

Current Status of Counselling in India

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ABSTRACT

Counselling was often misunderstood as a profession in India earlier. However, its role is getting the attention it needs now. This article delves into various trends and where counselling stands as a profession today. It addresses the lack of licensed workers in the field as well as the myths and misconceptions of the public, stopping individuals from accessing much-needed support. Moreover, the article talks about its expansive scope in India as well as incorporation of traditional practices in counselling followed by the emergence of specialized counselling institutes, universities and organizations dedicated to fostering excellence in the field.

Keywords: *Counselling, India, Professionalization, Trends*

Counselling refers to the *professional assistance* that is provided to an individual or a group of individuals. It is a process where an individual or group of individuals meet with a *trained* professional counsellor to talk about issues and problems that they are facing and work together with the counsellor to cope from and deal with them effectively.

The Misunderstanding

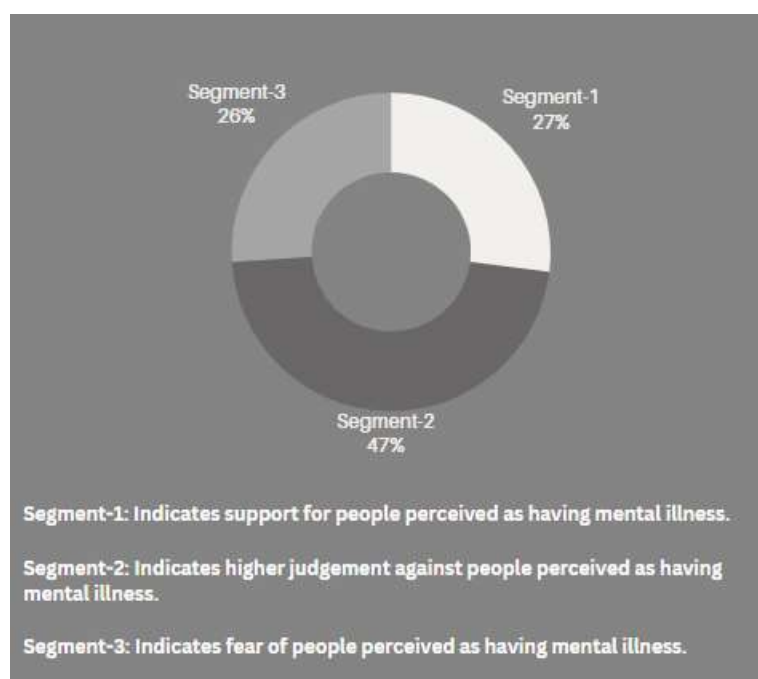
Counselling is often *misunderstood* in India. Many people in India are not aware till date of the existence of a professional who is trained especially to guide them. They often *use counselling and guidance interchangeably* due to this reason. *Guidance* is to assist individuals in making decisions about various aspects of their lives as it focuses on providing information, support or even resources to help individuals navigate their choices. Counselling, on the other hand, addresses specific issues which could be psychological, emotional or behavioral in nature. It is a professional practice and is hence, quite different from guidance, which even a friend with no training in counselling can provide.

Counselling in India has evolved significantly over the years. In Indian society, mental health issues are often *stigmatized* which is why the growth of this field has been quite slow as compared to psychology in general. Limited knowledge about mental health and counselling services contributes to various misconceptions related to the field. A *National Survey Report* on the *level of sensitivity, attitudes towards mental health, and the level of stigma associated with it* was conducted across eight cities in India over a span of 5 months in 2018. The study revealed the following three segments: -

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The study's results revealed that people have feelings of hatred (70%), disgust (65%) and annoyance (61%) towards the mentally ill. 60% of the people also are of the opinion that the main cause of mental illness is the lack of self-discipline and will-power. However, 68% expressed the need of providing the best possible care to people with mental illness. This not only shows a lack of understanding, empathy and acceptance towards individuals who are struggling with mental health issues, but also that there is a stigma surrounding mental illness by implying that it is a personal failing rather than a legitimate condition. On a more positive note, there is a *recognition of the importance of providing care and support* to those affected. Hence, these three main trends have greatly influenced the current status of counselling in India.

CURRENT TRENDS

1. *Counselling- A Professional Practice in India*

Counselling is gaining recognition as a professional practice, but in India, clinical psychology dominates, and counselling is seen as a field emerging from it. From the past few years, it is being acknowledged as a potent entity, separate from other fields.

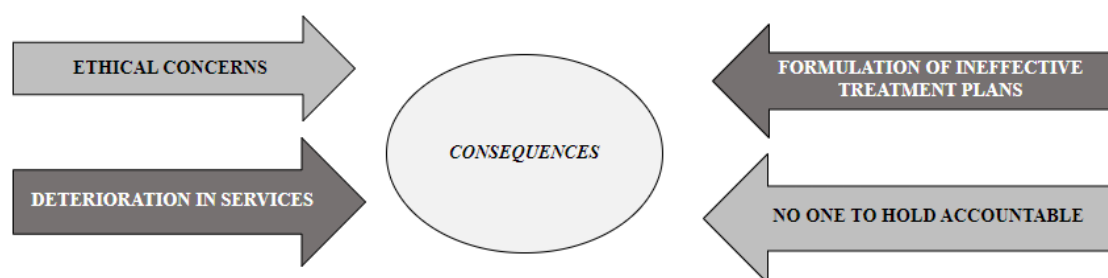
In India, counselling *does not have a governing authority* and you do not need a license to practice. You do need to get an RCI certificate if you wish to perform tests and become a licensed practitioner, but otherwise for therapy and counselling, *licensing isn't mandatory*. A master's degree is more than enough to start working in the field. Pereira & Rekha (2017) also hold the same view regarding lack of licensing authority assessing the status of counselling.

However, it can be seen that there is no individual organization for accreditation of counselling programs yet (Carson, Jain, Ramirez, 2009). Usually, independent organizations and institutes provide counselling courses that rely on international bodies for accreditations (Chang et al, 2013). Organizations Like *National Academy of Psychology or Indian Academy of Applied Psychology* haven't been advocating the need for accreditation &

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licensure for counselling psychologists. This is why reliance on government is more towards provision of the same (Agrawal, 2015).

The absence of a governing body to oversee licensed counsellors has therefore led to several negative consequences for counselling profession as a whole in India: -



Without clear guidelines, counsellors may engage in *unethical practices* such as breaches of confidentiality, dual relationships, or exploitation of clients. This can erode trust in the profession and undermine the integrity of counselling services.

Since there are no standardized criteria for obtaining a license or a body to ensure that a counsellor practices only after obtaining one, *the quality of services deteriorates*, potentially compromising the effectiveness and safety of therapy for clients.

Clients may be at risk of receiving harmful treatment since most counsellors *lack necessary training* which makes them unable to address the client's psychological and emotional mental health needs. This can make the client's case worse.

A governing body provides a framework for holding counsellors accountable for their actions and without such oversight, there may be *limited recourse for addressing complaints* or disciplinary issues related to counsellor misconduct or incompetence. In addition to this, there is a risk to public safety as individuals may falsely claim to be qualified counsellors or offer counselling services without proper training.

Overall, the absence of a governing body to ensure that licensed counsellors adhere to professional standards and ethical guidelines can have far-reaching consequences for both counsellors and their clients, including compromised quality of care, ethical lapses, and risks to public safety. Establishing effective regulatory mechanisms is essential for safeguarding the integrity and effectiveness of counselling services and promoting the wellbeing of clients in India.

2. Myths and Misconceptions Among Indians

In India, there are several myths and misconceptions related to counselling and mental health services and beliefs that are firmly held. These misconceptions can contribute to *stigma* and *barriers* to seeking help (YLCC, 2020).

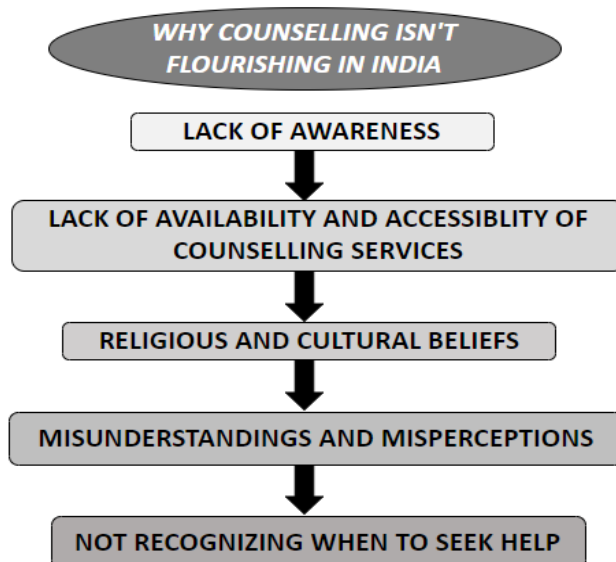
- **Counselling is Only for Adults:** There's a misperception that children and teenagers shouldn't receive counselling because it's mostly for adults. In reality, counselling services are for people of all ages, including senior citizens, kids, adolescents and young adults.
- **Counsellors Have Solutions to Your Problems:** Some people expect counsellors to have all the answers and solve their problems for them. While counsellors can provide

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guidance, support, and tools for coping, they cannot magically fix all problems. Counselling is a collaborative process where clients play an active role in their own growth and look for ways to cope along with the counsellor.

- **Counselling is Only for People with Severe Mental Illness:** One of the most common myths is that counselling is only for people with severe mental health issues like schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. In reality, counselling can be beneficial for a lot of other concerns and issues that people might have in their day-to-day life, including general stress, relationship problems, career, and personal growth.
- **Counselling is Only for the Rich:** There is a misperception that counselling costs a lot of money and only the rich can afford it. It is true to some extent that private counselling sessions cost a lot of money. However, there are also affordable or free counselling options available through community organizations, schools, and government initiatives. To make counselling more accessible, a lot of counsellors offer their services at a lower cost and even for free.
- **Counselling is Talk Therapy:** There's a misconception that counselling is a casual conversation, just like talking to a friend. However, counselling involves evidence-based techniques and strategies aimed at addressing specific issues and helping people develop coping skills and to understand and resolve their life's challenges effectively.
- **Seeking Counseling Means You're Weak:** There's a stigma attached to seeking counselling, with the belief that it indicates weakness. In reality, seeking help is a sign of strength and self-awareness. It takes courage to take steps to prioritize your mental health and well-being and admit when you need help.

Addressing these myths and misconceptions about counselling is essential. In addition to these myths, there are other reasons why counselling isn't flourishing in India: -



Increase in Scope and Emergence of Various Disciplines within Counselling in India

The scope of counselling in India has increased over the years and various fields and specialized disciplines have emerged within it.

Career counsellors, one of the most known and accessible, assist people in exploring career options, setting career goals, and making informed decisions about their professional paths. They provide assessments, guidance, and resources to help clients navigate job searches, career changes, and skill development.

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Clinical Mental Health Counseling focuses on diagnosing and treating mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders. Clinical mental health counsellors work in various settings such as hospitals, clinics, and private practices, providing therapy to individuals, couples, families, and groups.

School counsellors work within educational settings to support students' academic, social, and emotional development. They assist students with academic planning, career exploration, and personal issues, aiming to promote academic success and overall well-being.

Marriage and family therapists specialize in helping couples and families address relationship issues and improve communication and interpersonal dynamics. They work with families experiencing conflicts, transitions, or crises to foster healthier relationships.

Addiction counsellors help individuals struggling with substance abuse or behavioral addictions overcome their dependencies and develop coping strategies for recovery. They may work in rehabilitation centers, outpatient clinics, or community organizations.

Child and adolescent counsellors focus on the mental health and well-being of children and teenagers. They address issues such as behavioral problems, academic difficulties, family conflicts, and emotional regulation, providing age-appropriate therapy and support.

Grief counsellors assist individuals who are experiencing loss and bereavement, helping them navigate the stages of grief and find coping strategies for healing. They provide emotional support, validation, and guidance through the mourning process.

These are all *multicultural* counsellors who work with clients from diverse cultural backgrounds. Their aim is to *promote cultural awareness, sensitivity, and inclusivity in therapy* to better serve clients with diverse cultural perspectives. These disciplines represent just a subset of the diverse fields within counselling, each with its own theories, techniques, and ethical considerations tailored to specific client populations and needs.

Incorporation of Traditional Practices in Therapeutic Techniques

Yoga and Meditation

Yoga and meditation are deep rooted in Indian history. *Yoga therapy* is a mind-body practice that focuses on your physical, emotional and mental health. The practice uses various body postures, breathing and exercises to help you relax, relieve stress and manage underlying conditions or symptoms.

Yoga was first described by *Patanjali* in his classic text on yoga, called "*yoga sutras*". Yoga literally means joining together or union. It is derived from the sanskrit word "*yuj*" which means to unite, bind or join. Meditation has come from the Latin word "*meditatum*" which means "to ponder". It means to engage in contemplation or reflection. It can be described as a state of thoughtful awareness and mental silence at the same time.

The integration of yoga and meditation into counselling has gained popularity due to their holistic approach to health and well-being. Researchers have found that yoga helps reduce mental health symptoms because it helps regulate your heart which can in turn help restore your nervous system. When we have a regulated system, we feel much calmer and less stressed. It can help reduce ongoing environmental stressors such as work or family stress too.

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BENEFITS OF YOGA AND MEDITATION IN COUNSELLING	
STRESS REDUCTION	PROMOTES A SENSE OF PEACE
RELAXATION	EMOTIONAL REGULATION
SELF-EXPLORATION	PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Ayurveda

One of India's traditional medical systems is *Ayurveda*. The terms “*Ayur*”, which means life, and “*Veda*”, which means knowledge, are combined to form the name *Ayurveda*. It essentially refers to the science of life and includes taking good care of one's bodily, mental, and spiritual well-being.

It is predicated on treating the individual as a whole and adopting a holistic approach to health. A state in which the body, mind, and spirit are perfectly balanced is referred to as health in *Ayurveda*. It defines the three *Gunas*—*Sattva*, *Raja*, and *Tama*—as aspects of an individual's psyche.

Because *purity and satisfaction* are components of *Sattva Guna*, a *sattvik* leads a pure life devoid of expectations and ambitions and focused on serving others. *Raja Guna* is known for his *passion, activity, renown, and love of power*. A *Rajasik* individual places more emphasis on success and accomplishment. *Anger, ignorance, and greed* are examples of *Tama Guna*; a *tamasik* person is typified by lethargy, a selfish mindset, and the desire to damage others for one's own gain.

A psychologically sound individual needs the three *gunas* to be in balance. A mental disturbance is probably going to result from an equilibrium disruption. The practitioner or counsellor must first determine the client's *Guna*, or personality dimension. The *Tridoshas* are regarded by the *ayurveda* practitioner as the cornerstone of the treatment. The physiological humors of *Vata* (wind), *Pitta* (bile), and *Kapha* (phlegm) form the basis of the *Tridoshas*. Based on the components of, these are the three essential forces in the human body. These are also considered as the reason behind mental disorders called “*Unmad*”.

Ayurveda views the individual as a whole, or *Purusha*. Each *Purusha* is distinct in the *Prakriti* that he or she possesses based on the ratio of *doshas* in their body. The term “*Prakriti*” (nature) refers to the intrinsic qualities of an individual based on the equilibrium of their *trochas*. *Ayurvedic* counselling commences with a *Prakriti* examination of the individual. Every therapy should be implemented with consideration for the individual's *temperament* and *constitution*. Research (Bhalerao, Deshpande, & Thatte, 2012, for example) indicates that determining the *Prakriti* would be helpful in predicting susceptibility to a certain disease and creating therapy strategies catered to the needs of each individual.

Mindfulness

Mindfulness basically means *awareness*. It refers to the way of paying attention, which is accepting, sensitive and independent of any thoughts or judgement. It is about being aware and fully conscious of the present moment experience without attaching any value to it. *Mindfulness* has its roots in *Buddhism*, but the experience of *mindfulness* is mentioned in many sacred texts. Practicing *mindfulness* can be understood as a way of relating to one's

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own experiences that helps in decreasing the pains associated with life's difficulties, especially the self-imposed ones. It includes awareness, attention and remembering.



INSTITUTIONS FOR COUNSELLING IN INDIA

1. Government Initiatives

The following timeline *briefly* shows the establishment of institutions as well as universities who identified the need for counselling in India: -

ROLE OF GOVERNMENT OF INDIA AND UNIVERSITIES	
YEAR	ESTABLISHMENTS AND GROWTH
1954	CENTRAL BUREAU OF EDUCATIONAL AND VOCATIONAL GUIDANCE SET UP IN DELHI BY GOVERNMENT OF INDIA
1958	MES UNIVERSITY, BARODA, SET UP COUNSELLING SERVICES AND APPOINTED A FULL-TIME COUNSELLOR WITH ASSISTANCE OF UGC
1961	ALLAHABAD UNIVERSITY STARTED COUNSELLING CENTRE FOR ITS STUDENTS WITH THE ASSISTANCE OF USEFI (UNITED STATES EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATION IN INDIA)
1955-1960	ST. XAVIER'S COLLEGE, BOMBAY, STARTED COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR STUDENTS WHICH BECAME PSYCHOLOGICALLY ORIENTED IN 1960
1963	WILSON COLLEGE OF BOMBAY SET UP COUNSELLING CENTRES FOR ITS STUDENTS WITH A COUNSELLOR
1965	DELHI UNIVERSITY ORGANIZED A COUNSELLING CENTRE WITH ASSISTANCE OF UGC
2005	COUNSELLING IDENTIFIED AS ESSENTIAL BY NATIONAL FRAMEWORK CURRICULUM BY NCERT PG DEGREE PROGRAMS, CERTIFICATES AND DIPLOMAS OFFERED
2006-2007	SURVEY REVEALED THAT ONLY 10% HAD ACCESS TO COUNSELLING VERY LITTLE EMERGED IN TERMS OF MODELS OF COUNSELLING

2. Some of the Latest Establishments and Successful Improvements

2.1 National Institute of Mental Health and Neurosciences (NIMHANS).

The Mental Hospital established by the Government of Mysore and the All-India Institute of Mental Health established by the Government of India were amalgamated on 27th December 1974, resulting in the formation of NIMHANS.

The services provided here include counselling and support for issues like depression, anxiety, anger outbursts, lack of sleep; marital counselling for couples, support for alcohol/nicotine/drug de-addiction, services for technology addiction, family counselling, support for parents of children with behavioral disturbances, support and guidance for children with behavioral/emotional issues, stress and lifestyle management, personal exploration and growth, support and guidance for any mental health and wellbeing related concerns. Individual counselling, couple counselling, family counselling, support groups etc., are also provided.

2.2 Cognicare Centre for Child and Adolescent Counselling.

Cognicare was founded in 1994 officially and separated from its other branches in 2014. They provide counselling services for all age groups and its right for you if: you identify as a minority/multiple minorities (female, race other than Caucasian, member of the LGBTQ+ community, living with a disability, etc.), if you are struggling with your sexual orientation or gender identity or just want to further unpack in this area, if you are a parent of a child who identifies with the LGBTQ+ community, if you are a parent in general, couples (including LGBTQ+ couples and non-conventional relationships), if you are/have a child/adolescent struggling with either mental or behavioral issues, if you are struggling to afford mental health care, and/or if you are just someone who would like to prioritize their mental health. They provide individual therapy for adults, children/teens and couples through CBT. They specialize in LGBTQ+ issues, the Gottman couples' method, minority stress issues and parenting support.

2.3 Indian Counselling Services (ICS).

ICS is a leading online service provider for Psychological Therapy and Counselling. They consist of experienced Psychotherapists who have treated over thousands of patients and passed their therapeutic skills to their learners. They use scientific methods and state of the art practices to heal mental health issues. Programs such as diplomas in child psychology, counselling and clinical internships, advanced NLP and CBT master classes, etc., are also provided. Most psychology programmes require students to complete an internship or practicum to prepare them to work with real patients upon graduation, and ICS has given internship opportunities to IGNOU, AMITY, CHRIST, and DELHI university students and to other reputed universities from all over India.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the status of counselling in India is shaped by various factors, including ancient history, educational developments, institutions and service providers such as *Betterhelp*, *Amaha*, *Counsel India*, *Manochikitsa*, *Cognizavest*, *MindSpa*, *TalkItOver*, *Manastha*, *OpenCounselling*, and *Better LYF*. Counselling has undergone a significant growth over the years but there is still a need for recognition of counselling as a separate field.

The training programs have increased over the years, with different fields emerging within counselling. Some services also offer 24 hours availability of support through live chat and voice calls in India. Some even offer free counselling services where they recruit student interns and offer incentives in the form of recognition or certificates.

However, challenges such as stigma, accessibility and the need for continued advocacy remain pertinent. Moving forward, efforts in education, regulation, public awareness and implementation of rules is extremely important in advancing the status of counselling in India, ensuring that people have access to quality mental health support and well-being.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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