

# Status of Counselling Awareness among Secondary School Students: A Case Study of Oji River Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

Counselling provides information and assistance in critical areas of academic, social, personal, vocational, emotional and psychological challenges. Despite its importance, the level of counselling awareness among secondary school students leaves much to be desired. Hence, this descriptive study investigated status of counselling awareness among secondary school students in Oji River Local Government Area of Enugu State. A sample of 1218 students drawn from the population using proportional stratified random sampling technique participated in the study. The instrument for data collection was Counselling Awareness Inventory which was validated with the assistance of experts from the Department of Counselling Psychology. It has a reliability index of 0.83 which was established through test-retest method and Pearson correlation coefficient technique. The results of the study showed that there was no counselling awareness among the students; no significant difference in counselling awareness existed between male and female students and there was no significant difference in counselling awareness between students from schools located in urban centres and students from schools located in rural areas. It was therefore recommended that government of Enugu State should consider it a matter of necessity to employ professional counsellors and deploy them to secondary schools as staff to provide the much needed counselling services to the students.

**Keywords:** Career counselling, vocational counselling, academic counselling, personal counseling, marriage counselling

## Introduction

Onyekuru (2010) defined counselling as a dyadic relationship between a counsellor and a client in which the client is aided to cope with his problems through the expertise of a counsellor. Onyekuru and Ekechukwu (2014) saw counselling as a process essentially concerned with helping clients gain self-knowledge, self-dependence, self-development and self-actualization that will usher him to fullness of living, knowledge acquisition and problem-solving skills. Counselling is the process by which a professionally trained person (called counsellor) helps a person cope with mental and emotional problems, distress and discomfort. It is a service provided by a trained professional in which a client receives skilled advice to address any variety of life problems such as mental illness, mental conflict, substance abuse, sleeplessness, low school performance, bereavement or some other issues affecting the mental health and well being of the client and family. Counseling is a principled relationship characterized by the application of one or more psychological theories and a recognized set of communication skills modified by experience, intuition and other interpersonal factors, to clients' intimate concerns, problems or aspirations (Dryden & Feltham, 1993). Guidance and counselling is an integral and requisite part of any education system and a lot of emphasis should be laid on its implementation to ensure that its roles and objectives are realized. Guidance and counselling provides information in three critical areas: academic, personal, social, and career (Watts, 2010). In secondary school system, this information can help students resolve emotional, social or behavioural problems and also help them develop a clearer focus or sense of direction. Effective counselling programs are important to the school climate and a crucial element in improving student achievement and career development (Cheek & Bradley, 2009).

There are many types of counseling. Some of them as enumerated by Onyekuru (2010) include:

1. **Vocation/career counselling:** This is the type of counselling whereby a person or student is provided with information on the type of course or vocation to choose where success is most likely to be attained based on the person's innate talents or endowment. Some secondary school graduates enroll to read courses in the university they know nothing about which they wouldn't have chosen if they had had prior knowledge of them. They read such courses with difficulty and ultimately perform poorly. Secondary school students need to be guided through counselling to choose courses they have natural talent for where chances of success are high so as to minimize the risk of studying with bitterness and possible dropout.

Career guidance and counselling services which are components of the guidance and counselling programme are vital activities because one of the long-term goals of education is career placement (McLeod, 2007). If education is to realize this goal, then learners should have appropriate career information and undertake career exploration before making career choices. This aspect of learning can only be effectively handled under the context of guidance and counselling to create career awareness and career planning that will then influence learners' career decisions (Strong, 2009). Career guidance activities in secondary schools should focus on career education, career awareness, career planning, and placement. The role of career guidance and counselling in schools is to foster the career development of learners and enable them to choose the right courses in post-secondary education (Gazda, 2008). Therefore, lack of it undermines the economic productivity of a country due to lack of proper career preparation, training, placement, and satisfaction (George & Cristiani, 2012). Students in secondary schools may not have the necessary information concerning careers and being in their adolescent stage, should be helped to choose suitable careers, make the necessary preparations for it, enter into it in college and develop in it (Cheek & Bradley, 2009).

Some variations in career preferences of male and female students owing to socialization patterns and gender stereotype have been observed and this trend is said to pose some threat to students' ability to maximize their potentials in the contemporary world (Griffin & Hammis, 2003). Career choice and decision making in rural and urban centres remains a worrisome problem among Nigerian male and female students across the country as many students rely on chance and luck elements when it comes to choosing career because many of them are not aware of new opportunities (Ofem & Ajayi, 2008).

**2. Educational/academic counselling:** Students are most often faced with a variety of academic challenges ranging from poor concentrations, sleeplessness, anxiety, alcoholism, etc. If these challenges are not recognized and addressed at the onset, they can degenerate into a condition of learned helplessness and subsequent poor academic performance (Onyekuru, 2010). It is the duty of a counsellor to monitor the academic progress of students with a view to determining the reasons why some students are not doing well in their chosen fields. Through appropriate counselling interventions, the students with such poor academic records could be helped to overcome their worries and challenges, improve on their concentration and retention and subsequently on their academic performance. Academic counselling sessions enable students to strengthen their study skills and learn time or stress management.

**3. Marriage/couples counselling:** The union of a man and a woman as husband and wife in marriage is expected to lead to a blissful life for the partners. However, this is not always the case. Sometimes, marriage can be fraught with some challenges as couples have to make decisions on numerous sources of conflict including finances, in-laws/relatives, sex, recreation, friends, number of children or lack of children, etc. Uncompromising stance of couples on these issues may lead to poor marital adjustment and marriage instability. Therefore, marriage counselling is necessary to guide couples in their conducts so as to avoid strain associated with marriage and for peaceful cohabitation of the couples concerned.

**4. Family counselling:** This is the type of counselling which is provided to take care of problems inherent in a family. Change in behaviour is the ultimate aim of family counselling.

**5. Personal/social counselling:** Personal counselling deals with emotional distress and behavioural difficulties which arise when individuals struggle to deal with developmental standards (Onyekuru & Ekechukwu, 2014). Personal counselling is needed in the areas of anxiety over certain things, lingering anger, depressive feelings, lack of self-confidence, grief over the loss of a loved one, etc.

The importance of counselling in school and non-school settings cannot be over-emphasized. Counselling enhances the psychological well-being of the clients such that the clients are able to reach their full potential (Onomaodeke & Iruloh, 2011). Counselling forms part of the services that help the students to take full advantage of all the facilities which the school provides. Other importance of counselling as listed by Bruno (2010;10) includes (1) It helps clients to adjust to changes in and out of the environment (2) It enables people to gain accurate knowledge of themselves, their abilities and weaknesses. (3) It facilitates guidance of those who have fallen to recover and uncover themselves once again. (4) It enables individuals to make wise decisions which help to prevent wastage and misplacement of priority.

Some studies have been conducted on various aspects of counselling. Among these are studies reported on the status of guidance and counselling services awareness among students (Ibrahim, Wambly, Aloba & Raburu, 2014). Trusty (2006) conducted a study in four high schools in England in order to establish students' career exploration and readiness. He reported that many counsellors were already engaging with students in conversations about course selection, goals and postsecondary education, as well as career and financial planning. This was evidenced through career tests which were administered to fourth grade students in most schools that were selected. Clinedinst and Hawkins (2009) conducted a cohort national survey in Massachusetts to find out the level of career awareness among high school students. The study findings were that, counsellors spent on average 7 percent of their time on occupational counselling and job placement, compared to the 26 percent of time spent on post-secondary admission counselling. In Uganda, Muzongondi (2012) conducted a study in three districts to determine

how prepared secondary school students were concerning career decision-making. He used *post-ex facto* descriptive survey design. The study findings were that, only 8% of the sampled students had received counselling on career planning, preparedness and decision-making. Out of the 300 students, 82% had not received any special counselling in school while the remaining 10% had received types of counselling other than career counselling but mostly outside the school setting. They concluded that counsellors had not made remarkable impact on students' career decision-making endeavours. Since career decision is perceived to have an impact on individuals' career ambitions and prosperity, they recommended formation of special counsellors to deal with career counselling only. Other previous studies have been reported on gender differences and career awareness. A comprehensive report and data summary conducted by Ferris State University (2012) on a study which was done in 2002 in Michigan State about career guidance and decision-making among American youth: decisions without directions. The findings were that, both males and females are heavily oriented toward postsecondary education, but girls slightly but significantly exceeded the boys in their zeal for more schooling after high school. However, the study also found out that gender of the students appeared to have no significant effect on the likelihood of having made a career decision. Ibu and Maliki (2010) conducted a study on an evaluation of students' awareness, usage and assessment of guidance services in tertiary institutions in Plateau State using a sample of 30 undergraduate students. They found that there was counselling awareness among the students. They also found that though, students from schools located in urban centres are more aware of counseling services than those from schools located in rural areas, location had no significant influence on counselling awareness among the students.

Oluwatimilehin and Owoyele (2009) conducted a study on career aspirations: an investigation of senior secondary school students' awareness of contemporary high profile careers. A sample of 480 senior secondary school students participated in the study. The findings revealed that students had low level of awareness of contemporary career. This trend was the same among male and female, rural and urban students.

Ateji (2005) carried out a study on role of counsellors in ameliorating early marriage in Igala land, Nigeria. The objective of the study was to determine the awareness of the roles of counsellors among the people and evaluate the extent they would appreciate the service of counsellors on the problem of girl child marriages among Igala people. The finding revealed that the young girls in the school in most cases were not aware of the roles of counsellors and that they would appreciate such services. It was this lack of awareness and the absence of the counsellors that was attributed to be one of the major problems of the girl child marriage.

Despite the important benefits accruable from counselling, it is not certain if secondary school students in Oji River Local Government Area of Enugu State, Nigeria are informed about counselling services available let alone benefiting from them, hence, the decision of the present researchers to investigate the status of counselling awareness among secondary school students in Oji River Local Governemnt Area of Enugu State, Nigeria.

### **Research question and hypotheses**

The following research question and hypotheses were formulated to guide the study.

1. What is the status of counselling awareness among secondary school students in Oji River Local Governemnt Area?
2. There is no significant difference in counselling awareness between male and female secondary school students in Oji River Local Governemnt Area.
3. There is no significant difference in counselling awareness between students in secondary schools located in urban centres and those in schools located in rural areas.

### **Method**

The population of the study consisted of senior secondary school students in classes 1, 2 and 3. The students were in public secondary schools present in the six towns that make up Oji River Local Government Area of Enugu State. The total population of the registered SS1, SS2 and SS3 students in the public schools in the area as at the time of study (February, 2015) was 1824 students (Bureau of Statistics, Oji River Local Government Council, 2015). From the population of 1824 students from the towns, a sample of 1218 students was drawn using proportional stratified random sampling technique to ensure the retention of the percentage of the students from the towns in the sample.

The instrument for data collection was Counselling Awareness Inventory. It was a non-cognitive questionnaire seeking to find out if the students were aware of different and common types of counselling services. It was of two-point-response scale ranging from aware (2 points) and not aware (1point). It contained 14 items. The instrument was researcher-made but was validated by three experts in Department of Counselling Psychology, University of Port Harcourt. The reliability index of the instrument established through test-retest method and Pearson correlation coefficient technique was 0.83.

The copies of this instrument were administered to the students and retrieved on the spot after they had responded to the items. This ensured hundred percent recovery of the instrument. The minimum point obtainable by a student was 14 while 28 was the maximum point obtainable by a student. The data obtained from this

instrument were subjected to analysis using SPSS (version 21) and the results are presented below.

### Results

The data generated from the instrument were subjected to analysis and the following results were obtained.

**Rq.** What is the status of counselling awareness among secondary school students in Oji River Local Government Area?

To answer this research question, the data generated from the questionnaire were subjected to analysis using percentage. The results are presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Percentage awareness of counselling services among secondary school students**

Awareness	N	%
Aware	148	12.15
Not aware	1070	87.85

Table 1 shows that of the 1218 secondary school students that participated in the study, 148 students representing 12.15% of the students were aware of the counselling services as provided by the counsellors. Besides, 1070 students representing 87.85% of the students were not aware of the counselling services as provided by the counsellors. Hence, majority of the students were not aware of the counselling services as provided by the counsellors.

**Ho<sub>1</sub>:** There is no significant difference in counselling awareness between male and female secondary school students in Oji River Local Government Area.

The data from the instrument were subjected to independent sample t-test to determine gender differences in the awareness of counselling services. The result is presented in table 2

**Table 2: T-test on the awareness of counselling services of students based on gender**

Gender	N	$\bar{x}$	sd	df	$\alpha$	$t_{cal}$	$t_{crit}$	decision
Male	548	1.13	0.33	1216	0.05	0.43	1.96	Accept Ho
Female	670	1.12	0.32					

Table 2 shows that male students obtained a mean score of 1.13 while female students obtained a mean score of 1.12 from the Counselling Awareness Inventory. The standard deviation scores for male and female students are 0.33 and 0.32 respectively. The calculated t-value is 0.43 while the critical t-value at 1216 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level is 1.96. Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical t-value, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in counselling awareness between male and female students. Any observed difference in the mean awareness of male and female students was by chance.

**Ho<sub>2</sub>:** There is no significant difference in counselling awareness between students in schools located in urban centres and those in schools located in rural area.

The data generated from the instrument were subjected to independent sample t-test to compare the counselling awareness between students from schools located in urban centres and those in schools located in rural areas. The results are presented in table 3.

**Table 2: T-test on the awareness of counselling services of students based on school location**

Location	N	$\bar{x}$	sd	df	$\alpha$	$t_{cal}$	$t_{crit}$	decision
Urban	585	1.13	0.34	1216	0.05	0.86	1.96	Accept Ho
Rural	633	1.11	0.32					

From table 3, it can be seen that the mean awareness of students from schools located in urban centres is 1.13 while students from schools located in rural areas obtained a mean awareness of 1.11. The standard deviation for students in urban schools is 0.34 and the standard deviation for students in schools situated in rural areas is 0.32. The calculated t-value is 0.86 while the critical t-value obtained at 1216 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level is 1.96. The calculated t-value is less than the critical t-value. The null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in counselling awareness between students in schools located in urban centres and those in schools located in rural areas. Any observed difference in awareness of counselling services between these two groups of students is by chance.

## Discussion of findings

It was found that majority of the students had no counselling awareness. This finding is in agreement with the finding of Muzongondi (2012) which revealed that out of the 300 students sampled, only 8% of them had received counselling on career planning, preparedness and decision-making, 82% had not received any special counselling in school while the remaining 10% had received types of counselling other than career counselling but mostly outside the school setting. However, the finding in this present study is in disagreement with the finding of Ibu and Maliki (2010) who found that there was counselling awareness among the undergraduate students. The reason for the apparent disagreement in the findings of these two studies is that Ibu and Maliki's (2010) study was conducted in tertiary institutions with sample of 30 undergraduate students. Some of these institutions offer courses in guidance and counselling. This study was conducted in secondary schools where there was no deliberate effort towards posting counsellors to schools. Thus, the students scarcely encounter counsellors let alone knowing the roles of the counsellors.

It was found that there was no significant difference in counselling awareness between male and female students. This finding is similar to the finding of Oluwatimilehin and Owoyele (2009) which revealed that students had low level of awareness of contemporary career. This trend was the same among male and female, rural and urban students. The low level of awareness or lack of awareness of counselling services between male and female students can be explained from the fact that most of the students irrespective of gender lacked the awareness of counselling services of the counsellors as practising counsellors are never part of school staff.

It was also found that though the students from schools located in urban centres had a higher mean value for counselling awareness when compared to the students from schools located in rural areas, the difference in mean awareness between these two groups of students is not significant. The finding that there was no significant difference in counselling awareness between students from rural schools and students from urban schools is similar to the finding of Ibu and Maliki (2010) which revealed that though, students from schools located in urban centres are more aware of counselling services than those from schools located in rural areas, location has no significant influence on counselling awareness among the students. Absence of awareness of counselling services among students from schools located in both rural areas and urban centres is because counsellors are recruited for neither schools in rural areas nor schools in urban centres in the study area.

## Conclusion /recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that there was no counselling awareness among the students. Counselling awareness among the students is neither gender sensitive nor location sensitive. This implies that there was no significant difference in counselling awareness between male and female students. Furthermore, there was no significant difference in counselling awareness between students from schools located in urban centres and students from schools located in rural areas. It is therefore recommended that government of Enugu State should consider it a matter of necessity to employ professional counsellors and deploy them to secondary schools as staff to provide the much needed counselling services to the students. These counsellors should assist the students who have academic, emotional, social or psychological challenges that can militate against their academic performance or in appropriate selection of career based on their natural endowments. In this way the students and the society at large will develop to their full potential.

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