

COUNSELOR ETHICS IN IMPLEMENTING INFORMED CONSENT FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS: A LITERATURE STUDY

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the application of informed consent in counseling services for children and adolescents, with a focus on ethical aspects, legal protection, and efforts to build professional relationships between counselors and clients. The method used is library research, by reviewing various academic sources such as journals, books, and relevant legal documents. Data collection techniques are carried out through literature reviews, while data analysis techniques use a descriptive-qualitative approach to interpret the contents of these sources. The results of the study indicate that informed consent is not just filling out a form, but rather a deep and ongoing communication process. In the context of children and adolescents, its implementation becomes more complex because it must consider age, cognitive capacity, and involve the consent of parents or guardians. However, active participation of children remains important so that they understand the counseling process that will be undertaken. Counselors are required to have empathetic communication skills, an understanding of legal provisions, and sensitivity to the psychosocial conditions of clients. The proper application of informed consent is a strategic step in creating professional, safe, and client empowerment-oriented counseling services

Keywords: Confidentiality, Informed Consent, Communication

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INTRODUCTION

Ethics in guidance and counseling services are the main foundation that ensures the implementation of a safe, responsible, and respectful professional relationship between counselors and clients. Ethics not only regulate professional behavior, but also reflect the counselor's moral commitment to upholding human rights, individual dignity, and the best interests of clients. Within this ethical framework, counselors are required to carry out their duties empathetically, objectively, and sensitively to the psychological conditions and socio-cultural backgrounds of clients, including children and adolescents as vulnerable groups. Therefore, counseling services do not only rely on technical skills, but must also be organized based on moral principles and justice (Adela., et.al, 2025).

One of the main pillars in the practice of counseling ethics is the application of informed consent. Informed consent is a conscious agreement given by the client after receiving a thorough explanation of the goals, procedures, risks, benefits, and limitations of the counseling services to be received (Amri., et.al, 2024). This concept reflects respect for individual autonomy and is a form of transparency and accountability in the counselor-counselee relationship. In the context of counseling children and adolescents, the application of informed consent requires a special approach because they do not yet have

the full legal capacity to make their own decisions. Therefore, it is necessary to involve parents/guardians in the consent process, while still ensuring that children and adolescents remain actively involved and treated as subjects, not objects of services.

(Rahmina, 2024) However, the reality in the field shows that the practice of informed consent has not been carried out optimally, especially in child and adolescent guidance and counseling services. Based on data from the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection (KPPPA) in 2023, there were more than 13,000 cases of children experiencing psychological stress due to not understanding or not being involved in the counseling service process they were undergoing. This shows a major gap in the implementation of participatory and transparent principles, and highlights the importance of a more inclusive and communicative approach in explaining the rights and service processes to children. In addition, this practice is often ignored due to the mistaken assumption that children do not have the capacity to understand the process.

Furthermore, the Indonesian Counselor Association (IKI) Report revealed that most school counselors do not yet have an adequate understanding of the principles and implementation of informed consent ethically and legally. Many counselors have not been trained in explaining service information simply, clearly, and in accordance with the child's cognitive development stage. In addition, there are no standard operational guidelines that can be used as a reference by counselors to implement informed consent consistently. This unpreparedness strengthens the gap between the idealism of professional ethics and real practices in the field, which ultimately has the potential to harm counselees in terms of psychological and legal protection (Azzahra, et.al, 2024).

This journal offers a new contribution by comprehensively discussing the concept and implementation of informed consent in child and adolescent counseling services in Indonesia. Different from previous studies that only touched on general ethical aspects, this paper specifically highlights the integration between national legal norms, professional ethical values, and contextual practical approaches in the implementation of informed consent. The main focus is directed at how counselors can convey information appropriately to children and adolescents based on their age, cognitive level, and emotional sensitivity, without ignoring legal procedures that require parental/guardian consent (Rimayati, 2023).

The main benefit of this study is to provide practitioners, educators, and prospective counselors with an in-depth understanding of the importance of implementing informed consent that is not only legally valid but also psychologically meaningful for clients. With this comprehensive understanding, it is hoped that service providers will be more aware of their ethical responsibilities and be able to build professional relationships based on trust and active participation. In addition, this journal is also expected to be a reference in developing more ethical, child-friendly counseling service policies that support the rights of clients in schools and other psychosocial institutions, in line with the principles of child protection regulated in national and international law.

RESEARCH METHODS

In this study, a qualitative approach was used to explore the application of informed consent in the context of guidance and counseling. Qualitative methods were chosen because they allow researchers to explore the experiences, perceptions, and contexts of participants in more depth in relation to the theory being studied (Fikri, 2023).

During the research process, library research was also used to explore and understand informed consent from a broader perspective, by identifying patterns, themes, and meanings that emerged from various text sources, such as articles, books, or other

related documents. The content analysis approach makes it very easy for authors to help explore the understanding and application of informed consent more comprehensively and/or requires further development (Rodinda, 2022)

With the combination of these methods, it is hoped that this study can provide a more complete picture of the relevance and applicability of informed consent in the context of guidance and counseling, while highlighting the contribution of counselors in understanding and guiding individuals in the application of informed consent for children and adolescents.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

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Definition of Counseling Ethics

Ethics has two meanings Practical and Reflective. In fact, ethics means moral values and norms that are practiced or not practiced when they should be. Practical ethics means morality and the same thing as morality: what to do, what not to do, what to do right, and so on. Ethics as a reflection is moral thinking. Human ethics are manifested in moral perception, including the belief that "it is right, not something".

The new feeling that it is wrong to do what he believes is wrong deviates from moral norms and self-esteem when he goes. The actions he takes must be his own responsibility. Likewise, his attitude towards others when his work is destructive or otherwise praised (Jannah and Marjo, 2022).

Ethics in counseling guidance can be interpreted as a set of moral and professional principles that govern the behavior and decisions of counselors in carrying out their duties. This ethics covers various aspects from respecting client rights, maintaining confidentiality of information, to acting honestly and fairly in every interaction with clients. As a profession that is oriented towards providing assistance, counseling requires high ethical standards in order to provide effective and trustworthy services to clients.

In the world of counseling guidance, the concept of ethics, in addition to the code of ethics determined by professional organizations, also reflects the fundamental values that must be applied in every aspect of counseling practice. Counselors are responsible for ensuring that clients feel safe and comfortable in sharing their experiences. Ethics in counseling guidance act as the main foundation that ensures that every counseling process is carried out with moral responsibility and upholds the interests of the client. With clear ethics, the relationship between counselor and client can be established well (Karisma, et al, 2025).

Ethics can be interpreted as a set of rules that determine what is considered right and wrong in human behavior. C. Frederick in this rule helps us understand when our behavior is accepted by society and when it is considered wrong. Ethical rules serve as guidelines for moral behavior. If our actions are accepted and provide benefits to many people, then the action is considered ethical.

Conversely, if our actions harm others, then the action will be rejected and considered unethical. Thus, ethics becomes a guide for moral behavior in society. Ethics is also the study of morality. Morality can be defined as a guideline or standard used by individuals or society to determine good and bad actions. It helps us understand what is right and wrong in our interactions with others and the environment (Firdaus, et al., 2025).

Philosophically, ethics is a branch of philosophy that discusses the values and norms that govern human behavior, both as individuals and groups. In this context, the understanding of ethics can be classified into two types, namely critical reflection and applied reflection. Critical reflection on norms and morality is better understood as a human

effort to assess behavioral ethics philosophically, in line with fundamental changes in social interaction and relationships with the environment. On the other hand, applied reflection on moral norms focuses on how to apply and disseminate these values in everyday life and interactions between humans, which are dynamic and often changing.

In addition, the professional ethics of counselors are the rules of behavior that serve as a reference for counselors in carrying out their duties or responsibilities in providing guidance and counseling services to clients. This ethic includes respect for individual rights, self-development, and maintaining a relationship of mutual respect between counselors and clients. Thus, ethics not only serve as a moral guideline, but also as a foundation for building healthy and productive relationships in a professional context (Alawiyah et al., 2020).

Counseling Code of Ethics

A code of ethics is a guideline for actions, attitudes, behavior, and actions in carrying out tasks in everyday life (Putra & Shofaria, 2019). The code of ethics for the guidance and counseling profession is an integral component of a counselor's life and profession. Since college, all counselors have been equipped with a code of ethics for the counselor profession both theoretically and practically. As prospective counselors practicing in classrooms, laboratories, schools, and outside of school, the Code of Ethics must be implemented so that it is included in all guidance and counseling service activities (Rahardjo & Kusmanto, 2017). If there is a BK teacher who violates the code of ethics, the school itself will impose sanctions. BK teachers remind each other to be careful in their words and actions so as not to violate the code of ethics (Harahap., et.al, 2022).

The Code of Ethics for Guidance and Counseling in Indonesia as compiled by ABKIN contains the following (Sujadi, 2018):

1. Qualification; that counselors must have a) values, attitudes, skills, knowledge and insight in the field of Guidance and Counseling, b) obtain recognition for their abilities and authority as Counselors.
2. Information, testing and research; a) storage and use of information, b) testing, given to counselors who are authorized to use and interpret the results, c) research, maintaining the principles of research targets and confidentiality.
3. Process in service; a) relationship in providing services, b) relationship with clients.
4. Consultation and relationships with colleagues or other experts; a) the importance of consulting with fellow colleagues; b) handover of cases if unable to provide assistance to the client.
5. Institutional relationships; contains rules regarding the implementation of counseling services related to institutions
6. Independent practice and reports to other parties; a). independent practice counselors, concerning the rules for conducting private counseling, b). reporting to other parties.
7. Compliance with the profession, a). implementation of rights and obligations, and b). violation of the code of ethics.

The Concept of Informed Consent in Counselor Ethics

Informed consent consists of the word informed which means having received information while consent means agreement (permission), so informed consent in the profession of education personnel is a statement of agreement (consent) or permission from a counselee that is given freely, rationally, without coercion (voluntary) which will be carried out on him after receiving sufficient information about guidance and counseling.

Informed consent is also considered the right of self-determination, namely the right inherent in humans, in the sense that a person has the right to determine what will be done to him (Lestari & Innaka, 2021).

Basically, informed consent is a communication process. In this communication process, information is given by the counselor, received by the counselee, and documented in the informed consent sheet. Informed consent is not just a consent form obtained from the counselee, but is a communication process. The achievement of an agreement between the counselor and the client is the basis of the entire process of informed consent. The form contains confirmation or documentation of what has been agreed upon (Pratama, 2019).

Informed consent is a term that originates from the medical world, but has been widely adopted in the world of psychology, especially in counseling practice. This concept refers to the process of providing sufficient information to clients before they give their consent to participate in certain services. In the ethics of the Indonesian psychology profession, informed consent is part of the code of ethics that requires counselors to provide information clearly, honestly, and in accordance with the client's understanding capacity. Informed consent is one of the main indicators in building a healthy professional relationship. Without informed consent, counseling can be considered a violation of ethics and has the potential to cause legal conflicts. Therefore, a deep understanding of this concept is an absolute requirement for every counselor who wants to carry out their practice responsibly and ethically.

Informed consent is formal permission from the client that marks the beginning of a valid agreement that allows the start of treatment. Informed consent for minors or clients who are not qualified to provide informed consent themselves is usually left to their parents or guardians. Although there is no general rule that explicitly requires counselors to obtain written permission from parents for children to receive counseling, obtaining parental consent is a good practice for counselors unless there is potential harm to the minor.

Informed consent is a legal and ethical principle that requires counselors to disclose to clients the potential risks, benefits, and alternatives of the proposed counseling. Counselors should ask parents to sign a consent form giving their permission to treat minors at the first session. Counselors must inform parents or guardians of the principle of confidentiality at the beginning of the counseling process or when informed consent is taking place (Fahira, et. Al, 2023).

Requirements for Informed Consent

There are several important elements that must be met for informed consent to be considered valid, namely:

1. Client competence, meaning that the client has the intellectual and emotional ability to understand the information provided.
2. Disclosure of information, namely the extent to which the counselor conveys information completely and honestly.
3. Understanding, where the client truly understands the contents of the information, not just receiving it formally.
4. Voluntary, meaning that consent is given without any pressure or coercion.
5. There is a form of consent, either verbal or written, that can be verified.

Failure to fulfill any of these elements can render informed consent legally and ethically invalid. Counselors need to have high interpersonal communication skills to ensure that each of these elements is met properly, especially if the client has cognitive or emotional limitations, such as in children and adolescents (Asmidah, et. al, 2023).

Informed Consent for Children and Adolescents

In Law No. 23 of 2002 CHAPTER I Article 1 states that "a child is a person who is not yet 18 (eighteen) years old, including a child who is still in the womb. This means that the definition of a minor means a child who is under 18 years old when viewed according to the laws and regulations in Indonesia. Meanwhile, in Civil Law in Article 330 of the Civil Code quoted by Sri Indrawati Andrwati states that a minor means that someone has not reached the age of twenty-one, is not married, and if they are married, they have entered adulthood. In essence, a person is said to be a minor if they have not reached adulthood, are not married, and are still under the care of their parents. Teenagers between the ages of 11 and 14 vary in their understanding of the rights and issues of counseling relationships and should be assessed based on their individual developmental level. Croxton, Churchill, and Fellin argue for considering the age of 14 as the standard of consent for counseling. Every minor who is 14 years of age or older can give effective consent to any legally valid medical or mental health service for themselves and the consent of others are not required.

The service provider will encourage the minor to inform and obtain permission from his/her parents in the treatment, but notification prior to the provision of services is not required. Children under the age of 11 are generally cognitively incapable of understanding and making informed decisions regarding counseling. However, Parker, Rubin, Price, & DeRosier said that guidance and counseling should be carried out as early as possible considering that it is important to lay the foundation for later developmental stages.

There is some evidence that children under the age of 15 and over are less competent to give consent than adults. In essence, the level at which a child has achieved formal operational thinking seems to be generally consistent with their ability to understand the rights and issues necessary to make informed counseling decisions. Generally, the younger the child, the therapist must be willing to share information with parents, and vice versa, the older and more mature a child is, the more he/she can be included in the ongoing informed consent process (Fahira, et. al, 2023).

Children and adolescents are included in the vulnerable population group in the context of mental health services. They have limitations in understanding the risks and benefits of an intervention, as well as limitations in expressing their wishes verbally. Therefore, informed consent in this group must be carried out more carefully and in depth, but this does not mean that the child's voice is ignored. Counselors must ensure that the child understands proportionally what will happen during the counseling process. If necessary, the informed consent process can be repeated in each session. In some cases, the involvement of teachers or assistants is also needed to clarify the goals and benefits of this process. With a participatory and collaborative approach, informed consent is not just a formality, but becomes an empowerment tool for children to better understand their rights and roles in the counseling process (Hasibuan, et. al, 2023).

The Process of Obtaining Informed Consent

The process of providing informed consent cannot be done instantly, but must follow several stages. The initial stage is an explanation of the information, where the counselor conveys the purpose, duration, method, benefits, and potential risks of the service (Fikriya, et al., 2016). After that, enter the open discussion stage, which is when the client is given the opportunity to ask questions, express concerns, or ask for clarification. The next stage is giving consent, either verbally or in writing. The last is a periodic evaluation, where the counselor must verify that the consent is still valid and in accordance with the development of the counseling process, this stage must be carried out with empathy and

sensitivity, especially for clients with language or understanding limitations. This process is not just an administrative formality, but the foundation of a healthy professional relationship. When done correctly, the informed consent process can strengthen trust and openness between clients and counselors (Hasibuan, et al., 2023).

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CONCLUSION

Counseling ethics are the main foundation in the implementation of guidance and counseling services, which aim to protect the rights, confidentiality, and psychological well-being of clients. The code of ethics for guidance and counseling is a guideline for professional behavior that must be adhered to by counselors in carrying out their duties. Since the education period, counselors are equipped with an understanding of the code of ethics to be applied in every service. If a violation occurs, sanctions are given by the school. The ABKIN code of ethics includes seven aspects, such as qualifications, confidentiality of information, service processes, consultations, institutional relations, independent practice, and professional obedience. All of this aims to maintain the professionalism and quality of counseling services. One important principle in this ethic is informed consent, which is the consent given by the client consciously, voluntarily, and after understanding the information conveyed by the counselor completely and honestly. Informed consent is not just a form, but a two-way communication process that emphasizes understanding, clarity of information, and mutual agreement.

This is especially important in services for children and adolescents, which require a more careful approach and involve parents or guardians in accordance with the law and the child's developmental level. Counselors must have good communication skills and be able to create a safe atmosphere for clients to freely convey consent. When implemented properly, the application of ethics and informed consent will strengthen the professional relationship between counselor and client, and increase the effectiveness and success of the counseling process.

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