

COMPETENCY OF COUNSELLORS IN HANDLING GAY AND LESBIAN CLIENTS IN MALAYSIA



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ABSTRACT

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Competency is defined as a counsellor's efficiency in guiding trainees in terms of knowledge, skills and attitude. This research was conducted to achieve the main objective, which is to explore the competency of Malaysian counsellors in the aspects of knowledge, skills and attitude. To obtain information, the researcher used in - depth interview method through the purposive sampling technique. This research included 15 participants who were made up of registered counsellors and have experience in conducting counselling sessions involving gay and lesbian clients. The data was analysed by studying the transcriptions of interview recordings and identifying the themes that emerged based on the research objectives. The obtained results show (i) knowledge and understanding of gay and lesbian people (ii) information regarding gays and lesbians (iii) application of definitions @ terms (iv) basic counselling skills (v) communication skills (vi) openness attitude (vii) unconditional acceptance attitude. It is hoped that the results of this research would provide guidance for counsellors, especially for counselling involving gays and lesbians. To conclude, researches such as this are further widened and deepened with regards to identifying specific handling methods and guidelines for counselling of gay and lesbian people and in turn, become a source of references for other counsellors.

1. INTRODUCTION

The general definition of competency is being competent, qualified, willingness and the ability to execute a task flawlessly. Boyatzis and Kolb (1995) explained that competency is defined as knowledge, capability and reflected values. Competency is considered as the combination of knowledge, skills and personal traits and behaviour that has to be possessed and practiced in performing a job or position (Siti *et al.*, 2005; Bakar *et al.*, 2017). Horton (2000) explained that in the United Kingdom, competency refers to the actions that can reflect skills in performance while on the other hand, stated that in the United States of America, competency is evaluated through the basic traits in a counsellor that help trainees perform excellently (Rothwell and Lindholm, 1999; Dubois and Rothwell, 2000).

In this research, the competency of counsellors include the aspects of sexuality counselling skills, general knowledge of sexuality and the attitude that has to be possessed by counsellors in order to conduct sessions with clients facing sexuality problems such as being gays and lesbians (Constantine and Ladany, 2001; Caldwell, 2009; Cardwell, 2015). The topic of sexuality counselling must be emphasized on the counsellors as they need to earn the clients' complete trust in order to conduct the counselling session. Counsellors cannot have any prejudicial attitude.

Elements of prejudice are present in cross cultural counselling sessions (Hardianaema *et al.*, 2010). A counsellor can be viewed as unethical if they practice counselling services outside of their competency field as stated in the American Counseling Association (2005) under the section of professional responsibilities (c.2.a).

Counselling competency is vital towards gay and lesbian people as they face greater emotional disturbance issues compared to heterosexuals. At the same time, studies in the West also showed that gays and lesbians are more prone to committing suicides compared to heterosexual people (D'Augelli *et al.*, 2002; Grossman *et al.*, 2005; King *et al.*, 2008; Chakraborty *et al.*, 2011; Reisner *et al.*, 2015). A study by Marshal *et al.* (2011) found that 28% of gays and lesbians have been reported to attempt suicide compared to only 12% of heterosexuals and the numbers continue to increase. The countries involved are mainly the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the European countries; those involved purposefully harmed themselves and 16% have tried to take their own lives (Hunt, 2008).

King *et al.* (2008) said that homosexuals now need to acquire counselling services or health therapies to solve their problems. Not only that they face emotional problems, but they also have other personal problems just as heterosexuals do. Among the problems that they face are depression, career issues, problems at the work place, relationship problems and so on.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Past studies were conducted regarding the incompetency of counsellors with issues such as homophobia (Rudolph, 1990; Satcher and Leggett, 2007) religion (Balkin *et al.*, 2009) lack of training (Barrett and McWhirter, 2002; Pearson, 2003; Dillon *et al.*, 2004; Rutter *et al.*, 2008) and having cold personal relationships with counsellors. Several negative factors influenced competency such as religion, homophobia and heterosexism (Barrett and McWhirter, 2002; Israel and Selvidge, 2003; Rainey and Trusty, 2007; Balkin *et al.*, 2009).

Israel and Selvidge (2003) stated that it would not be possible for a counsellor to believe that it is morally wrong to be part of an ethnic or minority group. However, counsellors can believe that homosexuality is a sin and forbidden in any religion. In several traditional Protestant religions especially, the phrase "Love the sinner, hate the sin" is a highly influential mentality in the Christian community's views towards gay people. There are a few major concerns that have to be weighed as we look at the awareness when facing homosexual clients which are homonegativity, homophobia and heterosexism.

Until now, many counsellors are still uncomfortable with sexuality problems, especially when facing homosexual and transgender clients. Special training must be provided to help counsellors to face this issue for the purpose of identifying and helping these minorities achieve wellness in their lives and also to understand the problems faced by such clients (Pearson, 2003). Other than that, counsellors must also be able to handle their own emotions when facing clients with sexuality problems. Without the appropriate emotional skills, it will be difficult for counsellors to show empathy, genuineness, respect and ultimately immerse themselves in the client's issue. According to Easton *et al.* (2008) when a counsellor is in session with a client facing heavy behavioural problems, the counsellor too becomes more emotional.

Past studies also showed that most researches conducted, locally or internationally, only measured several competency fields only such as multi - cultural counselling (Sue *et al.*, 1992; Constantine and Ladany, 2001). Therefore, the current researcher believes that counselling competency studies must be expanded to other fields that include counsellors' personality competency, elderly people competency, work competency and competency in handling homosexual clients.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research focused on the main research question which is to identify the competency of counsellors. It is the competency that must be possessed by counsellors in handling cases of counselling for gay and lesbian people.

4. METHODOLOGY

This research utilized the qualitative approach in the case study design which involved in – depth interviews using semi – structured interview protocols. Case study is an advantage for the researcher in which it allows for gathering copious information on the participants involved and the environment of the samples on every issue discussed (Fidel, 1984). The case study conducted was said to be more specific, in – depth and wholesome towards every issue studies for each participant (Fidel, 1984; Merriam, 2001; Creswell, 2005). This research involved 15 counsellors registered under Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia (Malaysian Board of Counsellors) with valid certifications of practice. Purposive sampling was used to interview counsellors. Those who have been selected as participants of the research were identified by the researcher as counsellors with experience in handling counselling for gay and lesbian clients in Malaysia.

The research analysis was conducted through the process of data organization for interpretation. Data that have been categorized into the related themes was used to interpret the data obtained into meaningful information. This process used Nvivo 11 method, which corresponded to the view of Glaser and Peshkin (1992) who stated that computer software can assist researchers who use qualitative method in organizing, analyzing and storing data effectively. This program was able to assist the researcher in working more systematically.

This research gave emphasis on certain steps in analyzing data codes by free coding and axis coding (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Dini, 2016). Therefore, certain themes and codes were given to all related information and analysed based on the collected data with the research objective being the guideline. Lastly, an analysis was conducted and the resulting themes from the semi structured interviews conducted through the research objective of observing counsellors' readiness and understanding towards gay or lesbian clients can be seen. All of these themes were presented as well as possible and have been interpreted using a narrative approach in explaining all the issued presented (Suriati and Colonius, 2008).

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

According to the results of data analysis done, it can be deduced that the counselor's competency is a combination of aspects of knowledge, skills and attitudes or behaviors that need to be possessed and practiced in conducting counseling sessions. The findings have displayed six themes to appear which are (i) the understanding of gays and lesbians concepts, (ii) information regarding gays and lesbians, (iii) counseling basic skills, (iv) communication skills, (v) openness attitudes and (vi) positive attitudes.

5.1. The Understanding of Gays and Lesbians Concepts

Results findings have demonstrated that the understanding of gays and lesbians concepts means that the counsellor is able to understand the feelings of the individuals who are trapped in their own feelings and need help from other people. These individuals also require attention as it appears that one of the reasons why they became this way is because of lack of love and attention. It can be perceived through the statement below:

My understanding on this issue is that these people are among the people who crave for attention. To take an example of my own client on how he begins to get caught up in this world is because lack of love. It appears that they need and seek love from someone. Some of them broke up with the people they love, some are seeking for love they never get, some have family conflicts but they all agree that love is what they are looking for (PK11)

According to the statement above, young people especially teenagers in general are going through the process of adolescence and it is a level where they always need someone to share their feelings with other than being loved. In a family institution for instance, female teenagers usually turn to their mothers if they have issues to share or talk about. However, when their parents have no intention of giving them the attention they deserve to get, these

adolescents will turn to their friends as alternative to open up about their feelings (Remafedi *et al.*, 1998). Therefore, according to Kurdex (2001) in same sex relationship, lesbian couple acts more as a friend and not as family. This has made the communication process to be easier as friends will act more attentively and understands better than the family itself.

Next, according to PK5 statement, the understanding of a counsellor can be viewed from the psychological and medical perspectives. In psychology terms, it is said that the reason of the existence of gay and lesbian problems is due to genetic factors but from medical perspective, this genetic factor does not exist. The statement displays that the counsellor has extensive and broad knowledge related to this matter. It is based on his long-term experiences in counselling as he has handled cases involving sexuality. It is proven in the quote below;

For example in gay issue, as we know from psychological perspectives, this group of people is said to be genetically born as gays nevertheless in medical point of view on this issue, it never mentions anything about genetic factor as the problem and it actually does not exist in the first place. It is just that there might be small probability that chromosome aspects contribute to this problem if we were to define it roughly (PK 5)

The statement from PK5 is strengthened by past research when research on genetics demonstrated that gay, lesbian and male transsexual have normal male chromosome. Early research suggested that the influence of different hormones might be the reason someone turn to be gay, lesbian or transgender (Loraine *et al.*, 1970). The research done by Masters and Johnson shows 30 gays and lesbian have low sperm count and also low testosterone hormone content (Kolodny *et al.*, 1971) However, other researches done a few years later do not support these results (Meyer, 1995).

PK1 has also stated that the gays and lesbians factor can also be perceived through psychoanalytic theory. It will pass through the development of these individuals life from their childhood to adolescents and then adulthood life. There are possibilities that throughout these developments of lives, they experienced something that has affected their lives greatly. It can be seen through the statement below;

That is what I understood, so if we want to relate it to counselling theories then maybe we can relate it to psychoanalytic theory for example. We can see that in certain levels, their growths are distorted and the distortion development somehow affect their sexuality and etc (PK1)

Based on the above statement, an individual's experiences can affect and influence them in acting like gays and lesbians. According to Hughes (2006); Hughes and Deutsch (2010) he has explained that 28% of gay and lesbian are exposed to sexual abuse during their childhood and this has influenced the sexual orientation and tendency to like someone of same sex. The sexual abuse incident has affected the child to not accept whatever he or she did later on until it affected their lifestyle even during their adulthood (Amran and Suriati, 2013).

To conclude, the above results findings display how a counsellor who handles these gays and lesbians cases should have high understanding regarding the gay and lesbian issue theoretically, clinically, emotionally and physically so that the counselor is more prepared and knowledgeable in handling the cases related to this issue. However, the findings show that only seven counsellors who really emphasize on critical understanding related to this gay and lesbian issue whilst the other counselors emphasized only part of it.

5.2. Background Information of Gay and Lesbian Clients

Based on the findings, research participants have discussed that the counsellors who tend to handle sessions with gay and lesbian clients should have knowledge in regards to gays and lesbians backgrounds. This is because, as a competent counselor, he or she should have broad knowledge about sexuality problem. It helps counselor to have

better preparation in facing any situation related to these types of cases. This can be seen through the following quote;

In regards to the knowledge about the clients' lifestyle, if we do not have enough knowledge about the behavior of these gays and lesbians individuals, we will feel very strange about their behavior but they do not feel the same way. It means that they will just think that what they do is normal (PK11)

Other than that, results also display that the counsellors also have high desire in finding information related to these cases. For instance, counsellors looked for videos in relation to the sexuality counselling cases and always keep themselves updated about information related to the background of LGBT organizations especially the ones in Malaysia itself.

We have to look for videos and knowledge related to these cases and the ill effects of these acts. We also have to find out whether it is true that gay is the relationship between male couples and lesbian is the relationship between female couples. We also need to find out how do the relationships start, the groups and also the stories about them through internet and other resources (PK1)

Furthermore, findings demonstrate that a counsellor should have information on mental health problem as well. This is due to the reason that these groups of people usually have abnormal ways of thinking and has led them to engage in same sex relationship. They are said to suffer from mental health problem. It is stated in the quote below;

In terms of knowledge itself, the client should be notified about his or her mental health issue, in which the reason he or she became that way is because of their abnormal ways of thinking leading them to drive them oppositely in terms of sexual intimacy relationship, so it is important to have knowledge in mental health issue. The least to do is to master DSM as a preparation for the counsellors in facing these clients (PK12)

Next, in order to understand these gays and lesbian s cases, research participants have also mentioned to have related information on gay and lesbian organizations not only in Malaysia but also abroad to enhance their knowledge regarding the issue. It is perceivable throughout the below quote;

To handle these types of cases, counsellors should have information about LGBT for instance about the LGBT organizations; the moving groups, the names of the groups and then in terms of local concept, also about the extent of things they have done. We have to find out what is the possibility of our clients to be involved in these organizations? We also need to see in global context of what is happening and to what extent is the stage of the issue about this has reached (PK6)

In conclusion, the above findings are in accordance with the guidelines specified by [American Psychological Association \(2000\)](#). The following is the guideline set by APA in which counsellors are required to be prepared concerning knowledge of lesbian, gay, bisexual and issues related to treatments that should be implemented on them. Therefore, counsellors should try to understand the point of view on the issues that have been explained of in therapeutic condition so that it would not affect the counseling session held later on. The guideline is established by APA and Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Joint Task Force Committee, developing APA Ethical Principles on psychologists and Ethics Code of Conduct ([APA, 2000](#)). This guideline functions to facilitate continuous

development on the profession by aiding in ensuring that high level of professionalism is implemented when facing with clients suffering from these sexuality disorder problems.

5.3. Counselling Basic Skills

Results findings show that all fifteen research participants emphasize on counsellors' competencies which is related to counselors' skill in handling gay and lesbian cases. These competencies are referring to attitude that portrays the skills in counsellors' work-related performance on clients. Based on research participants' statements, they highlight on counselling basic skills which are confrontation skills, language usage, questioning skill and clients' rationalizing skills. Hence, counsellors are required to use this confrontation skill to bring about awareness in the client of something that they might overlook or avoid. Nevertheless, the skill might not be used during first and second sessions and it depends on the client's situation or condition. For instance, the research participants have confrontation with the clients' in their fourth session to make them aware of the situation or condition regarding their partner as perceived through below statement;

So, I used REBT theory in our fourth session and I used dispute irrational beliefs system method with my client using confrontation techniques when he always thought of his partner to make him aware of the situation or condition (PK12)

Apart from that, mastering client's persuasive skill is another skill required for the counsellors as clients rarely state the main issue they are facing in the first session with the counsellors especially the ones being referred to. Thus, the power of persuasion is vital in session held although it does not mean that the counselors are allowed to force the clients to tell them about their stories and problems. The research participants have also emphasized on advocacy as in the way counselors establish their relationship with the clients. It is stated in the statement below;

Sometimes in the first session, client will not open up to us. Later on then only he or she mentions that there is another issue he or she wants to talk about but is not ready to talk about it yet. That is why I usually end the session and tell them that I cannot wait to listen to their story. Once we told them that, that is how the table is turned and they will think that we as counsellors are really interested in their stories. Hence, power of persuasion is truly important in counselling sessions. In the ethics code of conduct also mentions about advocacy and how important advocacy is in the way of how counsellors persuade their clients other than the relationship establishment between counsellors and clients, and how counselors should not force their clients in telling about their problems (PK1)

Next, PK1 and PK9 were discussing about questioning skills. Questioning skills here means the counsellors' ability to ask questions which are intended to facilitate client's understanding on topics or issues being discussed. The appropriateness of question asked is important so that feedback obtained can help the ongoing mentoring process. If the counsellor is able to master good listening skills, counselor will be able to control the situation through good questioning skill with clients involved. It is perceivable that the way of questioning used by PK1 is very smooth and he does not question what has been done by the client until a stage where the client himself is aware of what he did is wrong and should never be done in the first place. Great questioning skills will make the client realize about the problem he or she is facing. The statement can be perceived as follows;

We can ask the client of what he thinks about having same sex intimate relationship. Whether it is okay or not to have that kind of relationship. Then, if he said okay, you may ask, what is okay about it? Up until a stage where he himself will realize that it is wrong to engage with that kind of relationship, then you can tell him that what he is doing is not right. From there, the client has entered a phase of judging and valuing the pathway he took without us noticing it (PK9).

Moreover, counsellor also need to always say positive things to clients who might have low self-esteem and feel ashamed of themselves when society keeps blaming them for what they did and turn their back as a punishment for their wrongdoings. Nonetheless it is the other way around for PK14 as he always provides opportunities for the clients to repent and to always stay positive. In the meantime, he is not only an expert in gay and lesbian cases but also experienced in handling transgender cases before. The quote can be perceived as follows;

There are also transgender and gay patients who came to me telling that they have met a lot of people who kept on turning their back as a punishment to them as if they cannot be given any chances to repent, I tried to rationalize with them that Allah is Merciful and Forgiving that even prostitutes who commit lots of sins will be forgiven by Allah if they are repenting except for shirk sin (PK14)

Holistically, it can be concluded that counselling basic skills stated by these research participants are significant in counselling session. A counsellor should master these counselling skills so that the sessions can be administered better as identity issue is considerably a sensitive issue. Each skill is closely connected to each other and counsellors need to master all of the counselling basic skills to create a harmonious atmosphere in every counselling session. Basically, it is not easy to be a successful counsellor as certain skills are needed. Counsellors should learn and understand all required skills in the process of assisting clients according to the suitability of place and time. If the skills applied are not suitable to be implemented then it will affect the whole counseling process as it will make it more difficult for clients to solve their problem. This is because eventually they will lose confidence and trust in their counsellors (Suradi, 1996; Mohamad, 2000).

5.4. Communication Skills

Findings demonstrate that the communication skill is also closely related to the use of language with the clients. Counselors should stress on every word and question used with their gay and lesbian clients because their identity is considerably a sensitive issue for them. Based on PK3 statement, the choice of word or the language used is important as it guarantees the comfortability of the clients and shows that clients are respected without any bias. This shows that counselors are willing to give opportunities for their clients to talk about their problem. The statement is shown as follows;

So, it means that you have to be careful on every word you choose so that it will not hurt them. Listen more on what they have to say (PK3)

Apart from that, communication skills are categorized into three which are to build trust, congruent and readiness. A total of 12 counselors have emphasized on the aspect of building trust on clients. Establishing close rapport with client in early session is highlighted as the most important one as stated below;

I believe that it is important to make them trust me as a counselor and good rapport in the early session is vital to develop the trust. This is because they will be sharing confidential things with me. When they start to share their problems, it means that they are starting to have faith in the counselor because if they did not believe in their counselors, they won't talk (PK14)

The research participants also discuss about counselor's non-verbal attitude with clients. In this case, counselors should always show readiness when their clients want to come clean and reveal that they are gay or lesbian.

First of all, when she said that she is a lesbian, I did not show any negative reaction after the statement she made because I know it is not easy for her to admit and be open about it. That means, we have be aware of our body language, facial expression and choice of words we use

towards our clients

(PK2)

Last but not least, research participants have also discussed about congruent where counsellors always need to be themselves and act naturally with the clients so that they will feel comfortable to share about their feelings.

Other than mastering the basic skills, I believe that a counsellor should be congruent because when we already accept the clients, we should act naturally especially when the clients decided to come clean and tell the counselors that they want to change and need help with it (PK12)

Communication skills is a skill that need to be mastered by a counselor. Counselors should have choices of word that can easily be understood by clients. This is because not every client is highly educated or has the same knowledge on things. Besides, counselors should avoid using lengthy and convoluted sentences as this will make clients become confused of the message to be conveyed. Non-verbal communication on the other hand comprehends body language and eye contact. For example, counsellor may nod his head and lean forward towards them as a sign of interest or any other reaction to show that the counsellor is interested of what the clients want to convey (Suradi, 1996; Sharif and Sulaiman, 2003).

5.5. Counsellor's Attitude

A competent counsellor must possess good attitude towards the client such as being fair and trusting clients with sexuality problems (Sue *et al.*, 1992; Arredondo *et al.*, 1996; Israel and Selvidge, 2003). Findings of this research show that several counsellors emphasized on the aspect of attitude that should be possessed by counsellors in facing cases of gay and lesbian clients. This attitude is the personality of a counsellor towards the client, which is constantly showing good examples towards the client in order for them to feel comfortable around the counsellor.

5.6. Non Judgemental

In the aspect of this attitude, participants of the research have emphasized on several attitudes that have to be shown towards gay and lesbian clients. Among them are being non-judgmental, counsellor's openness, counsellor's patience and counsellor's responsibilities. A competent counsellor must be able to accept whoever their clients are without showing bias towards the clients. Thirteen of the research participants stressed on this aspect, which can be seen from the statement below:

But as counselor we hold on to unconditional acceptance and I have to accept my client as she is without judging them even when I initially did not know that my client was a lesbian, but after two or three sessions went on, the traits began to show and I received a report from the Principal that my client often bothered and hit on her female friend (PK8)

Other than that, counsellors cannot punish clients after finding out that the clients are gays or lesbians, but must instead understand them rather than giving a lecture on how being homosexual is wrong. This must not happen at the earlier stage of the sessions as it might cause clients to not be present for the next session. This can be seen from the statement below:

A counsellor cannot judge a client, saying all sorts of nonsense when the counsellor does not understand the client, then gives the client a lecture, I think the client would never attend another session with the counselor (PK9)

PK13 stated that when a client comes out as gay or lesbian, they must be treated similarly as other clients without the counsellor saying things to imply that the counsellor is punishing the client, as seen from this statement:

As counsellors, we must be open and not judge a client as I said before, when a client admits that they are gay or lesbian, we cannot make weird expressions in front of them so that they would not be embarrassed. We treat and behave around them normally as we would with other clients, even when deep in our hearts we do ask 'why are they like that',

we must not show it in front of the client. One more thing, we should not make any statements that make it seem as if we are judging the client (PK13)

5.7. Openness

Other than that, participants also emphasized on the aspect of counsellors' openness during sessions. Nine counsellors stressed on this aspect of openness, in which the openness means that counsellors show an open attitude towards gay and lesbian clients and are ready to listen to their stories as they help guide the clients towards a better direction. This can be seen from the statement below:

That's why the first condition in facing such cases is counsellors' openness. When we meet them, we are ready to listen to their stories, maybe other people are not open towards this matter and it becomes an obstacle for them to continue to manage this case better and it will be difficult to handle the case (PK5)

A counsellor's openness also covers the aspects of thoughts and the language used by the counsellor towards a gay or lesbian client. The counsellor must always provide support for the client as the counsellor does not want this client to distance themselves from other people due to their identity. Behind the counsellor's openness must be a positive attitude towards the client as seen in the statement below:

The openness of a counsellor, the counsellor has to train themselves in terms of their mentality or speech to handle such cases because it involves our religious values as Muslims. We do not want the client to distance themselves from other people because they know what they are doing is wrong, so the counsellor must stay positive. This counsellor's competency emphasizes that counsellors must always stay open – minded in negative cases such as this (PK8)

The aspect of openness also includes a counsellor's openness towards sexual themes which means that the counsellor shows readiness in listening to sexual stories, how same sex intercourse happens, whether their sexual organs work or not and so on. Openness towards sexual themes was emphasized by four counsellors. A research participant stated that a client told his story of getting sodomized by his own father which caused the client to be involved in the world of gay people, as stated below:

The client told the story from his childhood when he was sodomized by his own father. At first the father told him to give him a massage only, his father touched his body and he saw that his father's penis was already erect, so the father forced the client to perform oral sex and soon, the father wanted to do anal sex with his son. When the client has grown up he wanted other people to fuck him like his father did, the client enjoyed what he was doing (PK9)

For PK14 who has become used to listening to their gay clients' sexual experiences involving regularly sodomizing other men, changing partners and sodomizing techniques, the counsellor did not show any odd expressions and displayed interest in the telling of the story as seen below:

Coming back to the issue of gay people, as a counsellor, you have to listen to whatever their story is because they will often tell stories in sexual terms, so the counsellor must be open if the client speaks of sexual matters such as when they talk about sodomizing techniques, they will talk about having to take a type of pill to last for 2 to 3 hours during intercourse because they are men with men, they are stronger compared to women (PK14)

Other than that, ten counsellors showed positive attitudes towards what their gay and lesbian clients do. Some of them stated that what the clients are going through is a test on the clients and the reason they came to see the counsellors is because they have the awareness in themselves to change or become better people, as can be seen in this statement:

But for me, what they are going through is a test for them and they might have strayed from the path a little in facing it, maybe they met people that they should not have, so they gradually lose control in the test (PK11)

This was also supported by PK2; this positive attitude showed by the clients can help them because they too are humans that need help from other people as stated below:

This attitude, on the other hand, is the counsellor's attitude towards the client themselves, a counsellor's positive attitude when finding out that the client is gay or lesbian, positive attitude to help the client because they are human (PK2)

A competent counsellor has to have good attitude towards clients such as being fair and trusting these clients with sexuality problems (Sue *et al.*, 1992; Arredondo *et al.*, 1996; Israel and Selvidge, 2003). Good attitude influences counsellors' competency. Not stereotyping is an important attitude for a competent counsellor to possess in order to create the awareness that when meeting a client with a status of minority, a significant difference must be made between minority ethnic client counselling and LGB client counselling. Israel and Selvidge (2003) stated that counsellors would never think that it is morally wrong to be part of a minority ethnic group; however, they can believe that homosexuality is a sin. In several traditional Protestant religions especially, the phrase "Love the sinner, hate the sin" became a highly influential mentality towards several systems of Christian faith towards gay people. Several concerns must be considered when looking at our self – awareness when working with LGBT clients, namely homonegativity, homophobia and heterosexism.

6. CONTRIBUTION

The study contributes is huge to course counselling knowledge especially in sexuality counselling. The research result will expose, explain dan give a description of practise counselling in gay dan lesbian towards counsellor in Malaysia. Description practice in counselling through this research result can be bench mark to the practice needed this process be develop with more faster. Therefore, most research about counselling competency with gay and lesbian client was undergo through quantitative. So, this research that was run through qualitatives was further study from researchs before this. Therefore, this research already explain about themes, counselling practices gay and lesbian that includes competency aspects contains a wide range of knowledge and skill that needs by the counsellor. This study show a gay and lesbian competency is consistent with multicultural competency that was important in caunselor's self. Counselor need to have this competency because they surely will face with many types of client behaviour especially gay and lesbian client in counselling session.

7. CONCLUSION

From the research, it can clearly be seen that counsellors in Malaysia have the awareness regarding competency in gay and lesbian counselling. However, the level of Malaysian counsellors' competency relating to sexuality cases is still low compared to counsellors from other countries. This is because attention is not greatly given to such cases as it is an isolated issue among counsellors.

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