

# THE CONTRIBUTION OF BUDDHIST COUNSELING FOR EMPOWERMENT IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE\*

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## Abstract

Social work refers to work by people of religion before professional social work was born. There should be something which infuses both of them. Buddhism believe that human need loving kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy and equanimity, the four infinite states of mind, those are key factors to develop heart of mercy, free from suffering that orient every action of Buddhism to human beings and for human beings, that's not only Buddhism's criterion but also foundation of compassion and companion of resources take part in Social Work. Social work profession is the compassion of human, but for Social Work profession it depends on social opinion, values, standard, lifestyle, national characteristics of each community that was shaped basically on national culture. Buddhism always gives prominence to mercy and compassionate. Buddhism is primarily concerned with ways and means to get rid of this sorrow. It is in this context that the idea of social service in terms of Buddhism becomes important in social work practice. Buddhist principles based therapeutic intervention utilizes the Buddhist model of ending suffering to help clients to deal with psychological issues.

**Keywords:** Contribution, Buddhist Counseling, Empowerment, Social Work Practice

## Introduction

Empowerment was first used in the mid-17th century. Historically, it has been described as the process of giving power or empowering others. In other words, empowerment may be understood as a way of assisting others to help themselves. In contemporary descriptions of empowerment, the term has become mainstream and well-known, and it is a frequently used term in society. Modern definitions are similar to historical definitions, but modern definitions are broader and include the process of enabling others to gain control and power. Empowerment involves the practice of increasing power from individuals to large communities so that individuals and collective groups can take action to improve their situations. This description explains empowerment as a way of enabling people to possess or to delegate power. Empowerment may derive from outside influences, but it is also something that can be generated within a person, which is called self-empowerment (Gutierrez,L. M., 1995:229-237). Empowerment method focuses on the achievement of goals and change of systems by utilizing available strengths, resilience, and resources. By focusing on competence rather than deficits in individual or social functioning, the empowerment model supports resourcefulness and the development of skills to remove social barriers for individuals and communities. Being empowered is not a static condition but rather a dynamic and cyclical one. Human individual and social systems are in perpetual motion, either getting better or getting worse at any given moment. Empowerment indicates one's perception of self-efficacy and essential value is mirrored in and accentuated by social relationships and the larger environment. Empowerment is a confluence of the individual, the interpersonal, and the sociopolitical where the experience of power in each sphere continually replenishes the others (Peterson, N. A., Lowe, J. B., Aquilino, M. L., & Schneider, J. E.,2005: 233-244).

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Empowerment involves the enhancement of an individual's capacity to know, to act and to enjoy. It brings confidence, awareness, mobility, ability to choose and capacity to control all types of resources and above all to possess decision making power. Meena Charanda (2019:229-240) Empowerment can be achieved through developing positive role models. The need for empowering individuals is vital in order to identify the real and appropriate needs, encourage commitment, ensure sustainability and personal development and inculcate self-esteem and equal opportunity to share power. The aim of empowerment is to transform the society through the transformation of individuals. we can see the difference of empowerment and the role that it plays in the formation of individual's personality as a rational, confident, independent human being. Empowerment deals with different aspects of human life also plays an important role while we asses the status of an individual in the society. It tells us that an individual is empowered means he or she is independent, confident, and this is possible because he or she has realized himself or herself as well as society also has realized his or her nature. Empowerment is a multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and multi-layered concept. Empowerment means moving from a position of enforced powerlessness to one of power.

## **Social worker and Empowerment**

Social workers aim to improve people's lives by helping with social and interpersonal difficulties, promoting human rights and wellbeing. Social workers protect children and adults with support needs from harm. From helping keep a family under pressure together to supporting someone with mental health problems, social work is a varied, demanding, often emotional and very rewarding career (BSW, 2022). These are some of duties of the social worker such as to identify individuals and groups in need of support, assess the needs, circumstances, and support systems of clients, intervene in crisis situations involving abuse, mental health emergencies, or trauma, and provide psychotherapy services if a licensed clinical social worker.

Social workers perform all of these duties and more in many different contexts. Empowerment in social work uses intervention methods to help guide people toward building autonomy and control in their lives. This approach recognizes that oppression is a primary contributor to disempowerment, which is experienced across a number of marginalized groups. Empowerment seeks to empower individuals and communities to gain personal, interpersonal and political power to better their lives. This work also strives to challenge systems that hinder these groups from meeting their needs( Holly Martinez,2022). As we see, there are four level of empowerment that social work have to work with; 1) individual empowerment, 2) family empowerment, 3) organization empowerment and 4) community empowerment. At the family level, social workers are concerned with the interrelationships among the members of the family such as the husband, the wife and their children. The family empowerment is the enhancement of the management, arrangement and betterment of the family life through enhancing abilities. At the institution level, the empowerment means creation of new structures and possibilities, as institution is a larger group of individuals working for attaining some common good.

## **Buddhism and Empowerment**

Religion and spirituality are two constructs that have become inextricably and inappropriately linked in the professional literature, despite their differences. Although religion

and spirituality are not necessarily mutually exclusive, they remain separate and distinct constructs. For example, one may express her or his spirituality through religion, whereas another may feel that religion inhibits the full expression of individual spirituality. Hence, some people will find religion and spirituality to be mutually exclusive. It is important to note that there is no consensus on the definitions of the terms spirituality and religion, and many scholars continue to merge the two erroneously. People may generally have a similar lack of precision regarding their religious and spiritual self-perceptions; this presentation is most likely a reflection of their personal experiences with, and understanding of, religion and spirituality in their lives(Richards, P. S., & Bergin, A. E. (Eds.) ,2000). Empowerment is possible through the adaptation of Buddhist teachings which will help in developing a peaceful society. Only a peaceful society can ensure creative and progressive thinking of individuals. The scriptures like Buddhist canonical literature declare that for establishing peace in society and bringing about progress at all levels. Empowerment is the capacity for building up confidence, insight and understanding, and developing personal skills. It is the ability to analyze situations and communicate more effectively with others. Kloos and Moore also discuss the role that religion can play in empowerment, and the theories of Buddhism can give community psychologists a deeper understanding of the concept of empowerment, particularly on the individual level. On an individual level, empowerment has typically been defined as a process and outcome in which individuals gain greater control over their lives (Rappaport, 1981), aided by, and resulting in, enhanced self-esteem and enhanced self-efficacy (Zimmerman, 1995).

In the context of Buddhist philosophy, the two previously discussed outcomes of empowerment enhance the ability of the practitioner to feel compassion, to empathize with others, and to act in an altruistic fashion. Again, this is different from the mastery focused community psychology definition of empowerment which has traditionally ignored how compassion, empathy, and altruism can be both empowering processes as well as outcomes of empowerment. The decreased obsession with self enables the practitioner to be more fully present to actual reality instead of acting and reacting according to conditioned perceptions which distort reality. Added to this, the insights into an individual's thoughts, feelings, and perceptions give the practitioner a greater ability to empathize with the plight of others, as well as greater awareness of the intentions behind his or her actions. Buddhist concept of self seems out of place. It would seem that the outcome of Buddhist practice is not necessarily enhanced self-esteem, but rather a peace of mind and insight into reality that supports the individual to let go of their over-identification with an enduring self. In a way, the effect is to feel good about yourself by letting go of yourself. The well-being that comes from this freedom, referred to in Tibetan Buddhism as Clear Seeing, is spoken about by Sogyal Rinpoche: "As this Clear Seeing deepens, grasping at a false self, or ego, has dissolved, and we simply rest, as much as we can, in the nature of mind, this most natural mind state that is without any reference or concept, hope, or fear, yet with a quiet but soaring confidence—the deepest form of well-being imaginable" (Rinpoche, 1993, p. 76).

### **The Contribution of Buddhist Counseling for Empowerment.**

Kin Cheung (George) Lee, Alice Oh, Qianru Zhao and others( 2017) stated that Buddhist counseling is a process of reducing suffering in individuals using wisdom and interventions from Buddhism, which aims to train the human mind to attain a state of equanimity, joy, and liberation. In the last 2,500 years, Buddhism has been a choice of healing method for millions of individuals but little is known about the components of Buddhist

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counseling from a psychological perspective. Many empirically supported contemporary psychotherapies such as mindfulness based cognitive behavioral therapy, dialectical behavior therapy, and acceptance and commitment therapy incorporate various Buddhist practices and ideas into their treatment modalities. Furthermore, there has been an increase in clinical and research endeavors to consider religiosity and spirituality in psychotherapy over the past decade. Due to these very reasons, it is crucial to demystify the process of traditional Buddhist counseling in order to increase mental health professionals' cultural awareness of this fourth largest religion in the world and provide considerations and recommendations for professionals who are interested in applying Buddhist ideas and practices in treatment. Adam McKenzie Hodgins (2010: 6) Buddhist practice, mindfulness and concentration work together to reduce suffering. Concentration helps the practitioner notice the various thoughts, body sensations, and reactions that come and go so quickly. Deep concentration helps the individual see the truth of the Dhamma in every phenomenon that arises.

Phra Medeedhammapranat, and Phramaha Atidet Satiwaro (2019) revealed from their study that for Buddhist Counseling Psychology's the Buddha's methods and followers of counseling, we find that is a process that the Buddha sermonized to human beings whom they had problems with suffering and they found the way of the cessation of suffering. Buddha explained the problems clearly and attracted one's mind on practicing along to his advises and to aim at solving problems until they would find happiness and could see the way of the solution of suffering (Dhukka). The Lord Buddha was a morally good friend and a good adviser. He let the decision-making up to them and get rid of all sufferings. The Methodological process and activities in supporting it's such as preaching, listening to the problem, Dhamma dialogue, having the word of comfort, suggestion, mental development etc. The model is based on the concept of being Kalyanamitra (being a good friend) that called another's utterance and reasoned attention. The example cases that are demonstrated can confirm the achievement of Buddha's methods of counseling and to be really able to solve problems. Each kind of methods is suitable for individual who asks for advice and the methods can be divided into 5 groups such as 1) stories health problems 2) stories mental problems 3) stories social problems 4) stories sickness problems 5) stories opinion and intellectual problems. The text of each example case has been analyzed the methods of counseling at the end of each story, different characters but there is the same objective that is helping human beings to find the cessation of suffering. R P C R Rajapakse (2017) Buddhism emphasizes the significance of counseling to the people. The Buddha over two millennia ago said that all living beings are insane. Every person is suffering from some sort of mental and psychological condition. But more often than not these psychological conditions are brought on by us. It is the role of the Buddhist monks in the society as a spiritual instructor to heal the society. Counseling integrated with Buddhist teachings would enhance the power of counseling and can be a fruitful way to accomplish the social needs. People today are facing many political, economic, environmental, and social problems due to the fast development of industrialization and globalization. These problems have a tremendous impact on the physical and mental well-being of the people. People are depressed, agonized, and may be addicted to alcohol or drugs on the one hand suffering from different kinds of physical illnesses on the other. In this background counseling has become very important. Counseling is not only for people who have problems in life but it can also be applied to common people in order to improve their life with well-informed choices and problem-solving. The Buddhism play a significant role in serving and healing people. As a

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social figure and a spiritual leader, the Buddhist priest is expected to take responsibility in delivering counseling service for the welfare of the society.

For the basic counseling process and the qualities of the counselor, the western approach to Counseling is considered as a process that follows several steps: 1)Developing a Rapport, 2) Information gathering,3) Understanding and clarification of the problem, 4) Provision of specific information which are not available to the counselee, 5) Deciding on the approach to solve the problem the counselee encounters. For qualities of a counselor, Carl Rogers proposes some conditions that should be adopted by a counselor. He found that these conditions are necessary to be implemented and sufficient for the process. They are 1) Relationship of client and counselor, 2) Client's incongruence, 3) Genuineness of counselor, 4) Unconditional positive regard, 5)Accurate empathy, 6) Client's perception. Buddhism and Carl Rogers share striking similarities on the qualities and personalities of the counselor with some slight differences. The major similar qualities of genuineness, non-judgmental acceptance, and empathy are proposed by both schools. Some qualities of a good counselor are read in early Buddhist scriptures, like Udayisutta of the Anguttaranikaya. This Sutta demonstrates five effective qualities of a good counselor,1) Gradual talk (Anupubbikatham); A counselor possesses the quality of presenting the dharma in a gradual way according to the level of the defilement in the patience like from talk of giving to morality then to four noble truths, 2) Talk on sequence (Pariyayadassavi katham); A counselor should have the quality of giving the dharma in whatever is good and showing the cause, 3) Compassionate talk (Anuddayatam paticca katham); A counselor should cultivate compassion towards the counselee and treat him/her with the sense of helping, 4) Talk without material expectation (Naamisantaro katham): A counselor should help the client with compassion without expectation of material gains, and 5) Non-judgment (Attanañcaparañca anupahacca katham): A counselor should not compare himself or herself with others and praise himself or herself.

We should not forget to mention about the founder; the Buddha, discussing on the Buddhist counseling. He was not only a religious teacher, but also a great psychotherapist and counselor. The healing of the Buddha to Kisagotami is one of the qualities that show his greatness as a counselor. The scenario of her shows vividly that she was totally mad. The cause of her neurosis is the death of her only dearest child. She ran from physician to physician, and spiritual teacher to spiritual teacher; just for waking up her child. None of them could console her despite surplus more pain and sorrow telling 'your baby is dead'. She, eventually, came to the place where the Buddha was and asked for his help. He was unlike to them, gave an assignment to bring master-seed from a house in which nobody had died. He gave a word of promise that if she could bring, he would cure her child. But there was no house wherein no one had died. Every house where she asked response either grandmother, father, brother or son died a few days back. These responses illuminated her to understand about impermanence of life; death is inevitable. This technique of the Buddha highlights the importance of analysis and understanding of a counselee's condition. He did not directly respond her that her child was dead. If he did, she might not accept it. He knew that advising or teaching her the right way would not be an effective way. Instead, he tried to calm down her powerful defilement of grief and sorrow by giving an assignment for self realization or self- awareness (Ankaching Marma,2017).

This Buddhist understanding of suffering is the theoretic foundation of Dhamma Therapy, a psycho-social intervention incorporated mindfulness practice and other Buddhist cognitive training to help clients to develop right view and understanding of the stressful situation that

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they are dealing with. When talking about the techniques of Buddhist psychotherapy or counseling, people usually think of mindfulness techniques only. There are other techniques of counseling found in Buddhism like counseling through instruction which can be brought into play to modern psychotherapy and counseling like mindfulness meditation is being blended. The methods of counseling through instruction are instructions; guidelines, advices, suggestions, etc. that are counseled to the clients. The followings are the different methods of counseling through instruction that are found in various occasions of the Buddhist scriptures. Progressive talk (Anupubbikatha): This technique is given to the counselee who is with powerful defilements in order to calm down them. Level of intelligence and defilements determine type of a person. A person, with low intelligence and more defilement, needs to go in gradual process so that he or she could grasp the conversation. In the procedure of gradual talk, the counselor could talk about generosity, compassion, eight worldly conditions, morality(Ankaching Marma,2017). According to the Mental Health Wellness Association, social workers, counselors, psychologists, psychiatrists, and therapists are all considered mental health professionals. But while counselors and social workers both operate in mental health, the focus and scope of their work differs. Social workers help people cope with various problems, which can include mental health issues, but also can encompass justice system involvement and access to housing, healthcare, and public assistance. Social workers offer emotional support to people working through challenging situations and connect them with additional resources, if necessary. Psychologist or Mental health counselors offer their individual clients therapeutic support through listening and helping them create plans of action to work through mental health issues. Similarly, social workers provide support to clients in ways such as intervening with parents to help a child's emotional growth. They also link families experiencing similar emotional issues together, and visit homes to help parents have positive interactions with their child. Social work is a profession concerned with helping individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their individual and collective well-being. It aims to help people develop their skills and abilities to use their own resources and those of the community to resolve problems. Clinical social workers use a variety of mental health interventions (talk therapy) and community-based social workers focus on social interventions at the community level. Counseling is a field which related to psychology according to the modern perspective. Buddhism is considered as a religion or philosophy by the most of the scholars. But according to Professor P. D. Premasiri there are many ways of doing philosophy, and philosophy of way of living is one among them. Buddhism is a way of living which discusses the philosophy of way of living. According to his interpretation, Buddhism discusses the most of the subject areas which are related to the people's living. The Buddha who wanted to find a solution for human's suffering was much more aware about the problems of humans either economics, politics, education, ethics, physical and mental illnesses or any problems which challenge human's happiness. Buddhism includes an analysis of human psychology, emotion, cognition, behavior and motivation along with therapeutic practices. The Buddhist psychological terminology is discussed by ethical overtones. It has two therapeutic goals: the healthy and virtuous life of a householder (samacariya) and the ultimate goal of nirvana, the total cessation of suffering. Buddhist counseling is a process of reducing suffering in individuals using wisdom and interventions from Buddhism, which aims to train the human mind to attain a state of equanimity, joy, and liberation. In the last 2,500 years, Buddhism has been a choice of healing method for millions of individuals but little is known about the components of Buddhist counseling from a psychological perspective. Many empirically

supported contemporary psychotherapies such as Mindfulness Based Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (MBCBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), and acceptance and commitment therapy incorporate various Buddhist practices and ideas into their treatment modalities. Furthermore, there has been an increase in clinical and research endeavors to consider religiosity and spirituality in psychotherapy over the past decade. Due to these very reasons, it is crucial to demystify the process of traditional Buddhist counseling in order to increase mental health professionals' cultural awareness of this fourth largest religion in the world and provide considerations and recommendations for professionals who are interested in applying Buddhist ideas and practices in treatments(Sumedha Viraj Sripathi Ukwatta,2017:21-38)

## Conclusion

Buddhism is considered to be a moderate religion without rigid formalities, in which compassion and respect for life are inherent and death is regarded as an integral part of life. Because of its non-theistic approach, some call it more a philosophy than a religion. According to Buddhist teachings, it is a fundamental error to think of one's self as existing separate from others. Both social work values and Buddhism teach the individuals to understand their responsibility towards oneself, the family, and the society. Buddhism and social work values caution the social worker not to neglect himself or herself, his or her family and the society in which he or she is living while he or she is discharging his or her professional duties. Both Buddhism and social work teach the people to respect and obey elders and superiors, worship and honor all religions, respect all people. Buddhism and social work has a very positive and revolutionary attitude towards women. Both believe in equal benefits for men and women. The precepts in Buddhism and social work values are very similar to each other. Non-violence, not committing theft, refrain from sexual misconduct, always speaking truth, and refraining from abusing drugs or alcohol are some of the common concerns. For example, Mindfulness, compassion and loving-kindness are the most commonly integrated Buddhist concepts in psychological treatment, they have shown to be helpful for mental health issues for the treatment of depression, anxiety, self-criticism, shame, feelings of inferiority, and positive and negative psychotic symptoms. The Buddhist compassion and loving-kindness also offer a model for both healthcare professionals and medical ethics.

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