
Career Counselling of Girls and Women: Guidelines for Professional Practice

Valerie Ward

Lynne Bezanson

Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation

Abstract

Guidelines for the Career Counselling of Girls and Women were drafted by a Collaborative Action Committee of which the authors were members. The Guidelines were an important component of a framework for action for labour market equality and were subsequently endorsed by the provincial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women and Ministers with Labour Market Responsibilities. They are presented as blueprints for the consideration and action of the counselling profession at all levels, from practitioners to policy makers.

Résumé

Les directives pour l'orientation professionnelle des filles et des femmes ont été rédigées par un Groupe de travail fédéral-provincial-territorial sur l'orientation, dont faisaient partie les auteures. Ces directives constituaient un élément important d'un plan d'action visant l'égalité sur le marché du travail et ont été ultérieurement approuvées par les ministres responsables de la condition féminine et les ministres ayant des responsabilités en matière de main-d'oeuvre. Nous les présentons comme plan d'action pour les conseillers d'orientation professionnelle à tous les paliers, depuis ceux et celles qui exercent leur profession jusqu'à ceux et celles qui font les politiques, afin qu'ils ou elles les examinent et les approuvent.

BACKGROUND

At their 1986 Conference, the First Ministers endorsed a framework for action for equality in education and training, as outlined in the document, *Towards a Labour Force Strategy: A Framework for Training for Women*. Within this document, career counselling for girls and women was recognized as fundamental to the achievement of labour force equality.

In order to ensure that the framework for action became a reality, the First Ministers directed that a Collaborative Action Working Group on Counselling be established. One of the tasks assigned to the Working Group was to recommend guidelines on the practice of career counselling for girls and women that could be adopted as policy or modified by jurisdictions to govern the delivery of their career counselling services.

The Working Group, which included the authors, was comprised of representatives from Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and British Columbia, as well as two federal departments, Employment and Immigration Canada and Status of Women Canada. The report of the Working Group was submitted in the fall of 1988.

This article describes the methods used in developing the Guidelines, presents the text of the Guidelines as formulated by the Working Group,

and suggests the next steps which need to be taken. It is hoped that these Guidelines will serve as a stimulus for individuals to reflect on their professional practice, and that the next steps outlined will encourage governments, professional associations, counsellor educators and employers of counsellors to initiate further action in the directions outlined by the Working Group.

METHODOLOGY

Guidelines, policies and standards governing the practice of counselling were requested from each jurisdiction and from selected counselling and psychological associations in Canada and the U.S. All material was reviewed to determine whether there was an existing policy which could be adopted as a model or, if none was available, to extract principles which could be incorporated into a model set of principles and guidelines.

A literature review was undertaken to locate additional sources which were specific, or could be adapted, to the career counselling context. While many of the documents contributed important elements (American Personnel and Guidance Association, 1983; Association of University and College Counseling Center Directors, undated; American Psychological Association, 1979; American Psychological Association Task Force on Sex Bias and Sex Role Stereotyping in Psychotherapeutic Practice, 1978; American School Counselor Association, 1984; Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association, 1982; Canadian Psychological Association, 1980; Fitzgerald and Crites, 1979; Fitzgerald and Nutt, 1986; Richardson, 1979), no single document studied was judged to be sufficiently comprehensive and explicit in outlining applications specific to career counselling.

A systematic analysis was undertaken of all principles and policies, and interrelationships identified. The 1979 APA principles were found to be the most comprehensive and were therefore used as an organizing structure. Elements of policies, principles and guidelines from the various source documents were separated out and clustered around central themes. As part of this process, judgments were made as to which principles were career-related or could be adapted to reflect this emphasis. Those items judged most important and relevant to career counselling were selected. Refinements were made to wording and several items were added (such as accessing community resources) to address gaps identified in existing sources.

GUIDELINES

The resulting Guidelines represent a synthesis of those documents found to be most useful, adapted specifically to the career counselling context. These Guidelines and accompanying recommendations, which form

part of the Report of the Collaborative Action Working Group on Counselling, were endorsed by the Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women and Ministers with Labour Market Responsibilities.

The full mandate of the Working Group as well as a synthesis of its recommendations are appended for interest.

Guidelines for the Career Counselling of Girls and Women

Career counselling is understood to include services and programs designed to facilitate individuals' development and their ability to make optimal choices regarding their roles in occupational, familial and social structures.

Responsible professional practice requires counsellors to be knowledgeable about the effects of gender in human development and to apply such knowledge in career counselling with girls and women.

In order to ensure responsible professional practice, jurisdictions must require all individuals involved in career counselling with girls and women to adhere to the following Guidelines:

1. Counsellors are aware of the assumptions underlying various theoretical approaches to the practice of career counselling and recognize that such theories may apply differently to women and men. Counsellors continue to examine theoretical bases and assumptions underlying their practice to ensure that they utilize theories and models which are free of sex bias and sex role stereotypes and promote the realization of full potential by girls and women.
2. Counsellors ascribe no preconceived limitations on the direction or nature of potential changes or goals in counselling with women. In particular, counsellors ensure that career choice is an open process and that no individual is limited by gender—or by race, age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation or religion—from the exploration of any career option.
3. Recognizing that the use of male terms as gender-neutral reflects bias against women, counsellors use inclusive and gender-fair language in all oral and written communication and ensure that the resources used to assist clients with decision-making are gender-fair. As an extension of this principle, counsellors also avoid the use of generic adjectives to describe women with handicaps (e.g., blind, deaf, and so forth) in order to avoid excessive focus on the disability; descriptive phrases (e.g., women with visual handicaps) are used as a much-preferred alternative to the more generic adjectives.
4. Counsellors are knowledgeable about support services available to women (e.g., child care, legal aid, health care, transportation, emergency services) and assist clients in accessing community resources which are suited to their needs. Where significant gaps are identified in support services available to women, counsellors may initiate or act as catalysts for the development of such support systems in their communities.
5. Counsellors continue throughout their professional careers to gain knowledge and awareness of social, biological and psychological influences on female development in general and on girls'/women's career development in particular.

As part of their ongoing professional development, counsellors continue to inform themselves about specific issues which may have an impact on the career decision-making of girls/women, e.g., balancing vocational and family roles, issues related to training and employment of women in non-traditional occupations, family violence, sexual harassment and sexual assault, as well as acquiring

- knowledge which is relevant to counselling particular sub-groups, such as women with disabilities, women from particular cultural backgrounds, long-term welfare recipients, and female offenders.
6. Counsellors understand that the source of client difficulties often rests in situational or cultural factors which limit her concept of self, her aspirations and the opportunities available to her. Counsellors recognize and are sensitive to the impact of stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination on the basis of gender—as well as race, age, disability, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion—and work to counteract the negative effects of such attitudes and actions.
 7. Counsellors are aware of and continually review their own values and biases and the effects of these on their female clients. Counsellors assess and monitor their own activities to ensure gender-fair practices, as well as participate in professional development programs, consultation and/or supervision to assist in identifying and working through personal biases and issues which have a limiting effect on their work with female clients.
 8. Counsellors support the elimination of sex bias within institutions and individuals, by promoting fair and equal treatment of all individuals through services, programs, theories, practices and treatment of colleagues and clients which recognize the full potential of each.
 9. Recognizing that there are circumstances where clients will have a preference for a same- or opposite-sex counsellor, whenever possible, clients will be given the opportunity to choose the counsellor with whom they will work.

It was noted that the documents reviewed focused almost exclusively on the responsibilities of counsellors themselves in providing services appropriate for girls and women. Given the mandate of the Working Group, the model Guidelines needed to go beyond the counsellor and include guidelines for jurisdictions employing counsellors. Supports to counsellors, for example, access to training, and supervision and tools to assist them in delivering appropriate services for girls and women, were seen as essential components of a strategy to promote labour market equality. The following specific measures to be taken by jurisdictions were included in the report.

1. The jurisdiction is committed to providing or accessing the training and/or professional development that supervisors and counsellors require to enable them to apply these principles effectively.
2. Each jurisdiction ensures that sex-fair language and balanced depictions of women and men appear in all publications and resource materials.
3. Counsellors will be given an opportunity for supervision/consultation to occur on a regular basis to assist them in working through conflicts and issues which arise for them in their work with clients.
4. A process will be put in place to monitor the implementation/application of the guidelines.

The relevant recommendation in the report, subsequently endorsed by First Ministers, is as follows:

It is recommended that each jurisdiction develop a policy and guidelines for the provision of career counselling to girls and women which reflect the principles and guidelines developed by the Collaborative Action Working Group on Counselling.

While beyond the mandate of the Working Group, it was also hoped that the Guidelines would be reviewed by professional associations representing counsellors in Canada and that these groups would consider adopting these Guidelines or adapting them to their particular contexts.

DISCUSSION

Policies and guidelines are important in stating the value an organization or jurisdiction places on a particular service or program. They influence resources for services, provide guidance on training requirements, and provide a framework by which progress and outcomes are monitored.

It was the hope of the Working Group that the full report and its recommendations would stimulate action, not only in the jurisdictions represented, but in the larger career counselling profession. The Guidelines, in particular, are intended to encourage counselling jurisdictions, institutions, associations and individual practitioners, to study their existing policies, practices and guidelines. Where existing policies and guidelines are demonstrably weak, the Guidelines are intended to be a useful comparative resource for consideration, adaptation or adoption. In this way, they are blueprints for reflection, analysis, reaction and action.

Action on the Guidelines can occur at several levels. Most obviously perhaps, and most easily accomplished is at the level of the individual practitioners. Counsellors may find it useful to reflect on the Guidelines in relation to their personal and professional preparation and practice. Such an analysis may suggest areas for further professional development as well as areas in which supervision and feedback may be of value.

For professional associations, guidelines for professional practice in the domain of career counselling for girls and women make a clear statement on the value and importance the association places on responsible practice. They also influence standards and availability of counsellor training and, ultimately, the extent and type of service received by clients. Several of the documents reviewed by the Working Group, while written with equality in mind, made no explicit reference to specific issues influencing inequity for girls and women. The Working Group concluded that general statements in support of equality in the delivery of career counselling services were not sufficient to guide professional practice. Associations may wish to examine this question as they reflect on approaches that will be most helpful in guiding the practice of their members. Associations might use the Guidelines as a framework to develop principles which make their values and standards explicit and at the same time more tailored to the particular counsellor populations they represent.

For university faculties with responsibility for the professional preparation of counsellors, the Guidelines may provide a framework for reviewing curricula to determine the extent to which the knowledge, awareness

and skills addressed in the Guidelines are required competencies for graduating counsellors. Counsellor educators are in excellent positions to make recommendations concerning the courses students are required to take as well as curriculum content. They may advocate to ensure that career counsellors entering the profession have studied issues specific to girls and women and have opportunities to examine their attitudes towards such issues and gain insight and skills required to work effectively with female clients. This group may also conduct and supervise related research and contribute to the refinement of the Guidelines, by incorporating new research findings relevant to the career development of girls and women.

The Guidelines can further be used within jurisdictions or by counsellors employed by them, to assess the degree to which their training policies and institutional practices support the career counsellor in delivering services in accordance with these Guidelines. Those who employ career counsellors and who are in positions to formulate the policies which will govern the level and quality of career counselling services can be particularly influential in promoting and supporting changes required for the achievement of labour market equality. It can be argued that, as long as the definitions of acceptable standards are restricted to those inside the profession, the amount of change which will actually occur will be inadequate. The Guidelines, particularly those formulated with jurisdictions in mind, can serve as a catalyst to assist in examining the rights and responsibilities of the various players. Some of the fundamental questions which policy makers can be encouraged to examine include the following:

What are the rights of female clients/students in terms of their receiving quality career counselling service?

Given these rights, what assurances need to be in place to ensure that the level of service required is made available to clients? To what extent are these assurances now in place?

What steps need to be implemented to fill identified gaps? Whose responsibility is each step?

How can the assurances be articulated in the policies and practices of the institution so that all parties receive the guidance they require to implement them?

Once articulated, what measures need to be implemented to monitor performance and outcomes at each level of responsibility?

Action at the level of organizational policy and accountability may be the most difficult and complex as all significant players, each with particular interests, need to reach common understandings and agreements. It is also the level of action which has the greatest potential to have impact on the opportunities available and, ultimately, the choices made by girls and women.

While it was not necessarily expected that any association or jurisdiction would adopt the Guidelines verbatim as published, it was hoped that

they would provide a starting point for the preparation of policies and training strategies. The activities planned by the Feminist Chapter of CGCA are an example of an association initiative in this area. It is the intent of the Feminist Chapter to study the Guidelines with a view to tabling them for consideration for adoption by the Association. Other CGCA members are invited to participate in this dialogue.

Ideally, initiatives which occur at the policy and guideline level can be co-ordinated with developmental initiatives which are producing the resources and training needed to put the guidelines into actual practice. Under the Creation and Mobilization of Counselling Resources for Youth (CAMCRY) program of the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation, over forty projects are being funded, all of which concentrate on innovation in career education and career counselling practice. Tools and training produced through these and other developmental initiatives will be important resources to assist organizations in putting the policies and Guidelines into practice and achieving the desired standards for delivery of career counselling services for girls and women.

Readers of the special issue are encouraged to identify ways in which the Guidelines, or adaptations of them, can be catalysts for action on individual, professional and jurisdictional levels.

Collaborative Action Working Group on Counselling

Mandate and Recommendations

Mandate

1. To review career counselling materials produced by all jurisdictions in terms of their usefulness for career counselling with girls and women;
2. To recommend guidelines on the practice of career counselling for girls and women that could be adopted as policy or modified by jurisdictions to govern the delivery of their career counselling services;
3. To recommend procedures to ensure that existing materials concerning career counselling for women are shared among jurisdictions; and
4. To recommend procedures to ensure current labour market information and future projections are provided to both public and private agencies which offer training.

Recommendations

1. That each jurisdiction develop a policy and guidelines for the provision of career counselling to girls and women which reflect the principles and guidelines developed by the Collaborative Action Working Group on Counselling.
2. That jurisdictions, individually, jointly or collectively develop focused, factual materials, in English, French and other languages, on the following subjects.
 - a) For use by girls and women:
 - vocational decision-making;
 - the need to study math, science and technologies;
 - descriptions of occupations, projected demand and other labour market information;

- labour laws and enforcing agencies;
 - realities of life on the job, including the wage gap, employment equity, pay equity, sexual harassment and health hazards; and
 - resources that respond to the particular training and employment needs of re-entry women, aboriginal women, immigrant women, single parents, women with low literacy levels, and women with specific disabilities.
- b) For employers, counsellors and instructors:
- materials which support and encourage the occupational integration of women.
3. That each jurisdiction establish a review process to ensure that the quantity and quality of career information materials which promote the occupational integration of women continue to develop.
 4. That the resource list which forms part of the Working Group Report be updated annually, resources be deposited with public, university and college libraries, and made available through a clearinghouse or other mechanism.
 5. That Labour Market and Status of Women Ministers share the Working Group Report with colleagues in their jurisdictions.

Source

Collaborative Action Working Group on Counselling. *Report of the Collaborative Action Working Group on Counselling*. November 1988.

References

- American Personnel and Guidance Association. *Guidelines for gender-fair professional practices*. Approved by APGA Board of Directors, March 1983.
- American Psychological Association. Principles concerning the counseling and therapy of women. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 1979, 8(1), 21.
- American Psychological Association Task Force on Sex Bias and Sex Role Stereotyping in Psychotherapeutic Practice. Guidelines for therapy with women. *American Psychologist*, 1978, 33(12), 1122-1123.
- American School Counselor Association. ASCA position statement on sex equity (Adopted March 1983). *ASCA Counselor*, January 1984.
- Annual Conference of First Ministers. *Towards a labour force strategy: A framework for training for women*. 1988.
- Association of University and College Counseling Center Directors (AUCCCD). *Equity statement on counseling center services* (undated, unpublished).
- Canadian Guidance and Counselling Association. *A position statement on guidance and counselling services in Canada*. June 1982.
- Canadian Psychological Association. *Guidelines for therapy and counselling with women*. 1980.
- Collaborative Action Working Group on Counselling. *Report of the Collaborative Action Working Group on Counselling*. November 1988.
- Fitzgerald, L. F. and Crites, J. O. Career counselling for women. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 1979, 8(1), 33-34.

- Fitzgerald, L. F. and Nutt, R. The Division 17 principles concerning the counseling and psychotherapy of women: Rationale and implementation. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 1986, 14(1), 180-216.
- Richardson, M. S. Toward an expanded view of careers. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 1979, 8(1), 34-35.

About the Authors

Valerie Ward received an M.A. in counselling psychology from the University of British Columbia. She and Lynne Bezanson participated on the Collaborative Action Working Group as representatives of Canada Employment and Immigration Commission, where they were involved in employment counselling development and counsellor training. Valerie is currently working as a Consultant with the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation, Ottawa.

Lynne Bezanson received an M.Ed. from the University of Ottawa. She is currently Director of the Creation and Mobilization of Counselling Resources for Youth project of the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation. She received the 1991 professional contribution award from C.G.C.A. for her work in developing competency-based training programs for employment counsellors.

Copies of the full Report of the Collaborative Action Working Group on Counselling are available from the Canadian Guidance and Counselling Foundation, Suite 202, 411 Roosevelt Avenue, Ottawa, Ontario K2A 3X9, (613) 729-6164.