

MIND TRANSFORMATION OF COUNSELORS-IN-TRAINING: GROUP SUPERVISION EXPERIENCE

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ABSTRACT:

Background: Supervision is an essential process for mental health professionals' training, inducing Buddhist counselors. We are not aware of any previous studies of counseling supervision in Thailand. This study aimed to explore group supervision experiences of counselors-in-training.

Methods: This was a qualitative study. Participants were eight counselors who were a group leader in the Buddhist Counseling and Personal Growth Group and received group supervision based on the Buddhist Counseling Psychology (BCP) Model. Data were collected via an in-depth interview and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Results: Findings revealed three main themes indicating mind transformation process of the counselors. Those were acknowledgement of own expectation towards the group; acceptance of the group members; and dedication of mindfulness and attention for the group.

Conclusion: The counselors reported that they applied the Four Noble Truths, the central teaching of Buddhism, for their mind transformation. This study demonstrated that the group supervision based on the BCP Model was able to cultivate both professional and personal development.

Keywords: Mind transformation, Buddhist counseling psychology, Group supervision, Supervisee experience, Counselor-in-training

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INTRODUCTION

Buddhist counseling psychology (BCP) in Thailand is a newly counseling and psychotherapy. The BCP is developed as an integrative approach of western counseling process and the Buddhist teaching which the understanding of life and world is from the eastern knowledge. For a decade, counseling practices and research studies based on the BCP have been done. As indicated in the study of Chuymanee [1], counselor-in-training reported their experiences during their counseling practicum that they had professional learning and extra values from counseling practice. As well, Pokaeo stated that

“Buddhist counselor has to understand themselves according to the ‘principles’. He should find himself in the ‘principles’. This understanding is most vital to counseling practice as it leads people to the understanding of life” (p.84) [2]

Moreover, Buddhist counselor development is related the counseling knowledge and the Buddhist teaching together.

Mind transformation of Buddhist counselor reflected professional development. Buddhist counselor development is related both counseling knowledge and the Buddhist teaching. As Pokaeo [3] mentioned that Buddhist counselor must understand deeply on key Buddhist principles such as “Ti-lakkhana” (the three characteristics of existence), “Paticca-Samuppada” (the dependent origination), “Idappaccayata” (specific conditionality) that shown in client’s concerns or problems. Previous studies [4, 5] have shown that counseling supervision is important process to counselor development, because it is the integration between (1) the formal theories and research and (2) the practice-based knowledge. Counseling supervision is the bridge between campus and clinic.

With regard to counselor development experiences in the west, previous studies have shown that professional and personal development cannot be distinctly dissociated for counseling

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psychologists [6, 7]. More importantly, these developments have a direct impact on the quality of counseling process and outcome [8]. Accordingly, promotion of both professional and personal development is a necessity to counselor-in-training. As one of the core competency for counseling psychology [5], supervision plays an important role as well as serves as a standard for training and improving counselors in order to foster professional and personal growth [9]. It is in this process, supervision, that association between professional and personal development is revealed. For instance, Rønnestad and Skovholt's Model [10] showed that professional development is a life-long process and that one's daily life can affect one's professional development.

For the Buddhist counseling psychology, there are no studies to date showing the relevance of professional and personal development among Buddhist counseling psychologists. Therefore, this research aims to examine the experience of counselors who received group supervision under Buddhist counseling psychology model in order to understand professional and personal development of Buddhist counselors. In addition, this research serves as a novel knowledge for Buddhist counseling supervision in Thailand as well as to serve as a part of the research project titled "*Process of group supervision based on Buddhist counseling model: a grounded theory*".

METHOD

This study employed qualitative research design as detailed below:

Key informants: Eight participants were recruited (2 males, 6 females) from master program of counseling psychology, Faculty of Psychology, Chulalongkorn University. All of the participants were of Thai nationality with an age range of 24 – 28 years old. Four of the following conditions were employed as participant selection criteria: 1) They must have had taken at least a course on Buddhist counseling prior to this study 2) They must be a part of counselor-in-training as a group leader in the Buddhist counseling and personal growth group 3) They must currently be in the internship program as counselors 4) They must have had at least 10 hours of group supervision under Buddhist counseling model. All participants were informed and asked to sign the consent form which approved from the Ethics Review Committee for Research Involving Human Research Subjects (COA No. 121/2011).

Instrument: Instrument included an interview guideline that had three main questions follow as (1) How was your supervision experiences? (2) How

did you apply the supervision experiences to counseling internship? (3) How would you see that you have transformed yourself from your supervision experiences? The interview guideline developed by researcher and reviewed by three experts on Buddhist counselors for content validity and corrected accordingly before application. The three experts agreed with the Index of Item-Objective Congruence as 1 indicating that the interview guideline can be used to obtain supervision experiences of participants.

Data collection: Researcher collected data via in-depth interview with each participant, was interviewed lasted an approximate of 45 – 60 minutes. An in-depth interview guide were created and checked with experts for high quality to gathering data. The interview guide was 1) Please describing your experience during the supervision 2) How did you apply that experience to your counseling practice? 3) Since the supervision, how did you observe the changes within yourself?

Data analysis: After verbatim transcription of the interview tapes, the scripts were analyzed by coding messages with similar meanings together. Then those with the same themes were grouped into subcategories and categories. Trustworthiness of the analysis- validity of the findings, interpretation, and summary from supportive data were achieved through external audit conducted by two Buddhist counselors and an expert on qualitative research.

RESULTS

The results revealed that participants were able to recognize their personal psychological development as a result of supervision experience. Such development is strongly linked to their professional development as Buddhist counselors in training. Specifically, three of the following themes were identified: 1) acknowledgement of own expectation towards the group 2) acceptance of the group members and 3) dedication of mindfulness and attention for the group.

Theme 1: Acknowledgement of own expectation towards the group. This refers to participants' awareness and recognition of their expectation for the counseling group. Expectations often lead to aspiration for good outcomes of a given experience such that sufferings occur when expectation is violated. It is when participants are aware of own expectation that sufferings subsided; acceptance of outcomes also increased. Buddhist counselor's mind developed through "the Four Noble Truths", which is the understanding of suffering [3]. As captured by the following passages:

“Once we know that we expect and are able to accept or decrease the expectations, our group counseling experience became smoother. For example, when we were in a group, we tend to expect the group to be this and that. We wanted the group to cry. We had to force ourselves in order to manipulate the group. So it felt stressful. However, once we became aware of ourselves, it was easier. There was no pressure. No stress”. (ID2, L620-624)

“To not having expectation with the group. Sometimes we wanted the outcome to be good but things turn the other way around. That is the moment when you get to see what happens within you. The moment you are aware of your thoughts, you will not be moody or do moody things to your group”. (ID7, L304-305)

“We realized and are aware of ourselves. Sometimes we have expectations with our case and our members. We wanted our members to walk the path we created for them or to say or think the things we wanted them to in order to control the desired outcome. The process allowed us to let go. Our minds became less occupied and we became less constraint within ourselves”. (ID8, L102-105)

Theme 2: Acceptance of the group members. This refers to participants' capability to open up and lessen own prejudice towards members' personal stories such that they are able to be in harmony and in homogeneity with the members. Participants would increase their explicit statement of acceptance towards the members as well as to become less of themselves and to attend to other's story without prejudice. Buddhist counselor's mind developed through the “*Idappaccayata*”, which explain the specific conditionality. They understand the cause and accept group members [3]. As captured by the following passages:

“We have to reduce our bias. We may have bias at first. For example, is it wrong for one to have a baby and move in with their boyfriend while still in school? We have this set of rules where we think living as a couple and having a baby is not appropriate for school age. But we learnt from supervision that these things happen. So it wasn't very shocking when hearing this story. It felt like

these things do happen. It's like we reduce the prejudice”. (ID1, L11-29)

“It made us leave ourselves and be with the case more...We had to reduce ourselves in order to fully experience someone's world. To not just get stuck in your own world”. (ID8, L107-112)

“We have to listen in an attentive way. We have to listen with understanding, acceptance and without prejudice. So that we hear them and accept them as they are...We might be in a group where a member did something wrong or inappropriate. But we are counselor and we cannot have bias towards them. We have to listen and understand the things that happened”. (ID4, L97-100)

Theme 3: Dedication of mindfulness and attention for the group. This refers to participants' experience of mindfulness and awareness with the happenings that occurred within the group. Participants would feel that they are fully attending to the members and their stories. They would not be swayed by interruptions which allowed them to be in homogeneity with the group. Buddhist counselor's mind developed through the “*Samma-sati*” and “*Samma-samadhi*”, which explain their mind can concentrate on the group [3]. As captured by the following passages:

“We have higher apperception. We are sensitive to emotions and words. Sensitive to the people in front of us. We are mindful to not jump back to own world. This allows us to fully be with them, to focus on them. Mindfulness made us focus, care and to not be distracted by our own world. It made us stay with the case and its problems. Stayed with the heart of the case. This allowed us to truly be with the person in front of us”. (ID8, L312-315, 355-359)

“When I first started doing Korat group counseling, the stories were just so extreme. Both the good extreme and the bad extreme. I admit that I was shocked at first. If I saw someone suffering very badly, crying while telling their stories, I would be shocked and not know what to do. But after a while, I got to observed many different things and perspectives. I gained more experience. It made me more stable with myself and my feelings. I was no longer shocked and swayed

by the member's pouring emotions. My awareness was with the member in front of me. It made me feel like I was able to fit in with the group better". (ID4, L218-223, 226-228)

DISCUSSION

The study of group supervision experience reflected the Buddhist principles. The principles are embedded in mind transformation of Buddhist counselors in training. Specifically, the findings demonstrated that participants' psychological development as counselor-in-training resulted from their group supervision experience consisted of 3 main themes. They are acknowledgement of own expectation towards the group, acceptance of the group members, and dedication of mindfulness and attention for the group. In addition, the results also reflected that group supervision under Buddhist counseling model was able to cultivate both professional and personal development. In the process of improving themselves, counselor-in-training relied on 'The Four Noble Truths' as an underlying guide to evaluate the condition of their psychological being [2]. Starting with the evaluation of sufferings, people suffered as their expectations are not met. The sufferings live until they realized that the cause of sufferings, called 'Samudaya', is their own expectations. Once realized, counselor-in-training would develop acceptance for their own expectations. This process is called 'Nirodha'. This process then leads to changes in expectation such that counselors no longer hold expectations against the group. They proceeded without expectations but with increased mindfulness, called 'Magga'. The whole process of evaluation, namely 'The Four Noble Truths' were presented throughout the research findings [11].

It was also found that experience of personal development through 'The Four Noble Truths' made an important impact on professional development of counselor-in-training. The findings revealed that participants were better able at leading the group counseling. This effect is in congruent with the 'Tuning in' process of Buddhist counseling principles [3]. The 'Tuning in' process is an important step for understanding their group members; counselors should be able to connect themselves with the group in a homogeneity manner. Furthermore, the reported experience of acknowledgement of own expectation towards the group and acceptance of the group members were also corresponding to the characteristics of well-developed counselors such as self-awareness, acceptance, and nonjudgmental [10, 12, 13].

CONCLUSION

This current study has demonstrated professional and personal development of counselor-in-training through psychological process of self-evaluation under 'The Four Noble Truths'. Regardless, future study should further explore this subject matter on professional Buddhist counselors with extensive counseling experience in order to observe greater self-development impact.

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