

# An Assessment of the Professional Capacity Needs of Counsellors to Cope with Poverty-Prone at Risk Secondary School Students in Osun State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The study assessed the professional capacity needs of counselor and difference in the capacity needs to cope with at risk students in terms of their sex, age and years of professional experience with a view to assisting the counsellors to improve service delivery in secondary schools. The study adopted survey design. The population for the study comprised all school counsellors in Osun State. A sample of 60 school counsellors was randomly selected for the study. A Professional Counsellors Needs Assessment Instrument (PCNA) was designed and validated to identify the needs of secondary school counsellors and determine gaps in their operations. The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A and B. Section A consisted of demographic characteristics of the respondents. Section B contained items on the professional capacity needs of counsellors. The pilot study of the instrument was carried out and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze the data which yielded reliability coefficient of 0.75 which is significant at 0.05 level of significance. Permission was given to the researcher by the school authority to administer on the professional counsellors. The results showed that 25 (41.7%) of the counsellors had moderate capacity needs to cope with at-risk students. It also revealed that male and female counsellors are not significantly different in their capacity to cope with student at-risk ( $t=1.197$ ;  $>.05$ ). The results further showed that the age of the counsellors do not significantly show difference in their capacity needs to cope with at-risk students ( $F=1.779$ ;  $>.05$ ). Finally, the results revealed there was no significant difference in the capacity needs of the professional counsellors in terms of their years of experience on the job ( $F=0.179$ ;  $>.05$ ). The study therefore concluded that professional counsellors in secondary schools require more professional skills, strategies and capacity needs to cope with at-risk students.

**Keywords:** Professional counsellors, At-risk students, and Capacity needs

## INTRODUCTION

The growing number of students who have little or no hope of success in schools present unusual concern and difficult challenge to educators (Barr and Parret, 1995). Students who are labeled as at-risk face a number of challenges. Usually these at-risk students have high rates of absenteeism, poor academic performance, adjustment problems, lack of interest in schools and poor attitude to school work and learning. Such students need the assistance of professional counsellors so as to cope with the academic and social problems and challenges associated with schooling. For instance student who absents him/herself from school without a legitimate reason and without the permission of the parents or school authority and on a regular basis will be labeled as truant, this kind of students at risk and needs the assistance of professional counselors. At-risk students can be defined as students who have been labeled either officially or unofficially as being in danger of academic failure due to a combination of background, family and personal related social adjustment problems including lack of motivation, intellectual capability and poverty. As the definition suggests, students can be at risk of failure academically and socially due to intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Students so defined are poverty prone and at-risk and are therefore vulnerable to academic failure. At-risk students are categorized into three groups, group one, are the students whose parents have no time of assisting their children to accomplish their academic tasks. They do not care about basic requirements needed by their children. Group two, are the students whose parents are interested in their children education but they are being affected by extreme poverty, have time and are willing but lack the intellectual and financial resources to translate their interest into supporting their children. The third groups of at-risk students are those who have lost their parents due to one disease or the other. Another group of at-risk students are those whose parents are financially rich but are very busy with their business affairs, not concentrating on helping their children academic affairs. As being stated earlier, however these students need help from school teachers, school counsellors and parents who will be concerned to their problems. It should be realized that academic achievement of students depend basically on the efforts of some individuals such as the parents, students, teachers (Tella & Tella, 2010) and also school counsellors. Adekola (2008) asserts that academic achievements of students are the result of teacher factor and parental factors.

Generally, students are faced with multiplicity of adjustment problems such as social-personal, emotional, academic, vocational choice. For them to cope with these problems they need appropriate guidance and counseling support services to better understand and accept themselves, their strengths and weaknesses, their

attitude and worth as unique individuals (Arowolo, 2013). It is necessary to assess the professional capacity of counsellors to cope with at-risk student, guidance and counselling services are very important and necessary in our schools not only in Osun State but all over Nigeria but reverse is the case. In a clear recognition of the critical value of counselling services and shortage of qualified counsellors in the secondary schools, the National Policy on Education (2004) states that;

*In view of the apparent ignorance of many young people about career prospects and in view of personality maladjustment among school students, counsellor shall be appointed in post primary institutions ----- qualified personnel in this category are scarce—p53.*

Acute shortage of qualified counsellors and non provision of needed facilities and materials in secondary schools compound the problems of the at-risk students the more deepening their antisocial problems. Counselling according to Idowu (1986) is a process in which an individual or a group of individuals with problems are led by a professional guidance /counsellor to have an insight into their behaviour, so that they may know the cause of their problems, try to deal with their problems so that they can function effectively in the world around them. Also, Makinde (1984) defined counselling as an interactive process whereby a counsellee, who is vulnerable and who needs assistance and the counsellor who is educated trained to give his/her assistance, the goal of which is to help the counsellee to learn to deal more effectively with himself and reality of his/ her environment. Kolo (2012) also opined that counseling is the relationship that is qualitative enough to change or affect people's life positively and as such involves a repertoire of skill to establish and maintain that relationship should be exposed to in-service programmes such as seminars and workshops in order to enhance their professionalism. In other words counseling is essentially an individualization and domestication of the education process through interactive engagements/dialogue between the counsellor and counsellee based on the distinctiveness and unique needs of the counsellee. It is therefore the responsibility of a counsellor to help individuals to plan, obtain and derive maximum benefit from educational, social, vocational and other kinds of experience which will enable those individuals to discover and develop their potentials. For at-risk students to discover and develop themselves, they need the assistance of the school counsellor through the counseling relationship to acquire relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and interest that would enable them become subject of development. However, professional counsellors are faced with challenges that have limited their ability to perform their expected roles maximally. One of these challenges is the lack of needed ingredients to cope with the problems of at-risk students. Professional counsellors are yet to be well equipped and trained to build their capacity to cope with the challenges of at-risk students due to other responsibilities assigned to them in place of counselling. According to Idowu (2007) and Kelvin (2007) other responsibilities assigned to school counsellors have not enabled them to practice their profession which is counselling. It has also been observed that professional counsellors have not been sufficiently exposed to appropriate and relevant in-service training programmes such as seminars, workshops and conferences to enhance their professionalism and to expose them to new developments in counselling. In most schools for example lack of facilities and equipment and conducive environment including adequate offices and space inhibit effective counselling of at-risk students and others predispose to or vulnerable to at-risk. The issue of rivalry between the school counsellor and the school teachers, perceiving counsellor as not doing anything, thinking they could as well counsel students, they thought advice giving is the same thing as counselling. The objectives of this study are to: (i) assess the capacity needs of counsellor to cope with at-risk students in secondary schools in Osun State. (ii). ascertain the capacity needs of male and female counselors to cope with at-risk students. (iii) examine the demographic characteristics of professional counsellors and their capacity needs to cope with at-risk students.

### **Research Question**

1. What are the capacity needs of counsellors to cope with the essential requirements of at-risk students in secondary schools in Osun State?

### **Research Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference between the capacity needs of male and female counsellors to cope with the special needs of at-risk students in secondary schools in Osun State.
2. There is no significant difference in the age and experience of counsellors capacity training needs to cope with at-risk students in secondary schools in Osun State.

### **Methodology**

The study adopted survey design. The population for the study comprised all school counsellors in Osun State. A sample of 60 school counsellors was randomly selected for the study. A Professional Counsellors Needs Assessment Instrument (PCNA) was designed and validated to identify the needs of secondary school counsellors and determine gaps in their operations. The instrument consisted of two sections. Section A and B. Section A consisted of demographic characteristics of the respondents. Section B contained items on the

professional capacity needs of counsellors. The pilot study of the instrument was carried out and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze the data which yielded reliability coefficient of 0.75 which is significant at 0.05 level of significance. Permission was given to the researcher by the school authority to administer on the professional counsellors. Data collected were analyzed using percentages and ANOVA.

## Results

### Research Question

1. What are the capacity needs to cope with the essential requirement of at-risk students?

To answer this research question, the respondents' responses were categorized on the basis of their responses to the items on professional needs of counsellors. Those who scored 12 to 27 were said to belong to low capacity needs, those who scored 28 to 30 were classified at medium capacity needs and those who score 31 to 48 were regarded as having high capacity needs. The frequency of the counsellors' responses are presented in Table 1

**Table 1: Level of counsellors' capacity needs to cope with the essential requirement of at-risk students.**

Capacity needs	Frequency	Percentage
Low	15	25.0
Moderate	25	41.7
High	20	33.3
Total	60	100.0

Table 1 shows that most of the counsellors 25 representing 41.7% had moderate capacity needs to cope with essential requirement of at-risk students, 15 representing 25.0% and 20 representing 33.3% had low and high capacity needs to cope with the essential requirement of at-risk students respectively.

### Research Hypotheses

**1. There is no significant different between the capacity needs of male and female counsellors to cope with at-risk students.**

To test this hypothesis, t-test analysis was carried out on the responses of male and female counsellors to cope with at-risk students as shown in Table 2.

**Table 2: t-test computation of the mean difference of male and female counsellors to cope with at-risk students**

Sex	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D	df	t	p
Male	28	29.11	2.27	58	1.197	>0.05
Female	32	29.88	2.65			

Table 2 shows ( $\bar{X}$  =29.11 & S.D=2.27) and ( $\bar{X}$  =29.88 & S.D=2.65) for male and female counsellors respectively. The t-test value reveals 1.197 with df =58 at 0.05 level of significant. The Table 2 further shows that the p-value is greater than 0.05, which implies that the difference in the mean of male and female counsellors to cope with at-risk students is not statistically different. Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no significant different between the capacity needs of male and female counsellors to cope with at risk students is accepted.

**2. There is no significant different in the age of counsellors capacity needs to cope with at-risk students.**

To test this hypothesis, a deceptive and one-way analysis of variance were carried out across the age range of counsellors on their capacity needs to cope with at-risk students has shown in Table 3 and 4 respectively.

**Table 3: Age range statistics of counsellors**

Age range	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D
25-35	18	29.00	2.249
36-45	31	29.39	2.431
46-55	11	30.73	2.831
Total	60	29.52	2.487

Table 3 shows ( $\bar{X}$  =29.00 & S.D=2.25), ( $\bar{X}$  =29.39 & S.D=2.43), and ( $\bar{X}$  =30.72 & S.D=2.83) for different age range respectively. This was further subjected to one way analysis of variance to test if there exist significant difference across the age range as shown in Table 4.

**Table 4: Difference in age range of counsellors capacity need to cope with at-risk students**

Sources	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	21.447	2	10.723	1.779	>.05
Within Groups	343.537	57	6.027		
Total	364.983	59			

Table 4 shows F-value of 1.779 at 0.05 level of significant. The result shows that the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the age range of the counsellors capacity needs to cope with at-risk students is retained.

**3. There is no significant different in the experience of counsellors capacity needs to cope with at-risk students.**

To test this hypothesis, a deceptive and one-way analysis of variance were carried out across difference range of years of experience of counsellors on their capacity needs to cope with at-risk students has shown in Table 5 and 6 respectively.

**Table 5: Counsellor Year of Experience statistics**

Years of Experience	N	$\bar{X}$	S.D
0-10	35	29.37	2.591
11-20	22	29.77	2.409
21-above	3	29.33	2.517
Total	60	29.52	2.487

Table 3 shows ( $\bar{X}$  =29.37 & S.D=2.59), ( $\bar{X}$  =29.77 & S.D=2.41), and ( $\bar{X}$  =29.33 & S.D=2.52) for different range of years of experience respectively. This was further subjected to one way analysis of variance to test if there exist significant difference across the different range of years of experience as shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Difference in range of counsellors years of experience and their capacity need to cope with at-risk students**

Sources	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
Between Groups	2.282	2	1.141	.179	>.05
Within Groups	362.702	57	6.363		
Total	364.983	59			

Table 6 shows F-value of 0.179 at 0.05 level of significant. The result shows that the p-value is greater than 0.05, the null hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the year of experience of counsellors needs to cope with at-risk students is retained.

**Discussion**

Counselling as a profession has several obligations to perform especially in schools, bearing in mind behavioural problems exhibited among secondary school adolescents. Challenges facing at-risk students are one of the reasons that professional counselors would need to build/develop their capacities to cope with these challenges. This study found that school counselors require further or more professional skills to assist students with at-risk behavior so as to adjust and cope with their academic activities. This is corroborated with the view of Tella & Tella (2010) that parents, teachers and school counselors need to put more efforts on how to assist students with the problem of at-risk behavior. The study also revealed that counselors are not different in their sex, years of experience and capacity to cope with at-risk students. Their inability to resolve this problem among students may be traceable to other factors other than sex and capacity as suggested by Idowu (2007) and Kelvin (2007). They were of the opinion that other responsibilities assigned to school counselors have not enabled them to practice their profession effectively.

Based on the findings of this study, it is therefore concluded that counselors in secondary schools require more professional skills, strategies and capacity to cope with at-risk students.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made:

1. School counsellors should be relieved of school activities not directly related to counselling to enable them counsel effectively.
2. Government should allow and encourage in-service training among school counsellors.
3. School counsellors should show more interest and concern in their clients (at-risk students) and profession for

better service delivery.

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