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## Confidentiality and Disclosure Concerns across Scholarly Disciplines: A Mini-Review

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### Abstract

Confidentiality and disclosure remain a significant concern regardless of age, gender, race, religion, national origin, and social class. Confidentiality reflects the act of keeping secret and protecting the privacy of clients. On the other hand, disclosure reflects the act of sharing matters with others. The thought about 'to tell or not to tell' exists in every individual especially when the individual share issues with the other person. Some choose to disclose and some choose to restrict disclosure. Thus, the aim of this mini-review is to discuss various concerns about confidentiality and disclosure across multiple scholarly disciplines. Furthermore, the review would provide comparisons between the need to protect confidentiality and the need to disclose. An electronic database was used to retrieve comprehensive literature. A number of articles were evaluated and the mini-review involved multiple disciplines. The methodology began with the designation of a search strategy, data filtration, in-depth filtration involving inclusion and exclusion criteria, and production of final output. We conclude that most of the findings highlight the need to protect clients' confidentiality and control disclosure whereas the rest of the findings discussed the need for disclosure. In short, the mini-review highlights that confidentiality is an ethical duty.

**Keywords:** Confidentiality, Disclosure, Ethics in Counseling, Ethical Duty, Privacy.

### Introduction

Concerns about revealing too much, too little, or nothing exists in every person (Kantrowitz, 2009). According to O'Connell (2012), confidentiality protects clients against disclosure and divulgence of the disclosure can only occur when authorized by the clients or when there is a confirmed sign of danger to clients or others. Confidentiality reflects the essence of the client-practitioner relationship and it is unlikely to produce the desired outcome that society would want without confidentiality (Levy, Galambos, & Skarbek, 2014). There are cases where fundamental of confidentiality is being eroded by the unlimited use of subpoenas (Levy, Galambos, & Skarbek, 2014). Legal practitioners would request for subpoenas from the counseling practitioners, social workers, and mental health practitioners to obtain access to clients' records and this would lead to disclosure as well. There are

multiple reasons for restricting disclosure such as private matters, felt that people would not listen and understand when they disclose, and felt obligated to tell people about their problems (Hunter, Barber, Olsen, McNeely, & Bose 2011). On the other hand, Hunter and colleagues (2011) stated that people choose non-disclosure due to the desire to keep matters in privacy, fear of disapproval and punishment, to seek support, and to change people's minds. Gender and age significantly would influence the process of disclosure (Alaggia, Collin-Vezina, & Lateef, 2017) and a decision to protect confidentiality refers to nondisclosure.

The main objective of the current mini-review is to identify various concerns relevant to confidentiality and disclosure via a strategic mini literature review. Furthermore, the mini-review would provide comparisons between the need to protect confidentiality and the need to disclose. Thus, 'concerns about confidentiality and disclosure' would be a recurrent theme in the mini-review while understanding diverse contexts in which the research took place. The research questions are as follows:

- (a) Who are often concerned with the issues of confidentiality and disclosure?
- (b) Which one do most of the clients prefer: Confidentiality or disclosure?

### **Methodology**

First, a search strategy was designed. Next, data were filtered based on a key term. Then, the process continued with the in-depth filtration process involving inclusion and exclusion criteria such as source type, specific keyword, language, and year. The final output then was accessed to identify clients' concerns about confidentiality and disclosure matters.

### **The Search Strategy**

All the articles reviewed were published between the year of 2015 and 2018. A computer-based search strategy was applied and the search was conducted. The key term, 'confidentiality and disclosure in counseling' was used to identify empirical articles and the search was conducted via SCOPUS database. Furthermore, the strategic search of articles involved inclusion and exclusion criteria. According to Panacek and Thompson (2007), inclusion criteria refer to subjects that are included in the study to attain the needs of the researcher. On the other hand, exclusion criteria refer to subjects that are eliminated from the research to avoid potential study problems (Panacek & Thompson 2007). The mini-review of nine articles from multiple disciplines focused on two aspects: (a) confidentiality; and (b) disclosure, which should be protected and limited anywhere and at any time. Table 1 shows the name of authors, year, title, and disciplines of the nine articles respectively. Multiple disciplines per article are possible (Steenbakkens, Steen, & Grietens 2018) as shown in Table 1.

**Table 1: Description of the Articles**

<b>Author</b>	<b>Year</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Discipline</b>
Thomson, Telfer, Awiti, Munge, Ngunga, & Reid	2018	Navigating the risks of prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV services in Kibera, Kenya: Barriers to engaging and remaining in care.	1. Agriculture and biological sciences 2. Biochemistry, genetics, and molecular biology
Mkwanazi, Rochat, & Bland	2017	The Amagugu intervention: A qualitative investigation into maternal experiences and perspectives of a maternal HIV disclosure support intervention in rural South Africa.	1. Medicine
Wirtz, Clouse, Veronese, Thu, Naing, Barat, & Beyrer	2017	New HIV testing technologies in the context of a concentrated epidemic and evolving HIV prevention: Qualitative research on HIV self-testing among men who have sex with men and transgender women in Yangon, Myanmar.	1. Medicine
Pickup, Bowater, Thorne, Clift, & Hudsmith	2016	Travel insurance in adult congenital heart disease- Do they declare their condition?	1. Medicine
Goyette, Wamuti, Owuor, Bukusi, Maingi, Otieno, Cherutich, Ng'ang'a, & Farquhar	2016	Understanding barriers to scaling up HIV-assisted partner services in Kenya	1. Medicine
Helm & Jones	2016	Practice paper of the academy of nutrition and dietetics: Social media and the dietetics practitioner: Opportunities, challenges, and best practices	1. Medicine 2. Nursing
Elsheikh, Crutzen, & Van den Borne	2015	Perceptions of Sudanese women of reproductive	1. Medicine

	age toward HIV/AIDS and services for prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV global health	
Ostermann, Njau, 2015 Mluy, Brown, Mühlbacher, & Thielman	One size does not fit all: HIV testing preferences differ among high-risk groups in Northern Tanzania	1. Medicine 2. Psychology 3. Social Sciences
Laharnar, Perrin, 2015 Hanson, Anger, & Glass	Workplace domestic violence leave laws: Implementation, use, implications	1. Medicine

### Data Filtration

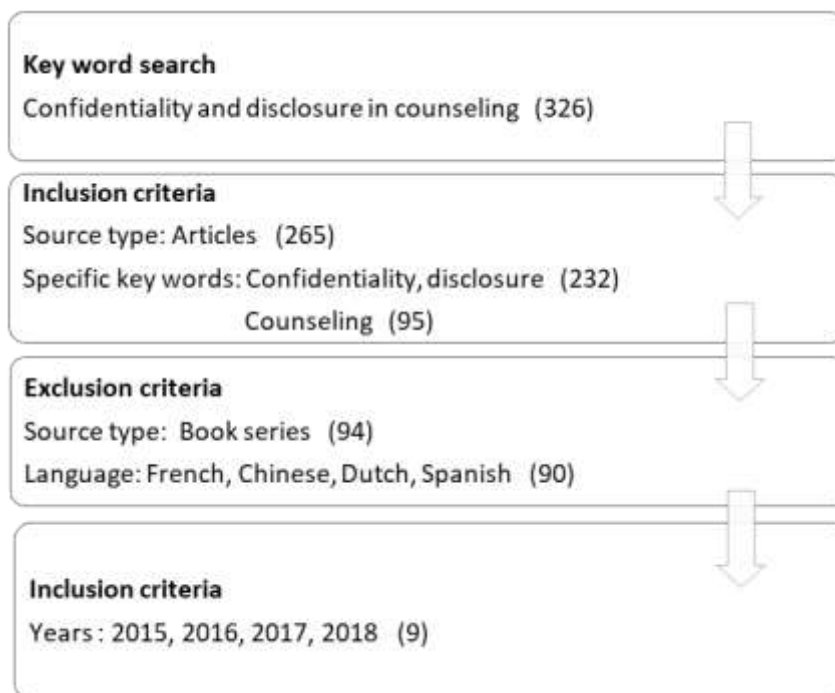
As reported in Figure 1, the data extraction initiated with the key word search which was 'confidentiality and disclosure in counseling' and yielded a total of 326 articles and one book series.

### Inclusion Criteria

The data generated were then brought to a closer inspection. An inclusion process was carried out and the criteria involved were as follows: (a) source type: articles; (b) specific keywords: confidentiality, disclosure, and counseling; and (c) year: 2015, 2016, 2017, and 2018. 'Year' was the final criteria processed after performing the exclusion process and the focus of this review was on the latest publications. The number of articles generated at each step decreased as shown in Figure 1.

### Exclusion Criteria

Two criteria were refined and excluded from the mini-review: (a) source type: book series; and (b) language: French, Chinese, Dutch, and Spanish. The final number of articles extracted was nine.



**Figure 1: Flowchart of the Mini-Review**

### Data Assessment

The final output of the mini-review was analyzed. A total of nine articles were analyzed and the information retrieved from the articles is as reported in Table 2. The limited number of articles made the review more manageable.

**Table 2. Information Retrieved as a Result of Data Assessment**

Title	Year	Information retrieved
Navigating the risks of prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV services in Kibera, Kenya: Barriers to engaging and remaining in care	2018	HIV positive women who have participated in the free prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) HIV program had to continuously contemplate the risks and benefit of PMTCT interventions to maintain confidentiality. Authors suggested that customized counseling should be provided to optimize the PMTCT interventions.
The Amagugu intervention: A qualitative investigation into maternal experiences and perspectives of a maternal HIV disclosure support intervention in rural South Africa.	2017	HIV infected mothers' do not disclose about their treatment to children due to their children's capacity to understand HIV, fear of HIV stigma towards mothers, and poor skills to undertake disclosure. They found that their school-aged HIV uninfected children were supportive after have they disclosed about their HIV treatment. However, structured support is required when dealing with primary school-aged children.
New HIV testing technologies in the context	2017	HIV Self-testing (HIVST) keeps disclosure within individuals' control. Men who have sex with men



of a concentrated epidemic and evolving HIV prevention: Qualitative research on HIV self-testing among men who have sex with men and transgender women in Yangon, Myanmar.		(MSM) and transgender women (TS) were optimistic about the privacy and confidentiality of HIVST as the test controls disclosure about their sexual behavior and HIV status. They requested HIV counseling and linkage to HIVST services.
Travel insurance in adult congenital heart disease- Do they declare their condition?	2016	Majority adult congenital heart disease (ACHD) clients are using travel insurance. The others did not disclose their cardiac condition when obtaining travel insurance. Authors suggested that appropriate counseling is necessary to increase the clients' awareness of the need for disclosure.
Understanding barriers to scaling up HIV-assisted partner services in Kenya	2016	Assisted partner services (APS) is used to identify new cases of HIV. However, HIV positive clients felt discomfort to provide partners' information due to lack of trust in the social worker. Poor understanding of the APS also affected clients' comfort to participate in the study. Authors suggested that good social worker-client relationship and alternative method of disclosure would make the clients feel comfortable to reveal their partners' information.
Practice paper of the academy of nutrition and dietetics: Social media and the dietetics practitioner: Opportunities, challenges, and best practices	2016	Social media tools have been used vastly to communicate food and nutrition information. It is used as virtual nutrition counseling and peer-to-peer support. The author highlighted that it is essential to use social media effectively and ethically. Disclosure rules should be followed and clients' confidentiality should be protected.
Perceptions of Sudanese women of reproductive age toward HIV/AIDS and services for prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV global health	2015	Sudanese women were introduced to Prevention of mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) services. However, several factors have affected their willingness to undergo antenatal HIV testing: (a) not interested to disclose their HIV status due to stigma; and (b) confidentiality issues. Further research should be conducted to identify psycho-social determinates that have influenced clients' decision to undergo HIV testing.
One size does not fit all: HIV testing preferences differ among high-risk groups in Northern Tanzania	2015	'Seek, test, and treat' strategy was used to curb HIV epidemic among high risk groups. Male mountain porters prefer testing in venues where antiretroviral therapy was available. In contrast, female bar workers were less likely to choose home testing as they were concerned about disclosure issues. Testing

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options should be tailored to improve uptake testing among high risk groups.

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Workplace violence Implementation, implications	domestic leaves use,	2015 laws:	Intimate partner violence (IPV) disclosure has resulted in positive workplace response. Employed survivors also reported negative reactions due to confidentiality issues. Workplace training on IPV were suggested.
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### Findings

The report as illustrated in Table 3 shows that most of the articles highlighted on the need to protect clients' confidentiality. For instance, HIV positive women were worried about their engagement in the treatment and decided not to disclose due to HIV stigma and discrimination. There were less than four articles that recommended disclosure for the benefit of clients.

**Table 3: Summarized Findings of the Mini-Review**

Participants	Outcome of the reviewed articles
HIV positive women	Confidentiality should be maintained during treatment.
HIV infected mothers	They recommend disclosure to get support from children.
Men who have sex with men (MSM) and transgender women (TS)	They prefer privacy and confidentiality to control testing disclosure.
Adult congenital heart disease (ACHD) patients	They need to disclose their disease to obtain travel insurance.
HIV positive patients	They are worried of confidentiality and prefers not to disclose their partners' information.
Clients with diet and nutrition issues	They highlighted to need to limit disclosure and protect clients' confidentiality.
HIV positive women	They are worried about confidentiality issues and prefer to limit disclosure
Mountain porters and bar workers	They are concerned about disclosure issues and prefer to control disclosure.
Employed survivors	They prefer disclosure but worried of confidentiality issues.

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### Discussion

'Confidentiality and disclosure' remain a significant concern regardless of age, gender, race, religion, national origin, and social class. The mini-review provided a comprehensive knowledge of confidentiality and disclosure. Strikingly, most of the articles focused on the need to protect clients' confidentiality although some recommended on the need to disclose information for the well-being of clients. Articles reviewed were mostly relevant to HIV cases



where the clients were worried that their HIV status would be disclosed during their treatment. They were fearful of HIV stigma and not getting support from the community. Furthermore, female clients preferred to do self-testing to control disclosure meanwhile male clients preferred to do testing at the given venue. On the other hand, HIV positive mothers would like to disclose their information to get more support from their children. However, they requested structured support to enhance their disclosure skills. Clients with congenital heart disease are also recommended to disclose about their illness prior to obtaining travel insurances. Thus, the mini-review highlights that confidentiality is an ethical duty. All the counseling practitioners, social workers, and legal and mental health practitioners are obligated to protect clients' information from disclosure unless authorized by clients. Confidentiality would be the highest preference expected by clients and it is the duty of practitioners to safeguard them.

### Conclusion

Results of the current mini-review highlighted that majority of the clients were concern about confidentiality and recommended not to disclose their information. These findings highlighted on the need to increase people's awareness of privacy protection. The inclusion of multiple scholarly disciplines would show the widespread of counseling in various fields and therefore, it is necessary to pay additional attention to ensure all the fields provide assurance of confidentiality.

Theoretically, this review would contribute to the existing body of knowledge on confidentiality and disclosure concerns in various fields. Furthermore, the use of systematic literature review may contribute to the strength of research methodology. Practically, this review would provide counseling practitioners, social workers, legal practitioners, and mental health practitioners with knowledge on why people prefer confidentiality. The findings provided justification for personal information privacy. In the future, individuals who are dealing with clients need to be trained and exposed to the elements and issues of confidentiality.

Thus, confidentiality would be the highest preference expected by clients and it is the duty of practitioners to safeguard them. We argue that confidentiality should remain a significant and utmost concern. In contrast, disclosure should remain restrained. Authors suggest that more articles could be included in the future mini-review to make in-depth analysis. Furthermore, confidentiality and disclosure could be explained further based on ethical principles to encourage and enforce ethical behaviors.

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