

Interpretations of Challenges and Treatment among Secular and Religious Counselors in Ethiopia

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Introduction

- In Ethiopia, evidence-based mental health care aiming to treat common psychological distress was recently introduced [1]
- Many Ethiopians have varied interpretations of mental distress including that they're normal reactions or caused by supernatural forces [2,3]
- Therefore, care from informal providers like religious leaders largely coexists [4]

Research Aim

To identify patterns in the interpretations of distress-related challenges and counseling approaches among secular and religious counselors

Methods

Participants:
Providers in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

- Secular Counselors ($N = 19$)
- Orthodox Christian Religious Counselors ($N = 17$)
- Orthodox Christian Religious-Secular Counselors ($N = 3$)

1-hour semi-structured interviews

- Providers were asked to discuss two to three problems they most commonly treat
- The same questions regarding causes, effects, and counseling approaches were asked about the mentioned problems

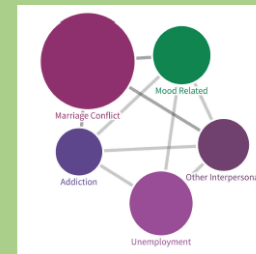
Figures and Results

Theme 1: Intersecting Targeted Challenges

The secular counselors mostly treated cognitive level challenges



The religious counselors mostly treated functional level challenges



"The primary and biggest cause I notice [for Chenket] is upbringing"*

- Religious-Secular Counselor
- *local term related to 'anxiety'

"[Anxiety] could be from the imbalance of the chemicals in our body"

- Secular counselor

"Satan does the work of separating [marriages]"

- Religious counselor

Theme 2: Causal Explanations

- Both provider groups primarily included **environmental** and **psychological** causal explanations
- The secular counselors included **physiological** explanations
- The religious counselors included **supernatural** explanations

Theme 3: Counseling Approaches

Secular Counselors

- ❖ Psychotherapy
- ❖ Therapeutic assignments
- ❖ Goal setting

Religious-Secular Counselors

- ❖ Drawing solutions
- ❖ Therapeutic assignments
- ❖ Religious teachings
- ❖ Consoling

Religious Counselors

- ❖ Recommendations or Advice
- ❖ Religious teachings
- ❖ Consoling

Conclusions & Further Study

- **Theme 1:** The discussed challenges were intersecting in their cause-effect relationships and the two provider groups treated different types of challenges
- **Theme 2:** The provider groups had both similarities and differences in the causal explanations of the discussed challenges
- **Theme 3:** In their counseling approaches, the religious-secular counselors combined features prevalent among both the secular and religious counselors

These findings emphasize the need to further explore the differences and similarities in the interpretations of challenges, treatment focal points, and counseling approaches within the coexisting care system

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References

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