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## **The Influences of Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support on Professional Standards and Competencies of School Counsellors in Bhutan**

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### **Abstract**

Counselling got its home in 1996 in Bhutan and schools in the country started staffing full-time counsellors in 2011. Today, the foundation of school counselling is in its way to get well-rooted in the school system. It is anticipated that there is significant growth in school counselling as a profession; however, it lacks evidence to prove with academic studies. Hence, this study intended to uncover the level of School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies, school's Healthy Workplace, and Stakeholders' Support of school counselling in Bhutan. It also aimed to investigate the relationship of a Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support on School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies. The study scoped entire schools of Bhutan having school counsellors currently. A total of 118 out of 146 school counsellors responded to the survey covering 80.82% of the school counsellor population. A survey-based design of a quantitative research method with a modified and self-administered questionnaire executed the study. The instrument was developed base on the three behavioural standards of ASCA School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies (2019), four avenues of WHO's Healthy Workplace Framework and Model (2010), and social exchange theory. Findings revealed that the professional standards and competencies of school counsellors in Bhutan at the highest level (Mean=4.38); however, Healthy Workplace, and Stakeholders' Support at a high level (Mean=3.94) and (Mean=3.71). Further, the study indicated a moderately significant relationship of a Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support on School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies in Bhutan ( $R=.461$ ). The Healthy Workplace has an influence on School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies with the statistically significant at \*\*\* level ( $\beta = .461$ ) and could predict 21.3% of the School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies with statically significant at 0.001 level. The study recommends for further research as some significant aspects of School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies like professional development, students' attitude, cultural diversity and contemplative counselling are not covered in this study.

**Keywords:** School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies / Healthy Workplace / Stakeholders' Support



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## Introduction

Counselling came into existence in 1945 when it was set up at the University of Chicago, USA, as Counselling Centre after World War II (Gladding & Batra, 2007). Thereafter, counselling program proliferated in the USA and then worldwide, however, counselling got its home only in 1996 in Bhutan. In recent years, Bhutan's fast-paced globalization under the reign of visionary monarchs and leaders took Bhutan to the unprecedented developmental height with economic and social evolution and revolution. Until 1999, television and internet were not available in the country (Lorelle & Guth, 2013, p. 2), and mobile phones were not common people's need until it was introduced in 2003. Subsequently, as urbanization, telecommunication, democratization, and exposure to western media increased (Lester, 2015, p. 15); the by-product of globalization and modernization such as mental health issue, psychosocial issue, family issue, youth-related issue, and unemployment issue slowly got a way to Bhutanese society. Thus, foreseeing these potential side effects, a systematic and comprehensive career education and counselling system was established in 1996 as envisioned by His Majesty the 4th King.

As counselling strengthened its existence with the time in the country, schools started staffing full-time counsellors in 2011 (Tshedup, 2017) prioritizing the youths of the nation. Today, the foundation of school counselling in Bhutan is in its way to being well-rooted in the school system. Doma & Dolkar (2019) found significant growth in the development of counselling as a profession in the country and increased demand in diverse areas. These findings indicate the positive impact of counselling in Bhutanese society despite its initial hardships. Nowadays, school staffs, administrators, and relevant stakeholders are seen more congruent in the school scenario unlike in the past. School as a primary workplace of a school counsellor is seen much healthier at present and relevant Stakeholders' Support and attitude towards counselling are considered much

positive at present-day and successively enhancing school counselling and the competencies of school counsellors.

Thus, in identifying the present position of school counselling in Bhutan and its effectiveness, it is imperative to know the effectiveness of the school counsellor, or in that sense, level of professional standards and competencies of school counsellors. To enhance the professional standards and competencies of school counsellors, it is vital to understand the influencing factors such as Healthy Workplace of a school and Stakeholders' Support in school counselling. Studying these by reviewing literature was nearly unfavourable as the literature suggests the significant dearth of research on counselling in Bhutan (Choidup & Dendup, 2020; Chophel, 2019; Dem & Busch, 2018; Doma & Dolkar, 2019; Lester, 2015; Lorelle & Guth, 2013; Pelden, 2016).

Therefore, the purpose of this research was to study the present level of a Healthy Workplace, Stakeholders' Support, and professional standards and competencies of school counsellors in Bhutan, further to investigate the relationship of a Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support on School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies.

Other than serving as an informative reference to ministry, policymakers and relevant authorities, findings of the study will help school counsellors to enhance their competencies by uncovering their present level and the relationship. The findings will also serve the schools to inform the present level of the school's Healthy Workplace and relevant Stakeholders' Supportive attitude.

## Literature Review

To strengthen the counselling program further and to address the immerging challenges, school counsellors' need to be personally proactive and professionally competent. School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies (SCPSC) came into existence in Bhutan when twelve American counselling professionals provided assistant in establishing school

counselling professional. They aided in setting culturally responsive counselling skills to infuse the country's philosophy of Gross National Happiness (Lorelle & Guth, 2013). School Counsellor Professional Standard and Competencies according to American School Counsellor Association (2019) refers to the mind-sets and behaviours of a counsellor such as knowledge, attitudes and skills to meet the rigorous demands of the profession. It further splits into three measurable aspects as a Professional Foundation, Direct and Indirect Student Service, and Planning and Assessment.

Healthy Workplace (HWP) of a school and Stakeholders' Support (SS) are imperatively influencing factors in empowering the competencies of a counsellor and in achieving the success of school counselling. A Healthy Workplace according to Burton & World Health Organization (2010) is one in which workers and managers collaborate to use a continual improvement process to protect and promote the health, safety and wellbeing of all workers and the sustainability of the workplace. It is further categorized into four measurable avenues as Physical Work Environment, Psychosocial Work Environment, Personal Health Resource, and Enterprise Community Involvement.

In addition to a Healthy Workplace, Stakeholders' Supports such as support of a principal, teachers, parents, communities, and relevant organizations are significantly contributing factors in achieving the success of counselling in the school. Social Exchange Theory helps in analysing and understanding the nature of Stakeholders' Support. This theory views human interactions, exchanges and supports as results-driven social behaviours on the fundamental concept of cost and reward. It means that cost and reward comparison-driven decision and behaviour are based on the costs as negative consequences of a decision and the rewards as positive. Social Convoy Theory, which is one of the specific social support theory, posits that, throughout the lifespan, individuals are surrounded by social networks consisting of a variety of individuals who provide social support (Orell &

Sterrett, 2011). Schools and school counsellors are mentally, by default, strong beholders of this philosophy as the success of their student's life is directly proportionate to the involvement of their stakeholders. This is proven by the study done by Elliott and Williams (2002) who found that the stakeholders involvements is a win-win result for the stakeholders.

Although, literature suggests the significant dearth of research on counselling in Bhutan but interest in studying counselling in Bhutan is growing steadily in the recent years. A handful of studies have already started emerging. For example, Dem & Busch (2018) who claim to be the first documented study by insiders on counselling justify a lot about counsellor's role ambiguity, role conflicts and challenges. They found that relevant stakeholders within the education must acknowledge and collectively address the existing challenges. A similar study by Choidup & Dendup (2020) uncover the top three discouraging factors of students seeking counselling as inadequate counselling rooms, students confidence in seeking help from a spiritual person, and fears of losing confidentiality. A study by an outsider, Lester (2015), reveals counselling in Bhutan is more inclined towards Buddhist philosophy. Yet, none of the above studies has focused on neither factors influencing school counselling nor School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies in Bhutan. Generally, Doma & Dolkar (2019) anticipate that there is a significant growth in the school counselling development as a profession, but lacks evidence to prove with academic studies. In nutshell, and to reiterate, there is no academic study done to confirm the present level of professional standards and competencies of school counsellors in Bhutan or factors influencing the School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies. Subsequently, there are no academic studies to reveal the current status of school counsellors' Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support of school counselling in Bhutan.



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## Materials and Methods

### Population

The study adopted a quantitative research method. The survey-based design was employed to survey the entire population of school counsellors in Bhutan. 146 school counsellors serving in different regions of Bhutan were the focused population of the study which was as per the latest record of Career Education and Counselling Division, Ministry of Education (CECD, 2020).

### Research Instrument

As a research instrument, 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was deployed to investigate the influences of a Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support on School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies. Best & Kahn (1998) criteria was employed to interpret the means score of the responses from high to low.

Of the two parts in the questionnaire, part I focused demographic information of school counsellors. Part II consisted of three sets of questionnaires as set A, set B and set C. Set A focused School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies which was modified and self-administrated base on School Counsellor Professional Competencies Assessment tool of American School Counsellor Association (2019). Set B focused on a Healthy Workplace questionnaire which was self-administrated based on the avenues of a Healthy Workplace of the World Health Organization (Burton & World Health Organization, 2010; Neira, 2010). Set C focused questionnaire of Stakeholders' Support which was self-administrated base on Social Exchange Theory (Emerson, 1976)

### Quality of Research Instrument

The reliability of instruments for School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies, a Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support were checked by Cronbach's Alpha-Coefficient. According to Santos et al. (2019), Cronbach's alpha is obtained from the covariance between items of a scale, the total variance of the scale and the number of items that make up the scale. The acceptable value of alpha in

reliability analysis is 0.7 and above, which indicates good reliability (Kline, 1999). The score of each item for all the 74 items was 0.78 and above indicating good reliability. Before the actual collection of data, the questionnaire was pre-tested with 15 teacher counsellors from the central part of Bhutan and those respondents were excluded in the actual data collection and analysis.

Three experts of Mahidol University, Thailand, validated the items using Item Objective Congruence Index (IOC). The item rating +1 indicates congruent with the research objectives, while 0 shows the difficulty in determining, and -1 a sign of being irrelevant to the objectives. IOC was calculated by applying the formula  $IOC = R/N$ , and the score of the items range from 0.66 to +1.00 indicating the sound validity of all the items.

### Data Collection Procedure

The data collection protocols were followed strictly such as approval letters from the Ministry of Education, Bhutan, CECD, district education officers and school principals as data was collected online using google form.

### Statistics and Data analysis

The computer program (Statistical Package) analyzed the data. Demographic information of school counsellors was analyzed by frequency and percentages. Mean and the standard deviation was used to analyze the level of School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies, a Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support. Pearson Correlation Coefficient analyzed the relationship of a Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support on School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies. The effect of a Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support on School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies was analyzed by employing Multiple Regression Analysis.



## Results and Discussion

### Demographic information

The demographic information of the school counsellors in Bhutan interpreted in frequencies (N) and percentages (%) using descriptive statistics presented that out of 118 school counsellors who responded, 65 of the respondents were male and 53 female indicating a fair ratio of genders. This finding is congruent with the latest record of Career Education and Counselling Division (CECD, 2020) which reveals the fair distribution of school counsellors in gender. More than half (59.3%) of the respondents were age between 21 to 30 years old and 38.1% between 31 to 40 years old indicating the domination of young and energetic population of school counsellors in Bhutan. The majority of the respondents (78.8%) hold a postgraduate diploma, 18.6% a master's degree, and 2.5% a bachelor's degree. Postgraduate Diploma in Guidance and Counselling Program in Bhutan is a two-year counselling training program for bachelor's degree holders if selected as a school counsellor (Samtse College of Education, 2018). Corresponding to the age, 61.9% of school counsellors have service experience between 1-5 years, 25.4% between 6-10 years, and 8.7% between 11 to 15 years. Service experience of school counsellors indicated relatively less seasoned school counsellors in Bhutan with only 4.2% more than 16 years of experience. Distribution of the school counsellors revealed fair ratio in terms of location as urban (26.3%), semi-urban (44.9), rural (21.2) and semi-rural (7.6); however, the coverage of school levels are dominated by higher and middle secondary schools as 41.5% and 42.4% respectively, just 16.1% in lower secondary schools and no counsellors in primary schools. The indication of low coverages of school counsellors in the lower secondary schools and no school counsellors in primary schools are the indications of shortages of school counsellors at the moment in Bhutan. The deployment of those full-time school counsellors available in the country are prioritized in the higher and middle secondary schools as they house adolescent youths of the country.

### Level of School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies

As per the objective one of the research, the level of School Counsellors Professional Standards and Competencies in Bhutan was interpreted by the descriptive statistics as shown in table 1.

Table 1: Levels of School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies

(N=118)

School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies	$\mu$	$\sigma$	Level
1. Professional Foundation	4.67	0.29	Highest
2. Direct and Indirect Student Service	4.43	0.39	Highest
3. Planning and Assessment	4.03	0.64	High
<b>Overall</b>	<b>4.38</b>	<b>0.37</b>	<b>Highest</b>

Notes: The rating scale was divided into 5 perception levels to the mean score between 4.21-5.00 as Highest, 3.41-4.20 as High, 2.61-3.40 as Moderate, 1.81-2.60 as low and 1.00-1.80 as lowest.

The overall level of School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies was perceived at the highest level with an overall average score of 4.38 indicating school counsellors in Bhutan perceive that they are professionally highly competent. This finding is supported by the findings of a study done by (Dolma & Dolkar, 2019) which stated that there is significant growth in the development of counselling as a profession. However, this finding contrasts the findings of a study done by (Dem & Busch, 2018) who justified a lot about counsellors' functional uncertainty, role ambiguity, role conflict, and role confusion due to limited training and

professional development. This finding is also incongruent to one of the findings of the study (Lester, 2015) that states counsellor preparation was one of the challenges and limitations in Bhutanese counselling in addition to confidentiality, client attitudes, and client accessibility to counselling.

Of the three areas of School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies, only Planning and Assessment area was rated at a high level with a mean score of 4.03. Professional Foundation and Direct and Indirect Student Service were rated the highest level with a mean score of 4.67 and 4.43 respectively. These signified that school counsellors in Bhutan perceive to be comparatively more competent in Professional Foundation and Direct and Indirect Students Service than Planning and Assessment. The levels of all the eight items of Professional Foundation were found at the highest with a mean score ranging between 4.35 and 4.92. Similarly, the level of 11 items of Direct and Indirect Student Service were dominated by the highest level with a mean score ranging between 3.75 and 4.94. Three items of Direct and Indirect Student Service rated high level were "consult parents regarding adolescent development issues", "Consult community regarding community problems that affect students" and "conduct awareness programs for parents and stakeholders". Out of six items in Planning and Assessment, one item rated moderate level was "agreement with the principal about the annual outcome of the counselling program" with a mean score of 3.37 and standard deviation of 1.34.

### Level of Healthy Workplace

The level of schools' Healthy Workplace of school counsellors in Bhutan was interpreted by descriptive statistics as shown in table 2.

Table 2: Level of Healthy Workplace

(N=118)

Healthy Workplace	$\mu$	$\sigma$	Level
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1. Physical Work Environment	3.47	0.97	High
2. Psychosocial Work Environment	3.92	0.75	High
3. Personal Health Resources	4.32	0.60	Highest
4. Enterprise Community Involvement	4.03	0.57	High
<b>Overall</b>	<b>3.99</b>	<b>0.59</b>	<b>High</b>

Notes: The rating scale was divided into 5 perception levels to the mean score between 4.21-5.00 as Highest, 3.41-4.20 as High, 2.61-3.40 as Moderate, 1.81-2.60 as low and 1.00-1.80 as lowest.

The overall level of a Healthy Workplace of school counsellors in Bhutan was perceived at a high level with overall average score of 3.99. School counsellors in Bhutan perceived that schools have conducive work environment as school being the primary workplace of school counsellors. Out of four avenues of a Healthy Workplace, only Personal Health Resource area was found at highest level with a mean score of 4.32. However, other three avenues were found at a high level with mean score of 3.47, 3.92 and 4.03 for Physical Work Environment, Psychosocial Work Environment, and Enterprise Community Involvement respectively. The level of two items of Physical Work Environment, "conduciveness of school counsellor's office" and "communication facilities of school counsellor's office" were rated moderate with mean score of 2.87 and 2.84 respectively. This finding is similar to the finding of a study done by (Choidup & Dendup, 2020). Their findings revealed that inadequate counselling room in the school is one of the top three discouraging factors of students seeking counselling. All the seven items of Psychosocial Work Environment were rated high level with a mean score ranging between 3.74 to 4.05. Similarly, other than one item out of four items of Enterprise Communities Involvement, the scores were



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dominated by high levels. This indicates that as per the perception of school counsellors, they are equally helpful to the communities as they are to the students.

As per the overall score (3.92) of Psychosocial Work Environment, schools counsellors perceived to have work environment of the schools conducive. This finding is incongruent to the finding of (Dem & Busch, 2018) that states the general lack of understanding about the nature of counselling among principals and teachers, which led to counsellor's role ambiguity, role conflicts and other challenges in the school. The overall score of a Healthy Workplace of school counsellors in Bhutan showed a significant support to the overall rating of School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies logically agreeing to the findings of cross-sectional studies (Nielsen et al., 2017) which found a stronger relationships between well-being and performance, and where workplace resources play both intrinsic and extrinsic motivational roles (well-being and performance). Thus, the overall score of School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies is logically attributed to the high achievements of Healthy Workplace of the schools in Bhutan.

### Level of Stakeholders' Support

The level of Stakeholders' Support in school counselling as perceived by school counsellors of Bhutan was interpreted by descriptive statistics as shown in table 3.

Table 3: Level of Stakeholders' Support

(N=118)

Stakeholders' Support	$\mu$	$\sigma$	Level
1. Principal	3.77	0.83	High
2. Teachers	3.98	0.68	High
3. Parents	3.68	0.71	High
4. Communities	3.34	0.67	Moderate

5. Organizations	Relevant	3.75	0.63	High
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<b>Overall</b>		<b>3.70</b>	<b>0.54</b>	<b>High</b>
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Notes: The rating scale was divided into 5 perception levels to the mean score between 4.21-5.00 as Highest, 3.41-4.20 as High, 2.61-3.40 as Moderate, 1.81-2.60 as low and 1.00-1.80 as lowest.

The level of Stakeholders' Support in school counselling was perceived at a high level with the overall average of a mean score 3.70. Out of five stakeholders of school counselling, only communities' support level was found at a moderate level with a mean score of 3.34. Other four Stakeholders' Support were found high level with a mean score of principal's support 3.77, teachers' support 3.98, parents' support 3.68, and relevant organizations' support 3.75. The level of all the six items of principal's support was rated high except one item, "allocation of school counselling budget" which was rated moderate with mean score 3.07. The overall score of teachers' support in school counselling was also rated high with all the five items of it at a high level with a mean score ranging between 3.88 and 4.04. Likewise, all the five items of parents' support were also rate high with a mean score ranging between 3.52 and 3.81. However, three items of communities' support in schooling counselling, "communities member in school counselling committee", "communities' help in curving problems of communities that hamper students", and "communities' help in terms of the resource" were rated moderate with a mean score ranging between 3.06 and 3.28. Unlike communities' support, all the seven items of relevant organizations' support in school counselling were rate high with a mean score ranging between 3.60 and 3.95.

The overall finding of the Stakeholders' Support in schooling counselling is in contrast to (Dem & Busch, 2018) who suggested in their recommendation that relevant stakeholders within the education system to acknowledge and collectively address the current challenges faced by school counsellors. **The**



### relationship of a Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support on School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies

Table 4: Correlation of variables

(N=118)

Variables	HWP	SS	SCPSC
1. Health Workplace (HWP)	1		
2. Stakeholders' Support (SS)	.777***	1	
3. School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies	.461***	.36 3***	1

(SCPSC)

\*\*\* Correlation is very significant at the 0.001 level (2-tailed)

The second objective of the research was to study the relationship of a Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support in School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies. Pearson Correlations Coefficient was used to predict the relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables. The finding indicated that Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support have a moderate positive correlation with School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies respectively with the statistically significant at 0.01 level ( $r = .461$ ) and ( $r = .363$ ).

(N=118)

				$R^2$	$R^2$ Change	$F$ Change	
Factors	$\beta$	t	R				
<hr/>							
Healthy Workplace							
	.461	5.599	.461	.213	.213	31.349	31.349
a = 83.388	$R^2_{adjusted}$	= <b>xx</b>					

### Factor as a predictor of the School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies in Bhutan

Table 3: Predictor of School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies

The third objective of the study was to determine the predictors on the School Counsellor Professional



Standards and Competencies in Bhutan. This part reflects the predictive factors of the School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies by Stepwise Multiple Regression Analysis (MRA). From the statistical analysis, of the two independent variables, it was found that only Healthy Workplace could predict the School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies in Bhutan. It was found that Healthy Workplace has an influence on School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies with the statistically significant at \*\*\* level ( $\beta = .461$ ); could predict 21.3% of the School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies with statically significant at 0.001 level. The predicted equation was as:

School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies =  $83.388 + .461(\text{Healthy Workplace})$

## Conclusions

The absence of academic studies to prove the general assumption of significant development of school counselling profession in Bhutan triggered the need for the research. As there lacks evidence in the literature to prove the growth of school counselling in Bhutan, there was a need for research to uncover the School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies. Thus, this study executed to determine the level of professional standards and competencies of school counsellors in Bhutan and to examine the influences of a Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support in School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies.

The findings of this study concluded that the level of School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies was at the highest level as perceived by the school counsellors of Bhutan which indicates that school counsellors in Bhutan perceived to be professionally at the highest competitive level performing significantly well. The highest level rating of School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies is attributed to the significant achievement of Healthy Workplace of the schools and Stakeholders' Support in school counselling as both Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support were rated high. The finding indicated that Healthy Workplace and Stakeholders' Support have a moderate positive correlation with School Counsellor

Professional Standards and Competencies, and it was found that only Healthy Workplace influences School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies. However, there are certain limitations of this study's generalizability as the study was fully relied on quantitative approach by just surveying school counsellors of Bhutan. The study was scoped down to Bhutanese context and the findings of the study are the stronghold of Bhutanese viewpoints. Another limitation of the study is that it lacks the coverage of important aspects of School Counsellor Professional Standards and Competencies such as cultural diversity, students' attitude towards counselling, and contemplative counselling. Thus, this study recommends further research taking the above aspects into account to refine the current findings.

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