaviors.

## VII. RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Suggestions for future research is they can explore another aspects or variables that give great influence and impact to counselling ethics such as the influence of counsellor's ethical behavior on their work load in the organization. Besides, there are another aspects or variables of ethics such as virtue, the use of ethical decision models and aspects of morality that can be studied which can increase branch of knowledge in ethical counselling in future.

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