Professional Challenges to Counselling Practice in Akwa Ibom State

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Abstract

This study assessed the professional challenges to counselling practice in Akwa Ibom State. Eighty copies of *Professional Challenges to Counselling Questionnaire (PROCE)* were administered   on professional counsellors in Akwa Ibom State. The instrument has a reliability coefficient of 0.78. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data. The results showed that counsellors in the State lag behind in the use of ICT. The researchers recommended, among other things, that in-service training should be provided for practicing counsellors by their employers and state chapters of counselling association should organize seminars and workshops for members of the association for greater productivity.

Keywords: Professional challenges, Counselling, Counselling practice, and Counsellor's experience.

1. Introduction

Professional counselling in developing countries is relatively a new field but fast gaining strength with a lot of challenges slowing its progress. In Nigeria for instance traditional and informal counselling has been in existence even before the inception of the nation because man naturally, always needs to be helped with some pieces of advice. Here in Nigeria modem guidance was first heard of in 1959 at Saint Theresa's College, Oke-Ado in Ibadan, in Oyo State when some teachers from the school who were Irish Reverend Sisters decided that their final year school certificate students should be presented with vocational guidance (Denga, 2001).

In 1977 the government of Nigeria saw the need for formal and modem guidance and counselling in the educational sector and provided for it in the National Policy on Education (2004:53) thus:

"In view of the apparent ignorance of many young people about career prospects, and in view of personality maladjustment among school children, career officers and counsellors shall be appointed in post- primary institutions"...

Government made provision for all interested teachers in the field of counselling to be trained and also that Guidance and Counselling should be compulsory for all trainee teachers just to give it the necessary publicity. Today counselling practice is the need of the moment due to man's quest for satisfaction in the three broad areas of educational concerns, vocational aspirations and the numerous sides of personal and social challenges.

This study is very imperative because at the beginning the field of counselling was only concerned with career ignorance and personality maladjustment challenges of secondary school students. However, as development sets in, the field of counselling took a new dimension to cater for, the young, old rich, poor, educated, uneducated, single, married, religious and persons from all walks of life. At the moment, the government at all levels and the general public are in need of professional counselling. As a result of this high demand and technological advancement, these professional counsellors are indeed facing a lot of challenges which this paper seeks to address and proffer a way forward.

2. Literature Review

Since counselling is a professionalized field, experts have lots of challenges which many authors seek to address and suggest how best to handle them in order to make the field more attractive and more rewarding. Low (2009) looked at the challenges of counselling in a secondary school setting in four different forms namely, internal challenges, external challenges, systems challenges and personal challenges. The internal challenges according to him are concerned with clientele groups, teachers' attitudes towards counselling and students' willingness to seek counselling. The external challenges to him are seen as issues outside the school which include culture, globalization, and students moving across borders. The systems challenges are things within the guidance

programme which may include the law establishing its practice in schools, referral procedures and resource planning. While personal challenges take the form of the needs as well as the skills of the counsellor which include training, supervision and attitudes towards the school system.

In another view point Hatch (2011) stated that professional challenges in school counselling could be understood using three theories namely, organizational theory, institutional theory and political theory. This author sees organizational theory as how effective and efficient an organization is in accomplishing its goals and achieving the results the organization intends to produce. Scott (1992:23) defines organizations as "collectivities oriented to the pursuit of relatively specific goals and exhibiting relatively highly formalized social structures". Hatch (2011) goes further to say that formal structures are instruments of goal attainment which can be changed or modified to improve employee performance.

On organizational theory and the school counselling profession Hatch (2011) is of the view that school counselling programmes have not been perceived as having fixed divisions of labour, and sets of rules that have been proven to govern the behaviour of school counsellors. He says that a few guidance programmes operate with clear formal structures, programme definitions or clear priorities. Olsen (1979) says that in school counselling, lack of planning, accountability, or evaluation has led to fragmented and inconsistent programmes. He is of the view that when applying the organizational theory to school counselling programmes, there should be a means of ensuring that school counsellors are effective in performing activities in such a way that desired educational objectives are achieved. In support of Olsen, George (2004) maintained that school counselling must demonstrate its effectiveness if it is to survive.

Institutional theory, according to Hatch (2011) explains an organization's effort to institutionalize structural elements and processes that establish rules, policies and procedures. Therefore, institutional theory when applied to the school situation the theory explains that school counselling practice show that rationalized myths exist in the school counselling profession. This means that different schools have different programmes for their schools which are often guided by current internal and external cultural norms and pressures when making decisions regarding services and programme content rather than using the data generated from the check-list to inform students' needs. It is believed that from the institutional theory perspective, sharing results of counselling programmes enhances the legitimacy, because when school counsellors share results with policy actors within the school, the policy actors come to understand the school counsellors' vital role as contributors to student learning.

For the political theory, Wirt and Kirt (2001:4) define politics as a "form of social conflict rooted in group differences over values about the use of public resources to meet private needs". It is said that political decisions often hinge on two important weighted components namely, value versus resource. If a programme is highly valued it is said to have earned social capital and resources are more likely to be allocated to implement it year to year. Applying political theory to the school counselling profession, the view is that counselling profession lacks ability to show that the value of the programme is worth their resource and has resulted in loss of positions, role definition, and programmes. School counsellors have felt marginalized and isolated for many years. They have referred to themselves as outsider in school leadership and governance and are often directed by administration to perform tasks that they view as outside of their responsibility (Stewart, 1965). Hatch (2002) gives more light to the controversy when he conducted a nationwide survey on school counsellors asking how the national school counselling standards have impacted their work. Among other findings, he noted that the professional challenges in school counselling are the consequences of organizational inefficiency, institutional illegitimacy and subsequent political devaluing.

Aluede, Adomeh and Afen-Akpaida (2008) gave many sides to the problems facing guidance and counselling which include guidance and counselling being professionally isolated from other human services professions such as psychology social work, sociology, nursing, public health and psychiatry. Secondly its inability to respond to the present day demands as they relate to issues of both national and international concerns. Thirdly, the profession's inability to have formally recognized requirements for certification and practice, fourthly, the profession does not have any regulatory body such as universities commission oversee each attempts to educate his that the professional challenges in school counselling are the training programmes, any body can receive certificate from anywhere, comes back to Nigeria to practice. This circumstance exposes the profession to the following situations (a) great disparity in both its courses and contents from one institution to another, (b) lack of standardized assessment materials for professional use and (c) lack of quality books for use in both undergraduate and graduate programmes.

Aluede et al (2008) stated further that the problems facing guidance and counselling in Nigeria stem from the, fact that Nigeria is a traditional African nation rooted in indigenous culture where members of a family stay together not as individuals but as a unit. As a result, family members prefer to discuss their personal and external

problems with their siblings, or extended family members alone as the need arises. Another problem as indicated by Aluede et al (2008) was that associated to decision making among people. Nigerians make their choices depending on the needs and values of their family. For example choice of school, marriage partners, jobs and other personal matters are subjected to family decisions which most often, are made by the father. They have great negative impact on guidance and counselling that is greatly based on freedom of choice and functionality

2.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to investigate and ascertain the professional challenges to counselling practice in Akwa Thom State with a view to understanding them and proffering viable remedies that will enhance the practice of counselling among professionals in the study region.

2.2 Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study

1. Does gender pose a challenge to counsellors in their field of practice?

2. Does reporting of guidance activities pose any challenge to counsellors?

3. Does lack of funds affect the effectiveness of counselling services?

4. Is the use of ICI' a challenge to practising counsellors?

5. Is getting clients a challenge to professional counsellors?

6. Does societal attitude to counselling profession affect counsellors' productivity?

3. Methodology

The research design adopted for the study is the descriptive survey. The population of the study consisted of all the counsellors spread in school and non-school settings in Akwa Ibom State. The study sample was eighty practising counsellors selected from the three Senatorial Districts in Akwa Ibom State using stratified random sampling technique. The Instrument used for data collection was the questionnaire constructed by the researchers tagged Professional Challenges to Counselling Questionnaire (PROCR). The instrument has a reliability coefficient of 0.78. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data.

4. Analyses of Findings

Table 1: Sex Distribution of Respondents

Sex	Number	Percentage
Male	32	40.00
Female	48	60.00
Total	**80**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

The survey showed a total number of 32 (40%) of male respondents and 48 (60%) of female respondents.

Table 2:   Breakdown of response rate

Work place	Number	Percentage
Primary school	21	26.25
Secondary school	31	38.75
Private school	3	3.75
Ministry of Education	4	5.00
Health Sector	3	3.75
Police	4	3.75
Prisons	3	3.75
Tertiary Institution	12	15.00
Total	**80**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

The survey showed that the highest percentage of counsellors work in secondary schools (38.75%) followed by primary school (26.25) and tertiary institutions (15%).

Table 3: Entry Qualification

Entering qualification	Number	Percentage
B. Ed.	63	78.70
M. Ed.	17	21.25
Total	**80**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

The field survey showed that 63 (78.75%) respondents entered the profession with first degree (B.Ed) while 17 (21.25%) respondents entered the profession with Masters (M.Ed) degree.

Table 4: Computer Literacy

Option	Number	Percentage
Yes	52	65.00
No	28	35.00
Total	**80**	**100.00**

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

The field survey showed that 57 (65%) respondents were computer literate, while 28(35%) were not computer literate.

Research Question 1: Does gender pose a challenge to counsellors in their field of practice?

Table 5: Percentage Response on whether Gender poses a challenge to counsellors in their field of practice

S/No	Statement	A	%	D	%	Total
1	Due to my gender clients find it difficulty to consult me	5	3.36	75	29.88	80
2	My gender is an added advantage to me	53	35.57	27	10.76	80
3	Clients like coming to me because I am of same sex with them.	18	12.08	62	24.70	80
4	I need more training on how to work with the opposite sex.	28	18.79	52	20.72	80
5	Because of my gender my establishment is calling for my change.	45	30.20	35	13.94	80
	Total	149	37.25	251	62.75	400

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

As shown in Table 5, 37.25 percent of respondents agreed that gender posed a challenge to counsellors in their field of practice, while 62.75 percent of respondents disagreed. Consequently, it can be concluded, that gender does not pose challenge to counsellors in their field of practice.

Research Question 2: Does reporting of guidance activities pose any challenge to counsellors?

Table 6: Percentage response on whether reporting of guidance activities pose any challenge to counsellors

S/No	Statement	A	%	D	%	Total
1	I find it difficult to submit my monthly report to the appropriate authorities	19	9.60	61	30.20	80
2	Filling the log book is very difficult for me.	19	9.60	61	30.20	80
3	I cannot prepare a work plan for my counselling activities	72	36.36	8	3.96	80
4	Mentioning of work plan makes me sick.	22	11.11	58	28.71	80
5	My promotion is delayed because during the interview I could not present my programme in a booklet.	66	33.33	14	6.93	80
	Total	198	49.50	202	50.50	400

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

As shown in Table 6, 49.5% of respondents agreed that reporting of guidance activities pose challenges to counsellors, while 50.50% disagreed. Therefore, based on the findings it was concluded that reporting of guidance activities do not pose challenges to practicing counsellors.

Research Question 3: Does lack of funds affect the effectiveness of counselling services?

Table 7: Percentage Response on whether lack of funds affects the effectiveness of counselling services

S/No	Statement	A	%	D	%	Total
1	My establishment does not think, it is necessary to spend money for any counselling activity	33	21.85	47	18.88	80
2	No money voted for counselling in my establishment.	9	5.96	71	28.51	80
3	I cannot perform my counselling duties as I should for lack of money.	16	10.60	64	25.70	80
4	I have not updated my knowledge in counselling since I left school for lack of money.	58	38.41	22	8.84	80
5	I find it difficult to gather information for lack of money.	35	23.18	45	18.07	80
	Total	151	37.75	249	62.25	400

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

As shown in Table 7, only 37.75% of the respondents agreed that lack of funds affect the effectiveness of counselling services while 62.25% of the respondents disagreed. Consequently, it could be concluded that lack of funds did not affect the effectiveness of counselling practice.

Research Question 4: Is use of ICT a challenge to practicing counsellors?

Table 8: Percentage Response on practicing   counsellors and ICT use

S/No	Statement	A	%	D	%	Total
1	Internet is used as a tool in my counselling activities.	22	14.19	58	23.67	80
2	I use social networks for follow up services.	27	17.42	53	21.63	80
3	I chat with my clients on face book.	23	14.84	57	23.27	80
4	I post some of my helping guide on the net.	18	11.61	62	25.31	80
5	Mobile phone has positive influence in the discharge of my duties	65	41.94	15	6.12	80
	Total	155	38.75	245	62.00	400

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

As shown in Table 8, 38.75% of the respondents agreed that practicing counsellors can use ICT, while 62.00% of the respondents disagreed. To this end it is concluded that most counsellors cannot for now use ICT in the discharge of their duties.

Research Question 5: Is getting clients a challenge to professional counsellors?

Table 9: Percentage response on whether professional counsellors have challenges in getting clients

S/No	Statement	A	%	D	%	Total
1	My workload is too much on due to large population of clients	41	50.00	39	12.26	80
2	I have very view clients to attend to	14	17.07	66	20.75	80
3	I find it difficult to received clients	10	12.20	70	22.01	80
4	No one comes to me for counselling	5	6.10	75	23.58	80
5	I feel like living the profession	12	14.63	68	21.38	80
	Total	82	20.50	318	79.50	400

Source: Field Survey, 2011.

As shown in table 9, 20.50% of the respondents agreed that professional counsellors have problems in getting of his client, while 75.50% of the respondent disagreed. In the light of this result, it was concluded that the professional counsellors, do not have problems in getting clients.

Research Question 6: Does societal attitude to counselling profession affect counsellor's productivity?

Table 10:   Percentage response on whether societal attitude to counselling professional affect counsellors productivity

S/No	Statement	A	%	D	%	Total
1	My colleagues look down on my activities.	8	4.57	72	32.00	80
2	Clients refuse to consult me because of what they think about the profession	11	6.29	69	30.67	80
3	I am being assigned more duties outside my professional training.	34	19.43	46	20.44	80
4	My colleagues do no refer client to me	66	37.71	14	6.22	80
5	Members of the host community do not value professional counselling.	56	32.00	24	10.67	80
	Total	175	43.75	225	56.25	400

 Source: Field Survey, 2011.

As shown in table 10, 43.75% of the respondents agreed that societal attitude to counselling profession affect counsellors' productivity, while 56.75% disagreed. Consequently, it was concluded that societal attitude to counselling does not affect professional counsellors' productivity.

5. Discussion

From the findings of the study, as shown in Table 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10, it is very obvious that practicing counsellors have little or no problems doing their counselling job, their place of posting not withstanding. But looking at the closeness of the results, one would suggest that since a handful of them still battle with some of these professional challenges especially in ICE, a lot should be put in place to help them continue with the profession successfully.

Furthermore, from the findings on research question 8, clearly shows that most professional counsellors in Akwa Ibom State are not making use of ICT in their professional practice. In all the statements put across to them such as "internet is used as a tool in counselling activities", 14.19% said yes while 23.67% said no, "use of social networks for follow up services" 17.42% said yes and 21.63% said no. Again counsellors do not make use of face book in their work with clients. It is only the mobile phone that they are using effectively and efficiently. With these findings, counsellors in Akwa Ibom State have the need to develop and move forward technologically. Also since they must work with young people who find great delight in the use of all these social net-working tools such as the face book, twitter, 2go, SMS, Google plus, e-mail amongst others, there is need for practising counsellors in Akwa Ibom to incorporate ICT into their professional practice.

6. Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made;

1. Counsellors should be given opportunity through seminars and workshops to improve upon the use of 1T in their counselling activities.

2. Social networks should be especially introduced for counselling efficiency so as to help counsellors penetrate the youth world.

3. State chapters of Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) should be up and doing in helping the profession by organizing workshops and seminars for members.

4. Practising counsellors should be encouraged to update their knowledge by attending conferences.

5. Government should help counsellors by providing them with in service training.

7. Conclusion

Since counselling profession is human-oriented, it becomes necessary that counsellors should as much as possible meet up with contemporary demands such as the use of technological development in the field, for purposes of social net working for effective service delivery. Since most of the challenges facing the counselling profession are fast disappearing, it is important left for the counsellors to show more commitment in the use of advances technology in their professional practice.

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