

Chinese Malaysian Counselors' ethnic identity and professional practice

Keh, Foo-Bee

This research was conducted to first explore the ethnic identity of Chinese Malaysian counselors, second to understand their counseling professional practice and third to explore the relationship between their ethnic identity and counseling practice.

Four Chinese Malaysian counselors were purposively recruited in this study. All of them fulfilled the selection criteria of being a registered and licensed counsellor under the Malaysian Board of Counsellors with a minimum counselling experience of 15 years. The research was based on multicultural theoretical framework. Narrative inquiry was used to collect data through interviews. Data obtained were analyzed using narrative analysis which focus on the content and meaning of their stories.

The research discovered several themes: Chinese Malaysian counselors' ethnic identity consists of: Chinese identity, religious identity and national identity. Chinese identity was founded by the surrounding environment of Mandarin speaking environment where all the respondents have gone through Chinese primary education. Education remains as the main factor in building their Chinese identity. All the Chinese Malaysian counselors interviewed shown strong beliefs in their religions, where three of them are Buddhists and one being a Christian.

Even though all of them claimed to be Malaysian, they have limited exposure and experience in interacting with other ethnic groups in Malaysia. One of the main reasons would be the implementation of the ethnic centric political structure since independence which contributed to the oppressed discourse within the Chinese speaking community.

The professional counseling practice are provided mainly in education institution and community organization where the respondents served as either a private practitioner or counsellors employed by the institution. All of them faced different obstacles in providing

counselling services within their work settings which include the dilemma between adhering to the religion practice or to the professional ethical code of conduct. Lacking multicultural counselling competency and support from the professional body were also identified through this research.

A strong relationship between counsellors' religious identity and professional practice was identified. Buddhist counsellors experienced similarity between Buddhism and counselling practice especially in the practice of enhancing self-awareness and mindfulness. Whereas Christian counsellor prioritized her religious identity more than her professional role as a counsellor.

Research implications for the education and training of counsellors in the Malaysian socio-political context are discussed.

Key words: Chinese Malaysian counselors, ethnic identity, counseling professional practice, multiculturalism perspective, narrative inquiry