# Addressing the Complexities and Challenges of the School Counselling Community in Bhutan through a Critical Narrative Inquiry

Kuenga Dem
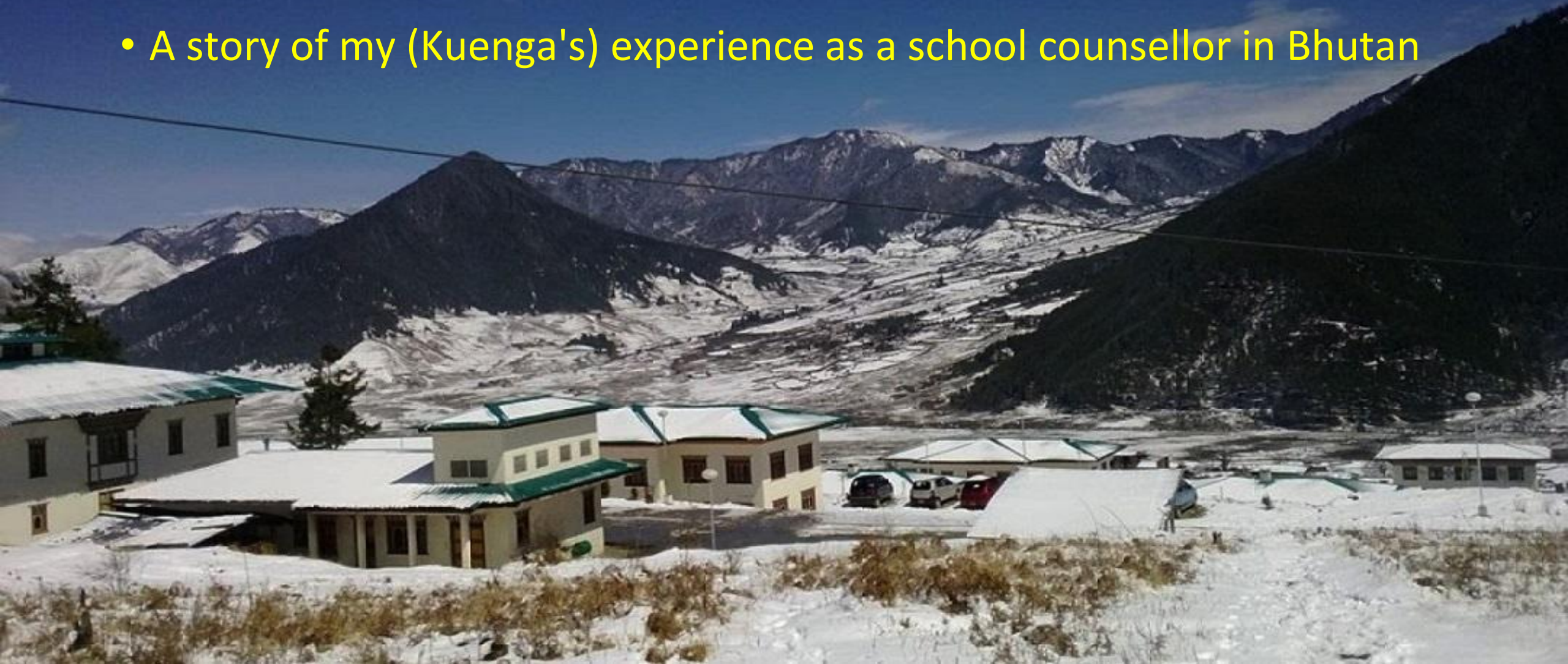
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# Context

- A story of my (Kuenga's) experience as a school counsellor in Bhutan

# Context

- Western consumerism and modern values vs traditional values
  - Bhutan society & youth
  - School counselling - relatively new
  - School guidance counsellors - caught in a web of complexity

- Purpose and Aim:

  - Story these complexities and challenges by enabling the voices of counsellors to be heard... to open up a dialogue
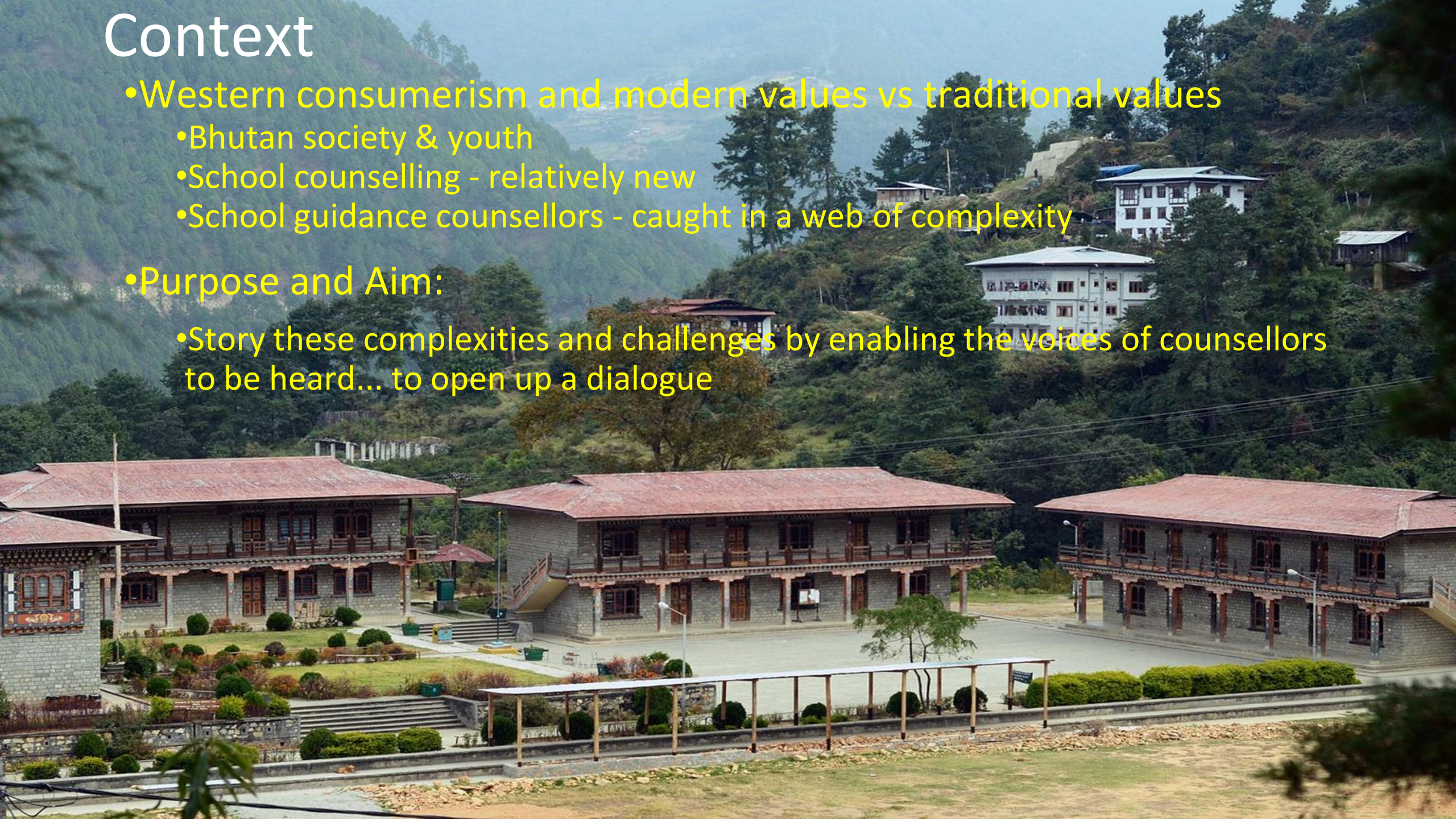
# Literature Review

- Complexities and Challenges
  - Challenges in Program Implementation
    - Stigmatisation (Low, Kok, & Lee, 2013; van Schalkwyk, 2011)
  - Ambiguous Roles and Responsibilities
    - Competing demands outside of counseling (Chata & Loesch, 2007; Foster, Young, & Hermann, 2005; Low et al., 2013; Jamtsho, 2015)
  - Supervision Challenges
    - Low levels & opportunities (Evans et al., 2011; Page et al., 2001)
  - Burnout Concerns
    - Role strain and high ratios (Brown, Dahlbeck, & Sparkman-Barnes, 2006; Campbell & Colmar, 2014; Gysbers & Henderson, 2014; Moyer, 2011; Stokes, Stops & Collins, 2011)

# Research Objectives

1) to understand the storied roles and responsibilities of school guidance counsellors in Bhutan

2) to identify the challenges and opportunities of implementing school guidance and counselling programmes as experienced through the narratives of the school guidance counsellors in Bhutan

# Research Design

- Social constructionist epistemology
  - language has a constitutive action through our social processes, and our historical and cultural specifics… (Burr, 2015; Gergen, 2001)

+ critical theory
  - enables a critical consciousness of power for transformative possibilities (Crotty, 1998)

+ narrative inquiry
  - narratives are constitutive of our reality (Bruner, 1986), units of power (Bruner, 1986a, 1986b) and enable marginalised voices to be heard (Pitre, Kushner, Raine, & Hegadoren, 2013).

= critical narrative inquiry methodology
  - *metanarratives*
    - encompassing and prescriptive (and often oversimplified) ideas that are self-legitimising tellings due to their dominance/authority and therefore must be questioned (Lyotard, 1984)
  - *counternarratives*
    - tellings that are counter or resistant to other other narratives, including metanarratives (Bamberg, 2004)

# Research Design

- Purposive sampling
  - Pioneer Bhutanese school guidance counsellors with work experience and an understanding of the research questions

- Participants
  - Four counsellors (three women and one man)

  - In this paper, we focus on **one** case story (Wangchuk's* story) to illustrate

  - Semi-structured narrative interview technique (via Skype)

  - Thematic narrative analysis
    - identification of themed narratives (metanarratives and counternarratives) within each case story

*pseudonym

**Semi-structured Narrative Interview Technique**

(adapted from Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000)

**Phase 1: Initiation**

I am curious to hear your story of your experience as school guidance counsellor. I would like you to recall the events that have shaped your experience up until now, starting from the beginning of your position.

i.    In recalling these events, I would like you to explore what it means and feels to be a school guidance counsellor in Bhutan. *(move to Main Narration)*

ii.   How did you feel about the way guidance and counselling programmes were going in your school? What occasion(s) do you remember contributing to these experiences? *(move to Main Narration)*

iii.  How did your position fit in school during your time here? Tell me what led you to think/feel this way. *(move to Main Narration)*

iv.   What events made your position challenging and why? *(move to Main Narration)*

**Phase 2: Main Narration**

Use of minimal responses (e.g., "Hmm", "Yes", "I see")

i.    "What happened next?"

ii.   At signs of concluding the story: "Is there anything else you would like to say or recall on this question?"

*(move to the next interview question in Phase 1. Otherwise, move to Phase 3)*

**Phase 3: Questioning Phase**

    i.    "What happened before/after/then?"

            (Questions refer only to events in the story)

    ii.    What support system would you envisage putting in place for yourself within the school and outside of the school?

**Phase 4: Concluding Talk**

(Stop recording, continue the conversation with small talk and conclude).

Wangchuk's Story

# Metanarrative:
# Counselling <u>is</u> (Simply) Advice-Giving

*Many of my colleagues had that deeply rooted notion, which I had few years ago, that counselling was **advice giving**, which was, in fact, **culturally inherent in our society**. Since time immemorial, our forefathers were into giving advice. So, this was **one of the most common mediums** which was **used by our teachers and parents** to help younger people or anyone overcome their problem.*
*Often especially teachers have that notion that advice giving is **something that doesn't work with modern children** and when I came up with a counselling knowledge and a new identity as counsellor in the same school system, where I worked as teacher before, was **challenging**. Counselling was **viewed with skepticism**; such as "**it is advice giving**", and "they have been doing that", "**it doesn't work**", "**kids would be pampered or spoiled** by counselling". It was **very difficult for me** to get in and **convince my principal and colleagues**— and, in fact, **convince a system as whole**.*

# Counternarrative:
# Burnout and High Workloads

*I get **burn out** sometimes, since I was a lone counselor placed in a school with over **thousand three hundred students**, where I was viewed as an **expert counselor** despite my **limited skills and competence**, the burnout was something I predicted . . it was more intense whenever I came across a situation where problem of the client seem beyond my capacity or comprehension. In such time I remained helpless, as I **did not have any other expert counsellors for consultation nor supervision** and undermined the quality of my service to the clients.*

# Counternarrative: Burnout and High Workloads

*Especially, when I had to face such issues day after day for longer period of time, then I don't feel like going to work . . . they don't care whether you are* **overloaded** *or not and if there are 10 cases you have to take care of 10 cases in a day . . . one after another and you have to deal with it ...* **You can't afford to have any delays.** *So In such situations you totally become tired, burned out, it's difficult, it* **demotivates you** *and you start questioning yourself whether you made right choice, right decisions by taking this profession or not, where you don't have any other support as well as no people understand what it's all about* **and burned out is one area which is least discussed, which is least thought about by those people who actually place you in that system.**

# Counternarrative:
# Need for Professional Development

*If I share some experiences, which I wish I could bury them forever along with my past, there were few cases of suicide, which I felt I could have done more, I still live with that wish and regret for not able to save those two beautiful lives, which happened in the school where I began my first year of my novice-counselling career. I **regret** every day of my life reflecting on what went wrong and what could have saved their lives. When I think of such incident I feel **very incompetent** and **quite stupid to call myself a counselor who is viewed as an expert to solve people's problems while I was not able to manage my own stress and guilt of not able to do much.** There were times when I thought many times about quitting my job simply because I was not able to do much to help those who needed my help.*

# Discussion

**Metanarratives of school counselling:**
- Counselling retold as a "western concept", "advice giving", "disciplinary measure", for "people with problems".
  - Similarities between school counselling in Bhutan and Malaysia: "lack of understanding about the nature of the school counselling services" (Low, Kok, & Lee, 2013, p. 193)

**Counternarratives as Challenges and Complexities:**
1. *Multifaceted roles and responsibilities of school guidance counsellors:* school counsellors struggling with priorities, role confusion, burnouts, heavy workloads, time constraints, role conflicts (Evans et al., 2011; Gysbers, 2001; House & Hayes, 2002)

# Discussion

**Counternarratives as Challenges and Complexities**

2. *Challenges in Implementation school guidance counselling programme*:
- Challenges in making counselling as integral part of the school as there is little evidence to show that counselling has the potential to enhance student achievement (Dahir & Stone, 2009) and school principal and teachers considered it outside the scope of their practice and not their responsibility (Lam & Hui, 2010).
- High expectations and resistance to the counselling programs.

3. *Professional development:* Training and supervision for continued growth of the school counsellors (Borders, 2002)

4. *School Guidance Counsellors as an 'Expert' or the 'saviour'*
and 'the need to save the saviour'

Discussion: Initiating a Dialogue

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