ATTITUDES TOWARD COUNSELLING IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Summary

This article assesses the attitudes of Middle Easterners on both a government and individual level toward the profession of counselling. It is based on two studies. Study 1 presents responses from 10 Middle Eastern countries to a survey questionnaire regarding the status of counselling and the projection for counselling services in the future for each country. Each country stated that counselling was present and projected that counselling services would increase in the future. Study 2 presents the responses to a self-report questionnaire of 40 Middle Eastern college students who had undergone an initial experience in counselling. About 80% of the students reported satisfaction with the services and 80% stated that they would recommend such services to a friend should the need arise. Arguments are made for expanding of counselling services in the Middle East.

Attitudes Toward Counselling in the Middle East

Little argument can be found with a statement by Shertzer and Stone (1976) that counselling has had its greatest development within the context of American society. Certainly no other country has displayed more of a commitment to the profession of counselling in terms of resources and job opportunities than has the United States. Recently, however, interest in counselling has grown in countries outside the United States. Tyerman (1959) reported the opening of the first child guidance clinic in Great Britain in 1959. Since that time there has been a rapid development and expansion of counselling services in Great Britain in contexts such as universities (Wren, 1961) and secondary schools (Woody and Dubner, 1971).

Reports of counselling services developing in many other countries have also flourished. France (Ostlund, 1958), Belgium (Ostlund, 1957), Norway (Hansen,
1965), Switzerland (Stauffer, 1974), the Soviet Union (Gass, 1959), India (Fletcher & Riddle, 1962), Japan (Nishigaki, 1957), and Nigeria (Okon, 1981), to mention but a few, have all reported on counselling services available within each country. Nearly all of the authors that report on counselling services within different nations and cultures stress the importance of taking into account the uniqueness of each respective culture if counselling is to be useful and productive. Given the highly individualistic quality inherent in counselling services, it makes good sense that sociological factors that influence the individual would effect the quality of the counselling relationship that develops within different cultural groups.

Little work has been done on the status of counselling in the Middle East. Soliman (1981) notes that counselling services in the Arab world have been a recent development and are not widely present. It is, however, this author's belief that the seeds are present for a rapid proliferation of counselling services in Middle Eastern countries in the near future. The rapid economical development of many Arab countries due to oil revenues has brought with it the need for change and adaptation not only on the technological level but on the psychological level as well. Even if on the surface such change appears to be positive, it still creates within the individual the need to adapt and adjust. This in turn creates in the individual stress and strain. This stress and strain can be seen particularly in the world of work. The young Middle Easterner today is faced with a vastly different world of work than were his or her parents at the same age. It is, therefore, around the question of "what work will I do?" that I feel counselling has as its most likely entry point into the Middle East. It seems clear that the recent turn of events in the Middle East contain within them opportunities for the counselling profession to provide assistance for individuals undergoing rapid change. However, it is no secret to those who practice counselling that it is extremely difficult to bring about change if the person to be changed is unwilling to do so. In light of this the two research projects of this article deal with the feelings and attitudes of Middle Easterners toward counselling. The first study involved the attitudes of governments as reflected by government officials and the second involved the feelings and attitudes of Middle Eastern college students who underwent an initial experience in counselling.

**Study 1**

A survey was conducted in line with the premise that before counselling services can be implemented on a large scale in the Middle East, an assessment must be made of the receptivity of the region to the profession. The survey involved administering a four question questionnaire to appropriate government officials in ten Middle East countries. The questions that were asked were: (1) What is the