

# SUPPORTING ORANG ASLI STUDENTS: COUNSELLING IN SCHOOL CONTEXTS

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**Abstract.** Counselling, provided by skilled professionals, offers assistance to individuals in navigating personal, emotional, and psychological challenges while fostering personal growth and well-being. For Orang Asli students, counselling holds exceptional significance due to the distinct cultural, socio-economic, and educational obstacles they frequently encounter. These barriers encompass factors such as cultural identity, language impediments, discrimination, poverty, and limited access to educational resources. Counselling proves invaluable for Orang Asli students as it furnishes them with a secure and nurturing space to confront and surmount these challenges. It serves as a platform for them to articulate their thoughts and feelings, gain deeper insight into their experiences, and develop effective coping mechanisms to overcome adversity. Furthermore, counselling aids Orang Asli students in cultivating resilience, enhancing self-esteem, and acquiring vital skills essential for both academic and personal success. Counsellors play a pivotal role in acquainting Orang Asli students with counselling services by exemplifying cultural sensitivity, establishing trust, providing pertinent information, collaborating with community leaders, and coordinating outreach endeavours. Through these initiatives, counsellors endeavour to render counselling services accessible, embraced, and advantageous for Orang Asli students. Overall, counsellors contribute significantly to enhancing the well-being, quality of life, academic accomplishments, and holistic development of Orang Asli students through their unwavering dedication, expertise, and advocacy efforts in providing holistic counselling support.

**Keywords:** *Orang Asli, counselling, counsellor, characteristic, myth*

## Introduction

Indigenous Peoples, as outlined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) Convention 169 (Article 1.1) in 1989, refer to “tribal people in independent countries whose social, cultural, and economic conditions set them apart from other segments of the national community, and whose status is governed wholly or partially by their customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations” (Tolentino, 2017; Henriksen, 2008). Globally, an estimated 370 million individuals self-identify as indigenous peoples, residing in nearly 90 countries (Jamieson et al., 2021). Just as indigenous communities in different countries (Browne et al., 2020; Anticona and San Sebastian, 2014), the indigenous population in Peninsular Malaysia is referred to as Orang Asli (Masron et al., 2013). The term “Orang Asli” translates to “original people” or “first people” in Malay (Nor et al., 2011). The Orang Asli communities are diverse, consisting of nineteen culturally and linguistically distinct groups, each with its own language, culture, and way of life (Nor et al., 2011). These groups include the Semai, Temiar, Jakun, Temuan, and others (PKK and UNICEF, 1998). Traditionally, they practiced animism and lived in close connection with the natural environment, relying on hunting, gathering, and farming for sustenance. Over the years, Orang Asli communities have

faced various challenges, including marginalization, land rights issues, poverty, and limited access to education and healthcare (Chew et al., 2022). Education among the Orang Asli in Malaysia has been a topic of concern due to various challenges faced by these indigenous communities. Efforts have been made by the Malaysian government and non-governmental organizations to improve education outcomes for Orang Asli children. Despite these efforts, disparities in educational attainment between Orang Asli and non-indigenous students persist. Issues such as high dropout rates, low literacy levels, and limited access to higher education continue to hinder the educational advancement of Orang Asli youth.

Studies conducted across CANNZUS countries indicate that Indigenous youth tend to experience higher rates of mental health issues compared to their non-Indigenous counterparts (Azzopardi, 2018; Carlisle et al., 2018; Atkinson, 2017; Gillies et al., 2017; Clark et al., 2012;). These issues can impact their academic performance, attendance, and overall educational outcomes. Meanwhile, the recent data from the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) published in Sinar Harian Web Portal (2021), highlights the substantial proportion of Orang Asli students who did not complete their education until Form 5 in 2021. The higher dropout rates among Orang Asli children compared to the national average dropout rate, as evidenced by studies such as Wong and Abdillah (2017), indicate the presence of significant may stem from various sources, encompassing language barriers (Webster, 2018; Brumby, 1977), restricted educational access, socioeconomic hardships (Shepherd et al., 2012), cultural disparities (Patel et al., 2021; Shepherd et al., 2018), discrimination (Wylie and McConkey, 2019), stigma (Faruk and Rosenbaum, 2023), and inadequate support services (Davy et al., 2016). These adversities significantly influence their mental well-being, triggering emotions like frustration, isolation, inadequacy, anxiety, and diminished self-esteem. Given the intricate interaction among these factors and their detrimental impact on mental health, it becomes apparent that Orang Asli students may benefit from counselling services to address and manage their emotional turmoil effectively. Counselling offers a nurturing environment wherein students can delve into their emotions, develop coping mechanisms, and navigate the hurdles they confront. Moreover, counselling aids in fostering resilience, boosting self-esteem, and honing skills necessary to surmount challenges linked to academic performance, cultural identity, and socioeconomic status. Consequently, the identified challenges underscore the urgent need for accessible and culturally attuned counselling services tailored to the specific requirements of Orang Asli students.

### ***Counselling***

One effective approach to addressing this psychological issue is through counselling services. Counselling is a dynamic and interactive process that involves a partnership between a qualified counsellor or therapist and an individual seeking guidance and support, commonly referred to as the client or counselee. Counselling is a collaborative process between a trained professional, known as a counsellor or therapist, and an individual seeking assistance, often referred to as the client or counselee. Counselling can be defined as a collaborative process between a trained professional, such as a counsellor or therapist, and an individual seeking assistance, aimed at addressing personal, emotional, or psychological concerns and promoting growth and well-being (ACA, 2014). Meanwhile, The Malaysia Board of Counsellors defines counselling as “a professional process of assisting clients in addressing personal, emotional, social,

educational, and career concerns. It involves the application of specialized knowledge, skills, and techniques by trained counsellors to facilitate the development of self-awareness, personal growth, and well-being in clients. Counselling aims to empower individuals to make informed decisions, cope with challenges, and achieve their full potential in various aspects of life” (Malaysia Counsellors Act, 1998). It provides a supportive and confidential environment for clients to explore their thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, develop coping strategies, and work towards achieving personal goals (McLeod, 2013). This collaboration is founded on mutual trust, respect, and confidentiality, creating a secure space where clients feel comfortable expressing themselves openly and honestly. Within this therapeutic relationship, the counsellor adopts a nonjudgmental and empathetic stance, aiming to understand the client's unique perspectives, experiences, and needs.

One prevalent misconception about counselling is the belief that it's exclusively reserved for individuals grappling with severe mental health issues or who are perceived as “crazy”. This misconception often discourages people from seeking assistance during everyday struggles or when they simply need support through challenging periods. In reality, counselling serves as a valuable resource for individuals facing a spectrum of concerns, ranging from relationship dilemmas and stress management to personal growth and career advancement. It provides a confidential and secure environment to explore thoughts, emotions, and behaviours, equipping individuals with strategies and resources to effectively navigate life's obstacles. Another misconception is that counselling primarily involves receiving directives or being told what actions to take. While counsellors may offer guidance and encouragement, their primary role is to facilitate self-discovery and empower individuals to make their own choices. Counselling emphasizes fostering self-awareness, assuming personal responsibility, and actively participating in the therapeutic process. Moreover, there is a misconception that counselling leads to immediate solutions or quick fixes to issues. In reality, the journey of personal growth and healing often unfolds gradually and requires commitment over time. It's a process marked by progress, setbacks, and challenges, necessitating patience and perseverance. Nevertheless, with dedication, individuals can achieve significant and enduring transformation. Therefore, it is essential to recognize counselling as a versatile and invaluable tool for nurturing mental health and well-being. Dispelling myths and misconceptions surrounding counselling is crucial in encouraging more individuals to seek the support they need to lead fulfilling and balanced lives.

The main aim of counselling is to establish a safe and supportive environment where clients feel at ease and motivated to explore their deepest thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Within this setting, individuals have the freedom to openly discuss their challenges, concerns, or uncertainties without worrying about being judged or criticized. Through this therapeutic process, clients can confront and tackle issues related to personal relationships, career decisions, mental well-being, or other aspects of their lives. Additionally, counselling seeks to foster personal growth and development by empowering clients to gain self-awareness, identify their strengths and weaknesses, and devise strategies to overcome obstacles. Ultimately, the objective is to help clients achieve a heightened sense of self-awareness, resilience, and satisfaction in their lives (Krumboltz, 1966). It is often provided in individual, group, and family settings, depending on the nature of the client's needs and preferences. Individual counselling, as outlined by the American Psychological Association (APA, 2020), involves personalized sessions between a counsellor and a client, providing a confidential setting

for the client to explore their innermost thoughts, emotions, and concerns. This intimate exchange allows for a focused examination of the client's issues, leading to a deeper comprehension of their experiences and offering tailored support to address their unique needs. Group counselling, as defined by the APA (2020), brings together a small cohort of individuals who share common challenges or goals, and under the guidance of a trained counsellor, group members can share their experiences, offer mutual assistance, and gain insights from each other's viewpoints. These group sessions often foster feelings of belonging and validation as participants recognize they are not alone in their difficulties, fostering heightened self-awareness and individual development. Similarly, family counselling, as articulated by the APA (2020), aims to tackle dynamics and obstacles within the family structure. During family therapy sessions, a counsellor collaborates with all family members or specific subsets to enhance communication, resolve conflicts, and reinforce familial bonds by delving into family dynamics and interaction patterns, striving to cultivate understanding, empathy, and cooperation among family members, ultimately enriching the overall functioning and well-being of the family system. The choice of counselling format depends on the client's preferences, the nature of their concerns, and the therapeutic approach deemed most effective by the counsellor.

### ***Counselling for Orang Asli students***

Orang Asli students, being indigenous peoples of Peninsular Malaysia, often face numerous challenges arising from socio-economic, educational, and cultural factors, all of which can profoundly affect their mental health and general well-being. To effectively tackle these challenges, a comprehensive approach is needed, which includes ensuring access to vital resources, offering culturally sensitive support services, and fostering opportunities for community empowerment and self-determination. Counselling services represent one of the key approaches employed to aid Orang Asli students. In recognizing the unique challenges and needs faced by Orang Asli students, counselling services offer a tailored and supportive framework to address a variety of issues they may encounter. These services encompass a range of interventions aimed at promoting the holistic well-being and academic success of Orang Asli students within the educational context. By providing a safe and confidential space, counselling services enable Orang Asli students to explore and navigate personal challenges, develop coping strategies, and access resources tailored to their specific cultural, social, and emotional circumstances. Counselling for Orang Asli students is essential for several reasons. Firstly, ensuring cultural sensitivity in counselling for Orang Asli students involves tailoring interventions to their unique cultural backgrounds. This means counsellors need to have a deep understanding of Orang Asli's culture, traditions, values, and beliefs. By acknowledging and respecting these cultural nuances, counsellors can create a therapeutic environment that fosters trust and rapport with the students. This cultural awareness not only validates the experiences of Orang Asli students but also ensures that counselling approaches are aligned with their cultural context, making them more relevant and effective. Ultimately, this promotes better understanding and respect for the students' experiences, leading to more meaningful support and intervention in their counselling journey. Secondly, counselling plays a crucial role in addressing the prevalent trauma within Orang Asli communities, which often arises from various sources such as discrimination, socioeconomic disparities, and historical injustices. These traumas can deeply impact individuals' mental and emotional well-being, leading

to feelings of distress, anxiety, and hopelessness. Counselling provides a safe and supportive environment for Orang Asli students to explore and confront these traumatic experiences. Through therapeutic techniques and interventions, counsellors help students process their emotions, understand the root causes of their trauma, and develop coping mechanisms to manage their symptoms effectively. By facilitating this healing process, counselling promotes resilience and well-being among Orang Asli students, empowering them to navigate the challenges they face and thrive despite their past adversities.

Additionally, counselling helps to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma by equipping students with the tools and resources needed to address and overcome the legacy of historical injustices within their communities. Additionally, counselling provides invaluable mental health support to Orang Asli students, aiding them in navigating and managing a range of psychological challenges such as anxiety, depression, and stress. These mental health issues can significantly impact students' daily functioning, academic performance, and overall quality of life. Through counselling sessions, students are equipped with coping strategies, emotional regulation techniques, and problem-solving skills to effectively address and alleviate their mental health concerns. Counsellors offer a non-judgmental and empathetic space for students to express their emotions, explore underlying issues, and develop healthier ways of coping with stressors. By addressing these mental health challenges proactively, counselling contributes to enhancing students' overall well-being and resilience. Moreover, improved mental health outcomes translate to better academic success, as students are better able to concentrate, engage in learning activities, and achieve their academic goals. Thus, counselling serves as a vital resource in supporting Orang Asli students' holistic development and academic achievements. Moreover, counselling plays a crucial role in contributing to improved academic performance among Orang Asli students by providing them with essential skills and strategies to excel in their studies. Counsellors work closely with students to identify their academic strengths and weaknesses, as well as any obstacles they may be facing in their educational journey. Through individualized counselling sessions, students are equipped with practical study skills tailored to their unique learning styles, helping them to effectively retain and apply new information. Additionally, counsellors assist students in developing time management techniques to organize their schedules, prioritize tasks, and meet academic deadlines. By fostering a supportive and encouraging environment, counsellors empower students to overcome academic challenges with confidence and resilience. Furthermore, counselling helps students develop adaptive coping mechanisms to manage stress, anxiety, and other psychological barriers that may hinder their academic performance. By addressing these emotional and psychological factors, counsellors enable students to focus better, maintain motivation, and achieve their academic goals. Counselling serves as a valuable resource in enhancing Orang Asli students' academic success by providing them with the necessary skills, support, and guidance to thrive in their educational pursuits. Finally, counselling serves as a catalyst for fostering empowerment and self-esteem among Orang Asli students by creating a supportive and nurturing environment where they can explore their strengths and capabilities. Through personalized counselling sessions, students are encouraged to reflect on their achievements, talents, and potential, thereby boosting their self-confidence and sense of self-worth. By recognizing and validating their unique qualities, counsellors empower

students to take ownership of their lives and make informed decisions about their futures.

This process of self-discovery and self-empowerment enhances students' resilience and fortitude, enabling them to confront and overcome challenges with greater confidence and determination. Additionally, counselling instills a sense of agency and autonomy in students, encouraging them to advocate for themselves and pursue their goals with vigor and conviction. As students develop a positive self-image and a belief in their abilities, they are better equipped to navigate life's obstacles and seize opportunities for personal and academic growth. Ultimately, counselling plays a pivotal role in nurturing the holistic development of Orang Asli students, fostering empowerment, resilience, and well-being that extends beyond the counselling session and into their everyday lives.

### ***Obstacles conducting counselling***

“Obstacles conducting counselling” refers to the various challenges or barriers that counsellors face when trying to provide effective counselling services to their clients. These obstacles can stem from a variety of interconnected factors. Firstly, there exists a pervasive stigma surrounding mental health issues within the community, fostering a fear of judgment or discrimination if individuals seek professional help, thereby perpetuating their hesitancy. This stigma is deeply ingrained in cultural beliefs and societal norms, portraying mental health challenges as taboo subjects often associated with weakness or shame (Rössler, 2016). Consequently, Orang Asli students may internalize this stigma, fearing judgment or discrimination if they openly acknowledge their struggles or seek assistance from mental health professionals. This fear of social repercussions further solidifies their reluctance to seek help, prompting them to conceal their mental health issues and hindering their access to necessary support and resources (Henderson et al., 2013). Consequently, the stigma surrounding mental health exacerbates the challenges faced by Orang Asli students, contributing to their isolation and impeding their overall well-being and academic success. Furthermore, Orang Asli students may harbour trust issues toward counsellors due to various factors, including previous negative encounters or general unfamiliarity with the counselling process (Núñez et al., 2022). Past negative experiences, such as feeling misunderstood or judged by counsellors, can erode trust and make students hesitant to engage in counselling again. Additionally, if students have limited exposure to counselling or mental health services, they may feel apprehensive or uncertain about what to expect, leading to mistrust. Language barriers among Orang Asli students exacerbate the challenges of accessing counselling services, particularly when counsellors do not possess proficiency in the student's native language. These barriers hinder effective communication and understanding between counsellors and students, making it difficult to convey thoughts, emotions, and concerns accurately (Schwappach et al., 2012). Orang Asli children may struggle to express themselves fully or comprehend the counselling process if the language used is unfamiliar or difficult to understand. This linguistic disconnect can lead to feelings of frustration, alienation, or disengagement during counselling sessions. Additionally, miscommunication due to language barriers may result in misunderstandings or misinterpretations of students' needs or experiences, impeding the effectiveness of interventions.

Meanwhile, logistical obstacles such as transportation difficulties and scheduling conflicts pose significant challenges to regular attendance at counselling sessions

(Kelley et al., 2011), particularly in remote Orang Asli community locations. Limited access to transportation options and long distances to counselling centres can make it challenging for students to physically reach their appointments, especially if they reside in rural or isolated areas with inadequate infrastructure. Additionally, scheduling conflicts may arise due to competing priorities such as familial responsibilities, school commitments, or economic activities. For Orang Asli families, who may face socioeconomic challenges and time constraints, attending counselling sessions may not always be feasible or prioritized. Consequently, these logistical barriers contribute to irregular attendance patterns, hindering the continuity and effectiveness of counselling interventions. Finally, a preference for traditional healing practices and cultural rituals among Orang Asli students may steer them towards seeking support from traditional healers instead of participating in counselling sessions. Within Orang Asli communities, traditional healing methods hold deep-rooted significance and are often perceived as integral components of holistic well-being (Chali et al., 2021). Traditional healers, who possess specialized knowledge and skills passed down through generations, are respected figures within the community and are trusted for their ability to address physical, emotional, and spiritual ailments. As a result, when faced with mental health challenges or emotional distress, some Orang Asli students may instinctively turn to traditional healers for guidance and treatment, viewing them as culturally relevant and accessible sources of support. Moreover, the cultural familiarity and sense of belonging associated with traditional healing practices may resonate more deeply with Orang Asli students, fostering a greater sense of comfort and trust compared to engaging with counsellors or mental health professionals from outside the community.

The process of counselling Orang Asli students involves overcoming diverse obstacles through a multifaceted approach. Counsellors must first adapt their techniques to accommodate the unique cultural beliefs, norms, and practices prevalent within these communities, demonstrating sensitivity and respect to establish trust. Collaboration with other professionals, including traditional healers and community leaders, may be necessary to address systemic challenges. Overall, counsellors must adapt their approach, build trust, address underlying issues, and collaborate effectively to provide comprehensive support to Orang Asli students.

### ***Counsellor characteristic***

Enhancing the process of overcoming obstacles in conducting counselling can be facilitated by counsellors possessing certain characteristic traits. “Counsellor characteristics” refers to the qualities, attributes, and traits that counsellors possess, influencing their effectiveness in providing counselling services (Madeson, 2020). Essentially, these characteristics define the counsellor's demeanour, skills, and approach to interacting with clients and facilitating the counselling process. Among the characteristics that counsellors need to possess in handling counselling with Orang Asli students are as follow: Cultural competence (Sue et al., 2009) is a foundational quality for counsellors, particularly when working with diverse populations such as Orang Asli students. This trait involves not just understanding but also valuing the diverse cultural backgrounds, beliefs, values, and customs that influence individuals' experiences and identities. When counselling Orang Asli students, cultural competence requires acknowledging the distinct cultural heritage, traditions, and practices of the Orang Asli community. By demonstrating respect for their cultural identities and experiences (Harrison et al., 2019), counsellors can establish trust and rapport with Orang Asli

students. Additionally, cultural competence entails adapting counselling approaches to align with Orang Asli's cultural values and preferences, ensuring that interventions are relevant and meaningful. In summary, cultural competence is crucial for counsellors to effectively connect with Orang Asli students, develop positive therapeutic relationships, and offer culturally sensitive and empowering counselling services.

The concept of empathy in counselling, which entails understanding the client's perspective and experiences from their viewpoint, plays a crucial role in developing positive therapeutic relationships and providing culturally sensitive and empowering counselling services, particularly with Orang Asli students. Empathy involves the counsellor respectfully acknowledging and reflecting on the client's communications, ensuring they feel heard and understood (Sutton, 2017). This quality is especially crucial for counsellors, particularly when working with clients facing cultural or language barriers, such as Orang Asli students. Empathy entails the capacity to comprehend and empathize with the emotions and experiences of others, enabling counsellors to forge deeper connections with their clients. With Orang Asli students, who often have unique cultural backgrounds, empathy becomes even more vital. By actively listening to their concerns and perspectives, counsellors demonstrate genuine interest and validation, fostering trust and acceptance (Ricks and Brannon, 2023). This empathetic listening not only helps counsellors grasp the specific challenges and needs of Orang Asli students but also cultivates a supportive environment for them to express themselves freely. Furthermore, empathy allows counsellors to navigate potential cultural differences sensitively, showing respect for the students' cultural identities and values. In essence, empathy enables counsellors to establish meaningful relationships with Orang Asli students, strengthen the therapeutic alliance, and offer tailored support and guidance to meet their individual needs.

Apart from that, flexibility and adaptability are essential attributes for counsellors working with Orang Asli students, allowing them to customize counselling approaches to suit individual needs and preferences (Owen and Hilsenroth, 2014). Orang Asli students, like all individuals, possess diverse backgrounds and experiences, necessitating varied counselling strategies. While some students may favour one-on-one sessions for privacy and personal dialogue, others may thrive in group settings for peer interaction (Seidman et al., 2022). Through flexibility, counsellors can accommodate these preferences and adjust their methods accordingly. Additionally, flexibility enables counsellors to effectively address unforeseen circumstances or shifts in students' situations. For instance, should a student encounter heightened stress due to familial or academic pressures, counsellors can adapt their plans to offer timely support. Overall, these qualities empower counsellors to meet the evolving needs of Orang Asli students, ensuring that counselling interventions remain relevant and beneficial for their well-being and personal growth. Furthermore, counsellors committed to continuous professional development and self-reflection demonstrates a dedication to improving their skills and staying informed about advancements in the field. Through engagement in workshops, seminars, and ongoing education, counsellors can acquire fresh insights and techniques that enhance their practice, enabling them better to serve their clients, including Orang Asli students. Continual self-reflection, as defined by Olayemi (2023), involves ongoing introspection and evaluation of one's thoughts, feelings, actions, and experiences. This practice is essential for counsellors as it enables them to critically assess their interactions with clients, identify areas for improvement, and adapt their approaches accordingly (Koshy et al., 2017). For counsellors working with Orang Asli



students, continual self-reflection holds particular significance due to the diverse cultural backgrounds and unique challenges these students face. By engaging in continual self-reflection, counsellors can address any cultural biases, ensure the delivery of culturally sensitive counselling services, and gain better insight into the impact of discrimination and historical trauma on their clients. Additionally, continual self-reflection empowers counsellors to navigate cultural disparities and communication obstacles effectively, leading to the establishment of trust and rapport with Orang Asli students. Ultimately, this process fosters cultural humility, self-awareness, and proficiency among counsellors, thereby enhancing the quality and effectiveness of counselling services provided to this demographic.

Moreover, continual professional growth (Rønnestad et al., 2019) and introspection (Posluns and Gall, 2020) empower counsellors to address the evolving challenges faced by their clients. Professional growth entails the ongoing process of acquiring new skills, knowledge, and expertise relevant to one's profession, including activities such as continuing education, training workshops, and gaining experience through practice. Continual professional growth and introspection are indispensable for counsellors for various reasons. Firstly, they ensure counsellors remain abreast of the latest developments, research findings, and best practices in the counselling field, equipping them with the necessary knowledge and skills to effectively support their client's evolving needs. Introspection involves self-reflection and self-awareness, enabling individuals to gain insights into their strengths, weaknesses, values, and beliefs (Feldman et al., 2014; Trapnell and Campbell, 1999). Through introspection, counsellors can examine their beliefs, biases, and reactions, enhancing their understanding of how these factors may impact their interactions with clients. This self-awareness is pivotal for maintaining ethical boundaries, managing countertransference, and providing culturally sensitive counselling services. In counselling or therapy contexts, professional growth and introspection complement each other, as counsellors continually strive to enhance their skills and self-awareness to support their clients' well-being better. Additionally, continual professional growth encourages counsellors to engage in regular supervision, consultation, and peer support, further enhancing their clinical competence and effectiveness. Overall, continual professional growth and introspection contribute to counsellors' ongoing development, ethical practice, and ability to deliver high-quality care to their clients.

In general, counsellors who actively pursue ongoing professional development and engage in regular self-reflection are better prepared to offer high-quality counselling services to Orang Asli students and other clients. Through consistently refining their skills, expanding their knowledge base, and remaining updated on emerging issues and trends, these counsellors can effectively adapt to the evolving landscape of counselling practice and continue to impact their clients' lives positively. By embodying these qualities, counsellors enhance their capacity to navigate challenges encountered when working with Orang Asli students, ensuring that they can provide valuable support throughout the counselling process. Ultimately, by possessing these traits, counsellors can overcome obstacles and furnish Orang Asli students with the necessary assistance to thrive in their counselling journey.

### ***Promoting counselling services for Orang Asli students***

Promoting counselling services refers to the activities and efforts undertaken to raise awareness about the availability, benefits, and importance of counselling services

among a target audience (Davis, 2023). The goal of promoting counselling services is to encourage individuals to seek help when needed, reduce stigma surrounding mental health issues, and increase access to counselling resources for those who may benefit from them. Advocating for counselling services among Orang Asli students is imperative for multiple reasons. Firstly, a significant number of Orang Asli students may be unaware of the existence or advantages of counselling services. Through promotion initiatives, awareness regarding mental health support options can be heightened, motivating students to seek assistance when necessary (Wiedermann et al., 2023). Additionally, there might be a stigma surrounding the pursuit of mental health support within the Orang Asli community. Promoting counselling services serves to dismantle this stigma by normalizing conversations about mental health and stressing the importance of seeking aid when encountering challenges (Shahwan et al., 2022). Furthermore, promoting counselling services can bridge the gap by informing students about available resources and facilitating their access to them. Cultural sensitivity is also pivotal; counselling services must align with the cultural norms, beliefs, and preferences of the Orang Asli community to be truly effective. Lastly, advocating for counselling services enables the early identification and intervention of mental health issues among Orang Asli students, potentially averting the escalation of problems and enhancing overall well-being and academic performance.

To effectively introduce counselling services to Orang Asli students, a multifaceted approach is necessary, encompassing a variety of strategies such as; the establishment of counselling outreach programs (Filges et al., 2022) is a crucial step in addressing the stigma around mental health support among Orang Asli students. These programs offer informational sessions, workshops, and interactive activities to provide insights into mental health and available counselling resources. Workshops offer practical guidance on coping mechanisms and stress management, while interactive activities encourage open discussions about mental health concerns. Overall, these efforts aim to nurture a culture of mental health awareness and destigmatize seeking counselling among Orang Asli students. To enhance the effectiveness of the outreach programme, counsellors can initiate interaction and involvement with the Orang Asli community. This involves actively reaching out to community members, leaders, and stakeholders to foster collaboration, gather insights, and ensure that the programme aligns with the needs and cultural context of the Orang Asli people. By engaging with the community, counsellors can build trust, establish rapport, and cultivate meaningful relationships, laying the groundwork for successful outreach efforts (Glowiak et al., 2018). This engagement may include conducting meetings, participating in community events, and listening to the perspectives and concerns of community members. Through ongoing engagement, counsellors can gain a deeper understanding of the community's challenges, strengths, and aspirations, enabling them to tailor the outreach programme better to meet the needs of the Orang Asli community and facilitate positive outcomes. Furthermore, to advance the promotion of counselling services, it is essential to leverage indigenous communication channels (Abdulai et al., 2023). This involves utilizing traditional modes of communication inherent to a specific culture or community, such as storytelling (Lilomaiava-Doktor, 2020; Humes, 2016), community gatherings (Geller, 2023), and ceremonies (Anderson and Migwans, 2023). By harnessing these channels, individuals or organizations aim to effectively disseminate information, share knowledge, and engage with the community in a manner that aligns with its cultural values and practices. Within Orang Asli communities, these channels, including

community gatherings, storytelling sessions, and traditional ceremonies, hold significant cultural relevance. By capitalizing on these platforms, counsellors can effectively communicate information about counselling services in a way that resonates with the cultural beliefs and practices of community members. Community gatherings provide a forum for direct engagement and interaction, enabling counsellors to address mental health concerns in a familiar environment. Storytelling sessions, rooted in oral traditions, offer a compelling approach to conveying messages and disseminating knowledge about mental health and counselling. Similarly, traditional ceremonies, steeped in cultural significance, offer timely opportunities to integrate discussions about mental well-being and the availability of counselling services into existing community practices. Through the utilization of these indigenous communication channels, counsellors can bridge communication gaps, enhance awareness, and promote acceptance of counselling services within the Orang Asli community.

In addition to the previously mentioned approaches, offering comprehensive training (Nasir et al., 2016) to community health workers or volunteers from the Orang Asli community is vital for enhancing mental health support within the community. These individuals, equipped with specialized knowledge and skills, serve as frontline advocates for mental health awareness and assistance, serving as initial points of contact for individuals seeking counselling. Through targeted training initiatives, these community members can enhance their grasp of mental health issues, effective communication methods, and crisis intervention strategies (Webb et al., 2023). By empowering them to identify signs of distress, provide basic counselling assistance, and offer guidance on accessing professional services, these trained individuals play a crucial role in bridging the divide between the community and formal mental health services. Moreover, they act as trusted sources of information and support within the community, contributing to reducing the stigma surrounding mental health issues and promoting help-seeking behaviours. Their involvement in awareness-raising, outreach efforts, and referral facilitation can substantially enhance access to mental health services and promote overall well-being among Orang Asli individuals. Hence, investing in the training and development of community health workers and volunteers is fundamental for fostering a supportive environment that prioritises mental health within the Orang Asli community. Establishing collaborative relationships with school teachers responsible for educating Orang Asli students is of utmost importance for the seamless integration of counselling services within the school environment (Williams, 2020). These partnerships are essential because teachers serve as frontline advocates for mental health awareness and support within educational institutions. They play crucial roles in identifying students who may benefit from counselling interventions and facilitating the referral process accordingly. By collaborating with educators, counsellors can align counselling services with the school curriculum or extracurricular activities, ensuring that mental health education and support become integral components of the school community. With their firsthand knowledge of students' behaviours and challenges, school teachers offer valuable insights to counsellors, enabling early intervention and support for students experiencing mental health issues. Furthermore, school counsellors, equipped with specialized training in addressing mental health concerns, can work collaboratively with external counsellors to ensure that students receive comprehensive support. By fostering strong partnerships with school teachers, counsellors can effectively promote mental health awareness, reduce

stigma, and ensure that Orang Asli students have access to the resources and support they need to thrive academically and emotionally.

In addition to collaborating closely with teachers, counsellors must also concentrate on crafting culturally pertinent visual and multimedia resources to facilitate effective communication within Orang Asli communities and schools (Kourkoutas and Giovazolias, 2015). This involves creating materials such as posters, videos, or pamphlets that resonate with the cultural background and preferences of the Orang Asli people. By customizing these resources to align with the distinctive cultural context of the Orang Asli population, counsellors ensure that information about counselling services is presented clearly and captivatingly. These materials serve as valuable aids for raising awareness about mental health and counselling, as they are tailored to capture the attention and interest of community members. Additionally, culturally relevant resources help foster a sense of connection and comprehension (Sue et al., 2009) facilitating the Orang Asli individuals' ability to relate to the information being conveyed. Overall, investing in the development of culturally sensitive visual and multimedia materials enhances the effectiveness of communication efforts and contributes to the overall success of counselling initiatives within the Orang Asli communities and schools. To ensure the effective delivery of counselling services to Orang Asli students, counsellors must prioritise confidentiality and privacy in their practice (Lustgarten et al., 2022). This emphasis is essential to address potential concerns regarding stigma or judgement among Orang Asli students. By highlighting the importance of confidentiality, counsellors reassure individuals that their personal information and discussions will remain strictly confidential. This assurance is critical in establishing a safe and trusted counselling environment where students feel secure in expressing themselves without fear of compromising their privacy (APA, 2019). Moreover, emphasising confidentiality helps alleviate worries about potential consequences or discrimination associated with seeking mental health support. By underlining the confidential nature of counselling services, counsellors affirm the right of Orang Asli students to access assistance without facing scrutiny or discrimination based on their mental health needs. This emphasis not only fosters a secure and trusted environment within counselling relationships but also encourages individuals to seek help proactively, knowing that their privacy will be upheld and safeguarded throughout the counselling process. Prioritising confidentiality and privacy in counselling services plays a pivotal role (Donner et al., 2008) in cultivating a supportive and non-judgmental environment that promotes the mental health and well-being of Orang Asli students.

Furthermore, placing a high priority on cultural relevance and responsiveness in counselling services (Sue et al., 2009) is of utmost importance when engaging with the Orang Asli community. This entails tailoring counselling approaches, techniques, and interventions to align with the cultural beliefs, values, and practices of the Orang Asli people. By doing so, counsellors can establish a deeper connection and understanding with their clients, fostering trust and rapport. This approach also ensures that counselling interventions resonate with the cultural context of the Orang Asli community, making them more effective and meaningful. Ultimately, prioritising cultural relevance and responsiveness in counselling services acknowledges and respects the diversity and uniqueness of the Orang Asli culture, thereby enhancing the overall effectiveness of mental health support within the community. By implementing the aforementioned strategies, counselling services can effectively increase their visibility and accessibility among Orang Asli students, thus dismantling barriers to

accessing mental health support within the community. This heightened visibility ensures that counselling services are readily recognizable and known to Orang Asli students, making them more likely to seek assistance when needed. Additionally, improved accessibility means that counselling services are conveniently located and available when required, reducing the logistical challenges associated with accessing mental health support. As a result, Orang Asli students are empowered to overcome any reluctance or hesitancy they may have had in seeking counselling, leading to increased utilization of mental health services and ultimately fostering better mental well-being within the community. Overall, these strategies work synergistically to bridge the gap between Orang Asli students and mental health support services, promoting a culture of proactive care and support within the community.

## **Conclusion**

Counselling plays a crucial role in meeting the varied personal, emotional, and psychological needs of Orang Asli students within the educational realm. It serves as a fundamental source of emotional support, providing a safe space where students can openly express their emotions and navigate challenges such as stress and anxiety. This support is instrumental in helping students engage more effectively in their academic endeavours. Furthermore, counselling contributes to the cultivation of resilience among Orang Asli students by imparting valuable coping mechanisms to help them overcome obstacles and maintain a positive outlook. Through counselling, students also gain a deeper understanding of themselves, including their strengths, values, and aspirations, empowering them to make well-informed decisions and pursue their goals. Additionally, counselling fosters the development of interpersonal skills by imparting effective communication, empathy, and conflict-resolution techniques, essential for fostering positive relationships within and beyond the school environment. Moreover, counselling addresses trauma and mental health concerns through tailored interventions designed to assist students in processing their experiences and developing effective coping strategies. By integrating counselling services into educational settings, educators and policymakers establish an inclusive environment that prioritises the holistic well-being and academic success of Orang Asli students. Through collaborative efforts, counselling becomes an indispensable component of the educational journey, ensuring that students receive the necessary support and resources to thrive.

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## Conflict of interest

The author affirms that there are no conflicts of interest associated with any parties involved in this research study. This means that neither the author nor any collaborators or contributors have financial, personal, or professional relationships that could potentially influence the integrity or outcomes of the research. By ensuring the absence of such conflicts, the study's credibility and objectivity are preserved, guaranteeing that the findings are based entirely on the research's merits and are not swayed by external factors or biases.

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