COUNSELLING APPROACHES FOR ADDRESSING ETHICAL DILEMMAS IN ADOLESCENTS

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Abstract
Adolescents often face ethical dilemmas that can have profound effects on their development and well-being. This paper explores various counselling approaches that can be employed to address these dilemmas. By examining theoretical frameworks and practical interventions, this paper aims to provide counselors with effective strategies for helping adolescents navigate ethical challenges. Key approaches discussed include cognitive-behavioral therapy, narrative therapy, and solution-focused therapy. The paper also considers the role of cultural competence and the integration of ethical decision-making models in counselling practices.

Keywords: Family dynamics, adolescents, Counselling approaches, ethical dilemmas.

Introduction

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage characterized by significant psychological, emotional, and social changes. During this period, individuals often encounter complex ethical dilemmas that can challenge their moral reasoning and decision-making capabilities. These dilemmas may arise from various sources, including peer pressure, family dynamics, academic stress, and societal expectations. As adolescents navigate these challenges, they require appropriate guidance and support to make ethical decisions that align with their values and promote their well-being (Beck, 2011).

Counselling approaches play a vital role in assisting adolescents to address these ethical dilemmas. By providing a safe and non-judgmental space, counselors help adolescents explore their thoughts, feelings, and values, enabling them to make informed and responsible decisions. The diverse counselling strategies employed in addressing ethical dilemmas among adolescents

include cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), solution-focused brief therapy (SFBT), psychoanalytic approaches, and person-centered counselling. Each of these approaches offers unique methods and techniques tailored to meet the specific needs of adolescents as they confront ethical challenges (Corey, Corey & Callanan, 2015).

The importance of addressing ethical dilemmas in adolescents cannot be overstated, as the decisions made during this period can have long-lasting implications on their personal development, relationships, and future goals. Moreover, unresolved ethical conflicts may contribute to maladaptive behaviors such as delinquency, substance abuse, and academic disengagement. Therefore, equipping adolescents with the skills to navigate ethical dilemmas through effective counselling interventions is crucial for fostering moral development, resilience, and positive life outcomes (De Sazars & Dolan, 2007).

This paper aims to explore the various counselling approaches available for addressing ethical dilemmas in adolescents. It will examine the theoretical foundations of these approaches, their practical applications in counselling settings, and the effectiveness of these interventions in promoting ethical decision-making. By highlighting the significance of these counselling strategies, the paper seeks to provide valuable insights for counselors, educators, and policymakers in supporting the ethical development of adolescents (Kelly, 2011).

Adolescence is a critical period characterized by increased cognitive abilities and moral reasoning. As adolescents encounter complex social and personal situations, they often face ethical dilemmas that challenge their values and decision-making skills. Effective counselling is crucial in helping adolescents resolve these dilemmas and develop a strong ethical framework (Blasi, 2004). This paper reviews various counselling approaches to address these challenges, focusing on practical strategies and theoretical underpinnings. Moral development refers to the process through which individuals acquire and refine their values, ethics, and sense of justice, often influenced by social, cultural, and educational contexts. Adolescents, in particular, undergo significant moral development as they transition from childhood to adulthood. During this period, they are frequently confronted with ethical dilemmas that challenge their existing moral beliefs and prompt them to reflect on and refine their moral reasoning. The resolution of these ethical dilemmas plays a crucial role in shaping the moral development of adolescents.

Common ethical dilemmas faced by adolescents.

Ethical dilemmas are situations in which individuals must make decisions that involve conflicting values or principles. Adolescents, due to their developmental stage, often face unique ethical dilemmas as they navigate the transition from childhood to adulthood. These dilemmas can be complex, as they involve issues of morality, peer influence, identity formation, and the desire for independence. Here are some common ethical dilemmas faced by adolescents:

Peer Pressure and Conformity: Adolescents often face ethical dilemmas related to peer pressure. They may feel pressured to engage in activities that go against their values or beliefs,

such as cheating, drinking alcohol, using drugs, or participating in risky behaviors. The desire to fit in and be accepted by peers can lead adolescents to make choices that conflict with their personal morals. The dilemma lies in choosing between maintaining their values and the fear of social exclusion. Example**:** An adolescent might be pressured by friends to try smoking. They know it is harmful and against their personal or family values, but fear being ridiculed or losing friendships if they refuse (Killen & Smetana, 2015).

Academic Integrity: Academic integrity is another area where adolescents face ethical dilemmas. The pressure to achieve good grades, sometimes from parents, teachers, or the competitive academic environment, can lead to the temptation to cheat on exams, plagiarize assignments, or take shortcuts in their work. Example**:** A student might consider copying answers during an exam to maintain a high GPA, knowing that cheating is wrong but feeling that failure might jeopardize their future educational opportunities (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2015).

Balancing Personal and Family Values: Adolescents often grapple with balancing their own emerging personal values with those of their family. As they develop their identity, they may encounter situations where their beliefs differ from those of their parents or cultural background. This can lead to ethical dilemmas, especially when the adolescent is expected to conform to family traditions or expectations. Example**:** An adolescent might be expected to follow a family tradition, such as pursuing a particular career, but their personal passion lies elsewhere. They face the dilemma of choosing between their desires and fulfilling family expectations (Yalom & 2005).

Relationships and Sexuality: Adolescents are at a stage where they begin to explore romantic relationships and their sexuality. These experiences can present ethical dilemmas, especially when they involve decisions about sexual activity, consent, and setting boundaries. Adolescents may struggle with questions of morality, respect, and responsibility in their relationships. Example**:** An adolescent may face pressure from a partner to engage in sexual activity before they feel ready. They may struggle with the dilemma of wanting to please their partner while also wanting to honor their personal values regarding sexual behavior (Eisenber & Morris, 2004).

Social Media and Digital Ethics: With the rise of social media, adolescents face ethical dilemmas related to online behavior. They may encounter situations involving cyberbullying, privacy concerns, sharing of personal information, or the pressure to present a false image of themselves online. Navigating the digital world requires ethical decision-making, as the consequences of online actions can be far-reaching. Example**:** An adolescent may witness a friend being cyberbullied and face the dilemma of whether to intervene and risk becoming a target or to remain silent and protect themselves (Wite & Epston, 1990).

Substance Use: Adolescents may face ethical dilemmas related to substance use, particularly when it involves illegal drugs, alcohol, or tobacco. The decision to experiment with substances can conflict with their understanding of the law, health risks, and personal values. Additionally,

they may have to decide whether to report friends or peers who engage in substance use, which can create tension between loyalty and responsibility. Example**:** A teenager might be offered alcohol at a party. They know it is illegal and against their better judgment, but they also fear being labeled as "uncool" if they decline (Walker, 2004).

Gender and Identity Issues: Adolescents exploring their gender identity or sexual orientation may face ethical dilemmas related to authenticity and acceptance. They may struggle with whether to come out to family and friends, knowing it could lead to rejection or conflict. Additionally, they may face dilemmas related to how they present themselves in different social contexts, balancing personal truth with the desire for social harmony. Example**:** An adolescent who identifies as LGBTQ+ may grapple with whether to come out to their conservative family, risking rejection, or to keep their identity hidden, which can lead to feelings of inauthenticity and internal conflict (Hardy & Carlo, 2011).

Bullying and Social Exclusion: Bullying is a significant issue during adolescence, and ethical dilemmas often arise for both victims and bystanders. Victims may face the dilemma of how to respond to bullying, whether to stand up for themselves, report the behavior, or endure it silently. Bystanders may struggle with whether to intervene or ignore the situation to avoid becoming targets themselves. Example**:** A student might witness a peer being bullied and must decide whether to report the incident to a teacher, knowing it could make them a target, or to stay silent and avoid conflict (Gibbs, 2014).

Loyalty vs. Honesty: Adolescents often face ethical dilemmas where loyalty to friends conflicts with honesty. They may be asked to cover for a friend's misbehavior or to keep a secret that they feel uncomfortable with. These situations challenge their values of trust, loyalty, and truthfulness. Example**:** An adolescent might know that a friend is engaging in harmful behavior, such as self-harm or stealing, and face the dilemma of whether to keep the secret or to tell an adult who can help (Gibbs, 2014).

Economic Pressure and Ethics: Some adolescents face economic pressures that can lead to ethical dilemmas, particularly in low-income families. They may feel the need to contribute financially, which can lead to situations where they are tempted to engage in unethical activities, such as stealing, working under illegal conditions, or participating in illicit activities to earn money. Example**:** A teenager from a financially struggling family might be tempted to shoplift to help provide for their siblings, despite knowing it is wrong (Gibbs, 2014).

Mental Health and Seeking Help: Adolescents struggling with mental health issues may face ethical dilemmas related to seeking help. They might worry about the stigma associated with mental health treatment, fear that their privacy will be violated, or feel conflicted about burdening others with their problems. The dilemma often revolves around whether to seek help or to cope alone. Example**:** An adolescent experiencing depression might hesitate to seek counselling because they fear being judged by their peers or misunderstood by their family (Gibbs, 2014).

Cultural and Religious Expectations: Adolescents from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds may face ethical dilemmas when their personal beliefs or desires conflict with cultural or religious expectations. These dilemmas can be particularly challenging, as they may involve deeply held values and community norms. Example**:** An adolescent from a strict religious background might struggle with the decision to attend a school event that goes against their family's religious practices (Gibbs, 2014).

Counselling Methods to Help Adolescents Navigate Ethical Challenges.

Adolescents often face various ethical challenges as they transition from childhood to adulthood. These challenges may include issues related to peer pressure, substance use, academic dishonesty, relationships, and decision-making. Counselling methods can play a critical role in helping adolescents navigate these challenges by providing guidance, support, and a safe space for reflection. Below are some detailed counselling methods that can help adolescents address ethical dilemmas:

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT): CBT is a widely used therapeutic approach that helps individuals identify and change negative thought patterns and behaviors. For adolescents facing ethical challenges, CBT can assist in recognizing how their thoughts influence their decisions and actions. A counselor might work with an adolescent to examine the consequences of their choices and challenge irrational beliefs that lead to unethical behavior. For example, if an adolescent is tempted to cheat on a test, the counselor could explore the underlying beliefs (e.g., "I must get good grades at all costs") and help the adolescent develop healthier coping strategies (Kelly, 2011).

Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT): SFBT is a goal-oriented therapy that focuses on the present and future rather than the past. It encourages clients to envision their desired outcomes and develop strategies to achieve them. For adolescents dealing with ethical challenges, SFBT can help them focus on positive behavior and the consequences of ethical decision-making. For example, if an adolescent is struggling with peer pressure to engage in risky behavior, the counselor can help them identify past successes in resisting peer pressure and build on those strengths (Blasi, 2004).

Ethical Decision-Making Models: Ethical decision-making models provide a structured framework for individuals to evaluate and make ethical choices. These models often involve steps such as identifying the ethical dilemma, considering the consequences of different actions, and choosing the most ethical course of action. Counselors can teach adolescents specific ethical decision-making models, such as the Five-Step Model by Corey, Corey, and Callanan (2015). This model involves: Identifying the problem, Identifying the potential issues involved., Reviewing the relevant ethical guidelines., Knowing the applicable laws and regulations., Considering possible and probable courses of action.

Values Clarification: Values clarification is a counselling technique that helps individuals explore and define their personal values. This process is particularly important for adolescents,

who may be in the process of forming their identity and ethical beliefs. Counselors can guide adolescents through exercises that help them articulate their values and understand how these values influence their decisions. For example, an adolescent might explore the importance of honesty, respect, and responsibility in their relationships and academic life (Beck, 2011).

Group Counselling: Group counselling provides a supportive environment where adolescents can discuss ethical challenges with their peers. This setting allows them to gain different perspectives and learn from others' experiences. In a group counselling session, adolescents can engage in role-playing exercises to practice ethical decision-making in various scenarios. Group discussions can also help them see the impact of ethical and unethical behavior on others, fostering empathy and moral reasoning (Blasi, 2004).

Psychoeducation: Psychoeducation involves teaching adolescents about ethical principles, moral development, and the potential consequences of unethical behavior. This method is often used alongside other counselling techniques to provide a foundation of knowledge that adolescents can draw upon when facing ethical dilemmas. A counselor might provide information on the importance of academic integrity, the effects of substance abuse, or the ethical dimensions of social media use. By equipping adolescents with this knowledge, they are better prepared to make informed decisions (Eisenber & Morris, 2004).

Narrative Therapy: Narrative therapy is a counselling approach that helps individuals reframe their life stories in a more positive and empowering way. For adolescents, this can involve reinterpreting past experiences and decisions in a way that emphasizes ethical growth and responsibility. A counselor might work with an adolescent to rewrite their narrative around a specific ethical challenge, highlighting moments of moral strength and resilience. This process can help the adolescent see themselves as capable of making ethical decisions in the future (Gibbs, 2014).

Theoretical Framework

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Development: Lawrence Kohlberg's theory of moral development provides a foundational framework for understanding how adolescents progress through various stages of moral reasoning. According to Kohlberg, moral development occurs in three levels: Pre-conventional (focused on avoiding punishment and seeking rewards) Conventional (adhering to social rules and expectations) Post-conventional (internalizing universal ethical principles). Resolving ethical dilemmas enables adolescents to advance from the conventional to the post-conventional stage by encouraging them to think critically about societal norms and develop their own ethical principles.

Rest's Four-Component Model: James Rest expanded on Kohlberg's theory by introducing the Four-Component Model of Moral Development, which includes: Moral sensitivity (recognizing the moral aspects of a situation) Moral judgment (determining the right course of action) Moral motivation (prioritizing moral values over other values) Moral character (having the strength to act on one's moral decisions). Engaging with ethical dilemmas

enhances these components, fostering comprehensive moral growth in adolescents.

Educational Implications

— **Role of Schools:** Schools play a critical role in facilitating moral development by providing opportunities for students to engage with ethical dilemmas in a structured and supportive environment. Programs that incorporate moral education, such as discussions on ethical issues, role-playing scenarios, and community service, can help adolescents develop their moral reasoning and character (Nucci & Narvaez, 2008).

— **Influence of Curriculum:** Integrating ethical discussions into the curriculum across various subjects can help students apply moral reasoning to real-life situations. For example, literature classes can explore the moral dilemmas faced by characters, while social studies classes can examine ethical issues in history and current events (Lapsley & Narvaez, 2013).

— **Teacher's Role:** Teachers can model moral behavior and facilitate discussions that encourage students to think critically about ethical issues. By creating an open and inclusive classroom environment, teachers can help students feel comfortable discussing their thoughts and values, further enhancing their moral development (Killen & Smetana, 2015).

Conclusion

Adolescents face numerous ethical challenges as they navigate the complexities of growing up. Counselling methods such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy, Solution-Focused Brief Therapy, ethical decision-making models, values clarification, group counselling, psychoeducation, and narrative therapy can provide valuable support in helping them make ethical decisions. These methods equip adolescents with the tools and frameworks they need to navigate their ethical dilemmas and make decisions that are consistent with their values and long-term goals.

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