

ACCANews

Official Semi-Annual Newsletter of Asia Christian Counselors Association, Issue 20/2



Editorial



The Covid-19 pandemic which started from the beginning of 2020 brought drastic changes to every aspect of life on earth. Due to movement restrictions, the delivery of counseling services also changed overnight to almost exclusively online.

ACCA's initial response was to produce three short videos for distribution to the Asian public with simple tips on how to cope with the most common mental health issues arising from home confinement. The topics covered the management of fear and anxiety, reduction of domestic quarrels and the way to grieve healthily in the absence of physical communal support over the loss of a loved one.

At the same time, ACCA actively encouraged all its existing member bodies in the eight Asian countries to be pro-active in reaching out to help the needy during this time of crisis. Soon, almost all the national Christian counseling associations initiated and promoted to the public free online counseling services manned by volunteer Christian counselors. Some of our

member bodies also ran webinars to teach the community on coping skills while others trained lay counselors in churches to equip them on how to address various mental health issues. Still others offered podcasts and online Covid-19 resources in their websites, Facebook and Instagram.

It is heartening to note that there are those national associations with better resources which had even gone an extra mile to distribute face masks and medical gowns to hospitals as well as food packages to the hardcore poor.

Despite all the disruptions, ACCA continued to function as usual as a regional Board, holding our semi-annual Board meeting by Zoom in May 2020. At our last meeting, we even adopted a Conflict of Interest policy as our SOP. Board members also come together online once a week to pray for our ministry.

As an effort to provide direction to Asian Christian counselors in facing the new normal, ACCA recorded a 90-minutes panel discussion entitled "How Will the Covid-19 Pandemic Affect Christian Counseling in Asia?" In addition,

Members:

AKKI (Indonesia)
PACC (Philippines)
NACC (Malaysia)
ACCI (India)
CCCC (China)
ACCS (Singapore)
MCCA (Mongolia)
CCAT (Thailand)

Associate Member:

CCAA (Australia)

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AKKI in partnership with the Reformed Theological Seminary of Indonesia went the extra mile to distribute face masks to the hospitals as well as food packages to the poor families affected by the Covid-19 lockdown in Jakarta.

we are also currently planning a monthly webinar for Asian viewers to talk on Post-Covid Leadership to shape Asian Christian counseling through the opportunity accorded by the crisis.

Although it was announced in Bali that our next Asian Christian Counseling will be held in Singapore in 2021, the pandemic has derailed our

plans and at this moment, the movement restrictions in Singapore are still in force. We are looking into alternatives like switching to a virtual conference in the event social distancing is still not lifted or the registration for attendance is not promising. Please pray for us with regards to this event as well as for the future direction for Christian counseling in Asia.

ACCA Covid-19 Resources

ACCA Panel Discussion on “How will the Covid-19 Pandemic Affect Christian Counseling in Asia?” (90 mins.)

Panelists: Dr. Simon Neo, Dr. David Nikles, Dr. Yakub Susabda, Dr. Reupah Philips

Facilitator: Dr. Edmund Ng

To view the video, please click on this link:

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1Rr9aH9CwI4uAym443orfqnu3J9uUOaUi>

Short Video Clips with simple tips to help people experiencing mental health issues during the Covid-19 pandemic.

1) **Reducing domestic quarrels** during enforced staying at home. To view, click on this link:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1F5VZcyID1WwLXypt09IARxOAmUeNq3h_/view?usp=sharing

2) **Managing fear and anxiety** during enforced staying at home. To view, click on this link:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/12NeYKkAa5cPY-nRW2kRrn3vZlZTRfrgo/view?usp=sharing>

3) **Grieving in a healthy manner** following the loss of a loved one through the Covid-19 virus. To view, click:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RZHqrgEX275TRPAAv919LSBMgWEGaT2O/view?usp=sharing>

Let us as Christian counselors be relevant to what is happening in our midst and do our part in extending God’s kingdom in this time of global crisis.

Books by Asian Authors

Whilst acknowledging the contributions and limitations of Christian counseling knowledge and techniques from the West, given our differing focus and contextual realities, we need to develop our own resources that are uniquely Asian.

Indeed, what will bring us together as Asian Christian counselors are our Eastern identities, common theological persuasions, economic and environmental struggles and the urgent need for more Christian counseling resources that embrace the sufferings and pains of Asia.

We Asians must rise up to meet our local needs! Hence, more Asian Christian counselors are encouraged to engage in thinking and writing, especially with regards to the many portions of the Bible that contain much of folk psychology presently left untapped by Christian counseling interpretations, to develop a deeper interface of psychology and theology that is spiritually and culturally-sensitive, holistic, existential and transformational for professional practice, people-helping and ministry in Asia.

ACCA invites Asian authors to list their books on Christian counseling or related subjects in our website for free promotion. The books must contain a substantial interface of psychology and theology and not just only psychological content.

The following information are to be submitted to president1@asiancca.org :

- a) Title and synopsis of the book (max. 200 words)
- b) Photo of the front cover
- c) Name and CV of the author (max. 150 words)
- d) Price in USD
- e) Where to order the book.

Note: You may submit as many books as you wish. However, selection of listing is solely at ACCA's discretion.

Submission of Short Articles for ACCANews:

ACCA invites the contribution of short professional articles on Christian counselling written by Asians for publication in ACCANews. Kindly email to president1@asiancca.org the following details:

- i) Article in Word format (max. 1,000 words);
- ii) Content comprises a substantial interface of psychology and theology, and not just on psychology alone;
- iii) Short C.V. of the writer (max. 150 words);
- iv) Author's email address for feedback from readers.

Short Article:

The role of Online Counseling in the Covid-19 Era

By Dr. Reupah Phillips, Board Member, ACCA

Recent events of Covid-19 and the related lockdown has skyrocketed the need for online services. These unprecedented times have led to unprecedented adaptation by people to do all their transactions online. More than ever, we are in times that demand us to move away our current practice of the same location counselling to online counseling in order to serve our clients and reach out to them despite of the constraints in the current situation such as the lockdown and social distancing. This form of counselling is highly accessible to people around the globe to gain access to basic counselling and mental health services. It is also applicable when a preferred or more experienced counsellor is not in the same vicinity as the client (Wong, K. P., Bonn, G., Tam, C. L., & Wong, C. P., 2018).

There has always been a struggle with face-to-face traditional counselling in the east where many individuals find it hard to have a face-to-face counselling session (Barak et.al., 2008). When considering the Asian population and culture, there is strong stigma regarding the use of mental health services and many would hesitate to seek help because of this stigma. Research in this culture has depicted that the Asian community are not comfortable with the idea of self-disclosure or bringing their problems out into the open. Based on these cultural restrictions and barriers, online counselling would serve as a boon since this is done in the privacy of one's own room. It would help tackle many issues which would have otherwise been left untreated (Rodda and Dan, 2014).

Distance Therapy

Research regarding distance therapy goes back many decades. Therapist sought the use of airmail correspondence and telephonic conversations to assist clients who could not meet in person, which has been seen since the start of the 20th century (Perla et al., 2011). In the past, therapy that was administered electronically would be referred by many terminologies such as teletherapy, e-therapy,

and cyber counselling (Barak, Klein, & Proudfoot, 2009).

Mental health needs are on the rise and the same location counseling could be restrictive at times. Online opens up multiple avenues to reach to people across culture and geographical locations. It is essential to break the myth that online counseling is not possible or that it is not as effective as the same location at this stage when we need to attend to our clients during this crisis.

Effectiveness of Online Counselling

In a study conducted by Cohen and Kerr (1999), one of the first studies done on the topic of online counselling and its effectiveness, they measured the difference between a computer mediated counselling service and a face-to-face counselling service. It was measured on the basis of anxiety that was faced by the client with the therapist. The researchers also were able to collate data from the participants of the study on the rating given to the therapist. There were several criteria: "expertness, attractiveness and trustworthiness" (p.18). What was noticed was that there were no functional differences between the two groups. Both groups had the same decrease in anxiety symptoms.

Procedure for Online Counselling

Clients are easily able to access their therapist through emails or through support groups (Mallen, Vogel, Rochlen, & Day, 2005). The client can schedule an appointment through a website after which the client is able to meet the therapist personally at another platform, where instructions are made available when the appointment is booked. From the therapist's point of view, consultations with colleagues on a particular case or collaborations with organizations can be done in a more efficient manner. It is also necessary to be aware that online supervision is available and also effective like the same location supervision. Getting online supervision instead of same

location will also enable you to test the effectiveness of the online counselling.

Caution and Ethics:

Since the online availability and usage has increased, and all forms of networking through the use of internet has been facilitated, one can only imagine that online counselling is here to stay. However, caution and care need to be observed keenly when offering these services.

It is important to highlight the advantages of this form of therapy. The ability for the therapist to offer multicultural counselling is a big bonus as well as a bane. The therapist has to be adept in handling different cultures and backgrounds. The easy accessibility and cost effectiveness make this form of therapy most sort after. In this digital age when people are well equipped with the internet, it makes it easy for clients to connect with the therapist.

With this advent, there are many disadvantages. First of all, we need to address the dehumanizing therapeutic environment. This include the lack of empathy and the inability to identify the non-verbal cues and facial expressions.

The therapist also has to adhere to the licensure requirements that are required with each country. The therapist has to keep in mind the privacy requirements and the trust considerations when dealing with clients of different nationalities (Jo Ann Oravec, 2000).

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996

The HIPAA privacy rules provide a format to follow when maintaining psychotherapy notes. As defined by HIPAA, psychotherapy notes mean notes recorded in any medium by the therapist. They have to be separated from the rest of the individual's medical record. This has to be maintained with privacy and should not be available for public viewing. This has to be done with much thought and concern by the therapist for the well-being of the client.

Conclusion:

Today, there is a great need for online counseling due to the hectic lifestyles and stretched working

hours which would lead to frustration. With the boom of internet facilities such as video conferencing, it helps a therapist to be available for the client when the need arises.

With this rise of demand towards Online Counselling, it is only a matter of time when this form of counselling will become the norm or the modus operandi for therapists all over the world to connect with clients. Therefore, as counselors we need to take on the responsibility to advocate for the technology assisted counseling.

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ACCS (Singapore)

ACCS started the year like the rest of the world, being in uncertainty and in the midst of the coronavirus pandemic. To extend support and encouragement, the team posted some resources on the website to provide information and understanding regarding the psychological impact along with coping tips. With all physical gatherings halted at the moment, ACCS is now looking at connecting with our members digitally and reaching out through online networking and training sessions. Preparations are also underway for our Annual General Meeting and for a new Executive Committee to come on board.



Photo: ACCS's Covid19 Resources in their website

ACCI (India)

We have great support from our members to provide counseling services to the Indian community in response to the Covid 19 pandemic. They conducted webinars and trainings to those who are affected. The responses from our members also included involvements in social work to the homeless individuals, migrant workers and slum dwellers. Our Promotional Secretary is also actively involved with individual Christian counselors in Sri Lanka, Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh to promote Christian counseling in those countries.



Photo: President of ACC India with community volunteers making medical masks and gowns.

MCCA (Mongolia)

The setting up of MCCA slowed down in the first half of 2020 due to the Covid19 pandemic but we are picking up step by step. Our planned trainings and seminars have been postponed. Nevertheless, MCCA obtained our official bank accounts for our operations and met the requirement of the Mongolian Tax Authority. In Mongolia, Facebook is the most popular social media and so we have created a Facebook group and started to introduce our association and its purpose through posts and live videos. We have 191 members in this FB group and more than 10 people have become official members of MCCA. We are presently planning to organize an official launching of MCCA, a meeting of all members, as well as trainings and seminars.



Photo: First meeting of MCCA on 13 Jun 2020.

CCAT (Thailand)

CCAT held the Sukjai Telemental Health Care Project in May 2020. It is a free counseling program using Careline and VDO call, manned by 22 psychologists and counselors as volunteers. CCAT has been creating materials in Thai to increase awareness of mental health via CCAT Facebook (www.facebook.com/ccat.thailand). We are currently producing a short video series on suicide. CCAT together with CWF and McGilvery Leadership Institute will be hosting the CWF 60 hours Lay Counseling Training online.



Picture: CCAT's telemental health care

