

Overview of Counseling in Bhutan

Dechen DOMA^{※1}
Tshering DOLKAR^{※2}

The purpose of this article is to provide a brief overview of counseling as a developing profession in Bhutan. Counseling is experiencing rapid growth in Bhutan and there is an increased demand for clinical and non-clinical services in diverse areas of mental, emotional and social needs in Bhutan. Currently, there is a dearth of literature on this topic in this area. Therefore, with the primary aim to understand the growth of counseling as a profession and its impact on the lives of the people of Bhutan. Authors of this article are counseling professionals responsible for developing this profession in Bhutan. As there is a dearth of literature on this topic in the context of Bhutan, the researchers have based this article on their professional experiences supported by the limited resources available.

This study has shown that there is significant growth in the development of counseling as a profession and its positive impact on helping people cope up with social issues such as mental health, domestic violence and substance abuse. This study will provide a baseline for civil society organizations, Bhutan Board Certified Counselors and professional working in the government agencies. This study will initiate further development in the field of counseling.

Keywords: Counseling, and Bhutan Board Certified Counselors.

1. Introduction

Bhutan, a small beautiful country situated in the eastern Himalayas. Geographically, it is situated between the two powerful Asian countries with China to the north and India to the South. Bhutan has remained secluded from the rest of the world to maintain its cultural identity and unique way of life. However, in 1999, the Kingdom of Bhutan has opened its doors to the larger world and allowed

※ 1 Visiting researcher, Asian Research Institute for International Social Work, Shukutoku University

※ 2 Director of Bhutan Board for Certified Counsellors (BBCC)

its citizens access to the internet and television networks. Western influences have led to unprecedented and widespread changes in Bhutan with rapid growth in the economy followed by a numerous of changes in the context of the social system. Social issues such as mental health, substance abuse, domestic violence, conflict, confusion in values and attitudes and suicidal behavior are increasing among the younger generations as a result of the confusion created through the explosion of influences from the outside world

As an emergent, evolving, and dynamic profession, counseling is experiencing rapid growth, and there is increased demand for clinical and non-clinical services in diverse areas of mental, emotional and social needs in Bhutan. There is a dire need for counseling professionals (both in the schools and communities), such as psychologists, mental health workers, and other frontline helpers like the social workers to mitigate societal issues, such as child protection, trafficking of women and children, suicide, sexual abuse, and domestic violence. Having a pool of trained counselors in varied disciplines will allow effective consultation, collaboration, and networking. Therefore, the development of an expanded infrastructure is crucial for the sustainability and identity of the helping professions.

The term counseling in this article refers to a profession that is designated to help people who are experiencing both situational and long-term issues related to mental health, divorce, violence, sexual abuse, natural disasters, confusions, school stress and the loss of a job. In addition, the term professional counselor refers to a counselor, clinician, or a practitioner who engages in the specialized practice of substance abuse assessment, mental health, family, and other issues. A professional counselor may have a background in different disciplines and may have a graduate degree, diploma degree, or a certified as a counselor, supervisor, or peer counselor. However, the term also includes those who have specialized addiction training or have received the job training in Mental Health Facilitation training and substance abuse assessment or treatment. A professional counselor in Bhutan are those individuals who have an advanced degree, extensive training, and certification/licensure in a counseling field. He/she works with individuals, groups and families to provide support and help. He/she provides talk therapy and listens and work in social community settings as social workers or case managers in schools, institutions, clinical settings, and other fields. A professional counselor also empowers people to lead healthy and fulfilling lives.

In the Bhutanese context, social work, counseling and psychology overlap each other, and the nature of the work are closely related, although the disciplines are distinctly different. Counseling is an important tool for a social worker to help them assist their clients. However, social workers can only provide counseling if they have achieved a certain level of education training and certification. A

counselor, on the other hand, is required to receive training in clinical psychology, supervision, human development, vocational guidance, and knowledge of other human services occupations; yet counseling has its own identity. Social work does not exist as a distinct cadre of government focus or employment in Bhutan.

However, social work activities including counseling take place around recognized needs such as substance abuse and domestic violence often supported by non-governmental organizations. Either way, counseling is simply one of the many tools at a social worker's disposal to help them assist their clients. A counselor can have extensive training in areas like psychopathology and trauma-related disorders to directly help clients overcome their problems. A counselor needs to attain at least a master's degree to reach that level of expertise.

2. Social Changes in Bhutan

Bhutan is widely known to the outside world as the country of Gross National Happiness (GNH) emanating from the wisdom of the monarchs of the country. Gross National Happiness is Bhutan's development of economic and political philosophy. GNH combines the philosophy of human values with economic development toward achieving equitable and sustainable development goals. Although Bhutan is trying to achieve GNH in the most simplistic way of living and sharing love, care, and compassion, it is challenged by the advent of modernization and economic survival (GNHC, 2017).

Bhutanese society continues to undergo substantial changes in terms of social, economic, political, and technological structures as it joins the global economy. These forces and trends are creating substantial challenges for our children and other individuals in society today. A few examples of these challenges include a rapidly changing of family culture (traditional joint family to the nuclear family system), where the extended family culture is increasingly replaced by nuclear families (Phuntsho, 2017). Social issues like unemployment has contributed to the growth of high crime rates, conflicts in values and attitudes, high divorce rates, conflict with law, mental health issues, suicide and domestic violence in the country (Choden, 2003 & Dorji, 2016). Rural – urban migration in Bhutan has become a serious issue in the recent years. It is also a factor that contributes to the rising phenomenon of drug use among the youth population.

These challenges are real, and they have a substantial impact on the social, economic, spiritual, and career aspirations and achievement of our people across all the ages. Therefore, there is a need to establish holistic and systematic prevention and intervention strategies to tend to the needs of the changing Bhutanese society. Having specific prevention and intervention strategies and services can

empower people to make meaningful choices in their lives. Helping professionals such as social workers, counselors and psychologists can contribute to the positive mental health and wellbeing of the people. Therefore, it has become self-evident that there is a strong need to develop these professions in Bhutan.

3. History and Present State of Counseling in Bhutan

The movement of counseling as a profession began with school counseling following a Royal Decree issued by His Majesty the Fourth King Jigme Singye Wangchuck on the 10th of January 1996. The Royal Decree expressed the need to institute a systematic Youth Guidance and Counseling Program in schools to address the increasing challenges of youth-oriented issues in the country. The Career Education and Counseling Division (CECD) was set up under the Department of Youth and Sports (DYS) within the Ministry of Education (MoE). The government has worked towards institutionalizing the school guidance and counseling system and various initiatives have already been implemented. These include the training of teachers as counselors, student support programs, developing resource materials, providing consultation and supervision, counseling referrals, and technical support to the schools (CECD, 2010).

3.1. Counseling as a Developing Profession: Counseling Services in Bhutan

Counseling in Bhutan is presently instituted in schools, hospital psychiatric inpatient and outpatient units, social service organizations, and substance abuse rehabilitation centers. The service is provided on appointment and a drop-in basis. Counselors in all of these settings sometimes go to family's homes to provide home-based counseling. Counselors working in the field of substance abuse also sometimes go to public places for outreach (Lester, 2015). Organizations, such as Ministry of Education (MoE), Respect, Educate, Nurture, Educate, Empower Women (RENEW), Bhutan Narcotics Control Authority (BNCA), the Ministry of Labor and Human Resources (MoLHR), Ministry of Health (MoH), the Royal Bhutan Police (RBP) have counselors in their respective organizations. Samtse College of Education under the Royal University of Bhutan offers Contemplative Counseling Psychology at the Postgraduate Diploma and at the Master level (SCE, 2017). Likewise, the Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences of Bhutan has started a bachelor degree in clinical counseling (Chezom, 2016).

3.2. Counseling in the Government Agencies

3.2.1. Counseling in Education

The Ministry of Education has actively promoted the development of counseling programs and counselors in schools by training teachers as guidance counselors since 1996. The Youth Guidance counseling division trained the first few cohorts of teachers through the various levels of training as described below.

Level 1: Youth Guidance and Counseling Workshops. Basic skills, techniques and theories in counseling.

Level 2: Advanced skill development in counseling. Refresher courses and specialization in specific areas of counseling for Level 1 counselors.

Level 3: Diploma in school guidance counseling. Selected school counselors were sent to National Council of Education Research Training (NCERT), New Delhi and National Institute of Public Cooperation and Child Development for a period of six months (IPCCD) in Bangalore, India.

Level 4: Master's degree courses in counseling. Selected school counselors were sent to Canada and Australia.

The Royal Civil Service Commission approved the recruitment of full-time School Guidance Counselor positions in 2013. Since then the Ministry of Education has placed about 82 fulltime counselors across the schools in Bhutan: 60 fulltime counselors for Central schools, 10 fulltime counselors for Higher Secondary Schools and 12 fulltime counselors for Middle Secondary Schools (as cited in Policy and Planning Division, MoE, 2017, p.62).

The school counselors work in collaboration with the teachers, students, families, administrators, industry, employers, and other community members. They are concerned with developmental issues, addressing and resolving specific problems, developing decision-making skills, assisting people to cope with a crisis, enhancing personal insight, teaching conflict resolution, and improving general relationship skills. These abilities can be directly transferred to the lives of students after their graduation from school (CECD, 2010).

3.2.2. Counseling in Health

Mental health counseling services in Bhutan has not been given priority in the country till date. However, efforts are being made through the psychiatry department of the National Referral Hospital in the capital. The Khesar Gyalpo University for Medical Sciences in Bhutan (KGUMSB) has initiated a 4-year Bachelor of Science Programme in Clinical Counseling in 2016 to develop the

profession in clinical counseling (Tshedup, 2016). The clinical counselors will be placed in the psychiatric department of the hospitals in Bhutan to provide mental health counseling services to those patients recommended by the psychiatrists of Bhutan. The curriculum will have practical components like mental disorders, substance abuse, family stress and family problems and other social and mental issues (Chezom, 2016).

To date, mental health counseling services were provided through traditional helping practices. Bhutanese explanations of mental health problems are often based upon traditional and spiritual beliefs. It is estimated that 99% of the Bhutanese seek religious help for physical and mental health problems (Dorji, 2011), or a combination of modern health treatment and religious rituals performed by the monks and shamans (Pelzang, 2010). In order to encourage people to seek modern health treatment, the government has appointed monks in the hospital to perform religious rituals for the patients admitted in the hospital (Tshewang, 2018).

3.2.3. Bhutan Narcotic Control Authority

The Bhutan Narcotic Control Authority (BNCA) is the nodal agency of the government for all matters related to narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and substance abuse. The BNCA, in collaboration with the Colombo Plan, has trained school counselors, health professionals, school principals, psychiatrist, law enforcement officials, Royal Bhutan Police, Royal Bhutan Army, educators from the Royal University of Bhutan, and social workers from the civil society organizations on Drug Advisory Program (BNCA, 2017). The Colombo Plan certifies these addiction counselors and their credentials are recognized in 60 different countries (Passang&Dem, 2017). The BNCA also focuses on psychoeducational training on substance abuse and addiction to peer counselors, at-risk youths, families and communities. Drop-in centers have been established to provide counseling services to young people with substance abuse and addiction issues across the country. However, the detoxification is provided only at the Jigme Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital (BNCA, 2013).

3.3. Counseling in Civil Society Organizations

Social issues are emerging in Bhutan and receiving government and/or other formal attention. Social issues include domestic violence, unemployment among youth, alcohol and drug addictions, crime and theft, HIV AIDS, suicide, sexual abuse, child protection, and disaster preparedness. Counseling is available in organizations addressing domestic violence and addictions. Respect, Educate, Nurture, and Empower Women (RENEW) is a non-governmental organization founded by Her Majesty the Queen Mother Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck which aims to empower women and children

(Lorelle&Guth, 2013). RENEW is the main provider of services for those affected by domestic violence, and provides shelter, counseling, and legal assistance in the capital city (Guth, Lorelle, Hinkle, & Remley, 2015).

RENEW has outreach workers in all 20 districts of the country and they provide community-based support services. They carry out the work of the social workers and are trained as Para-professionals in Mental Health Facilitation (MHF). The MHF training helps them to recognize, identify, and refer problems for treatment using basic counseling skills to help their clients. These social workers deal with issues such as relationships problems including risky sexual behavior and divorce at the community level (BCMD, 2017).

In order to address the expanding drug epidemic, civil society organizations like the Youth Development Fund (YDF) and Chitheun Phendhey Association (CPA) provided drug education and rehabilitation programs. Likewise, rehabilitation centers were established by the Bhutan Institute of Wellbeing under the YDF in Thimphu and Samzang Retreat Center under the CPA in Paro Bhutan.

4. The Force Behind the Counseling Movement in Bhutan

4.1. Role of the Royal Family

Her Majesty the Queen Mother Gyalyum Sangay Choden Wangchuck, created and became the first president of RENEW (Respect, Educate, Nurture and Empower Women), in 2004. Her Majesty has also continuously reiterated the importance of counseling in the community to promote positive mental health and to improve the well-being of the Bhutanese people in order to promote GNH. Her Majesty has specifically commanded that counseling services be professionalized and recognized as an alternative means of support and treatment.

Her Majesty has personally taken initiatives toward supporting professionalizing counseling and has signed a memorandum of understanding with the Royal University of Bhutan, the Royal Civil Service Commission, the National Commission for Women and Children, the Royal Bhutan Police, Bhutan Narcotics Control Authority (BNCA), Gross National Happiness Commission, MoH, MoE, the Ministry of Labor and Human Resources, and RENEW. These stakeholders signed the memorandum of understanding on August 9, 2013, to support the establishment of a Bhutan Board for Certified Counselors (BBCC) to create the professional standards for counselors in Bhutan (BBS, 2013).

Her Majesty has also signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc. and Affiliates (NBCC) in the United States to help Bhutan develop a board for certified counselors. To date, NBCC has helped MoE, MoH, Youth Development Foundation,

Chithuen Phendhey Association, BNCA, Royal University of Bhutan, and RENEW through volunteer placement and training counselors in mental health (Guth et al., 2015).

There is strong support for professionalizing counseling among these stakeholders. Many initiatives have been taken towards the development of counseling services in the country to address the increasing mental health issues caused by child abuse, domestic violence, cross-border trafficking, exploitation, prostitution, HIV, trauma, crises, emergencies, natural disasters, suicide, rape, substance abuse, etc.

There is an urgent need for these stakeholders to create a professional identity and synergy among them. This will allow the stakeholders to facilitate discussions on what is working well while also addressing areas that need to be improved and facilitating actions that would address issues of concern in the society. Creating an effective means of communication for people involved in areas of the counseling profession in different institutions and ministries and developing systems in the society that involve different stakeholders is important.

4.2. Bhutan Board for Certified Counselor (BBCC)

Bhutan Board for Certified Counselor (BBCC) was established in 2013 as a certification body. BBCC will bring counseling professionals such as counselors, social workers, and psychologists under one umbrella to develop professionalism and provide quality services to protect the clients as well as the profession. The function of BBCC is to provide an excellent opportunity to validate and orient all the counseling paraprofessionals working in Bhutan into the national standards of counseling in all areas, clinical and non-clinical (The Bhutanese, 2013). The following acts and policy support the development of the counseling profession.

1. The Domestic Violence Prevention Act 2013
2. Suicide Prevention in Bhutan – A Three Year Action Plan (July 2015–June 2018)
3. Bhutan Medical and Health Council Act (BMHCA)
4. Child Care and Protection Act 2013

Principles of counseling are based on the philosophy of the Noble Eightfold Path of Buddha's teaching: Right seeing, Right thought, Right speech, Right action, Right livelihood, Right effort, Right mindfulness and Right contemplation.

The Bhutan Board awards Bhutanese counselor's certification for Certified Counselors (BBCC) in accordance with their education, qualifications, training and experience. The counselors

are certified at the following levels:

Peer Counselors: This category consists of individuals who do not have a degree but are trained through numerous short training programs and experiences in their relevant fields of expertise such as rehabilitation, civil society organizations, and Drop in centers.

Associate Counselors: Diploma: This category consists of school counselors and others who have obtained a Diploma in counseling.

Master Counselor: This category consists of counselors who have a master's degree in counseling.

Supervisory Counselors: This category consists of counselors who have a master's degree and experience in supervision.

5. Conclusion

Bhutanese society is becoming increasingly complex and the effects are directly evident in the mental health and wellbeing of the community, families, and individuals. Structured counseling service is needed to help people reach their optimum level of achievement in varied life situations such as educational, professional, vocational, moral, health, personal, and marital areas. The efforts of all stakeholders are required to treat and prevent these problems which can have a serious impact on the mental health of our people. Along with prevention services, the establishment of appropriate remedial and developmental services is necessary to adequately address the situation in Bhutan. The above approaches to helping people require competent professionals across all levels of our society (Dolkar, 2017).

A principal challenge for counseling in Bhutan is to bring together the existing practices with new materials in a way that fits the changing culture and meets the distinct needs of this diverse nation. This integration is challenging in part because traditional helping practices in Bhutan have not been created from a written model but have been an undocumented part of life preserved in action rather than in articulated constructs. Buddhism and traditional cultural values are so deeply rooted in the way of living of the Bhutanese people that it is difficult to separate the one from the other. Thus, counseling Bhutanese includes traditional elements such as neighborly helping, shamanistic intervention, Buddhist practices, and current medical and lay approaches to mental health problems such as substance abuse, sexual abuse and domestic violence. Bhutanese counselors are those professionals, whose credentials are certified by the BBCC. Currently, there are around 147 certified counselors spread across different organizations who are engaging and addressing personal and social concerns (Lhamu, 2017).

Counselors' levels of training range from a few brief training programs to master's degrees earned outside the country. The public education system employs counselors in many schools, and a

graduate level diploma program is in place for school counseling. A similar degree program is being developed for counseling in the healthcare and social work contexts. A proposal has been submitted to the government to create a cadre for the employment of counselors in the national health system, and mental health training is provided to an increasing number and variety of health workers.

[References]

- Bhutan Broadcasting Service (2013, September, 12). *Bhutan board for certified counsellors launched*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=31436>
- Bhutan Centre for Media and Democracy. (2017). *Celebrating civil society: The third sector outside the government, corporate, and private sectors*. Thimphu: BCMD.
- BNCA (2013). *Miracles of Life: True stories and facts about getting over drug & alcohol addiction successfully*. Thimphu: BNCA.
- BNCA (2017). *Review of functions of drop – in-centre services*. Thimphu: Bhutan Narcotic Control Authority.
- CECD (2010). *Guidance and counselling framework for schools in Bhutan*. Thimphu: Ministry of Education
- Chezom, S (2016, July, 19). *Clinical counseling introduced to create responsive mental health care system*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=60505>
- Choden, T. (2003). *Traditional forms of volunteerism in Bhutan*. The centre for Bhutan studies. Thimphu Bhutan. Retrieved from <http://www.bhutanstudies.org.bt>
- Dorji, T. (2016, May, 6). *Alcohol and drugs trigger crime among the young*. Retrieved from <http://www.kuenselonline.com/alcohol-and-drugs-trigger-crime-among-young/>
- Dolkar, T. (2017), Prevention of illegal substances use and abuse in Bhutan. In Israelashvili, M., & Romano, J. L. (Eds.). (2016). *The Cambridge handbook of international prevention science (pp 597-604)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Dorji, C. (2011, October). Psychiatry cases treated in Bhutan. *Presentation at Bhutan Counselor Institute*, Thimphu, Bhutan.
- Gross National Happiness Commission. (2017). FAQs on GNH: *Gross National Happiness*. Retrieved from <https://www.gnhc.gov.bt>
- Guth, L. J., Lorelle, S., Hinkle, J. S., & Remley, T. P. (2015). Development and implementation of an international counseling outreach effort in Bhutan: A group stage conceptualization. *The Journal for Specialists in Group Work, 40(1)*, 22-37.
- Lester, S. V. (2015). *Bhutanese counselors' experiences with Western counseling: A qualitative study*

- (Doctoral dissertation, Old Dominion University).
- Lhamu, P. (2017, September, 29). *Board certifies 147 counselors for practice*. Retrieved from <http://www.kuenselonline.com/board-certifies-147-counselors-for-practice/>
- Lorelle, S., & Guth, L. J. (2013). Establishing the school counseling profession in Bhutan: Reflections from the field. *Journal for International Counselor Education*, 5(1), 1.
- Passang&Dem (2017, March, 10). *25counseling professionals certified*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=68145>
- Pelzang, R. (2010). Religious practice of the patients and families during illness and hospitalization in Bhutan, *Journal of Bhutan Studies*, 22, pp.77 -97.
- Phuntsho, K. (2017). Civil society: Change, challenge and chance. *The Druk Journal*, 3(2), pp.15-22.
- Policy and Planning Division, Ministry of Education (2017) *Annual Education Statistics*. Retrieved from <http://www.education.gov.bt/wp-content/downloads/publications/aes/Annual-Education-Statistics-Book-2017.pdf>
- Samtse College of Education. (2017). *Programme definitive document for the master of arts in contemporary counseling psychology*. SCE: Samtse.
- Tshedup, Y. (2016, July, 19). *Creating a wholesome mental health system*. Retrieved from <http://www.kuenselonline.com/creating-a-wholesome-mental-health-system/>
- Tshewang, P. (2018, July, 24). *New lam of JDWNRH, Zhung Dratshang” s Zhu Dhap Chhungsho appointed*. Retrieved from <http://www.bbs.bt/news/?p=100509>
- The Bhutanese (2013, August, 17). *Bhutan Board for Certified Counselors to be established*. Retrieved from <https://thebhutanese.bt/bhutan-board-for-certified-counselors-to-be-established/>

ブータンにおけるカウンセリングの概略

デチェン・ドマ
トゥシェリング・ドルカル

本稿の目的はブータンにおいて一つの専門職として発展しつつあるカウンセリングについて概観するものである。ブータンでは現在カウンセリングが急速な発展を遂げており、精神的、情緒的、社会的ニーズの種々の分野において臨床的・非臨床的サービスに対する需要が増している。現在、このテーマについて書かれたものは未だほとんどない。よって本稿は、専門職としてのカウンセリングの成長およびそのブータンの人々の生活への影響を跡づけることを主たるねらいとする。筆者は専門職カウンセラーあり、この専門職を発展させる責務を負う。ブータンのコンテキストの中でこのトピックを論じた文献の欠如の故に、本稿は限られた資源により支えられた専門職としての筆者たちの経験にもとづくものとなっている。

この研究は専門職としてのカウンセリングが大きく発展していること、そして人々の精神衛生、家庭内暴力、薬物乱用等社会問題との取り組みへの援助に積極的インパクトを与えていることを示している。この研究は市民社会組織、ブータン資格カウンセラー協会および政府機関で働く専門職のための基礎情報を提供するだろう。この研究はカウンセリングという分野のさらなる発展をもたらすこととなるだろう。

キーワード：カウンセリング，ブータン，ブータン専門職カウンセラー委員会