

ROSAMOND MITCHELL,
University of Georgia;

R. C. CONKLIN,
and

CHARLES TRUAX,
University of Calgary;

C. W. DUNCAN,
University of Florida.

EFFECTIVENESS OF VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION COUNSELORS AND COUNSELOR-AIDES AS RATED BY REFERRING FIELD COUNSELORS

The demand for professional counselors continues to exceed the production of our graduate schools. As a result professional organizations including the National Rehabilitation Counseling Association, the American Personnel and Guidance Association, the American Rehabilitation Counseling Association, and the Division of Counseling of the American Psychological Association have advocated use of sub-professional counselor-aides who will perform the more menial tasks associated with counseling. The general opinion is clear that counselor-aides should operate under close supervision and in very restricted areas such as typing, record keeping, aptitude testing, and other non-professional tasks. The assumption is that professional education and effective counseling are highly correlated, an assumption seriously questioned by some recent research (Truax, 1966; Berenson, Carkhuff & Myrus, 1966; Carkhuff & Truax, 1965; Kratochvil, 1968; and Pierce, Carkhuff & Berenson, 1967).

The pressure for more counselors has influenced some agencies particularly in vocational rehabilitation to utilize counselor-aides under supervision in all aspects of the counseling situation. Occasionally aides have performed all services of a professional counselor in spite of the generally negative expectations of their professional co-workers. Perhaps the most serious obstacle to the full use of counselor-aides is this negative attitude of professional organizations and professional colleagues with and under whom they would work.

This study was an attempt to evaluate the case management of counselors and aides under high and low caseload conditions using the referring field counselor as the rater.

PROCEDURES

A large residential rehabilitation center's counseling services were completely reorganized for this and similar studies conducted over a 14-month period. Three hundred eighty-one clients (called students in the center) were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: a professional counselor, a counselor-aide working alone but under supervision, and a counselor and an aide working as a team. Also, each of the three conditions (counselors, coun-

selor and aide, and aides alone) were randomly assigned to having high or low caseloads. The high caseload workers handled twice as many clients as the low caseload workers (60 clients vs. 30 clients).

CLIENTS

All clients were residents of the Hot Springs Rehabilitation Center and had been counseled under one of the three conditions at least nine months. Approximately two thirds of the clients were male; two-thirds white; and one-third Negro. The largest group of major disabilities was in personality or behavioral problems with a sizable number of students with a hearing deficit and/or mental retardation. The educational level ranged from one college graduate down to a sizable number with below a ninth grade level education.

The clients were involved in training courses covering some 25 areas; the majority training in secretarial, accounting, general clerical, stenographic, general mechanics or custodial work.

Since the clients were randomly assigned to the three conditions and to high versus low caseloads, clients of equal difficulty were seen under each condition.

COUNSELORS AND COUNSELOR-AIDES

Four master's level, experienced, professional counselors were assigned to either high or low caseloads. Four aides were carefully selected ostensibly as secretaries and without special training assumed the role of counselor-aides under the two degrees of responsibility. These were chosen by the staff on the basis of their apparent interpersonal skill. They were given informal consultation and supervision by the professional counselors. The counselors and aides worked together in a one-to-one relationship so that informal supervision and consultation occurred from the beginning. A good working rapport seemed to develop between the professionals and the aides. Each aide was clearly responsible to his individual supervisor even when he handled his own caseload. It was also understood from the outset that aides would not be upgraded to the level of professional counselors.

THE FIELD COUNSELOR RATINGS

There were 60 field counselors, each of whom evaluated the management of his clients on the Field Counselor Rating Scale. This scale consists of 27 items pertaining to counselor case management and client progress. Each of the 27 items is a 7-point continuum. For example, item 10 is "ability to accurately understand the client's needs, goals, feelings, strengths, and weaknesses." On the continuum, seven represents excellent or very satisfactory and one represents poor or not satisfactory. It is significant for this study that the field counselors had generally negative expectations of the counselor-aides. One might expect that such an attitude would negatively affect their ratings of the aides.

RESULTS

Analysis of variance with two levels of caseloads suggests that the field counselors saw no differences in the conditions offered their clients. Surprisingly, there was a slight preference for the aides working alone but under supervision, although this did not attain significance.

The counselors and aides and counselor-aide teams having low caseloads were evaluated as providing significantly greater understanding of the client

($p < .05$), ability to influence the client ($p < .05$), ability to predict problems ($p < .06$), effectiveness in helping the client work out problems and arrive at decisions ($p < .05$), effectiveness in helping the client choose alternative programs ($p < .06$), and overall management of the case ($p < .05$), than under high caseload conditions.

Within the total group of counselors and aides the field supervisor ratings suggested a significant ($p < .05$) individual effect on the quality and comprehensiveness of the monthly progress report sent to him. This was an effect of the individual worker and not the counseling situation or caseload.

The ratings likewise suggested a significant ($p < .05$) interaction effect between the conditions of level of supervision and caseload on one scale. Specifically, the ability to make full use of all relevant information about the client and integrate it at the beginning of his program, was differentially affected by the two conditions.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study are encouraging for further exploration in the use of sub-professional helpers in counseling. While many professional counselors are unsure about the full use of counselor-aides, this study suggests that the performance of the aides can prove their value, at least in a carefully controlled situation. It is important to note that the counseling staff selected the aides on the basis of their interpersonal competence and it was clear from the beginning that the aides were responsible to their supervisors and were not even potentially in competition with them.

Within this non-threatening setting, and with daily contact and supervision by professional counselors, these aides were able to demonstrate therapeutic ability. The field workers saw no essential difference between the care given by aides, counselor-aide teams, or professional counselors.

REFERENCES

- Berenson, B. G., Carkhuff, R. R., & Myrus, Pamela. The interpersonal functioning and training of college students. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 1966, **13**, 441-446.
- Carkhuff, R. R. & Truax, C. B. Training in counseling and psychotherapy: An evaluation of an integrated didactic and experimental approach. *Journal of Consulting Psychology*, 1965, **29**, 333-336.
- Kratochvil, D. Changes in values and interpersonal functioning of counselor candidates. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 1969, **8**(2), 104-107.
- Pierce, R., Carkhuff, R. R., & Berenson, B. G. The differential effects of high and low functioning counselors upon counselors-in-training. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 1967, **23**, 212-215.
- Truax, C. B. The training of nonprofessional personnel in therapeutic interpersonal relationships. Symposium paper presented at American Public Health Association, San Francisco, November 5, 1966.

L'EFFICACITE DES CONSEILLERS EN REHABILITATION ET DES ASSISTANTS-CONSEILLERS TELLE QUE JUGEE PAR LES CONSEILLERS AYANT REFERE LES CAS

R. C. CONKLIN, C. B. TRUAX, R. MITCHELL et C. W. DUNCAN

On a demandé aux conseillers que avaient référé 381 clients à un centre résidentiel de réhabilitation d'évaluer le traitement qui fut subséquemment accordé à ces clients. Les clients pouvaient être à la charge soit d'un conseiller de niveau professionnel, soit d'un assistant-conseiller travaillant seul mais sous supervision, ou d'un conseiller aidé d'une équipe. En dépit des attentes négatives, les évaluations des conseillers ayant référé les cas indiquèrent, en général, qu'il n'y avait pas de différence significative entre les traitements procurés sous ces trois conditions de consultation, et ce indépendamment du nombre de cas assignés à chacune de ces conditions.