

Chapter 1: Contemporary Issues in Counseling Research

Overview of chapter

Counselors are paying increasing attention to the efficacy of their practice as evidenced by counseling research. The shift in focus is largely the result of managed care and third-party reimbursement provisions. This introductory chapter covers the role of counseling research in effective service provision, the Scientist-Practitioner model, and Empirically Supported Treatments. This chapter also serves as an introduction to the fundamentals of research including the roles, benefits, and challenges of research; an understanding of the scientist-practitioner model; an overview of basic types of research; and the formulation of research questions, hypotheses, and methodology.

Key words

Scientist Practitioner (SP) model – integration of research and therapy

Scientist practitioner – researchers who use data-based interventions that have been proven to be effective through research

Empirically Supported Treatments (EST) – treatments that have been found to have important effects on specific problems

Representativeness – sampling concept that indicates the sample provides researchers access to the data needed and can provide the same results as studying an entire population

Validity - the extent to which the results of a measurement or procedure actually serve the purpose for which it is intended

Reliability - the extent to which the results of a measurement or procedure actually serve the purpose for which it is intended

Research question - a statement of the problem and its significance

Random sampling - every person in the population has an equal and independent opportunity to participate in the research

Systemic sampling - method which involves choosing every 5th person on a list of potential participants

Stratified random sampling - method which ensures that identified subgroups are represented in the sample; each subgroup is sampled equally

Cluster sampling - a successive series of random samples used when the overall population under consideration is too large for simple random sampling methods

Convenience sampling - made up of the members of the larger population that are most accessible to the researcher; gathered based on non-random methods; also known as opportunity samples

Scientist-practitioner - uses research as the basis for reflective practice and to generate ongoing rigor in clinical skills

Chapter Outline

- I. Scientist practitioner
 - a. Managed care – limited number of sessions to provide services

- b. Role of evidenced based treatment
- c. Treatment of all cases a formal research projects
- d. SP model views counselors as having three roles
 - i. Producers of new data
 - ii. Consumers of research
 - iii. Evaluators of effective therapy
- e. Relationship of SP model to basic counseling skills
- f. Data Based Problem Solver Model as extension of SP model

II. World of Counseling Research

- a. Research on theory and effective models
 - i. Outcome more attributable to common factors than for a particular theory
 - ii. Role of Empirically Supported Treatments (EST)
- b. Research on counselors
 - i. Key elements affecting client outcome - counselor's level of skill, cognitive complexity, ability to relate to clients
- c. Journals as primary sources of counseling research

I. What is Research? Why Conduct Research?

- a. Research defined
- b. How research informs the counseling profession
- c. The role of the scientist-practitioner in counseling
- d. How research ideas are developed
- e. Basic research components
 - i. Research questions
 - ii. Hypotheses
 - iii. Variable
 - iv. Research design
 - 1. quantitative
 - 2. qualitative
 - v. methods of empirical inquiry
 - 1. experiments
 - a. independent variable
 - b. dependent variable
 - 2. descriptive research
 - 3. relational or correlational research

II. Importance of sampling and Generalizability

- a. Defining and sampling a population
 - i. Target population
 - ii. Sample population
 - iii. Representativeness in sampling
- b. Validity
- c. Reliability
- d. Determining area of interest
- e. Research problems
- f. Research questions
- g. Hypotheses

III. Sampling procedures

- a. Random sampling
 - i. Systemic sampling
 - ii. Use of random number generator
- b. Stratified random sampling
- c. Cluster sampling
- d. Convenience or opportunity sampling
- e. Role of size in sampling
 - i. Best and Kahn (2006) considerations

1. larger sample increases likelihood of representativeness
 2. survey designs typically require larger samples than experimental designs
 3. samples divided into subgroups require large initial sample group
 4. mailed surveys require large initial sample sizes due to low response rate
 5. subject availability and cost factors influence sample size
- IV. Writing the Research
- V. Realities of research in counseling
- a. Improving/controlling behavior as a goal
 - b. Accountability to the profession
 - c. Funding concerns
 - d. Divide between research and practice
 - e. Paradigm shift to scientist-practitioner model
 - f. Ethical and legal considerations
 - i. Best practice approach
 - ii. Competency
 - iii. Role of consultation and supervision
 - iv. Protection of participants

Suggested Activities

1. Read the following article:
 Lenz, S., Bruijn, B., Serman, N. S., & Bailey, L. (2014). Effectiveness of Cognitive Processing Therapy for Treating Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. *Journal Of Mental Health Counseling, 36*(4), 360-376
 How does this article address contemporary issues in counseling research? Specifically, how does it relate to evidenced based treatment and the scientist-practitioner approach? How does this research inform the counseling profession?
2. Visit the ACA website at www.counseling.org. What is the flagship journal of ACA? List the titles of 10 recent articles from that publication. Select another division of ACA that interests you. What is its journal? List the titles of 10 recent articles from that publication.
3. Investigate three of the articles from your list above. What was the research question(s) directing the study? What were the hypotheses (if applicable)? How did the study conduct sampling? How did the study address generalizability?
4. Your text states: "When there are gaps between what our clients need and what we are able to provide them, an idea for research is born". What counseling issues interest you? What presenting problems do you believe call for a more effective intervention? Identify the gap between the needs of a particular client type and the treatments available. Based on this, decide upon a research area that you would like to see investigated. For example, you may have learned that many of the pharmacological interventions for mood stabilization have unpleasant and difficult side effects for clients (e.g. weight gain, lethargy, difficulty concentrating). From this you may decide that you would like to research what non-pharmacological interventions provided by counselors provide the most effective treatment for clients suffering from bipolar disorder.
5. In the previous activity, you identified an area of interest or a research problem. Using the examples provided in your text, develop a corresponding research question and one or more hypotheses for this identified research problem.

Test Questions

- 1) Concerns related to counseling research include ALL BUT WHICH of the following?
 - a) As a profession, counselors are paying increasing attention to the efficacy of practice
 - b) Counseling journals sponsored by ACA divisions are lacking in manuscript submissions
 - c) Changes in funding requirements make research necessary
 - d) Managed care requires counselors to examine treatment practices
- 2) The Scientist-Practitioner model
 - a) Focuses on the objective assessment of data only
 - b) Focuses on the subjective experience of counseling only
 - c) Provides direction for developing evidenced based treatment practices
 - d) None of the above are true regarding the Scientist-Practitioner model
- 3) The Scientist-Practitioner model was formulated as a way to
 - a) Integrate research and therapy
 - b) Redefine the helping professions
 - c) Increase PhD's in counseling
 - d) Integrate qualitative and quantitative practices
- 4) A best practice approach to counseling
 - a) Includes methods clearly outlined in the ACA Code of Ethics
 - b) Requires advanced training in research and statistics
 - c) Integrates clinical experience and empirically validated treatment approaches
 - d) Is a myth, no one can achieve best practice
- 5) The Scientist-Practitioner model proposes three roles for the practicing counselor. They include ALL BUT WHICH of the following
 - a) Producers of new data
 - b) Manuscript authors or co-authors
 - c) Consumers of research
 - d) Evaluators of effective therapy
- 6) Something that has influenced the need for a Scientist Practitioner approach to counseling is
 - a) The practice of counseling has become increasingly time-limited
 - b) Data does not exist to substantiate any current counseling approaches
 - c) Counselors must take the market from psychologists in order to survive as a profession
 - d) Previous research in the field has largely been poorly conducted and is not considered currently valid
- 7) A systematic investigation which involves collecting, analyzing, and interpreting information in a sequential manner in order to increase our understanding of the phenomenon of interest is also known as
 - a) Statistics
 - b) Analysis
 - c) Research
 - d) Methodology
- 8) Counselors primarily conduct research in order to
 - a) Inform practice
 - b) Become published authors
 - c) Benefit clients
 - d) a & b
 - e) a & c

- 9) Guiding the direction of the research, which of the following defines the relationship between what you want to know and how you intend to discover this knowledge through research?
- Hypothesis
 - Research question
 - Variables of interest
 - Research design
- 10) An inference or speculation that is indicative of the researcher's best estimation of the projected results of the research is the
- Hypothesis
 - Research question
 - Variables of interest
 - Research design
- 11) Which of the following defines characteristics with more than one attribute or value that can be observed or manipulated
- Hypothesis
 - Research question
 - Variables of interest
 - Research design
- 12) Researchers wishing to study categorical variables would use which research design?
- Quantitative
 - Qualitative
 - Phenomenological
 - Narrative
- 13) When a researcher is interested in linking or making an association between two or more phenomena, the design that should be used is
- Descriptive
 - Experimental
 - Relational
 - Phenomenological
- 14) Researchers wishing to study characteristics of a particular group of people need to consider
- Sample size
 - Total population
 - Generalizability
 - All of the above
 - a & c only
- 15) Characteristics of quality research include ALL BUT WHICH of the following
- A focus on a small slice of a large problem
 - Being limited in scope
 - Broad research questions in order to maximize generalizability
 - Clearly defined research problem
- 16) Which of the following is true regarding research questions
- It is a statement of the problem and its significance
 - They can be in declarative or question form
 - It must be specific in focus and intention
 - All of the above are true regarding research questions

- 17) Which of the following is true regarding the hypothesis
- a) It is a tentative or potential answer to the proposed research questions
 - b) It can be formulate before or after data collection
 - c) It can be in declarative or question form
 - d) All of the above are true regarding the hypothesis
- 18) Research designs that include selecting participants from identified subgroups within the total population employ
- a) Systemic sampling
 - b) Stratified sampling
 - c) Random sampling
 - d) Convenience sampling
- 19) ALL BUT WHICH are true regarding sample size
- a) Realistically, the larger the sample the greater the generalizability
 - b) Trade-off occurs between the most desirable size and the most practical size
 - c) There are absolute minimum numbers that must be met for a study to be valid
 - d) Subject availability and cost factors are legitimate considerations
- 20) One of the primary applications of counseling research is
- a) Controlling cognitive distortions
 - b) Improving weight loss
 - c) Smoking cessation
 - d) Improving/controlling behavior