



Counselling Psychology in Kenya: A Contemporary Review of the Developing World by Geoffrey Wango, (2015). Nairobi: Kenya Literature Bureau.

Reviewed by Nicholas Esadia

The role of counselling in modern living is highly significant. There is strong evidence of the potential benefit of psychological treatment to individuals with a wide range of social and mental health problems. However, the emerging profession of psychological counselling in Kenya, as in other developing countries, needs to absorb and adapt to rapid and profound development. This requires various aspects of life and professions — including counselling and psychology — to be more defined. This is the rationale of *Counselling Psychology in Kenya*.

I chose to review this book with a lot of excitement from a list of publications for several reasons: (1) The *Counsellor Magazine* is about counselling in developing countries; (2) *Counselling Psychology in Kenya* raises issues that many practicing counsellors and students want clarified; (3) *Counselling Psychology in Kenya* extends to include certain key aspects that are pertinent to modern living; (4) The author is an expert in counselling and offers highly thrilling informative content; (5) It is a general as well as professional book on counselling.

Dr Geoffrey Wango, the author, is a counselling psychologist and Senior Lecturer in the Department of Psychology at the University of Nairobi. He has immense experience in counselling as a practitioner, supervisor, teacher and lecturer, and has several other publications to his name. I come from a position that holds that a professional practitioner must have knowledge and skills—and this is evident in this highly professional book. The author's choice of language and topics reflects a skilled writer who chooses both the topics and words carefully — and effectively communicates counselling as a profession and a helping process. The book is therefore a source of new and important knowledge on counselling psychology particularly as it relates to Kenya and the developing world.

The book starts by recognising the professions and practice of counselling psychology. It is interesting that the book does not delve into topical philosophies of whether counselling and theories as practised in the Western world are appropriate to Africa. Instead, it seeks to inform both counsellor practitioners and trainees on the need to develop counselling into a helping profession that is built on certain key principles — professional competence and ethics — while honouring the deep dimensions in which helping can be offered. This actually turns out to be a major strength rather than a weakness though I must admit that at first, I would have considered the philosophy and prominence on same as pertinent. But Wango as the professional goes ahead with the professionalism and builds a rather new philosophy of adherence into counselling professional growth and development.

Reading through the book, one discovers that Kenya — and the developing world — is a society undergoing heavy transition at the social-political-economic fronts. Subsequently, there is a lot of turbulence that includes

political uncertainty and ethnicity, the threats of terrorism, sexuality and relationship issues, HIV and AIDS and other terminal illnesses, religion and spiritualism, educational challenges and reforms, family crisis as well as technological advancement. The author asserts correctly that these issues are not necessarily unique to Kenya or developing countries, and need to be contextualised. Thus, the demand for counselling is greater and wider and more urgent in a bid to resolve these and other issues. Wango argues on the need for counselling practice and services that is client-centred.

The book sets out to demystify counselling as a profession through a splendid background of guidance and counselling in traditional societies. It highlights the past, present and future of counselling, particularly essential knowledge and research to enhance the profession's adoption in a more traditional-cum-contemporary society such as Kenya. This is through a positivist method of gathering information on the development of guidance and counselling in Kenya and weaving it into a complex subjectivity that encompasses researcher as well as competence on the practitioner. The book offers a practitioners' perspective that allows them to appreciate the potential of a research approach that acknowledges and explores everyday practice.

The early chapters are meticulously done and pinpoint the often unrecognised importance of three aspects of counselling psychology: information on counselling (counsellor competence); professionalism (accreditation); and professional ethics (research, improved practice) that must be embraced in the personal development of the practitioner. There is also an emphasis on research to be able to at once connect with personal dimensions of practice. This highlights a passion for counselling. Then there is the ability of the reflective practitioner to stand back and take a look at counselling practice. Practice-based research must stem from the more systematic

investigations based on modern practice.

A dominant discourse in the book is what counts as evidence in counselling. Deductive reasoning must dominate various models of counselling but once again, evidence-based research, as exemplified through practice and systematic reviews, must set the standards for acceptance. Dr Wango does not shy away from advocating for viable evidence research in a country where research is slowly gaining prominence. I was particularly surprised by this almost meta-analysis viewpoint of evidence-based counselling practice and I asked myself whether the author may not be asking too much in our context. Nonetheless, the ground for professionalism laid out in the book is laudable.

The book, it seems to me, comes into its own when it come to professionalism. I am not sure whether the positivist approaches and the epistemological and methodological viewpoints are too much an insider knowledge derived from practice on the author. Still, it would certainly be useful if the knowledge, skills and attitudes exemplified in the book are embedded in counselling particularly in Kenya. The practice-based approach also encourages counselling practitioners to engage in an ongoing evaluation of practice. This could be the visionary of the future counsellor. There is also the suggestion that we should generate knowledge with an openness for nuances that are practice-based in our context. The author has it; I pray the counselling practitioners grasp it too.

The book is strong in many professional and practical aspects including the general organisation and arrangement of parts. Part one (Chapters 1 to 4) consists of a background to the profession. Part two (Chapters 5 to 8) explores the major professional development in counselling, including counsellor competence (Chapter 5), professional ethical standards (Chapter 6) as well as the philosophical foundations (Chapter 7), and these offer sound advice that will be of use to both researchers and practitioner (counselling in practice,

Chapter 8). It is in the third part that counselling psychological services become even more fascinating (Chapters 9 to 12). Overall, the book offers a useful digest of received wisdom drawn from the present and future, while also emphasising the meaning-making that the practitioner, researcher and trainee can reflexively engage with on their journey towards critical appreciation of counselling as a profession, and in our context.

A very significant aspect that does not escape the author is the role of technological development in counselling psychology practice and research, particularly in the developing world. The author envisions that the use of technological advancement is quintessential to practice and research for such countries as a result of distance, inadequate facilities, few professionals and unequalled proportion in resource allocation among the general population. Information and technological advancement has a part to play in health care services including counselling. Laptops, Smartphones and computers enable access to information and psychological assistance. Practitioners can make exceptional use of technological advancement — including the Internet — to ensure enhanced services with the use of phones, emails, Skype, video chats, Face book, Twitter, You tube and teleconferencing.

The book offers guidelines for critical reflection that many practitioners and researchers will find valuable. The professional and ethical subtlety and complexity of counselling research and practice are well recognised and addressed. The book ends with several concluding remarks in which the author provides a personal reflection that encourages meaning and significance of our practice. I am not sure but I tend to think that Dr. Wango is being too professional, or is this the future of not just counselling but all professions?

In the end, one appreciates the counselling profession (as well as others) and its impact in our lives.

Nicholas Esadia is an Editor at the Jomo Kenyatta Foundation, E-mail: nicholuskidwaro@gmail.com.