

## PROFESSIONAL ETHICS AS A PILLAR OF COUNSELOR INTEGRITY IN GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING PRACTICE

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### Abstract

Professional ethics is an important foundation in maintaining the integrity of counselors in guidance and counseling practices. Counselors have high moral and ethical responsibilities, especially in maintaining confidentiality, respecting client rights, and building healthy professional relationships. This study aims to examine the role of professional ethics as a pillar of counselor integrity and its application in the context of guidance and counseling services in educational environments. The methods used are literature studies and descriptive analysis of the code of ethics of the counselor profession. The results of the study indicate that the application of professional ethics not only prevents moral and legal violations, but also strengthens client trust and improves service quality.

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### INTRODUCTION

The counseling profession is a profession that requires not only technical skills but also high moral responsibility. In carrying out their duties, counselors not only act as providers of psychological assistance, but also as figures who must be able to maintain client trust through professional and ethical attitudes (Fazria, et al., 2024). This is where professional ethics are important as the main foundation in building counselor integrity. Professional ethics in guidance and counseling include basic principles such as confidentiality, responsibility, fairness, competence, and respect for individual dignity (Nirwana, 2021). These values serve as guidelines in every interaction between counselors and clients, as well as being a benchmark in assessing the quality and validity of counseling practices (Jannah and Marjo, 2022).

Counselor integrity is an inseparable aspect of ethical practice. A counselor with integrity will act consistently between the values he believes in and his professional behavior, even in difficult situations or when faced with moral dilemmas (Nurismawan, et al., 2024). However, in practice, various challenges are still found that test the integrity of counselors, such as ethical violations, conflicts of interest, or abuse of power relations. This shows that understanding and implementing professional ethics must be a primary concern in the education and supervision of the counselor profession (Daniati, et al., 2024).

Therefore, this study aims to examine the role of professional ethics as the main pillar of the formation of counselor integrity in guidance and counseling practices. Through this study, it is hoped that it can contribute to strengthening the ethical awareness of counselors and improving the quality of guidance and counseling services based on the values of professionalism and moral responsibility (Nugraha, 2023). This

journal is different from previous studies because it emphasizes professional ethics as the foundation of counselor integrity, not just a code of ethics. The focus is also on instilling ethical values since counselor education, as well as critical analysis of the application of ethics in real practice, including challenges such as conflicts of interest and abuse of power. In addition, this journal aims to build ethical awareness and professional commitment, not just socialize the rules, so as to provide a deeper contribution to the development of the guidance and counseling profession.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a literature review method to examine the role of professional ethics as a pillar of counselor integrity in guidance and counseling practice. Literature review was chosen because it allows researchers to collect, organize, and analyze various relevant and current library sources regarding the concept of professional ethics, integrity, and counseling practice. The analysis was carried out critically by reading, classifying, and synthesizing information to build a comprehensive understanding of the role of professional ethics as a pillar of counselor integrity. This research is theoretical and limited to a literature review without primary data collection (Santoso, 2020).

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **Understanding Professional Ethics and Counselor Integrity**

The word ethics comes from the word ethos (Greek) which means character, moral character or custom. Another opinion says that ethics comes from English which is called ethic which means a system of moral principles or rules of behavior, a system, moral principles of rules or ways of behaving. The definition of ethics seen from the etymological aspect means the science of what is usually done or the science of customs. This meaning is the background to the formation of the term "ethics", by Aristotle used to indicate moral philosophy (Shilphy, 2020). Ethics is a critical and rational reflection on the values and norms that govern human behavior, both as individuals and in social groups. Ethics is the science of how humans should live as humans, namely by being responsible and upholding moral values.

A profession is a vocation for someone who undergoes special expertise, after being obtained in long and intensive preparation (study), with the first goal of earning a living. So, a professional is not an amateur and does not practice his/her expertise as philanthropy or charity (K. Bertens, 2020). A professional is a term for someone who has special expertise, carries out a job based on certain competency standards, and is committed to responsibility and ethics in his/her field. A professional is an individual who works not solely for personal gain, but on the basis of expertise and responsibility to the community. Professionalism is an attitude and behavior that reflects a high commitment to the best work standards, ethics, and service.

Professional ethics is a set of moral principles, values, and behavioral norms that serve as guidelines for someone in carrying out their duties and responsibilities in their professional field. This ethic regulates how a professional should behave, act, and make decisions responsibly, honestly, and fairly, both towards clients, colleagues, and the wider community. professional ethics are norms determined by and for a particular professional group, which aim to maintain the honor of the profession and protect the public interest.

In the context of counseling, professional ethics includes responsibility to clients, maintaining confidentiality, competence, professional relationships, and integrity in carrying out guidance and counseling services. Professional ethics require moral responsibility from every individual who carries out a particular job or profession, by

prioritizing the interests of clients above personal interests (Nurul, Yarmis & Dina, 2024). Professional ethics are not only about written rules, but also concern the counselor's moral commitment to uphold human values, responsibility, and honesty in every professional action. In guidance and counseling practice, this ethic is an important basis for maintaining client integrity and trust. In general, integrity is the unity between thoughts, words, and actions that reflect moral values such as honesty, responsibility, and consistency in behavior. According to KBBI, integrity is a quality, nature, or condition that shows complete integrity so that it has the potential and ability to radiate authority and honesty. Integrity is a personal quality that shows honesty, consistency in acting according to moral values, and responsibility for what is believed to be right. People who have integrity will stick to moral principles even in difficult situations or when no one is supervising. (Majdi, 2024)

A counselor is a professional who provides psychological and emotional assistance to individuals (clients) who are experiencing problems in their personal, social, educational, or career lives. Counselors help clients understand themselves, develop their potential, and make the right decisions. Counselors are professionals who have expertise in providing guidance and counseling services to help individuals achieve optimal development. Counselors are facilitators of client growth and development who use psychological principles and counseling techniques systematically. (Raudhatul Jannah & H. K. Marjo, 2024)

Counselor integrity refers to the counselor's commitment to carrying out their professional roles and responsibilities honestly, consistently, and in accordance with ethical values and professional standards. Integrity in counseling practice means upholding moral principles and ethical values in all professional actions and decisions, including when facing dilemmas. Integrity is a very important personality trait for counselors to have because it concerns credibility, trust, and exemplary behavior in relationships with clients. Counselors with integrity are those who: (1) Maintain the confidentiality of information. (2) Not abusing position or power relations in counseling relationships. (3) Respecting the rights, dignity, and autonomy of clients in every counseling session. (4) Consistency between words, values believed, and professional actions. (5) Acting fairly and objectively, free from conflicts of interest (Yulianti, et al., 2024).

Counselor integrity is the moral foundation that supports all professional actions of counselors. Without integrity, a counselor's expertise and technical knowledge will lose their meaning because they no longer reflect the human values that are the core of this profession. In carrying out their duties, a counselor is required to not only be technically competent, but also uphold ethical and moral values. Therefore, integrity is the main characteristic of a professional counselor, namely a counselor who is able to maintain client confidentiality, act fairly, not abuse power, and is consistent in implementing the professional code of ethics as a form of responsibility towards clients and society.

### **The Role of Professional Ethics in Maintaining Counselor Integrity**

Professional ethics play an important role in maintaining the integrity of counselors. These ethics are the moral foundation and principles that guide counselors in carrying out their duties, ensuring healthy and effective relationships with clients, and maintaining trust and security in the counseling process. In the counseling profession, integrity is not only about being honest, but also about consistency between actions, professional values, and codes of ethics. A counselor is responsible for the impact of the professional relationships he or she builds. Therefore, professional ethics becomes a moral compass in every step of counseling services.

The following are the roles of professional ethics in maintaining counselor integrity: First, Building Trust with Clients. Trust is the main foundation in a counseling relationship. Ethics protect this trust, especially through the principles of confidentiality and non-maleficence. Professional ethics require counselors to maintain the confidentiality of information provided by clients. Counselors must avoid abusing client trust and provide objective support. Counselors must build a safe and trusting relationship with clients, where clients feel comfortable sharing their problems. Professional ethics guide counselors to maintain confidentiality, respect client privacy, and be honest. This builds strong trust between counselors and clients, which is the main foundation in the counseling process (Wibowo, 2023).

Second, Respecting Client Rights and Dignity. Professional ethics encourage counselors to provide fair and impartial services, respect individual rights, and avoid discrimination. Counselors must avoid discriminatory behavior, harassment, or exploitation of clients. Counselors must respect the diversity of cultures, values, and beliefs of clients, without discrimination. Professional ethics is a guide so that counselors do not violate clients' human rights (Fitriani, 2023).

Third, Encouraging an Attitude of Responsibility and Accountability. Counselors must be responsible for their actions and be willing to accept evaluation and criticism. Professional ethics emphasizes that counselors must be accountable for decisions made in the counseling process (Rahmawati, 2023).

Fourth, Maintaining Competence and Professionalism. Counselors who uphold professional ethics will build a good reputation in the eyes of the public. This will increase public trust in the counseling profession and allow more people to benefit from counseling services. Counselors must continue to update their knowledge and skills according to professional standards. Ethics require counselors not to provide services beyond their abilities or expertise, so that integrity in practice is maintained (Santoso, 2022).

Fifth, Avoiding Conflicts of Interest. Professional ethics provide guidance for counselors in dealing with various conflicts that may arise in counseling practice. By adhering to ethical principles, counselors can make the right decisions and avoid actions that harm clients. Thus, professional ethics are not just rules, but also a solid foundation for maintaining the integrity of counselors and ensuring that counseling practice provides maximum benefits to clients. Professional ethics regulates counselors to avoid situations that can lead to conflicts of interest or abuse of power. Thus, the integrity of the counselor is maintained and does not harm the client (Prasetyo & Nurhadi, 2024).

#### Implementation of Counselor Ethics in Guidance and Counseling Practice

Counselor ethics are an important part of guidance and counseling practice that cannot be separated from the professionalism of a counselor. These ethics include moral values and behavioral norms that must be adhered to so that the relationship between counselor and counselee runs in a healthy, safe, and mutually respectful manner. In practice, the implementation of counselor ethics is reflected in how a counselor carries out his/her duties and responsibilities with integrity, responsibility, and full professional awareness. A counselor is required to uphold humanitarian values, such as respecting the human rights of every counselee, maintaining the confidentiality of information conveyed, and treating each individual fairly without discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, race, gender, or social background.

Counselors operate as client facilitators, advisors, instructors, consultants, and assistants to help clients grow and manage their daily lives. Counselors are also experts who have the professional authority to provide services. In the process, counselors must actively participate in developing the counseling process with existing approaches and methods. The counselor's personality determines success and ethics. Counselors need

spontaneity, flexibility, focus, openness, emotional stability, self-confidence, and knowledge. (Athalia A. Aptanta Tumanggor, 2022)

(1) Spontaneity, the counselor's capacity to react to events or situations in the counseling relationship. The counselor's extensive experience will help them anticipate responses. (2) Flexibility, counselors must be able to change, modify, and determine methods as needed. This rejects the assumption that customer problems do not have a single solution. (3) Concentration, counselors show concern by focusing on the client. (4) Openness, does not mean that the counselor will not judge, but rather he will try to understand and accept the client's feelings and thoughts. (5) Emotional stability, counselors must be mentally stable. (6) A counselor must always believe that clients can change and form an effective daily life. (7) Commitment to humanity, as social beings, counselors must be sensitive and willing to help clients. The counselor's humanity and devotion drive the counseling process. Based on the results of the personality formulation above, all guidance and counselor practitioners, namely counselors, in carrying out their duties must be accompanied by special ethics and values. Ethics in the counseling profession have been systematically arranged so that they will be easier to understand, internalize, and implement by counselors. The ethics that must be implemented by counselors in their services must involve awareness and commitment to maintaining and maintaining the responsibility to protect the trust and information provided by clients. In the explanation above, it can also be understood that counselors are not only required to understand theoretically the science but from all aspects of personality that lead to positive things, which supports the implementation of professional counselor ethics.

The implementation of counselor ethics in guidance and counseling practices includes: First, Counselors are Able to Maintain Client Confidentiality, One of the main foundations in a counseling relationship is trust. Without trust, the counseling process will not run optimally, because clients will not feel comfortable opening up and expressing personal problems honestly. In this case, confidentiality and privacy are very crucial aspects and cannot be ignored by a counselor. Counselors are required to be able to keep all information provided by clients as something confidential, and to ensure that there will be no misuse of the data or information. The principle of confidentiality in counseling is an ethical and professional obligation that must be adhered to by every counselor. The Counseling Code of Ethics and the Personal Data Protection Act provide a legal and moral basis for counselors not to divulge client information without permission (Chadiza Auliana Utami, 2023).

Second, Respecting others, An attitude of respecting and honoring others without discriminating against ethnicity and race is very necessary for a professional counselor. Because from the nature of respecting and honoring others, concern will arise in the counseling process. This will form a relationship with the client as an effort to establish closeness. And it is hoped that the client will want to be enthusiastic about solving his problems.

Third, Responsibility, is natural, meaning that it has become part of human life, that every human being must be burdened with responsibility. If he does not want to be responsible, then there is another party who forces that responsibility. Thus, responsibility can be seen from two sides, namely from the side of the party who acts and from the side of the interests.

## **CONCLUSION**

Professional ethics is the main foundation that forms the integrity of counselors in carrying out guidance and counseling practices. Counselor integrity is reflected in the conformity between moral values, ethical principles, and consistent professional actions

in providing services to clients. The application of professional ethics not only increases the trust and credibility of counselors, but also ensures the quality of responsible services and respects client rights. Therefore, strengthening the understanding and implementation of professional ethics must be the main focus in counselor education and training in order to maintain integrity and professionalism in counseling practice.

## SUGGESTIONS

In general, it is important for every counselor to continue to improve their understanding and awareness of professional ethical values as part of their integrity in carrying out their duties. Ethics are not only a guideline for behavior, but also a reflection of moral responsibility in building client trust and maintaining service quality. Therefore, educational institutions, professional organizations, and counseling practitioners are expected to work together in instilling ethical values from an early age and creating a work culture that upholds professionalism and integrity.

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