

PUBLIC PERCEPTIONS OF COUNSELLORS:
A SURVEY OF KNOWLEDGE AND ATTITUDES TO COUNSELLORS ON THE
GOLD COAST

School of Health Sciences

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Counselling

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DECLARATION

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the material presented in this thesis represents my own work and does not include the work of others, unless appropriately stated.

ABSTRACT

This survey sought to determine the public perceptions and knowledge of counsellors on the Gold Coast and Northern New South Wales. Comprising of two studies, this paper extended on previous research conducted by Rogers and Sharpley (1983), Sharpley, Rogers and Evans (1984), and Sharpley (1986).

Study I included a representative sample of 226 members of the general public, plus a sample of 105 medical practitioners. Respondents were asked to complete a 24-item questionnaire regarding their perceptions and knowledge of counsellors. Four questions were designed to investigate whether or not distinctions could be made between counsellors, psychologists, psychiatrists and social workers. An additional seven questions were included for only medical practitioners to answer and sought to determine whether or not, and under what circumstances, medical practitioners would refer to a counsellor. These questions were also concerned with establishing what value medical practitioners would place on having a counsellor working as a team member of their practice.

The results of Study I indicated that both the general public and medical practitioners viewed counsellors positively. Results further showed that the confusion and lack of knowledge reported by respondents from the last Australian study conducted by Sharpley (1986), was no longer evident.

Study II was designed to assess the validity of the reported sources that respondents from Study I indicated that they would utilise in order to access a counsellor. Three samples were involved in Study II. The first sample comprised of 60 medical receptionists, the second sample included 25 counsellors listed in the yellow pages telephone directory, while the third sample involved 6 community centres listed in the yellow pages telephone directory. However, the results of Study II showed that counsellors were not as readily accessible from these sources as was perceived by respondents from Study I. Hence, it could be concluded that counsellors need to involve themselves with promotion and education if they are to maintain the positive regard indicated by the respondents of this study.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of a very dear friend, Barry (Baz) Woodall, who gave endlessly of his time in navigating the delivery and collection of the questionnaires. Without his unfailing belief in me and unwavering support, this research paper would not have eventuated.

His 'pep talks' were motivational and his untimely death facilitated my final drive to complete my degree in dedication of his friendship and the time he invested in helping me.

Although he did not witness the completion of this paper, he is very much a part of the finished product. He taught me a lot about daring to dream and turning the dream into reality.

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