

BOOK REVIEW

Counselling Older Adults: Perspectives, approaches and research
by Eleanor O'Leary

The experiences and needs of older adults are often not given due emphasis both in American society and in other countries. Many counselors and service providers feel uneasy when the needs of older adults and what they experience during the aging process are the focus of their work. This is natural since most people are uncomfortable at the thought of growing old and facing death, the end point of the aging process. The United States and other western countries emphasize youth in the media and tend to ignore the elderly and their problems. This is unfortunate since older adults often become isolated both in American society and in other western countries. They frequently cut off from relationships that might make growing older and facing the prospect of ill health and dying more bearable.

The book that Dr. O'Leary has written emphasizes the relevance of counseling older adults. *Counselling Older Adults: Perspectives, approaches and research* is an erudite work that represents one of the few books ever to be published on counseling the elderly. Dr. O'Leary describes both the process and different theories of aging, the attitudes different groups have toward older adults, counseling theories and approaches that can be utilized with the elderly, research on the effectiveness of these approaches and ethical issues related to counseling older adults. These topics represent the major areas that need to be addressed in a book of this type. The entire book is well written and is extensively documented and researched.

Dr. O'Leary is promoting an empowerment model of dealing with the needs of the elderly. She advocates counseling as one method of helping older adults to view the aging process as growth producing. This is not to say that she is unaware of the physical and psychological difficulties and traumas that the elderly experience since she is highly cognizant of these problems. Dr. O'Leary, for instance, offers a relevant and sensitive discussion of the following issues that older adults face including the problem of loss, retirement, loneliness, depression, psychosexual difficulties, anticipation of death and insomnia. She believes that the elderly can experience personal growth during the process of aging that compares favorably to the growth process discussed by Dr. Kubler-Ross in the book *On Death and Dying*.

Dr. O'Leary provides an excellent description of some of the most up to date theories and approaches to counseling the elderly. In addition to this, she also emphasizes the following highly relevant counseling variables: counselor related variables, client related variables and counselor preparation considerations. It is important to recognize the importance of counselor related variables in counseling older adults in a model that stresses empowerment since the attitudes of counselors toward growing old and eventual death affect their clients in how they deal with these same issues. In addition, Dr. O'Leary offers insights on how different client variables can affect the therapeutic process in a clear and concise way. She emphasizes the importance of training to help counselors to learn about the needs and characteristics of the elderly, specific skills and

approaches that can be utilized with older adults, and their own attitudes toward both older adult and their own aging.

The emphasis this book places on analyzing research conducted on counseling approaches that have been utilized with the older adult is exemplary. Dr. O'Leary takes a critical look at the research that has been performed assessing the use of psychodynamic, humanistic, behavioral and cognitive, and family therapy approaches with older adults. She criticizes the research designs and statistics used in many studies as lacking in many ways.

The type of critical review of the research that Dr. O'Leary has undertaken in this book is often not found in other books and articles that describe research that support the effectiveness of certain therapeutic approaches. *Counseling Older Adults: Perspectives, approaches and research* provides a knowledgeable review of the relevant research on this topic that helps readers to critically assess the effectiveness of counseling with older adults.

This book is developmental in its orientation to the aging process and the kinds of models that can be used effectively with older adults. It emphasizes the need for empathic and congruent counselors who can listen to older adults and who can help them to explore the physical and psychological issues and problems that growing old can cause. Dr. O'Leary emphasizes that many older adults need counseling that can help them to engage in a growth process related to how they cope with physical and sometimes mental deterioration. *Counseling older adults: Perspectives, approaches and research* is a highly recommended book for readers who are concerned with the needs of older adults, counselors who want to learn how to work with the elderly and researchers in the field of counseling older adults.

Reviewed by

Richard C. Page

University of Georgia