

SOME COUNSELORS SAID TO ABUSE LAW

State Charges They Exploit Rules on Professional Titles

By IVER PETERSON

The State Attorney General's office said yesterday that the operators of unlicensed mental-health counseling services here were exploiting loopholes in the laws governing the use of professional titles to give the impression that their practices were approved and regulated by the state.

An aide to Attorney General Louis J. Lefkowitz said the services were "relying on the false assumption" among their clients that such professional-sounding titles as "group therapist," "marriage counselor" or "psychoanalyst" reflect a professional, state-approved status.

"The people basically don't realize that there is this loophole in the law," said Stephen Mindell, deputy chief of the Consumer Frauds Bureau.

"The loophole is that anybody can call himself a psychotherapist or marriage counselor. Anyone from a kindergarten dropout on up can call himself a psychotherapist, hang out a shingle and start dispensing advice."

"People see the title 'psychotherapist' and they think they're going to a doctor, an M.D., a psychiatrist," Mr. Mindell said.

"The guy who cuts your hair has to have a license, so shouldn't the man who hands out advice on marital problems also be licensed?"

Not All Titles Restricted

State law restricts only the titles of psychiatrist, psychologist and social worker to persons who have met state educational requirements and have passed a state licensing examination.

The Attorney General's office is conducting an inquiry into the expanding mental health counseling business. The inquiry will focus on unlicensed mental-health practitioners who misrepresent their professional qualifications, Mr. Mindell said.

The City Department of Consumer Affairs is also conducting an investigation dealing, in part, with some mental-health counselors' use of the title "Ph.D." when the degree was earned with little or no study and was awarded by an unaccredited institution.

An inquiry by The New York Times has disclosed that several dozen persons holding doctorates from Philathea College, an unaccredited institution in London, Ontario, are involved in a number of group counseling and training centers in the New York City area.

Problem 'Distressing'

Bess Myerson, the Commissioner of Consumer Affairs, said yesterday that "this whole nether world of the mental health profession is very distressing."

"They are not only taking people's money, but they may also be injuring the psyche of the individual," she said.

She and Mr. Mindell said their inquiries had been hampered somewhat by the reluctance of those with complaints about fraudulent mental-health operators to come forward and present them.

The number of such complaints has, however, been rising since newspaper articles began last week to focus attention on the issue, Mr. Mindell said.

The Attorney General's inquiry will probably result in recommendations for "very strict legislation" governing the use of professional titles in the mental-health field, he said.

The New York Times

Published: July 22, 1972

Copyright © The New York Times