

Recruiting and Training Paraprofessional Counselors in Developing Nations

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Abstract

As a result of limited counseling resources available to community members in developing nations, it is critical that researchers begin to address the recruitment and training needs of paraprofessionals that will serve as resources for community members. Recruiting and training of paraprofessional counselors in developing nations will help alleviate the dearth of professional counselors and counseling services. A review of the paraprofessional literature led to recommendations for recruiting and training paraprofessionals in developing nations. The West Indies serves as a model for implementing the recommendations. A possible training program is offered, and implications and limitations are discussed.

Keywords: Paraprofessional Counselor, Developing nations, West Indies, Training, Recruitment

1. Introduction

Currently, in developing countries, there appears to be a less than an optimal number of professional counselors to meet the various counseling needs of the populations of these nations. In addition to the call for counselors to serve generally in traditional counseling roles such as agency, career and school counseling, there are often few professional counselors available after a major disaster or crisis or when there is civil unrest. This deficit is felt and compounds the many other issues facing a nation after such a devastating event.

According to a report released in January 2005, by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), vulnerability to natural and man-made disasters including hurricanes, Tsunamis and earthquakes is among a range of emerging issues challenging the physical health and wealth of the world's developing nations. This vulnerability is often a result of the location of these nations and the small and fragile economies they try to maintain. These countries are usually low lying, leaving them open to rising sea levels, storm surges and dramatic weather events. For example, in September 2004, Grenada, a small island in the West Indian, was hit by hurricane Ivan, leaving almost 90% of the island's houses damaged along with schools, hospitals and infrastructure such as roads. On January 12th, 2010, a catastrophic magnitude 7.0 earthquake demolished the West Indian island, The Republic Haiti. The earthquake killed an estimated 230,000 people and affected approximately 3 million others, according to the government of Haiti (USAID, 2010). It is important to note that these disasters not only damage the physical structure of a country and the physical health of the survivors; they also adversely affect the psychological well being of survivors.

The National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (2005), reports that the vast majority of people surviving these disasters will recover because of the resiliency of human nature. They say however, that many of the survivors of such disasters will develop psychological disorders such as major depression, generalized anxiety and may also experience non-specific distress and somatic complaints. In addition to these symptoms, individuals will need to begin to rebuild both their personal and professional lives (Jordan, 2006). This could be a daunting task in the absence of basic resources such as food and shelter. Being without basic resources can be very stressful; this may cause individuals to need assistance from professional counselors. Unfortunately, quite often, there are few mental health workers, including professional counselors, in these countries to assist with the magnitude of issues that face the many survivors (Benight & Harper, 2002). To counter this shortage, some countries use individuals who are minimally trained, if trained at all, to deliver services that would generally be provided by professional counselors in more developed nations.

Therefore it is apparent that there is a need for more trained counseling personnel in developing countries to provide the necessary counseling services individuals require both in day-to-day living and after a disaster or crisis. One way of helping developing nations address their need for the provision of more counseling assistance is through the recruiting and training of individuals in their communities to become paraprofessionals. This training would help to reduce the burden of the lack of professional counselors in these countries and would be an avenue toward helping to provide much needed services. These individuals would be expected to do more than merely assist professional counselors. They may be required to perform in the absence of professional counselors (Jordan, 2006).

Paraprofessionals have been used in the United States to help provide assistance to agencies and communities that experienced a shortage of professionals in a particular profession, counseling included. Pickette (1984) dates the community based paraprofessional movement back to the early 1900s in Great Settlement House projects such as the Henry House project in New York City. She also says that in the 1930s programs like the Social Security Act of 1935 and the Works Progress Administration used paraprofessionals to provide services for their clients. However, Pickette (1984) continues that during the 1940s, not much attention was given to these workers and there was little improvement given to their work status. She continues that it was not until the late 1950s and 1960s that utilizing paraprofessionals was revived because administrators and service providers realized that there was a shortage of professional personnel. These administrators then needed to find alternative means to provide support in order to lessen growing gaps in mental health services. Today, paraprofessionals are still being utilized in various fields in the United States. For example these individuals serve as instructional assistants in schools; they serve as mental health technicians in hospitals and in mental health agencies and others work as client advocates and outreach workers in the community. There are program models demonstrating the success of using paraprofessionals to deliver much needed services in the United States, and these models could be used as models for recruiting and training of paraprofessionals to provide counseling related services in developing nations.

Like many other regions of the world where there is a shortage of professional counselors in developing countries, the islands of the West Indies also are experiencing a major shortage in counseling personnel. These islands also face the need for counselors in schools, in mental health agencies, and social services. For example, currently in Antigua and Barbuda, there are less than 10 school counselors in the public school system on the island, yet there are over 25 public primary and secondary schools. Additionally, the islands in the West Indies annually stand in danger of being hit by hurricanes and earthquakes that quite often leave at least two islands devastated physically and the inhabitants mentally in need. The ratio of professional counselors to clients is often unrealistically disproportionate, and, therefore, often the population is underserved and professional counselors who do serve face burning out. There is always the need to fly in counselors from other parts of the world to assist the overburdened counselors in trying to meet the needs of the population after such disasters.

The focus of this paper will be on the recruiting and training of paraprofessionals in the West Indian setting. This information is perceived as having potential generalizability to other developing nations as well. Models of recruiting and training of paraprofessionals in the United States will be used in the West Indies for preparing paraprofessionals to work in the counseling profession.

2. Recruiting Paraprofessionals

In the face of the critical shortage of professional counselors in developing countries, more specifically the West Indies for the purpose of the present paper, it seems that traditional recruitment strategies for professional counselors alone will not be enough to meet the ongoing ever present need, especially not in the foreseeable future. There is therefore a need to be creative and come up with ways to recruit paraprofessional counselors to fill the void. One way of seeking ideas is to review models for recruiting paraprofessionals used in other regions. For example, Post, Pugach, Hains and Thurman (2002), while discussing strategies for assisting with teacher shortages in urban communities and how to rid an urban community of this shortage, quoted Hodgkinson (2002) as follows: "In the face of such critical shortages, it appears that traditional recruitment strategies ... will not be sufficient to meet the on going need, at least not in the foreseeable future (p 2)." The same could be said for the recruitment needs of paraprofessional counselors in the absence of professional counselors in developing countries. One suggestion given by Post et al (2002) to alleviate such a shortage is to systematically support a wide range of avenues for individuals in the community who want to become teachers [counselors]. They refer to this as multiple entry points into the profession.

The multiple entry points system is going to require an assessment of where individuals are and their readiness to enter the counseling profession at the appropriate level of functioning. Post et al (2002) continue that the goal of a recruitment program such as this is to ensure that everyone who is interested in a career in teaching [counseling] in the community has access to a program that best matches his or her education, experience, family circumstance and timeframe. This idea could in theory be transferred to the West Indian culture and the recruiting of paraprofessionals. Similarly, it will be important to assess where prospective paraprofessionals are in their current employment and to determine the level of interest they have for being affiliated with the counseling profession.

Post et. al (2002) believe that for a recruitment process to work, it is going to require the commitment of the community in order to foster a high level of commitment among stake holders across a range of institutions. In their review, as government officials from the school districts, local institutions of higher learning, school boards, local teacher education institutions, and the business community were identified stakeholders. Similarly, for the recruitment of paraprofessional counselors to be effective in the West Indies, all stakeholders must support such a program. This unified support is important because it is going to require a commitment on the part of the stakeholders from each area where help is needed to make preparation of paraprofessionals a successful endeavor. For the West Indian region, collaboration among the Ministries of Education, the local community colleges and perhaps the local branches of the University of the West Indies, the business community and local foundations and agencies that could benefit from the future services of these paraprofessionals counselors would be required.

The publication, *Recruiting Minority Teachers: A Practical Guide* (AACTE, 1989) purports that there are four principles that should guide a recruitment program. These principals are: (a) Concern for the many aspects of the issue and readiness to address them; (b) commitment by the highest leadership of the affected institutions to the recruitment program; (c) collaboration among all concerned about the problem, with the willingness to share information and resources and responsibilities; and (d) creativity in developing a program, being ready to combine strategies, putting together pieces of different programs already established or to even try something different.

In the AACTE report, key stakeholders who shared concerns for the shortage of teachers in a school system in the Norfolk, Virginia area and who wished to recruit paraprofessional teachers to work in urban classrooms were two local universities, the school systems in the area and the individuals to be trained. These stakeholders were able to proceed with recruiting trainees because there was a commitment to the cause based on the initial meetings (Littleton, 1998). The goal was to train substitute teachers, teachers aids and other nonprofessional individuals to become certified teachers in order to help relieve the local shortage of teachers. The goal was that the public school system in this project would have more certified teachers in the classroom.

The project was designed to train individuals who may have already been involved in the school system because they would already know the children and how the system worked. Creativity was manifested through the delivery of the training curriculum and the curriculum itself. Additionally, creativity was needed when scheduling classes in order to accommodate nontraditional students.

This program could be a model for to recruiting paraprofessional counselors in the West Indies. The four AACTE principles could very easily be used to develop a recruitment program in the West Indies. A difference would be that the individuals recruited in the West Indies would be certified as paraprofessional counselors and not as professional counselors. There already are many individuals in the community who volunteer their time to work with youth programs, HIV counseling, in the churches as lay counselors, and in the schools as teachers, many of whom may be attempting to help students in need in the absence of professional counselors. These individuals could be recruited to be trained as paraprofessional counselors and given certification specific to their training that would allow them to assist professional counselors or to work as gap fillers in communities where there are no professional counselors.

Of the four AACTE principles mentioned, creativity is probably the one that is going to be most needed in the West Indian setting. This is because the concept of counseling is relatively new, and the recruiting of paraprofessionals to be used in place of professional counselors is going to require a creative process to ensure that such a program serves the needs of the population for which it is intended. It is going to take creativity to select individuals who are suitable for such positions. It is also going to take careful planning to implement a recruitment program.

Another program providing a model for recruiting paraprofessionals is The Pathway Project. This project used several methods to recruit its paraprofessional teachers. These paraprofessionals were to eventually become certified teachers. The Pathway Project employed several methods to recruit paraprofessionals. They sent letters of information to prospective individuals already in the system, asked principals and other officials to refer prospective candidates for the project, asked community leaders to communicate information about the project, posted notices on bulletin boards in schools and in the community, and disseminated information via the local media through newspapers, radio, and television (Clewell & Villegas, 2001). Similarly, this method could be used in the West Indies. Individuals already working in the communities could be identified by community leaders or by their peers, and letters containing invitations and information could be sent to the nominees. Likewise, church leaders could share information about the project to lay counselors and others in their congregations. Information could be posted in church bulletins and other community agencies. The prospective paraprofessionals would then have to complete an application process and be selected from those in the recruitment pool.

Recruiting paraprofessionals in the islands in the West Indies or any other developing nation may prove to be a relatively easy task since currently many of the positions that would normally be filled by professional counselors are held by lay people who could be recruited and trained more extensively as paraprofessionals. These individuals would come from churches, and government agencies where they may have already been involved in some type of counseling. It would be important to recruit individuals from the culture in which they are to practice in order to help reduce the cost of recruitment and make the helping relationship more compatible.

3. Training Paraprofessionals

Training paraprofessional counselors in the West Indies would help to assist professional counselors on a daily basis in the schools and in community agencies. Training these individuals would also allow them to fill the gap where there are few or no professional counselors to render the services usually administered by professional counselors. Additionally, these individuals would also be readily available and trained in the event that there is a natural disaster or a crisis on one of the islands. To become a recognized professional counselor in the U.S., it is important to demonstrate completion of specific training within the framework of a master's degree and subsequent periods of supervised practice (Paredes, 2005). These are clear expectations of the American culture. However, this is not the case in the West Indies and in some other developing nations. Often, individuals rendering counseling services are not trained at the master's degree level if formally trained at all. Many attend theology colleges and receive training in pastoral or Christian counseling and then perform the tasks of a professional counselor.

Therefore, in developing a program to train paraprofessional in the region, it will be necessary to take these patterns into account. This will have a direct effect on the type of training these paraprofessionals are to receive. These paraprofessionals will be more than volunteers, yet not full professionals. The training of paraprofessionals in the West Indies would cater to two groups of individuals, those that are already serving in semi-counseling roles and those interested in the counseling profession. The nonprofessionals who are already serving as lay counselors in churches, private agencies, and government agencies could be trained through in-service, on the job training in conjunction with a curriculum designed to give them the needed skills or to enhance the skills they already have. These professionals may need assistance to complete the training program. Research has shown that paraprofessionals may face the challenge of balancing family life and returning to school (Smith 2003). The second group of prospective trainees is those individuals who are not a part of the counseling field and are interested in serving as paraprofessional counselors (e.g. teachers and nurses).

All trainees would complete a one-year diploma program or a two-year associate degree program. The program length would be determined by the training program developers and coordinators based on the perceived need of the country. These programs would be provided through the local colleges on the islands. It would be important for each island's college officials to collaborate in order to ensure uniformity of the dissemination of information to paraprofessional trainees. The American Psychiatric Association (APA) (1959) outlined steps to training volunteers that could be applicable to training paraprofessionals. The first step in the training process is orienting potential paraprofessionals to the profession. This orientation would help the trainees determine their interest in the field. The orientation could also be concentration specific, that is, school or community.

The second step in the training process would focus on enhancing professionalism and presenting exposure to ethics specific to the counseling profession. The third step is course work training. The fourth step would be in-service training, on the job training for those already in an agency or school setting. APA (1959) used two-hour sessions weekly for academic training. The fifth step in the training process would be refresher in-service training and advanced training. The refresher training would not replace the training that an individual would need to become a professional counselor.

The APA (1959) model could be used in conjunction with the paradigms Authier and Gustafson (1975) and Ivey and Ivey (1999) present on using microcounseling to train paraprofessionals. The format of this type of training includes written manuals, poor and good model videotapes and short videotaped practice interviews between trainees which are immediately reviewed. With the microcounseling paradigm, each session is concerned with teaching one of the following: attending behaviors, minimal encouragers, open invitation-to-talk, reflection of feeling, paraphrasing, and summarization. The microcounseling approach would be used in the fourth stage, the course work and skills training stage of the proposed model. Authier and Gustafson (1975) say that the technique is micro since the trainees learn only one skill per session; each skill is concisely defined in operational terms; the model videotapes portraying good and bad examples of skills are short (five to eight minutes); and the videotaped practice interviews are also five to eight minutes in length. Table I provides an outline for the proposed program.

4. Discussion

There are many foreseeable challenges to implementing a recruiting and a training program for paraprofessionals in the West Indies. There will be the need to decide what skills to teach and what level of education to employ for training paraprofessional counselors. Additionally, there will be the challenge to determine how much education these individuals will need to complete in order to be prepared to provide the services required of them. That is, on the one hand, deciding whether these individuals need to complete an associate's degree which could require at least two years of course work, or, would these individuals be able to achieve readiness through a diploma program that would be at least a year of course work. This decision would influence the curriculum that would be established. The deciding factor could be the point at which the individual is entering the training program. It may be plausible that individuals who have already been serving as lay counselors could complete a diploma program for a year, using their years of experience as credit for the second year that may be required of someone not already in the field.

Conversely, individuals who are just completing high school or 'A' level (sixth form) would complete an associate's degree. It is important to note, however, that for a curriculum to be established, there will be the need to conduct a needs assessment to determine the needs of the country. This will help to ensure that the curriculum is designed to provide the individuals being trained with the necessary information and skills needed to perform the tasks they were recruited to perform. It will also be important to determine the credentials that these trainees will receive at the end of their training. Indeed, it may be important to make clear to these individuals that they are not professional counselors. This could be a challenge since they are being asked to perform some of the duties that are associated with professional counseling. Additionally, it may be difficult convincing these trainees that they will need additional future training for them to become professional counselors.

Funding for such a training program in developing nations may pose a challenge. Often governments in these countries are strapped for money and therefore, it may be difficult for them to subsidize such programs. Additionally, funding to assist individuals to return to school may also prove to be difficult. To be able to establish such programs, the government agencies given the responsibility to set up a program may need to seek funding from international organizations such as the World Health Organization or other funding agencies willing to give grants for program development.

Another challenge would be the modification of the suggested models to ensure that they are culturally appropriate. There will be the need to ensure that these models are modified to meet the needs of the specific country or region and are implemented to meet the needs of both the trainees and the country or culture they are intended to serve. It would be necessary to have a pilot study before implementing such a program. This research would give the administrators involved the opportunity to see whether or not what this manuscript is suggesting is plausible. Some areas of research that would need to be explored include, methods of recruitment and whether or not these methods are effective ways of attracting individuals that are suitable for becoming paraprofessionals.

Additionally, it would be important to assess whether or not these recruitment methods are effectively reaching the various sectors of the community that may yield suitable individuals for recruitment and training. It will also be important to assess whether or not the models used in the US would be culturally applicable in developing countries. Additionally, to assess the effectiveness of the program, there would need to be instruments designed to measure that the objectives of the program were met. Participant feedback on the training sessions at various points of the training would be beneficial. This would help program coordinators to modify and to improve upon the program. It would also be important to have trainees complete an evaluation after the fifth stage of advanced training and when they would have worked in an agency and received in-service training to see if they were able to utilize the skills learned in a real world setting. Since there will be two potential groups of people to be trained, it may be helpful to conduct a comparative study of the different points of entry into the profession to see if there are significant differences. This would also help to determine if the level of maturity is important for someone entering the profession as a paraprofessional. That is, would it be more effective to train lay individuals already in the field than to train individuals just completing high school or 'A' levels.

Although the literature review proved to be fruitful, most of the information found focused on training of volunteers. The terms volunteer and paraprofessional were used interchangeably in some cases. Additionally, most of the literature focused on the recruiting and training of paraprofessionals to serve as adjuncts to professional counselors and not as a separate profession. The models reviewed in the literature were useful to help develop and define a recruitment and training program for developing countries. However, it will be necessary to measure the effectiveness and application to the West Indian culture and to other developing countries. Literature specifically addressing the training of paraprofessional counselor to work in developing countries was not found. This suggests that more research needs to be conducted to determine if such a plan will be effective.

Although there are potential challenges, recruiting and training paraprofessional counselors to work in developing countries in the absence of professional counselors has benefits. Smith (2003) says that one of the benefits of training paraprofessionals is that they often already work and or live in the community they are being trained to serve in. This causes these individuals to be familiar with the culture of the population. The training of paraprofessional counselors will help to alleviate the dearth of professional counselors in developing countries. With paraprofessional counselors there would not be the need to deploy professional counselors from developed nations in the event of a natural disaster or other crisis in developing countries. These individuals would also be available to serve on a daily basis in community agencies and in schools. Additionally, trained paraprofessionals would serve as a pool of individuals who could be chosen by government to support for further training in North America or Europe.

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Appendix 1

Table 1: Proposed Training of Paraprofessional Counselors in the West Indies

Steps	Topics
Orientation	Purpose of the paraprofessional program History of counseling profession Philosophies of counseling Overview of various fields of counseling <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School • Community
Professionalism and Ethics	Work and role of paraprofessional in the counseling profession Overview of American Counseling Association (ACA) code of ethics Expectation of professional counselor and expectation of paraprofessional serving in such a capacity Confidentiality
Coursework and Skills Training	Attending Behaviors <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posture, varied eye contact, verbal following Minimal Encourages-to-talk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitating communication by being minimally active Open invitation-to-talk <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of open-ended questions (questions that cannot be answered by yes or no) Reflection of feelings <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbally reflecting back feelings expressed by the client Paraphrasing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeating in a concise manner the essence of the content of the client’s statements Summarizing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Condensing and recapitulating both the feeling and content of the client’s comments over a long period of time
In service training hours (500)	Video/Audio taping in an organizational setting for supervision review Live supervision Weekly supervision with professional counselor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review case notes • Review of tapes and specific skills for further skills development
Refresher in service/advanced training	Workshops for specific techniques training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grief counseling • Substance abuse counseling • Marriage and family issues • Career guidance • Child abuse • Other topics as needed for the population