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**SOCIO-CULTURAL COMPETENCE OF A PRESENT-DAY
COUNSELOR: CURRENT PROSPECTS AND
FUTURE CHALLENGES**

Aleksandr F. Bondarenko

**Full Member of the National Academy of Educational Sciences of Ukraine,
Doctor of Psychology, Professor, Chief of the Department of Psychology,
Kiev National Linguistic University, Kiev, Ukraine, 03150
albond2012@gmail.com**

Svetlana L. Fedko

**Candidate of Psychological Sciences, Lecturer of the Department of Psychology,
Kiev National Linguistic University, Kiev, Ukraine, 03150
sv.correspondence@gmail.com**

ABSTRACT

This article presents a theoretical analysis of socio-cultural determinants which influence counseling practice both with the empirical study of stated phenomena in the professional awareness of counseling psychologists.

The culturally appropriate approach in counseling is generally recognized in the modern multicultural world. The specific feature of professional psychologist – sociocultural competence – is rightly considered to be an integral part of general professional competency of a counselor. Thus, the subject-matter of this investigation is the socio-cultural awareness of counselors as a starting point of their socio-cultural competence.

The Sociocultural Awareness Questionnaire for counseling psychologists, MMPI short version (Mini-Mult), Eysenck Personality Inventory Lie Scale were administered to psychologists (N=253) from Ukraine, Russian Federation, Belarus, Federal Republic of Germany and Finland, aged 22 to 68, with counseling work experience from 1 to 38 years.

Principal component analysis (PCA) extracted six factors for socio-cultural awareness of psychologists: importance of psychologist's personal «Self»; understanding client's feelings / states; influence of age and experience on professional behavior; searching of culturally-appropriate methods of psychological interventions; psychologization of client's psycho-emotional state; commitment to the traditions of anti-psychiatry. The suggested results are able to provide a solid framework for future, large-scale study of the cultural aspects of counseling.

Key words: *counseling, awareness, socio-cultural competence, culture appropriateness principle, antipsychiatry, universalization, indigenization.*

Introduction

The modern globalized world poses entirely new set of challenges both for each separate country and for each person as well. In this way, the counseling professionals are forced to intensify efforts to find culturally appropriate communicative competences to ensure their successive work with clients having different cultural background.

In this research we were mainly concerned with value-semantic conditionality of the counseling process. The significance of this subject arises due to the rapid expansion of Western scientific thought in the non-Western countries. The expansion of Anglo-Saxon culture has long been considered by colleagues as a form of cultural exchange. But actually, promoted ideas about global unification and

integration began to be perceived as one-sided in doctrination in their essence.

Over the past several decades the problem of socio-cultural influence upon counseling processes have come to the fore because of people's desire for preservation and development of their own original cultural identifications, on the one hand, and for improving the efficiency of counseling, on the other.

The interdependence of counseling and cultural environment is an acute issue of modern counseling psychology. The functional field of psychologists' professional activity involves interaction with certain mentality bearers, whose psychological difficulties are usually determined by specific factors of socio-cultural background. It seems reasonable to say that there is a special link that mediates counseling and cultural tradition. We call it *socio-cultural competence* of a practicing psychologist or a counselor. It implies the ability to recognize and understand the cultural conditioning of a counselor's professional activity and, therefore, to provide the culturally-appropriate ways of psychological support that is addressed to a client / patient as a representative of certain socio-cultural community.

So professionals are faced with the task to create a system of psychological knowledge and, therefore, psychological practice, which could provide consumers of psychological services with a proper assistance, adequate to their socio-cultural worldview. The first step on the path toward this approach is taking into consideration cultural and ethnical identities, religious traditions and understanding that applying psychological techniques implies, first of all, the achievement of positive experiences of a client rather than proof the advantages of the method.

Background

The phenomenon of culture and its social implications holds a special place in psychological science in general and in counseling in particular. Understanding culture as one of the main determinants shaping social consciousness was the reason for the inclusion of the Cultural Appropriateness Principle in those areas, the direct object of which is human being. The ways of this shaping may be viewed in numerous directions, including those that open its

axiological (Vengeret al., 2012), ideological, religious, everyday habitual conditionality (Sampson, 2000) and associate it with socio-cultural traditions in general (Bondarenko, 2015; Sandomierski, 2015; Sosland, 2013; Sukharev, 2005.).The culturally-appropriate approach in counseling is based on the set of factors which can contribute to the specificity of counseling process. These factors include established beliefs, values, traditions, rules and language of a particular community or group of individuals. The nature of this statement can be easily pictured by the following example.

It is well-known, that Asian and Western cultures have arisen from totally different religious, ideological and social backgrounds. Both cultural traditions can be characterized by dramatically different viewpoints concerning the nature of man, human relationships, family, parenting, life goals etc. This explains why the ideas of Western individualism and internal locus of control may hardly be applied within collectivistic, external Oriental cultures. Consequently, counseling methods which translate individualistic worldview are unsuitable for this group of clients.

A brief analysis of the current state and developmental vectors of counseling professions on the post-Soviet Union territory showed that these fields are heavily influenced by a number of circumstances caused by cultural, political, ideological and other factors. The reasons of this assertion are as follows.

1. Commercialization processes. There is no clear determination criteria for which one might give a name or determine a counseling or psychotherapeutic approach (Downing, 2010). During recent decades the list of traditional approaches is actively replenished with those that are based on various speculative ideas or considerations. Numerous arbitrary or borrowed trainings of personal growth, leadership, etc., have become part of the average consumption.

2. The choice of theoretical and methodological approaches proceeding from the criteria of popularity, accessibility or innovation without taking into account their ideological bases (Northworthy, Heppner, Ægisdóttir, Lawrence & Pedersen, 2012).The practical implication of the under estimated client's cultural backgrounds is in essence the imposition of alien values that might cause potentially irreparable damage to a given personality.

3. The imbalance between Western scientific thought and non-Western one, general trend towards universalization, establishing of so-called «universal values». An essential feature of these processes is that the ideas of universalization are presented as globalization. The latter, on closer examination, represents westernization, or even americanization (Bzhezinskii, 2009; Inozemtsev, 2004).

4. Uncritical borrowing of counseling methods and techniques from the Western psychology as if they were really universal. This tends to be interpreted as adoption of the best practice or as a result of professional partnership. It is appropriate at this point to emphasize, that there is a *Lucrimax phenomenon* at the core of the trend under consideration (Etkind, 1997). The simplest interpretation of this phenomenon is human desire for foreign as «genuine» and, at the same time, the denial of his or her native as «false». Thus, the above mentioned westernization of counseling is nothing else but the manifestation of a kind of professional *Lucrimax* among psychologists.

5. Total pan-psychologization hiding under the guise of «humanization» and rooting in the theoretical concept of anti-psychiatry of the 60's.

It is clear from the foregoing, that present-day psychological services that emerged within the territory of economically developed and industrialized West is represented by a set of methods which are based on Euro-American cultural tradition, with the individualistic orientation and Protestant religious ethics. It is clear that such counseling model can rightly be considered as culturally encapsulated (G. Wrenn's term, 1962). So, the cultural limitations of existing approaches to psychological counseling are obvious. The set of moral values, beliefs, philosophical and religious traditions which are specific to a particular culture can perform as the restrictive condition for their universal usefulness (Bondarenko, 2015; Kim, Yang & Hwang, 2010). Based on certain socio-cultural context, the counseling approach becomes automatically oriented to a certain group of clients—representatives of the relevant ethnic group. This apparently provides a suitable basis for culturally-congruent counseling practice. The phenomenon described above can be interpreted in terms of «culturally-centered» (Bernal, 2006), «culturally-rooted» (Sinha, 2004), «culturally sensitive» (Morris, 2006), «culturally acceptable» (Kim et al., 2010) etc.

At the same time, very little is known at present about the actual existence of methods that would be fully relevant to socio-cultural background of each community they are applied to. Instead, the focus is shifted toward the multicultural aspect of a counselor – client interaction (Wei & Heppner, 2005) or personality traits of a psychologist in multicultural society (Collins, 2007).

The peculiarities of the orientation of the socio-cultural content of a counselors' work are defined by two culturally-appropriate trends: indigenization and universalization; the explicitness and implicitness of which determine the actual reflexive attitude of psychologists towards their own professional activity. It was found that the indigenization and universalization opposition is inherently incorrect. It is important to understand that in fact one is talking about the *explicit and implicit indigenous positions*, views and systems of counseling and psychotherapy.

It is evident that the traditional «universalistic approach» tends to hide its own socio-cultural background and, implicitly broadcasting a definite socio-cultural context (Anglo-Saxon), provides its conceptual foundations with comprehensive status. At the same time, indigenous approach is explicit in its nature. It is now clear that indigenization trend is the outcome of psychologists' methodological awareness resulted in qualitatively new approach in counseling, based on specific psychological theories, concepts and methods, which, in turn, are derived from the socio-cultural background of local community.

Objectives

It should be noted, that the direct study of theoretical and methodological orientation or adherence of a counselor to one of the two leading culturally-oriented trends – universalization or indigenization – seems to be impossible due to following reasons. The first reason is lack of reliable and valid assessment tools. The second – there is no evidence to suggest, that the cultural appropriateness principle, as a core principle of counseling profession, is correctly understood by present day counselors. So, this research was aimed at studying *cultural awareness* that is considered to be the starting point of *sociocultural competence*, i.e. the ability of professionals to understand the socio-cultural conditionality of their own professional

activities both with the cultural identity and ethnic identity of their clients. Hence, the **objective** of this research is a theoretical analysis of socio-cultural conditionality of counseling practice and the empirical study of the stated phenomena representation in the professional consciousness of counseling psychologists.

Method

In accordance with the specifics of the study, the task of selection of the appropriate data collection tools was solved by developing a Sociocultural Awareness Questionnaire for practicing psychologists. The Questionnaire consists of two units.

The first unit aimed at identifying the *basic elements of socio-cultural awareness* of psychologists. The respondents were asked series of questions concerning social and cultural issues of their own professional activity. The answer had to be chosen from multiple options (Figure 1).

1) Are you concerned with client's religious beliefs as possible coping strategies in counseling process?		
Yes	No	Don't know
2) What, in your opinion, is the direct subject of psychologist's professional activity?		
Psycho-emotional traumas induced by interpersonal relationships	Any human feelings or states	Hard to answer.

Figure 1. Sociocultural Awareness Questionnaire – Unit I (fragment)

The second unit aimed at assessing the socio-cultural orientation of counselors in their professional activity. The theoretical framework of this unit is represented by two modern social and cultural trends – *universalization* and *indigenization* – which reflect ideological and value-semantic orientation of practicing psychologists. The key provisions of these two approaches were re-formulated into the statements (Figure 2) with 7-point scale for assessment the agreement / disagreement.

To differentiate the respondents into categories by age, professional status, etc., a number of additional questions were offered.

<i>Since there is no identical socio-cultural systems there cannot be absolutely universal methods of psychological help.</i>	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3
<i>The individual's intrapsychic problems come from the cultural factors (e.g. accepted moral norms and values).</i>	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3

Figure 2. Sociocultural Awareness Questionnaire – unit (II) (fragment)

Finally the Questionnaire included the following assessment scales: 1) professional positioning in counseling process; 2) clients' / patients' positioning; 3) awareness concerning the subject of psychologists' professional activity; 4) frequency of appealing for other professionals' support (e.g. neurologist, practitioner etc.); 5) commitment to antipsychiatry; 6) attitude to the term «diagnosis» in professional activity; 7) appeal to the client's religious beliefs; 8) commitment to the pan-psychological traditions; 9) awareness of cultural appropriateness phenomena in psychological counseling; 10) commitment to indigenization trend; 11) commitment to universalization trend; 12) age; 13) work experience.

Based on the assumption that a counselor is a bearer of not only professional characteristics but also personal qualities, the additional stage of experiment was conducted. The initial list of variables was complemented with the scales from MMPI short version (Mini-mult) (V.P. Zaitsev's modification). Thus, it was decided to associate the problem of socio-cultural awareness with psychologists' personal characteristics. Eysenck Personality Inventory Lie Scale was also applied.

Data analysis

The Quantitative Analysis was used for data processing. For this purpose the empirical data was subjected to the coding procedure that enabled its further processing using statistical methods.

The Kolmogorov-Smirnov (KS) test of distributional adequacy was applied to demonstrate whether the data were appropriate for explanatory factor analysis. A Principal Component Analysis based on 13 explanatory variables on the first stage and 21 on the second were performed to reduce their number into common factors. The Varimax method of orthogonal rotation with Kaizer normalization

was used. The cut-off for factor loadings was set at 5.0. All statistical calculations were performed using SPSS (PASW) Statistics 16.0.

Participants. The study involved 253 psychologists from Ukraine, Russian Federation, Belarus, Federal Republic of Germany and Finland, aged 22 to 68. In order to ensure the comprehensiveness and unbiased estimation of the studied phenomenon, the sample covered a wide range of counseling work experience (from 1 to 38 years) and professional statuses. In general, we have dealt with fully developed professionals, as it can be seen from the Mode and Median indexes concerning the indicators of Age and Experience of counseling work (Table 1).

Table 1

Descriptive Statistics for Variables «Age» and «Experience»

Descriptive Characteristics	Age	Experience in Counseling Work
N	240	240
Mean	39,90	10,30
Standard error of the Mean	0,691	0,469
Median	37,00	8,50
Mode	37a	5a

The data were collected by in-person interviews as well as absentia (by using Internet). After elimination of several data from the respondents because of incorrect completion of the survey, the final sample size was 240 people.

Results

The Principal Component Analysis extracted six factors. The factor loadings explain 12,9%; 12,5%; 11,1%; 9,6%; 9,0% and 9,0% of the total variance.

Table 2

Inner Factor-Structure of Socio-cultural Content of Professional Reflection of Counseling Psychologists

Factor	% of total variance	Variables
1	2	3
Factor 1. «Professional Maturity»	12,9%	- work experience; - age;

<p>Factor 2. «Cultural appropriateness of professional activity»</p>	12,5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - awareness of cultural appropriateness phenomena in psychological counseling; - professional positioning in counseling process; - commitment to indigenization trend;
<p>Factor 3. «Ability to assess the client's mental state»</p>	11,0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the attitude to the term «diagnosis» in professional activity; - client's / patient's positioning;
<p>Factor 4. «Commitment to the traditions of anti-psychiatry»</p>	9,6%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - commitment to antipsychiatry; - commitment to universalization trend;
<p>Factor 5. «Understanding the subject-matter of psychologists' professional activity»</p>	9,0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - awareness concerning the subject of psychologists' professional activity; - commitment to the pan-psychological traditions;
<p>Factor 6. «Openness to cooperation with representatives of related professional fields»</p>	9,0%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the frequency of appealing for other professionals support (e.g. neurologist, practitioner); - an appeal to the client's religious beliefs.

Taking into account the interaction of factor variables, we proposed the name of each factor as follows (Table 2): «Professional Maturity»; «Cultural appropriateness of professional activity»; «Ability to assess the client's mental state»; «Commitment to the traditions of anti-psychiatry»; «Understanding the subject-matter of psychologists' professional activity»; «Openness to cooperation with representatives of related professional fields».

As one may see, despite the large sample size, the obtained factor loadings are quite low. This fact indicates that the problem of sociocultural reflection remains to be unfamiliar for the majority of counseling community. The latter, in turn, tells us that not socio-cultural norms but personal qualities of psychologists encourage them to a deep reflection and improvement of their professional activities.

To verify this assumption, an additional stage of experimental study was conducted. At this point, the task was to emphasize the fact that in counseling profession the psychologist's personality in some way is inseparable from his professional skills (Kucherovskaya, 2007).

Following this argument, the initial correlation matrix was supplemented by additional variables – MMPI short form (Mini-Mult) basic scales (V.P. Zaitsev’s modification). In this research we were guided by the concept of a holistic approach to the personality based on L.N. Sobchik’s theory of leading tendencies. Therefore, clinically oriented basic scale was replaced by the analogues, corresponding to the psychological nature of the initial scales.

Final sample group consisted of those respondents who provided complete information on personal parameters by Mini-Mult test and whose performance on Eysenck Personality Inventory Lie Scale did not exceed allowable rate (28% of initial sample).

A distinct advantage of this stage was that extracted factors involved personal parameters of respondents. Six factors were extracted, which explained 70,4% of the total variance. The loadings are distributed according to the serial number of factors: 18,4%; 12,5%; 12,3%; 10,3%; 9,5% and 9,4%. It is obvious, that high factor loadings enable us to imagine much more realistic overall picture of psychologists’ socio-cultural reflection than in the previous phase of the study. This result is worth a more careful look.

Table 3

Inner Factor-Structure of Socio-cultural Content of Professional Reflection & Personal Characteristics of Counseling Psychologists

Factor	% of total variance	Variables
1	2	3
Factor 1. «Importance of psychologist’s personal Self»	18,4%	- anxiety; - individualism; - emotional lability; - neurotic overcontrol; - pessimism;
Factor 2. «Understanding of client’s feelings / states»	12,5%	- optimism; - rigidity; - the frequency of appealing for other professionals support (e.g. neurologist, practitioner); - the attitude to the term «diagnosis» in professional activity;
Factor 3. «Influence of age	12,3%	- age; - experience;

and experience on professional behavior»		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - client's / patient's positioning; - professional positioning in counseling process;
Factor 4. «Searching of culturally-appropriate methods of psychological interventions»	10,3%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - awareness of cultural appropriateness; phenomena in psychological counseling; - awareness concerning the subject of psychologists' professional activity; - commitment to indigenization trend;
Factor 5. «Psychologisation of client's psycho-emotional state»	9,5%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - commitment to the pan-psychological traditions; - commitment to universalization trend; - an appeal to the client's religious beliefs;
Factor 6. «Commitment to the traditions of anti-psychiatry»	9,4%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - the attitude to the term «diagnosis» in professional activity; - commitment to antipsychiatry.

Based on the semantic content, the factors were named as follows (Table 3): «Importance of psychologist's personal «Self»; «Understanding client's feelings / states»; «Influence of age and experience on professional behavior»; «Searching of culturally-appropriate methods of psychological interventions»; «Psychologisation of client's psycho-emotional state»; «Commitment to the traditions of anti-psychiatry».

Discussion

The first factor – «Importance of psychologist's personal Self» – confirms the well-known statement by Carl G. Jung that not only the method, but also psychologist's personality itself is a powerful tool of influence in counseling process. This is the major factor, and therefore could be considered universal.

There is also an increasing tendency to understand what is really going on with person who call for the psychologist's help (second factor), and this trend is manifested in a certain part of professional sample. The third factor is directly related to the influence of age and professional experience on understanding the sociocultural roots of psychologists' professional methodology.

The proof of this is almost immediate from the fourth factor. It captures the fact that some part of the psychological community

tends for searching culturally appropriate methods of psychological interventions. These psychologists are prone to in-depth analysis of counseling methods and connect them with the mentality, personal and spiritual determinants of their clients' / patients' behavior.

Importantly, the study also shows that even among highly professional community the Kant's idea that mental suffering should be treated by philosophers still exists (fifth factor). The main danger of «psychologization» lies in a failure to recognize the true subject matter of psychologist's professional activity. Its practical implications can be illustrated by a substitution, as a result of which a person, who needs the drug therapy, can simply become disabled. The fact that the latest trend deserves close attention is supported by the sixth factor – «Commitment to the traditions of anti-psychiatry».

Based on the results, it seems reasonable to say, that the problem of cultural appropriateness in counseling is slow to embrace by psychological community. Our proof amounts to showing that there are some contradictions in understanding the socio-cultural nature of counselors' own professional activities. In particular, it concerns the understanding the limits of their professional competence and conditioning of the professional activities by the pan-psychologism ideology. These contradictions complete the proof.

Indeed, in the first quarter of the XXI century, the causes and consequences of human suffering should not be limited to the brain processes only. The data obtained from the experiment may be characterized by a complete logical validity and correlation with the current state of national and international counseling practice, on the one hand, and on the other hand there is a number of controversial points which require further in-depth research and analysis.

Conclusion

The findings might be characterized by a number of issues which require further profound analysis. Particularly, it is noteworthy that the current process of professional reflection still not gone beyond the established 80's tradition, that outlined a kind of vicious circle, marked by figures of Z. Freud and K. Rogers, Carl Jung and F. Perls, the barriers of which our local psychologists so far failed to overcome.

Due to the specificity of the obtained data, one may emphasize the need to supplement the counselors' vocational training with such component of the professional training as «socio-cultural competence» that involves skills of successful solution of professional tasks using the culturally-appropriate methods.

It must be noted, that this research is the initial stage of future large-scale study of the cultural aspects of counseling. The latter requires the special research tools. Another issue for further investigation is clarification and confirmation of culture-specific methods complementary to the certain socio-cultural group.

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СОЦІОКУЛЬТУРНА КОМПЕТЕНТНІСТЬ ПРАКТИКУЮЧИХ ПСИХОЛОГІВ: СУЧАСНИЙ СТАН І ПЕРСПЕКТИВИ

Олександр Бондаренко

дійсний член Національної академії педагогічних наук України, доктор
психологічних наук, професор, завідувач кафедри психології,
Київський національний лінгвістичний університет,
Київ, Україна, 03150
albond2012@gmail.com

Світлана Федько

кандидат психологічних наук, викладач кафедри психології
Київський національний лінгвістичний університет,
м Київ, Україна, 03150
sv.correspondence@gmail.com

АНОТАЦІЯ

У статті представлено теоретичний огляд проблеми соціокультурної зумовленості практики надання психологічної допомоги та емпіричне дослідження особливостей репрезентації зазначеного феномену у професійній свідомості практикуючих психологів.

Культуродоцільний підхід у вирішенні питань надання психологічної допомоги є широко визнаним у сучасному мультикультурному світі. Соціокультурна компетентність розглядається як невід'ємний елемент професійної компетентності психолога в цілому. Предметом даного дослідження є представленість феномену культуродоцільності в професійній свідомості психологів-практиків, як основоположного елементу їх соціокультурної компетентності.

Для вирішення завдань дослідження був застосований спеціальний комплекс методик: опитувальник соціокультурної рефлексії психологів-практиків, скорочений варіант методики MMPI в модифікації В.П. Зайцева, шкала соціально-бажаних відповідей особистісного опитувальника Г. Айзенка. У дослідженні взяли участь 253 фахівці у галузі психологічної допомоги віком від 22 до 68 років, з досвідом консультативної роботи від 1 до 38 років.

В результаті факторизації змістовних корелятивів структури професійної свідомості практикуючих психологів, були виділені такі

елементи соціокультурної рефлексії: значимість особистісного «Я» психолога; прагнення до розуміння того, що відбувається з клієнтом; вплив віку і досвіду роботи на осмислення взаємодії з клієнтом; пошук культуродоцільних інтервенцій; психологізація стану клієнта; прихильність до традицій антипсихіатрії. Отримані результати здатні закласти міцну основу для подальшого, більш широкомасштабного вивчення соціокультурних аспектів практики надання психологічної допомоги.

Ключові слова: психологічне консультування, рефлексія, соціокультурна компетентність, принцип культуродоцільності, антипсихіатрія, універсалізація, індигенізація.

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СОЦИОКУЛЬТУРНАЯ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТЬ ПРАКТИКУЮЩИХ ПСИХОЛОГОВ: СОВРЕМЕННОЕ СОСТОЯНИЕ И ПЕРСПЕКТИВЫ

Александр Бондаренко

действительный член Академии педагогических наук Украины,
доктор психологических наук, профессор, заведующий кафедрой психологии,
Киевский национальный лингвистический университет,
Киев, Украина, 03150
albond2012@gmail.com

Светлана Федько

кандидат психологических наук, преподаватель кафедры психологии
Киевский национальный лингвистический университет,
Киев, Украина, 03150
sv.correspondence@gmail.com

АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье представлен теоретический обзор проблемы социокультурной обусловленности практики оказания психологической помощи и эмпирическое исследование особенностей репрезентации указанного феномена в профессиональном сознании практикующих психологов.

Культуросообразный подход в решении вопросов психологической помощи является широко признанным в современном

мультікультурному світі. Соціокультурна компетентність розглядається як неотъемлемий елемент професійної компетентності психологів цілком. Предметом даного дослідження є представленість феномена культуросообразності в професійному свідомості практикуючих психологів, як основоположного елемента їх соціокультурної компетентності.

Для рішення завдань дослідження був застосований спеціальний комплекс методик: опросник соціокультурної рефлексії практикуючих психологів, скорочений варіант методики MMPI в модифікації В.П. Зайцева, шкала соціально-одобряємих відповідей особистісного опросника Г. Айзенка. В дослідженні прийняли участь 253 спеціаліста в області психологічної допомоги в віці від 22 до 68 років, з досвідом консультативної роботи від 1 до 38 років.

В результаті факторизації змістових корелятів структури професійного свідомості практикуючих психологів, були виділені наступні елементи соціокультурної рефлексії: значущість особистісного «Я» психолога; прагнення до розуміння походження клієнта; вплив віку і досвіду на осмислення взаємодії з клієнтом; пошук культуросообразних інтервенцій; психологізація стану клієнта; приверженість до традицій антипсихіатрії. Отримані результати здатні слугувати міцною основою для подальшого більш широкомасштабного вивчення соціокультурних аспектів практики надання психологічної допомоги.

Ключові слова: психологічне консультування, рефлексія, соціокультурна компетентність, принцип культуросообразності, антипсихіатрія, універсалізація, індигенізація.

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