



**EXPLORING EXPERIENCES OF PRACTICUM
COUNSELORS' JOURNEY IN SUPERVISION:
A CASE STUDY OF UNDERGRADUATE COUNSELING
PROGRAMME USING CREATIVE ARTS AT
INTERNATIONAL ISLAMIC UNIVERSITY MALAYSIA**

BY

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ABSTRACT

Doing practicum is required in counseling training. Practicum counselor will meet client for the first time at a real setting. It is the beginning of one's professional journey. A qualitative study was conducted to explore the journey of a group practicum counselor. The experiences were shared using creative art during their weekly supervision. With the use of creative activities (drawing, play dough and play therapy tools), guided journal, reflective journal and focus group discussion, their challenges were explored and shared. The narratives from FGD and personal reflections or process journals were analyzed together with the products created. All thirty practicum counselors in the third year program of Bachelor of Education Guidance and Counseling who went through 7-week counseling practicum in the Klang Valley were involved in the study. Researcher used qualitative software, ATLAS.ti version 7. Throughout the process, the researcher generated and grouped the verbatim into categories, themes and subthemes and patterns reflecting on the research questions in a coding template. The data analysis processes required the researcher to be involved in description and interpretation of the data. For the journal, researcher used content analysis to get the gist and theme of the content. From the finding of the study, researcher divided the data into three phases. For the first phase (pre- practicum), data revealed about the feeling of practicum counselor before going to the practicum site, challenges that they faced and sources of support they get at that time. For the second phase (during practicum) data represent for the seven week of practicum journey. Data revealed that practicum counselor have various kinds of challenges such as are interpersonal relationship, lack of counseling skills, contact hours, documentation of the counseling file and service. Although practicum counselor faced many challenges during the seven weeks of practicum, they adopted various kinds of coping strategies to deal with their personal and professional issues. Communicating with friends and university supervisor seem to be important source of information to cope better. The third phase (post –practicum) data revealed that practicum counselors expressed their challenges during practicum through the use of creative arts. The study manage to capture various feeling related to their experiences at different phases of the practicum journey (pre, during and post practicum). They found themselves to be more at ease and objective in sharing their issues based on their drawings and creations. They found that creative art and journal writing help them express their issues related to practicum and evaluate their coping reactions. The weekly meeting acted as a constant stress releaser to practicum counselor. The study also confirms the need for continuous support from supervisor and the platform to share their experiences during supervision. It will be interesting to find out how the practicum experience prepare them in fulfilling the bigger task of internship at the end of the programme as well as how relevant it is in their process of becoming a professional counselor

خلاصة البحث

التدريب العملي أمر ضروري في التدريب الاستشاري. فالمستشار سيقابل عميلاً لأول مرة في إعداد حقيقي، وهذا هو بداية رحلة المستشار المهني. قد أُجريت الدراسة النوعية لاكتشاف رحلة مجموعة من مستشاري التدريب العملي، فتبادلت تجاربهم باستخدام الفنون الإبداعية عند إشرافهم أسبوعي باستخدام الأنشطة الإبداعية (رسم، لعب العجين، لعب أدوات العلاج)، والمجلة الموجهة، والمجلة العاكسة، والتركيز على المناقشة الجماعية تستطيع أن تكتشف تحدياتهم. وقد تمّ البحث بتحليل السرد من المناقشة الجماعية، وانعكاسات الشخصية، أو عمل المجالات مع إنشاء المنتجات. تكونت عينة البحث من ثلاثين من مستشاري التدريب العملي في السنة الثالثة من الطلاب بكالوريوس التوجيه والإرشاد الذين قاموا بالتدريب العملي بكلا نجل طول سبعة أسابيع. تستخدم الباحثة البرنامج النوعي ATLAS.ti الإصدار السابع. وقامت الباحثة بتوليد وتجميع الحالات إلى مجموعات، والمواضيع الرئيسية، والمواضيع الفرعية، وأنماط التفكير للأسئلة البحثية في نموذج الترميز. واستخدمت الباحثة تحليل المحتوى للحصول على جوهر الفكرة الرئيسية لتلك المحتويات. وبعد ما حصلت الباحثة على نتائج الدراسة، قامت بتقسيم تلك البيانات إلى ثلاث مراحل. فالمرحلة الأولى (قبل التدريب العملي)، ظهرت البيانات عن شعور المستشارين قبل ذهابهم إلى موقع التدريب العملي، والتحديات التي واجهوها، ومصادر لدعمهم في ذلك الوقت. وبالنسبة للمرحلة الثانية (خلال التدريب العملي)، مثلت البيانات رحلة مستشاري التدريب العملي طول سبعة أسابيع حتى ظهرت البيانات بأن المستشارين يواجهون التحديات المتنوعة كالعلاقة الشخصية، والافتقار إلى مهارات الاستشارة والأوقات، وتوثيق ملف الاستشارة وخدمتها. ورغم أن هناك العديد من تحديات، يستطيع المستشارون التعامل مع قضاياهم الشخصية ومهنتهم، فيبدو أن أفضل مصدر للحصول على المعلومات هو التواصل مع الأصدقاء والمشرف الجامعي. وأما المرحلة الثالثة (آخر التدريب العملي)، فكشفت البيانات أن هؤلاء المستشارين عبّروا عن تحدياتهم من خلال الفنون الإبداعية. واستطاع البحث اكتشاف الشعور العديد المتعلق بتجارهم في مراحل مختلفة من رحلتهم عند التدريب العملي (قبل، وأثناء، وبعد التدريب العملي)، ووجد البحث أنهم مرتاحون بالفنون الإبداعية عند التعبير عن قضاياهم. الفنون الإبداعية، وكتابة المجالات تساعدهم لاكتشاف قضاياهم عند التدريب العملي وتقييم ردود الفعل. قامت الباحثة الاجتماع الأسبوعي بمثابة إفراز الضغوطات للمستشارين. وتؤكد الدراسة أيضاً بأن المستشارين يحتاجون إلى الدعم المستمر من المشرف والمنصة المناسبة ليتبادلوا خبراتهم عند الإشراف. وأخيراً، فالمعرفة عن كيفية تجربة التدريب العملي تجهزهم لأكثر التدريب في نهاية البرنامج تكون مثيرة فضلاً عن مدى معرفة ملائمتهم العملية لتجعلهم مستشارين مهنيين في المستقبل.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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*Dedicated to my late mother Mek Yei Binti Wahid, my father Kassim Bin Dumat
with lots of respect and love*

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Counseling needs no introduction to our society today. The public has started to acknowledge the roles of professional counselors in helping people with all kinds of issues faced by them, be it young or old. Counseling was first introduced to the school setting in Malaysia in 1963 whereby guidance and counseling teachers were assigned to assist students in identifying their potentials and setting their career goals (Amir Awang & Latif Mirasa, 1984). As stated in a circular on March 1996 (326)95/ABM 96), schools are recommended to have a counselor for every 500 students. Abdul Malek Abdul Rahman, Nor Junainah Mohd Isa, and Azizah Atan (2013), reviewed a circular KP (BS-HEP) 8543/60/(91) from the Ministry of Education dated 18 March 1996, of which they detailed that there are three main functions of a school's counselor, which involves (1) academic guidance (choosing subjects, studying skills, placement); (2) career guidance (career's interest inventory, career information and choices); and (3) psychosocial and mental health (personality development, psychosocial skills, self-defense skills).

Realizing that there is a need, the Ministry of Education agreed to appoint fulltime counselors at schools based on the school category. In the case of higher institutions, at the end of 1960, Institute of Technology MARA was the first higher institution which provided counseling service to its students. It was followed by University Malaya (UM) and University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM) both of which offered counseling service in relation to school students' issues (Jabatan Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia, 2011). The counseling services were not offered to schools and

higher institution only. It was also offered to the government and private sector, communities and non government organizations (NGO). In January 1992, the Department of Public services established a Psychology and Counseling Unit. This development of establishing Psychology and Counseling Units continued till 2006, where by then, eight ministries had established their own counseling units.

Subsequently in 2007, all ministries were required to have at least one counselor (<http://www.jpa.gov.my / psychology>). In the government hospital setting, the counseling position became a full time position by early 1992 (Abdul Aziz Abdullah, 2004)

In the community setting, the counseling service was widely used at rehabilitation centers and the prisons in Malaysia. The social welfare department and LPPKN (Wan Abdul Kader Wan Ahmad, 2004) are some of the agencies that provide information about counseling service to the people on how to handle cases related with the personal and community issues. For NGOs, Persatuan Pengasih Malaysia (www.pengasih.org) a center for drug addicts, counseling skills and services were applied in order to give the awareness to the public about their services. All of these developments show that counseling service is a profession that can help people to manage their issues.

American Counseling Association, (2010) defined counseling as a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals. Counseling also can defined as a systematic process to help relations based on the psychology principles that are conducted by a registered counselor in the counseling code of ethics in order to achieve change, progress, holistic adjustment, both voluntary and self-clients.. Changes, improvements and adjustments are ongoing throughout the life of the client

(Malaysian Counselor Act 1998, (2005). Thus, it is clear that the acceptance of this profession is an impetus to bring this profession to a greater height.

Before providing counseling service to the people, a counselor must have proper formal training. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure the quality of services provided by the counselors not be compromised. The training of counselors has to be monitored. The counseling training was started by Ministry of Education during the early 70s. A counseling educator must have all the necessary core competencies of counseling training. The Malaysia Counselors' Act 1998 marked an important historical moment to the world of counselors in Malaysia. The Malaysian Board of Counselors (Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia) under the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development is responsible for the accreditation procedures of counseling training programs, registration and licensures of qualified counselors after fulfilling the requirements set up by the board.

The Malaysian Board of Counselors holds a similar role as the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Program (CACREP) in the USA, of which it is responsible for the accreditation of counseling program in Malaysia. In fact, Malaysia was the first country which established a law that protects the profession of counselors (The Malaysian Board of Counselors website, <http://www.kpwkm.gov.my>). The law highlighted the specific requirements for the training and practice of counselors in Malaysia. The title of counselor is exclusive to those with credentials accredited by the Malaysian Board of Counselors. To earn the accreditation, anyone who is doing practicum and internship must fulfill the required hours for the practicum and internship as set by the Board. In general, the counseling programme offered at universities aims to give counseling knowledge and skills, capabilities in doing research and psychology assessment and therefore giving full

attention to the field involved. Another goal of the programme is also to develop personal growth as a counselor. There are four major components in the curriculum of educational counseling. They are knowledge and counseling, skills in counseling, research and individual assessment, and the focus courses (Jabatan Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia 2011). Most of the universities offer counseling programme to students. The details about the university that offers counseling programme according to the level of study are as follows (Jabatan Pengajian Tinggi Malaysia).

University	Level of study		
	Bachelor Degree	Postgraduate (Master)	Postgraduate (Ph.D)
Universiti Putra Malaysia	/	/	/
Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris	/	/	/
Universiti Malaya	/	/	/
Universiti Islam Antarabangsa Malaysia	/	/	/
Universiti Sains islam Malaysia	/	/	/
Universiti Malaysia Sabah	/	/	/
Universiti Malaysia Terengganu	/	/	/
Universiti Malaysia Sarawak	/		/
Universiti Sultan Zainal Abidin	/		
Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia		/	/
Universiti Teknologi Malaysia		/	
Universiti Utara Malaysia		/	

Based on the major component that must be fulfilled by the counseling educator, counseling practicum is an important required course under the second major component (counseling skills). It is normally taken when counseling students'

are half way through their program after fulfilling certain basic courses. During practicum, counseling students are expected to be able to conduct individual counseling and group counseling, plan and conduct counseling activities. This seven-week practicum is an intense experience with many expectations and tasks to be completed. It is a *journey* that practicum counselors may have to go through that gives them meaningful experiences of helping other individuals in the counseling relationship. According to (Ruhani Mat Min, 2008b), the journey of the practicum is a learning process related to one's counseling knowledge and skills, relationship with other people, ability to adjust to the new role as a practicum counselor while also meeting the expectation of others.

Additionally, the journey of counseling practicum is essential for future counselors as it provides hands-on skill of applying the counseling techniques in dealing with the real problems at actual settings. While performing all required tasks, practicum counselors engage with the real school community and school activities at the practicum site. It is evident that the learning experiences through practicum will help any practicing counselors to become a quality counselor (Wan Marzuki Wan Jaafar, 2011)

Along the counseling practicum journey, practicum counselors are expected to fulfill certain required tasks during the counseling practicum. In the case of Institute of Education (INSTED) practicum counselors, they will have to spend a minimum of 250 hours per semester at the site to fulfill 100 contact hours including 70 hours of individual counseling and 30 hours of group counseling. Client contact hours refer to the time a practicum counselor attends the client in a face-to face session be it individual or group work classroom guidance or any counseling activities with school community (Haniza Rais, 2010).

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The counseling practicum is a component in school counseling training that is scheduled almost at the end of the study programme. It is scheduled for the undergraduate and postgraduate level for all universities that offer counseling training. There are eight major components in the counseling practicum curriculum (Piawaian dan Kelayakan Latihan Kaunselor). There are 1) assessment 2) group counseling 3) career development 4) human development 5) helping relationship 6) professionalism 7) cross culture and 8) research and programme planning. The duration of counseling practicum is seven weeks. At INSTED, IIUM, the counseling practicum is divided into two phases: The first phase is counseling practicum and; the second phase is counseling internship. The first phase is scheduled in the third year of study and the second phase at the end of study after completion of all courses. The purpose of the counseling practicum is to make students perform the tasks as a counselor in a particular setting, applying the knowledge they have learned during their time at the university. During the practicum period, students must fulfill 250 hours on site including 100 hours directly with the client under the supervision from the university supervisor and site supervisor. As stated in the course outline for the practicum subject, they are expected to demonstrate the skill and knowledge in the counseling area that includes individual counseling, conducting programme at school, social interaction with the school community such as with the school principal, administrators, teachers and also with the university supervisor and site supervisor. For the bachelor level, the placements for counseling practicum are mostly at schools. They are normally placed at secondary schools around Klang Valley, Kuala Lumpur. During the counseling practicum, they will come back to IIUM for university supervision. The university supervision is done to help practicum students' deal with

their challenges and whatever matters that need to be dealt with the university supervisor. The practicum counselor will be supervised and monitored by the university supervisor and the site supervisor. For the postgraduate level, the purpose for practicum is to conduct a systematic assessment of the counseling needs and counseling setting. It is also to prepare the practicum counselor with the readiness of conducting programmes in the real setting. For this level, the practicum counselor will be placed at an agency setting, higher institution or rehabilitation center based on their interest.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

Although many studies on counseling practicum have been done but there are few studies conducted pertaining to the activity involved during the weekly supervision. The research on the use of creative activities during supervision has not yet been discussed in Malaysia. The use of creative activities in counseling supervision is a relatively new phenomenon and there is little research examining experiences by using creative activities on the practicum counselor during supervision. (Power, 2013)

The studies by Rahimi Che Aman & Nor Shafrin Ahmad, (2010); Ruhani Mat Min, (2012a); Wan Marzuki Wan Jaafar, (2011) only focus on the challenges faced by the practicum counselor. They agreed on the stress and anxiety faced by practicum counselors and the potential practicum counselor during the counseling practicum. Therefore more indepth study needs to be conducted on Malaysian practicum counselors to explore their personal experiences throughout the journey. No doubt, helping these professional is important. The training must include supervision background professional expectation. This professional development or lack of it will have a detrimental effect on the professional of future counselor.

Research conducted by Rahimi Che Aman and Nor Shafrin Ahmad (2010), did not mention specific activities conducted during the supervision. They mentioned that practicum students were called back to the university during their practicum but there is no specific activity done with the students. Although Ruhani Mat Min, (2008b), conducted qualitative interviews to explore challenges and difficulties with 10 participants, it was only on general views of the practicum and the experiences itself was not explored in depth.

The journey of practicum being studied will also provide an opportunity for the practicum counselors to explore their own practice of counseling skills in an actual setting. Being at the practicum site for the first time these counselors are expected to experience challenges as they start the practicum. The research will identify whether these challenges are managed properly or otherwise, how the difficulties are handled and whether there were challenges not handled well.

What is found in the literature only focuses on the expectations to be an excellent counselor (Ruhani Mat Min, 2012b). According to Rahimi Che Aman and Nor Shafrin Ahmad (2010), before a practicum counselor goes to the counseling site, the higher institution must make sure that the practicum counselor is prepared with the counseling knowledge be it in theory or practical knowledge. It means that practicum counselor must prepare themselves with the ample knowledge and counseling skills that make them ready to serve the counseling service. Additionally, Wan Marzuki Wan Jaafar (2011), said that, counselor educators must perform their task in an excellent way. They must prepare practicum counselors with skills that they can use in certain situations like counseling session with a risk client.

One of the challenges faced by the practicum counselor as mentioned in the previous research is, the practicum counselor will experience a transition period

during the practicum period. They need to shift from the role of a student to the role of a practicum counselor and from the university environment to the school environment. Rahimi Che Aman and Nor Shafrin Ahmad (2010), conducted a research on practicum counselors that showed that there are a few weaknesses of the practicum situation. For example, in the case of the university supervisor's, who are required to conduct only one visit to the practicum counselor site but this situation poses problems to the practicum counselor because it is difficult for them to deal with university supervisor and report about the challenges and difficulties during their practicum. In addition, the requirement to fulfill 252 hours (as stated by Lembaga Kaunselor Malaysia) for training practicum is a big challenge. This also makes it difficult for the practicum counselor because some of the participants that were involved in that research are school teachers and were pursuing their study part time (Rahimi Che Aman & Nor Shafrin Ahmad, 2010).

Looking through the literature, most studies done locally focus on professional expectation, such ability to conceptualize counseling theories into practice, administrative matter, school culture. Yet most studies are not in depth and include a small number of participants. None have looked at the total experiences of the practicum counselors, exploring their struggles for 7 weeks and looked at how they cope with those expectations. To fill the gap, this research intends to discover more in-depth experiences and follow the participants weekly development through a consistent means of gathering data such as journal writing and weekly meetings. The study looked at the practicum experiences through the process of participants' involvement in creative activities coordinated by the supervisors on weekly basis.