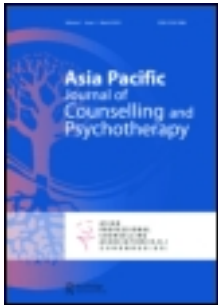


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Counselling licensure in Taiwan

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Counsellor credentialing is one mechanism by which high standards of professionalism and ethics are upheld by counsellors, thereby protecting consumers of counselling services. Licensure is the most stringent form of counsellor credentialing, as it is a governmentally sanctioned credentialing and backed by law, regulating the title and practice of counselling. Licensure for counsellors in Taiwan is a relatively recent phenomenon introduced in 2001, while in the USA it has existed since the 1970s in some states. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the requirements for counselling licensure in Taiwan and to compare these with licensure requirements in the State of Ohio in the USA where counselling licensure has been evolving since 1983. Suggestions to strengthen and refine counselling licensure in Taiwan are presented and discussed.

Keywords: counselling licensure; counsellor credentialing; licensure requirements; licensure laws; Taiwan

Counsellor credentialing is one mechanism by which high standards of professionalism and ethics are upheld by counsellors, thereby protecting consumers of counselling services. Such credentialing comes in many forms (Bloom, 1996; Pelling & Sullivan, 2006; Remley & Herlihy, 2007; Sweeney, 1995) and includes degrees, registration, certification, licensure and programme accreditation. While most of these credentials offer a way to protect the public and benefit the profession by recognizing the professional competence of those providing services, licensure is a statutory process that regulates the title and practice of counselling (Bradley, 1995; Fretz & Mills, 1980; Pelling & Sullivan, 2006; Sweeney, 1995). Licensure grants individuals, meeting the minimum professional requirements, the legal right to practice the profession (Remley & Herlihy, 2007).

According to the American Counselling Association (ACA, 2012),

Governmentally sanctioned credentialing is usually called licensure and is based on the legal concept of the regulatory power of the state. This power holds that the state has the right and obligation to pass laws and take other such actions as it may deem necessary to protect the health, safety and welfare of its citizens. (para 2)

Counselling licensure law stipulates the qualifications, including educational and internship experiences, required to be eligible to apply for licensure in the profession.

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Further, it restricts or prohibits the practice of counselling by individuals not meeting state-determined qualification standards (ACA, 2012).

Like other forms of credentialing, such as certification and registration or register lists, licensure can neither guarantee high standards of performance by licensed counsellors nor can it guarantee favourable client outcomes. By setting minimum standards, licensure protects the public from being served by incompetent or untrained professionals. It is however an important process to enhance the professionalization of counselling as well as its public image and recognition (Pelling & Sullivan, 2006; Wang, Kwan, & Huang, 2011). Addressing the benefits of a system of counselling licensure in Taiwan, Wang et al. (2011, p. 46) emphasized that it serves 'a gate-keeping role to ensure delivery of quality training and mental health services'. Ideally, licensure laws combined with aspirational codes of ethics developed by professional organizations guide practitioners to serve their clients following the highest standards of ethical practice.

In the United States of America (USA), counsellor licensure traces its beginnings to the early 1970s, when the first counsellor licensure law was passed in the State of Virginia (Bradley, 1995; Davis, Witmer, & Navin, 1990). Currently, licensure laws have been enacted in all 50 states of the USA, as well as in the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico (ACA, 2011). One disadvantage to the system of counselling licensure in the USA is that licensure requirements differ from state to state resulting in problems of fragmentation and licensure portability. A second potential area of concern is that separate licensure laws have been enacted for psychologists and social workers in the USA, leading to professionals doing similar work in separate silos. Common requirements for counselling licensure in the different states in the USA include (1) a master's or doctoral degree in counselling, (2) completion of supervised counselling experiences, (3) passage of a state or national counselling examination, (4) continuing education requirements after licensure and (5) adherence to a Code of Ethics and standards of practice (ACA, 2011). Given the system of state counselling licensure in the USA, there are variations in requirements. For example, although all States require at least a master's degree for licensure, the number of credit hours and specific graduate courses required vary, as well as the requirements for clinical and supervised experience and the criteria for supervision. With regard to examinations, all States require that licensure applicants pass a written examination, and some also require an oral examination. While many States accept or require the National Board for Certified Counsellors' (NBCC) examination, other states administer their own examination (Bradley, 1995; Brooks & Gerstein, 1990). As a result of such variations, there have been calls for licensure portability and more uniform licensure standards and requirements in the USA (Rudow, 2011).

Counsellor credentialing in many Asian countries has been evolving in recent years. It consists of different systems that are at various developmental stages (Wang et al., 2011). For example, Malaysia enacted the Counsellors Act 1998 (Act 580) that regulates the practice of counselling (See & Ng, 2010). Counsellors in Malaysia have to be registered with the Board of Counsellors and obtain a certificate of practice under the Act. Other countries such as Australia, Japan and Korea have a similar certification or registration system for counsellors, but it is approved by professional organizations rather than the government (Pelling & Sullivan, 2006; Wang et al., 2011).

The legislative government in Taiwan passed the 'Psychologists Act' in 2001 to regulate the standards and requirements of practice for both licensed counsellors and psychologists in Taiwan. The Psychologists Act excludes school counsellors because unlike in the USA, school counsellors in Taiwan are required to have a teacher certificate and not a counsellor license. Further, except for those who are certificated or licensed in their

respective professions, such as social workers, nurses, occupational therapists and psychiatrists, in order to be eligible to practice psychotherapy or counselling, individuals have to fulfil the requirements and pass a national licensure exam called the 'Professional and Technical Senior Examination for Psychologists'. However, the particular law passed in Taiwan has two separate sections for licensed counsellors and clinical psychologists. Licensed counsellors are referred to as counselling psychologists in Taiwan, and the requirements and scope of practice for them somewhat differ from those for clinical psychologists.

Although the background and circumstance of counselling licensure in Taiwan and the United States are different, the purpose and rationale of them are similar; namely, to regulate the profession and to protect the public. Further, the passage of licensure laws regulating the practice of counselling has a significant impact on the development of the counselling profession itself, as well as on counsellor training programmes. The purpose of this paper is to discuss the requirements for counselling licensure in Taiwan and a single state in the USA, Ohio. Ohio was selected as a comparison state because it has had counselling licensure since 1984, and the legislation on which it is based is robust and frequently updated. The regulatory body, the 'Ohio Counsellor, Social Worker, Marriage and Family Therapy Board' (Ohio CSWMFT Board) is an active entity that conducts periodic reviews and updates licensure requirements. Further, both the authors have trained and worked in Ohio and thus have an understanding of counselling licensure laws and requirements in Ohio. In the Asian region, Taiwan is pioneering in the regulation of the standards and practice of counselling through licensure law. By comparing licensure laws and requirements in Taiwan and Ohio, it is possible to illuminate strengths and weaknesses in each, as well as compare differences and similarities. Suggestions for the on-going professionalization of counselling in both locations may be derived from this work.

The requirements for counselling licensure in Taiwan and Ohio are first outlined and compared, and then strengths and weaknesses of each are discussed. In addition, suggestions for the on-going professionalization of counselling in both locations are offered.

Requirements and standards in Taiwan and Ohio

The licensure laws in both Taiwan and Ohio regulate the title and practice of the profession of counselling and require applicants to hold at least a master's degree in counselling or a closely related field, as well as pass a written licensure examination before becoming licensed to practice. However, they differ in terms of specific requirements for admission to the examination as well as standards to practice counselling. Further, Ohio has two sequential levels of licensure (per Chapter 4757 of the Ohio Revised Code): (1) Licensed Professional Counsellor (PC), requirements for which include a master's degree in counselling and a pass score on the National Counsellor Examination (NCE) and (2) Licensed Professional Clinical Counsellor (PCC), involving an upgrade from a PC to a PCC status, after completing 2 years of experience under the supervision of a PCC-Supervising Counsellor (PCC-S), which includes the diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders, and a pass score on the National Clinical Mental Health Counsellor Examination (NCMHCE) (Ohio CSWMFT Board, 2011). Beyond PCC level, practitioners may apply for the PCC-Supervisor (PCC-S) designation after a minimum of 1 year of post-PCC experience and completing additional academic work or continuing education hours in clinical supervision. All licensed PCs and PCCs must complete 30 hours of continuing education during every 2-year renewal period with 3 hours of ethics training being mandated.

By contrast, Taiwan only has one level of licensure; that is, a counselling or clinical psychologist license, the holders of which are not permitted to diagnose mental and emotional disorders. In addition, the law in Taiwan further mandates that both licensed counsellors and clinical psychologists shall treat mental and emotional disorders under a physician or psychiatrist's diagnosis and note (per Articles 13 & 14 of the Psychologists Act [2001]).

Specific requirements and standards for counselling licensure in each location are outlined and compared per academic training, supervised experience, scope of practice, examinations and continuing education.

Academic training

As mentioned previously, both Taiwan and Ohio require a minimum of a master's degree from an accredited educational institution for counselling licensure. In Taiwan, applicants are required to hold a degree with a major in counselling psychology or a closely-related field, while in Ohio, applicants must hold a master's degree specifically in counselling. Graduate degrees in psychology or marriage and family therapy are not considered degrees in counselling (per Rule 4757-13-01 of the Ohio Administrative Code [Ohio CSWMFT Board, 2011]).

With regard to required course work and credit hours, Taiwan demands a total of at least 21 semester credit hours in the areas of psychological evaluation, testing and assessment; counselling and psychotherapy (including theories, techniques and professional ethics); mental health and abnormal psychology; as well as personality, social and developmental psychology. The topic area of counselling and psychotherapy must include at least four graduate courses, 3 semester hours for each course with a total of 12 semester hours, and all the other topic areas must include at least one graduate course (3 semester hours) for each. From the year 2016, Article 7 of the Regulations on Professional and Technical Senior Examination for Psychologists (2011) further specifies that applicants should have a total of at least 21 semester credit hours with at least one graduate course (3 semester hours) in each of the following seven areas: counselling and psychotherapy theory, counselling skills and techniques, professional ethics and codes, mental health and abnormal psychology, client appraisal and psychological assessment, group counselling and psychotherapy, as well as a practicum.

Ohio, on the other hand, requires a minimum of 60 semester hours (or 90 hours per quarter) of graduate credit, with at least one graduate course in each of the following 11 areas: human growth and development; counselling theory; counselling techniques; group dynamics; social and cultural foundations; lifestyle and career development; research and evaluation; appraisal of individuals; professional, legal and ethical responsibilities; a practicum and an internship. In addition to these core courses, for PC licensure at least 20 semester hours (or 30 hours per quarter) is required in the following areas: clinical psychopathology, personality and abnormal behaviour; evaluation of mental and emotional disorders; diagnosis of mental and emotional disorders; methods of prevention and intervention of mental and emotional disorders and treatment of mental and emotional disorders. The one-tiered system of licensure in Taiwan makes it easier to regulate and monitor. However, the three-tiered system of licensure in Ohio provides recognition to counsellors as they gain more experience.

Further, while both Taiwan and Ohio require a supervised internship for counselling licensure, the required hours and specific requirements differ in each location, as do the supervised experience requirements for PC and PCC status in Ohio. The specific requirements regarding the supervised internship and experience are detailed in the following section.

Supervised experience

As mentioned previously, Taiwan has just one level of licensure, with this requiring at least 1 year of internship experience at a medical institution, counselling agency, college counselling centre, community mental health centre or other organization approved for counselling practice by the Department of Health, Executive Yuan. With regard to the supervised internship, Taiwan requires a minimum of 43 weeks or 1500 hours, of which no less than 9 weeks or 360 hours shall be in direct services to clients (per Article 1–5 of the Enforcement Rules of the Psychologists Act [2011]). All interns need to be supervised by licensed counsellors, that is, counselling psychologists in Taiwan with more than 2 years of clinical experience. In Ohio, to qualify for the PC license, supervised practical experience at an appropriate site is required during the master's degree – no less than a total of 100 hours of practicum, of which 40 hours shall be in direct services to clients, and 600 hours of internship, of which 240 shall be in direct services. Furthermore, for PCC status in Ohio, Rule 4757-13-03 of the Administrative Code requires at least 2 years of post-professional counsellor licensure experience (3000 hours) in clinical counselling supervised by a PCC-S, which includes the diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders and conditions. For applicants with a doctorate in counselling in Ohio, at least 1 year and a minimum of 1500 hours of supervised experience must be completed after the award of the doctoral degree, and 1 year and a maximum of 1500 hours of supervised experience may be completed as a part of a doctoral internship at a Board-approved counsellor education programme.

As for supervision, applicants in Taiwan are required to have at least 50 hours of individual supervision during 1 year of internship experience (per Article 7 of the Regulations on Professional and Technical Senior Examination for Psychologists [2011]). Although Taiwanese law stipulates that counsellor trainees have to be supervised by licensed counsellors with more than 2 years of clinical experience, it does not further specify requirements pertaining to training supervision. Ohio, on the other hand, regulates counselling supervision (per Rule 4757-17-01 of the Administrative Code) with regard to the purposes, requirements and registration of training supervision. In addition to an average of 1 hour of face-to-face contact between the supervisor and supervisee for every 20 hours of work by the supervisee, the rule also specifies the qualifications and scope of practice of supervising counsellors for counsellor trainers engaging in training supervision for licensure as a PC or PCC.

Scope of practice

In Taiwan, licensed counsellors are not allowed to diagnose mental and emotional disorders. They are permitted only to treat mental and emotional disorders under a diagnosis and a note of physicians or psychiatrists. Thus, the scope of practice of counsellors in Taiwan is somewhat restricted. In Ohio, as a result of advocacy efforts on the part of the counselling profession, both PCCs and PCs may diagnose and treat mental and emotional disorders. PCCs may do so independently, but PCs may only undertake diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders under the work supervision of a psychologist, psychiatrist, professional clinical counsellor, independent marriage and family therapist or independent social worker (Ohio Revised Code, 4757.21). While both PCs and PCCs in Ohio can engage in the private practice of professional counselling, licensed counsellors in Taiwan can only do so after at least 2 years of practicing and receiving clinical training in the organizations approved by the Department of Health, Executive Yuan (per Articles 7 & 20 of the Psychologists Act). The ability of counsellors in Ohio to independently diagnose and treat mental and emotional disorders is a strength as it increases their professional scope

of practice. By contrast, this scope of practice is restricted in Taiwan, but this may also be viewed as a benefit because it could lead to collaboration between counselling professionals and other professionals such as physicians and psychiatrists in Taiwan.

Examinations

Both Taiwan and Ohio require passing a written examination for counselling licensure. In Taiwan, as long as applicants meet the educational and supervised internship requirements, they are eligible to sit the national licensure examination. The examination is administered by 'Examination Yuan' once each year, and the subjects involved encompass the psychological foundation of counselling; counselling and psychotherapy theories; counselling and psychotherapy practice as well as professional ethics; group counselling and psychotherapy; mental health and abnormal psychology; as well as client appraisal and psychological assessment (see Regulations on Professional and Technical Senior Examination for Psychologists).

In addition to passing a written examination for PC (NCE) and PCC (NCMHCE) licensure, Ohio has more specific requirements and policies regarding licensure examinations. For example, Rules 4757-13-02.B and 4757-13-03.C of the Administrative Code specify that applicants for the PC or PCC examinations shall pass the required examination prescribed by the counsellor professional standards committee within 2 years of application. If applicants fail the examination, they are required to wait for 90 days to re-take the examination. Furthermore, Rule 4757-13-05 of the Administrative Code regulates that applicants for PC and PCC licensure are only allowed to sit for the examination three times. Applicants who have not achieved a passing score after the third attempt are not allowed to re-take the examination until they have completed a total of 9 semester hours or 12 quarter hours of graduate coursework or other approved remediation (Ohio Revised Code 4757-13-05).

Continuing education

To maintain and expand professional competence as well as to ensure the provision of responsible and quality service to clients and community, both Taiwan and Ohio require continuing education for license renewal. In Taiwan, the counsellor license is valid for 6 years and counselling practitioners have to participate in continuing education within the period for license renewal. The requirements for license renewal are 180 hours of approved continuing professional education, of which no less than 12 hours shall be in the area of professional ethics and codes (Per Article 9 of Psychologists Registration and Continuing Education Guidelines [2003]).

In Ohio, PC and PCC licenses are valid for 2 years and the requirements for license renewal are 30 hours of approved continuing professional education within the period (see Ohio Administrative Code 4757-9-02). In addition, Rule 4757-9-02 A and B of the Administrative Code requires that for PCC-S counsellors 6 of the 30 hours shall be in supervision continuing education, and for all renewals, 3 of the 30 hours shall be in the area of legal and ethical responsibilities for professional counsellors. While both Taiwan and Ohio prohibit counselling practice with an expired or lapsed license, Ohio has more specific policies regarding restoration of the license after lapse. According to Rule 4757-7-01 of the Administrative Code, licensees are eligible to restore their license when it has been expired for less than 2 years and the continuing education requirements are met. However, licensees who fail to restore within 2 years following the expiration date of

their license have to apply as if never licensed. That is, they have to comply with the current education and supervision requirements as well as take an examination again to be licensed.

Discussion and comments

As mentioned previously, counsellor licensure in Taiwan is relatively new and is less detailed in many respects than Ohio licensure. Ohio passed counsellor licensure law in 1984 (Brooks & Gerstein, 1990), whereas Taiwan passed the licensure law for counsellors in 2001. By considering laws and policies pertaining to the practice of counselling in Taiwan and Ohio, interested parties might benefit from considering counselling in a wider and more global context, rather than placing a within-country or within-region focus on the issue.

Counsellor training and preparation programmes is one area that is worthy of attention in this regard. The United States has a longer history of establishing standards and accreditation for counselling training programmes, such as the Council for Accreditation of Counselling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) standards, which have been adopted in Chapter 4757 of Ohio Revised and Administrative Code (Ohio CSWMFT Board, 2011). By contrast, Taiwan has not yet established standards or criteria for counsellor training, but has taken the first important statutory step to establish counsellor regulation through licensure for counsellors. The educational requirements, including course work and supervised internship requirements, for counselling licensure in Taiwan are not as prescriptive when compared to those in Ohio. As Huang, Lin, and Chang (2010) suggested, Taiwan may want to consider policies regarding the education and practical training of counsellors so that consumers of counselling may have greater confidence in the equivalence of the counselling training of different counselling practitioners.

Ohio also has more detailed policies regarding licensure examinations. In Taiwan, once an applicant meets the educational and supervised internship requirements, they are eligible to sit for the examination with no time or period limits. However, in Ohio, applicants have to successfully complete the required examination within 2 years of application and can only attempt the examination three times. Applicants who fail the examination three times are required to complete further graduate coursework or other approved remediation to be allowed to re-take the examination. Taiwan may want to consider how they would handle cases where applicants for counselling licensure repeatedly fail the required examination.

Furthermore, due to the different background regarding the scope of practice for licensed counsellors in Taiwan and Ohio, the requirements for counselling licensure as well as licensure renewal are somewhat different. Licensed counsellors and psychologists in Taiwan are not allowed to diagnose mental and emotional disorders and are permitted only to treat mental and emotional disorders under a physician or psychiatrist's diagnosis and note. This may be another reason why the educational and supervised experience requirements for counselling licensure in Taiwan are not so stringent. This is an area that Taiwan may consider paying attention to in order to enhance the skills, capabilities and scope of practice of licensed counsellors.

Despite the fact that counsellors in Taiwan have a limited scope of practice when compared to counsellors in Ohio, requirements for licensure renewal in Taiwan are stricter in terms of required hours for continuing professional education each year as compared with those in Ohio. In Taiwan, 180 hours are required over a 6-year period, while in Ohio 30 hours are required over a 2-year period. In effect, if the hours of continuing education credit

were required annually, Taiwan would require 30 hours per year. However, Ohio has more specific policies on restoration of the license after expiration or lapse and stricter requirements for licensees who fail to renew their license. While Ohio may want to consider mandating more continuing education requirements given the challenging and complex work counsellors carry out, Taiwan could consider policies regarding restoration of an expired or lapsed license.

Considering the different history and background of counselling licensure in Taiwan and Ohio, it may be hard to compare and discuss the strengths and weaknesses regarding each. In the authors' opinions, the professionalization of counselling in Taiwan can be enhanced through amending the licensure law for counsellors in several areas. First, clinical supervision could be regulated and specified in the licensure requirements, especially for private practice. Although the law requires 2 years of clinical training before private practice, it does not further specify requirements for training or work supervision. Ohio has more specific requirements regarding counselling supervision, and Taiwan can take those into account to regulate appropriate training or work supervision for licensed counsellors who may consider private practice. Second, to provide adequate training supervision for interns and licensed counsellors as well as to protect consumer and client welfare, Taiwan may further regulate and specify supervision training and requirements for clinical supervisors in addition to 2 years of clinical experience. An experienced and astute clinician would benefit from education on topics such as the developmental needs of supervisees, models of supervision and effective ways to mentor counsellors-in-training. Third, licensed counsellors should be empowered to diagnose and treat mental and emotional disorders through adding appropriate training and supervision requirements, like those for PC or PCC status in Ohio. Fourth, to protect the public as well as ensure the quality and professionalism of counselling service, Taiwan could develop and establish more specific standards of ethical practice and professional conduct under the licensure law as well as the ethical principles of licensed counsellor or counselling psychologist associations. The law in Taiwan mandates the regional counsellor associations to regulate the ethical principles for their licensed counsellors. However, more specific standards and codes of ethical practice as well as disciplinary action for violation of the ethical codes need to be further stipulated. Finally, additional remediation and continuing education may be required for those counsellors who have violated the law or ethical practice.

Licensure for counsellors plays a vital role in regulating counselling training and practice. The standards set assure those who are utilizing counselling services that they are being served by trained professionals who have passed appropriate examinations. Counselling licensure bodies around the world would benefit from looking both within their own jurisdiction through a process of self-study and evaluation, as well as from looking outside their own boundaries to examine how other countries or regions are approaching this important issue. Laws and polices should be reviewed and amended periodically in order to keep pace with changes in the profession and changes globally.

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