

## **Counseling in Indonesia: History, Identity, Trends and Challenges**

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### **Abstract**

Guidance and Counseling or Counseling in Indonesia's school context has been developing since the 1960s. It has been dealing with its cultural adaptation, mistrust, and low professional standards' issues as the position is as teachers and without standardized licensure as counselors. These situations have become more challenging when Indonesia started the transition period to a democratic country in 1998. More psychological problems have developed along with the trending of population growth, free trade, politics, and environmental damages. However, psychological services are still limited including the low number of professionals. Today, the psychological difficulties are inevitable for most Indonesians who are living in the more collective community with individualistic pattern of behavior as the result of the surge in globalization and governmental system transitions. To provide counseling services, counselors and other mental health professionals mostly have adopted Western counseling and psychotherapy theories which developed from more individualistic societies but, in Indonesia they are helping individuals from collective communities in coping with individual-patterned mental health challenges. This article will discuss the history of Guidance and Counseling or counseling in Indonesia, Counselor identity as a professional, contemporary trends on social issues, and the challenges of counseling to meet the community demands.

**Keywords:** Guidance, counseling, Indonesia, mental health

## **Introduction**

The early development of Indonesian guidance and counseling was actually not as an answer for social issues as what happened in the United States of America in the 1900s or even in several Asian countries like China, Philippines, and India (Hohenshil, Amundson, & Niles, 2013). It was implemented without clear purpose since 1960s except to support schools' visions particularly on student learning process until 1993. If it is expressed in an analogy, Guidance and counseling adoption in Indonesia was like planting a four-season tree in the tropical land that either needs modifications of the tree itself or cultivating the soil so that it becomes cultivable.

Historically, counseling grew in a Western-patterned culture based on the social dynamics before World War I (Dwairy, 2006). When it was adopted in Indonesia, counseling came to a more collective-patterned Eastern culture compared to most Western countries such as the United States (Hofstede, 2013). Consequently, there were cultural meetings between the professionals and the people in Indonesia, which lead to the dialogue about the counseling services and the needs of society. Moreover, the long Indonesian history began with a kingdom that went to colonialism, independence, a new order, and finally a reformation era that has brought its people and social constructions a multidimensional dynamic.

Good, Good, Hyde, & Pinto (2008), stated that it is important to understand disorders without ignoring the context of individuals affected by globalization, neoliberal economic policies, and postcolonial politics. However, this article will not specifically discuss these terms one at a time, rather it aims to frame the paradigm of understanding interactions between Indonesia and counseling beginning with initial counseling implementations to current contemporary issues. It is noteworthy that, in fact, counseling in Indonesia has survived for decades with adjustment and few professional issues until this 21st century. This article will discuss the history of guidance and counseling in Indonesia, counselor identity among other mental health professionals, contemporary trends on social issues, and challenges placed on counseling to provide more effective services amid globalization issues. The terms guidance and counseling are used interchangeably.

## **The History of Guidance and Counseling in Indonesia**

Guidance and Counseling as a profession was introduced in 1962 during a conference held by the Faculty of Teachers and Education held in Malang on 20-24 August 1960. Four years later, Bandung and Malang Institutes of Teachers and Educational Science initiated the opening of a new program on Guidance and Counseling (*Bimbingan dan Penyuluhan*) (Kartadinata, 2005). This in turn inspired a project development called *Proyek Perintis Sekolah Pembangunan (Developmental School Pioneer Project)* by the other eight Institutes in Padang, Jakarta, Bandung, Yogyakarta, Semarang, Surabaya, Malang, and Manado. The Guidance and Counseling profession began to develop and resulted in the Basic Plan Pattern and the Development of Guidance and Counseling. This growth is inseparable with the birth of the 1975 curriculum for high schools in which there was a guideline for Guidance and Counseling (Kartadinata, 2005). Fourteen years later, in 1989, a legal letter (SK) from the Ministry of Information was disseminated (SK Menpan No 026/Menp an/1989) containing the rules of credits for teachers under the Ministry of Education and Culture. The Guidance and Counseling service was included in the rules of Indonesian Educational system. However, the implementation still had no clear guidelines or manuals until 1993 (Kartadinata, 2005).

Since its early adoption, the Guidance and Counseling was changed several times. Firstly, it was called *Bimbingan dan Penyuluhan* or Guidance and Counseling (while the definition of counseling was not a professional relationship between a counselor and a client but more

supervisory like in the agricultural or medical field). With this name, the service was offered from 1975 to 1984. After this time it was then called Career Guidance because of curriculum alterations in Indonesian middle schools, which came to be more career oriented in design and began considering the initial history of Guidance and Counseling in the US. About ten years later, the Career Guidance, subsequently, was called Guidance and Counseling after the school curriculum changed in 1994.

Considered as a curative approach, Guidance and Counseling was initially implemented to treat the maladjusted-behavior of students at schools. Subsequently, the service continued to developing various institutions. Since the professionals in the Guidance and Counseling services were still limited in number, teachers from a variety of educational backgrounds were recruited to be Guidance Counselors at schools. Consequently, many of those teachers did not provide services based on the new professional ethics, which then left the Indonesian society mistrusting of the profession. Currently, this profession is still struggling to gain the credibility within the community, in order for its existence to be more recognizable as beneficial.

Because of the unbalanced policies, the number of professionals, educational backgrounds, and services focused on psychological problems, Guidance and Counseling services were not accepted and this trend resulted in the public perception that the Guidance and Counseling services were merely focusing on the students' problems or mental health weaknesses. As a result, those who are seek counseling services are perceived of as psychologically weak. Once a student's parents are invited to the school by the guidance counselor, it means that the student is in a big problem and this stigma can be seen as evidence of inferiority or even lead to social exclusion and excision.

In spite of these problems the service continues to develop. Contemporary positive approaches toward an individual's psychological issues influence scholars and professionals. The Guidance and Counseling services has gradually moved from clinical to more developmental perspectives (Myers, 2002). Moreover, Kartadinata (1996) has mentioned decades ago that the service of Guidance and Counseling could approach communities with an ecological approach by which individuals are understood by their context or community settings. This statement is in line with Kim and Hwang (2006) in the research about indigenous psychology, which supports the believe of understanding people within their own context, so that a professional will be able to treat people comprehensively.

Today's development of Guidance and Counseling is in the wave of uncertain middle school curriculum changes. Its service would be different with that of the previous curriculum, and allow Guidance Counselors to implement comprehensive counseling services developed by Gysbers and Anderson (2001) or Dollarhide (2011). Remembering that this profession is highly dependent on changes in a school curriculum, the new services will be dynamic. It means that the profession will need to adjust to the demands of the new school curriculum or national educational system so that Guidance and Counseling services provide better benefits for students and educational institutions. However, it is important for the association to formulate professional standards and improve competences of Guidance Counselors or School Counselors through a more progressive counselor education program in order to meet the needs of the Indonesian community in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Counselor Identity as a Professional**

Among other related mental health professionals, such as psychologists and psychiatrists, Guidance Counseling is the youngest profession growing around the world, especially in the U.S (Counseling Around the World, 2012). Moreover, it is becoming more popular in Asian and

African countries. Compared to those two other professions, Counseling offers a different perspective as its name suggests. Commonly known as mental health services, psychologists and psychiatrists seem strongly affiliated with therapy for mental illness, while guidance and counseling provides an approach more focused on developmental processes, prevention, and wellness orientation (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 1999).

Due to its similarity in approach with related professions, it is difficult to define the professional identity of counselors (Myers, Sweeney, & White, 2002). Many counselors find it difficult to clearly identify themselves in terms of their professional identity (Calley & Hawley, 2008). Although the borders with the other professions' services sometimes are overlapping, Counseling provides a unique service which pays more attention to those who are still in a normal condition or those who are not afflicted with mental illness. According to Witmer and Sweeney (1992), this professional focus is more acceptable with the ecological wellness approach by which a Counselor sees clients as a united system of tasks in life.

With the different characteristics of services, Counseling could be a potential professional bridge amidst other mental health professionals in providing psychological help in the community. Counseling may work for those who are still relatively stable, while psychologists can help individuals who need personality reconstruction, and psychiatrists assist those who need medication or other medical approach recoveries. Once these three professions have one goal in providing psychological services for people, they may collaborate with their specialties without becoming isolated in the identity terrains.

In terms of identity, Guidance Counselors or Counselors in Indonesia are still designed to work in educational settings. Beside the legal nature that has not forcefully supported the service in other fields, most study programs have not offered diverse counseling specialties such as mental health, rehabilitation, social work counseling or other related disciplines. Myers et al. (2002) suggest that the differences between counselors and other professionals are a result of different ways they negotiate their identities. Counselors in the US, mostly identify themselves in terms of their specializations. In addition, they also refer to the population they are serving such as addictions, clinical mental health, and rehabilitation or the settings where they are working at like schools, colleges, hospital, or correctional rehabilitation centers. These ways allow counselors to gain confidence in providing professional services and set clear boundaries at least between professionals in the same fields. Moreover, it also allows them to identify themselves as different from other related professionals.

Indonesian Guidance Counselors are still predominately present in schools although many other counselors work in other fields such as in the family planning organizations, social services, and non-governmental organizations. All of those positions are still affiliated with their ethical codes as published by Indonesian Association of Guidance and Counseling. Ethics is considered as a means of professional unification. In addition, counselor identity could be defined in terms of ethical behavior since professional ethics serves as guideline for counselors to present themselves as a professional (Hendricks, 2008). Unfortunately, Indonesian counselor ethics are not strictly enforceable to be followed by guidance counselors or counselors. Presently this is a vulnerable area for those professionals who conduct themselves unethically. There is no clear procedure on how to make reports when a professional behaves unethically. Furthermore there are no firm consequences or punishment for those who break these ethical codes. Since the low implementation of Indonesian counselor ethical codes, supervision on their practices is also potentially low this adds to societies be decreasing levels of trust towards the profession.

Implementing counselor ethical codes is a primary way to develop guidance counselor and counselor identity as professionals. They are professionals with skills and potentials to

empower people who need psychological help. Without ethics, counselors' behaviors may follow their believed values or culture that they are affiliated with. It is a risky business when a professional does not implement ethical codes. They could lose their professional identity and finally provide service poorly and without moral responsibility. Consequently, clients might not meet their wellness and life goals or even turn to be worse.

Interprofessional collaboration with other professionals may be the best way to maximize each of the professions roles so that they contribute more effectively to the most critical problems education, mental health or other fields (Keyton & Stallworth, 2002). Counselor identity in Indonesia may be improved when they are able to perceive themselves as professionals with specific characteristics and specific understanding about their capacities, and uphold the ethical codes as professional counselors.

### **Contemporary trends on social issues**

While Counseling around the world faces challenges in their communities, Indonesian Counseling has been dealing with the impact of democracy in the society. Since 1998, Indonesia has also experienced various social issues and natural disasters such as volcanoes, earthquakes and tsunamis. All of these issues are inseparable from the availability of mental health services in the community from both government and non-governmental organizations. Political issues are also leading to connecting an individual's life in relation with their necessity as a responsible civilian and their roles in the society (Walker, 2008).

Indonesian transitions from an authoritarian system to a more democratic governmental system has more or less influenced the pattern of interpersonal interactions and individual-country relationship. Indonesian masses were easy to run *amuk* either during or after 1997 (during president Soeharto's administration) caused by political frustration and humiliation, or political violence (Good, Subandi, & Mary-Jo DelVecchio Good, 2007). The term *amuk* is a Javanese term that is defined as culture-bound syndromes delineating individual's becoming wild, dangerous, aggressively attacking others, or even murdering. Today, similar syndromes are often shown in various social and political occasions which have led to common sense and permissiveness. It seems like behaving in such a way is considered to be acceptable because of the misconception of the term freedom in democracy concept understanding.

In Dwairy's (2006) book, entitled *Counseling and psychotherapy with Arabs and Muslims: A culturally sensitive approach*, it is stated that community characteristics determine an individual's attitudes toward their concerns. Most people in Eastern countries have lived with colonialism for centuries. They remained in their tribes to survive and be free from oppressions of colonizers. As a result, people tend to be interdependent including in terms of all their daily issues. This history influences them to make decisions collectively instead of individually (Hofstede, 2013).

However, with the wave of democratization, people have direct affiliation with their nation similar to when the Industrial Revolution began in the 1760s. To be a democratic country, all individuals have the right to contribute to his or her country no matter what their backgrounds. Those who had no possibility to be a leader, now have such opportunities. With this opening of opportunity, dare to express their ideas in various ways so that their individuality is more salient instead of reflective of collective feelings. People then tend to be aware of their "self" including their autonomy in making decisions and behaving.

This outcome is inevitable since individuals have been for decades in the situation where it was not acceptable to give priority to their "self" and now the door is open widely to unleash their "self" to be who they want to be or do what they want to do. It is known as the freedom of

self-expression. This presents challenges to what mental health professionals such as counselors should do in providing services for communities with this transitional situation.

### **Challenges on counseling**

As mentioned earlier, counseling in the US is based on the changing needs of community. Counseling services originated from the Western culture where people tend to value individualization instead of communality (Dwairy, 2006). Independency and autonomy are key ideas that several theories of counseling aim to develop in individuals (Sharf, 2011). To apply such counseling theories and approaches, (Indonesian or other Eastern countries) students in counseling programs may face cultural clashes with the counseling theories itself and furthermore, they may face challenges in providing services to individuals from the local culture. It is considered to be difficult to adopt new values in counseling approaches or theoretical orientation among counseling students or trainees (Sumari, Mohamad, & Ping, 2009).

Beyond the issues of becoming a counselor, it is important to consider the transitions of people who now live in a democratic society as this has brought a new pattern in developing relationships among people. Indonesia is now defined by both collectivistic and individualist cultural values. The political aims for more democracy could potentially alienate past community cohesiveness that could result in personal tensions within families or community. Culturally, Asians are value interrelatedness but the wave of political systems and world dynamics is leading them to be more individualized. According to World Health Organization in the World Mental Health Report, depression is now the fourth leading global burden or disease and it is predicted will be the second leading by 2020. Walker (2008) discussed this prediction in relation to the contribution of political, economics, and social changes toward depression in his book *Depression and Globalization: The politics of Mental Health in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*.

Of the dynamics of governmental systems and social situations, technology has taken a significant part in most Indonesian behavioral changes. With the boom of Internet access and other high technological devices such as the Ipad and Smart phone, Indonesians tend to be highly consumptive of those products. Being individuals in the middle of a more highly technologized society may lead to mental pressure once those individuals are unable to adjust or utilize their devices exceeding their existence as a human being. In a quote, Albert Einstein said that *"I fear the day that technology will surpass our human interaction. The world will have a generation of idiots"*. It seems that what Einstein said has happened since technology can reduce people interactions. Today's easiness with technology has led people to use it more as a replacement rather than communicating with others face to face. Their real world interactions are replaced with a virtual reality.

Regarding the trends of advanced technology use among people, Howard Gardner and Katie Davis (2013) discuss *"how today's generation is different in terms of identity, intimacy with others, and their process of minds"*. In the book of *The app generation: How today's youth navigate identity, intimacy, and imagination in a digital World*, Gardner and Davis (2013) mentioned that:

*Youth who grow up and live in the age of technology are more attached to the tools or electronic devices and they are more familiar with the facilities offered in apps. With apps, most activities can be done much easier with one touch.*

Gardner compared it with himself who was born in the 1950s and grew up without that kind of sophisticated technology. What has happened in the US with technology occurred in the other countries including Indonesia as well. Smartphone technology and other tools have drastically changed youth patterns of behavior. It provides easiness for them to do something but at the

same time, their mind does not process like when they do a task manually. This burgeoning technology might now facilitate a generation to live easier and be more interesting but we never know what will happen in the next generation when human potentials may struggle hard to grow because of being replaced by technology.

Defining Guidance and Counseling as a four-season tree in a tropical climate, it is important to reflect that to grow the tree in a tropical land it will need modifications. In biological terms, a creature could survive with evolution in an unfamiliar environment through adaptation and natural or human selection. Learning from the origin of Counseling services that emerged in the 1900s, Indonesian Counseling needs to grow by answering community demands in mental health or empowerment services with offering different networked approaches with other professionals. Considering that going to a psychological service is sometimes stigmatizing for clients when seen negatively by other people, Counseling may take this opportunity by offering a new paradigm that is focusing on individual cohesiveness in a communal society. It is important to redesign how counseling could take a part in empowering people from collective cultures. Moreover, Indonesian counseling may take progressive steps in preparing counseling students to be professionals with clear identity through licensure and credential certification for their practice. On top of those points, changing the paradigm of counseling is needed. One paradigm that appears to be a positive prospective is the Wellness paradigm (Myers, 1991). This paradigm may be one alternative describing how counseling can work for individuals with their given situations (Myers et al, 1998). Focusing intensively on how individuals' potentials help them to reach psychological wellbeing will bring Counseling to be known as a supportive help for people to have a better quality of life without the stigma of diagnosing them with mental illness. Realizing that developing this approach may cost human resources, especially with limited faculty members in Indonesian universities, Counseling may start from its origin as Educational and Developmental oriented services and continue to evolve from there.

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