

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

INTRODUCTION

Papua New Guineans are a group from a single country but are not an homogeneous group. The 35 participants in this study constituted almost the total population of the PNG students at UNE. This study explored the types of personal and academic difficulties experienced by the Papua New Guineans studying at UNE and attempted to determine the coping strategies employed by these students in resolving the difficulties that they have experienced. The study further identified the people from whom these students preferred to get help when unable to resolve conflicts on their own, and identified the characteristics of the helpers of these students.

Understanding the data was facilitated by several informal conversations with participants. While these were not formal or structured interviews, nor were they held with all participants, information is included from these conversations below because it adds valuable information to interpreting the data.

The discussion of the findings was undertaken in the order that the questionnaire was set out under five sections:

- (i) Demographic information;
- (ii) Problems encountered;
- (iii) Helper qualities;
- (iv) Responding to problems encountered;
- (v) Use of UNE Counselling Services.

Discussion of the results of the study makes references to the cultural backgrounds of the participants and how those cultural backgrounds may influence the lives of the participants in this study during their time at UNE.

Demographic information on the participants in the study is described in detail in Chapter 2. The participants were asked to state their residence location before coming to

UNE to study. The study revealed that 60% were city residents (Cities include Port Moresby, the capital, and Lae, the second largest city), 29% resided in towns, 9% in small Government Outstations, and only one (3%) participant claimed to have lived in the village up to the time they came to UNE. The majority of the participants were living in a non-traditional environment due to work commitment and education before coming to study at UNE.

Table 5.4 (p. 76) further reveals that 54% of these participants were born into a traditional village culture, while 23% grew up in Outstations, but still away from the village. An Outstation is not a village nor town in characteristics but the residents work for the National Government for wage. City-reared participants constitute 9% with a further 14% in towns making a total of 23%. This is an interesting spread of participants' backgrounds and illustrates the demographic shift from rural to urban. The 54% who grew up in the village have shifted into towns and cities due to work commitments.

As stated in Chapter 1 of the study, the majority of the Papua New Guineans (over 80%) are rural traditional people who depend on subsistence agricultural farming, where their livelihood depends upon the clan or family land.

The lifestyles of the parents of these participants include 54% fully traditional and 46% partly traditional, (Table 5.5 p. 77). 'Fully traditional' refers to people living a lifestyle where there has been very little change to the food eaten, styles of houses built, and gardens made. The parents would still be participating in a major way in traditional roles, with all villagers observing the customs and expectations, and taking part in ceremonies. The main change has been in their belief system. Christianity has had a profound influence on the lives of the people. Christianity was first introduced in the 19th century and almost all Papua New Guineans belong to a mainstream religious denomination. The dominant religion is Christianity comprising 96% of the total population (1990 Census).

'Partly-traditional' refers to villages that are on the fringe of the towns and cities, where significant changes to the traditional lifestyles has been experienced. There is usually a certain number of villagers on wage employment in the towns and cities while living in the village and still observing and taking part in the traditional functions and customs, marriage rituals and obligations but who may be less strict in their practice.

As the 54% of the participants have grown up in the traditional lifestyles of the villages, they have been socialised into their culture and feel very much connected to the village life—the PNG expression is that *culture is in the blood*. The other 46% from partly-traditional backgrounds are more urbanised and not as confident in their traditional cultures even though they may know about some aspects which they may or may not practise. This assumption changes for individuals who make regular contact with their traditional villages.

The way the traditional societies of participants are organised is shown in Table 5.6 (p. 78). A total of 69% of the participants come from patrilineal societies.

As present behaviours are affected by the past events, it was quite essential, as part of the demographic information gathered, to ask the participants about the period lived away from the village, where they grew up and where their parents are living now. The majority (83%) indicated that they have been away from home for 10 or more years for various reasons, while 17% claimed to have been away for less than 10 years. Two participants (6%) were born and lived away from their traditional villages for over 30 years but despite that, one of the participants has made a specific effort to learn the language of her traditional village which she now speaks fluently, and she has also learned the customs and takes an interest in the culture of her people. In all, 69% of the students have lived away from home for over 15 years. The reasons for living away from home for such long periods are; 77% participants lived away for educational purposes; 17% for occupational purposes; and 6% lived away for other reasons such as marriage to an outsider from another Province or country (see Table 5.8, p. 81).

Because these participants have been away for so long, another interesting finding was made regarding the regularity of contacts made with their people and traditional culture in the village where the parents are living at present. A total of 48% of the participants indicated contacting home regularly which would mean as often as every month or even every fortnight. Another 48% contact home sometimes which means once-in-a-while but not as regularly as the first group. One student does not contact home at all these days, for specific security reasons however this participant is very much in-tune with the traditional culture. The regularity of the contacts disclosed by most participants probably indicates their closeness and strong kinship ties and reflects how much students are connected to their family culture and events at home. Most of those who make regular contact home are female participants and other students who have left

their families behind under the care of extended family members and their spouse(s) while they study at UNE.

In summary, the group of students has been away from home for a long time and, while there has been some lessening of traditional influence, generally these students still tend to use traditional methods of problem solving while studying at UNE.

The study revealed, many of the participants have travelled to different parts of the world, including the USA, New Zealand, England, Sweden, Italy, Philippines, Malaysia, Yugoslavia , Hawaii and many other Pacific countries as well as Australia. The main reasons for this extensive travelling were: 71% travelled for education and training purposes, 6% travelled away for employment purposes, and 6% travelled away for short-term holidays (Table 5.11, p. 85). The contact with other cultures would have a significant impact on the individual's outlook on life. The assumption is that these 'globe trotters' would function more successfully and be able to cope with the new situation in UNE than a person coming directly from PNG for the first time. Traditional habits and customs would have undergone some changes and other coping strategies would have taken their place to cater for the changing needs of the family. However, to identify the extent of changes in the participants is not the aim of this study. Further, these changes would be difficult to assess unless the researcher is aware of cultural ways of the participant's earlier life.

The subjects in the study are mostly post-graduates, with only 9% studying for their first degree. Of all participants, 49% have already achieved overseas qualifications or have experienced overseas training as well as earning qualifications from PNG, at different times of their working lives, mostly in the 1980s and 90s. The other 51% had obtained training and basic degrees from Papua New Guinea alone.

The participants were a group of highly qualified professionals in their respective fields of study and work. The largest group (37%) were teachers/lecturers/academics by profession, 23% were accountants, 11% agricultural economists, crop agronomists and agriculturalists and trainers in the agriculture department, and 6% were administrators and planners. The remainder are from professions such as library studies, banking, an administration manager and a cartographer who was training at the time to be a counsellor. Over 80% have skills and a significant number of experiences from work.

Many participants would be the only highly educated family member either in the clan or in the area representing their traditional village. Clan members look up to them as leaders because of their education. Highly educated individuals are automatically ascribed leadership in decision-making avenues in the village. Many villagers would come to them for advice, for new ideas, for general knowledge regarding health or politics. Some may approach the educated person to mediate between conflicting parties at the village level or between the government and the village, for instance over a land dispute. In fact, it seems that the more educated one is, the more one is seen as eligible to stand for politics in the eyes of their people.

With their qualifications, work and village experiences, these educated clan members are regarded as having established coping strategies when faced with new challenges. When one is well educated, one is expected by one's clansmen and the community in general, to be broad-minded and have a more informed view-point, be able to assess situations and issues and make decisions which are suitable for them and those that are in their care. Having this in mind, the following discussion concerns the problems and difficulties encountered by the participants in this study and the methods employed to cope with those difficulties, while studying at UNE.

PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AT UNE

The question in this section was **who do you go to for help when faced with academic, family, personal, financial, relationship difficulties, and health problems?**

The common and most serious difficulties identified by the participants were problems relating to, academic 46%, family 11%, personal problems 3%, relationships problems 9%, health 3%, financial concerns 15%. Fourteen percent stated that they had no problems (Table 5.21, p. 101).

Other occasional happenings such as serious sickness in the family or a family death back in PNG were reported to have a tremendous affect on the life of the student. Other problems expressed by participants ranged from feelings of aloneness, feelings of being isolated mainly due to cultural differences, and not being able to get to know Australians easily. This was coupled with an expressed feeling of helplessness because everything happening at home and in Australia which affects the student was beyond the control of the student. For example, one student commented ...

I feel helpless here ... I cannot help my own family back home while I am here.

As mentioned above, nearly half of the participants claimed to have experienced serious academic problems, which included:

- being unable to live up to academic demands and expectations;
- unable to meet assignment deadlines;
- having difficulty with academic writing;
- having difficulty in understanding the content of science subjects, for example, having to learn unfamiliar scientific formulae for the first time was a serious problem reported by some individuals;
- particular students found it difficult to be focused on their study and maintain constant concentration. The students who made these comments had left their families in PNG. One of these participants had been separated from spouse and children and was not on speaking terms with them for a period of time. They were unsettled for a semester and their study was affected. Students separated from spouse and children found themselves lonely and isolated which contributed to the academic difficulties facing them;
- Male students who were alone at UNE without their families, found themselves having to think and plan for house work, cooking, laundry and other household duties for the first time in their married lives. Not only do they have to be consistent in these duties but there are also time-consuming and 'fiddly' to most Papua New Guinean males, especially those male students from the patrilineal societies of Papua New Guinea. Household duties, rearing children, cooking and gardening are regarded as women's jobs. As a result, the men sometimes drink excessive amounts of alcohol and sometimes develop poor eating habits which, in turn, causes loss of energy, fatigue and reduces concentration making an already demanding study program even more difficult.

Some topics are taboo to a Papua New Guinean. One of the most difficult topics is sex. Sex is not openly discussed in Papua New Guinea cultures. It seems this particular aspect of PNG culture is as strong as ever among the participants in this study. Not a single participant mentioned any difficulty related to sexual matters. It was as if this

aspect of life didn't exist among the participants. Many of these participants who were away from their spouses after leading a normal married life suddenly find themselves not able to meet their sexual needs. They may turn to other sources or form relationships with other international students or local Australians. In some instances, students have disrupted their family life seriously, even to the point of separation. A few of the males have, on occasions harassed single female Papua New Guineans. In one instance, a female participant had been harassed to such an extent that she was no longer prepared to tolerate it and was planning on confronting the man with the threat of legal proceedings. This particular student commented:

I don't believe in giving myself to someone I don't love. They are wasting their time trying

Many Papua New Guineans are very superstitious people and possess strong beliefs of an outside locus of control. There is assumed to be an outside cause for both problems and good fortune. Education rarely takes away the belief in the supernatural. Both educated and uneducated people believe strongly in sorcery, poison and other magical powers of specially gifted people in their local area.

It was revealed during informal conversations held with participants that some bring certain traditional protection items (which cannot be named) from home to keep their family and home protected in Australia. One participant claimed to have contacts with the spirits, possibly his/her own deceased relatives or ancestors and believed that someone was always with the family wherever they went watching over them and protecting them from all harm. Other students in the study have indicated seeing strange events taking place while they were out socialising with this particular student. Relying on traditional beliefs seems far stronger than seeking help from a person from another culture, such as Australian counsellors.

Another student believed that her family was being cursed by senior members of their extended family (both dead and living). This originated in different conflicts in the past and that was the cause of the many problems facing the student's family. The 'spell' had to be broken before she could live a trouble-free life. (The participant did not want to mention the specific problem). The student proudly announced her plans for breaking the spell as soon as her study was completed. When asked the reasons for leaving it for so long, the student replied: *We have been prayed over many times but the problem is still existing.*

As can be seen, some problems experienced at UNE are suspended until the student gets home and solves it the traditional way. The village sorcerer or medicine man will probably be contacted and it will involve some costs in terms of cash for him to perform the ritual to break whatever spell or curse was assumed to be placed on the families of these students.

One other student believed that her wedding was not blessed by her step-father and that is why her marriage has been unstable at times. Her decision was to continue to leave the situation in the hands of God. The student commented:

There are many ways of solving this problem but my family is committed to God and we will not look for ungodly ways.

Other participants have indicated that they are proud to be Christians because they believe God takes care of everything.

Another student believed that the husband from whom she is now separated originally used black magic to attract her to him. She claimed she didn't have any love for him nor was he one of her boyfriends in the past. They were separated at the time of this study.

Students living in Australia are living away from home and their cultural environment. However the support network which powerfully influences them is the same as the one that they are accustomed to in PNG. The following discussion relates to other ways of coping with life difficulties at UNE.

The question **who do you go to for help when you faced with academic problems?** was asked in Section 2 of the questionnaire. The findings in the study revealed that 29 participants consult their lecturers and supervisors when faced with **academic** problems, 18 discuss their problems with class mates and 13 turn to close, trusted *wantoks*, presumably from Papua New Guinea (refer to Table 5.14, p. 89).

For **family** problems, 29 keep it within the family which means discussing the problems with the spouse only, 14 turn to close trusted *wantoks*, (refer to Table 5.15, p. 91) The next largest group (8) turn to their church members for prayers and support.

Personal problems again tended to be dealt with at the family level, where 25 turn to their spouse, 10 to close trusted *wantoks* and 10 contacted home in PNG. Some students claimed they tried to cope by keeping their personal problems to themselves (Table

5.16, p. 93). The same trend appeared for **financial** difficulties, where 22 contacted their banks in PNG, 15 contacted their employer, 12 kept to themselves, 10 turned to their spouse and 8 sought help from close trusted close *wantoks* (Table 5.17, p. 95). When faced with **relationship** problems, 17 tended to keep it within the family and consult the spouse, 16 discussed it with close trusted *wantoks* and, 9 turn to church groups for prayers and support (Table 5.18, p. 97). For **health** problems, 29 consult the doctor, 18 turn to their spouse before consulting the doctor, 6 contact their close trusted *wantoks* first before consulting the doctor (Table 5.19, p. 99). (Note that *wantoks* are most frequently consulted with relationship problems).

The trend in the results obtained from participants concerning the people who were contacted for help indicated that most participants preferred to keep problems at the family level and among close trusted *wantoks*, that is among people they know well on a personal level. A total of 29 (83%) indicated that they have not used the Counselling Services at UNE (Table 5.29, p. 161). The following quote may explain the reasons for not using the Counselling Services at UNE. Most Papua New Guineans, as a cultural group, need to know the counsellors personally and their role in actual practise before they feel comfortable about seeking counselling from the counsellors. The fear of seeing a counsellor was summed up by one student during an informal interview:

I feel scared and vulnerable when I don't know what to expect from the counsellors. I don't know what they are going to do to me. It basically boils down to trust. Can I trust them to keep matters discussed confidential?

The comment implies the extent to which many of the participants are ignorant about the functions of counselling and what counsellors can do for people. Papua New Guineans like to deal with people at the **personal** level.

Many Papua New Guineans put more emphasis on relationship building than on other aspects of interaction. For this reason, the need to know their counsellors is important. This is contrary to the code of ethics governing a professional counsellor at UNE. The counselling code of ethics states that:

[I]t is necessary for Counsellors to keep their relationships with clients on a professional basis. When counsellors engage in dual relationships, they tend to impair their professional judgment, the danger of exploiting the client increases, and clients are put in a vulnerable position by the power implicit in the therapist's role (Pope, 1985a in Corey 1991, p. 64).

For a Papua New Guinean, the opposite seems true. S/he must know the person before s/he goes to him/her for help. Perhaps a compromise of some kind can be created here, taking into consideration aspects of PNG cultures and the counselling code of ethics. What is the purpose of the availability of Counselling Services if many international students are not using the Service at all for cultural reasons?

Twenty one continue to have trust in Divine Intervention and trust God to provide answers to their problems All the time and a further 6 Usually follow this belief (p. 148). The trend seen here is similar to the way difficulties are approached in the family cultures of Papua New Guinea, where problems are kept in the family or, if serious, problems may be taken to the clan elders/chiefs or to the traditional imposed court system. Taking problems to the prayer group which also resembles a family of God with a common purpose is a common practice in PNG.

Five of the respondents indicated facing no problems that were worth talking about. One of the five has travelled extensively, is experienced in dealing with people and has no children living here. Another has family living in Armidale, lives by strong Christian principles and seems well able to cope with life here, despite losing a loved-one back home in the middle of the year.

Most of the participants were affected in some way by problems and difficulties affecting their families back in PNG. Some of these problems and events included: children left behind, deaths, sickness in the family which threatened the life of one of the close family members, school fee problems; and other responsibilities given to members of the extended family such as taking care of property or business during their absence. If these responsibilities are not carried out well and other difficulties arise, students living away from home can feel a deep sense of helplessness and anger with relatives. When everything is going well in the family at home, the student at UNE is usually happy and at peace as well.

The family systems theory stresses that an individual is an integral part of a family system and eventually the wider community system. Brammer (1993), contends that human systems are self-regulating and interactive within the person and each person interacts within a social system. If this is the case, then it is not surprising that Papua New Guineans, although living in Australia, still feels the strong connectedness to their people in PNG.

The above description shows that despite the long distances from home, happenings in PNG had affected the participants in different ways.

The fact that distance does not prevent events from affecting the students here, even if they are removed from the situation is an interesting point. One student commented:

I can feel and sense events taking place at home even though I am living far away

How can one explain that? There is anecdotal evidence where students have travelled home during the study break to keep abreast of happenings at home and to find peace of mind to a certain extent and have returned feeling settled and motivated to study. This goes to show further, how much Papua New Guineans are connected strongly to their people despite the long distances from home.

The extended family is a social system and operates as one. When one of the parts of the system is affected or not functioning well, the problem ripples through to the rest of the system which can be affected dramatically. For instance, a death in a family is an event in many societies in PNG that would cause complete disorder in the social system. The clan stops functioning normally to observe the funeral customs and cultural practices of that culture. In some parts of Papua New Guinea, the clan takes part in ceremonies and other customary practices for many months, sometimes for years for the close family members, depending on the status of the deceased.

There was anecdotal evidence where a student had been found to be almost at the point of breaking down, where the student felt a deep sense of helplessness when he could not do anything practical about situations facing his family in PNG. The particular student did not have the finance to travel home and study demands, pressures and the need to meet academic deadlines for different assigned tasks conflicted with the desire to go home. Eventually, despite study commitments, the student decided to go home.

Some female students have experienced a serious sense of guilt about coming to study in Australia, away from their families (mainly husband and children). These students have gone through very stressful and agonising times, constantly worrying over the children and husband. By going overseas the woman had done something culturally unacceptable. Consequently she felt responsible for the way she felt and repeatedly blamed herself for feeling this way.

In the PNG context, if the husband is playing the role of the mother to the children while the mother is studying, he is often psychologically tormented by demeaning comments and gossip from the extended family and the community in general. This prevents him from living a normal happy life, and going about his own business. The student mentioned above was quite anxious about all these happenings and rang home every week and spent a large proportion of her allowance on phone bills. Her way of coping with these problems was by committing herself to God. She would attend several different church services and prayer groups. It seems this was the coping mechanism she chose to find relief and peace of mind.

Another participant had her spouse here in Armidale, staying home while she was studying. However, she was not at ease seeing the spouse at home. She was often lead to believe that she had made the wrong decision even getting married in the beginning. The pressure from her spouse was so great that it was unbearable. She was living in fear of physical abuse if she did anything out of step or expected too much from her husband. She was pressured to be home on time, help with the cooking, and take over the children, despite her study pressures. The student was careful not to socialise with others unless permission was granted or her spouse went with her. This particular student took extra precautions not to offend her spouse in any way because he was playing her role in the house while she was studying. One wonders how persons cope with such a situation and what it does to their self-esteem and motivation in pursuing a study program. The struggle continued for this student, balancing family commitments, fulfilling cultural expectations and, at the same time, keeping up with academic pressures and living up to the expectations of her as a student. Despite the strong cultural demands and expectations placed on this student, she persevered and completed her studies successfully.

HELPER QUALITIES

Some of the difficulties described above are real examples witnessed in the course of the study. Having these problems in mind, the 35 participants were asked to identify the most important qualities of people they go to for help when faced with difficulties that cannot be solved alone.

In the study participants were presented with a list of 17 common desirable helper qualities and were asked to rate each quality in three different situations—at UNE, in the village and at work in PNG. By setting out the questions in this way, it was hoped that some differences would be shown in the qualities one looks for in the three different situations. Qualities were rated from most important to the least important. This data is presented in Table 5.35 overleaf.

The results of this exercise showed a wide spread of results. It indicated that Papua New Guineans may not be really looking for desirable qualities in their helper. If they did, the majority if not all, would either go one way (most important) or the other way (least important) when rating the 17 helper qualities, or it could be that they were looking at other qualities or aspects of the person's personality not mentioned here. If so what other aspects might be involved? Papua New Guineans may go to someone for help because of the assigned role that the person plays. One can relate to the PNG concept of ascribed status in the family or clan which is important in many parts of the country.

For instance, PNG students may go to their lecturer, because it is his/her duty to make sure students do well in their studies. A student goes to see staff of the International Office (IO) because the function of the IO is to take care of students' issues, not because of the approachable personalities those staff members may possess. Of course, the contact is made easier if the staff member is helpful, pleasant and willing to listen to and discuss problems.

Table 6.1 shows the number of subjects and the percentage of most frequent responses of participants when asked to rate most important helper qualities for three different contexts.

| HELPER QUALITY | UNE | | VILLAGE | | WORK | |
|---|-------|----|---------|----|-------|----|
| | Freq. | % | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| Listens attentively and understands | 21 | 60 | 17 | 49 | 17 | 49 |
| Accepts others as they are | 17 | 49 | 12 | 34 | 10 | 29 |
| Genuine and empathetic to other's needs and their well being | 11 | 31 | 14 | 40 | 9 | 26 |
| Trustworthy, capable, dependable and friendly | 12 | 34 | 11 | 31 | 10 | 29 |
| Has leadership experiences and qualities | 8 | 23 | 5 | 14 | 5 | 14 |
| Possesses positive view of themselves and confidence in their abilities | 11 | 31 | 10 | 29 | 7 | 20 |
| Have their own identity | 12 | 34 | 5 | 14 | 6 | 17 |
| Open-minded and open to change | 12 | 34 | 6 | 17 | 6 | 17 |
| Willingness to help and ability to be tolerant of others | 12 | 34 | 10 | 29 | 7 | 20 |
| Sincere, authentic and honest in dealings with people | 13 | 37 | 12 | 34 | 10 | 29 |
| Fair and not take sides | 13 | 37 | 8 | 23 | 10 | 29 |
| Knowledgeable, wise and patient | 13 | 37 | 8 | 23 | 8 | 23 |
| Someone who is sympathetic and supportive | 11 | 31 | 13 | 37 | 19 | 54 |
| Understanding and knowledgeable regarding traditions and is experienced in the area of problem-solving and mediation in the village | 1 | 3 | 17 | 49 | 0 | 0 |
| Believes in God and leads a practical Christian life | 8 | 23 | 8 | 23 | 3 | 9 |
| Reliable close friend who often shares personal problems | 5 | 14 | 4 | 11 | 1 | 3 |
| Maintains good social relations with everyone, honest and does not gossip about others nor spread what is told in confidence | 14 | 40 | 10 | 29 | 9 | 26 |

This Table is a compilation of three previously presented Tables, namely 5.22 (p. 137), 5.23 (p. 140) and 5.24 (p. 143). This representation allows comparisons across the three contexts investigated in this study.

The 'mentality' that participants display when faced with problems is carried over from the cultures of PNG. In some cultures, one inherits the role s/he plays according to her/his position in the family tree. For example, an aunt and an uncle have a defined role to play because of their status position. One does not have a choice, unless s/he is away from home as in the case of the subjects of this study. In this case, absence allows them to relinquish their role responsibilities. By the same token, participants may be seeing the Counsellors at UNE as professionals who are trained to do that particular job and are simply performing an expected role not because of the personal qualities they may possess. If that is the case, why isn't counselling sought more frequently by students needing help?

The following discussion relates to individual helper qualities, how those qualities are interpreted and what the qualities mean in the three different situations mentioned. The helper quality of *being fair and not taking sides* is a quality that is probably practised in PNG but this may be to a lesser extent than is practised here in Australia. In many cultures in PNG, supporting one's own clan leaves a person no choice but to oppose their enemy. The concept of being fair may exist within the family and people are treated according to their status in the clan.

Some cultures in the Highlands of PNG, are fast changing and respect for elders is diminishing as new generation leaders are taking over. It seems many clansmen are competing to accumulate wealth to prove themselves as a *bik man* (Head Man) and to gain status as leaders. They may be lacking a leader's wisdom and the extensive knowledge of the traditions which were an important qualities of a traditional village *bik man*.

A total of 37% of the participants even thought the helper quality for a person to be *fair and not take sides* was important at UNE though only 29% thought this quality is important at work in PNG. This could mean that these participants would prefer someone who would take sides with them.

Helping another in the family or clan happens because it is an obligation. Some Papua New Guineans see this form of helping as security or an investment for the future. If some material help is given, one expects to get the original amount to be returned plus 100% profit. Help is very much connected with the livelihood of the clan members and every one is interconnected in this web of 'give-and-take' trading that occurs in the everyday lives of villagers. This is done basically for survival and encourages

interdependency and dependency. One of the qualities that Papua New Guineans may look for in someone is whether that someone is hospitable, selfless and generous. The concept of giving freely and not expecting anything back, may be connected with religious concepts. Papua New Guineans may find it difficult to be altruistic.

This system of give-and-take operates well in the village but does not function so well in the workplace in towns and cities. For example, someone on very low wages expects to receive help from *wantoks*. Relatives turn up at one's door regularly of pay days, expecting to be given some money and food. Extended family obligation becomes a burden for struggling families in the urban centres.

Another helper quality is **Accepts others as they are (is non-judgmental)** and being non-judgmental is a concept that goes against what is practised in many PNG cultures. The participants come from cultures where "Others know what is best for you and you don't". Therefore, people are often judgmental and critical about the actions and behaviours of another person in the family. The helper quality of **listens attentively and understands**, may also be non-existent in some situations in PNG. This particular issue has been a problem among the participants here in Armidale where some members of the PNG community have decided to take on the role of correcting and being judgmental about another's actions. Many of the participants themselves have been victims of this kind of interference where individual participants have had their characters attacked and their family lives seriously disrupted .

Many times, both at UNE and in PNG, an individual has been publicly humiliated and criticised, and often the feelings and opinions of the individual are ignored. The person being criticised is often left with a feeling of bitterness and hatred because his/her reasons for behaving in a certain way are not understood and people draw their own conclusions and form beliefs not necessarily based in fact.

The quality of listening to another rarely happens in the PNG cultural context. Many Papua New Guineans often tend to believe rumour and gossip and make it out to be true. Often conflicts may last for a long time because nobody wants to know the truth. People believe what they want to believe. Many members of a clan are clouded with favouritism, nepotism, bias and prejudice and often are not willing to sit and listen to another. The saying that "Blood is thicker than water" describes the strong loyalty that exists to the clan.

RESPONDING TO PROBLEMS ENCOUNTERED AT UNE

The aim of Section 4 of the survey was to identify coping strategies used to solve problems faced by the participants at UNE while they are away from home. Papua New Guineans have adapted a variety of ways and approaches to solve personal problems facing them at UNE. This Section attempted to identify the coping strategies employed among the participants under study. As a group coming from another culture to Australia, the participants have faced a number of difficulties and they still face them. What do they do when they are experiencing difficulties?.

UNE is a multicultural University and the Papua New Guineans are among the 50 or so countries that have representatives here. They come into contact with many other cultures other than the host culture. Through study, they are continually gaining new ideas and skills, not only professional skills but skills related to areas of personal growth. Some conflicts that may be faced have to do with cultural differences—different ways of living, relating to others, decision making, solving problems and so on. Because the Australian ways are different from the Melanesian ways of PNG, a person coming to study in Australia would need to adapt to the new way of life. Some participants have been able to cope with the transition well, while for some others, it takes a long time to make the adjustment or, in a few cases, they don't adjust at all.

Any personal difficulties experienced while living in PNG are dealt with at their family or clan level or *wantok* level. The findings in this study confirm this problem solving strategy in that 80% of the participants indicated consulting relatives when faced with problems. The relatives in this case included siblings, parents, uncles and aunts depending on the ascribed status of the relative. In addition to this, depending on the seriousness of the problem, 43% claimed consulting their clan leaders while 37% claimed consulting friends, other than their relatives with their problems. The participants who resided in urban centres (9%) established other avenues of seeking assistance with their problems. This included seeking formal counselling in the urban centres. The 11% in the Other category tended to use alternative sources of help, for instance trusting a supernatural being to help with their difficulties. This group may seek the help of a church congregation for prayers and support.

'Losing Face' is an issue that cannot be avoided among Papua New Guineans, especially among many PNG men. Papua New Guinean men often pretend to not have problems. They pretend for a long time and are not willing to admit their ignorance on certain

skills of studying or not understanding the supervisor. They may try to forget about their problems or push the problem aside even though the issue may require immediate attention. One student, in expressing his frustration, commented:

My Supervisor is asking me to do one thing while I want to do something different. I don't feel confident doing what he is asking me to do. I can't do what he is asking me to do but I haven't confronted him with my feelings on this. I don't know how to tell him. He told me to do one thing the last time I met with him but I haven't done it. When he asked me again whether I had completed the task set and I said I did but in actual fact I haven't done it. I didn't tell him my feelings. I don't know what to do ...

This particular student was having a difficult time at UNE. It seems he lacked the communication skills needed to assert himself and express his feelings to his Supervisor. Even if he did know what to say, the underlying issue was losing face again. He could not admit his weaknesses to another man since they both were university academics with the exception that one was a student. It seems this student wanted to maintain his university academic image in front of all the others in his department and his supervisor.

Students have been known to take sides against another group and sometimes, if the issue is not dealt with openly, people may not feel comfortable to see each other or talk to each other. They may avoid any meeting with the individual(s) they are in conflict with. One student commented saying:

We go through a third party to solve our relationship problems. We don't go direct to the person involved in the conflict. We were never taught to go direct and confront a person. Very few people take this course of action. Many turn to their friends and wantoks and discuss the issue with them. The issue is talked about in a ... negative or positive way. In this way we get ... satisfaction and this is our way of releasing stress and frustration. We may never find the solution to the problem but this is the way it is done back in PNG and we feel good after talking about it in this manner.

Other ways of solving problems included: directly confronting the person(s) in the conflict; trying to forget about it; praying for the people in the conflict; or talking to them in an attempt to make peace. Many Papua New Guineans are known to keep their hurts and disappointments to themselves because they are too embarrassed to express their feelings to the person with whom they are in conflict. Many also lack assertiveness to confront themselves and the other party in an appropriate manner. Often the accumulated hurts may be released inappropriately during a drinking party or some other similar gathering.

Responding to Relationship difficulties with spouse/partner:

Many participants have had difficulties of varying degrees with their spouses/partners also. Sometimes, the problems were serious enough to call for a separation but participants felt obligated through custom not to take such an extreme measure which meant the student spouse has had to endure their problems for the duration of the study.

- (i) talk to a close friend(s) or a close *wantok*;
- (ii) contact the police for serious cases;
- (iii) talk to a UNE counsellor;
- (iv) talk to the PNGSA Patron;
- (v) keep to self in fear of verbal and physical abuse from the spouse; or
- (vi) take up drinking with friends.

The findings in the study indicated that participants tended to keep these types of difficulties to themselves, in order not to lose face. The exception was when the difficulty developed into something beyond their control. Only 29% of the participants **talk to their close friends or close *wantoks*** Sometimes, 14% Often, 6% Usually, while 44% Never take their problems to close friends. There was anecdotal evidence where particular individuals felt restricted from talking to someone. They feared that the idea of taking the problem outside would not be approved by their spouse. Again, this might result in a loss of face for the male spouse if his problems were discussed with someone else outside the family.

Only 17% of the participants **contacted the police**. Sometimes, 74% indicated Never while 9% gave no response. In one instance, a particular student contacted the police in fear of physical assault from her spouse. The spouse, after spending a night in the cell, went to court and was given a restraining order by the court which was effective for a short term before the situation again degenerated.

The UNE **Counselling Service** is provided for students to seek help on difficulties such as those faced by the Papua New Guineans in this study. The findings in this study indicated that only 18% of the participants have taken their problems to the UNE Counsellors, and 73% Never sought counselling at any time during their stay at UNE.

The other avenue was to talk to the **PNGSA Patron**. The result revealed that 6% took their difficulties to the Patron 'Often', another 6% did so Sometimes, 77% have Never spoken to the Patron about difficulties facing them. Only one participant indicated talking to the patron All the time.

Sometimes relationship problems are kept **within the family**. The student affected may feel restricted from talking to someone outside in fear of verbal or physical abuse from the spouse. This was confirmed when 21% indicated keeping the problems to themselves All the time for the reasons mentioned earlier, 9% Sometimes keep problems to themselves, 3% keep to themselves Often, 6% Usually keep to themselves and 3% Never keep their problems to themselves.

Many male students **turn to drinking** when they are frustrated, or stressed over difficulties faced either in the family or with academic studies. There was anecdotal evidence where students have become involved in brawls during drinking sprees even to the point of physical fights and damaging property. The findings in the study indicated that 26% turn to drinking Sometimes, the majority 66% claimed Never taking up drinking as a way of coping with stresses or problems concerning academic studies. The Never group consisted mainly of Christians among the PNG community.

BELIEFS ABOUT FORMAL COUNSELLING:

Participants' beliefs about formal counselling were sought toward the end of the survey questionnaire. Possible reasons for the results obtained for **Questions 14 and 15** may be:

- (1) Most of the participants simply had no experience in counselling and therefore could not comfortably talk about counselling.
- (2) It is possible that questions may have been 'too close to the bone' and participants did not feel comfortable responding.
- (3) Since it was last item in the questionnaire, participants may have found the questionnaire long and tedious.
- (4) Solving problems or coping with problems through counselling may be outside participants normal way of coping.
- (5) Some questions may have been poorly worded for the participants to understand what was asked of them.
- (6) It is possible that there may have been too many questions to answer.
- (7) Some may not have felt obliged to respond to all the questions.

The study revealed that Papua New Guineans faced serious academic problems. There are services made available to help alleviate some of, if not, all of the academic problems and successfully complete the course. These services include: individual counselling interviews by qualified counsellors; counselling workshops on self awareness; assertiveness training; stress management; and meditation organised and run by the Counselling Service.

The functions of the Student Services Department includes providing up-to-date information on accommodation for students; employment; scholarships; and excursions during the semester.

Language workshops are organised and take place during the semester. Skills training workshops include: academic writing skills; study skills; reading; note taking;

referencing; and research writing skills. There are also part-time language tutors for individual tuition at the Service which are available to international students at UNE.

Despite all these services being available to Papua New Guinean students, the 35 Papua New Guineans in this study claimed they faced serious academic problems. There is anecdotal evidence that not many Papua New Guineans use these services. So, the questions that come into mind are: Are they using the services exhaustively? If they don't use these services, what is preventing them from using them? Is it pride or is it a cultural thing? Is 'losing face' an issue? Are they telling themselves that they can do an essay but, in actual fact, they have difficulty writing an essay but are too embarrassed to admit they need help by attending writing workshop? They may have learnt incorrect methods and may find it difficult to make changes easily and may be embarrassed about starting all over again with younger Australians.

Vagueness of the reply provided by some participants when answering questions with terms like Sometimes or Usually may indicate insecurity or uncertainty.

Some conflicting issues brought out in the comments of the participants in the last part of the questionnaire needed to be explored further. Some of the participants saw a difference between help received through counselling and help received at home. The differences are in the emphasis they put on the individual. Formal counselling helps individuals sort out their problems and, in the PNG context, the problem can be solved by someone else rather than the one affected by it. The concept of individual verses group responsibility is emphasised here again.

THE USE OF UNE COUNSELLING SERVICE

Use of the UNE Counselling Service by participants was low. The most common reasons for not using the Counselling Service were:

1. Participants' problems are not serious enough to be taken to a professional counsellor. This comes from the belief that only serious problems are taken to counsellors.
2. Counsellors are strangers and, because they are not known personally, it is not possible to build trust in a stranger. Papua New Guineans like to know with

whom they are dealing and what their abilities are. Papua New Guineans are generally anxious about stepping into the unknown. One student said:

I am suspicious about what they will do to me.

3. The No response participants and those that gave non-committal answers were in the majority and it was sensed that these participants did not want to be open or do not want to reveal their difficulties or weaknesses with others, especially to another Papua New Guinean (the researcher). The issue of trust is involved here. Participants in this case may find it difficult to reveal their feelings and thoughts and, therefore, are unable to learn from others or from the Service. A strong cultural mentality prevents them from opening up and taking on contemporary methods and approaches to solving difficulties. One male participant commented :

Family and personal difficulties I may face is my problem. I can deal with it myself. I don't need help from anybody.

This type of attitude can prevent one from entertaining or accommodating new ways of looking at issues. Seeking and being seem to need help from a person outside his family may be demeaning for a PNG male. They worry about what others will say about them if they seek counselling. They fear the assumptions of the rest of the Papua New Guineans not in possession of the facts. The same fear was expressed, about attending other workshops such as academic writing. Occasional comments such as the following may be made "No gut ol iting olsem mi no gat hat" (English translation is: "I have no brains"). This is an example of 'losing face'.

4. Many simply did not know how to solve a problem any differently even though issues affecting them are contemporary issues requiring different and new skills to resolve. One student commented:

I don't know what else to do. I deal with my problems the best way I feel comfortable to deal with it

5. Papua New Guineans generally assume that UNE Counsellors may not understand their culture and problems well enough to give sound advice. This is supported by the following statements from two participants:

UNE Counsellors do not understand our culture. How can they counsel us from a different culture.

Counsellors at UNE must understand PNG cultures before giving counselling to [a] Papua New Guinean student.

6. There were participants in the group who still did not know the functions of the Counselling Service. A comment made by one of the participant adds meaning to this result because this participant thinks that:

Help received at home is more practical while professional Counsellors induce a lot of talking.

7. Twenty percent of the participants were embarrassed about telling a stranger their problems. The following comment supports this result:

I am comfortable talking to close friends and wantoks, not go to a complete stranger. I must know the person before I can talk to him/her about my problems.

8. Formal counselling is a Western concept and 23% of participants are not used to the idea of being counselled in this context. This point is supported by a comment made in the last part of the questionnaire, namely:

Informal counsellors at home counsel in their cultural context and [this] is more appealing. UNE counsellors use [a] Western concept of counselling.

9. Nine percent of participants thought **counselling was only for women and not for men**, while 20% disagreed with the statement which could mean that counselling is for both men and women. A total of 20% of the participants Strongly agreed with the statement that Papua New Guinean men are unlikely to use counselling because, culturally, this is seen as a sign of weakness, while only 6% 'Strongly disagreed' with this statement. One student commented:

Why go to a Counsellor when one should know how to solve [one's] own problems.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the main issue raised in the discussion was that despite living away from home for long periods of time and their qualifications and training, Papua New Guineans at UNE are very much affected by their culture in their outlook and views on coping with difficulties facing them. Papua New Guineans have a very strong cultural bond with their people. Some changes from their traditional culture are evident but many still use the traditional methods of solving problems. Many prefer to keep their problems in their families and with close trusted *wantoks* because this is the method they are used to following in their culture. Perhaps many participants also consider other qualities of a helper rather than the list given in the questionnaire. Firstly they must know that person and establish some kind of relationship at the personal level before they can go to them for help to solve personal problems.

The serious difficulties facing the group of students in the study were mostly academic problems and then financial difficulties for some large families, or family and relationship problems for others. The study revealed that the majority of the Papua New Guineans at UNE did not use the Counselling Service at UNE. There was a general lack of the skill of assertion to freely express their opinions and feelings on the issues affecting them.

The majority of the participants are not aware of the functions of the UNE Counselling Service and many also possessed a distorted idea of what it is, what it can do and the importance of the Service in the institution.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction and Overview: Chapter 1-6.

As outlined in Chapter 1, this study endeavoured to examine the experiences of Papua New Guineans studying at UNE. The aims of the study were to:

- identify difficulties encountered and then investigate how these difficulties are dealt with;
- identify their helpers and the qualities that attract the students to seek help when faced with problems;
- identify the use of the UNE Counselling Service and other student services available to PNG students.

The research questions that were posed arising out of the aims were :

- (i) what are the difficulties experienced by Papua New Guineans studying at UNE?
- (ii) what are the coping strategies employed by these students;
- (iii) who do the students prefer to contact for help;
- (iv) what are the characteristics of the helpers of these students?

The data obtained from the questionnaire and informal conversational interview were used to consider these six issues in relation to the research questions. The six issues were:

- a) what is helping in the Western concept of helping another in crisis?
- b) what is helping in the traditional societies of PNG?
- c) what are the differences and similarities in the two concepts of helping?
- d) what are the desirable qualities of a helper in the village and at work in contemporary PNG, as well as while studying at the University of New England?
- e) what are the coping strategies adopted by Papua New Guinean students at UNE when they have a need to resolve difficulties? and
- f) what does a Papua New Guinean perceive helping or counselling to be?

In order to achieve the aims of the study, a descriptive survey using a questionnaire as the main tool to collect data from the participants was constructed. A very brief

informal conversation seeking clarification was conducted with those participants that the researcher came into contact with.

The participants' experiences at UNE have been a mixture of positive and negative experiences. The majority (46 %) indicated having experienced serious academic difficulties. Other serious problems faced were family difficulties (11%), financial hardship (15%), and serious relationship difficulties (9%). Specific details on the types of academic difficulties faced by participants were described in Chapter 6.

Other difficulties faced included aloneness and feelings of isolation, and helplessness. Additionally, other happenings back in PNG often had a serious effect on almost all participants. Some participants were affected by these circumstances more than others. The study revealed that a number of the participants are superstitious and believed in an external cause to the difficulties they faced. As a result, an external solution was often sought and it was not unusual to find that difficulties faced were kept until after completion of the period of study to be dealt with in the traditional way back in the village upon their return.

The following is a summary of the coping mechanisms used by the participants when faced with difficulties. The findings in the study revealed that the majority of the participants tended to keep their problems to themselves or within the family most of the time unless the particular challenge facing them was beyond their control. When this happens almost half of the participants indicated contacting a close friend or trusted *wantoks*, over eighty percent contacted their spouses, a quarter sought help from the church congregation for prayers and support, almost twenty percent kept their problems to themselves, over ten percent sought help from course mates while only eleven percent claimed getting help from UNE Counsellors. Other avenues used by a small number of the participants was contact with the Patron of PNGSA.

The trend seemed to be that the participants find it easy to reveal their personal and family problems to a family member, a close friend or trusted *wantok*. This reflects the way problems and difficulties are solved in the different groups in PNG. Problems are mainly kept within the group (both immediate and extended families). If serious they may take their problem to the clan chiefs and leaders. The participants have kept this concept at UNE, where they do not feel comfortable taking their problems to complete strangers who come from a different culture. Some of the questions Papua New Guineans may ask are:

- Will they understand my problem in my context?
- How can I trust them enough to tell my difficulties?

The difficulty facing Papua New Guineans, it seems, is the level of trust in a person. If participants do not know a helper to trust him/her enough, they may not open up to the helper.

Getting outside help by the participants in this study is minimal and very few students indicated getting help from outside as evident from the results presented in Chapter 5. For academic problems, over eighty percent of participants contacted their lecturers, half contacted and discussed with classmates, a little over one third preferred to discuss their difficulties with close trusted *wantoks*. For financial problems, over sixty percent contact their bank in PNG, about forty percent contact their employer, one third preferred to keep to themselves while a little under one quarter turn to close trusted *wantoks*. Twenty nine percent had other sources to turn to such as family members at home in PNG, obtaining a loan from UNE, or seeing UNE counsellors and Student Services, etc.

One third of participants contacted family and close trusted friends for relationship problems. The spouses were the first people contacted for health problems before the doctor is consulted. After that participants contact close trusted *wantoks*.

These results reveal an interesting point. The Papua New Guineans are used to solving problems within their extended family in their culture in PNG. Many cultures discourage their members from taking their problems outside the extended family unless the person from whom help is sought is a close blood relative.

The participants in this study may not be familiar with seeking help outside, especially from strangers like the UNE counsellors. The concept of keeping things within the family or to close trusted *wantoks* is practised among the participants in this study. Therefore, anybody else is outside their close family, trusted *wantoks* and friends is unlikely to be contacted for help. The majority of participants have turned to God for help.

When discussing the qualities of the participants' helpers, the findings indicated that the responses were wide-spread with the majority falling in between Most important qualities and Least important qualities which indicated that they may not have been

certain of what responses to give or that they had never looked at their helpers in that particular way. Another reason could be that there are other qualities that the participants were looking for in the helper that were not listed in the questionnaire. If they were looking at the listed helper qualities as important or not important, the responses would either skew one direction (most important) or the other direction (least important). The following saying describes what is expressed above " Either the glass is half-full or it is half-empty". The researcher suggests that the concept of placing importance on the qualities of helpers may have been difficult for the participants because, in real life, one does not look at a person in bits and pieces but as a whole person—that is whether you know and like that person or you don't like that person. A single known desirable quality of a helper may override all other undesirable qualities of a person. By the same token, an individual may have all the desirable helper qualities but one small known undesirable quality may override all the desirable qualities depending on the situation.

The concept of helping and the reasons for helping in PNG were described in Chapter 3. Basically 'helping' in the traditional cultures of the participants is deep-rooted and has strong connections with survival meanings. People in the family/clan support each other for survival in the harsh conditions of PNG. Help is given knowing that help will be returned to you in the future. In other words, assistance given to another family member is a form of security or investment for the future. Parents pay school fees for their children so that, in the future when children find paid jobs, they, in turn, will care for the aging parents. The participants in the study may not have assessed the qualities of their helpers at UNE, at work and in the village in the same way but may seek help from someone because of the roles that are played at UNE.

Participants in this study found themselves in a situation removed from their cultural setting, having difficulty in being themselves, where they are free to **be** and feel good about it. In the UNE context they are not doing things they are used to doing. A **feeling of helplessness** was revealed in this study. Those participants who still very much feel part of the culture in PNG, seemed affected more than others who felt distant from home. Village people look up to the participants to take the lead in everything that happens in their extended family back in Papua New Guinea. Living away from home brought about the feeling of helplessness—the feeling of letting their family down, of not being able to assist, or take part in the different happenings at home. The thought that their families are struggling on their own was depressing for many of the participants. The effort to maintain concentration and focus on their study became a burden for many.

Many participants experienced the **feeling of isolation** overwhelmingly. They perceive the host culture as different. In the host culture, people mind their own business and leave one alone to mind one's own business, something most Papua New Guineans are not used to, coming from a society where everything is done communally and for others. The pressure of socialisation actually dictates what one should do and how one should behave.

Many participants experienced **aloneness** at UNE unless family members were living with them. A number of participants felt the aloneness more if this was first time to be away from their families and home.

In conclusion, the experiences of Papua New Guineans studying at UNE in 1996/7 are summed up by the departing comments of one of the students:

Australians have everything they need but they miss three very important aspects of life that I am rich with in my culture and that is : smile, humour and hospitality. I feel sad for Australians because they don't have what I have. They have lost the humanness and [are] well on the way to be artificial beings.

Another commented upon her departure.

The culture in Australia is one that shapes people to wear too many masks and lead an artificial life. I felt people are not being genuine and being true to themselves and to others. I felt restricted and I found it hard to be myself without being frowned upon. What is normal in my own society may not be normal here. That does not make me any less important or strange. It is just different ways of looking at the same thing.

Besides these comments made by some participants, there have been many good experiences. The Papua New Guineans have come away from extended family responsibilities and related problems and have been able to lead an independent life at UNE relatively free from family obligations. Participants have been able to have some privacy to be with their immediate family members more for their short stay at UNE.

The Australian society like all other societies reflects its different culture in the way the people live, raise their children, differ in socialisation, in expectations, in ways of problem solving, and in the sense of community living together and ways of just 'being'.

Individuals in Australian society are basically on their own. They live alone most of the time unless they have family members living near them otherwise people are left to cope for themselves as they age.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As a result of the findings from the study, the following recommendations are made

Recommendation 1: The University of New England should introduce a compulsory unit to be included in the Orientation program for new international students. This should include an intensive unit organised and run by the International Office in conjunction with the Counselling Service involving all the counsellors for a couple of days. This would:

- be an appropriate introduction of new students to the expertise and orientation of the counsellors;
- provide an opportunity to sensitise new students to the culture of 'helping' in a Western context;
- provide a point of contrast to traditional helping methods which the new international student brings with him/her and provide an opportunity for similarities and differences in helping methods to be discussed in a structured situation;
- also help new students to gain some confidence in the counsellor's speciality;
- present an opportunity for the students to be introduced to the different study skills and personal development courses that are organised and conducted by the counsellors during the year;
- whet the appetite of overseas students generally, and Melanesian students in particular, to attract these new students to participate because they probably don't know the benefits one can get from such courses;
- also serve as an introduction and opportunity to get to know the other new international students, all of whom are probably just as 'lost' as one another; and

- would provide a means by which distorted concepts of the role of counsellors and of the Counselling Service that the new students may come with could be clarified at the beginning of the period of study

While some aspects of this recommendation have been undertaken in the past, the approach has arguably been through "white-skin" eyes and, therefore, fails to meet the specific needs of PNG students. A more intensive, more focussed and more highly structured program is needed.

Recommendation 2: Self Awareness workshops should be developed for each cultural group, such as Papua New Guineans who are the focus of this study.

If Papua New Guineans continue to be among the largest group of international students on the UNE campus there needs to be a weekly or monthly program organised for and by the students on different topics, either a focused discussion or a workshop organised on counselling topics such as assertiveness training, listening skills, or stress management courses that the students can attend for personal growth and improvement. A self-awareness program needs to be organised and properly introduced so that it may attract participants for other workshops as well as encourage individuals looking for help to seek counselling.

The benefit of self-awareness courses would be:

- students could work on building trust among themselves and it would be the beginning of an understanding of themselves, their values and beliefs which are not necessarily universal so that they could come to understand that every one has values and beliefs that require respect;

During these workshops, students could be introduced to other services that are located in town if required (for instance the women's shelter).

Recommendation 3: That UNE should develop a specific dedicated **mentoring program** which focuses not only on the pragmatic aspects of students completing their degrees and graduating but which also attends to the issues of personal and professional development as well. Research conducted at UNE by Uakeia (1994) on the issue of mentoring of international students confirms the need for a well structured mentoring system at UNE. In the study, of those who had mentoring experiences while studying at UNE, the majority (56%) confirmed that:

... the effect of a mentoring relationship on [a postgraduate student participant's] personal growth was very valuable. The majority (82%) confirmed that a mentoring relationship had a very positive effect on their academic growth and was perceived as being very valuable (p.66).

It was apparent in the Uakeia (1994) study that mentoring had a significant beneficial effect in developing both personal and academic growth. The majority of those who had not had a mentor expressed interest in developing a mentoring relationship and further recognised the positive contribution that mentoring can offer a postgraduate student in realising his/her potential.

Recommendation 4: UNE must focus on **personal** and **professional** development as well as on the academic development of the students.

FURTHER RESEARCH

A number of possibilities exist for further research. Since this study concentrated on the experiences of the Papua New Guineans only, there are specific limits concerning the applicability of results to other cultural groups at UNE; and to Melanesian students at other universities. The degree to which the results of this study can be generalised to other nationalities at UNE or to other Melanesian students in different settings is limited.

Consideration should be given to studying international populations on other campuses, especially larger metropolitan campuses where anonymity poses even greater pressures and possibly encourages particular cultural groups to cluster together to provide traditional support to one another. Further research could pose questions such as:

- What are the experiences of the range of international students at UNE in seeking help for their problems?
- How do international students cope with the problems facing them?
- What is the difference between help received here at UNE and help received at home?

- What impact does studying at a large metropolitan campus have on the type of help sought and received by international students compared with what happens at a small rural campus such as UNE?

Further research could compare and contrast different helper qualities in different settings and cultures. International students bring to the UNE campus a world of difference. It is unreasonable to assume that they will look for the same qualities in helpers as is assumed in the West. Focus needs to be on the particular aspects that makes both cultures and individuals different.

For a campus to be truly international, greater attention needs to be paid to the providers of counselling, welfare and support services and the understanding that these providers have of cultural diversity. Understanding needs to move beyond lip-service to a more complete understanding of multi-culturalism as suggested by Pedersen (1976, 1985, 1988, and 1990). Understanding also needs to address the implications of a culturally diverse population studying at a Western campus.

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APPENDIX 1

QUESTIONNAIRE

**Questionnaire on Personal and Academic
Experiences
of Papua New Guineans studying at UNE**

Section One: Personal Information

Please read carefully the following items and respond by **ticking** or **filling in the blank spaces** provided for you.

1. Please indicate your gender:

Male ☐ Female ☐

2. Where do you come from in PNG?

Province _____ District _____

2.1 Where do you live while you are working in PNG?

☐ City (Lae, Pom) ☐ Town ☐ Station ☐ Village

2.2. Where did you live as you were growing up and before leaving home?

☐ City (Lae, Pom) ☐ Town ☐ Station ☐ Village

2.3 Before you left home, what kind of life style did your parents have?

☐ Traditional ☐ Partly traditional ☐ Non-traditional life style

3. How is your traditional society organised?

☐ Patrilineal (in the male line) ☐ Matrilineal (in the female line)
☐ Other

3.1 How long have you lived away from home? (No. of yrs)

3.2 Reasons for leaving home : Please tick box(es)

- ☐ Education ☐ Live with relatives/friends ☐ Occupation
☐ Other

3.3 How much contact do you have with your parents and relatives and traditional support system at your village?

- ☐ None at all ☐ Sometimes ☐ Regularly

4.0 Have you travelled overseas before coming to UNE?

- ☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, answer the following questions.

| 4.1 Where? | When? | Reason?..... |
|------------------|-------------|--------------|
| | | |
| | | |
| | | |

5. What dependants do you have in Armidale?

- ☐ Spouse ☐ Children ☐ None

5.1 What is your profession? (eg teaching.)

.....

5.2 What are your qualifications ?

| | | |
|-----------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| degree(s) | where gained? | when? |
| degree(s) | " | " |
| diploma(s) | " | " |
| certificates(s) | " | " |

Section Two: Problems Encountered

It is common for overseas students to experience personal difficulties while studying away from home for a number of years at an overseas university, such as UNE. The following statements are intended to explore the experiences and difficulties you might have had while studying at UNE. Please answer the following questions as honestly as you can.

6.0 Who do you go to for help when faced with :

6.1 Academic Problems. Tick the appropriate box(es).

- ☐ Lecturer(s)
 - ☐ Patron of PNG Students' Association
 - ☐ Class mates
 - ☐ Closely trusted Wantoks
 - ☐ UNE counselling services
 - ☐ Church members
 - ☐ Keep the problem to myself
 - ☐ Try to forget about it
 - ☐ No academic problems
 - ☐ Other (please indicate)
-

6.2 Family Problems. Tick the appropriate box(es)

- ☐ Talk or discuss with spouse
 - ☐ A close wantok from my area
 - ☐ Member(s) of my church
 - ☐ Lecturer(s)
 - ☐ UNE Counsellors
 - ☐ Student Services workers
 - ☐ Class mates I am close to
 - ☐ Patron of PNG Students' Association
 - ☐ PNGSA leaders (President, Deputy)
 - ☐ Keep the problem to myself
 - ☐ No family problems
 - ☐ Other (please indicate)
-

6.3 Personal Problems. Tick the appropriate box(es).

- ☐ Student Services workers
 - ☐ UNE Counsellors
 - ☐ Church member(s) (eg. priests, pastors, church elders)
 - ☐ Close Wantoks from PNG
 - ☐ PNGSA leaders (executive)
 - ☐ Lecturer(s)
 - ☐ Patron of PNG Students' Association
 - ☐ Contact home by phone or correspondence
 - ☐ Discuss it with my spouse
 - ☐ Keep it to myself
 - ☐ No personal problems
 - ☐ Other (please indicate)
-

6.4 Financial Problems. Tick the appropriate box(es).

- ☐ Contact my bank in PNG
 - ☐ Contact my employer for support
 - ☐ Close trusted Wantok(s)
 - ☐ Lecturer(s)
 - ☐ Contact parents/extended family in PNG for support
 - ☐ Contact member(s) of my church
 - ☐ Get help from spouse
 - ☐ Student services
 - ☐ UNE counsellors
 - ☐ Apply for a loan from UNE financial office
 - ☐ Keep it to myself
 - ☐ No financial problems
 - ☐ Other (please indicate)
-

6.5 **Relationship problems with others**, including your own family

Tick the appropriate box(es)

- ☐ Close trusted Wantoks living in Armidale
- ☐ Church members (Pastor, Priest)
- ☐ Contact my family in PNG
- ☐ PNG Student Assoc. leaders
- ☐ Patron of PNG Students' Association
- ☐ Talk it over with spouse before we approach the other person(s) in the conflict
- ☐ Keep all problems to myself
- ☐ Class mates
- ☐ UNE counsellors
- ☐ Student services
- ☐ No relationship problems with others
- ☐ Others (please indicate)

6.6 **Health problems**

- ☐ Close trusted Wantoks living in Armidale
- ☐ Talk it over with spouse before seeing the Doctor
- ☐ Keep it to myself
- ☐ UNE counsellors
- ☐ Church members (Pastor, Priest)
- ☐ Consult the Doctor
- ☐ Other (please indicate).....

7. **What academic problems have you experienced?** Tick the appropriate box(es).

- ☐ Difficulty with academic English
- ☐ Access to library resources
- ☐ Arranging a suitable Supervisor
- ☐ Difficulty with academic writing
- ☐ Other (please indicate).....

8. **Of all the problems you have indicated from 6.1 to 7, which one was the most serious problem?**

.....
.....

Section 3: Personal qualities of your helpers

Think of the people you feel comfortable talking to about your problems. You may have had problems when you were at home in the village or at work in PNG. You may have experienced problems while you have been here at UNE. The following statements are made about the desirable qualities of a helper in each situation. What are **the most important qualities** of your helpers?

9. Rank the list of qualities (a-q) of helpers in each situation, (village, at work, and at UNE) from 1 (MOST important) to 6 (LEAST important) in the column spaces below.

| | Qualities of helpers | In the village [Rank 1—6] | At work in PNG [Rank 1—6] | At UNE [Rank 1—6] |
|----|---|------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------|
| a. | Listens attentively and understands. | | | |
| b. | Accept others as they are (is non-judgmental). | | | |
| c. | Genuine and empathetic to others' needs and their well-being. | | | |
| d. | Trustworthy, capable, dependable and friendly. | | | |
| e. | Has leadership experience and qualities. | | | |
| f. | Possesses positive view of themselves and confidence in their abilities. | | | |
| g. | Have their own identity. (These people know who they are, what they are capable of becoming, what they want out of life and what is essential). | | | |
| h. | Open-minded and open to change. | | | |
| i. | Willingness to help and able to tolerate others. | | | |
| j. | Sincere, authentic and honest in their dealings with people. | | | |
| k. | Fair and not take sides. | | | |
| l. | Knowledgeable, wise and patient. | | | |
| m. | Someone who is sympathetic and supportive. | | | |
| n. | Understanding and knowledgeable regarding traditions and is experienced in the area of problem-solving and mediation in the village. | | | |
| o. | Believes in God and leads a practical Christian life. | | | |
| p. | Reliable close friend who often shares personal problems. | | | |
| q. | Maintains good social relations with everyone, honest and does not gossip about others nor spread what is told in confidence. | | | |

Section 4 : Responding to problems

10. At home in PNG, people respond to personal problems in many different ways. **How do you solve your personal problems while you are at home in PNG? Is it through :** Please tick the box(es).

- ☐ formal counselling
- ☐ relatives (parents, brothers/sisters)
- ☐ clan elders according to cultural patterns
- ☐ friends other than relatives
- ☐ other(please indicate)

- 10.1 Here are some ways of responding to personal problems that you may use when you have problems and you want to **keep them to yourself** while you are at UNE. **What level of responses would be true for you in the following statements?**

Rate yourself by circling the appropriate number.

| | 1 Never | 2 Sometimes | 3 Often | 4 Usually | 5 All the time |
|---|------------|----------------|------------|--------------|-------------------|
| i) Keep them to myself and worry about it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ii) Put it aside for a while until I am ready to deal with it. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| iii) Play sport or take up other activities as a way of releasing stresses | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| iv) Take it out on the family although I don't mean to hurt them in any way. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| v) Meditate as a way of finding peace in myself. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| vi) I trust in the Lord to give me courage to deal with my problems | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| vii) Try to forget about the problem | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| viii) Write the problems down and read them aloud to myself | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (ix) Other | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

11. Sometimes you may encounter relationship difficulties with others while studying at UNE. **How do you respond to these types of problems?**

Rate yourself by **circling the appropriate number**.

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|-------|-----------|-------|---------|--------------|
| Never | Sometimes | Often | Usually | All the time |

- | | | | | | | |
|-------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| i) | Go and tell friends/Wantoks about it and get support/sympathy. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ii) | In this situation, you need someone (the rest of the Wantoks) to mediate and settle it like the way it is done back in PNG. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| iii) | It is good to get support from your close friends to approach the other person. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| iv) | Take it to the PNGSA leaders to help solve the problem if one cannot do it on his/her own. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| v) | Keep away from the person who has hurt you and cut off your relationship with him/her until s/he apologises or compensates you. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| vi) | Is there another behaviour that is not listed that you use. Write it in and rate it as for (i) to (v). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

12. **How do you specifically respond to relationship difficulties with your spouse/partner?**

- | | | | | | | |
|-------|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| i) | Talk to a close friend(s) or a close Wantoks(s). | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ii) | If serious I may contact the police. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| iii) | Talk to a Counsellor at UNE. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| iv) | Talk to PNGSA Patron. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| v) | Keep it to myself in fear of verbal/physical abuse. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| vi) | I may go out and have some drinks with friends. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| vii) | Other | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

Section 5: Counselling Services at UNE

The University of New England provides a number of student support services and one of the services provided is counselling. Professional counsellors are employed to provide counselling services to anyone who needs these services.

13. **Have you been able to use the UNE Counselling Service during your stay at UNE?** (Please tick the appropriate box).

Yes ☐ No ☐

If **yes**, answer questions 13.1,13.2, 13.3, 13.4,14,15,16,17.

If **no**, go to questions 14,15,16,187

- 13.1 **How often have you used the Counselling Service?** Please tick box(es).

☐ 1 – 2 times ☐ 3 – 4 times ☐ 5 – 6 times ☐ more than 6 times

- 13.2 **What kind of problem did you take to the Counsellors at the UNE Counselling Services?** (Please tick the appropriate box(es)).

- ☐ Personal conflicts
- ☐ Marital problems
- ☐ Sexual problems
- ☐ Financial problems
- ☐ Conflicts with others (eg. Wantoks)
- ☐ Grief and loss
- ☐ For personal growth
- ☐ Health problems
- ☐ Other (please indicate)

- 13.3 **What made you aware of these possibilities?** (Please tick appropriate boxes)

- ☐ Friends
- ☐ Lecturers
- ☐ Orientation activities involving counsellors
- ☐ Brochures, notice board, etc.
- ☐ Other (please indicate)

13.4 What were your reasons for taking your problems to the counsellors?

- ☐ For confidentiality reasons.
- ☐ I needed professional counselling with my particular problem(s).
- ☐ I knew the service was available to me .
- ☐ I was counselled before and the experience was good
- ☐ Other (please indicate)

14. Here are statements representing beliefs about formal counselling at UNE. Rate each statement according to your agreement or disagreement by circling the appropriate number.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|--|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| | Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |
| i) Professional counselling is only for people with serious problems. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ii) The Counselling Service is not used because many Papua New Guineans do not know what it actually does. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| iii) I do not go for counselling because I am afraid that the Counsellors may see through me and find out the weaknesses and fears that I have. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| iv) Many students are embarrassed and too shy to tell a stranger all about their personal difficulties. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| v) One can get counselling even if they have no problems in their life. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| vi) One can get support from a Wantok, friends and family members at home and there is no need to go for professional counselling. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| vii) Formal counselling is a Western concept and New Guineans are used to informal helping from relatives and Wantoks. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| viii) Counselling is for women only. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ix) PNG males are unlikely to use counselling because culturally this will be seen as a weakness. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| (x) Other | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

15. Here are some statements or beliefs about counselling generally (not specifically UNE counselling services) and what it means. **For each statement or belief, rate your level of agreement or disagreement by circling the appropriate number**

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|----------------|-------|-----------|----------|-------------------|
| Strongly Agree | Agree | Undecided | Disagree | Strongly Disagree |

- | | | | | | | |
|-------|--|---|---|---|---|---|
| i) | It is a place where you can go and get advice from an expert. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| ii) | Counselling is helping someone to manage their life better. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| iii) | An individual can receive counselling for personal growth, whether they have problems or not. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| iv) | The counselling services at UNE, should be used by all students who want to improve their lives at UNE, at home and improve relationships with others. | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

16. **What do you think is the main difference between counselling you have received at UNE and help you have received at home in PNG?.**

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

.....

17. **Please add any other comments that you would like to make that are relevant to this study**

.....

.....

.....

.....

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX 2

MAP OF PNG SHOWING RURAL-URBAN DRIFT BASED ON INFORMATION FROM THE 1990 NATIONAL CENSUS

APPENDIX 3

RESEARCH PLAN

STAGES IN PLANNING A SURVEY

