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Climate change and mental health: the counseling professional's role

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ABSTRACT

There is a lack of research within the counseling profession that addresses EcoWellness or the impacts of climate change on mental health. Although climate change has consequences for every individual no matter their background, professional counselors have generally been absent from advocacy or leadership initiatives related to climate change or sustainability. This article provides an overview of the impacts of climate change on mental health and proposes the argument that professional counselors should be on the frontlines of climate advocacy and leadership. Further, a discussion of different avenues of leadership and advocacy is presented, along with suggested models of leadership.

KEYWORDS

Advocacy; climate change; counseling; EcoWellness; global warming; leadership; mental health; ecological

Introduction

Within the counseling field, many professionals adhere to an ecological model of counseling (Cook, 2012). Ecological counseling “takes into account the many systems that influence and interact with individuals on a regular basis,” (Shallcross, 2013) however, one system that is often overlooked within this model is EcoWellness, or our clients’ connection with nature. Two well-known models of wellness counseling are the Wheel of Wellness developed by Sweeney and Witmer (1991) and Witmer and Sweeney (1992) and the Indivisible Self Model developed by Myers and Sweeney (2008). Although both of these models are typically used within holistic counseling practice as the basis for understanding the client comprehensively, neither of these models have a specific category for EcoWellness or the health of an individual as it relates to their natural world. While there are components within the larger categories of these models of wellness that touch on the client’s environment, nature-based wellness is not laid out as something unique from the other facets of wellness. Connection with nature can be a major factor in promoting physical, spiritual, mental, emotional, and social health (Reese & Myers, 2012), so focusing on it more specifically in counseling is relevant and important.

While the clients’ connection with nature has tended to be overlooked, so has professional counselors’ focus on climate change, as evidenced by the lack of available literature. Climate change has shown that it can cause devastating impacts on all of the areas of wellness mentioned above (Jaakkola et al., 2018). Climate change also negatively impacts marginalized populations disproportionately (Shonkoff et al., 2011), bringing up social justice and advocacy considerations. In order to truly promote overall client wellbeing, counselors must holistically consider the systemic barriers that clients are confronted with, which should also necessitate a focus on the impacts of climate change.

Overview

Climate change, or “long-term change in the average weather patterns” (National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), 2021, para. 6), is a force that leaves no human unaffected. National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA; 2021, para. 4) also specifies that global warming, or the “long-term heating of Earth’s climate system” is mostly caused by human activity and that we are currently seeing the highest increase in global temperatures that has ever been recorded. This brings up social justice concerns (American Counseling Association, 2020) including economic disparities, cultural affronts in regard to land loss, and the distribution of resources after a climate crisis or the access to resources as a preventative measure. As Naomi Klein touches on in her book *This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate* (2014), our consumer-driven society necessitates extreme production of material goods, which is mainly funded by those with the most wealth and resources. However, the mass production that occurs is typically at the expense of the planet, most affecting those with few resources and little power to change the system.

Ecological Counseling

When looking at the definitions of climate change and global warming through an ecological perspective, it becomes evident that addressing clients’ issues in the context of their broader environment should also include addressing climate change and its effects on clients’ holistic wellness. Climate change is impacting people on physical, emotional, mental, spiritual, and economic levels (Letcher, 2021). In order to attain optimal holistic wellness for both counselors and their clients, focusing on climate change will continue to become exponentially more relevant and important. This can start by taking a closer look at the existing model of ecological counseling.

Ecological counseling considers the various systems with which the client interacts or is impacted by in their daily lives (Shallcross, 2013). In an effort to strive for best practice then, a counselor would need to also consider the impacts of climate change and global warming on their client and the systems that they are a part of. However, even through an ecological lens, this ideal of holistic wellness can fall short. Reese and Myers (2012) point out these shortcomings in the ecological model. Their proposed model is called EcoWellness and introduces a model of wellness that incorporates nature and its impact on mental health in order to achieve full holistic wellness and expand on the commonly acknowledged ecological framework of counseling. Implementing the concept of EcoWellness into counseling practice with clients could be one of the most direct avenues of leadership and advocacy that professional counselors can take with this topic, as they could incorporate it within their already established practices with clients without much change in their routine. Although this model bridges a gap in the previous literature and introduces other avenues of clinical work for mental health counselors to explore, there are still some questions regarding the divide between ecological wellness and EcoWellness.

This article provides a discussion of the relevance of climate change to the counseling field and proposes an argument for why professional counselors at all levels should be aware of and concerned about the impacts of climate change on mental health. Discussions of advocacy and leadership initiatives within the field are also included. Following this overview is a section on who is impacted by climate change and how, before discussing more direct avenues of advocacy.

Scope of Impact

An important question that needs addressed when beginning to explore avenues of advocacy for counselors within the realm of climate change is who exactly is impacted? Although there is no individual or group that is exempt from the impacts of climate change on the planet, there are populations who are more vulnerable and at higher risk of suffering from these devastating impacts (Jaakkola et al., 2018). Marginalized groups will face the most significant consequences of climate

change (Hayes et al., 2018). Specifically included are individuals from low-income backgrounds, Indigenous populations that rely heavily on their natural environments, young children who will be the ones facing the brunt of the worsening climate crisis as they age, and those with untreated mental and physical health conditions.

Impact on Marginalized Groups

Additionally, it is important to emphasize that different marginalized identities do not exist within a vacuum and there are people who will experience the effects of climate change at an even more disproportionate rate due to intersectional marginalization (Hayes et al., 2018). Social justice issues should be of high concern to counselors, as they affect clients' wellbeing, the counselor's relationships with clients, and broader society as a whole. Watts et al. (2018) describe this impact and note that climate change not only exacerbates existing issues, but eventually has negative implications for all populations and people groups. With this in mind, any social justice advocacy or leadership effort that professional counselors become involved in that is not also conscious of climate change and its impacts on their clients seems to be undermined in the long run. However, as climate advocacy and initiatives to combat global warming increase, public health does as well (Nissan & Conway, 2018). Nonetheless, if global warming continues to rise, it can be assumed that public health may begin to decline. Taking this into consideration, counselors' focus should shift to those who are most marginalized in society.

Impact on Young People

Considering the impacts of climate change on younger generations is maybe one of the most crucial areas for prolonging advocacy initiatives and creating a better world for our clients and ourselves, due to the eventual responsibility the next generation will have for carrying on these sustainability endeavors. Children and adolescents have been some of the people on the frontlines of advocacy and leadership toward a more sustainable future. Notably, Greta Thunberg, a Swedish teen advocate for climate change, has won several awards for her advocacy work including a humanitarian award worth one million Euros (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2020). In one instance, a group of teenagers banded together after the Trump administration pulled out of the Paris climate accord in June of 2017 and worked with lawyers to demand governmental change with the argument that the children had "been deprived of their right to life, liberty, and property," (A. Klein, 2017, para. 4) in the face of global warming due to irresponsibility on the part of the United States government.

A term introduced by Glenn Albrecht (2006) describes the state of distress that humans may experience when they suffer "the loss of, or inability to derive solace from, the present state of one's home environment." The term Albrecht uses is referred to as solastalgia. Solastalgia continues to be a common experience amongst young people, as observed by Gislason et al. (2021). In their paper, they go on to discuss their findings that children and youth are disproportionately experiencing elevated levels of distress related to climate change after having been exposed to messages about the potential consequences for the future throughout the majority of their lifetimes. Although efforts to raise awareness are crucial in the fight against climate change, often young people stand to bear the brunt of the anxious and urgent messaging, which seems to be negatively impacting their mental health on a larger scale (Gislason et al., 2021). Not only are the direct results of climate change posing new and difficult challenges for young people, they are also facing new mental burdens and questions about the stability of their future that generations prior may not have encountered in the same way.

Further Cultural Considerations

There are unique concerns in the counseling field regarding culture and climate change, as many places until recently did not begin to recognize mental health issues as public health concerns (Saraceno et al., 2007). The United States Surgeon General released a statement in 2021 declaring

youth mental health as a public health issue in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic (Murthy, 2021). Although the growing awareness of mental health as a public health issue is necessary, it is long overdue. Scarcity of resources because of a lack of awareness could ultimately lead to further intersectionality of marginalization and significantly impact the wellbeing of marginalized groups.

Roberts et al. (2019) found that children in the United Kingdom who were exposed to air pollution at the age of 12 were significantly more likely to experience depression at age 18 than those who had not been exposed to air pollution. Typically, individuals who are at higher risk of being exposed to air pollution are those that live in urban environments or crowded cities. U.S. cities are some of the major hubs for air pollution (Gariazzo et al., 2020). Coupled with this is the continuation of gentrification within these cities, leading to disproportionately Black and nonwhite people being forced out of affluent areas and into communities with far fewer resources (Mallach, 2018). Counselors, therefore, should be aware of the impacts of the changing world on their clients' mental health and the sociopolitical inequities that clients may be facing due to this as well.

For the individuals being pushed into lower-resourced areas, or those who live in rural environments across the globe with low populations and little access to resources, the impacts of climate change still follow them. Even though these areas contribute much less substantially to greenhouse gas emissions than urban environments, the negative impacts of climate change on their mental, physical, and other areas of health will likely affect them disproportionately (Bush et al., 2011). These inequitable consequences will yet again put individuals in these communities at higher risk and have a negative impact on health disparities globally (McMichael et al., 2003), creating more social justice issues for consideration.

The cultural and sociopolitical impacts of climate change do not exist in a vacuum and should not be treated as though there is a one-size-fits-all approach. Professional counselors will need to use their training in multiculturalism to broaden the scope of awareness of the intricacies at play. Further discussion on advocacy and leadership initiatives that counselors could be involved in are discussed later.

Impacts on Mental Health

Although the impacts of climate change on mental health have not been extensively researched yet, there are some who would argue that global warming is the most consequential threat to the overall wellbeing of people across the globe (Cornforth, 2008). Global warming and climate change have been evident for generations, but within the past 19 years have become an issue of major concern due to the rapidly changing atmosphere due to man-made emissions (NASA, 2020). However, even within the limited available research on mental health impacts of climate change, the preliminary discussions suggesting its existence are striking.

Berry (2009) provides three courses in which climate change can negatively impact mental health. The first of these pathways is direct exposure to trauma caused by the increased occurrence of natural disasters. The second and third courses are more indirect. The second includes detriments to physical health due to natural disasters, poor air quality, and other environmental challenges that come along with global warming. Further, climate change may compromise social wellness by slowly destroying the physical land on which economic opportunities are produced and on which communities rely (Berry, 2009). Not only are the firsthand exposures to trauma caused by climate change a direct route of impact on mental health, there is also the presence of what is called eco-anxiety.

Eco-anxiety is described as having an awareness of climate change and its impacts on mental health and understanding that as temperatures continue to rise, mental wellness will suffer to an even greater extent (Clayton et al., 2017). Usher et al. (2019) urge professional counselors to become involved in responding to the mental health issues that are beginning to arise due to climate change and point out the opportunity that is available to make a difference for not only clients, but also the planet. This could also be a point of advocacy for counselors and counselor educators alike, not only in providing

mental health treatment, but also in preparing future counselors to be more aware of climate change and empowering them to become the leaders and advocates on the frontlines challenging the systems that are in place.

Traditional Advocacy Efforts

There are many different avenues of advocacy that exist within the mental health field. However, often these avenues are narrow and specific to one population or issue. One area of advocacy and leadership that has been overlooked within the counseling profession is that of climate change and its impact on mental health. Not only is climate change a concern that effects not just one group, but all of humanity, there are also considerations specific to clients' mental health and overall wellbeing that counselors, counselor educators, and other mental health professionals alike should be more aware of and involved with.

Often when we think of climate change advocacy, we envision protests with people holding up signs and chanting; or we think of individuals speaking with legislative authorities trying to convince them to enact new policies to protect the planet. While both of these more traditional avenues of advocacy are ongoing and important, they still leave room for growth. Most traditional advocates for sustainable initiatives tend to focus on the overall health of the planet and its ecosystems, or on the physical health aspects that accompany global warming and don't address mental health concerns as thoroughly.

When examining advocacy within the mental health field more specifically, we find that although there are advocacy competencies in place, and it is an expected part of the profession to be involved in social justice advocacy to some extent, the issue of climate change has been widely overlooked. The American Counseling Association (ACA) developed their advocacy competencies (ACA, 2018) as supplemental material to go along with the formerly established Multicultural Counseling Competencies (Sue et al., 1992) in an effort to engage counselors with challenging systemic barriers that impact their clients more comprehensively. According to the ACA advocacy competency standard of client/student empowerment, client empowerment involves not only helping clients recognize systemic barriers, but also assisting them in learning how to address these barriers, continue to assess their approaches, and support them as they process their experiences (ACA, 2018). Climate change is certainly a systemic issue that impacts clients and exacerbates other social inequities that they already face. One difference with climate change as opposed to other social justice issues, however, is that it impacts each client in some way, no matter their privilege or marginalization.

Special considerations may need to be made for counselors and other mental health professionals who are advocating within a low-resource area. It is estimated that 30% of all countries do not have mental health services and 40% do not have mental health policies in place at the governmental level to help guide the services that are available (Hann et al., 2015). Mental health advocacy groups have been shown to be an effective way to create change at the global level by emphasizing the gap in accessibility to mental health services, particularly in lower income countries (Eaton et al., 2011). Involving stakeholders can be an important part of advocacy as well in order to create large-group buy-in and drive sustainability initiatives in the long-term.

Counselors as Advocates in the Climate Crisis

Individual Advocacy

According to the ACA Advocacy Competencies (2018), we see that strategies for advocacy on an individual level include identifying barriers facing clients, recognizing the counselor's own socio-political position in relation to power within the therapeutic relationship and the systems that the client is a part of, identifying allies and experts to assist in advocating, and developing a plan together with the client to address barriers. Within this context, we could advocate on behalf of clients if we

have access to systems that the client does not (ACA, 2018), or if the client decides not to be involved in advocacy initiatives. Collaboration with the client is consistently emphasized throughout these competencies, so it is important for counselors to be mindful of participating in collaborative efforts whenever possible.

On the individual level, one of the most direct ways for counselors to become involved in climate advocacy initiatives is within the context of the counseling relationship. This is where Reese and Myers (2012) model of EcoWellness comes in. EcoWellness is defined as “a sense of appreciation, respect for, and awe of nature that results in feelings of connectedness with the natural environment and the enhancement of holistic wellness,” (Reese & Myers, 2012, para. 3). Implementing EcoWellness within ecological counseling work allows counselors to understand their clients’ experiences through an even broader holistic lens and helps them to become aware of avenues for advocacy that they may not have thought about beforehand.

Social justice is at the heart of the counseling profession. Lee and Hipolito-Delgado (2007) define social justice as full engagement from all people in a society with an emphasis on individuals who have been excluded or marginalized due to systemic oppression including those who have been discriminated against due to characteristics such as age, gender, race, sexual orientation, disability, or socio-economic status. Seeking continued education about the systems that are affecting clients would likely benefit a counselor who hopes to remain social justice oriented and better understand what their role is in challenging those systems.

Another area of advocacy that counselors can become involved in is beginning to make changes within their personal lives to promote a healthier environment. Maibach et al. (2019) make the point that health professionals are generally trusted by society as professionals who will put public interest above their own interests. Due to the trust that is placed in counselors by clients, and the professional standard of placing the needs of clients above the counselor’s own, enacting change in their personal lives could be a meaningful step for clinicians who hope to create positive change in the lives of their clients as well.

Community Advocacy

The ACA Advocacy Competencies (2018) also apply, but in a slightly different way, in a community context. Within a community advocacy effort, the professional counselor’s role would be more of a supporter or participant and less of a leader. In this context the counselor could use their skills of group facilitation to assist with and understand group dynamics, identify member strengths, offer any skills that they have that other members may not, and contribute to group considerations within an ecological framework (ACA, 2018). Community advocacy may involve more listening and less directing.

As with any client work, empowerment should be a focal point when engaging in community advocacy initiatives (ACA, 2018). It is not enough for a counselor to step into an advocacy role and then leave the community unequipped to continue the work on their own. Community advocacy from a counseling perspective would include bringing the counselor’s unique skillset into the communities and then helping the individuals within it to learn to sustain themselves and any needed advocacy work for the future. Counselor educators specifically could be involved in community education initiatives at this level as well.

Systems Advocacy

In a broader systems advocacy context, the counselor’s role is slightly different. Counselors working to advocate for groups of clients or communities can take into account the previous advocacy competencies, while also leveraging their unique position of access to knowledge of themes that are negatively impacting their client communities (ACA, 2018). Systems advocacy could take place on many levels including but not limited to staff meetings, school board meetings, agency discussions, or

other spaces that clients do not have access to. Counselor educators and clinicians could collaborate in order to conduct research, distribute this research within an academic setting such as a classroom, inform stakeholders within the community, and educate clients.

Professional Advocacy

Advocacy in this realm could look different for each professional. As counselor educators it could be their job to ensure that the people who are most vulnerable when it comes to climate change have the necessary information that they may not already be getting, whether this be through initiatives in their academic community, within their classrooms, or taking their teaching skills out to the community to conduct trainings or provide resources. This could also look like collaboration amongst colleagues within academia from different schools within their professional network, or perhaps inviting trained individuals into the classroom to speak to students.

Counselor educators and clinicians alike could advocate for the protection of lands and environmental policy at the legislative level with their clients in mind. As clinicians, counselors can instill hope and empower clients to work together as a community for the greater good of all people, which is a part of the ethical standards for best practice (American Counseling Association, 2014). Counselors who live in an area that is immediately impacted by climate crises, could also start a group for the survivors of the crisis. When counselors are mindful of working through an updated ecological model that includes an emphasis on EcoWellness, gaps in service may be more easily identifiable and new pathways to advocacy could be found.

EcoWellness in practice focuses on three dimensions including access to nature, environmental identity, and transcendence (Reese & Myers, 2012). Counselor's work with clients could include interventions such as psychoeducation about EcoWellness or about human connection with nature, helping clients to develop a plan for connecting with nature more in their daily lives, or even incorporating the outdoors into counseling sessions. Reese and Myers (2012) also mention that clinicians who have a wider knowledge base of sustainable practices can also provide individual or group services focusing on psychoeducation to help educate clients on how they can lessen their environmental impact. This type of intervention can act as a catalyst both to promote EcoWellness and a feeling of connectedness with nature within the client, but also as another form of advocacy by promoting a more sustainable future for all of humankind through education and awareness-raising.

Progress cannot be made without first educating oneself. In this regard, counselor educators could have a unique advocacy role by helping to prepare future counselors to become more aware of the impacts of climate change. This could look like introducing conversations surrounding social justice and health disparities, the impacts of the personal choices we make in our own lives and how these affect others, or more concrete discussions of ways to become involved with sustainability initiatives at individual, community, or legislative levels.

Leadership

Along with general concern for clients' wellbeing comes the issue of public health disparities as a whole as global warming increases. When policies and initiatives are enacted to reduce global emissions, public health begins to improve as well (Nissan & Conway, 2018). Any advocacy initiatives that professional counselors try to enact should have a focus on developing leaders within their own communities. This work can include leaders of many different backgrounds; however, some specific models of leadership may be most appropriate.

It is important for leaders to use a blended model of leadership based on community values and long-term strategies. A professional counselor who wants to take a leadership role with this issue will likely need to adapt more than one approach to leadership and exhibit qualities in line with charismatic, transformational, servant, and democratic leadership approaches. In order to effectively lead

and create sustainable change, flexibility will likely be necessary. Although each model of leadership has its own strengths, a holistic leadership approach will be imperative, similar to typical counseling work. Adapting to the needs of our unique clients, communities, and systems will require us to use humility and discernment to determine the appropriate method.

Charismatic Leadership

A charismatic leader possesses skills such as authenticity, personal power, warmth, drive, and persuasiveness (Murray, 2020). This type of leader tends to be the person on a team with a strong vision for the group and is able to win over their followers through their strong, authentic personalities. Someone with these leadership qualities could potentially help create change by appealing to people's emotions and getting community members more personally invested with the topic of climate change and mental health.

Transformational Leadership

Transformational leaders do exactly what their name suggests; transform. These are the leaders who inspire change amongst their followers and are concerned with each team member's success. There are four pieces that make up a transformational leader including idealized influence, or being an ideal role model, inspirational motivation, individualized consideration, and intellectual stimulation (Riggio, 2009). Transformational leaders challenge their followers to actively engage and care about them each uniquely. As a professional counselor, this leadership type could be useful when working with clients or students to help inspire them to make changes within their communities or providing trainings and sharing their motivation with the people that attend.

Servant Leadership

Amongst other leadership types, servant leaders have a unique role. The servant leader is focused on serving their followers needs first instead of leading them. The driving idea behind servant leadership is that when follower's well-being and growth are prioritized then they will be more engaged and effective with the work that they do (Eva et al., 2019). Servant leadership is described by Sousa and van Dierendonck (2017) as a leadership model driven by humility and actionable steps. A servant leader is one who is able to get their hands dirty, so to speak, and humble themselves enough to do the hard work that other leaders may find beneath them. A servant leader as a professional counselor in the climate advocacy role may find themselves serving in communities that are most vulnerable to global warming, creating change through their actions and the relationships that they build as they lead. They are individuals who may have the skill of not only leading, but of empowering, equipping, and producing work that lasts for the long-term.

Democratic Leadership

Lastly, a democratic leadership style would be useful for counselors involved in climate advocacy work in order to produce buy-in from followers and get their input on issues that were important within their own communities to enhance impact. Democratic leaders focus on distributing responsibility amongst their followers and helping to facilitate decision-making in groups (Gastil, 1994). Counselors as democratic leaders could help to facilitate group discussions, as well as collect insight from vulnerable populations about their needs and the impact climate change is having on them. They could help to create change through discussion and participation by all of the members on the team.

The key for counselors who want to take on a leadership role in the work to stop climate change and preserve clients' mental wellbeing will likely be flexibility. No matter which leadership model one takes on, what will remain important is that the leader is focused on community values, navigating uncharted territory, and has an eye for organization. Other leadership styles could potentially be appropriate in this work as well, however, more laissez-faire or bureaucratic approaches could produce less desirable results. A focus on long-term sustainability will be crucial as well, as climate change is not a short-term issue.

Leadership in Action

Developing leaders could take place at many different levels. As a counselor educator this could include having discussions with or even leading trainings for other university faculty. In this way, not only would they be reaching a wider range of students, they would also begin to cultivate a culture of awareness of climate change and sustainability in their academic settings. Transformational leaders may be best suited for this type of work. Challenging the existing systems that are in place and creating lasting change would require someone who is passionate about the cause, invested in their followers, and can inspire intellectual engagement.

Engaging community members is another avenue of leadership development that should be considered. In order to create real change, it is important to get as much buy-in from community members and stakeholders as possible. At the educational level, this could include university partners in the community, members of the city or state that the university is in, or alumni. At the clinical level community engagement could include agency partners and stakeholders, or members of the clients' family or support systems when appropriate. Community involvement could also happen in the more traditional sense with a focus on legislation and engagement from politicians.

Although counselors have a unique opportunity to serve as leaders in promoting sustainability, it may also be important for them to collaborate with professionals and leaders from other disciplines. As has been made evident, climate change is something that affects every person differently. Along with this, there is almost no part of our lives that remains untouched in some way by climate change. Working together with public health officials, medical experts, media outlets, and other professionals will be a necessary endeavor if mental health providers hope to be successful in their efforts to promote holistic client wellness. Often within the mental health field there is a lack of knowledge surrounding public health perspectives, which ends up creating a barrier for access to mental health care, funding for mental health care, and collaboration with other health professionals (Saraceno et al., 2007). Creating interdisciplinary teams of leaders will be an important step.

Since leadership in this realm is broad and encompasses many avenues, including ones not mentioned in this article, it is clear that one specific type of leadership model may not be appropriate. Leadership up until this point with climate change and mental health impacts has been sparse. There is no guideline in the literature for best practice when developing leaders in this arena. Following this is a discussion of leadership models that would likely be effective.

Implications for Professional Counselors

It is crucial to have a social justice orientation within one's counseling work (ACA, 2018). However, current social justice frameworks within counseling have left out EcoWellness considerations and have overlooked the reality of climate change's impacts on clients' wellbeing (Reese & Myers, 2012). In order for counseling work to be instrumental in creating lasting change, Fickling and González (2016) suggest that we must be mindful of the importance of counselor reflexivity, have a focus on critical consciousness and empowerment, and be actively engaged in advocacy.

Beneficence also needs to be considered when deciding how or if one should become involved with climate change advocacy or leadership as a professional counselor. Beneficence describes the responsibility that counselors hold to not only consider, but contribute to the wellbeing of their client (American Counseling Association, 2014). This also means to be active in preventing harm whenever possible (Forester-Miller & Davis, 1996). Therefore, if through means of therapeutic conversation, leadership, advocacy, or personal commitment to change we are able to prevent harm, then doing so would fall within the bounds of the counselor's moral guidelines (American Counseling Association, 2014). Continuing education on climate change and its impacts on mental health could be a starting point for clinicians. Goodman et al. (2004) stated that unless foundational change is happening outside of our offices within our smaller communities, whether that be neighborhoods or schools, and is discussed in religious and political spheres, then our work will never truly come to fruition. To create lasting change, counselors' work must also exist outside of the office.

Counselors hoping to foster self-advocacy in their clients would need to be mindful of emphasizing the client's unique cultural values in the development of an advocacy plan. Any advocacy action plan that is created with clients would need to be practical and doable, considerate of the client's culture, and relevant to their life (Ratts & Hutchins, 2009). Preparing clients to be advocates has to be a collaborative effort that does not put them at a greater risk.

Counselors could also simply start the conversation with their clients about how climate change is affecting them and empower them to take control of what they can to slow the process. Expanding mental health access is another disparity that has been shown to become more prominent in the wake of climate-related disasters (Flores et al., 2020). Those most impacted by climate crises will also likely be the ones who are struggling the most financially, so providing pro-bono services or educating the public about the importance of mental health care could be other avenues of leadership.

Issues related to supervisory relationships should also be considered in this context. As a supervisor, part of one's role could be to facilitate discussions with their supervisees about the implications of climate change on clients' wellbeing. They could also facilitate discussions related to personal choices the supervisee is making that are contributing to climate change and discuss ways for them to become involved in sustainable practices. General discussions of advocacy and the counselor's role within different systems and contexts related to this issue would be appropriate as well.

Implications for Counselor Educators

The main role of counselor educators is to prepare future counselors for their work with clients (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011). However, counselor educators also hold other roles such as mentors and gatekeepers. Within all of these roles, it is the duty of counselor educators to encourage development in future counselors. Within this development comes education about leadership and advocacy work as well.

Not only do counselor educators need to instill engagement in advocacy in their students, they are also expected to advocate on behalf of their students (American Counseling Association, 2014). Counselor educator work in the realm of climate change and mental health will likely take various forms. This could include education about climate issues and mental health impacts, education about advocacy and leadership, and active engagement within their academic and other communities as an advocate, although this is not an exhaustive list.

Educating future counselors on the topic of EcoWellness will be important, but in order to do so counselor educators will first need to become familiar with the topic themselves. Committing to learning more about EcoWellness and understanding its implications for clients, counselors, and various communities will be necessary if counselor educators hope to pass this information along to their students. Advocating for an expansion of current counseling curriculum will also likely be necessary, as EcoWellness expands on the present model of holistic wellness.

Addressing multicultural issues will continue to be of utmost importance to counselor educators as well. Equipping future counselors to be able to understand multicultural issues and systemic oppression will be central to advancing sustainable initiatives and promoting client wellbeing. Education should also extend beyond the classroom and encourage students to become involved in real advocacy efforts being made within their communities. Counselor educators may also need to not only share knowledge but collaborate with students as an active participant in the knowledge experientially.

Chan et al. (2019) discuss the similarities in advocacy between counselors and counselor educators. Based on Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) they state that the same advocacy competencies that counselors work from when advocating for clients can also be applied for counselor educators advocating for students. These principles apply on various systemic levels as well and allow the counselor educator to advocate from an ecological perspective.

Future Research

Future research is needed to better understand the similarities and differences between the traditional holistic models of wellness including the Wheel of Wellness (Sweeney & Witmer, 1991; Witmer & Sweeney, 1992) and the Indivisible Self Model (Myers & Sweeney, 2008) and the expanded model of EcoWellness (Reese & Myers, 2012). Although the two seem to be closely interrelated, further distinguishing the differences could allow clinicians to address more specific needs within their counseling practice. Learning more about EcoWellness is also an important next step for counselor educators who hope to prepare their students to be well-rounded counselors that take into account all areas of an individual's life.

In order to initiate change, it may also be useful for future research to focus on gaining a better understanding of counselors' current knowledge on the concept of EcoWellness. Taking this a step further, gathering data about whether counselors are already incorporating EcoWellness into their practice or not could be a useful starting point for further investigation as well. Furthermore, learning more about counselor's experiences with EcoWellness both in their professional and personal lives could be important to gather more extensive information about the various ways professionals might be incorporating it into their work.

Understanding more about why professional counselors choose to become engaged with this type of work, or why they choose not to, could help uncover deeper potential biases within the profession that need to be addressed before creating lasting change. Learning about the barriers that hinder EcoWellness for not only clients, but also counselors may help to clarify potential starting points as well. Collecting qualitative data from different communities, perhaps those who are most at-risk, of the ways in which they believe counselors could better meet their needs in terms of EcoWellness could also be beneficial. Additionally, helping to foster awareness of EcoWellness first and gaining a better perspective of individuals' attitudes toward their current state of overall wellness may be needed.

Conclusion

This article provides an overview on the mental health impacts caused by climate change and their relevance to professional counselors. Considerations vary for different professional counselors based on the diverse roles they may hold. Continuing on as normal is no longer a viable option and the future of not only counseling, but the wellbeing of people in general, depends on continued advocacy and leadership efforts toward a more sustainable future.

Further research is needed both within the mental health field and outside of it on climate change generally and on its impacts on mental health, as well as its impacts on overall wellbeing. Leadership and advocacy will go hand in hand with research in this realm as advancing the available literature will require greater public awareness of the realities of climate change, as well as political allyship. Professional counselors have a momentous opportunity to not only impact the future of the profession of counseling, but also the future of our world in a substantial way. Utilizing the unique skillset that

counselors are equipped with, they can be a part of creating a legacy that will impact their clients and continue to span far beyond the clinical setting.

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