

# Psychological Well Being of School Counselors

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**ABSTRACT---** *National development and government initiatives in realizing educational transformation has made the profession of school counsellors facing a challenging and vulnerable role with stress that affects their well-being. Aspects of psychological well-being of school counsellors need to be explored and understood to ensure their services in schools are implemented effectively. The study aims to understand contribution of self-compassion to psychological well-being among school counsellors. The results of the previous studies have found that; (i) self-compassion contribute to the psychological well-being of school counsellors; and (ii) good psychological well-being of teachers can improve the quality of counselling services. The implication of this study explains the need to improve psychological well-being among school counsellors. Proposed follow-up recommendations need to be done by focusing on quantitative studies aimed at better understanding of this issue.*

**Keywords---** *Psychological Well-Being, Self-Compassion, School Counsellors.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

The role of guidance and counselling teacher is very important in developing student human capital in line with the government's ambition in the Second Core of the Education Development Master Plan (PIPP). In this regard, the Ministry of Education Malaysia intends to produce well-qualified, well-informed and knowledgeable individuals. In addition, guidance and counselling teachers are also responding to the government's desire to realize the transformation of education towards the integrated and holistic development of student potential. This is in line with the mission of guidance and counselling services which focused on efficient and impactful program management as well as producing students who are balanced in terms of intellectual, high-level emotion and high moral standards. Among them are the mentoring activities towards students' academic achievement to ensure students are learning in a positive manner. In addition, activities related to learning skills and motivation, which may help students see the relationship between their academic achievement skills with career goals.

In developing the potential of guidance and counselling services, the Ministry of Education has outlined 22 roles of guidance and counselling teacher in schools. Succinctly, guidance and counselling teachers need to provide annual planning, identify needs in their services, regulate student inventories, promote services, conduct guidance and counselling activities for groups and individuals, manage activities related to learning skills, assist students in selecting elective subjects, be involved with educational activities focused on drug prevention, and providing students' direction to further their education. In addition, the teacher needs to conduct referral and consultation activities, collaborating in programs involving parents, government and private agencies, improving service

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quality, managing and facilitating internal training programs, offering crisis counselling services, acting as communications personnel, engaging as curriculum committee members and School Planning Council, mentor-mentee program coordinator and student development program coordinator.

Currently, the National STEM Strategic Plan 2018-2025 by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Innovation touched on the role of guidance and counselling teacher through the second focus area of improving teaching and learning (T&L) quality. In this focus area, the second strategy emphasizes the role of guidance and counselling teacher as an important individual in the school to encourage students to take an interest in STEM. Guidance and counselling teachers not only play a role in developing students' potential but are also responsible for the growing issue of mental health problems. The findings from the 2015 National Health and Morbidity study, which was conducted by the Ministry of Health, found that 29.2 per cent of 4.2 million people aged over 16 years old had mental health problems. In this regard, guidance and counselling teachers need to equip themselves with professional and personal skills. This is in line with the view of (Kim & Lambie, 2018) that individuals involved in counselling services need to maintain their well-being in order to effectively deliver counselling services to their clients. Therefore, guidance and counselling teachers should be able to manage their professional interests while not neglecting their personal needs and welfare.

## **II. ISSUES OF PROFESSIONAL WELFARE IN COUNSELING SERVICE**

Meanwhile, the ACA Code of Ethics (American Association of Counsellors, 2014), stated that counsellors involved in personal care activities should monitor and maintain their well-being and that it is part of their professional responsibility. Furthermore, counsellors are encouraged to monitor two important relationships, (a) between personal well-being and therapeutic effectiveness and (b) between counsellors and their colleagues (Callender & Lenz, 2018). In addition, he said, counsellors should emphasize on developing relationship skills in order to give a confident and vibrant service delivery. Whereas, Nelson et al. (2018) stated that concern for clients is one of the important features of counselling. In addition, an important practice that counsellors must learn is to practice self-care and if counsellors do not learn to look after themselves, they are likely to experience stress in their personal and professional lives, which may lead to burnout problem. Therefore, guidance and counselling teachers need to be proactive and always keep themselves in good condition for them to be able to practice well during the counselling session.

In Malaysia, there are a number of factors that lead to high stress on guidance and counselling teacher, which includes factors such as managing crisis situations, working overtime, low self-development opportunities, lack of experience in performing new assigned tasks, lack of support from the school's top management, and lack of appreciation despite performing well. Moreover, guidance and counselling teachers are forced to perform tasks not in their job descriptions, heavy workloads, inadequate staffing to assist them, the need to make critical decisions spontaneously, conflicts with students, peers, and outside organizations (parents and others), competition in the process of self-development, having to meet deadlines for completing an assignment, not having a lot of personal time (e.g.: breakfast) and sometimes having to do other people's work (Arenawati Sehat et al., 2009). All of these scenarios raise concerns and illustrate that appropriate planning and action must be taken to ensure that the profession can be used effectively by students in the school.

A similar scenario is happening in the West in which guidance and counselling teachers face a range of personal issues. There are times when a client's suffering becoming a pain for the counsellor. Therefore, it is important for a counsellor to enter the world of others but at the same time not being lost in that world. In fact, a counsellor who does not take care of his or her well-being will result in failure to instill the well-being to his client (Neswald-Potter et al., 2013). In addition, any difficulties experienced in the counsellor's personal life or related to the work performed will make the counsellor vulnerable to stress, feeling burnout and compassion fatigue (Smith 2017). Researchers often associate these professions of counselling with burnout issues that may affect their services (Kim & Lambie, 2018).

According to Roxas et al. (2019), counsellors are also human and they may also experience burnout, dissatisfaction, stress, and negative emotions. Although they may have the advantage of having a better knowledge about professional and personal issues, counsellors are not immune to various threats to their well-being. On the other hand, counsellors could benefit greatly from the profession including having a sense of purpose, a high sense of well-being, good relationships with others, and opportunities for personal growth. However, counsellors face a lot of pressure when sharing their experiences with each client, doing their best to be competent, unbiased, non-judgmental, cultivate love for clients, and fully attend the clients. In conclusion, all of these emotional demands in counselling can cause a great deal of stress for the counsellor.

Self-care is an important practice in personal and professional life that should be practiced and aimed at maximizing physical, mental, and emotional well-being (Smith 2017). Furthermore, it can be seen that careers dealing with mental health are constantly exposed to the stress and trauma of clients that can lead to emotional exhaustion. It is therefore important to ensure that individuals involved with mental health professions improve and maintain well-being not only for their own benefit but for the community that utilized their services. According to the ACA code of ethics (2005), professional counsellors have an ethical obligation to constantly evaluate their well-being throughout the continuum whether that are good, in stress, stressful or in an affected situations and counsellors under the ACA code are also expected to take steps to improve their well-being when necessary (Wolf et al., 2014). This can be exemplified and served as the basis for all individuals who wish to be involved in counselling services especially in schools so that the process of guiding and helping the selection of alternative solutions to client issues can be effectively implemented.

### **III. PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLORS**

Huppert (2009) explained that psychological well-being is about living a good life and is a combination of feeling good and functioning effectively. In addition, sustainable well-being does not require individuals to feel good all the time; painful emotional experiences such as frustration, failure or sadness are a normal part of life and it is important for individuals to be able to manage negative or painful emotions in order to maintain long-term well-being. According to him, psychological well-being is compromised when negative emotions are extreme or at a high level and impaired an individual's ability to function in his or her daily life. The concept of good feelings incorporates not only positive emotions of happiness and contentment, but also emotions such as interest, engagement, confidence, and love. The concept of effectively functioning individual involved the development of an individual's potential, has the ability to control one's life, and has a sense of purpose such as working toward

goals and developing positive relationships. Therefore, guidance and counselling teachers should apply the elements of psychological well-being in order to overcome the problems and challenges faced by in the career.

Well-being is a very important element especially in relation to psychological well-being. The psychological well-being model of Ryff (1989) is based on several theories that have been pioneered by Rogers, Maslow, Jung, Jahoda, Frankl, Erikson, Buhler, Neugarten and Allport. Furthermore, Ryff (1995) described in detail the developmental psychology of life that offered a broad range of well-being including continuous development throughout life. These perspectives include Erikson's model of the stages of psychosocial development, Buhler's formula of the formulation of basic life principles that function in life and the emphasis on Neugarten's personality changes in adulthood and old age. Clinical psychology also offered many forms of well-being, such as Maslow's assertion of self-perfection, Rogers's view of fully functioning individuals, Jung's formulas of individual concepts and Allport's concept of maturity (Ryff, 1995). Finally, the well-being included Jahoda's formulation on positive criteria for mental health and Birren's conclusion about positive functioning in later life. Among the key dimensions of the psychological well-being model are self-acceptance, purpose in life, self-autonomy, control of the environment, good relationships with others and continuous self-development (Ryff, 1989; 1995). The concept of self-acceptance means not only positive attitudes toward oneself, emphasized by Maslow, Rogers, Allport, and Jahoda, but also perceptions of one's good and bad traits. Well-being generally includes a positive assessment of one's life, a sense of continual growth and development, believing that life is purposeful and meaningful, having good relationships with others, the ability to effectively manage one's life and the world around (Ryff, 1995).

From a broad perspective, the six dimensions of psychological well-being are defined based on the theory with high scores that are; a) self-acceptance, which are positive attitude toward oneself, acknowledging and accepting various aspects of self, including good and bad qualities and feeling positive about life in the past; b) have a positive relationship with others, which means having a friendly and satisfying relationship, having trust in relationships with others, caring for the well-being of others, capable of empathy, love and strong bonding, and understanding the tolerance in human relationships; c) autonomy, which is self-determined and independent, able to withstand social pressure, think and act in a certain way, to regulate behaviour from within, to evaluate oneself through personal standards; d) have a sense of self-mastery and competence in managing the environment, controlling various external activities, using effective environmental opportunities, being able to choose or create contexts that meet personal needs and values; e) have a purpose in life that is to have an aim in life, to feel that the present and the past are meaningful, to put faith in the meaning of life, to have dreams and objectives for life; f) personal development that is having a continuous sense of development; looking to grow, open to new experiences; a sense of potential, seeing improvements in self and behaviour over time, changing by reflecting more knowledge and self-efficacy (Ryff, 1995). It can be concluded that the psychological well-being elements discussed play a major role in helping guidance and counselling teachers to develop success in the service, have a positive and innovative way of thinking about work planning, be clear with the service mission while always having a good network with all parties for personal and professional interests.

In addition, there have been recent studies that support the importance of psychological well-being in counselling services as well as barriers such as stress, burnout, compassion fatigue, and counsellor's personal instability (Can, 2018). A review of Can's (2018) study of 84 trainee counsellors in the United States found a negative relationship between well-being and compassion fatigue. This finding reinforces that counsellors need to

be given training and wellness strategy courses to ensure they are able to perform services effectively and withstand any stress. In addition, psychological well-being can contribute to the well-being perceptions of the counsellor. The study of Meeryman et al. (2015) looked at the relationship between psychological well-being and wellness perceptions of 100 undergraduate counsellors through training programs in the United States. As a result, it can be seen that all six dimensions of psychological well-being have a significant relation to the wellness perceptions of counsellors that we can assume as a person's assessment of their lives. Another dimension that has come to the attention of western researchers is that self-compassion is said to be highly related to the career as a counsellor and can help with the challenges of burnout, stress and emotional exhaustion (Norris, 2018).

#### IV. SELF-COMPASSION OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLOR

Self-compassionate counsellors are able to develop the emotional and skills needed to show love to others. Strengthening self-compassion can be a powerful tool in enhancing personal and professional ability, self-development, vision and producing a better quality of life (Nelson et al., 2018). According to him, self-compassion and empathy are a necessary trait for those who choose a career as counsellor. Counsellors need to have high energy in helping others especially in clients' recovery, as well as training to self-heal. This can lead to fatigue, stress, emotional exhaustion, and burnout. An unstable counsellor did not do self-care and ignores their own emotional needs, and this can be detrimental to clients, block the border, caused ethical conflicts, or made them withdrawn early in a counselling relationship

The dimension of compassion is based on the theory of Social Mentality by Gilbert (1989). This theory sees that the desire to form relationships such as sexual relations, friendship or status can be attained through the pursuit of various forms of biosocial - which can be shaped by understanding each other's role in a relationship. Neff and Germer (2017) explain that generally, self-compassion is a feeling that is directed from within the individual, that the individual can feel compassion for the suffering of others, can nourish themselves in the face of suffering, regardless of whether the pain is caused by external circumstances or due to personal weaknesses or failures or personal shortcomings. Therefore, self-compassion involves feeling touched by one's own suffering, not avoiding or relinquishing it, resulting in a desire to alleviate one's suffering and to heal themselves with goodness. Compassion also involves the understanding of not judging one's pain, shortcomings and failures, and seeing this experience as part of a larger human experience.

According to Neff (2003), self-compassion consists of three dimensions; *self-kindness* that is the ability to be gentle and self-aware, especially in facing disorders, it produced a desire to heal oneself when facing good or bad circumstances. Self-kindness refers to the tendency to support and sympathize with oneself when one is aware of his/her own shortcomings rather than by evaluating or judging oneself harshly. Second, *common humanity* is the understanding that one's failure and suffering are part of human experience. By applying the principles of human equality, one can see that pain, shortcomings and failures are part of human experience and not because of something wrong with the individual. These principles help individuals to not break free from their relationships, to label or to judge, or to isolate themselves when in distress. Practicing these skills helps individuals not to judge others' experiences and is important for an open counselling practice (Nelson et al., 2018). The third component of self-compassion is *mindfulness*, the ability to recognize one's feelings without avoiding them or to over-identify

them. When an individual is careful, the individual will think and feel without judging or applying meaning to it. In short, always take the painful feelings as part of the experience and neither clinging to it nor running away from it. This concept of self-compassion is able to add value and is best used by guidance and counselling teachers in order to have a healthy lifestyle and to better focus on professional and social responsibility

## **V. THE IMPORTANCE OF SELF-COMPASSION FOR THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING**

Neff and Costigan (2014) explained that self-compassion is an understanding of not avoiding pain, but nourishes it with goodness and goodwill, producing a sense of well-being that is fundamental to the experience of human. The component of self-compassion is linked to the concept of healthy personality by Maslow (1971) and Rogers' (1980) that emphasized unconditional acceptance and strived to reach the full potential of the individual. According to him, when individuals become aware of suffering and act in goodness, understanding that suffering is part of the human condition will make it easier for the individual to overcome life's struggles. This principle is very important and can serve as a guide for guidance and counselling teacher if it is observed and understood well in the face of a variety of social problems and worrying students' behaviour.

Many western researchers have found that self-compassion is related and contributed to the well-being of counsellors (Todd 2017; Nelson et al., 2018). For example, Manning-Jones et al. (2016) conducted a study of 198 psychologists who found that self-compassion predicted a significant negative impact on emotional regulation and stress. According to him, self-compassion is able to compensate for helping the professionals in difficult situations and make them able to use these opportunities to grow. This is in line with the principle of psychological well-being that sees individuals striving to grow, be open and aware of their potential. A qualitative study by Todd's (2017) on seven school counsellors found that through experience, they were able to incorporate the principles of well-being, compassion and resilience in their service. This action has a positive impact on school counselling services. Neff (2003) also emphasized that compassion has a positive effect on psychological well-being. All findings from the previous researchers agreed that compassion can positively influence psychological well-being, especially for the profession that engaged in service.

## **VI. SUGGESTIONS AND IMPROVEMENTS**

Self-compassion elements and psychological well-being can be a tool for counsellor self-care and should be incorporated into university guidance and counselling education in order to produce graduates who are capable of facing personal and professional challenges. In addition, this model of psychological well-being can serve as a guide for the Ministry of Education in formulating policies involving the teaching profession so that they can constantly focused on personal care. The ministry's ambition or initiative in improving the quality of student education is a noble effort and a wise step towards putting Malaysia at the forefront of the world as a knowledgeable nation. The ministry's efforts to spur education transformation should not override in-service training and continuous well-being to ensure that teacher momentum can be further enhanced and sustained.

## VII. CONCLUSION

This review paper explains the importance of self-compassion and psychological well-being in helping guidance and counselling teachers to perform schoolwork more efficiently. In addition, it also builds confidence, thinking ability and enabled effective counselling sessions. However, there is still lack of studies examining the psychological well-being of guidance and counselling teachers especially those in secondary school. The western researchers also proposed to examine the contribution of self-compassion to psychological well-being (Neff & Costigan, 2014; Norris, 2018). Accordingly, the researcher intends to look at the level of self-compassion and psychological well-being of guidance and counselling teachers, which can provide insight and useful information to the Ministry of Education in designing appropriate interventions to empower the service profession

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