

PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING SERVICES IN SOCIAL MENTAL AND HEALTH CARE IN VIETNAM TODAY

PHẠM ĐÌNH DUYÊN^(*)

1. Features of today society are the growth and development of the social economy, together with the improvement of spiritual and material life of all social classes. The boom of multi-dimensional information, the fast and exciting life rhythm, high effective requirement of works and plans, and negative impacts from the natural and social environment, however, have continuously created the psychological pressure on each society's member. Such pressures were rooted from daily life and workplace. They are stress of education, examinations, competition of working and producing as well as conflicts of love, marriage, family relationship like break - up, couple's arguments, family violence, illness, unfilial kids or social evils, and even in various social relationship. Mental and spiritual pressures have positive effects in some aspect, as following: asking for people to have high concentration and responsibilities at work, activating psychological functions and helping people more careful, more urgently, more clever and sensitive in activities (1, p. 368). But most of pressures led to negative impacts on spiritual life of

society such as stress, low self-esteem, depression, and pessimism. As a result, the low effectiveness of study and work made people feel negative and lead to spontaneous behaviour. They are the causes of broken families, arguments of couples, friends, colleagues, boss and staff. Some serious cases are people feel stuck, self - abused and even kill themselves. Vietnam recently has offered a new service called psychological counselling service which aimed to minimize negative effects, to help people overcome mental difficulties, to resolve conflicts, confusion and to train people basic set of life skills.

Psychological counselling service is a communicating progress between two subjects that are counsellor and consulted one, either individual or group. One needs to be offered information, asks for opinions and looks for a solution or suggestion from the counsellor. The other one will meet those consulted one's demand. Hence, in

^(*) Lecturer, Department of Military Psychology (University of Politics)

fact, psychological counselling service is a kind of helping people to overcome their mental difficulties in life, to relieve the pressure and burden by which balancing their Psychotherapy.

This service plays an important role in spiritual health care for all society's members in both theory and practice.

Theoretically, “psychological counselling service will improve the awareness of yourself, environment as well as circumstances, then positively changing the knowledge and behaviour through their own ability. This service hence helps people to be able to make decisions that fit with their status and effectively implement them, by which relieving negative feelings and finding the relaxation, confidence as well as making them have positive thoughts and behaviours” (2). Also, the service helps consulted people to find out and explore potential ability.

During these years, the counselling service has played a significant role even it is very new, because the service has helped people to overcome their psychological obstacles in life and working activities, then support them to completely develop both mental and spirit. Most of consulted people have found out the solution to their thought's conflict, relieve burdens and negative feelings, balance their Psychotherapy and live a positive and happy life. “There are lots of people, who received the service, has called back and thanked to consultants because they found back a happy, optimistic and better life” (3). So, it might be confirmed as “if medical is a tool that

provides people a healthy physical, then support services, psychological counselling for example, will ensure a good spirit and high living standards for individuals and families” (4).

2. Together with achievements, the psychological counselling service still has limitations, compared with its potential and growing prospects. In fact, the growth in terms of quality and quantity of counselling service in Vietnam for now is incommensurable in comparison with the demand of whole society.

First limitation is about the number of counselling offices and psychological consultants: The service is being operated by counselling offices and a team of consultants. For the number of offices: Vietnam is a high population country with about 86,92 millions people in 2010 (5), however, the number of counselling offices is only more than 100 places nationwide. This limited number of places has led to the result of just few people know about the operation of this counselling service. Through a survey with 100 people done in such districts as Cầu Giấy, Thanh Xuân and Hà Đông (Hanoi) in 2011, there was only 13% of them knew about counselling offices while 87% did not know any (6). Moreover, these offices basically located in only Hochiminh, Hanoi and some big cities or towns, so it is really hard and inconvenient for major people to approach the counselling services.

The number of consultants did not meet the demands of society as well. There

are many psychological training centres such as the Faculty of Psychotherapy at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Vietnam National University-Hanoi), The faculty of Educational Psychotherapy at the Hanoi National University of Education, The Faculty of Military Psychotherapy at the University of Politics, the Department of Educational Psychotherapy at the Thái Nguyên University of Education, Huế University of Education, Đà Nẵng University of Education, Hochiminh University of Education etc. But most of them do not have intensive training courses of psychological counselling service, and there is estimated that only 20% of fresh graduates work in the field of psychological counselling. As the latest survey, the number of consultants only meets 5% of whole practical demands in Hochiminh city in which the scale and quality of current psychological counselling service is most developed (7).

Secondly, it is about the form of psychological counselling service:

Today, there are many individuals and groups working in economic and social fields, even government and private companies, have joined in psychological counselling service including schools, Youth Union, Vietnam Women's Union, Vietnamese Students Union, press and media, and passionate individuals as well. Names of psychological counselling places are based on the classification of those group. In Hanoi, for example, there are Hoàng Nhân Psychological Counselling

Center, Tân Trí Việt Consulting Center, Linh Tâm Psychological Counselling Center, Psychological Counselling and Support Center of University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU Hanoi. Some centers located in Hochiminh city such as Love – Marriage – Family and Educational Psychological Counselling Center of The Scientific Association of Educational Psychotherapy, Psychological Counselling Center for Family and Kid, Psychological Counselling Center for Love and Family “Bridge of Happiness” so on. Besides, there are psychological counselling programs on radio as Window of Love (VOV), A Journey with you (HATV), Midnight Talk (Hochiminh)...

Although names of counselling offices are various but they basically offer a quite similar service which is to give advisory through phone calls, SMS, voicemail, email and sharing corner of magazines. Other forms are still not popular and often, for example, private counselling service, consulting courses those are long term and centralized for training life skills, communication skills in family and society, counselling service for parents like how to communicate and educate their kids at the teenage, or online consulting services. And, the best way of giving advisory – a direct counselling is not focused to develop yet.

Thirdly, it is about the quality and effectiveness of psychological counselling service:

Today, only managers of psychological counselling offices are those who received the

professional training while staff does not and some even moved from another fields. Consultants are short of professional and not qualified because most of them did not receive any basic training course, Associate Professor – Dr. Trần Thị Minh Đức of University of Social Sciences and Humanities, VNU Hanoi evaluated (8). As a survey done in Hochiminh city, among 27 consultants there are only 8 studied in the faculty of educational Psychotherapy (9) while the rest have previously studied in medical, foreign language, law, social study...

Also, the quality and result of counselling service have not met the expectation^(*): There are only limited cases with useful recommendation and solved due to the professional knowledge or scientific-based explanation. Basically, consultants only listen to customers' thoughts and worries then show them the sympathy and offer recommendations on the basis of their own experience.

The reason of above situation is due to the requirements of applicants are good at communicating and talking, aware of social fields, having passion with job while a professional training background is only an unconditional requirement. Successful applicants will be trained about the basic counselling skills in a short term before officially working. During working period, they will use the experience as

well as their own knowledge together with learning from others in order to improve level and skills.

One more reason of unexpected result is the love of consultants for their jobs. Because the society has not recognized counselling service as an official job so consultants basically do not consider this as a long term job. They only work as a contemporary staff and still look for a more stable job. Some already had a main job but still done counselling service as a part time job, as a result, they are unable to spend whole time and effort on improving working skills. It seems a complicated cycle between the working passion and income as well as treatment consultants received. They do not receive a good income hence they can put all effort in working and vice versa. If the conflict is solved, it will motivate consultants and facilitate the counselling service to develop.

3. Through reality and reasons pointed out above, it is necessary to well implement following solutions so that the quality and effectiveness of counselling service will be increased:

Firstly, governmental offices including Ministries and related departments need to reach an agreement of providing a developing strategy which ensures a high quality, quantity as well as suitable distribution for counselling offices. Also, these offices are required to widely promote their functions and scope of work for all people so they will contact if necessary. Moreover, the improvement of people's knowledge, for example, makes them to fully

^(*) Evaluation of the effectiveness in counseling services is based on many aspects as: the time length of each counseling case, the amount of consulted customers and the frequency of working with familiar customers or via counseling tests so on.

understand the importance of mental health care as well as the necessity of counselling service is required.

Secondly, psychological counselling service is a meaningful social activity because it directly relates to human and their living quality. This service is needed to be recognized by Government and society by providing a job code and good level of income that increase the passion of those work in this service.

Thirdly, the diversification of counselling forms is essential in order to meet the society's demand in mental health care. Also, those counselling forms that obtained high results need to be continued.

Fourth, the quality of consultant team is needed to keep improving because this meaningful and determinant solution will facilitate to improve the effectiveness of counselling. Applicants for job need to have a certain knowledge, professionally trained, communication skills as well as love their jobs. They also need to fully improve knowledge, particularly updating latest information that directly relates to the counselling service. Training courses, which aim to improve working levels and teach consultants basic counselling skills, have to be organized (held) usually. There are many existing issues but key factors, for now, are to enhance the collaboration with large and prestige counselling organization in domestic and foreign. One more important requirement is the supervision and evaluation of each consultant's counselling ability as the

foundation to offer encouragement and awards to motivate staff at work. It is the facilitation for staff to keep improving their counselling ability, together with the reasonable offer and cares, will be the foundation of the love for job of consultants. Here is also the determinant condition to increase quality and effectiveness of psychological counselling.

In conclusion, counselling service is still new in Vietnam; however, it has step by step proved the importance, role and position to social life. Therefore, the exploitation and research, which will provide new solution to the quality improvement of counselling service, have a vital meaning to the community health care in terms of both physical and spirit.

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