

The Counseling Profession in the Philippines

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In the following few pages, the counseling profession in the Philippines is reviewed. Regulation of counseling in the Philippines advanced drastically due to the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004, RA 9258 (Republic Act No. 9258). Counseling education and employment opportunities in counseling in the Philippines are also presented. Similarly, counseling representation and the ways in which people can become counselors in the Philippines are outlined.

Keywords: *Philippines, Counseling, Regulation, Education, Representation, Supervision.*

Counseling Regulation in the Philippines

Counseling in the Philippines has drastically advanced due to the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004, RA 9258 (Republic Act No. 9258), which in a short matter of time, professionalized the practice of guidance and counseling. Because of RA 9258, the Professional Regulatory Board of Guidance and Counseling (PRB) was created, and in collaboration with the Accredited Professional Organization (APO), which is the Philippine Guidance Counseling Association, Inc. (PGCA) had the mandate to formulate the rules and regulations (referred to as the Implementing Rules and Regulations or the IRR for the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004) that govern the profession of counseling. The IRR were written, formulated, adopted, and took effect in September 2007 (House Resolution No. 2057). Prior to this time, there were no legal or statutory means by which the practice of counseling was regulated. What may have existed was a voluntary regulation of the profession, where only people who were trained in guidance and counseling, counseling education, and counseling psychology identified as counselors and practiced the profession. Before the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004, no movement precluded anyone who claimed to have had any training in counseling whatsoever to identify and practice as a counselor, nor was there any regulation, laws, or rules to ensure adequate training and ethical practice. In essence before 2004, the guidance counselor had no professional identity (Santamaria & Watts, 2003).

Judging by the nationwide regulation and the Republic

Act on the profession, counseling practice was regulated much earlier than the practice of psychology, such that the Guidance and Counseling Act became a law in 2004 (Republic Act No. 9258), while the Philippine Psychology Act (Republic Act No. 10029), regulating the practice of Psychology and creating a Professional Regulatory Board of Psychology, was approved in March 2010. The Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004 defined a Guidance Counselor as a Filipino (natural born or naturalized), one who has been registered and issued a valid Certificate of Registration and a valid Professional Identification Card, and who performs the functions of guidance and counseling. It is a monumental action that because of the Guidance and Counseling Act, no person can practice guidance and counseling and call himself or herself a counselor without a valid Certificate of Registration and a valid Professional Identification Card.

Counseling, interchangeably referred to as Guidance and Counseling, is defined as “the profession that involves the use of an integrated approach to the development of a well-functioning individual primarily by helping him/her to utilize his/her potentials to the fullest and plan his/her present and future in accordance with his/her abilities, interests, and needs” (Republic Act No. 9258). The functions of a guidance counselor identified in Republic Act 9258 are: counseling, psychological testing (personality, career, interest, mental ability, aptitude, achievement, learning and study orientation), research, placement and group processes, and teaching guidance and counseling courses, specifically those covered in the licensure examinations, and other services related to human development.

Article III of the Guidance and Counseling Act mandates that individuals register for the practice of guidance and counseling primarily through licensure examination. Individuals are eligible to take the licensing exam with these three criteria: a) citizen of the Philippines or a foreigner whose country enjoys reciprocity, b) has no convictions of any offense, c) a Bachelor’s degree and a Master’s degree in guidance and counseling from an institution recognized or accredited by the Commission on

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Higher Education. Passing the licensure exam means to have a weighted general average of 75% and to have no grade lower than 60% in any of the five subjects: Philosophical, Psychological, and Sociological Foundations of Guidance; Counseling Theories, Tools, and Techniques; Psychological Testing; Organization and Administration of Guidance Services; and Group Process and Program Development. Out of the individuals who took the exam, the licensure examination pass rates have ranged from a low of 41.12% in 2013 to a high of 72.2% in 2009, and an average rate of 59% in the years since 2008 to 2017 (Republic of the Philippines Regulation Commission). According to Valdez (2018), the Philippines has a shortage of registered guidance counselors, that from 2008 to 2017, there are only 3,220 in the entire nation with about half of those (1,528) passing the licensing exam, while the other half (1,692) were grandfathered by March 2009. Individuals could also register for the practice without examination (i.e., be grandfathered) within a 2-year window, by submitting credentials before the Act took effect which included: a) for those who have doctoral and masters degrees, evidence of at least three years teaching and/or counseling practice, b) for those who had passed 18 units of masters level courses in counseling, evidence of at least seven years of counseling practice, and c) for those who had completed academic requirements for a masters degree, evidence of five years of guidance and counseling experience.

Counseling Education in the Philippines

Counseling education in the Philippines can occur at the undergraduate, masters and doctoral levels. Individual programs determine their curriculum and most include applications of counseling theories and models to Philippine society and current issues through research theses and dissertations (e.g., Garabiles, 2010; Nisperos, 1994). The requirement for registering to practice guidance and counseling is a Bachelor's degree in Guidance and Counseling or other related discipline, and a Master's degree in Guidance and Counseling. It is most usually the norm that students who pursue the study of counseling at the graduate level hold a Bachelors degree in Psychology. Some Guidance and Counseling undergraduate programs do exist, but they are not many (e.g., AB in Guidance and Counseling, BSEd in Guidance and Counseling). The Bachelor's degree takes 4 years to complete and the AB/BS Psychology degree includes internship and practicum requirements as mandated by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). The practicum is in the form of an on-the-job training and have permission to train at government or non government organizations for a mandatory 200 hours.

The Masters degree in Guidance and Counseling that is ultimately required in registering to practice as a counselor, abound in the Philippines. Across all regions of the Philippines, there are a total of 162 Master degree programs varying between Guidance and Counseling, Counseling Education, and Counseling (Commission on Higher Education, 2018). (The Masters degree that does not lead to registration as a counselor, but instead as a psychologist, is the Masters degree in Counseling Psychology. Masters programs in Psychology, which also last two years, is the minimum requirement to take the licensing exam and register as a psychologist, along with having 200 hours of supervised clinical experience or practicum/internship work [Republic Act No. 10029]). As a consensus, Masters in Guidance and Counseling programs in the Philippines take roughly two years to complete averaging 42 credits. Most of the programs require

an undergraduate degree in Psychology B.S/B.A or related field to enter and require a thesis to complete and 200 hours of practicum/internship. Similar to programs in western countries, many job placements after licensure prefer hands-on experience, although a specific number of supervised counseling hours is not a requirement for registration and licensure. Programs, therefore, design the Practicum course as a way to gain some experience in the field prior to entry, to allow some training in counseling, with close supervision of professors (Santamaria & Watts, 2003).

Although the terminal degree to register as a counselor is a Master's degree, the Philippines also has a few (less than 10) doctoral programs (e.g., EdD in Guidance and Counseling; PhD in Guidance and Counseling; PhD in Psychology and Guidance, PhD in Counseling). These programs that focus on counseling, provide advanced studies in technique and innovative intervention practices that respond to trends and relevant issues in counseling, opportunities for research and empirical work in counseling, and advocacy projects to improve Philippine society as a whole. Most doctoral programs consist of 60+ credits and require a dissertation.

Universities in the Philippines are accredited by boards that are authorized by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED). To strengthen and increase the quality of higher education, numerous accrediting agencies for both private (Association of Christian Schools and Colleges Accrediting Agency, Inc. [ACSC-AAI], the Philippine Accrediting Association of Schools, Colleges and Universities [PAASCU], and the Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation [PACUCOA]) and public (the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities of the Philippines [AACUP] and the Association of Local Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation [ALCUCOA]) institutions exist to certify the levels of accredited programs (Ching, 2012). Although a requirement of registration for the practice of counseling is a Masters degree in Guidance and Counseling from an institution recognized or accredited by CHED, there is no accreditation for the specific counseling program, unlike in the U.S. (e.g., CACREP). To date, there are no accrediting boards specifically upholding the standards of guidance and counseling programs because there are no standardized policies identified by CHED. As of January 2018, regulatory guidelines and standards for graduate programs are said to be in progress by a technical committee led by CHED with identifying curriculum standards for guidance and counseling programs (Valdez, 2018). This development is due to the observation that license examination pass rates have been low. Although according to the National Economic and Development Authority (NEDA) there are 162 institutions nationwide that offer guidance and counseling courses, there are no CHED-mandated policies, standards, and guidelines for guidance and counseling programs and this may have contributed to the low pass rates (Valdez, 2018).

Opportunities for Counseling Jobs in the Philippines

Article II of the Implementing Rules and Regulations for Guidance Counselors (Professional Regulatory Board of Guidance and Counseling, 2007) describes their scope of practice as a) designated or appointed guidance counselors or counseling psychologists in educational institutions, rehabilitation centers, non-governmental organizations, community-based

agencies, hospital and other workplace, b) faculty members who teach in the counselor education program or who conduct training for guidance counselors, and c) administrators involved in the supervision and management of guidance services or programs at the basic education, tertiary level and non-formal sectors as community, hospital, church, industry and private practice. While the PGCA lobbied for the recognition of licensed guidance counselors in the academe (Professional Regulatory Board of Guidance and Counseling, 2007), it appears that many of them may be working in other contexts, yet still adding to the shortage of guidance counselors. In addition, the PGCA also lobbied with both CHED and the Department of Education to have a guidance counselor in all schools. In particular, in 2006, CHED issued a memorandum CMO No. 21 (Commission of Higher Education, 2006) entitled "Guidelines on Student Affairs and Services Program", indicating the provision of such guidance services as counseling, appraisal, follow-up, and referral—all of which licensed guidance counselors are trained for. This resulted in a need for 10,000 Registered Counselors (RGC's), but such need was not fulfilled. Being that there are only 3,220 RGC's in the entire nation, and a great breadth of job opportunities and contexts that is under Article II of the IRR (Professional Regulatory Board of Guidance and Counseling, 2007) and lobbied by the PGCA, there is a disequilibrium, where RGC's are in low supply, but the demand for them is quite high. On the other hand, another kind of disequilibrium, is also experienced among Registered Psychometricians (RPM's). Coming on the heels of the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004 has been the Psychology Act of 2009 for the licensing of psychometricians and psychologists. The accredited professional organization, the Psychological Association of the Philippines (PAP) is lobbying for the appointment of these licensed professionals in schools. More specifically, "Psychology Practitioners in Public Service", a Special Interest Group in PAP, was created to help lobby for plantilla positions for RPM's in government (including public schools) and to elevate the status of RPsy's (i.e., higher pay) in public service (Psychological Association of the Philippines). Currently, there are about 15,000 RPM's (with just a little over a thousand registered psychologists) since the enactment of RA 10029 (Psychological Association of the Philippines). Unlike the Implementing Rules and Regulations for Guidance Counselors (Professional Regulatory Board of Guidance and Counseling, 2007), that of Registered Psychologists (RPsy) were identified in terms of job placements and opportunities, but those for RPM's were not. Plans are underway with the PAP (Psychological Association of the Philippines) in lobbying to the Civil Service Commission and to CHED about job opportunities for psychometricians, specifically to work in the academe (Psychological Association of the Philippines). In essence, RPM's could potentially fill the need for RGC's in public schools if an item were granted them to work in public or private schools or in government, however, RPM's being Bachelor's-degree-in-Psychology holders, could not work without supervision from a RPsy (Republic Act No. 10029).

Another issue that is at play here is that although RGC's are licensed to work in the academe (for testing and guidance and counseling), there is a real limitation that RGC's cannot put up a private practice, nor work in other clinical applications like testifying in court, unless they work in collaboration with a RPsy. Because of all these issues and circumstances and unintentional consequences of regulation, many seek licensure in both fields, as Registered Counselors and Registered Psychologists, so that

they have the flexibility to work where there are opportunities and where their interests lie, such as working in more clinical settings or supervising RPM's in testing and assessment. In the current state, holding a bachelors degree in Psychology, and with 15,000 other RPM's, there are no job opportunities, unless a Master's degree is pursued in either the Counseling or the Psychology route, and sit for both licensing exams and be registered in both fields.

If, however, this state of affairs continues without changes in the IRR for both fields—i.e., the disproportionate low number of guidance counselors versus the high demand and a disproportionate high number of RPM's versus the lack of regulated job opportunities currently allowed, the state of counseling as a profession and its progress may be disrupted. Moving the profession forward may necessitate the respective rules and regulations (Republic Act No. 9258 & Republic Act No. 10029) adjust to the current state of affairs (e.g., workforce available, low passing rates of licensing examinees, regulated Masters degree in counseling holders vs. Bachelors in Psychology degree holders, plantilla positions in public schools).

Counseling Representation in the Philippines

There are two sets of counseling organizations in the Philippines: one that is primarily counseling focused (e.g., PGCA, PACERS, IPCAP) and another where counseling is associated with a spiritual/religious orientation (e.g., PACC, FPCA). The main counseling organization in the Philippines is the Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association (PGCA), which is the Accredited Professional Organization of the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC)—the government agency that regulates the status of professional licensure and status of various professions in the Philippines.

Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association (PGCA). The PGCA, formerly known as the Philippine Guidance and Personnel Association (PGPA), is not only the Accredited Professional Organization of the PRC, but it has been the first to be PRC-accredited as a provider for Continuing Professional Education (CPE) (Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association, Inc., 2017). The PGCA is also a member branch of the American Counseling Association (American Counseling Association). The PGCA held its first conference at the University of the Philippines in 1965, where it was conceived by 25 original members. Since this time, the PGCA holds conventions, has expanded its chapters across multiple regions, created international affiliation with the American Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA) and publishes *Guidance Journal* annually (Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association, Inc., 2017). The PGCA aims to be the "premier Philippine professional organization of counselors with international recognition" (Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association, Inc., 2017). Members of the PGCA are one of three categories: Regular (licensed or non-licensed who are grandfathered in), Associate (who have not yet graduated or have no license yet) and Junior (hold a Bachelor's degree). The PGCA works to develop counselors who are professional and goal driven, and who fiercely advocate for their clients' well-being. The organization actively strives to continually improve the field of counseling in its service to the profession and the Philippine society through research, meetings, and publications (Philippine Guidance and Counseling Association, Inc., 2017).

Philippine Association for Counselor Education,

Research, and Supervision (PACERS). The organization, PACERS, was established on March 6, 1976 as a way to promote the field of counselor education. Through their shared community, PACERS links counselors to researchers with the goal of exchanging expertise. With over 30 years of collaboration, and through supervision, professional training, and research, PACERS aims to take the lead in promoting counselor education (Philippine Association for Counselor Education, Research, and Supervision). Members of PACERS are one of three categories, attesting to its academic stance: Regular/Associate (hold a masters degree in Guidance and Counseling), Affiliate (in the process of completing a master's degree) and Life (sustained involvement as a member of the Board of Directors or a standing committee, nominated by the PACERS Board). PACERS is focused on the development of professionals who will contribute to the field of counseling, who promote discussion and high standards of ethical and professional competence, and work to inspire counselors to contribute to training the next generation of counselors (Philippine Association for Counselor Education, Research, and Supervision).

Integrated Professional Counselors Association of the Philippines (IPCAP). The IPCAP was founded in 2006, in response to the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004, to uphold the regulations outlined here. The IPCAP focuses on the development and professionalism of counselors, to increase networking, provide educational and counseling resources, and to enhance society through the competent practice of counseling. IPCAP is also an accredited provider for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) for Guidance Counselors (Integrated Professional Counselors Association of the Philippines, Inc.).

The following organizations, PACC and FPCAP, demonstrate the inherent value of faith and spirituality in Filipinos' lives (Dy-Liacco, Piedmont, Murray-Swank, Rodgerson, & Sherman, 2009), especially tapping into resources that are instrumental in counseling practice in the Philippines. What has evolved, therefore, is counseling that is rooted in the Philippine context and is therefore unique to the Philippines (Tanalega, 2004).

Philippine Association of Christian Counselors (PACC). The PACC was formed in 2000 after several different religious institutions met to create a group of Christian counselors dedicated to helping people reach emotional, relational, psychological, and spiritual wholeness while maintaining the highest standards for ethical practice in counseling. The PACC promotes the core values of authenticity, compassion, and competence. Unlike other professional organizations, the PACC does not require its members to hold specific academic degrees. Instead, prospective members must be active in the helping profession or with a fervent desire to serve through counseling in the future, abide by the PACC's code of ethics, and uphold the mission and vision of the PACC. The PACC has been approved by the Philippine Regulatory Commission Board for Guidance & Counseling as an accredited provider of CPD (Philippine Association of Christian Counselors).

Family and Pastoral Counseling Association of the Philippines (FPCAP). The FPCAP was established in 2008 by 21 founding members, an organization of pastoral and family counselors whose service is meant to serve, protect, and strengthen families. With the impetus of RA 9258, the FPCAP's mission is to dedicate itself to the development and welfare of professional practitioners who integrate counseling and spirituality. By combining psychotherapy and spirituality,

counseling members of this organization learn to promote relationship between families, God, and society. Members of FCAP are one of two categories: Regular (hold a masters or doctoral degree in Counseling, Psychology, Family/Pastoral, or Theology and whose work centers around family/pastoral counseling) and Associate (students with at least 18 credits, practitioners, diploma certificate holders, or have been working in the field of family/pastoral counseling). FPCAP values high ethical standards of pastoral counseling, promotes integrity and service-orientation as well as continuous efforts to enrich lives through ministry (Family and Pastoral Counseling Association).

Pathways to Becoming a Counselor in the Philippines

The most common way to become a practicing counselor in the Philippines is to study a Bachelor of Arts or Science in Psychology, Sociology, Theology or other related field, and then a Master's degree in Guidance Counseling, Counseling, Counseling Education, Pastoral Counseling, and so on. To practice as a counselor, after one's Masters degree, the next step is to register and be issued a valid Certificate of Registration and a valid Professional Identification Card, after having passed the licensure examination. A doctoral degree is not required to practice in the counseling profession, but a doctoral degree certainly predisposes someone to be in the leadership position of government or non-government organizations, as well as in academia or in research.

Supervision of Counseling in the Philippines

Counseling supervision is usually provided through group/course supervision provided in the Practicum or Internship courses (usually two classes) in guidance and counseling masters degrees. Students in masters degree programs usually and independently seek sites to practice counseling skills. In these placements, students gain experience in counseling practice, some are provided formal one hour weekly supervision, some receive informal and irregular supervision, and some receive none. Other than group supervision provided in their classes, supervision is not systematic nor regulated, and is dependent on the supervisor or mentor the student works with. There is, however, a lot of mentoring and training happening outside the supervision hour, especially among peers.

Concluding Remarks about Counseling in the Philippines

Much like the diverse cultures inherent in the Philippines, counseling in the Philippines has developed with various names (guidance and counseling, counseling, pastoral/family counseling), but it has unified as a discipline and the practitioner's professional identity as a counselor has strengthened through the Guidance and Counseling Act of 2004. Because of the country's history (i.e., pre-colonial Philippines, Spanish colonization, American occupation, the Marcos regime) (Roces & Roces, 1985) the roots of counseling straddle between indigenous (Enriquez, 1977) and religious/spiritual resources (Bulatao, 1992; Tanalega, 2004) and the societal problems that ensue from experiences of oppression. Competent counselors in the Philippines acknowledge the invaluable influences and

resources in counseling that necessarily include the involvement of family, spirituality and/or religiosity, and a powerful sense of hope and resilience (Tuason, Galang-Fernandez, Catipon, Dey, & Carandang, 2012).

The counseling practice in the Philippines needs to deeply respond to the protracted societal issues of widespread poverty, rampant violence and trauma, frequent natural and human-made disasters, the inevitability of overseas working, countless street children and child laborers, prevalent graft and corruption in leadership positions, political unrest and senseless and unresolved deaths, and oppressive economic inequality, to be relevant advocates for well-being, mental health, and social justice (Tuason, 2008). In the Philippines, counseling has evolved into a recognized profession that is fundamental to increasing the wellbeing of individuals and essential to a movement of healing and nation building in society.

Bio

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Dr. Tes Tuason, Professor, Clinical Director of the CMHC program and Licensed Psychologist, did her Ph.D. at the University at Albany and her postdoc at the University of Utah. Born and raised in the Philippines, she learned resilience of spirit and using one's personal power for transformative teaching and social justice research.

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