

# Psycho-Social Roles of Medical Social Workers in Managing Stressed Patients in Government Hospitals in Rivers State, Nigeria

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## Abstract

The focus of this study is to investigate the psycho-social roles of medical social workers in managing stressed patients in government hospitals in Rivers State, Nigeria. Two research questions are generated to guide the study. Descriptive design is adopted for the study. The population covers all medical social workers in Rivers State Government hospitals. A sample of 300 respondents is randomly selected for the study. The selection is done through the use of simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Questionnaire is the main instrument used for data collection. The instrument is face-validated by professionals in the Department of Educational Sociology, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt. Furthermore, the reliability value of 0.72 Correlation Co-efficient is established for the study. Percentage and frequency table are used to analyze all respondents' data for the study. The results of the analysis revealed that psycho-social roles of medical social workers in managing stressed patients in government hospitals help the ill with such illness recuperate faster. Based on the findings, the study recommends, among others that State Government should fund the hospitals adequately, in order to train medical social workers on cutting edge counselling techniques for the treatment of stressed patients. Again, the state government should employ qualified medical social workers, who are proficient in psycho-social roles of managing stressed patients in government hospitals.

**Keywords:** Psycho-social roles, medical social workers, managing stressed patients, government's hospitals, Rivers State, Nigeria

## 1.1 Introduction

Management of stressed patients in hospitals is a major concern in most states of Nigeria. This is so because the regimen for managing stress is based on the use of drugs relaxation techniques and guided imagery in Rivers State rather than on introducing a new way of stress treatment. However, review studies of stress management trend recommend a combination of two or more techniques to address the multi-dimensional nature of the stress response (Murphy, 1996; Mimura and Griffiths, 2003). Of these roles, the management of stressed patients is still an obvious challenge, in that psycho-social roles are downplayed by medical professionals in Rivers State. Thus, to ensure that stressed patients are recuperated faster, this study is carried out, in consideration of the related literature on the roles of medical social workers in counselling stressed patients as well as assisting them on personal social belongings in hospitals.

### 1.1.1 The roles of medical social workers in counselling stressed patients in hospitals:

Jennings (2012) explains that stress has been categorized as an antecedent or stimulus as a consequence or response and as an interaction. Thus, to counsel stressed patients, interaction is usually a focal point, for which positive behaviours are achieved. Based on this fact, counselling is a dynamic and purposeful relationship between two people, in which procedures vary with the nature of the clients' needs, so that there is always natural participation between the medical social worker and stressed patients for wellness to be achieved.

In this direction, Patterson (1971:223) argues that:

Counselling is a relationship wherein the counsellor provides the psychological climate, or condition in which the client is enabled to change, to become able to make choices, resolve his problems and develop a responsible independence which makes him or her a better person, a better member of society.

Thus, for medical social workers to effectively counsel their patients, Emenogu (1989) listed qualities which they must possess:

1. The ability to relate easily, as well to all kinds of persons,

2. Sincere interest in people and their welfare,
3. Maturity and stability,
4. The ability to remain calm in the face of emergency,
5. A sense of human (taking one as fellow human),
6. The ability to maintain an objective point of view,
7. High moral values, capable of providing dynamic leadership to the guidance programme.

### **1.1.2 The roles of medical social workers in assisting stressed patients with personal social belonging in hospitals**

The medical social workers' assistance to stressed patients is to ensure that they are comfortable and socially prepared for treatment in hospitals. In view of this fact, Kaneku, Ryu, Nishida, Tamasato, Shumodaira and Kume (2013:20) note that:

Social work services are provided to patients and their families to ensure that a patient's illness, recovery, and safe transition that form one care setting to another are considered within the context of his or her psycho-social needs and the specific demands and opportunities of his or her environment.

For this to be achieved, Kaneku, et al (2013) also explain that the medical social worker should focus on psycho-social factors, including positive relationship, living arrangement, patients' developmental history, economic, cultural, religious, educational and vocational backgrounds as they impinge on the understanding of the treatment and relapse prevention in the hospital. In this regard, medical social workers should encourage family members to bring cloths and specific personal belongings to the stress patients, in so far that they will be approved by the concerned authorities in the hospital before using them. Beyond this, medical social workers should assist stressed patients to make their beds, and wear them clothes that are appropriate for stress treatment techniques to commence. Again, they should help stressed patients in keeping their personal belongings in clean places that are appropriate for accessibility in hospitals.

#### **2.1 Statement of the problem**

In pre-independence period, patients suffering from stress were treated with drugs in Nigerian hospitals. In this regard, stressed patients were not completely treated; hence there were recurrence in emotional stress or tension among them. In post independence, a new method of managing stressed patients was introduced by medical social workers in Nigerian hospitals. This is the origin of the medical social workers' roles in the hospitals, because the new method involved psychologic or manipulative manoeuvres to decrease physical or emotional stress and tension: autogenic training, biofeedback training, hypnosis, meditation, progressive muscular relaxation (Mosby's Medical Dictionary, 2009), used in treating patients suffering from stress. But, this did not include psycho-social roles of medical social workers in managing stress. Based on this lacuna, the study is spurred to investigate psycho-social roles of medical social workers in managing stressed patients in government hospitals in Rivers State, Nigeria.

#### **3.1 Objectives of the study**

The following objectives are stated for the study:

1. To examine the roles of medical social workers in counselling stressed patients in government hospitals;
2. To investigate the roles of medical social workers in assisting stressed patients with personal social belongings in government hospitals.

#### **4.1 Research questions**

The following research questions are stated for the study:

1. What are the roles of medical social workers in counseling stressed patients in government in hospitals?
2. What are the roles of medical social workers in assisting stressed patients with personal social belongings in government hospitals?

#### **5.1 Research Methodology**

Descriptive design is used for the study. The population is all government hospitals in Rivers State. This also covers all medical social workers, whose roles are to manage stressed patients in government hospitals. A sample of 300 respondents is randomly selected for the study. The selection is done by the use of the simple random sampling and purposive sampling techniques. Thus, simple random sampling technique is used to select one hospital out of all government hospitals in Rivers State.

All the government hospitals were written on papers and wrapped by the researcher. They were then put in a basket for picking. Someone is called to mix –up the wrapped papers for the purpose of picking one hospital. Indeed, through this process, the person called upon picked Braithwaite Memorial Hospital (BMH) for the study. Furthermore, the purposive sampling technique is used to independently select respondents for the study. The instrument used for data collection is the questionnaire, which is structured into Section A: biographic data with multiple questions (items) such as age, sex, marital status, educational status, socio-economic status and religion; Section B: field responses on the psycho-social roles of medical social workers in managing stressed patients in government hospitals using modified four-point Likert attitude scale of Strongly Agreed (SA) rate 4, Agreed (A) rated 3, Disagreed (D) rated 2 and strongly disagreed (SD) rated 1. Face validity of the instrument is established by professionals in the Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt. Beyond this, test-retest method of reliability is used to determine the reliability value of 0.72 Correlation Coefficient for the study. The researchers administered the copies of the questionnaire with the help of their paid personnel; and they collected same immediately the responses were completed by respondents. The statistical methods used for the study are percentage and frequency table. Percentage and frequency table are used to analyse all respondents' data for the study.

## 6.1 Results

The results of the study are presented in Tables 1, 2 and 3. Table 1 results deal with biographic data of respondents while Tables 2 and 3 results deal with questions (items) that address the roles of medical social workers in managing stressed patients in government hospitals.

**Table 1: Biographic data of respondents**

Biographic characteristics	Number of respondents	Percentages
<b>Age group (in year)</b>		
21 – 30	60	20
31 –40	120	40
41 – 50	90	30
51 – 60	30	10
<b>Sex</b>		
Males	150	50
Females	150	50
<b>Marital status</b>		
Single	60	20
Married	180	60
Divorced	30	10
Separated	30	10
<b>Educational status</b>		
First degree certificates	180	60
Master degree certificates	90	30
Doctor of philosophy (Ph.D) degree certificates	30	10
<b>Socio-economic status</b>		
High socio-economic status	30	10
Middle socio-economic status	60	20
Low socio-economic status	210	70
<b>Religion</b>		
Christian religion	180	60
Islamic religion	60	20
Traditional religion	30	10
Others	30	10

**Source:** Field survey, 2015

The results of age group show that 60 respondents, representing 20% were from age group of 21 – 30 years, 120 (40%) were from age group of 31 -40 years, 90 (30%) were from age group of 41 -50 years, while 30 (10%) were from age group of 51 -60 years. For sex, the results indicate that 150 respondents, representing (50%) were males, while 150 (50%) were females as well. Also, for marital status, the results depict that 60 respondents, representing 20% were single medical social workers, 180 (60%) were married ones, 30 (10%) were divorced, but committed in their professional roles in medical social work, while 30 (10%) were separated ones, who also perform the same roles in the hospitals.

Furthermore, the results for educational status show that 180 respondents, representing 60% had first degree certificates, 90 (30%) had master degree certificates, while 30 (10%) had Ph.D degree certificates, and they are management staff. Equally important is the results for socio-economic status which delineate that 30 respondents, representing 10% were medical social workers in high socio-economic status, 60 (20%) were middle class income earners, while 210(70%) were low class income earners in government hospitals. Finally, for religion, the results indicate that 180 respondents, representing 60% were medical social workers, who were members of Christian religion, 60(20%) were members of Islamic religion, 30 (10%) were members of traditional religion, while 30 (10%) were members of other religious groups or organizations.

**Table 2: Analysis of the roles of medical social workers in counselling stressed patients in government hospitals**

S/No	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total
1.	Medical social workers advise patients to be calm while taking treatment	210 (70%)	60 (20%)	15 (5%)	15 (5%)	300 (100%)
2.	Medical social workers advise patients to observe maximum rest	90 (30%)	90 (30%)	60 (20%)	60 (20%)	300 (100%)
3.	Medical social workers advise patients to engage in recreational activities that will help them recuperate quicker	90 (30%)	120 (40%)	45 (15%)	45 (15%)	300 (100%)
4.	Medical social workers advise patients to avoid noise and incessant visitors who may make them uncomfortable	180 (60%)	45 (15%)	45 (15%)	30 (10%)	300 (100%)

**Source:** Field survey, 2015

From the data in the table above, 210 (70%) SA and 60 (20%) A that medical social workers advise patients to be calm while taking drugs, while 15 (5%) D and 15(5%) SD, that they did not advise them. Besides, 90 (30%) SA and 90 (30%) A that medical social workers advise patients to observe maximum rest, while 60 (20%) D and 60 (20%) SD, that they did not advise the sick to observe maximum rest. Apart from this fact, 90(30%) SA and 120 (40%) A, that medical social workers advise patients to engage in recreational activities that will help them recuperate quicker in hospitals, while 45 (15%) D and 45 (15%) SD. In the same vein, 180 (60%) SA and 45 (15%) A that medical social workers advise patients to avoid noise and incessant visitors who may make them uncomfortable, while 45 (15%) D and 30 (10%) SD.

**Table 3: Analysis of the roles of medical social workers in assisting stressed patients with personal belongings in government hospitals**

S/No	Items	SA	A	D	SD	Total
1.	Medical social workers assist in providing food for patients	210 (70%)	30 (10%)	30 (10%)	30 (10%)	300 (100%)
2.	Medical social workers assist in providing cloths for patients	210 (70%)	60 (20%)	15 (5%)	15 (5%)	300 (100%)
3.	Medical social workers assist in cleaning patients' belongings	90 (30%)	120 (40%)	60 (20%)	30 (10%)	300 (100%)
4.	Medical social workers assist patients to use the toilets	240 (80%)	30 (10%)	15 (5%)	15 (5%)	300 (100%)

**Source:** Field survey, 2015

Based on the foregoing facts in the table above, 210 (70%) SA and 30 (10%) A with the opinion that medical social workers assist in providing food for patients, while 30 (10%) D and 30 (10%) SD, that they did not give such advice to patients with stress. Again, on response whether medical social workers assist in providing cloths for patients, 210 (70%) SA, 60 (20%) A, that medical social workers provide cloths for stressed patients while 15(5%) D and 15 (5%) SD. Apart from this, 90(30%) SA, 120 (40%) A that medical social workers assist in cleaning patients' belongings, while 60 (20%) D and 30 (10%) SD. In addition, 240 (80%) and 30 (10%) were

of the opinion that medical social workers assist the patients to use toilets, while 15 (5%) D and 15 (5%) SD on this opinion, hence they did not assist them in the hospitals.

### **7.1 Discussion of findings**

The result of the first research question reveals that the roles of medical social workers in counselling stressed patients in government hospitals help them recuperate for positive behaviours. In tandem with the result of the first research question, Patterson (1971) explains that counselling has a relationship wherein the counsellor provides the psychological climate or condition in which the client is enabled to change, to become able to make choices, resolve his problems and develop a responsible independence which makes him or her a better member of the society. Also, the result of research question two reveal that medical social workers perform the roles of assisting stressed patients with personal belongings in government's hospitals. The result is supported by Kaneku et al (2013) who note that social work services are provided to patients and their families to ensure that a patient's illness, recovery, and safe transition that form one care setting to another; are considered within the context of his or her psycho-social need and the specific demands and opportunities of his or her environment.

### **8.1 Conclusion**

Based on the findings of the study, it is obvious that psycho-social roles of medical social workers in managing stresses patients in government's hospitals help them recuperate faster in Rivers State. In support of this fact, the study suggests for additional researches on the relationship between inadequate funding of government hospitals and care performance of medical social workers on stressed patients, as well as the relationship between strike among medical workers and effective treatment of stressed patients in Rivers State, and indeed in Nigerian hospitals.

### **8.2 Recommendations**

In the light of the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. State government should fund the hospitals adequately in order to train medical social workers on cutting edge counselling techniques for the treatment of stressed patients.
2. State government should employ qualified medical social workers, who are proficient in psycho-social roles of managing stressed patients in government hospitals.
3. State Orientation Agency (SOA) and other public enlightenment agencies should inform, educate and communicate with the people, especially stressed patients on the importance of psycho-social roles in managing stress cases in approved government hospitals.
4. State Assembly should enact a law that will ensure that all government employed medical social workers, practice according to their professional ethics in Rivers State.

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