

COUNSELLORS' CHALLENGES AND THEIR COPING STRATEGIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AKWA IBOM STATE OF AKWA IBOM STATE.

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the relationship between counsellors' challenges and their coping strategies in Akwa Ibom State. Three research questions and three hypotheses were formulated. A survey design was employed in carrying out the study and a sample size of 190 respondents were selected from a population of 221. A researcher-made questionnaire titled "Counsellors' Challenges and Coping Strategies Questionnaire (CCCSQ)" was used for data collection and the generated data were statistically treated using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) with Pearson Product Moment Correlation. All the hypotheses tested were rejected. From the analysed data, the following major findings were discovered: Counsellors' remuneration has significant relationship with their coping strategies. Counsellors' numerical strength has a significant relationship with their coping strategies. Counsellors' gender has a significant relationship with their coping strategies. In the light of this, the researcher offers the following recommendations: All schools should provide basic resources for guidance and counselling. These include a counselling office equipped with reference materials as well as adequate career resource materials.

Keywords: Counsellors Challenges, Coping Strategies, etc.

INTRODUCTION

Counselling plays a significant role in the overall growth and development of secondary school students. This is because most of the secondary school students fall within adolescence stage which is characterized by many physical and psychological changes. This period pose a number of personal, social, and educational challenges, Mutie and Ndambuki (1999). Guidance and counselling was not emphasized in Nigeria's educational system not until 1960s during which it was adopted after independence. This was probably because at the time, it was assumed that guidance and counselling could be provided at home by parents and the community or in religious set ups by ministers and religious leaders (Mutie & Ndambuki, 1999). As a means of instilling discipline among school age children, the education system encouraged physical

punishment that included caning and manual work. The last half of the 1900s and the early 2000s have witnessed a rise in the cases of indiscipline and unrest in secondary schools in Nigeria. This state of affairs coupled with social, economic, political, educational and leisure changes has necessitated the introduction of guidance and counselling as a means to counter the high level of indiscipline and other academic problems among students.

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 children, career officers and counselling shall be appointed in post primary institutions”. Government also noted that qualified personnel in this category (counselling) are scarce, and that government shall continue to make provisions for the training of interested teachers in guidance and counselling (NPE. 2004).

According to Ngumi (2003) the provision of guidance and counselling in secondary schools is riddled with a number of problems, which are attitudinal, structural, human and cultural. The author further stresses that, there is lack of trained school counsellors in institutions of learning, lack of enough time and facilities and reference materials for use by counsellors. Oraegbunam (2008) also opines that there are some challenges facing counselling practices in schools in Nigeria such as non-recognition of counsellors by the principals and absence of counselling in the timetable. Nwokolo (2006) also states that poor remuneration stands as a serious challenge to counselling services in schools. The author opines that counsellors should be paid more than ordinary teachers since their services are elaborate.

Low (2009) looked at the challenges of counselling in a school setting in four dimensions namely internal, external, systems and personal challenges. According to him, internal challenges are concerned with clientele groups, teachers’ attitudes towards counselling and pupils’ willingness to seek counselling. External challenges are issues outside the school which include culture and globalization; system challenges are things within the programme which include law establishing its practice in schools, referral procedure and resource planning while personal challenges include skills and techniques of the counsellor including training, supervision and attitude towards the school system.

Good remuneration is the desire of every worker including a counsellor. This is one of the reasons, researchers on school counsellor and remuneration state that counsellors should be made to be effective and result-oriented as possible through adequate salaries and allowances (Chark, 1993). Nwokolo (2006) maintains that a good remuneration such as bonuses from the government and school authority give way to effective counselling services. The author further states that a situation where counsellors are made to suffer deprivations from both the employer and the school authorities does not only become stressful but also equally annoys both the counsellor and the learners.

Okere (2005) explains that counsellors who are really committed and open-minded will be able to enhance qualitative counselling services using all the facilities available to make counselling interesting and real for the students. We know that the responsibility of counselling is with the clients(students) but counsellors have to manage the resources and the programme, ensuring that students and counsellors have access to what is needed, and controlling the process. These reveal that whatever modern materials or equipment that are used by counsellors in our educational system, add up to produce a conducive environment for effective learning competencies and good career choice among students.

Mullan (1990) maintains that the successful implementation of guidance and counselling programmes depends on support from the stakeholders. According to the author when counsellors are adequately remunerated in terms of allowances for the extra stress they undergo, they tend to do their work effectively and efficiently. Tambawal (2007) in a study on counselling for effective management of human resources discovers that counsellors who are well paid as at when due will work without stress. To them the work will be like a hobby and not as a labour. According to Low (2009), quality guidance and counselling services require a number of facilities. These include: office space, bookshelves, drawers, files, finance, time, reference books, guidance and counselling manuals, psychological test materials etc. Most of the facilities could only be provided by a counsellor who is adequately funded. A counsellor faced with the problem of poor remuneration often finds it very difficult to flow with his clients. Such a counsellor cannot be enthusiastic.

Maduewesi (2005) states that one of the challenges facing counselling services in Nigerian schools is inadequate counsellors. The author further stated that most schools are even forcing their counsellors into the classrooms to teach because of inadequate teaching staff.

Kiragu (2002) explains that counsellors who are really committed and open-minded will be able to enhance qualitative counselling services using all the facilities available to make counselling interesting and real for the students. Counselling can only be effective where the counsellor-student ratio is manageable and considerate.

Gender role perception is a factor that influences the concept of self and job perception of the individual's work. Several studies have explained that work stress are related to the sex group. For example, Akwaji (2004) in explaining the root of career sex stereotype states that competitively men and women are not perfectly substitutable for one another. The researcher senses that although both sexes may be similarly distributed across intelligence quotient categories and level of education, women could stand less work through work experience because they spend proportionally fewer years in the labour force than men do. Thus, productivity differentials between men and women will appear. This factor to a large extent influences the female occupational preference. Consequently, gender stereotyping of profession results therefrom.

Mutie, and Ndambuki (1999) state that gender disparity in the choice of career is not simply an African or Nigerian phenomenon but a global one. According to the author, it is only more prominent and has lasted for too long in our part of the world. We all live with it in our educational institutions. The author notes that there is gender inequality in some jobs and that there are still major gaps in all sectors and in every region of the world. The reason given by the author is based on the stress coping ability of both men and women in their respective career. This implies that men and women who are counsellors have differential coping abilities. For instance, women are sometimes already stressed at home as such coming to work as a counsellor does not permit much stress.

Oraegbunam (2008) believes that occupational stereotyping is fast giving way to uniformity in perception and vocational aspiration. The adduced reasons for this change include societal discouragement of gender discrimination in vocation resulting in the influx of both sexes into traditionally typical occupations. The author further states that this trend is made possible due to high number of female professionals with higher degrees being churned out yearly from universities.

Maduewesi (2005) attributes sex differences in coping with stress of males and females to the following factors, namely, biological and physical differences, cultural roles, social sex role expectations, social status in the world of work and socio-economic status with regards to marital responsibilities. Onyejiaku observed further that in spite of these facts, there is increasing evidence to show that work stereotypes between males and females greatly influence their stress coping abilities. The author also opines that despite physiological, psychological, and traditional gender differences in vocational roles, the increasing equal educational opportunity for both sexes and quest for financial independence and security among present day families indicate a definite change in the proportion of males and females in various vocations.

Gladding (2003) observes that most women consider “housewife” as the most popular and earliest preference seconded by teaching and social service occupations. The women almost avoided the field of business. Furthermore, Coop (2009:42) states that most women are interested in working with people and in helping others than men. Thus, the author observes that there is a concentration of women in such humanitarian-oriented vocations as social work, guidance and counselling, health technology, nursing and teaching. On the other hand, men were interested in independence and opportunity for leadership and prestige. As stated by the author, the women can cope with stress associated with counselling of students. This implies that women have more coping strategies than men. It is against this background that this study poise to undertake in order to examine the extent of coping strategies of the counsellor in Akwa Ibom State.

Statement of the Problem

The need for the employment of counsellors in Akwa Ibom State should receive a big boost in the State Education Board. This will go a long way to ameliorate vocational, educational and personal-social problems of adolescents. Cases of juvenile delinquency, drug and sexual abuse, disobedience to school rules and regulations, lateness, use of abusive words, inappropriate career choice among others are all reported dimensions of school children’s problems, which raise a lot of concern to counsellors, parents and other stakeholders.

The resultant effect of this negative trend is evident in school drop out, low academic achievement, emotional and mental distress and maladaptive behaviour. The government realised that if the problem is not checked, it will damage the very fabric of Nigeria developmental efforts. This is why the Federal Ministry of Education included counselling as one of the educational services in the (National Policy on Education 2004). This study is imperative because despite the provision made for secondary school counselling, the professional counsellors are facing a lot of challenges, which this paper seeks to address and proffer necessary strategies.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to examine the challenges and coping strategies of school counsellors in Akwa Ibom State. Specifically, the study seeks;

1. To examine the relationship between of counsellors’ remuneration and their coping strategies in Akwa Ibom State.
2. To find out the relationship between numerical strength of counsellors and their coping strategies in Akwa Ibom State.
3. To examine the relationship between counsellors’ gender and their coping strategies in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Questions

To guide this study, the following research questions were formulated:

1. Is there any relationship between counsellors' remuneration and their coping strategies in Akwa Ibom State?
2. Is there any relationship between counsellors' numerical strength and their coping strategies in Akwa Ibom State?
3. Is there any relationship between counsellors' gender and their coping strategies in Akwa Ibom State?

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study:

1. There is no significant relationship between counsellors' remuneration and their coping strategies in Akwa Ibom State.
2. There is no significant relationship between counsellors' numerical strength and their coping strategies in Akwa Ibom State.
3. There is no significant relationship between counsellors' gender and their coping strategies in Akwa Ibom State.

Research Design: A survey research design was used in the study. This design as stated by Udoh and Joseph (2005) typically employs questionnaire in order to determine the opinions, attitudes, preferences, and perceptions of persons of interest to the researcher.

Population of the Study: The population consisted of all the counsellors in the 230 secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State with a population of 221 (SSEB, Uyo, 2018).

Sample and Sampling Technique: A sample of 190 respondents was selected to take part in the study using a stratified random sampling technique.

Research Instrument: A researcher-made questionnaire was used for data collection. The questionnaire titled "Counsellors' Challenges and Coping Strategies Questionnaire (CCCSQ)" consists of 3 sections (A, B and C).

Reliability of Research Instrument

To ascertain the reliability index, the researcher conducted a pilot test on the instrument using neutral subjects who did not take part in the main study. A split-half reliability method was used to ensure the reliability of the instrument.

Method of Data Analysis : The data collected were analysed using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) with Pearson Product Moment Correlation. This statistic made it easy to determine the significant relationship between the variables. The relationship was determined at .05 coefficient level of significance.

Result

Hypothesis 1

There is no significant relationship between counsellors’ remuneration and their coping strategies in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 1: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Counsellors’ Remuneration and Counsellors’ Coping Strategies

1 showed calculated .474, found to be greater than the value of 188 freedom		Counsellors’ Remuneration	Coping Strategies	Table a r-value of which is be greater critical r-.135 at degree of and .05
	Counsellors’ Remuneration		.474**	
	Coping Strategies	.474**		

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

significance level. Since the calculated r-value is greater than the critical r-value, then the null hypothesis, which stated that counsellors’ remunerations has no significant relationship with counsellors’ coping strategies is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This shows that counsellors’ remuneration significantly relate with counsellors’ coping strategies.

Hypothesis 2

There is no significant relationship between counsellors’ numerical strength and their coping strategies in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Counsellors’ Numerical strength and their Counsellors’ Coping Strategies

	Counsellors’ Numerical Strength	Coping Strategies	The
Counsellors’ Numerical Strength		.613**	
Coping Strategies	.613**		

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

analysis of the relationship between counsellors’ numerical strength and their coping strategies showed a calculated r-value of .613 and a critical r-value of .135 at .05 alpha level and 188

degree of freedom. Since the calculated r-value is greater than the critical value then the null hypothesis, which stated that counsellors' numerical strength has no relationship with counsellors' coping strategies is rejected, while the alternative hypothesis is upheld. This implies that counsellors' numerical strength has a significant relationship with their coping strategies.

Hypothesis 3

There is no significant relationship between counsellors' gender and their coping strategies in Akwa Ibom State.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of Counsellors' Gender and their Counsellors' Coping Strategies

	Gender	Coping Strategies
Gender		.362**
Coping Strategies	.362**	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The analysis on Table 3 indicated a calculated r-value of .362 and a table r-value of .135 at .05 alpha level and 188 degree of freedom. Since the calculated r-value is greater than the table value then the null hypothesis, which stated that there is no significant relationship with counsellors' gender and their coping strategies is rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. The implication is that gender of counsellors has a significant relationship with their coping strategies.

Discussion of Findings

The result on the study of counsellors' challenges and coping strategies has revealed several findings. For instance, finding on hypothesis one revealed that counsellors' remuneration has a significant relationship with their coping strategies. The result implies that the allowances and salaries paid to the counsellors to a large extent determine how they cope with their services. This finding is in support of an earlier findings by Okere (2005) who explained that counsellors who are really committed and open-minded will be able to enhance qualitative counselling services using all the facilities available to make counselling interesting and real for the students.

To be able to function effectively, the counsellor needs additional finances to take care of his personal and official needs. These reveal that whatever modern materials or equipment that are used by counsellors in our educational system, add up to produce a conducive environment for effective learning competencies and good career choice among students. Mullan (1990) also maintained that the successful implementation of guidance and counselling programmes depends on support from the stakeholders. According to the author when counsellors are adequately remunerated in terms of allowances for the extra stress they undergo, they tend to do their work effectively and efficiently.

This finding corroborates with the finding of Tambawal (2007) who concluded that for effective management of human resources a greater number of counsellors is needed. The implication here is that having more than one counsellor to take care of the students is more profitable as this will reduce the stress associated with counselling services. Maduewesi (2005) also discovered that one of the challenges facing counselling services in Nigerian schools is inadequate counsellors. The author further stated that most schools are even forcing their counsellors into the classrooms to teach because of inadequate teaching staff. The respondents also asserted that a school should have more than one counsellor to help in proper counselling of the students.

Findings on gender and counsellors' coping strategies revealed that counsellors' gender and their coping strategies are significantly related. Gender in this case refers to the biological sex of the counsellor. The calculated r-value was found to be greater than the critical value hence, the null hypothesis was rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis. This finding is in line with the finding of Mutie, and Ndambuki (1999) who concluded that men and women who are counsellors have differential coping abilities. For instance, women are sometimes already stressed at home as such coming to work as a counsellor does not permit much stress.

Oraegbunam (2008) also discovered that occupational stereotyping is fast giving way to uniformity in perception and vocational aspiration. The adduced reasons for this change include societal discouragement of gender discrimination in vocation resulting in the influx of both sexes into traditionally typical occupations. Maduewesi (2005) attributed sex differences in coping with stress of males and females to the following factors, namely, biological and physical differences, cultural roles, social sex role expectations, social status in the world of work and socio-economic status with regards to marital responsibilities. The respondents also opined that male counsellors can cope with stress more than their female counterparts.

Conclusion:

The professional challenges to counselling practice in secondary schools are enormous as revealed by the study but there is still hope. This is because if all the suggestions for moving counselling forward as agreed by counsellors are adopted then counselling in Nigeria will compete favorably with its counterparts in other countries especially those in the developed world. Based on the findings of this study which have been discussed in the foregoing sections, the following conclusions have been drawn:

There are insufficient guidance and counselling personnel in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State. The attitude of principals towards guidance and counselling is negative. The support given to guidance and counselling departments in secondary schools in Akwa Ibom State is not sufficient.

Recommendations

For guidance and counselling to play the role for which it was intended in secondary schools, it requires concerted efforts from all the stakeholders in the education process. In the light of this, the researcher offers the following recommendations:

1. All schools should provide basic resources for guidance and counselling. These include a counselling office equipped with reference materials as well as adequate career resource materials.

2. There is need to offer guidance and counselling department all the necessary assistance and support it deserves such as financial and moral support.
3. There is need to organize for seminars and workshops to offer continuing education in guidance and counselling. This will equip the counsellors with latest theories and techniques of counselling to cope with their work.
4. Government should include counsellors when taking a decision that concerns them. For instance guidance and counselling was not properly addressed in the National Policy on Education.
5. Workshops and seminars should be organized for school heads who see counsellors as unimportant. These seminars will educate them and give them fresh orientation on the purpose for which counselling came into the secondary school system in the first place.
6. Counsellors should be exposed to on-line counselling through training in information technology (IT) in order to keep pace with present level of globalization.

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