

Counseling in Botswana: History, Current Status and Future Trends

Dr. Jabulani Allen Muchado

University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana

Abstract

The article presents an overview of counseling in Botswana, an update of the history, current status, anticipated future trends and challenges in light of the social and educational development in the country. Counseling in Botswana has evolved over years. The initial effort started in 1963 with an introduction of career guidance in secondary schools. The development of guidance and counseling programs for schools has influenced a number of psychosocial intervention services and training programs. A number of training programs emerged at Colleges of Education and at the University of Botswana. All these developments had several challenges in the area of developing robust professional counseling service statues. The article discusses the current status, future trends in counseling and make recommendations for future development of the profession in Botswana.

Keywords: Counseling; Guidance; Evolution; Professionals.



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1. Introduction

The counseling profession in Botswana is at infant stage. There are no regulatory standards of practices, nor national licensure bodies and accredited training programs. The mental health services in the country lack cohesive structures. The rapid growth of counseling is largely to the emergence of HIV and AIDS epidemic resulting in widespread of counseling centers and testing center. HIV and AIDS counseling services are provided by lay counselors and the increase in number of fly by night counseling center and clinics is of great concern to professional counselors. The development of reliable and strong professional counseling organizations has also remained elusive. In this article, I trace the history, current status and future trends of counseling service in the schools and community settings.

1.1. Botswana: The Country

Botswana is a landlocked country in Southern Africa bordered by South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia and Namibia. According to the population and housing census of 2011, the population of Botswana stood at 2.2 million people. Botswana gained independence on September, 30, 1966. The country has remained politically stable since independence with regular multiparty democratic elections. It is widely considered to be one of the leading countries in Africa in respect of governance. This reflects the generally high quality of public institutions, an independent legal system and a low level of corruption all of which have been sustained over a long period of time ([Capital Resources \(PLY\) Limited, 2013](#)). Botswana has the fastest growing economy in the world and this rapid growth has brought all kinds of positive development in the area of tourism, education, counseling, technology and the use of computer and internet.

Botswana is known for having the best wilderness and wildlife areas on the African continent with 30% of its total land devoted to national parks, reserves and wildlife management. Tourism accounts for 12% of the GDP and the industry has grown in the area of accommodation, hotels, attraction of festivals such as cruising, hiking and climbing. Botswana's impressive economic performance over the post-independence period has been the basis for widespread social development, government schemes, primarily derived from the mining sector have been used to fund extensive social provision, particularly in the form of public education, health, water supplies, roads and other infrastructure ([Capital Resources \(PLY\) Limited, 2013](#)). Public health care systems and education have been the major priority in the development budget. For example, the education system made great strides in educational development after independence in 1966, notably basic education. Formal education was perceived as a viable way of meeting the country's manpower needs and promoting citizens quality of life ([National Development Plan 6, 1985-1919](#)). The education system is comprised of seven years of primary education, three years of Junior, and two years of senior secondary (7 – 3 – 2), vocational and university education. Access to schooling is regarded as a basic human right and a major contributor to social, individual and economic development ([Muchado, 2002](#)). The rapid process of social, educational and economic transformation has impacted heavily on young people hence the need of career and counseling services. The Revised National Policy on Education of 1994 made a number of recommendations with regard to the development of comprehensive guidance and counseling programs in primary, secondary and teacher training institutions. For example, Recommendation 19 states that: "the guidance and counseling program in primary schools should be strengthened and teachers trained to provide the services" (p.4.7.36).

Several counseling and research studies made recommendations to the improvement of guidance and counseling structures and services in the country. [Navin \(1985\)](#), in her needs assessment study recommended the establishment

of guidance and counseling structures in the Ministry of Education, (including schools, and Higher Education institutions) and the wide community. Other consultancy reports by Rollin (1990), Maes (1995) made the same recommendations regarding the establishment of guidance and counseling structures in community and improvement of guidance and counseling programs and training curriculum in education institutions. Research studies in Botswana (Kanjii, 1984; Maphorisa, 1989; Muchado, 2002) made several recommendations in regard to strengthening of guidance programs in schools and counseling services in the community.

1.2. Historical Overview of Counseling in Botswana

Counseling in Botswana has always been part of the family support systems embedded within the traditional practices. Olanyika (1979), asserts that guidance is as old as man. Be that as it may, the traditional form of guidance and counseling finds no place in today's ever evolving world. Man and his environment are in constant change. The social structures, occupations and activities that man engages in are rapidly shifting. In Botswana, family members like aunt, grandmothers, traditional leaders, elders in the community, spiritual leaders provided guidance and counseling to family and community members. Counseling services are still offered by these individuals though at a minimal level due to the introduction of modern counseling approaches. It was a process of guiding, advising and assisting family members and people in the village. There were cultural ceremonies like *Bogwera* and *Bojale* where young people were initiated into adulthood by advising and counseling them about issues of health, social behavior and family life. This is confirmed by Gibson and Mitchell (2003) that the first counterparts of professional counselors were perhaps the elder of ancient tribes who advised the youths and guided them towards responsible decision and behavior. The people who offered guidance used their experiences and wisdom to craft this unique process of helping their fellowmen. Counseling in Botswana prior to modern counseling was still tied to the traditional indigenous approaches of helping. Modern counseling was introduced to Botswana in the late 1980s as a response to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. However, modern and traditional indigenous guidance and counseling services are still offered together depending on the issues presented by the clients. People still revert to the traditional family setup of counseling offered by the significant others (aunt, elders, etc.) when they have psychosocial and marital problems.

1.3. Current Status of the Counseling Profession in Botswana

Counseling in Botswana is facing mental health issues and social challenges that have affected a number of developing African countries. According to Garbleman *et al.* (2007) the development of counseling or any profession tends to accelerate as a country becomes more industrialized and economically stable. When a country does not have a stable economic situation it may fail to have a stable health system and structures and thus affecting the growth of counseling. Botswana has maintained a stable and strong political and economic growth since independence providing a healthy atmosphere for developing infrastructure and education sector. Modern counseling services were introduced in the late 1980s by different non-governmental organizations (NGO) responding to the HIV and AIDS pandemic. It was offered by foreigners and social workers. Different sectors of the economic started structures such as counseling centers and agencies to offer psychosocial services. Stockton *et al.* (2010), posit that counseling in Botswana is evolving into a fully developed profession and is taking place in increasing number of settings. Whereas many mental health counseling services are still specific to HIV and AIDS issues, general counseling services are increasingly offered through government ministries and community agencies, nongovernmental organizations, prisons, churches, and private agencies. Not all of these services are provided by professional counselors.

1.4. Counseling Services in the Community

The rapid economic growth and mental health issues ushered different kinds of counseling intervention services. This resulted in a number of agencies and centers offering counseling. The counseling services at these centers were offered by counselors (trained for one week) and this watered down the counseling profession. Clients presented problems related to HIV and AIDS such as orphan hood, grief, child headed families, death of loved ones and suicide. This called for community care givers and paraprofessionals to offer services for cash payment. A number of professionals such as social workers and others took advantage of the situation. The problem of regulatory procedures and control of counseling service providers has significantly affected clients. Mental health professionals in Botswana are worried about the growth of community counseling services offered by lay counselors. Lack of a regulatory body to control and regulate the practice of counseling in the community has resulted in paraprofessionals in areas of marriage and family, rehabilitation counseling practicing without appropriate training and certification. The number of mental health community professional counselors is not known. Graduates of University of Botswana in Masters of Counseling and Human Service program whereabouts and what they are doing in the community is not known. Lack of structures and facilities that recognize counseling is a challenge. Private sectors and institutions prefer to hire psychologists instead of counselors.

1.5. Counseling in School Settings

Guidance in Botswana started in the early 1960s, when teachers were designated to provide career services to secondary school students. Their role was to help students with career choices, and they were expected to help disadvantaged students overcome their learning difficulties. Muchado (2002), posits that the need to introduce a program that will go beyond addressing career needs of students was very clear in Botswana in the early 1970s. The

young people were grappling with social, personal and educational issues hence the need to introduce a comprehensive guidance and counseling program. Counseling in schools started in the late 1970s when the Ministry of Education adopted a recommendation from a needs assessment consultancy report (Navin, 1985) to introduce guidance and counseling division and develop a comprehensive guidance and counseling program for secondary schools. Counseling is offered as part of guidance program in schools; they complement each other and can also be offered together as an educational program or support service. The focus in the education system was to strengthen the guidance program by addressing the social and personal needs of students, hence the combination of guidance and counseling. The development of counseling service in schools has had many challenges such as shortage of professional counselors and facilities like counseling rooms, lack of recognition by school management and support from teachers and parents. Graduates of Masters of Education in Counseling and Human Service from the University of Botswana who specialized in school counseling are not given the opportunity to practice counseling or teach guidance. They do different work like management or teach different subjects. This has affected the growth of counseling programs in schools. The number of school counselors is not known, but the need for counseling is evidenced by a number of studies for example (Levers, 2007) asserts that there is need for training more Botswana professionals with specializations in children and youth issues and for continuing education in the areas of trauma, bereavement and crisis intervention.

Counseling in primary and secondary schools is currently provided by volunteers and designated senior guidance teachers and ordinary teachers. Schools have a senior guidance teacher who is supposed to teach guidance and provide counseling service to the whole school. Guidance is a timetabled subject and teachers trained in guidance are expected to teach it and counseling is offered by professional counselors. The school counselor and guidance teacher position does not exist in the current primary and secondary school establishment. Counseling at College of Education institutions is not practiced because they are no school counselors except at the University of Botswana where they have a fully pledged Careers & Counseling Center with a compliment of professional counselors with varied specializations. Private primary and secondary schools have some well-established guidance and counseling centers managed by a qualified counselor or psychologist.

2. Counselor Training

The need for trained guidance teachers and professional counselors has been a recurrent theme in research studies, consultancy reports, and conferences (Haseley, 1983; Maes, 1995; Montsi *et al.*, 2000; Muchado, 2002; Navin, 1985; Phillips, 1983; Revised National Policy on Education, 1994; Stockton *et al.*, 2010) bear testimony to this. Navin (1985), in her consultancy report emphasized the importance of training and development of guidance and counseling program at the University of Botswana. Phillips (1983), states that there is need of training teachers to be exposed to the importance and relevance of guidance and counseling. Haseley (1983), states that all teachers should receive in-service and pre-service training in guidance and counseling. Maes (1995), highlighted the critical need for training counselors to meet the needs of children, youth, and parents. Montsi *et al.* (2000) posit that the current training programs in teacher education colleges have to be upgraded to full specialization and the University of Botswana should expedite its proposal in response to the Ministry of Education's request to mount undergraduate and graduate degree counseling programs. Muchado (2002), state that trained counselors can coordinate the school guidance curriculum, provide counseling to the students and consultancy service for students, teachers, parents, and provide career guidance. Stockton *et al.* (2010), state that there is need for the development of a comprehensive program of in-service training for practicing teacher-counselors in addition to comprehensive pre-service training programs in guidance and counseling. The Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) recommendation 19 (3) states that; the guidance and counseling program in primary schools should be strengthened and teachers trained to provide this service.

Train guidance teachers to teach guidance and offer student personnel services at primary and secondary school. The graduates of Masters of Education in Counseling and Human Services are supposed to serve in the community, schools and institutions setting that offer counseling services. The University of Botswana introduced a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Counseling program in 2005 and has so far graduated four PhD graduates. Colleges of Education provide training in guidance and counseling as a minor subject. Boitekanelo College one of the private institutions in our education system has introduced a Diploma and Bachelor of Education in counseling program to train counselors and health care workers professionals to work in the health care setting. In all these training programs the number of trained professional counselors is not known because there is no counseling profession directory. A scanty number of practicing counselors is always given by different counseling associations in the country. Despite all the training in counseling the graduates face an economy that cannot absorb them because counseling is not recognized in a number of employment sectors. There are no jobs for community counselors, but the need for counseling service is clear in health sectors and community settings. The problem of drug and substance abuse amongst young people is of great concern to government and the nation.

3. Counseling Associations

There is enough evidence to suggest that counseling is growing in Botswana and the need to coordinate the activities and services of this profession is becoming clear. A number of paraprofessionals (volunteers, lay counselors) started practicing in the late 1980s in response to the psychosocial needs of people affected and infected by HIV and AIDS. This resulted in the formation of a number of Counseling Associations. The Botswana Guidance and Counseling Association (BGCA) was started in 1998 and stopped functioning around 2004. Botswana

Association for Psychosocial Rehabilitation (BAPR) started early 2000 and is still strong in its pursuit of meeting the emotional, social, mental and spiritual needs of individuals, families and caregivers through psychosocial rehabilitation. The Botswana Counseling Association (BCA) was started in 2005 and officially launched in 2007. Its mission is to promote and protect the interest of counseling, psychological and development services and monitor the delivery of these services in Botswana. The association draws its membership from professional counselors, guidance teachers, clinical social workers, counseling psychologists who are providers of psychosocial services in the country. Another association that has just been started is the Botswana Marriage and Family Counseling (BMFC). In addition to these associations, the following are also involved in providing counseling, welfare and psychosocial services; Botswana Family Welfare Association (BOFWA), Botswana Psychological Association (BPA) and Botswana Social Workers Association (BSWA).

Botswana Counseling Association has continued to play a major role of advocacy for the counseling profession in Botswana. The Association has so far hosted two successful international conferences in collaboration with National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC) and many other counseling organizations. The Association is currently working with the International Association of Counselors (IAC) to explore the possibility of a joint international conference in Botswana. The Association has developed a Counseling Act that needs to be approved by parliament and enacted into a law that will regulate and control counseling practice in Botswana. The Association is doing this in collaboration with other relevant stakeholders. The purpose of Counseling Act is to regulate, control and monitor the counseling practice in Botswana. The Association has mounted several training workshops for its members and different institutions in the country. The Association has over 600 registered members and Code of Ethics for its practicing members. As observed by [Stockton et al. \(2010\)](#) that Botswana Counseling Association provides a forum for counselors to discuss ideas and develop strategies for meeting the many challenges and diverse needs of the country.

3.1. Professionalism and Counseling Practice

There is a growing concern about issues of standard of practice due to a number of paraprofessionals and untrained people offering counseling. Counseling practice in Botswana is not regulated therefore this is a concern about the welfare of the clients and the quality of service provided. The problem of malpractice, supervision and misconduct by practicing professionals will always be a great concern if there are no regulatory standards. There are no registration facilities, certification or licensing statutes, counseling service is offered by providers who have not been accredited. There are no structures to approve counseling programs that are offered by different institutions. All educational learning programs must be accredited by Botswana Qualification Authority (BQA) which is a national body for accrediting institutions and learning programs. The problem of counseling training programs floated by people or organizations that have no idea of what counseling is all about is becoming a serious concern to professional counselors. However there is nothing that can be done until a counseling national accreditation body is established.

4. Research in Counseling

The trends of counseling research in Botswana from publication of staff in counseling, the research projects of students within and outside the country seem to focus mainly on the direction and development of guidance and counseling in Botswana ([Alao and Odirile, 1998](#)). A number of research studies by graduate students are on the implementation and challenges of guidance and counseling programs. This could be lack of training in educational and social research skills. This was observed by [Montsi et al. \(2000\)](#) in their evaluation survey that schools are engaged in needs assessment studies to inform their programs, but there is no evidence that these were informed by local investigations, especially participatory research. It is important that the training programs include some aspects of action research to empower the guidance personnel to conduct simple studies to inform their plans and programs. Similar recommendation made by [Muchado \(2002\)](#), [Navin \(1989\)](#). As counselors get better training in community counseling, referral, placement and follow up; evaluation and research service roles must be developed. [Muchado \(2002\)](#), recommended that, there is need for conducting outcome and action research studies on a regular basis to provide continuous valid feedback on the experiences of guidance teachers in the classroom and school environment. The Guidance and Counseling Division in the Ministry of Education needs feedback from the schools for nationwide planning and coordination of Guidance and Counseling program.

[Alao and Odirile \(1999\)](#), in a paper presented at national conference reported that research output in the area of counseling in Botswana appeared inadequate for the period of review. Between 1963 and 1999, not much has been published in counseling in Botswana, but few research studies on guidance and counseling have been carried by counselor education staff and Botswana studying abroad. One can make the same argument that not much has been done in the period of 2000- 2015. A number of studies on Guidance and Counseling by graduates at the University of Botswana looked at the implementation of guidance in the classroom. Research has been recognized as one of the vital support of the counseling profession as it enables the counselor to verify the efficiency of his/ her practice and to plan the future interventions based on the data generated from research ([Alao and Odirile, 1999](#)). The problem might be that research in Botswana training institutions is not emphasized at first degree or Masters level resulting in some deficiency in research skills. [Muchado \(2002\)](#), comments that there is still misconception, confusion and negative attitude about Guidance and Counseling as a subject and support service in primary and secondary schools; and that a research study of the nature of guidance as a subject and counseling as support service and the role of a school counselor is highly recommended. Botswana Counseling Association has hosted two international

conferences in 2010 and 2012 and there was a notable increase in research papers on counseling by local presenters from private institutions, Colleges of Education and the University of Botswana.

4.1. Future Trends of the Counseling Profession in Botswana

Specific drivers of the counseling trends are likely to be community mental health needs, specialized training in counseling programs at higher education institutions, youth issues and unemployment and the agenda of Botswana Counseling Association. Stockton *et al.* (2010), posit that undoubtedly, professional counseling in Botswana will continue to grow. Increased numbers of counselors and counseling centers to address community mental health need are likely driven in part by the devastating impact of the HIV and AIDS crisis in the country. From the early 1990s to present, counseling in Botswana has been driven primarily by mental health counseling interventions responding to the scourge of HIV and AIDS. Botswana is one of those Sub Saharan African countries severely affected by the impact of HIV and AIDS pandemic. An increase in orphan hood and people on ARV therapy is an indication that counseling is still needed. HIV and AIDS have contributed to the current societal problems of people experiencing psychological distress, grieving; children led families, destitute and hunger. Counseling is required to deal with the increasing societal problems whether spearheaded by government, nongovernmental organizations (NGO) or private agencies & institutions. There is need for specialized counselors in areas such as rehabilitation, grief, and children counseling. The government initiatives of “everyone must test for HIV” and the pre and post HIV testing counseling have a long way to go.

4.1.1. Youth

The problem of drug and alcohol abuse is growing at an alarming rate. Young people need formalized counseling programs in schools and out of school setting. Some engage in drugs because they are idling, no jobs and recreation centers. There is need for mental health counselors to work at youth centers to assist them to cope with the numerous societal problems.

4.1.2. Unemployment

An estimated rate of unemployment amongst youth is 70%. Young people need career counseling to help them identify their interests and abilities and match them with their qualifications. School & community counselors will be needed to provide career education and counseling.

4.1.3. Mental health

The societal problems are becoming more complex. Issues of health and wellness, diseases, crime and violence need professional counselors to train young people in assertiveness skills. Interventions to combat HIV and AIDS will need counselors to educate people about practicing safe sex. There is an increase in intimate femicide and suicide, drug & substance abuse amongst school going youth. That means they are grappling with serious societal and personal problems that need school counselors to provide psychosocial counseling intervention services.

4.1.4. Training

Specialized training in different areas in counseling is crucial given the dynamics of problems faced by young people. The tertiary education should shift the focus of training and develop programs that produce counselors who can function in the community. The country will need rehabilitation counselors given the rising problem of substance abuse. The education system is missing school counselors to augment what the guidance teachers are doing in the classroom. Counseling programs at higher institutions should offer research as a core course. Professional counselors need to have a strong background in research skills to enable them to be involved in action research that can inform their practice.

4.2. Counseling Association

Professional bodies play a major role in developing and nurturing professional counselors. Botswana Counseling Association has a major role in networking its members with specialists and re-known scholars through regular conferences and seminars. Botswana Counseling Association is already playing the advocacy role by pursuing the Botswana Counseling Profession Act to go through parliament. The Act will provide the required regulation and monitory procedures to regulate counseling practice and setting out the necessary standards of practice and accreditation requirements.

5. Conclusion

There is still a lot to be done regarding the development of counseling in Botswana. The driving forces for development of counseling are influenced by the political and economic stability of the country which provides a conducive environment for growth. The major influences will likely be the need for mental health counseling as the country tries to address HIV and AIDS related social and health problems. The need for training and professional development of counselors will continue as the demand for specialized counseling service grows. When the numbers of practicing counselors increase, the need of standard of practice and regulatory procedures will become a reality hence the need to push the agenda of Botswana Counseling Profession Act. Botswana Counseling Association will play a major role in advocacy for the problem of the client and the profession. Participation in international conferences and collaboration with international bodies will enrich Botswana Counseling Association membership

and encourage them to do more research in counseling. A strong need exists for Botswana counselors (paraprofessionals/ professionals) to re-organize themselves and make counseling visible and viable.

Recommendations

Counseling in Botswana has great potential for growth given the success story of the current trends and strides in development. In light of all these strides in development, I offer the following recommendations:

1. Paraprofessionals will continue to provide psychosocial intervention services to assist fellow country men who are overwhelmed by societal problems. Therefore there is need for Botswana Counseling Association to mount regular short courses, workshops, and training seminars for untrained counselors.
2. Counselors must play a pivotal role in the growth of their profession. Botswana Counseling Association should vigorously pursue the proposed Counseling Act to make sure it goes to parliament and be enacted into law without delay.
3. The need of specialized counselors to serve in school and community is very clear. Therefore, advanced training counseling program should be offered at the University of Botswana and other private institutions.
4. Recognition of counseling service is critical in the education system; therefore the government of Botswana through the Ministry of Basic Education should establish positions of guidance teacher and school counselor.
5. Networking & collaboration amongst professional counselors plays a major role in professional and personal development. Therefore Botswana Counseling Association should hold yearly international conferences.

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