Emotional intelligence of counseling undergraduates of two Malaysian public universities

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ABSTRACT: The main objective of this study is to identify the Emotional Intelligence (El) profile of counseling undergraduates of two Malaysian public universities. A total of 134 counseling students from University of Malaya and Islamic Science University of Malaysia took part in the survey. The Self Rated Malaysian Emotional Intelligence Scale (SRMEIS) which consists of 39 items was used to measure overall emotional intelligence and its components (Emotional Perception and Expression, Emotional Facilitation of Thinking, Emotional Understanding and Emotional Management). Overall, the students are found to be highly emotionally intelligent. The result shows no significant difference in El scores of students from the different universities. However there is significant difference in El based on the year of study and gender. Students in the later year of study have better scores in terms of Emotional Facilitation of Thinking, Emotional Understanding and Emotional Management. Meanwhile, males are found to be better equipped with the El abilities of using their emotions to assist cognitive processes and regulating their emotions if compared to female counterparts. Finally, the authors discussed the importance of El for the counseling profession and implications of the findings.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, counseling, counseling undergraduates, Self Rated Malaysian Emotional Intelligence Scale (SRMEIS)

1 INTRODUCTION

The increasing demand for professional counselors in the Malaysian public and private sectors has encouraged many Malaysian universities to offer various counselor training programs. Some of the universities offering either undergraduate, graduate or postgraduate programs are University of Malaya (UM), the National University of Malaysia (UKM), Islamic Science University of Malaysia (USIM), University Putra Malaysia (UPM) and Sultan Idris Education University (USP), just to name a few. The offering of any degree in counseling in Malaysia requires accreditation from Malaysian Board of Counselors and is regulated by the Counselors Act 580 (1998). Therefore it is undeniable that the teaching and learning of all these programs are set at the highest standards. However, the full package to become a competent counselor must include knowledge, skills, personal characteristics and other competencies. Although unsaid, being emotionally intelligent is an added value for the counseling professionals. According to Goleman (1995) although cognitive ability opens doors for individuals to enter a particular setting, emotional intelligence will play a greater part in determining the individual's success in that setting. Goleman (1996) believes that emotional competencies are twice as important in contributing to excellence compared to pure intellect and expertise.

Emotional Intelligence is continuing to gain popularity among researchers in the academic and professional world. Mayer and Salovey (1997) viewed emotional intelligence as a set of four interrelated abilities involved in the processing of emotional information. The abilities referred to are Emotional Perception and Expression (EPE), Emotional Understanding (EU) Emotional Facilitation of Thinking (EFT) and Emotional Management (EM). Emotional perception involves registering, attending to and deciphering emotional messages as they are expressed in facial expressions, voice tone, objects of art and other cultural artifacts (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). Meanwhile emotional facilitation of thinking concerns the effect of emotions on intelligence, as it describes emotional events that assist intellectual processing. EFT helps people to consider multiple perspectives when facing any particular situation, thus making them think about a problem more deeply and more creatively (Mayer, 1986; Mayer & Hansen, 1995). The third branch of emotional intelligence which is emotional understanding refers to the ability of employing emotional knowledge and rational reasoning using emotion. A person who is able to understand emotions, their meanings, how they interact, and how they progress over time is truly blessed with the capacity to understand the fundamental truths of human nature and inter-individual relationships (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso, 2000). The last branch