



## Counselors Perceptions and Competencies in Handling LGB Clients

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**Abstract:** Despite the growing literature on counselors' competency in handling LGB, few or there is a dearth of studies that have been conducted along this line within the context of Philippine education. Hence, this paper determined the levels of counselors' attitudinal awareness, skills and knowledge in handling the LGB clients. The descriptive quantitative design was used. The researchers utilized a survey questionnaire instruments consisting of two parts, the personal information and the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (SOCCS). There were one hundred eight (108) guidance counselors/advocates participated in the study from the Philippines. It was found out that the overall results based on the SOCCS appeared to be high ( $M=4.80$ ;  $SD=1.08$ ). The attitudinal awareness of the participants seemed to be high while the skills and knowledge of the participants appeared to be in average levels. The higher the scores the greater levels of sexual orientation counselor competency in handling the LGB. Thus, generally, the participants are competent in handling LGB clients.

**Key Words:** Sexual Orientation; Counselor Competency; SOCCS; LGB

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Graham (2009) cited that biased attitudes toward Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual (LGB) may have a negative impact on the LGB clients' perception towards the mental health professionals. The stigma, prejudice and discrimination experienced by LGBT people serve as specific stressors that have an impact on their psychological distress (Meyer, 2003). The problems encountered by the LGBT students in schools are well documented (Hansen, 2007). The LGB clients may seek counseling services, thus the role of the counselors is significant and counselors must be well versed in understanding and addressing the unique needs of the students regardless of their sexual orientation.

The Association for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Issue in Counseling (ALGBTIC) released the suggested competencies for use in counseling the LGBT that promotes development of sound and professional counseling practices (Burnes et al, 2009). Aliason (2009) found out that affirming attitudes of counselors in conducting sessions with lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) clients has an important effect on clients' treatment. Kanamori & Jeffrey (2017) in their study presented positive attitudes of counselors to LGBT clients. Greater personal familiarity and multicultural competence as well as being female were associated with more positive attitudes, whereas quantity of diversity training was not related and professional experience was related to more negative attitudes.



Manalastas & Torre (2016) presented an initial training works in the counseling professional practice raising awareness of LGBT issues. Counselors' competency refers to the awareness, knowledge, skills, and beliefs needed to promote students' academic, career, and social-emotional development (American School Counselor Association, (ASCA), 2012).

Graham (2009) in his study found out the importance of attending workshop dedicated to counseling LGB clients and a general training session on LGB issues. He also stated that participations in the continuing professional development, such as participation in the said workshop and training, is significant in the self-perceived of counselor participants overall competency levels, as well as on the specific knowledge, skills and awareness in handling LGB. Bidell (2005) initiated the use of Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (SOCCS) which measures the knowledge, skills, and awareness levels of counseling competency with LGB clients.

Despite the growing literature on counselors' competency in handling LGB, few or there is a dearth of studies that have been conducted along this line within the context of the Philippine education. Hence, this paper determined the levels of counselors' attitudinal awareness, skills and knowledge in handling the LGB clients using the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (SOCCS; Bidell, 2005).

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY

### 2.1 Research Design

This study utilized quantitative approach, specifically the descriptive design, in collecting and analyzing the data. Ethridge (2004) stated that descriptive studies may be characterized as simply the attempt to determine, describe or identify what is. Descriptive research is aimed at casting light on current issues or problems through a process of data collection that enables them to describe the situation

more completely than was possible without employing this method (Fo& Bayat, 2007).

### 2.2 Participants

The participants were guidance counselors (n=60), guidance personnel (n=14), guidance head (n=13), head of other department (n=5) and teacher (n=9) from the Philippines. There was a total of 108 participants, which comprised of 21.30% male (n=23) and 46.30% female (n=50) and 4.63% (n=5) did not indicate their gender. The mean age is 38 years, ages ranged from 22 to 65 years. The participants are currently employed in National Capital Region (n=44), Luzon (n=42), Visayas (n=5), Mindanao (2). Fifteen (15) participants did not indicate their place of employment. Mostly of the participants are Master's Degree holders (n=73), twenty (20) are Bachelor's degree holders, ten (10) are Doctoral degree holders and five (5) participants did not indicate their highest educational attainment.

The participants' years of service in the counseling profession indicated that 32.41% have 1-5 years (n=35); 30.56% have 6-10 years, 11.11% have 11-15 years (n=11), 16.67% have 16-20 years (n=18), 8.33% have 20 years and above (9%). One participant did not indicate his/her years of service in the counseling profession.

There were 7.41% of participants who did not experience counseling the self-identified LGB (n=8), 46.30% of participants have/had 1-5 self-identified LGB counselees (n=50), 11.11% of participants have/had 11-15 self-identified LGB counselees (n=12), 2.78% of participants have/had 16-20 self-identified LGB counselees (n=3), 13.89% of participants have 20 and above self-identified LGB counselees (n=15), and .93% of participant did not indicate the number of his/her self-identified LGB counselees (n=1).

There were 48.15% of participants attended trainings/seminars/learning activities related to counseling the self-identified LGB students (n=52). On the other hand, 51.85% of participants did not attend any of those.



In relation to participants' trainings / seminars / learning activities on interventions to address the needs and other concerns and issues of the self-identified LGB, there were 31.48% have (n=34) and 67.59% does not have (n=73). One (1) participant did not answer the item in the survey.

### *2.3 Measures*

The researchers utilized a survey questionnaire instrument consisting of two parts. First was the personal information and the second was the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (OCCS: Bidell, 2005).

The personal information included name (optional), age, gender, current work position, school/institution and highest educational attainment. The year/s of service in the counseling profession, number of LGB counselees, attendance in the seminars/trainings/learning activities related to counseling and interventions to address the needs and other concerns and issues of LGB were also included in the survey questionnaire.

The evaluation of counseling competency with LGB clients was measured using the Sexual Orientation Counselor Competency Scale (SOCCS) developed by Bidell (2005) with 29-item self-report instrument designed to assess the knowledge, skills, and awareness components of counseling competency with LGB clients. SOCCS made up of ten questions, the skill subscale with ten questions, and the knowledge subscale with six questions. Responses to the items are based on a seven-point likert scale ranging from 1 – not at all true to 7 – totally true.

### *2.4 Procedures*

The survey questionnaire instrument was administered to the guidance and counseling practitioners in the Philippines through hard copy distribution during counseling professional organization's national convention and through soft copy using google form sent to their email address or social media accounts.

### *2.5 Data Analysis*

The Statistical Package for the Social Sciences or SPSS version 20 used to analyze the data obtained from the instrument. Particularly, this study utilized mean, percentage and standard deviation to present the information gathered for the descriptive questions in the study.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main goal of the present study was to determine the levels of counselors' attitudinal awareness, skills and knowledge in handling LGB clients. The subscales of the Total SOCCS are attitudinal awareness, participants appeared to be high (M=5.80; SD=.79), skills (M=4.27; SD=1.01) and knowledge (M=4.25; SD=.46), however, participants obtained average scores. Based on the current study, it was found out that the overall results based on the SOCCS appeared to be high (M=4.80; SD=1.08).

The participants obtained high scores. The higher the scores the greater levels of sexual orientation counselor competency in handling the LGB. Thus, generally, participants are competent in handling LGB clients based on the SOCCS.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

The attendance in seminars / trainings / learning sessions appeared to be significant in enhancing the competency of the counselors in handling LGB clients. Some topics attended by the counselors were the following: LGBT Psychology 101, Gender sensitive counseling, Common issues of LGBTQ, LGBT Counseling, Discrimination and Rights of LGBT, Counselors in Culturally Diverse population, How to deal with gay struggles, Coming out, Understanding LGBT, Learning Session: Bata Bahaghari: Lessons from Working Together with LGBT Children, LGBT identity, concerns and issues, gender sensitivity, Handling LGBT in schools, LGBT Psychology, Feminist Counseling, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity and Expression.



Based on the present study, the participation of the counselors in the continuing professional development, specifically workshops and trainings, topics and issues in relation to LGB appeared to be significant in enhancing the competency of the counselors in handling LGB clients. Thus, the results of the present study supported Graham (2009) that the participation in workshops dedicated to counseling LGB clients and general training sessions on LGB issues and self-perceived competency levels, suggesting that additional training influenced participants' overall perceived competency.

What is presented in this present study may serve as a baseline measurement of counselors' perceptions and competencies in handling LGBT. At any rate, the evolved findings resulted counselors to become aware on the importance of continuing professional development, specifically participation in the workshops and trainings, in handling clients regardless of sexual orientation.

In spite of this, much still needs to be worked on, particularly when it comes to the number of participants. The measurement used should be validated in the Philippine setting. Additional measurements must also be considered. The results of the present study may be used in future studies to come up with more intensive research on the counselors' perceptions and competencies in handling not only LGB but also transgender clients.

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