



The Malaysian Counselling Profession, History and Brief Discussion of the Future

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Abstract

This research reviews, in chronological order, the modern history of the profession of counselling in Malaysia. The literature review begins with the policy, regulations and government legislation. It then describes the training of counsellors in Malaysia and the services they offer. The article concludes by asking four senior figures in Malaysian counselling their opinions about the future of counselling in Malaysia. Much of the policy, training, and services refer to educational counselling because counselling in Malaysia, like many other countries, has its roots in education. This research establishes Malaysian counselling has had a documented history for over forty years.

Introduction

This research reviews, in chronological order, the modern history of the profession of counselling in Malaysia (See Figure 1a and 1b). The literature review begins with the policy, regulations and government legislation. It then describes the training of counsellors in Malaysia and the services they offer. The article concludes by asking four senior figures in Malaysian counselling their opinions about the future of counselling in Malaysia. Much of the policy, training, and services refer to educational counselling because counselling in Malaysia, like many other countries, has its roots in education. In

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the literature, very little is available about the counselling process in Malaysia, yet this research establishes it has had a documented history for over forty years.

Policy

One of the formative events for the profession of counselling in Malaysia, was the Ministry of Education's 1963 policy to have guidance (including counselling) in schools. This policy was the start of three decades of events that lead to Malaysia being one of the first nations in the Asian and the Pacific Rim having legislation regulating the practice and profession of counselling.

In 1964 the government took an even stronger stance. The Ministry of Education Circular (a memo) KP 5209/35/(4) (Othman & Awang, 1993) announced the importance of counselling and recommended a course of action by which it would be a key component of the Malaysian government's education system (Othman & Awang, 1993; Ministry of Education, 1964). The recommendations centred on a guidance (counselling) teacher being placed in each school (Ministry of Education 1963, 1968). This was not the first education document to recommend that counselling need be an integral part of the schooling system. In fact, in the 1955 Federation of Malaya Annual Report on Education (1955) made many similar recommendations. However, the 1964 circular (KP 5209/35/(4)) was the first to make a significant impact to counselling (Lloyd, 1987).

The Ministry of Education (MOE) Circular KP 5209/35/(4) was a catalyst that resulted in the Guidance and Counselling Section being established under the Ministry of Education (Othman & Awang, 1993). The Guidance and Counselling Section, established in 1963, provided the foundations for the introduction of formal counselling services into the Malaysian education system. An important step in the providing of these services was the conceptualisation and formal definition of "Guidance" (which encompassed counselling) provided by the Guidance and Counselling Section in 1968 (Othman & Awang, 1993). The definition was important as it marked the MOE's focus in implementing guidance and counselling services in schools.

Over the decade from 1969 to 1979 counselling gained momentum, the number of teachers, services provided and the training offered to teachers (in guidance and counselling) steadily increased. By the end of the 1970's, the Malaysian government and education community was viewing counselling as a significant contributor to children's education. A clear indicator of this was the 1979 Report of the Cabinet Committee on the Study of the Implementation of the National Education Policy (Recommendation 239.1), which drew attention to the role of counselling. It recommended that counselling should go beyond career guidance (counselling) and provide a broad range of mental health services to schools (Othman & Awang, 1993; Pope, Musa, Singaravila, Bairgaze, & Russell, 2002).

In 1980 the organisational shifting within the Guidance and Counselling Section was noteworthy as it led to a more comprehensive and systematic implementation of programs to train in-service teachers to be guidance counsellors and counsellor teachers (Othman & Awang, 1993). In 1982, the Guidance and Counselling Section implemented

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mandatory requirements concerning teaching-counselling hours and duties. This mandated that teacher-counsellors teach for 12 periods per week and the numbers of teacher-counsellors be allocated according to the size of the respective schools (Lim & Mc Non, 1982). It was also mandated that all secondary schools have at least one guidance teacher (teacher-counsellor) (Othman & Awang, 1993). Mr. Louise (Louise, 2004) a long time teacher, who became a school principle, and then transitioned into the counselling profession, reports that these mandates were in large complied with and generally achieved what they set out to, with their effects being felt well into the mid-1990s.

In 1997, the Malaysian government implemented a national level affirmative action Mental Health Policy. From 1997 to 1998, mental health education material was produced and distributed nation-wide. Officially 32 different topic posters were made, 200,000 leaflets distributed and TV documentaries on 'What is mental health.' were delivered to the Malaysian public (Buletin Kesihatan Masyarakat, 2000). One of the major impacts of the affirmative action on mental health was to raise the status of counselling which culminated in the 1998 Counsellors Act being passed by the government. This gave counsellors a legal identity.

The 1998 Counsellors Act (Act 580) was a landmark in the Malaysian counselling profession. It provided the legal and social framework for counsellors and counselling in Malaysia. Malaysia was one of the first nations in the South-East Asian and Australasian region to have an act to regulate the profession. Act 580, may be well developed and clearly written legislation but will probably need some amendments, particular in regards to foreign qualifications. Unfortunately, six years after the Act was passed it is rarely enforced.

In the late 90's and early part of the new millennium, the national level affirmative action Mental Health was implemented but the program had little impact on the general community, with the vast majority of the Malaysian public being unaware of the existence of such a program (Louise, 2004; Salim, 2004). This along with the infirmity of the Counsellors Act, has left the profession of counselling with a strong need for advocacy and implementation of the existing policies.

The Ninth Malaysian Plan (Malaysian Prime Minister's Department, 2006) covering 2006 to 2010, is an attempt to provide a National Mission Statement, which is a policy and implementation framework aimed at obtaining greater outcomes from the country's collective developmental initiatives. Chapter 15, Fostering Family and Community Development, focuses on mental health and social needs. The programmes outlined in the chapter give greater emphasis to building families skills and a more caring society. The plan is an attempt to promote balance between material growth and societal development and has the potential to provide a planned, systematic development of counselling services by providing centres of services and additional support within existing facilities.

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Training

In 1963, the first policy for counselling in Malaysia was translated into training. The Guidance and Counselling Section was established within the Educational Planning and Research Division of the Ministry of Education and began providing training workshops to teachers (Ministry of Education, 1968; Othman & Awang 1993). From 1963 to 1980, the Guidance and Counselling Section remained within the Educational Planning and Research Division of the Ministry of Education (Amir & Latiff, 1984) and continued providing training and workshops to teachers. In 1980, the Guidance and Counselling Section came under School's Division of the Ministry of Education, which led to an increase in the amount and depth of training (Amir & Latiff, 1984; Salim 2004). There has been a gradual increase in training programs within academia, institutions and the community.

The late 1960's saw the first series of training programs. In 1967, Pre-service teachers training in guidance and counselling were first offered to teachers (Ministry of Education, 1968). 1968 saw seminars begin to train teacher-counsellors, teachers appointed in schools as guidance teachers were given 3-day seminars on guidance and counselling (Othman & Awang, 1993). The University of Malaya was the first tertiary institution to offer guidance and counselling services training as an elective for its Diploma in Education (Othman & Awang, 1993). In 1969, the Ministry of Education approved and conducted the first In-Service Course, a six day course designed to expose active service teachers to guidance and counselling skills, and theories (Scorzelli, 1987b). By the close of the 1960s, counselling services were a common concept and were receiving training, in the education system.

In 1972, all short courses ended for in-service teachers because the UNICEF funding was discontinued (Ministry of Education, 1979; Othman & Awang, 1993). In 1973, the Schools Division organised seminars and courses for career and guidance teachers. It appears from the interviews conducted, but unclear in government documentation, as if School Divisions took over Guidance and Counselling Sections responsibility after UNICEF aid was discontinued. The political events behind the re-shuffling remains clouded in government bureaucracy. However, it resulted in an increase in training and planning for training with the education system (Ministry of Education, 1979), so much so that local government universities started offering counselling courses.

The 1970's saw Malaysian Universities taking mental health, and guidance and counselling seriously (Ministry of Education, 1970). In 1970, the Department of Psychology was established at Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). In 1975, guidance and counselling vocational theory courses started at UKM, final year undergraduates in the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities were offered these courses. In 1977, the Centre for Educational Services at Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM) started guidance and counselling courses; under USM's Teacher Education Training Program, guidance and counselling course was offered. In 1979, the Department of Psychology was established at the University of Malaya. Hence, the government universities systematically introduced guidance and counselling (Othman, Othman & Awang, 1984a, 1984b).

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The 1980's saw the Malaysian government elevate the status of counselling and training. The 1980 organisational shifting of the Guidance and Counselling Section was significant as it led to a more comprehensive and systematic implementation of programs to train in-service teachers to be guidance counsellors and counsellor teachers. By the early 1980's specialist training was being offered. The Teacher Education Division (Ministry of Education) started the Specialist Training Certificate Program in 1980. This was a one-year program, with the first batch being teachers who were yet to graduate (Othman & Awang, 1993).

The Specialist Teacher Training Institute began admitting practising teachers to the certificate program in guidance and counselling in 1980. The teacher training portion of the institute was designed to prepare Primary School teachers who began the program after completing the 11th grade and received a teaching certificate after 3 years. The counsellor education program was offered after teacher training and teaching experience and required the equivalent of one year of full-time course work, but it could be completed by the accumulation of points from a several short courses. The course work and the practicum focus primarily on the applied skills of school guidance and counselling. The program is currently designed to prepare approximately 40 'guidance teachers' per academic year.

In 1981, Teacher Education Division (MOE) produced a Guidance and Counselling curriculum (Rahman, 1987). This curriculum was for an introductory course for the trainee teachers at the teachers training college. 1981 also saw Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM) launch a Bachelor of Education Guidance and Counselling program. The Teacher Education Division started a Guidance and Counselling course in 1982 for the in-service teachers, to be held during the holidays. Participants of this course were encouraged to finish a six-month upgrading course for them to obtain the Specialist Training Certificate (Othman & Awang, 1993). A one-year course was also offered for those who did not attend the holiday training courses. Increased efforts were made to upgrade guidance and counselling teachers by the Ministry of Education. Growing momentum in the training and upgrading the skills-sets of counsellors as a whole occurred during the 1980s (Ninggal, 2004; Othman & Awang, 1993).

Universiti Pertanian Malaysia began admitting students to its 4-year guidance and counselling Bachelor of Education major in 1981. The courses are taught by lecturers from the Education Faculty, with the major courses taught by lecturers in a separate guidance and counselling unit. The program is designed to graduate approximately 50 counsellors per year.

Postgraduate training is often a landmark in a professions development and often enhances or establishes a legitimate place within society. UM offered specialised Masters level counselling training from the mid 1970's, followed by USM in the mid 1980's and UKM in the late 1980's (Prof. Dr. Zulkifili Manaf, personal communication, 20 February, 2004). From the 1980's onwards, foreign trained graduates with Master and PhD degrees in counselling, emerged in Malaysia. UM has offered a PhD in counselling

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for three decades, and to present is the only Malaysian institution to offer doctoral level training in counselling (Zulkifili Manaf, 2004). University of Malaya admitted its first guidance and counselling major to the Master of Education program in 1976. Although many of the Faculty have received graduate degrees in the United States, this graduate program is more closely resembles the British model of higher education, with external examiners and evaluators from the United Kingdom and Australia, than to an American model (Zulkifili Manaf, 2004). The degree is not structured to produce large numbers of graduates, and by 1984, only four students had completed the two-year program of study (Othman & Awang, 1993).

Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia began offering its post-Bachelor's degree Counselling Diploma in 1980. The Diploma courses are taught in the Psychology Department by lecturers primarily educated in U.S. psychology and counselling programs. The program requires one full-time academic year of course work, supervised experience, and research, and it culminates in a counselling practicum. This University's practicum is a supervised counselling experience, as opposed to the research orientation of the practicum at the University of Malaya. The lecturers view the counselling graduate as a practitioner-scientist (Othman, Othman, & Awang, 1984b).

In 1985, the in-service training for the Ministry of Social Welfare (counselling services), the Ministry of Home Affairs (drug rehabilitation), and the Department of Prisons was conducted by teams of consultants from the United States. This training was directed at those who counsel the drug abuser (Scorzelli, 1987a).

From the 1990's to the present, there has been a steady increase in training supported by local universities and the Malaysian government. Private and off-shore institutions have also recently offered various training modules, such as De La Salle University, a Philippine University, offering a Master of Counselling, and the Hoffman Institute (European mental health training provider) offering certificates in various counselling approaches.

Evolution of Services

From the mid-1960s, guidance and counselling services have been available in Malaysian schools. The unassuming beginnings and limited services offered in schools in the 1960s had extended and increase significantly over the decades under the Ministry of Education (Ng & Stevens, 2001). Initially, the role of the counsellor was counselling deviant behaviour and career guidance. The 1980s saw a wider range of services and acceptance in the community (Staff, 1983), to present where counsellor are being consider the 'cure' for all social ailments (Salim, 2004).

From its beginnings in the 1960's to the 1980s, school counselling continues to be the main function of Malaysian counsellors to the 1980's. School counsellors were still primarily teachers, and counselling was a function they performed in addition to their teaching responsibilities. Furthermore, school counsellors were only employed in secondary schools, and their major duties involved vocational guidance. The emphasis

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on vocational guidance can be attributed to the country's educational system. Specifically, children were required to pass a series of examinations to continue their secondary education or to qualify for college entrance. In Forms 3 (year 9) and 5 (year 11), children took (and still do) an examination to determine whether they qualified for higher education. Although they could take the examination a second time, failure usually meant entering the world of work, and the school counsellor attempted to prepare the student for these possibilities.

Before 1982, school counsellors often assumed their role without any training or received only two weeks of in-service education. Then from 1982, there was an 8-week, in-service training requirement, as well as an opportunity to seek higher education in counselling in Malaysia or abroad. At this time, the Ministry of Education paid all educational expenses and provides the teacher with paid leave of absence. After receiving a counselling degree, the teacher had a work commitment of five to seven years at his or her particular school (Scorzelli, 1987a).

In 1985, 888 teachers employed by the Ministry of Education were classified as counsellors; 17 of them had Master's degrees in counselling (Scorzelli, 1987a). Because of the shortage of qualified teachers in Malaysia and the priorities of the school administrators, only 642 of these individuals perform the functions of a counsellor (Scorzelli, 1987a). As indicated above, the major responsibility of a school counsellor was, and often still is, teaching, and counselling is still viewed as a secondary role.

The roles of counsellors in the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's were in general rather limited. Scorzelli's (1987a) research clearly demonstrated that individuals in Malaysia who work as counsellors assume the role of either drug counsellor or school counsellor. For the most part, they were employed in the governmental drug rehabilitation centres and prisons, voluntary drug rehabilitation agencies, schools, and universities. Except for the universities and some of the private schools, these people rarely had the job title of counsellor, but instead were referred to as officers of the various governmental ministries (Scorzelli, 1987a). This reflected the community's misunderstanding of counsellors and the social taboos around mental health.

The early 1980's saw a surge in mental health and counselling services offered in Malaysia. Haque, (2001) reported that, in 1980, the Malaysian Psychiatrists Association and other mental health groups acknowledge the importance of counselling for mental health in Malaysian. The importance of counselling services began to have a small impact on Malaysian society and psychiatrists started referring clients to counsellors.

The status of mental health professions improve in the early 1980s and facilitated the development of a more professional identity, reflected in the creation of PERKAMA (Malaysian Counsellors Association), PERCEMA (Malaysian Psychologists Association) and APECA (Asian Psychologists and Educational Counsellors Association). This provided groups with a focus for exchange of knowledge, advocacy and development of the profession. For example, the Malaysian Counselling Association was founded in 1980 by a group of college and school counsellors, and is reported by Prof. Ninggal

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(2004), the Deputy President, to have currently over 1,000 members. Although most members are school counsellors, the Association has broadened its membership base. In addition, the Association has encouraged counsellors to publish textbooks and articles, and in 1984 it published the first issue of its official journal, PERKAMA (an abbreviation of PERsatuan KAunseling MALaysia). Contributors to the first issue of PERKAMA were members of the Association, and the articles covered a wide range of theoretical (for example, relationship building) and practical (such as., drug counselling) issues in counselling.

The 1980 organisational shifting of the Guidance and Counselling Section led to a more comprehensive and systematic implementation of services from guidance counsellors and counsellor teachers (Othman & Awang, 1993). Examples of this include a special officer who was assigned to the Guidance and Counselling Section. The officer was to organise preventive drug abuse counselling and educational programs in schools from 1981 (Othman & Awang, 1993).

The 1980's also saw drug abuse counselling for the community as well as schools. The Ministry of Educations assigned special officers, hospital and rehabilitation centres developed positions for drug counsellors, and the Malaysian community saw the role of counselling in combating social ills (Tay, 1996). Tay's (1996) research on drug abuse programmes in Malaysia describes the drug counsellor's role was, and still generally is, directly related to the country's rehabilitation and aftercare system. The governmental programs were, and still often are, either separate facilities or units in the prisons, and they are designed to reshape drug users in all areas of their lives.

Substance abuse has been a concern of Malaysia's authorities for years. Because of Malaysia's close proximity to the "Golden Triangle," different kinds of illegal substance are readily available in the country. In 1983, in view of the severity of the drug problem, the Prime Minister of Malaysia declared drug abuse as a threat to national security. This set out an era of substantial preventive, rehabilitation efforts and the establishment of the Anti-Dadah (Drug) Task Force to monitor the drug situation. This trend is clearly evident in the country's drug rehabilitation programs, which emphasises drug counselling (Scorzelli, 1986, 1992) and help raise the profile of counselling in Malaysian society.

In 1985, there were five rehabilitation centres that accommodated 1,200 clients. Because of the small number of women who were identified as drug abusers (1.1% in 1984), all of the governmental centres were for men only. The clients of the centres were usually men who had been arrested for drug use or volunteers with chronic drug abuse problems. In this treatment approach, the drug counsellor's role was identified as psychological services, and the counsellor conducted individual and group counselling (Scorzelli, 1987a).

Currently, there is a variety of voluntary agencies in Malaysia, ranging from day programs to residential facilities. Residential facilities house drug abusers who have volunteered for treatment. Many of the voluntary agencies have a strong religious foundation, and religious instruction constitutes a significant part of treatment. The research of Pope and associates (2002) suggests that those employed as drug counsellors often lack formal training in counselling and are often recovered addicts. Moreover,

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most of the staff members are recovered drug addicts who have undergone a brief period of in-service training. However, Pope and associate's research did not conduct a survey across the counselling population, but instead relied heavily on a few interviews.

The late 1980's and early 1990's saw career counselling develop its own identity (Pope et. al, 2002). Career guidance had been an early role of school counsellors but, with Malaysia's emergence as an economic powerhouse, career counselling became a significant service in Malaysian trade and industry.

By the late 1990s, counselling as a profession had made expansion into most institutions, offering services in schools, in industry, in health systems and to the public. This included training in hospitals, mental health clinics for the public, nation-wide counselling centres and information campaigns. Malaysia's rapid economic development and its impact on society had even prompted private and government enterprises to use counselling (mental health) services in the industrial setting. However, these services are generally directed at personnel selection, organisational development and employee motivation, with little interest in the overall mental health needs of employees (Pope, et. al., 2002).

From 1998, extensive training modules were offered to Malaysian health institutions. In the training modules, 44 national level core trainers trained over 1,401 hospital and health care staff in basic counselling skills and referrals. In addition, Mental Health Life Skills Training programs were set up and delivered to the public. In late 1998 counselling (Mental Health Life Skills Training) clinics were established. These clinics were called Klinik Kesihatan (Health Clinic) and were established in Penang, Kedah and Kelantan. In early 1999 more Mental Health Life Skills Training clinics were established in Sri Kembangan, Selangor, Pekan Nenas, Selangor, Poliklinik Kg. Simee, Ipoh, Perak and Sibul. The clinics offered practical counselling services to the Malaysian public. By the end of 1999, the government had established 129 mental health counselling centres nationwide. They offered a range of services to the Malaysian public including psychosocial-rehabilitation, vocational training and preparation, daily skills, mental health and life skills training.

Interviews with senior Malaysian counsellors, such as Professor Zulkifili Manaf, the Head of University of Malaya Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling, indicated that by the early 1990s, small numbers of counsellor educators in Malaysia were obtaining their doctorates in the 'West', from places such as the United States, Australia, United Kingdom, and returning home to reshape domestic counselling programs (Zulkifili Manaf, 2004). It appears from the sparse literature of the 1990's that the awareness of the increasing role of career counselling in business, industry, and government led to an expansion of the professional roles. The more entrepreneurial counselling students began to gain employment in human resource and training departments in large corporations (Zulkifili Manaf, 2004). Organisations such as Telekom Malaysia had hired counsellors as part of their human resource and training departments (Pope, et. al., 2002).

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In Malaysia, the beginning of the new millennium brought with it positive attitudes and goals about mental health from the government, including such things as a comprehensive promotion of Mental Health, with the theme 'Healthy Lifestyle'. The campaign paid special attention to children, adolescents, parents, working adults and the elderly. This included extensive distribution of materials, such as a manual on Mental Health Messages, training modules on mental health and life skills, forums to facilitate planning, implementation and writing of mental plans, and establishment of state level co-ordinating committees for mental health. This campaign was a significant contributor to some of the attitudes at present, where counsellors are considered the 'cure' for all social ailments and have a major role to play in the future development of Malaysia as a country and a culture.

During the planning period for the Ninth Malaysian Plan (Malaysian Prime Minister's Department, 2006), the Government has approved the establishment of various counselling services and centres. Examples of these centres and types of services are the *Kompleks KASIH Keluarga*, which are one-stop family service and training centres to provide programmes designed to strengthen the family unit. The main focus of these programmes includes parenting skills, reproductive health services and counselling. In addition, the establishment of *Pusat Rujukan Sosial*, which are centres providing counselling, referrals, and information on social development programmes, have assisted in promoting counselling services to the community. A total of 47 such centres have been established throughout the country so far (Malaysian Prime Minister's Department, 2006). These centres and the implementation of the Ninth Malaysian Plan continue to provide additional counselling services to the public.

There have been clear signs in 2006 that Malaysia as a society is taking counselling more seriously. Some examples have recently been reported in national English language newspapers. The New Straits Times (2006) recently reported that civil servants can access cyber counselling service using email. The Public Service Department's (PSD) Siber-Kaunseling is an interactive facility for all public servants wanting advice and counselling. The Star newspaper (2006) reported that SOCSO (The Social Security Organisation) will compensate workers for mental health issues such as depression and stress-related ailments at the workplace. As part of this the paper reported about 1,500 government doctors nationwide have been trained to assess workers with such conditions. They have also been given the latest guidelines, known as the Impairment and Disability Assessment of Traumatic Injuries, Occupational Diseases and Invalidity (second edition), on how to assess such disorders. In summary, the need for counselling and mental health is reaching most levels of policy, society and training.

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Future

The discussion on the future of Malaysian counselling is a summary of what some senior Malaysian counsellors think about the future of their profession. Four senior Malaysian counsellors were interviewed on their thoughts about the future of counselling in Malaysia. A semi-structured interview was conducted based around three questions :

1. "What training and infrastructure is needed to train Malaysian counsellors?"
2. "What government policy or action is required and why?"
3. "What services do counsellors need to offer to the Malaysian public; including Educational, Industry, Career, Clinical, and General counselling?"

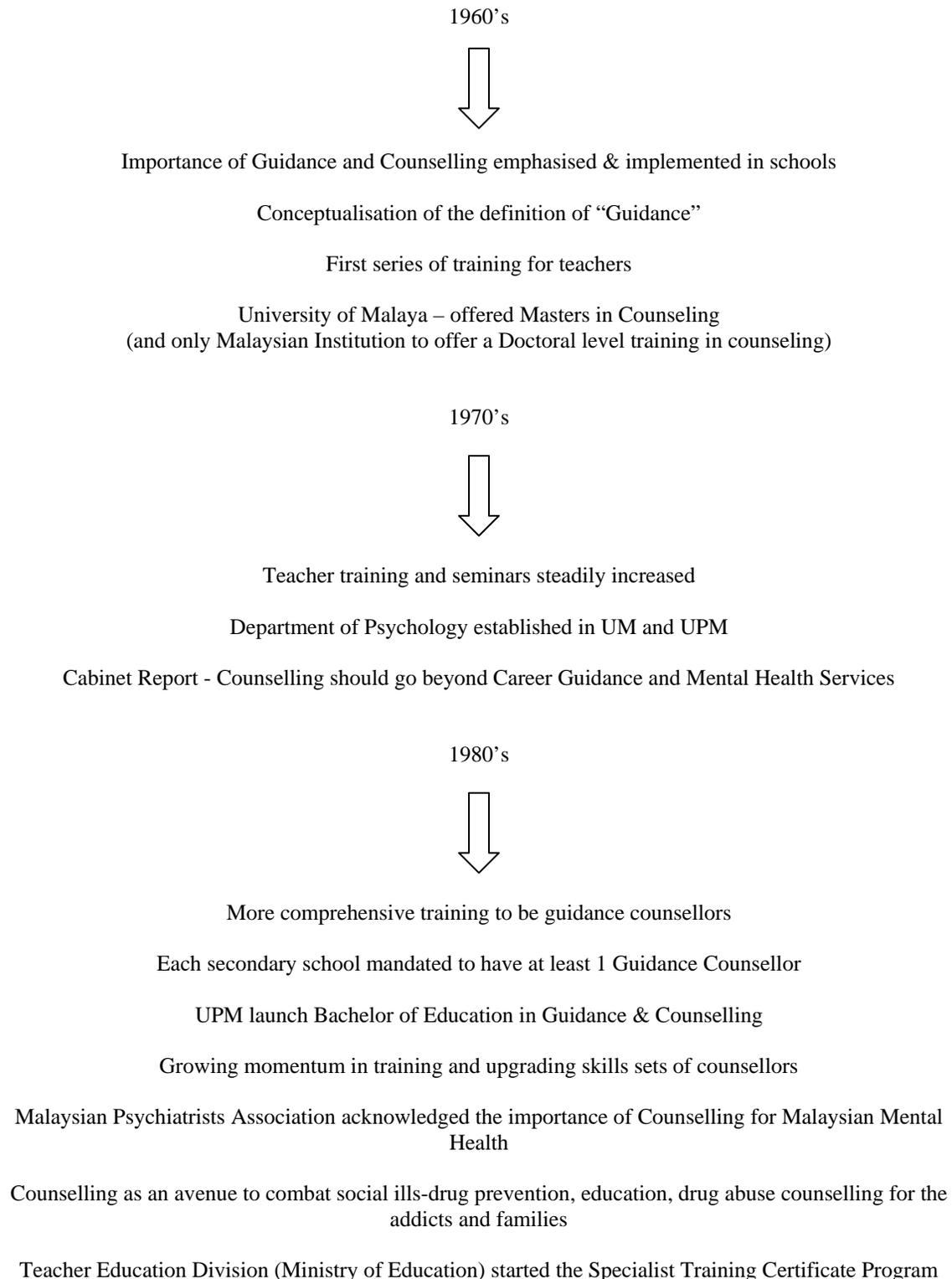
This discussion of the future is an attempt to analysis possible directions for counselling in Malaysia. Although the projections of the counselling profession could be viewed as discouraging, the future of counsellors in Malaysia actually appears promising from the comments of the counsellors interviewed. Counselling, including guidance, has strong support from the Ministry of Education, the government at large, and university faculties are offering counsellor education programs. Moreover, the general public has opportunities to see counsellors, even if limited at present. The value and need for counselling is, nevertheless, acknowledged (Malaysian Prime Minister's Department, 2006), and counselling programs are being supported across Malaysian society according the key counsellors interviewed (Ninggal 2004; Salim 2004). With the pressure from applicants for counselling programs, sometimes as many as several hundred applying for 50 openings in a Bachelor's degree program, some programs are tempted to expand and increase their intakes.

Malaysia has developed some diversity in it counsellor education programs. A theme running thought the interviews of the four counsellors was that the demand for counsellors and the demand by people wishing to enter counsellor education, exceeds the capacity of the current programs. Counsellor education programs in Malaysia should resist significant expansion at this time, until the present programs are fully staffed and until the graduates of these programs have been evaluated on the job. At present it would be difficult to judge which of the different models should be expanded.

Parallels can be draw between the development of counselling in Malaysia and its emergence in western countries such as the United States. Malaysian counselling, as in other nations, was initially identified with the schools, with the first counsellors being teachers. Furthermore, the emergence of counselling in non-school settings was the result of the country's rehabilitation effort, although the focus was on drug abuse rather than physical disability. Despite these similarities, there are a few major differences. In Malaysia there is not the assumption that counsellors are psychotherapists, which is not the case in other nations such as the USA. Unlike the situation in other countries such as the USA, Malaysia has only a few psychiatrists and psychologists who perform psychotherapy for clinically significant issues. Specifically, there are approximately 100 psychiatrists and 200 clinical and counselling psychologists in Malaysia. Most of them are attached to the universities, and only a very few are in private practice.

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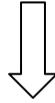
Figure 1a: Flowchart Summary of the History of Counselling in Malaysia (detailed version)



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Figure 1a: continued

1990's



Counselling as a profession grew – counselling offered in schools, industry, health systems & the public

Extensive training modules – training of hospital and health staff in basic counselling skills

Mental Health Life Skills Training Programs implemented

Clinics were established for Mental Health Life Skills Training Programs - offered practical counseling services to the Malaysian Public

Total of 129 Mental Health Counseling Centers nationwide offer a range of services – psychosocial rehabilitation, vocational training, mental health and life skills training

Mental health education materials was produced and distributed nation wide

Counsellor Act - written legislation to regulate the counseling profession

2000-present



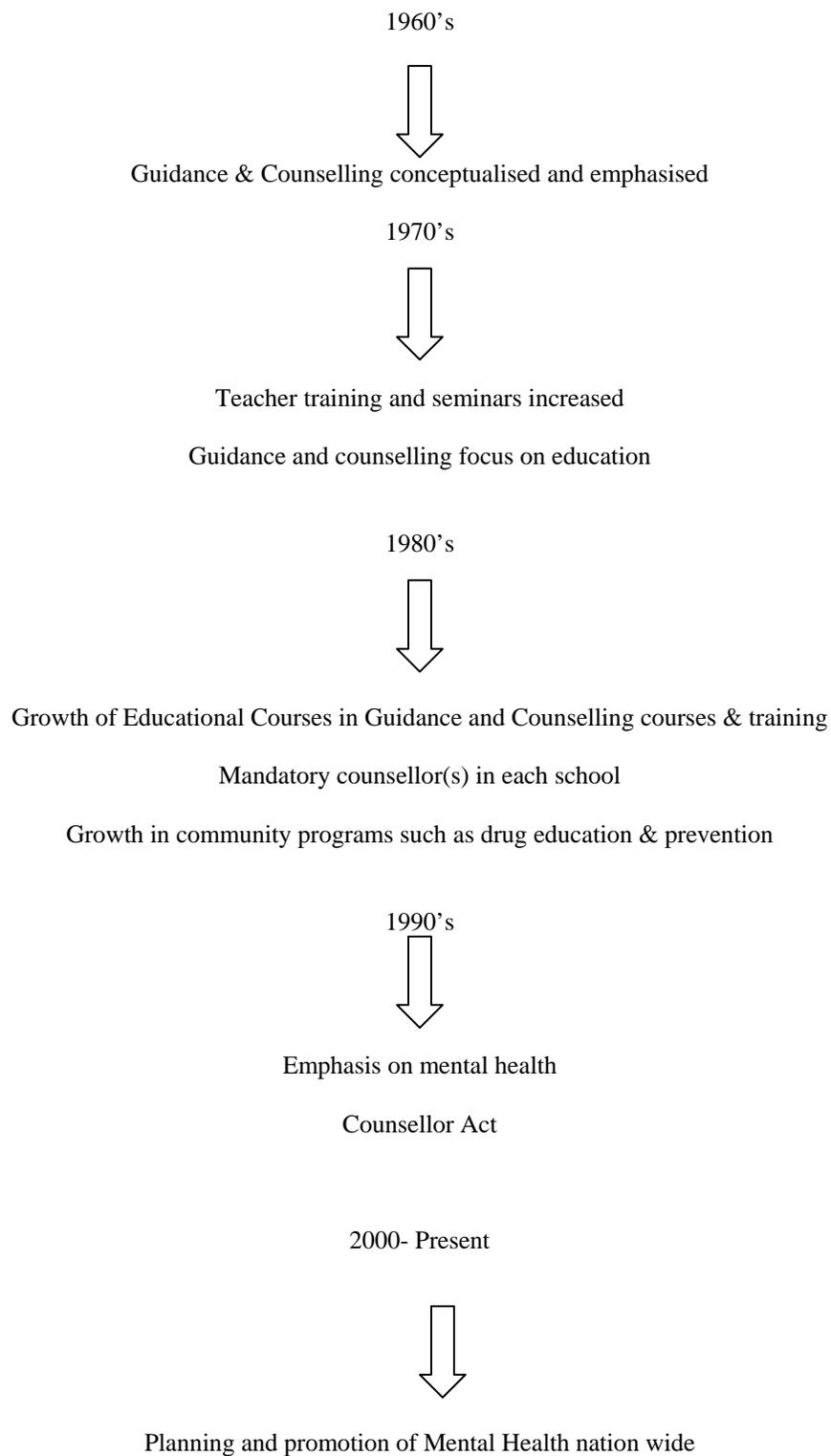
Comprehensive promotion of Mental Health themed “Healthy Lifestyle”

Forums to facilitate establishment and coordination of committees for mental health

National Plan of Action for the implementation of the Mental Health Program

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Figure 1b : Flowchart Summary of the History of Counselling in Malaysia.



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Overall Themes

Foremost among all interviewees was the need to address the Malaysian public's attitude towards counselling. In general, a person seeing a counsellor is typically considered crazy. Therefore, Malaysia needs to make a paradigm shift in terms of how counselling is perceived. A suggestion during one of the interviews was that the word "Mental Health" should be used extensively until the public becomes desensitised to it. The counselling profession needs to heighten the importance of counselling and mental health.

There is a continuing need to create an awareness of the importance of counselling for the Malaysian public. For that to happen, tertiary education providers, health associations, government, and private practitioners need to get involved and become advocates for the profession of counselling and mental health.

Training and Infrastructure

Counselling as a profession is potentially a very important part of the nation's development, given the progress of life and development in Malaysia. There are signs in the social scenario that indicate mental health is becoming an important issue: broken relationships, increase in depression, suicide rates, and so on. There are many citizens who are "walking time bombs" and have no access to services to provide evaluation and treatment. Therefore, more counselling services are needed, more so than ever before because of the increased psychosocial pressures.

There is a shortage of institutions offering counselling courses and majors in counselling (degrees and higher degree), in fact only 6 local universities. Therefore there is a need for institutions, including private, to provide counselling education, competent trainees and counsellors in a variety of counselling areas. For example, Mohamad Hussein (1994) and Quek (1996, 1997) research identified generalised short in counsellors and a lack of variety in services. While other research has identified particular areas that lack of expertise, for example Ng (2004) identified a lack of family and couples counselling in Malaysia.

Although it is recognised that there are Malaysian scholars abroad who have great depth of knowledge and expertise in counselling, they are yet to impart this to their compatriots still within Malaysia (Zulkifili Manaf, 2004). It is disappointing that many of these scholars were sent by the government to complete courses in counselling abroad. It is hoped, by many in the counselling community, that they return and contribute to their home country.

A significant number of Malaysian counsellors are trained in western countries and even larger numbers are trained based on western techniques. Thus, identifying critical cross-cultural issues and competencies is important to understand the interaction of culture, mental health and counselling. The interviewees identified that because of the Malaysian culture, counselling tends to be more directive and advice giving, thus, it seems important that Malaysian counselling models are researched and used, as appropriate, to improve the mental health of Malaysians.

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Policy

Malaysia still has an edge over many other Asian nations because it has safeguarded professional standards by the passing of the Counsellors Act. However, compared to Malaysia's Asian neighbours (such as Thailand, Philippines, and Japan), most other aspects are lagging behind and need to be addressed. There is little use for the law to be in place when most other aspects of counselling are below standard, for example training, services, models, availability, public acceptance, and research.

There are currently two major dives in policy dealing with counselling. Firstly, there are attempts to have insurance policies cover counselling services. Secondly, to increase the affordability of obtaining mental health services. Second, currently the Malaysian government is trying to place a counsellor in each government department to promote mental health and the psychological well-being of society.

The roots of counselling are in schools, but ironically schools lack counselling infrastructure. For example, teachers who are counsellors are promoted to administrative positions where counselling expertise is not practised. School administration and practices make little distinction between counsellors and teachers. Thus, there is little opportunity for counsellors in schools to engage fully in mental health promotion or professional development. Many school counsellors still have minimal qualifications, experience and supervision in counselling.

The interviewees relate that Malaysia is a 'spoon-feed' culture and therefore needs to give counselling to the people via indirect methods, for example personal development programs, to generate interest in counselling instead of opening up clinics and expect people to walk in for counselling. Advocacy and promotion of counselling are needed but done through the promotion of Malaysian models.

Services

Globally, often the first activity conducted with the counsellor's client is the measurement of symptoms by standardised instruments. However, Malaysia is not equipped with such instruments in assessment, often assessment is in the form of an educated guesses by the counsellor which can not be formally validated. At present, tests that are used to assess a person's mental health, aptitude and so forth are predominantly from the United States, Britain, and Australia, which proves to be rather costly and often culturally inappropriate. In Malaysia, manuals and testing instruments that are culturally appropriate are not used and poorly distributed. Some Asian counterparts, such as counsellors in the Philippines, have a richer pool of testing resources for their population.

Although there are many school counsellors in public schools offering guidance and career assessments, the interviewees report there is a sense that young people within Malaysia have no sense of the direction they wish to pursue. Given that they underwent 11 years of public school education with experts in Guidance and Counselling in these schools, the interviewees felt, in general, that the counsellors lacked the adequate assessments to equip students with an idea of a possible career path. Children in

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Malaysia potentially could go through a range of assessments and testing of mental health abilities and attitudes that leads them to having a good sense of what they want to do in the future. Hence, the interviewees felt that counselling needs to have more of an impact at the school level to be considered useful by the post-school members of society.

In summary, the interviewees, asserted that the future of the counselling profession should be driven by its needs, that is to increase the number of counsellors in school and other sectors, counsellors need to improve qualifications and training, and availability of mental health programs for the community at large. A national counsellor registry should be established, the government and community needs to implement current regulations and a concerted research effort is need to understand counselling and counselling needs in Malaysia.

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