

Conceptions of Helping: A Cross-Cultural Comparison from The Helpee Perspective

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The purpose of this study was to describe commonalities and differences between Taiwanese and American Caucasian graduate students regarding conceptions of helping. A modified constant comparative analysis was applied to transcripts of in-depth interviews. Common conceptions included the identification of two forms of help, tangible and intangible, characteristics of helpers and the helping relationship, the impact of helping on helpees, the interchangeable roles and responsibilities of helper and helpee, helping as a holistic unit in a supportive context, and the ultimate goal for helping. Major differences were found in the participants' emphasis on cognition, affect, and behavior with an effective helping, negative emotions associated with having problems, reasons and attitudes for seeking informal and formal help, and participants' conceptions of helpers' credentials.

CONCEPTIONS OF HELPING: A CROSS-CULTURAL COMPARISON FROM THE HELPEE PERSPECTIVE

Helping can be conceptualized as an interaction between a person, the helper, and a second person, the helpee, with the specific aim of resolving a problem. An understanding of helping concepts might play an important role for helpers in conceptualizing how to work with helpees. Since the process of helping has been identified as intricately linked to cultural and ethnic factors (Atkinson & Lowe, 1995), conceptions of helping might vary across ethnically/culturally different groups. An understanding of conceptions of helping within the ethnic/

cultural framework might be a prerequisite for enhancing the quality of the helping process with people of diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

A major challenge for modern helping professionals is to provide effective helping across ethnically and culturally different populations. Previous studies have emphasized the helping theories, techniques, and strategies of the helper (e.g., Brammer & McDonald, 1996; Ivey, 1993; Martin & Moore, 1995; Nelson-Jones, 1993; Okun, 1992), particularly based on mainstream Western Caucasian helpers' viewpoints (Sue & Zane, 1987). A weakness of these studies was that they depended solely on the Western helpers' views on helping; little research has described the giving and receiving of help from the viewpoints of helpees. The application of Western helping philosophies, theories, models, strategies, skills, and techniques to help ethnically and culturally diverse populations might cause an incompatibility or a conflict between the helpees' perspective on helping and the Western approach of helping.

Evidence indicated that people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds prefer different ways of helping (Atkinson & Lowe, 1995). Authorities have identified that helping, help-seeking, and helping attitudes and behaviors were intricately linked to cultural/ethnic factors (Atkinson & Lowe; Cherng, 1992; Hsiao, 1992). Traditional helping theories, techniques, and practices mainly derived from Western Caucasian mainstream cultures worked well with Caucasian middle-class clients and did not work effectively with ethnically and culturally different groups (Atkinson & Lowe; Sue & Sue, 1990). For example, much of the empirical literature supported the fundamental premise that Western-created formal helping theories have failed to meet the needs of Asian clients (Leong, 1986; Sue & Sue; Sue & Zane, 1987). One reason for this failure might be that most Western helping philosophies, theories, and skills might be incompatible with the helping concepts of ethnically/culturally different people. Atkinson and Gim (1989) concluded that the conflict between the cultural values of Asian Americans and the values inherent in the Western helping system may be the main reason Asian Americans fail to make an initial contact with the helping system, whereas the inappropriateness of helping services may account for the high dropout rate among them.

Taiwanese helping professionals also noticed the incompatibility or potential conflict between the adopted Western helping approaches and Taiwanese perspectives on and need for helping (Hong, 2000; Hsiao, 1990; 1992). The willingness of Taiwanese to initiate formal psychological helping has remained very low. For example, only 3.8% of Taiwanese university students in the sample studied indicated that they seek psychological help when they are having severe mental health or psychological problems (Chang & Kuo, 1984). Another study indicated that 2.17% of Taiwanese university students would initiate formal help seeking if they had suffered from severe psychological problems (Cherng, 1989). Lee (1985) reported that only 5.6% of Taiwanese university students in the sample ever used the services provided by the university counseling center. Furthermore, studies on preferences for sources of help have shown that Taiwanese relied mostly on informal helping, rather than on formal helping professionals (Chang & Kuo, 1984; Cherng, 1988; 1989; Lee; Chien & Fang, 1998). Counseling professionals were ranked behind friends, classmates, parents, and siblings by Taiwanese students for seeking support (Chang & Kuo; Cherng; Chien & Fang; Ju, 1986).

In addition, Taiwanese tended to have a negative attitude toward formal help-seeking in general (Hong, 2000; Hsiao, 1992; Nu, 1987; Pan, 1996) which might prevent them from formal help seeking. Studies indicated that Taiwanese university students viewed the ability to solve problems independently as a way to maintain self-esteem and were inclined to wait until a problem was out of control before initiating formal help seeking (Cherng, 1989). Also, Taiwanese restriction of emotions and the avoidance of emotional expression might be a factor in their unwillingness to seek formal psychological help. Taiwanese tended to view formal help seeking as a sign of weaknesses and losing face (Cherng, 1988; Hsiao), attaching a strong stigma of shame to seeking professional help (Cherng; Hsiao).

In conclusion, previous studies indicated that Taiwanese help-seeking and help-receiving behaviors were greatly affected by the cultural context, such as preferences of the selection of helpers, negative emotional reactions associated with having problems and seeking help, and unique attitudes and stereotypes of seeking formal help (Cherng, 1988; 1989; Hsiao, 1990; 1992; Lee, 1985; Kuo, 1986).

Three major reasons substantially contributing to Taiwanese underutilization of the helping services and the reluctance to seek and receive professional help were 1) the lack of trust of helping professionals and services (Hong, 2000; Hsiao; Pan, 1996), 2) the low awareness of formal helping resources (Cherng, 1988; Hsiao), and 3) the perception of social stigma associated with obtaining formal helping services (Cherng; Hsiao). The conflict between cultural values of Taiwanese and the values inherent in the Westernized helping system may be the reason Taiwanese refrain from entering the helping system and prematurely terminate helping services (Chang & Kuo, 1984; Cherng).

Therefore, a culturally responsive helping approach responding to helpees' needs for help and conceptions of helping within the sociocultural context is necessary (Atkinson & Lowe, 1995). The development of indigenous psychology aiming to match Taiwanese cultural contexts and provide Taiwanese with effective help has been greatly emphasized by Taiwanese authorities (Yang, 1993; Hwang, 1993; 1996). For example, counseling professionals stressed the development of indigenous counseling styles, models, and skills compatible and responsive to Taiwanese clients' cultural characteristics (Cherng, 1992; Hong, 2000; Hsiao, 1992; Lin, 1998; Miller, Yang, & Chen, 1997; Wang, 1992). A way to enhance the development of Taiwanese indigenous psychology is to incorporate a comprehensive understanding of lay people's unique philosophical, historical, aesthetic, and cultural characteristics through direct contact with people (Yu, 1996). A constant comparison of viewpoints across different groups to thoroughly differentiate peoples' uniqueness and commonalities was an effective method in integrating and developing indigenous theories, concepts, and phenomena in profound ways (Yu). Thus, the descriptions and comparisons of Taiwanese and American helpees' conceptions of helping might serve as a tool for developing indigenous helping styles, models, and skills.

The purpose of this study was to describe and compare helpees' conceptions of helping and to address the question "what are the commonalities and differences between Taiwanese and American Caucasian graduate students regarding conceptions of helping?" A comparison between the helping perspectives from these two ethnically/culturally different populations assists both helpers and

helpes to identify and recognize the unique characteristics of helping as it relates to culture. In order to have a comprehensive understanding of participants' conceptions of helping in the context of their beliefs, desires, concepts, motives, values, rationales, and explanations about helping, the author employed the framework of folk psychology, a system through which ordinary people organize their knowledge, experiences, and transactions within their cultural context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Folk psychology is defined as "a cultural group's body of shared beliefs or ways of thinking about the world" and represents something being "shared and used by us all in everyday life (Fletcher, p.4)." Folk psychologists believe that all knowledge represents a human creation and thus is somewhat subjective and relativistic, and that realism can be established on descriptive data that comes from the human mind as rational and scientific regardless of time, place, culture, race, personal desire, or individual uniqueness.

The term folk psychology refers to our ordinary characterization of people in terms of their beliefs, desires, hopes, doubts, and so on (Bechtel, 1988) and serves a causal-explanatory role for references to human intentional psychological phenomena (Greenwood, 1991). As "an instrument of culture" (Bruner, 1990), folk psychology is a system through which people organize their experience, knowledge, and transactions with regard to their cultural context. Because folk psychology is an everyday conceptual scheme that accounts for our own and other's actions in terms of beliefs, desires, emotions, and motives (Greenwood), it is roughly adequate to the demands of everyday life, with which human beings comprehend, explain, predict, and manipulate a certain domain of phenomena (Churchland, 1991). Therefore, concepts of folk psychology are appropriate for comprehending Taiwanese and American participants' conceptions of helping, including their beliefs, desires, concepts, attitudes, motives, values, rationales, and explanations of helping in a causal explanatory form within two different cultural contexts respectively. Fletcher's (1995) concepts of folk psychology, which consists of three content areas describing participants' conceptions of helping, were adopted:

(1) fables and proverbs, (2) general beliefs and attitudes, and (3) shared fundamental beliefs.

Common sense is often expressed in fables or proverbs, sometimes as a valuable guide for behavior and as a causal generalization or psychological principle (Fletcher, 1995). The two specific groups of Taiwanese and American Caucasian graduate students might develop their own purpose-built set of slogans, fables, or proverbs, which have a large influence on building and reinforcing a social ideology to regulate their cognitions and behaviors related to helping. Widely held beliefs and attitudes can be thought of as commonsensical in a particular culture (Fletcher). Both ethnic groups of participants might hold widely shared general beliefs of helping as a result of the impact of their culture, and these shared general beliefs might change with time and vary within people's cultures. Shared fundamental beliefs are those assumptions that people form to maintain even a minimally intelligible and explicable view of the world and our place in it (Fletcher). Students' past fundamental beliefs related to helping serve as the central controlling mechanism that affects their future behaviors.

This study was designed to describe students' construction of the meaning of generic helping within Taiwanese and American students' sociocultural contexts respectively, with the purpose of discovering and comparing two ethnic groups of students' general and shared fundamental beliefs related to helping. The comparisons of conceptions of helping were based on the descriptions that reflected students' daily common sense, general beliefs and attitudes, and shared fundamental beliefs about generic helping.

METHOD

The inquiry of this study, Taiwanese and American Caucasian's conceptions of helping, was a complex phenomenon and was best understood through the perspective of individual participants by a qualitative method with in-depth interviews and detailed data analysis.

Participants

A snowball sampling technique was used to recruit participants. This technique was chosen based on its chain effect of finding suitable students who have rich personal opinions and genuine interest in the experiences of helping and being helped in life. Older students with rich work experience in the helping professions as a teacher, counselor, minister, and psychologist, were preferred because they might have a greater self-awareness in situations where they were either helpers or helpees. This population also might have a better understanding than lay people of what constitutes effective helping. The author employed snowball technique to select suitable participants based on his/her positive observation and self-awareness of the interaction between the helper and the helpee in the context of helping, with an attempt to collect rich information about the conceptions of helping.

The first participant, chosen by the author, was selected based on age and work experience. At the end of the first interview, the interviewee was asked to recommend and prioritize two students from his or her own ethnic group as potential participants. The student ranked first on the list was then contacted, and if he or she declined to participate, the student ranked second was contacted. This snowball sampling procedure continued until ten interviews were completed for each ethnic group, five male and female graduate students from Taiwan, and five male and female graduate students from the U.S.A.

Data Checking

The author communicated in Mandarin while interviewing Taiwanese students. The interviews were recorded and first transcribed in Mandarin, and then translated into English. Two independent experts checked the translations: a Taiwanese doctoral student majoring in Speech Pathology and a Caucasian American who has mastered the Mandarin language through more than ten years working in Taiwan. Five sentences randomly chosen from each of the 30 to 40 pages of the Mandarin transcripts respectively were checked, and the experts were asked to make a judgment about whether the Mandarin transcription and the English translation contained similar meanings.

In addition, the author consulted with the experts about the terms and sentences she had the most difficulty translating, and modified the translation based on the experts' recommendations.

Conversely, the author communicated in English with the American graduate students. After the interviews were completed, an American graduate student majoring in Counselor Education reviewed the interview transcripts. The student reviewed five sentences randomly chosen from each of the 30 to 40 pages of the English transcripts respectively. After he read the sentences, the author discussed the text with him to ensure the meanings of the sentences of the English transcriptions were correct, and asked about the terms and sentences she had the most difficulty translating. The data check confirmed the accuracy of the transcription and minimized any bias in the transcription of information.

Data Analysis

The unit of analysis was the transcript produced by interviews with individual participants; each transcript was analyzed separately. The author (a Taiwanese counseling professional) and an American professor with a Ph.D. in counseling were the analysts. Both went through the same stages of data analysis, as outlined below.

There were two stages of data analysis. First, the transcript data were analyzed by the two analysts according to the principles of daily common senses, general beliefs and attitudes, and shared fundamental beliefs defined by Fletcher (1995). The analysts read the data more than five times to become familiar with them. All significant ideas that recurred several times within the data were listed on note cards and developed into a data-recording chart. The analysts scrutinized the categories, themes, and patterns for salient themes, ideas, and languages present in the data transcription. The data relating to core ideas, such as beliefs, desires, concepts, motives, attitudes, rationales, values, and explanations of helping were coded into categories, themes, and patterns, which were modified to better fit the data during the coding process.

At the end of first stage of analysis, the summary statements about participants' conceptions of helping were completed and both of the

analysts wrote a composite statement about each ethnic group. In order to describe the commonalities and differences about the conceptions of helping between the two groups, the composite statements were compared using a modification of the “constant comparative analysis” (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 72). In the second stage of analysis, the modified constant comparative analysis involved two comparisons between the ethnic groups, Comparison I and Comparison II. For Comparison I, the analysts focused on the developed categories, themes, and patterns in the composite statement of the American student group and then examined only the categories, themes, and patterns from the Taiwanese student group in order to look for commonalities and differences. For Comparison II, the analysts repeated the procedure in the reverse order. They completed a commonality and a difference from Comparisons I and II, incorporated them into a single summary statement, and after a thorough discussion, integrated these two summary statements into a draft report. Themes of commonalities and differences were identified and elaborated in the next session.

During the process of data analysis, two counseling professionals (one Taiwanese and one American) who have had rich teaching and research experiences were invited by the analysts to form a trial team. The four met regularly six times and were actively involved in discussions on the appropriateness, representativeness, and sensitivity of the categories, themes, and patterns described by the analysts. The process of this trial checking was to ensure that the raw data was appropriately sorted and abstracted into accurate and complete core summaries of categories, themes, and patterns. For example, the analysts would explain the process of data analysis to the professionals—how they comprehended and conceptualized the data, elicited meaning from the data, formulated the core ideas related to the conceptions of helping, and sorted them into categories, themes, and patterns. Subsequently, the two professionals and the two analysts came to a consensus on any necessary changes in the wording of each core area. The analysts then modified the categories, themes, and patterns by incorporating these two professionals’ feedback, and completed the final report.

RESULTS

Seven commonalities and six differences emerged from the comparison of the two composite statements about helping from the two groups of participants. Both groups shared some similar categories, themes, and patterns of helping and expressed profound differences in their conceptions of helping.

Commonalities between The Two Groups Two Forms of Helping. Participants distinguished between two forms of helping: tangible (concrete) and intangible (emotional) help. The coexistence of both types makes helping more effective and powerful. For example, an American participant said:

“... that was hard for me to think (the) intangible thing (help) was enough like counseling or talking to somebody (and) sharing it up. Real help was both of these things ... it was emotional support but also tangible support, too.”

Common Characteristics of An Effective Helper. Some common characteristics of an effective helper included a positive attitude, interest, motivation, caring, confidence, a pleasant personality, and professional knowledge and ability. An American participant said:

“I think that was probably her most outstanding characteristic...made her helpful with me (were) the caring, the interest in students, easy to talk to, the sense of humor, those things.”

Helping Relationship. A relationship between a helper and a helpee exists in an effective helping situation. An egalitarian relationship makes a helping experience more effective. Trust, genuineness, and safety are the most important elements in a helping relationship. A Taiwanese participant emphasized:

“The (helping) relationship consists of trust, acceptance, and many other things, such as tolerance, and accommodation, etc....the (helping) relationship is basically a trust, an agreement, ...a tolerance, ...an understanding...”

Impact of The Helping Experience. An effective helping experience can have an emotional, cognitive, and/or behavioral impact on helpees.

As one American participant said:

"... there were a lot of good things (that) happened to me after that [receiving help]... I was sort of a low B student but after that [receiving help] I became a mostly A student... I applied for some other positions ... and was able to do that (work). I really see that [receiving help] as a doorway to open up a lot of things to me..."

Roles and Responsibilities. Helpers and helpees have roles and responsibilities in and contributions to the helping process, and the helpers' and the helpees' roles can be interchangeable. Helpers can learn from the helpees and the helping process as well. Helping experiences benefit both the helpees and helpers. One Taiwanese participant said:

"... a role of a helper doesn't mean that you are always a helper. You learn something from the interaction with the helpee and know that it might be my (the helper) need."

Helping Context. The helping context is expressed in holistic terms. Both Taiwanese and American participants claimed that it is very difficult to separate the different factors in an effective helping experience. An American participant said:

"...(helpers) providing a safe environment...(Helpers) did create the atmosphere of trust... I really developed a close relationship with him (helper)..."

Ultimate Goal of Helping. The ultimate goal of helping is to empower helpees to help themselves, to feel more independent and confident, to feel good about themselves, and to grow. One Taiwanese participant emphasized:

"People who can help themselves are themselves. The final goal (of helping) is to help them (helpees) to accept themselves, be themselves, and be happy."

Differences between The Two Groups

Emphasis on Cognition, Affect, and Behavior. For Taiwanese participants, the result of an effective helping experience tended to be

cognitive learning. However, for American participants, the result tended to be emotional arousal or behavioral changes. A Taiwanese participant emphasized cognitive learning:

"...he (the helper) is very knowledgeable in some fields... it (the helping) needs to be more systematic to know that what you (the helpee) should do how you (the helpee) can do... I need the helping to be more organized..."

An American participant stressed the importance of the emotional impact of helping:

"...somebody (the helper) believed in me other than myself...it was just amazing... sometimes it brings tears to my eyes to realize that they believe in me... somebody ... just cares about me as a person..."

Negative Emotions. Taiwanese participants have more negative emotions attached to the processes of seeking and receiving help than do American participants. Taiwanese male participants tended to feel ashamed and embarrassed about seeking help and female participants were inclined to blame themselves and feel guilty about bothering others if they asked for help. A Taiwanese female participant said:

"I feel she (the helpee) felt very shameful...she (the helpee) wondered why she (the helpee) has so many problems and was so fragile...she (the helpee) won't let others know she was fragile and helpless..."

A Taiwanese male participant mentioned:

"I seldom shared my frustration (with others)...I don't mean I won't trust others. The major reason (I don't ask for help) is that I am a man. I feel to tell someone I have a problem is embarrassing myself..."

Reasons for Seeking Help. Taiwanese participants think that they should seek help only when they have very serious problems, such as suicidal thoughts or serious psychiatric problems. They would rather try to solve their own problems and avoid seeking help until the problem is unbearable. American participants seemed much more free in seeking formal help for various problems and sought help at the beginning stages of a problem. An American participant mentioned her attitude regarding help seeking:

"I knew I needed help so I was willing, I saw I was very willing to get this help... my goal was to feel better... I would come to this woman (the helper)... I ended up sort of feeling a lot better..."

A Taiwanese participant said:

"I never sought (formal) help... There are not serious psychological problems for me to seek (help from) helpers or counselors..."

Attitudes for Help-Seeking. Taiwanese participants were less likely than American participants to seek help. Taiwanese students tended to use self-help techniques. They reported negative feelings attached to the idea of seeking and receiving help from others. American participants seemed to view seeking and receiving help from other people more positively than Taiwanese participants and felt good about being helped and solving problems before they became too serious. An American participant mentioned:

"... I would go (to) ask her a question (help)...if this is a better way... I just ask that question before it built up to that point where I really get in trouble ... I don't really get anything to go that further. I don't mind asking questions (help)..."

Emphasis on Helper Credentials. Taiwanese participants tended to place weight on the professional knowledge and ability of helpers, especially their cognitive and intellectual abilities, and appreciated the help in terms of increasing their knowledge, gaining more information, and doing activities on their own. American participants emphasized the personal characteristics of helpers with appreciation for emotional and psychological support. A Taiwanese participant emphasized:

"Of course he (the helper) needs to be knowledgeable...the information and knowledge he provided, the analysis and help he provided is accurate...they provide professional knowledge, they provided professional instruction..."

An American participant described what the helper did for him:

“(the helper) created the atmosphere to make you (the helpee) feel safe... they listen...you can tell they were genuinely interested (in the helpee) and you (the helpee) had a positive experience out of what was happening (helping)...”

Reliance on Informal Help. Taiwanese participants relied much more on informal help rather than on formal help. Due to the students' stereotypes and lack of information about mental health services, they were more reluctant to seek formal help. On the other hand, American participants were open about formal help and seemed willing to seek formal help for its benefits. A Taiwanese participant said:

“...it (informal help-seeking) is a cultural trait...to find friends to talk to when they have some private or personal things, even when they encounter a very serious problem...”

In summary, American and Taiwanese participants shared some similarities about conceptions of helping: two forms of helping, common characteristics of an effective helper, a mutual helping relationship, the impact of the helping experience, the roles and responsibilities of helper and helpee, a holistic helping context, and an ultimate goal of helping. Profound differences arose between two groups regarding the emphasis on cognition, affect, and behavior for an effective helping; negative emotions attached to the processes of seeking and receiving help; reasons and attitudes for help-seeking; and the reliance on informal help.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study implied that people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds might have some conceptions of helping unique to their ethnic/cultural identity. First, Taiwanese participants were inclined to be more hesitant and reluctant in help-seeking than American participants because they connected help-seeking to negative factors, such as weakness, incompetence, stigma, shame, guilt, embarrassment, and sadness. Second, Taiwanese participants tended to have negative attitudes or concepts about help-seeking and were inclined to get less benefit from various helping resources. This finding

paralleled the results of previous studies reporting that Taiwanese were likely to attach negative attitudes and emotions (e.g., shame, guilt, stigma, inability, and weakness) to help-seeking and help-receiving (Cherng, 1988; Hong, 1996; Hong, 2000; Pan, 1996).

Third, Taiwanese participants, compared to American participants, were likely to expect to receive a problem solving, knowledge-oriented, and structural helping style. In contrast, American participants tended to emphasize the psychological and emotional impact of helping. These findings implied that helping professionals could modify their helping styles, strategies, and skills to meet the expectations of helpees from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds.

On the other hand, the common characteristics of conceptions related to helping highlighted by participants, such as characteristics of effective helpers, the importance of the helping relationship, the holistic helping context, the impact of the helping experience, and the ultimate goal of helping, might serve as guidelines for helping professionals to work with people from American Caucasian and Taiwanese cultural backgrounds. Helping professionals might employ these common characteristics identified by the two groups to strengthen the interaction with helpees and to enhance the quality of the helping process.

In summary, these findings assist helping professionals in further understanding the similarities and differences between Taiwanese and American Caucasian people in terms of generic helping, so they can carefully modify their helping styles when working with helpees from these two groups. For example, helping professionals should pay more attention to self-esteem, face-saving, shame, guilt, and other emotional issues when working with Taiwanese helpees. Helping professionals might need to work on changing or reframing Taiwanese helpees' attitudes toward help-seeking into more positive and constructive concepts to decrease their negative feelings and encourage potential Taiwanese helpees to initiate help-seeking behaviors. Helpers could acknowledge helpees' internal struggling and conflicts to initiate help seeking and provide an opportunity for processing helpees' negative feelings and emotions. This might enable the student to seek help as soon as they recognize that they have problems, rather than waiting until they have more serious problems.

Taiwanese helping professionals might need to work on the promotion of the professional helping services, such as the enhancement and demonstration of their professional knowledge, skills, and abilities within a structurally knowledge-oriented and problem-solving framework to ensure the quality of helping and to gain trust from the public. Information should be provided in order to educate Taiwanese about the availability and accessibility of helping resources, and to clarify the roles and functions of helping professionals. Additionally, because Taiwanese tended to rely on informal help within their own social support network, it is important to establish a connection between the informal helping network and the formal helping resources.

The personal characteristics of helpers, such as the provision of emotional and psychological support. It might be crucial for helping professionals to enlarge the impact of positive emotional attachment on American helpees by using an egalitarian helping relationship.

Based on these findings, while working with helpees, clinicians might consider modifying their helping styles by incorporating the specific characteristics of helping specified by participants, and integrating the common helping characteristics identified by these two groups. Researchers should investigate the important factors associated with helping concepts from the helpee perspective addressed in this study, such as Taiwanese emotional issues attached to helping and problem-solving, and use of the cognitive learning helping style during the process of helping. Also, educators should provide training to break the myth that helpees from different cultures hold similar beliefs, desires, concepts, and explanations about helping, and to actively instruct trainees with culturally responsive knowledge, attitudes, and skills to work with ethnically/culturally diverse helpees. In summary, clinicians, educators, and researchers need to pay attention to how helpees from diverse ethnic/cultural backgrounds construe their own beliefs, concepts, motives, desires, values, rationales, meanings, and explanations of an effective helping experience and an effective helper. Future research could focus on the commonalities and differences of the categories, themes, and patterns of helping concepts that emerged in this study, in order to investigate how helping professionals could employ these conceptions of helping to assist helpees effectively.

LIMITATIONS

The small number of participants from two ethnic/cultural groups and the criteria of sample selection (older students with rich work experiences in helping professions) might limit the transferability of this study. Another limitation might be the usage of two different languages. During the process of translation, some subtle meaning expressed by Taiwanese participants in Mandarin might not have been delineated precisely and accurately into English. In addition, helping professionals need apply the results of this study carefully due to the difference in the nature of various helping professions.

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