



Characteristics and Ethics of Counseling Psychologists: A Professional Perspective

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Abstract: In an era where society exhibits increasing cultural diversity and rapid technological changes, counseling psychologists must possess appropriate characteristics and ethics to provide quality services that meet professional standards. This article aims to study and analyze the necessary characteristics and ethics for counseling psychologists within the context of Thai society and international standards. This study employs document review and concept synthesis from diverse secondary sources, including academic research, professional documents, and international organization reports. The findings reveal that the characteristics and ethics of counseling psychologists encompass several important dimensions: professional competence, cultural sensitivity, client welfare, responsibility, and continuous self-development. This article presents policy and practice approaches covering curriculum development, supervision, training, and the establishment of professional standards appropriate for the Thai context.

Keywords: counseling psychology, ethics, professional characteristics, cultural sensitivity, supervision

1. Introduction

Counseling psychology is a professional field that plays a crucial role in promoting mental health and supporting individual potential development in society. Over the past decades, the growth of counseling psychology has gained widespread recognition both nationally and internationally, particularly in the context of Thai society, which is facing rapid social, economic, and technological changes (Constantine, 2001; Gerger et al., 2020). These challenges have created increased demand for quality psychological services that are appropriate for the diversity of service recipients.

The characteristics and ethics of counseling psychologists constitute a crucial foundation that determines service quality and professional credibility. International organizations such as the American Psychological Association (APA) and the American Counseling Association (ACA) have established clear standards and practice guidelines regarding characteristics and ethics that counseling psychologists should follow (APA, 2017; Pope & Vasquez, 2016). However, applying these standards in the Thai social context still requires adaptation and development to suit local culture and context.

The importance of studying this topic lies not in directly adopting international standards, but in creating deep understanding about appropriate characteristics and ethics for counseling psychologists in Thai society, including finding approaches to develop and improve

professional standards that align with societal needs and changes in the 21st century. This study therefore aims to analyze the characteristics and ethics of counseling psychologists from a professional perspective, identify emerging challenges and opportunities, and propose sustainable development approaches consistent with contemporary Thai social context.

2. Historical Context of Counseling Psychology

Understanding the development of counseling psychology from past to present is essential for gaining a comprehensive perspective on the changes and adaptations of this field in different eras. Counseling psychology has undergone continuous development and transformation throughout more than a century, with each period having distinct characteristics and different challenges. In its early stages, counseling psychology emerged in the context of education and career guidance in the United States in the early 20th century (Welfel, 2015), focusing on helping individuals choose careers and make social adjustments. During this period, concepts about ethics were not clearly defined, and most practices relied on practitioners' experience and common sense.

The expansion of counseling psychology began seriously after World War II, when many veterans needed assistance in readjusting to civilian life. The growth of this field created a necessity for developing professional standards and clear practice guidelines (Koocher & Keith-Spiegel, 2016). This period marked the beginning of defining necessary characteristics for counseling psychologists, including developing systematic training curricula and creating professional organizations responsible for supervising practice standards. In the 1950s-1960s, development in counseling theories and techniques grew rapidly, with concepts from clinical psychology and psychotherapy being applied to counseling.

During the 1970s-1980s, it was a crucial period for developing ethics in counseling psychology. Increasing awareness about client rights, cultural diversity, and the complexity of relationships between counselors and clients led to the development of more comprehensive and systematic ethical guidelines (Sue et al., 1992). During this period, the importance of cultural sensitivity and the ability to work with diverse client groups gained widespread recognition and was incorporated as part of professional standards. This period also marked the beginning of developing concepts about multicultural competence, which became a crucial foundation for contemporary practice.

Entering the 21st century, counseling psychology faces new challenges from technological changes, expansion of online services, and increasing complexity of mental health problems in contemporary society (Campbell, 2013). These developments have led to revisions and expansions of the scope of characteristics and ethics that counseling psychologists must possess, including the ability to use technology ethically, maintain privacy in the digital age, and provide services appropriate for the increasing diversity of clients.

3. Dimensions of Counseling Psychologist Characteristics

The characteristics of counseling psychologists in the contemporary era encompass several important dimensions that have been developed and refined through decades of accumulated experience and research. Comprehensive analysis of these dimensions will help us understand the current situation and plan appropriate responses.

3.1 Professional Competence

Professional competence is a crucial foundation for quality counseling psychologists. This dimension encompasses theoretical knowledge, practical skills, and diverse experiences. According to American Psychological Association (APA, 2017) standards, counseling psychologists must possess comprehensive knowledge in personality theories,

psychopathology, assessment methods, and diverse intervention techniques. This competence does not come from one-time learning but requires continuous development and improvement throughout one's career. Research by Falender and Shafranske (2017) indicates that professional competence must blend explicit knowledge with tacit knowledge gained from actual practice experience.

Developing professional competence in the Thai social context must consider cultural appropriateness and local context. Thai counseling psychologists need knowledge about Thai values, beliefs, and social systems, including integrating Buddhist concepts and Eastern philosophy with modern counseling approaches. Constantine's (2001) study emphasizes the importance of developing competence consistent with each society's cultural context to maximize service effectiveness and appropriateness. Professional competence also includes the ability to use assessment tools validated in the Thai context, develop appropriate intervention plans, and conduct systematic follow-up evaluations.

3.2 Cultural Sensitivity and Diversity

Cultural sensitivity and diversity have become increasingly important characteristics of counseling psychologists in the 21st century. This dimension involves not only working with people from different cultures but also understanding and respecting diversity in gender, age, religion, socioeconomic status, and physical and mental differences. Research by Ratts et al. (2016) developed Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies, emphasizing not only adapting to cultural differences but also taking action to address social injustices that may affect clients' mental health.

In the Thai social context, cultural sensitivity has complex and diverse meanings. Thai society comprises diverse ethnic groups, each with different languages, traditions, and belief systems. Thai counseling psychologists must develop understanding about this diversity and be able to adapt services to meet each group's specific needs. Tao et al. (2015) found that counselors' multicultural competence positively correlates with counseling outcomes and client satisfaction. Cultural sensitivity also includes awareness of bias and power inequalities that may exist in counselor-client relationships and the ability to manage these issues appropriately.

3.3 Client Care and Safety

Client care and safety are at the heart of counseling psychologist characteristics. This dimension encompasses harm prevention, confidentiality maintenance, creating safe and supportive environments, and appropriately managing crisis situations. According to American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) guidelines, counseling psychologists have a primary duty to attend to and protect client welfare above all else. This principle means that in situations where conflicts exist between different interests, client safety and welfare must be considered first. Pope and Vasquez's (2016) study emphasizes the importance of developing sensitivity and skills in identifying warning signs of self-harm, violence, and other crisis situations.

Client care in the Thai context must consider cultural factors that may affect mental health problem expression and perception. For example, concepts about "saving face" and the importance of family and community may make Thai clients hesitant to disclose personal problems or fear social stigma. Counseling psychologists must therefore develop skills in creating open and non-judgmental atmospheres, including using communication approaches appropriate for Thai culture. Safety care also includes maintaining confidentiality and protecting clients' personal information, which has become more complex in the digital age due to technology use in service delivery. Gerger et al. (2020) highlight the necessity of developing data protection and privacy approaches consistent with international standards and local laws.

4. Ethics in Professional Practice

Ethics in professional practice for counseling psychologists constitute an important framework for determining appropriate behavior and decision-making in service delivery. These ethics do not arise in a vacuum but develop from practice experience, research, and reflection on past mistakes.

4.1 Fundamental Ethical Principles

The fundamental ethical principles of counseling psychologists can be divided into main principles including: non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy, justice, and fidelity. These principles are widely accepted in the international professional community and form the foundation of many organizations' ethical codes (APA, 2017; Welfel, 2015). The principle of non-maleficence is the first and most important principle, meaning avoiding any actions that might cause harm to clients, both physically and mentally. In practice, this principle includes maintaining appropriate relationship boundaries, avoiding personal relationships with clients, and not using clients' personal information for personal benefit.

The principle of beneficence focuses on proactive actions to promote client welfare and development. Koocher and Keith-Spiegel's (2016) study indicates that this principle means not only providing quality services but also supporting clients in developing their own problem-solving abilities and enhancing psychological strength and resilience. Client autonomy is a principle that emphasizes respecting clients' rights to make decisions about their treatment and life conduct, including providing sufficient information for informed consent. Justice involves providing equal and fair services to all clients without discrimination based on factors unrelated to treatment needs.

4.2 Confidentiality and Information Disclosure

Confidentiality is one of the most important ethical principles in counseling psychology practice. This principle is the foundation of trust between counselors and clients and is a crucial condition that makes clients feel safe in disclosing sensitive personal information. Lamont-Mills et al.'s (2019) study found that understanding and adhering to confidentiality principles affects the quality of counseling relationships and treatment outcomes. However, confidentiality is not an absolute principle; there are situations where law and ethics allow or require information disclosure, such as when clients are at risk of harming themselves or others, abuse cases, or court orders.

In the Thai social context, confidentiality has increased complexity due to cultural and family factors. Thai culture that emphasizes family and community importance may create different expectations about information sharing with family members. Counseling psychologists must be able to clearly explain confidentiality boundaries to clients and families from the beginning and must have skills to manage conflicts that may arise between client needs and family expectations. Pope and Vasquez's (2016) study emphasizes the importance of creating clear understanding about confidentiality boundaries from the beginning of counseling relationships, including reviewing and updating this understanding as necessary throughout the service period.

4.3 Relationship Boundaries and Multiple Relationships

Managing relationship boundaries and avoiding multiple relationships is an important and complex ethical issue. Multiple relationships refer to situations where counseling psychologists have more than one role with the same person, such as being both counselor and friend, or having business relationships with clients. APA (2017) study indicates that multiple

relationships may be harmful because they may lead to conflicts of interest, power misuse, and loss of neutrality in counseling. However, not all types of multiple relationships are harmful; careful assessment of risks and benefits is required.

In small communities or areas with limited numbers of counseling psychologists, avoiding multiple relationships may be impossible or detrimental to community access to services. In such cases, ethically managing multiple relationships becomes a necessary skill, including providing clear consultation to clients about potential complexities, planning to manage possible conflicts, and having appropriate consultation and supervision systems. Welfel's (2015) study suggests that counseling psychologists develop the ability to identify potential multiple relationships, assess risks and benefits, and develop strategies for ethical management.

5. High-Performance Employee Bullying Coping Model (HPEBCM)

Supervision and professional development are important components in creating and maintaining quality standards for counseling psychologists. These processes not only help new practitioners develop necessary skills and knowledge but also serve as important mechanisms for maintaining and improving practice standards continuously.

5.1 Supervision Systems

Supervision systems are processes where experienced counseling psychologists provide support, guidance, and practice monitoring for those with less experience. Falender and Shafranske's (2017) study indicates that quality supervision is a crucial factor in developing competence and maintaining ethical standards. Good supervision systems should have clear structures, specific objectives, and systematic evaluation processes. Supervision involves not only knowledge and skill transfer but also professional identity development, ethical consciousness building, and preparation for independent practice.

In the Thai context, supervision systems still have room for development and improvement. The lack of experienced counseling psychologists trained as supervisors is a significant problem. Kavanagh et al.'s (2008) study found that systematic supervisor training affects supervision quality and supervisee outcomes. Therefore, developing supervisor training curricula appropriate for the Thai context is an urgent need. Supervision should also consider cultural factors and population diversity to help supervisees develop abilities to work with diverse clients, including developing awareness of social justice issues and unconscious bias.

5.2 Continuing Education and Professional Development

Continuing education and professional development are responsibilities of counseling psychologists that must be carried out throughout their careers. The rapidly changing nature of psychological knowledge, new technologies, and understanding about cultural diversity make lifelong learning essential. APA's (2017) study emphasizes the importance of developing personal learning plans consistent with career needs and goals, including systematic tracking and evaluation of learning outcomes. Continuing education should not be limited to attending conferences or training but should include reading academic literature, participating in professional communities, conducting research, and reflecting on one's own practice.

Developing continuing education programs in Thailand must consider specific needs and limitations of Thai practitioners, including access to learning resources, language constraints, and cultural appropriateness of content. Developing online curricula and using technology for learning may be solutions that help increase access to learning opportunities, especially for practitioners in remote areas. Campbell's (2013) study highlights the potential of digital technology in supporting lifelong learning for counseling psychologists, including

creating online learning communities and sharing experiences among practitioners. Professional development also includes participating in policy and professional standard setting, supporting research and new knowledge development, and promoting recognition and understanding of counseling psychology in Thai society.

Table 1: Summary of Dimensions of Counseling Psychologist Characteristics and Ethics

Dimension	Key Components	Success Indicators
Professional Competence	Theoretical knowledge, practical skills, diverse experience	Certification, client outcomes, supervisor evaluation
Cultural Sensitivity	Diversity awareness, communication skills, approach adaptation	Multicultural competence scores, client satisfaction
Client Care	Safety maintenance, harm prevention, supportive environment	Harm occurrence rates, client trust
Practice Ethics	Confidentiality, relationship boundaries, ethical decision-making	Number of complaints, guideline compliance
Continuous Development	Continuing education, supervision, practice reflection	Learning hours, professional activity participation

Model 1: Integrative Conceptual Framework for Counseling Psychologist Development



Figure 1: Integrative Conceptual Framework Model for Counseling Psychologist Development
Source: Synthesized by the authors (2025)

6. Conclusion

The characteristics and ethics of counseling psychologists in the contemporary era are at an important transition point. The emerging challenges require careful and creative responses, while simultaneously, emerging opportunities open doors to exciting new possibilities. Developing characteristics and ethics in this era does not mean isolating oneself from change, but means learning to dance to the rhythm of the modern world while maintaining the spirit and core values of the profession.

This research study highlights the importance of developing characteristics and ethics that encompass multiple dimensions, from professional competence, cultural sensitivity, client care, practice ethics, to continuous development. Each dimension is important and interconnected, inseparable from others. The sustainability of the counseling psychology profession does not depend on clinging to old forms but depends on the ability to make counseling psychology teachings and values relevant and beneficial to people in all eras. True development of characteristics and ethics means making counseling psychology an effective "medicine" for the suffering and problems of the modern world while being a "light" that helps guide people toward true happiness and peace.

Future operations must rely on cooperation from all parties, including counseling psychologists, community leaders, academics, policymakers, and general community members. Success in developing characteristics and ethics will occur when everyone works together sincerely and committedly, using counseling psychology principles as guidance. Working with compassion, patience, and wisdom will help us overcome various challenges and create a bright future for counseling psychology and all humanity.

7. Policy and Practice Recommendations

7.1 Education Policy Level

Developing counseling psychology curricula at the higher education level should be improved to align with international standards and Thai society's needs. Integrating content about ethics, cultural sensitivity, and digital world practice skills is essential. Educational institutions should develop evaluation approaches that measure not only theoretical knowledge but also personal characteristic development and ethical consciousness. Creating collaborative agreements with various agencies to provide diverse and quality internship sites, including developing standardized supervision systems for student interns.

7.2 Professional Organization Level

Professional psychology organizations in Thailand should play a proactive role in setting and enforcing ethical standards. Developing strict professional licensing systems and continuous monitoring of member practice. Organizing training and academic conferences to enhance member knowledge and skills, including creating cooperation networks with international professional organizations to exchange experiences and practice standards. Developing transparent and fair systems for reporting and managing complaints about unethical practice.

7.3 Practice Level

Counseling psychologists should develop personal learning plans focused on continuous characteristic and ethical development. Participating in consultation groups with professional colleagues to share experiences and learn from each other. Using technology to enhance service efficiency and access to new knowledge, including developing abilities for self-practice reflection and seeking supervision when necessary. Creating work environments that support ethical practice and self-care to prevent burnout and efficiency loss.

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