

# Counselling Regulation, Education, and Representation in Malaysia

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Over time, counselling in Malaysia has grown from the stage of infancy (Ng & Stevens, 2001) to pubescence (See & Ng, 2010). While its historical origin has some influences from the counselling profession in the United States (Lloyd, 1987), counselling in Malaysia has become an important mental health profession with its uniqueness and strength. Feit and Lloyd (1990) defined 'a recognized counselling profession' as comprising 'ethical standards, licensure, accreditation, specialized training, and a strong identity. This was supported by Johari (2001), who added that 'professional bodies' to the existing criteria. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of counselling in Malaysia. It is divided into five sections beginning with the counselling regulation and legislation, followed by counselling education, description of counselling representations through associations, some explanations on the pathway to becoming counsellors in Malaysia, and finally, counselling supervision.

**Keywords:** *Malaysia, Counselling, Regulation, Education, Representation, Supervision.*

## Counselling Regulation in Malaysia

### Registration of Counsellors

Counselling in Malaysia has moved towards professionalism and prominence with the introduction of the Counsellors Act 1998 (Act 580, Act 580; Commissioner of Law Revision and Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Bhd, 2006, (Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia, 2016; Othman, Che Din, & Sipon, 2000; See & Ng, 2010). As a result, Malaysia is regarded as one of the first countries in the South-East Asian and Australasian region to have a specific Act to regulate the profession. This Act provides an advantage over many other Asian countries because it safeguards professional standards and provides a legal and social framework for counselling in Malaysia (Glamcevski, 2008).

As an Act that applies only to Malaysian practicing counsellors regarding their practice, it aims to regulate the

practice of professional counselling in Malaysia (Mohd Ishak, Amat, & Abu Bakar, 2012). The Malaysian Counsellors Advisory Council was established under the Act. It acts as an advisory body to the Minister on matters pertaining to the Act and matters referred to it by the Board.

The Board of Counsellors is seen to hold more critical functions. The Act dictates that the Board is to (1) oversee the provision of counselling services,(2) to evaluate the need for counselling services in Malaysia, (3) regulate the training of counsellors and determine the types and levels of counselling that can be made available; (4) determine the qualifications entitling a person to be registered under the Act; (5) determine the standard of counselling training programs; (6) make recommendations to the government in relation to the standard of counselling services; (7) register counsellors and make them qualified; (8) regulate chargeable fees by a registered counsellors for his services; (9) appoint members of the Board to sit on any board, committee, or body formed for any purpose affecting the counselling profession; to regulate the conduct of the counselling profession including prescribing the code of ethics for the counselling profession; and (10) to perform other activities as deemed necessary to enable it to carry out its functions effectively.

Under the Act, counselling is defined as a systematic process of helping relationships based on psychological principles performed by a registered counsellor in accordance with the counselling code of ethics to achieve a voluntary favourable holistic change, development, and adjustment of the client, such

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that the change, development, and adjustment will continue throughout the lifespan of the client' (Act 580; Commissioner of Law Revision and Percetakan Nasional Malaysia Bhd, 2006).

Based on the definition above, it can be understood that counselling can only be performed by a registered counsellor. Sub-section 22(1) of the Counsellors Act 1998 mandates that individuals must register for the practice as a counsellor in order to use the title 'registered counsellor' or to use displays on any form of devices representing that he or she is a registered counsellor. Additionally, they must also hold a valid practicing certificate issued under this Act (Sub-section 23(1)). To register, a person must be a Malaysian citizen or a Malaysian permanent resident, aged 21 years and above, entitled and suitable to be registered as a counsellor, and holds qualifications as listed in the Counsellors Act 1998. Failure to do so causes one to be guilty of an offense and shall on conviction be liable to a fine not exceeding thirty thousand ringgit or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or both as stated in Sub-section 22(2) of Act 580.

The Malaysian Board of Counsellors also has regulations for non-Malaysian citizens and non-Malaysian permanent residents wishing to practice as counsellors in Malaysia. According to the Counsellor Act 1998, they may apply for temporary registration. The Malaysian Board of Counsellors will consider the registration of a person who is registered or licensed as a counsellor in the country where he or she ordinarily practices counselling, has counselling expertise, and physical presence in Malaysia for not less than one hundred and eighty days in a calendar year to conduct counselling services (Act 580; Commissioner of Law Revision and Percetakan Nasional Bhd, 2006).

## Ethical Codes

The issue of unethical conduct of counsellors is provided in Sections 6 and 7 of the Act. A committee will hold an investigation for every complaint against any counsellors. If found guilty, the counsellor's name will be removed from the registry, suspended, or ordered to be fined, or they may also be reprimanded for the misconduct. Disciplinary authority is given exclusively to the Board, which exercises disciplinary control in respect of all such counsellors in accordance with the Act. Offensive practices (such as fraud and forgery) and their related penalties are also clearly provided in the Act.

To further strengthen the professionalism in the delivery of the counselling services, a specific code of ethics was developed, following an adaptation of the American Counseling Association (ACA) Code of Ethics (American Counseling Association, 2014) as a result of the joint effort between the Malaysian Board of Counsellors and the Malaysian Counselling Association. Hence, the Counsellors Act 1998 and the Code of Ethics (Malaysian Board of Counsellors, 2016b) provide guidelines for Malaysian counsellors to have ethical and professional practices. In many circumstances, the content in the Code of Ethics matches or complements the Act. Nevertheless, in cases where conflict arises between the two, the content of the law prevails. An example of such conflict is when the counsellor finds that his or her colleague has wrongfully practiced or claimed (in an advertisement) his expertise in the area that he is not an expert or was trained in (Mohd. Ishak et al., 2012). The code of ethics outlines the steps that the counselor needs to be taken by the counsellor, i.e., to avert and correct any unethical conduct displayed by his or her peers. It is further reinforced in

the Counsellors Act 1998 that a disciplinary punishment shall be imposed if the counsellor acts fraudulently, dishonestly, or moral turpitude.

Other than this, the functions of the Code of Ethics (Malaysian Board of Counsellors, 2016b) are to provide guidelines to assist counsellors to act professionally so that services can be provided effectively and values can be nurtured, to create principles that determine ethical behaviour and best practices, to enable the Board to clarify ethical responsibilities of counsellors registered with the Board, and to be the basis for processing complaints and inquiries on counsellors' ethics.

The Code of Ethics (Malaysian Board of Counsellors, 2016) only comprises eight sections as opposed to the ACA Code of Ethics (nine sections). Section A, B, C, and D of this code outlines the responsibilities of counsellors towards their clients, other professionals, and the community. The elements of confidentiality, privileged communication, and privacy are highlighted to help build healthy relationships and avoid ones that may impair professional judgment or increase harm to the clients (Mohd. Ishak, 2012). Section E provides details about testing and evaluation issues. This is followed by Section F on supervision, training, and teaching, which relates to the counsellor-client as well as the supervisor/educator-student relationships. Aspects of multicultural competencies are also mentioned. The code also outlines counsellors' conduct when conducting research and publishing in Section G. Finally, Section H covers standards and laws pertaining to the resolution of ethical issues. This includes adherence to five basic moral principles: autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, and fidelity (Mat Rani et al., 2017; Mohd. Ishak et al., 2012).

As the mental health field is diverse, with counsellors and the client population varying in degrees in terms of the roles they play, the existing Code of Ethics (Malaysian Board of Counsellors, 2016b) must be broad enough in scope to accommodate application in many different situations (Mat Rani et al., 2017). Another limitation of the code is that the guidelines provided may not always be clear. Thus there is a call for a more systematic manner of decision-making. There may be a need to fall back on the court's decisions for interpretation in some circumstances.

Both the Counsellors Act 1998 and the Code of Ethics (Malaysian Board of Counsellors, 2016b) provide ample guidelines for counsellors to function effectively in the profession. However, there may be a need to update and revise the existing documents from time to time as they must adapt to changes as new issues or situations arise. For example, the ACA Code of Ethics has already included a new section on distance counselling, technology, and social media. Another example is in terms of counsellors' qualifications. Even though more institutions are providing counselling programs, they are not yet listed in the Counsellors Act 1998; and this may later cause difficulties for graduates from those programs to be registered under the Act. Hence, by keeping track of current development and revision of the existing guidelines, the counselling profession will maintain its relevance and further enhance the high standards of professionalism in the counselling profession within society.

## Counselling Education in Malaysia

The Malaysian Ministry of Education has been working on producing quality graduates in guidance and counselling. At

present, counselling programs are offered by various Malaysian public and private institutions of higher education. The early development of counselling in Malaysia began in schools and public institutions of higher learning in the late 1960s. During its inception, the field of counselling in Malaysia was heavily influenced by the counselling profession in the United States (Lloyd, 1987). The first two areas of emphasis were school guidance and drug abuse prevention. University of Malaya (UM) was the first to offer a guidance and counselling major as part of its Master's in Education program in 1976, and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) offered a Diploma in Psychology (Counselling), which was later changed to the Diploma in Counselling Psychology in 1979. By 1980, more Malaysian public universities began offering guidance and counsellor education programs focusing on their specializations to fulfill the Ministry of Education's goal of providing full-time school counsellors by the year 2000.

Concurrently, several Malaysian universities began by offering counselling services to their own university students to support them in navigating university life. MARA Institute of Technology was the first institution to offer counselling services to support its students, followed by the University of Malaya, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia, and other universities (Nasir, 2008). Currently, all public and private higher education institutions are required by the Malaysian Qualification Agency (MQA) to provide counselling services to their students, which must be performed by registered counsellors only (MQA, 2018).

## Counsellor Education

The Malaysian counsellor education incorporates multiple counselling and psychological components. In Malaysia, institutions offering counselling in the undergraduate and graduate levels include: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSII), Universiti Sains Malaysia (USM), Universiti Malaya (UM), Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (UTM), Universiti Utara Malaysia (UUM), Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (UNIMAS), Universiti Malaysia Terengganu (UMT), Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia (USIM), Kolej Universiti Insaniah, and HELP University College.

At present, there are ten public universities offering counselling programs at the Bachelor's level and Master's level, one public university offering a counselling program at the Bachelor's level only, three private universities offering counselling programs at the Master's level only, and ten public universities offering doctoral-level counselling programs. At the Master's level, nine public universities offer coursework-based programs, two offer a combination of coursework and research programs, and one public university is currently offering a research-based program (Malaysian Board of Counsellors, 2017). All doctoral counselling degrees are currently offered in the research-based mode except the University of Malaya who began to offer a doctoral degree in a combined research and coursework mode. However, the research and coursework combination does not intend to produce counsellors who specialize in a particular area.

## Curriculum and Delivery

Overseen by the Malaysian Ministry of Education and the Malaysian Board of Counsellors, each counsellor education program incorporates four components: knowledge, skills, research and assessment, and area of specialization. Only some public higher education institutions have their own emphasized

areas of specialization (e.g., educational, management and organization, marriage and family counselling, and drug and substance use/abuse). For example, the University Putra Malaysia is known for producing school counsellors, while the Universiti Sains Islam Malaysia offers Master's in Counselling (Family Counselling or Drug Abuse) specializations. The other universities offer counselling programs that train future counsellors in any setting without an area of specialization.

Most programs are delivered on-site through lectures and clinical training (practicum and internship). Practicum training is a required program component and needs to be completed before the internship. Practicum is typically offered in-house at the program's institution for one academic semester (4 months), accruing 253 contact hours. Practicum experience may include simulations, live or recorded sessions in counselling labs, case consultation, and clinical reports through supervision by a qualified supervisor. Counselling labs are specifically developed for individuals and group experience, allowing students to perform practicum and enhance their counselling competencies and experiences.

Experiential learning is a unique learning experience offered by counselling programs in the form of counselling retreats, professional development, seminars, and professional counselling forums, social and community outreach projects, as well as client-centered programs. These programs are designed to expose and create awareness to the counselling students on current societal and mental health issues faced by Malaysians.

Internship in this field is typically carried out by an outside organization offering counselling services, lasting between 14 to 24 weeks, with 504 hours (192 direct contact hours of individual and group counselling). Students are supervised by a primary supervisor and an on-site supervisor based on recorded sessions and case studies. Their skills are evaluated based on specific areas, namely, administration, individual group counselling, and psychological assessment skills. They also have opportunities to involve rehabilitation and prevention.

## Issues in Counsellor Education

The demand for counselling education continues to rise as mental health awareness increases among the Malaysian authorities and society. About four decades ago, public universities were satisfying the increasing demands for counsellors by offering quality programs and specializations aimed at responding to the current social and mental health needs of Malaysian society. However, despite numerous advances made by the Malaysian counselling profession, some challenges remain.

As the number of training programs continues to grow in the country, more counsellor educators will be needed to teach these programs. However, at present, there are no standardized educational, clinical, or research requirements to become a counsellor educator in these institutions other than the requirement to register with the Malaysian Board of Counsellors. As a result, information on the varying educators' educational and research backgrounds, teaching and pedagogical methods, and clinical skills remain unregulated. One significant implication is the difficulty in measuring the qualification of the area of specialization being offered by the counsellor educators.

In addition, there is no existing database or mechanism to track the current human resource, educators, researchers, research projects, and area of specializations of the Malaysian counselling professionals. With the increased number of research-based doctoral counselling programs, the existence

of a national counselling database with vital information on the progress of the profession will allow for cross-cultural, international research opportunities.

## Counselling Representation in Malaysia

The first national professional counselling association in Malaysia was established on January 16, 1982, called the Malaysian Counselling Association (PERKAMA). Originally known as the Malaysian Counsellor Association, it was founded by a group of school counsellors, counsellor educators, and welfare officers interested in counselling (Othman & Abdullah, 2015; See, Othman, Salim, & Che Din, 2009). The name was later changed to the Malaysian International Counselling Association (PERKAMA International) in 2011 (Mohamad Hanafi & Jusoh, 2015).

The association's primary purpose is to provide a professional base for Malaysian counsellors or those in related professions in terms of professional orientation and esprit de corps (Mohd Ishak et al., 2012). Other aims of the organization include: enabling the development of the profession, encouraging learning, professionalism, and competency of counsellors, enhancing identity, harmony, and collaboration among members from various disciplines through the exchange of knowledge and experiences, as well as providing a resource of counselling professionals to help social and mental health issues in the society (Jusoh, 2015; Mohd Ishak et al., 2012).

Beginning as a small association with about 500 to 1000 members (Glamcevski, 2008; See et al., 2009), this association now has over 7000 members (Malaysian Board of Counsellors, 2016). Membership of PERKAMA International is open to those who are qualified in counselling and related fields. Those who do not have the required qualifications are accepted as associate members or student members (Mohd Ishak et al., 2012; Zambri, 2012).

PERKAMA has played a massive role in lifting the dignity of professional members of the community. Upholding the belief that professionalism among counsellors requires identification of professional norms with peers, PERKAMA had taken the initiative to formulate a code of ethics in 2008 before it was accepted and revised as the Code of Ethics by the Malaysian Board of Counsellors in 2011 (Mat Rani et al., 2017; Mohd. Ishak et al., 2012). Other roles played by PERKAMA include providing services related to social issues, implementing professional development programs to enhance the level of counsellors' competencies, expanding the scope of community service in the society, creating community counselling to meet current social needs, mobilizing all counselling practitioners to actively engage in community development professionally and becoming a prominent advocate for the Malaysian Board of Counsellors to ensure that every counselling practitioner is qualified and registered (Mohammad Hanafi & Jusoh, 2015).

The association is active in organizing conferences, seminars, and workshops to help increase Malaysian counsellors' professionalism and competencies (Mohamad Hanafi & Jusoh, 2015; Mohd Ishak et al., 2012). In other words, PERKAMA supports the life-long learning initiative as implemented by the Malaysian Board of Counsellors (Mohd. Ishak et al., 2012). The Malaysian Board of Counsellors promotes life-long learning by introducing Continuing Professional Development (CPD) points to ensure that counsellors are up-to-date with the latest development in counselling.

The association also encourages its members to be involved in research and publications. In 1984, the association published the first issue of its official journal, which covered both the theoretical and practical aspects of counselling (Glamcevski, 2008). Besides that, books, articles, and magazines such as Suara PERKAMA International and other publications have also been distributed to advance the field of counselling in Malaysia (Othman & Abdullah, 2015; Zambri, 2012). PERKAMA has also sought the accreditation of counselling services as a guideline in providing monitoring procedures on practitioners on any premise that carries out counselling services (Mohamad Hanafi & Jusoh, 2015).

Members of PERKAMA are also active in the community and consultative work in order to strengthen the counselling services and professionalism in the community (Zambri, 2012). PERKAMA members were involved in providing crisis intervention and counselling services during the MH370 and MH17 airplane tragedies and various natural disasters throughout the country and abroad (Mat Rani et al., 2017).

Previously, counsellors had only one local counselling association to enhance their professionalism through participation in activities, which is PERKAMA (Mohd. Ishak et al., 2012). However, given the rapid development and social changes in the country, new counselling associations have emerged. Among these associations include the Association of Education Counsellors Malaysia (PEKA), the Association of Syarie Counselling Malaysia, the Malaysian Registered Professional Counsellor Association (PAKARMALAYSIA), and the National Association of Christian Counsellors (NACC Malaysia).

Even though this growth can be seen as a positive effort among counsellors, Abu Bakar (2016) was of the view that there is a need for stakeholders such as the Malaysian Ministry of Women, Family, and Community Development, the Malaysian Board of Counsellors, and the Malaysian Public Service Department (Counselling and Psychology Division) to coordinate the associations related to counselling profession as well as the counselling activities to ensure that the services provided are well-regulated and beneficial to the society. In contrast, the authors view that having divisions organized around specific interest and practice areas such as those developed by the American Counseling Association (ACA) would better enhance counsellors' professional identity.

## Pathways to Becoming a Counsellor in Malaysia

The most straightforward way to become a practicing counsellor in Malaysia is to pursue a bachelor's degree in counselling in an accredited institution, which takes four years to complete. With the qualification, a person is eligible to apply to be a registered counsellor once he or she passes the interview conducted by the Malaysian Board of Counsellors. Once registered, the person is also eligible to apply for the Certificate of Practice, which allows him or her to practice as a counsellor. A person can also be a registered counsellor by pursuing a Master's degree in any accredited institution. The primary academic qualification to pursue a Master's degree is a Bachelor's degree in any field. Some public universities have strict entrance requirements to a Master's degree level. For instance, the University of Malaya requires applicants to have at minimum a 3.0 CGPA at the Bachelor's level in any human-

related field and documented experience in the helping field. The Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia requires applicants to have a strong background in psychology. If accepted, the person may be required to take and pass several pre-requisite psychology courses. Public universities usually have stricter requirements due to the limited places offered and the lack of training staffing.

## Work Setting

Registered counsellors in Malaysia are employed in different and various fields. They are mostly available in public sectors such as schools, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, and higher education institutions. Counsellors are also available in limited private sectors, mainly because private sectors are unwilling to invest in mental health care. Some government-listed companies appoint consultants to be their counsellors who are called if the service is needed.

Other than the public and private sectors, some counsellors choose to work with non-government organizations that provide support services for free. Some religious institutions like mosques and churches also offer counselling services. However, the counselling services at these settings are usually not regulated because the job is performed voluntarily. In addition, some professional helpers are not trained counsellors, yet they claim that they are counsellors.

## Supervision of Counselling in Malaysia

### Supervision of Practicum

There are two stages of supervision of counselling in Malaysia. First, supervision during the practicum hours, and second, supervision of internship experience. Students taking practicum courses are advanced Bachelor's and Master's degree students. According to the Standard and Qualification of Counsellor Training (Malaysian Board of Counsellors, 2016), only students who have completed core courses, including the Life Span, Counselling Theories of Career Development, and Group Counselling courses, are allowed to register for the practicum course. As discussed in the earlier section, the counselling profession in Malaysia is regulated by the Malaysian Board of Counsellor. The Board's responsibility is not limited to monitoring the registration of counsellors. Together with the Malaysian Qualification Agency, the Board is also responsible for monitoring the local institutions in Malaysia, which offer counseling programs. This is to ensure that the curriculum is in line with the Board's standards. During their practicum training, student counsellors are required to complete supervised practicum hours. A qualified practicum supervisor must obtain at least a Master's degree from an accredited institution, either locally or abroad, and he or she must also be registered with the Board. The supervisor can be assisted by a Registered Counsellor with a minimum qualification of a Bachelor's degree in counselling, with a valid Certificate of Practice issued by the Malaysian Board of Counsellors.

In terms of the practicum sites, the Malaysian Board of Counsellor requires the site to have the necessary facilities for clinical training. In addition, the practicum supervision is held on campus. Therefore, institutions that offer counselling programs must have counselling training facilities. The facilities provide conducive environments for individual and group counselling, audio-video equipment for supervision purposes, and support staff responsible for taking care and handling the equipment.

A supervised practicum consists of 3-credit hours, which is held for 14 weeks or a semester. During this period, the students are expected to complete 252 hours, of which 96 hours should be spent in direct contact with clients. Students accumulate their direct contacts with clients through counselling sessions. These sessions can be in the form of individual, group, couple, marriage, or family counselling.

### Practicum Supervision Procedure

The Malaysian Board of Counsellors provides four aspects that a counselling program needs to follow. The four procedures are:

- (1) Practicum Supervision Requirements - In order to fulfil the 252-hours of practicum, the Malaysian Board of Counsellor, in its Standard and Qualification of Counsellor Training, set six rules and requirements for the students. The six rules are: (1) Official registration in practicum course, (2) Practicum students need to conduct sessions from the beginning towards the termination, (3) Each student needs to be supervised at least three times by the practicum supervisor, (4) The practicum site must meet the Malaysian Board of Counsellor's requirement as discussed in the previous section; (5) Practicum students need to conduct a minimum of 3-sessions with each client; (6) The handling of the administration and supervision of the practicum must conform to the requirement set by the Standard and Qualification of Counsellor Training.
- (2) Evaluation criteria - The practicum supervisors need to evaluate specific criteria set by the Malaysian Board of counsellors. The criteria to be supervised include: (a) A application of theory, (b) Application of counselling techniques' skills, (c) Case conceptualization, (d) Intervention plan, and (e) Compliance to ethical codes.
- (3) Record keeping - All hours collected during the practicum training need to be documented. The purpose of documentation is to protect both counsellors and clients. Counsellors are responsible for keeping and managing the record and documentation of daily activities in the logbooks, treatment intervention plans, counselling session reports, standardized tests, and any other documents that are deemed necessary for counselling.
- (4) Counselling-Related Activities - Lastly, the practicum supervisors are also responsible for supervising cases requiring referral, consultation, guidance activities, testing and measurement in counselling, professional growth activities, and educational psychology.

Although the Board has set standards that institutions and students need to follow, there is no specific explanation on how the 252-hours can be met. The guidelines provided in the Standard and Qualification of Counsellor Training (Malaysian Board of Counsellor, 2016) only provide general recommendations. Institutions that offer counselling programs often set their own rubric in addition to the general guidelines to ensure that their practicum students meet the requirement. For example, Universiti Malaya, which is the pioneer in counselling programs in the country, has a very rigorous procedure to meet the Board's requirements. Students are to conduct 24-hours of individual counselling, 30-hours of group counselling, and 42-hours of supervision. These three activities contribute to 96 hours of direct contact. The remaining hours are fulfilled through 36-hours of peer supervision, 20-hours of program management, 48-hours of the preparation of clients' reports, 36-hours of

administrative work, and 16-hours of counselling promotional activities (Practicum Rubric for Faculty of Education students, 2018). Judging from the hours, it can be summarized that the total supervision hours received by the practicum students are 78 hours.

In conclusion, the supervision practice during the practicum training is a tedious and challenging job. Although the course consists of only 3-credit hours, the practicum students need to accrue 252 hours in total within one particular semester. At the same time, the students undergoing practicum usually have not finished some courses. This means that they are usually registered in other courses while in practicum. The main aim of the practicum is to prepare students for internship experiences. Therefore, this period is also known as a pre-internship experience.

### Supervision of internship experience

While doing practicum training on campus, students are strongly recommended to find a suitable internship site. Students are required to find internship sites by themselves. They may choose to do their internship in educational, mental health, rehabilitation, or any other settings approved by the academic supervisor. In order to maintain the supervision standards, the students are assigned, two supervisors. Firstly, the academic supervisor, and secondly, the site supervisor. Both supervisors must be registered counsellors and are registered with the Malaysian Board of Counsellors.

Students need to complete a minimum of 504-hours of internship that consists of six credits. Of 504 hours, 192 hours must consist of direct contact with clients either in individual, group, couple, or family settings. The remaining 312 hours need to be dedicated to other counselling related-activities such as administrative work, mental health promotions, and outreach Programming.

In order to ensure that interns are academically and mentally prepared for internship training, the Malaysian Board of Counsellors (2016) requires that they finish all the courses listed in the curriculum that they enrol in. This will equip the interns with all the knowledge necessary in understanding the clients, from introductory psychology courses to counselling practice. In addition, during the internship, they conduct a minimum of three counselling sessions and receive a minimum of 5-times of supervision.

### Internship Supervision Guidelines

The Malaysian Board of Counsellors provides general guidelines in internship supervision. They can be divided into internship supervision requirements, internship evaluation criteria, record keeping, and counselling related-activities.

1. *Supervision Requirement.* In their guidelines, it is noted that supervision can be face to face, either in an individual or group supervision. The ratio between the supervisors and students in individual supervision is one supervisor to a maximum of five interns. Besides face-to-face supervision, the Board also recommends group supervision. An academic supervisor can supervise a maximum of ten interns in a group. Each intern must receive individual supervision or in groups at least five times during their internship training period. Since the interns are supervised by two supervisors, academic and site supervisors, both must rate, evaluate and assess the interns' work. The academic supervisor contributes a maximum of 80% marks, while the site

supervisor contributes the remaining 20%. Both supervisors supervise and evaluate their interns' competencies regarding their direct contact with clients, record keeping, and organization of counselling-related activities.

2. *Evaluation criteria.* The Malaysian Board of Counsellors lists six areas to be evaluated during the internship. Those areas are (1) Application of theory, (2) Using skills and techniques in counselling, (3) Case conceptualization, (4) Treatment intervention and planning, (5) Compliance to ethical standards, and (6) Reflection. Area 6 is the only area that is not included for practicum students.
3. *Record Keeping.* Interns are responsible for preparing documentation for each activity, direct contact, and the program they organize as proof of accumulated hours. Record keeping tasks include the preparation and maintenance of a logbook, intervention planning, counselling report, the use of test and measurement, and any related documents.
4. *Counselling-related Activities.* Supervisors play an active role in helping interns to do necessary referrals, consultations, organize guidance programs and the professional growth of the counsellors, and test and measure while increasing their exposure to psychology.

In summary, the internship experience allows the students to have life experience as professional helpers in a natural setting. The period is crucial because it allows them to polish their knowledge and skills before graduation. However, the Malaysian Board of Counsellors only provides general guidelines on the number of required supervisions each intern must receive. The rubric and specific guidelines of supervision are not mentioned in their standard. Thus, it is up to the individual supervisor to interpret the standard. There is no uniform standard that all accredited institutions can follow and refer to. This leads to a question of whether the interns receive enough supervision or otherwise. Another question is the qualification of the supervisor. The standards of counselling training only mention the minimum academic qualification of supervisors, which is a Master's degree in counselling from an accredited institution. This implies that any supervisor who graduated with a Master's degree or a Ph.D. without prior counselling experience is qualified to supervise the students as long as they are academicians. The supervisors' experience in counselling sessions is not noted in the Standard and Qualification of Counsellors' Training.

### Current Trends and Future Needs

Since the enactment of the Act of Counsellor in 1998 (Act 580; Commissioner of Law Revision and Percetakan Nasional Malaysia, 2006), counselling in Malaysia has exceedingly developed and is gradually accepted as a professional field. Before the enactment, counselling is like any other helping field that is not regulated. The rapid development of counselling is evidenced by the increasing number of higher education institutions offering counselling programs and the increasing number of registered counsellors. With the increasing number of institutions that offer counselling programs and the number of registered counsellors, there is a need to look at future trends. Based on the recent report issued by the Malaysian Board of Counsellors (2018), the urban areas, particularly in the state of Selangor and the main capital city of Kuala Lumpur, recorded the highest number of registered counsellors. At the end of 2017, there were 7765 registered counsellors in Malaysia. The report also shows that 68% of the counsellors are female, and 69% are Malays.

Malaysia is a multi-racial society. Even though multicultural counselling is a compulsory course in all counselling programs offered by accredited higher education institutions, the fact remains that counselling clients from diverse backgrounds are challenging. Most Malay counsellors work in government sectors, in which the majority of the population they serve is Malay. Examples of these sectors are schools, public hospitals, government departments, rehabilitation and detention centres, and prisons. The service is provided free to people who are part of the sectors and members of the public. More counsellors from other ethnicities are needed to improve the counselling service, especially in the government sector. Higher education institutions may play a role in recruiting more students from minority groups. More outreach programs are also needed to introduce the field to the public. One of the reasons behind a large number of registered counsellors in urban areas is the awareness of the importance of mental health among the urban population, who are mostly educated. The government agencies such as the health clinic need to take the initiative to introduce the service. Currently, the government sectors that offer the service are usually located in big cities.

Another issue that needs attention is the need to introduce areas of specialization in counselling. Of all the counselling programs offered by Malaysian higher education institutions, only one offers program specialization. The Malaysian Board of Counsellors (2016c) has prepared the Standard and Qualification of Counsellor Training (with specialization). The Board suggests six specialization areas. Unfortunately, most universities choose not to offer any specialization areas due to the lack of human resources. The biggest challenge is the lack of uniform standards and qualifications for counsellor education.

The Board only requires counsellor educators to be registered with the Board and have a Master's degree from accredited institutions. Most of these educators graduated from Malaysian public universities that do not have any concentration areas. Counsellor educators in Malaysia also completed their doctoral degrees from different institutions. Some graduated from foreign universities and come from local public universities. A majority of them graduated from institutions in Commonwealth countries, which focus on research. Commonwealth countries such as the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand. A small number of educators in this field graduated from American universities that offer more concentration in counselling.

The limited number of counsellor educators who receive training in certain specialization areas becomes a challenge to institutions that intend to offer specialization areas. Due to this fact, there is a need for the Malaysian Board of Counsellors to review their standards and qualifications of counsellor educators because counselling is a field that requires practical training under proper supervision. A counsellor cannot claim that he or she is a specialist in a particular area just by doing empirical research in one particular area. Counsellor educators in Malaysia focus their work on research and teaching. Thus, they need proper practical training in specialized areas if they want to teach and train counsellors who intend to be specialists.

Regarding the areas of specialization, the Malaysian Board of Counsellors may also introduce the Continuing Education (CE) program. Specialists in particular areas can handle the CE program, and they may consist of Malaysians or foreign experts. In addition, qualifications obtained from CE can be added to existing credentials to indicate the counsellors' and counsellor educators' qualifications.

Supervision after graduation is another critical issue in the field of counselling. Malaysian Board of Counsellors under the Counsellor Act 1998 only requires individuals to register with the Board. Once individuals finish their degrees, they are eligible to apply. Once registered, they can offer and perform counselling services without supervision. The Counsellor Act 1998 does not mention post-graduation supervision. This may lead to situations where inexperienced counsellors conduct counselling. Without proper supervision, there may be inexperienced counsellors who harm clients. Counsellor educators without experience in counselling may also have issues in teaching practical courses. Since there is no post-graduation supervision of counselling, some counsellor educators may never practice in a natural setting, yet they train future counsellors. Due to this limitation, it is strongly recommended that the Malaysian Board of Counsellors review the standard and qualifications of counsellor educators to improve the counsellor's education training.

## Conclusion

Counselling in Malaysia has gone through many developmental stages. During the infancy stage, counselling was only available in selected educational institutions such as schools and a small number of higher education institutions. The service was performed by anybody who may have personal characteristics that make them suitable for helping others. With no act and standard to regulate the profession, anybody may call themselves counsellors and claim that they were doing counselling jobs. With the enactment of the counsellor Act in 1998 and the establishment of the Board of Counsellors, counselling has gradually been accepted and became well-known. Awareness to seek counselling services from professionals who are registered also increased. Today, counselling is the only helping field in Malaysia with an Act and Board that regulates the service and the practitioners offering the service. The Act and the Board also regulate the training of counsellors. Other fields like psychology and social work are still not regulated by any act.

Despite this positive development, there are many limitations that the authors have discussed and highlighted in this chapter. Continuous improvements are needed to ensure that the counselling profession remains a respected helping profession in the country.

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