ASERVIC Conference 2017 Poster Proposal:

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4. Pain and Suffering: Integrating Theology and Counseling in Clinical Practice

5. 30 minute Poster session

6. 30 minute Poster session

7. Practitioner

8. Religion

9. presentation description and rationale (research or theory)

Counselors are tasked with the responsibility of attending to the health and well-being of clients (Torres, 2005). Addressing issues of pain and suffering fall under the responsibilities of counselors. The twin themes of pain and suffering have been used interchangeably, however, they are quite different. Schmutzer and Peterman (2016) indicate that suffering is primarily subjective, internal, and typically mental or emotional; suffering is viewed primarily as an experience. Pain on the other hand is primarily objective, external, and typically social or physical; pain is primarily a thing or event such as betrayal, hunger, poverty, persecution, disease, a laceration, a broken femur, each of which can be viewed as events that are potentially damaging to a person, to a person’s relationships, or to a person’s goals. Pain and suffering arise when an individual’s physical integrity is threatened, as in the case of trauma (Reid & Wise, 2012) and/or discrimination on the basis of age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and/or religious belief(s) (Freire, 2014).

Pain and suffering can be interpreted as having a spiritual dimension when engaging client concerns in therapy. From a Christian theological perspective, therefore, it is faith in the living Lord Jesus Christ who suffered a gruesome death, but yet who lives to intercede for his disciples, that is, his brothers and sisters, who is able to identify with our sufferings. For this reason, Jesus Christ invites his disciples to come to him to receive
mercy and find grace to help them in their time of need (Heb 4:15–16), especially in their time of pain and suffering in extremis, when they are tempted to despair.

The American Counseling Association Code of Ethics (2014) states that counselors need to be cognizant of clients’ spirituality under multicultural issues and diversity. Clients have voiced their preference in working with counselors who are sensitive to their religious issues (Burke et al., 1999). The Integration Approach developed by Narramore (1973) and promoted by contemporaries like Jones (2010) and McMinn (2012) understands that a relationship exists between Christian faith and contemporary psychology. An integrationist believes that both the disciplines of psychology and theology differ in the ways they address human nature, human development, what goes wrong with humans, and how humans can recover from those wrongs (Johnson, 2010). From the perspective of an Integration Approach, illness/psychopathology stems from humanity’s rebellion against God, leading to our brokenness (Jones, 2010). Illness results in pain and suffering, and involves having an unhealthy sense of self; lacking awareness of one’s brokenness, and/or unwholesome relationships (McMinn, 2012). Counseling clients experiencing pain and suffering, focus on: developing a healthy sense of self; maintaining awareness of one’s brokenness; and engaging in rewarding and close relationships (McMinn, 2012).

10. Objectives (3)

1) Attendees will learn how to conceptualize pain and suffering from a theological (biblical and pastoral) perspective.

2) Attendees will be educated on the application of the integration approach to theology and counseling in understanding pain and suffering.

3) Attendees will analyze the ethical implications and best practices in facilitating therapy from an integration approach to pain and suffering.

11. Diversity/multicultural issues
The ACA ethics code states that counselors need to be cognizant of clients’ spirituality under multicultural issues and diversity. Counselors should familiarize themselves with spiritual concepts pertaining to mental health concerns. Pain and suffering are universal concepts with various cultural, ethnic, and/or religious interpretations. This poster will provide a Christian theological interpretation of pain and suffering in clinical practice.

12. Summary of presenters’ competency/expertise

John Harrichand is a doctoral student in the Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision Program at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia, a Resident in Counseling, and the Graduate Student Representative of Virginia’s ASERVIC. He has approximately 6 years of counseling and Christian integration experience through masters and doctoral studies and practical application with clients.
James Harrichand is completing a Ph.D. in Christian Theology at McMaster Divinity College in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. He also serves as the English Ministry Pastor of a Vietnamese Church in Toronto, Canada. His attention is centered upon an interdisciplinary dissertation proposal that deals with the twin themes of pain and suffering from both the disciplines of biblical studies and pastoral theology (on a macro level). On the micro level this proposal also engages a few disciplines within the social sciences, such as, psychology, anthropology, educational, socio-cultural, and contextual fields.

13. Program Guide Summary:

This poster seeks to orient itself around the twin themes of pain and suffering as experienced by Bible characters, and applied in clinical counseling practice through the Integration Approach. Both the experiences of the sacred and secular persons will be brought to bear on an integrative methodology for counseling wherein one can find hope. Focus is also placed on the ethical implications and best practices in facilitating therapy from an integration approach to pain and suffering.