

## STRESS, MENTAL HEALTH AND ADJUSTMENT OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELLOR IN ANAMBRA STATE

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### ABSTRACT

*The main purpose of the study is to find out the Stress, Mental Health and Adjustment needs of school counsellors in Anambra State. One research question and two hypotheses guided the study. It was a descriptive survey design. The population was all the 130 secondary school counsellors in the State. This was used because the population size is small. Data was collected using researchers made 12-item questionnaire. Findings from the study reveal that there are areas of adjustment needed by the school counsellors. This may be due to the fact that they are not regularly exposed to refresher courses. Based on the findings recommendations are made including that the Government should provide refresher courses for the school counsellors because this will go a long way to update their knowledge and enhance their performance amongst others.*

### INTRODUCTION

For many decades now stress phenomenon has become an important area of research in medicine, psychology and counselling amongst others. Uzoka (1995) had defined stress as merely the level of activation, with the notion that some stress is essential for activating people to achieve in their undertakings. In other words, nobody is immuned to stress and it is viewed as the disease of growth and development. According to Ezeilo (1995) stress refers to the subjective experience of discomfort and tension. Further more Griffiths (1981) refers to stress as those situations and conditions which place individuals including counsellors under some pressure, involve some adjustment in their behaviours and can cause changes which are unpleasant, sometimes maladaptive and even associated with physical damage. On the other hand mental health had been emphasized from the nineteenth century and has been described as the ability of an individual to withstand the stresses imposed by the environment (Weare,2000 and Stedma,2005). This is because when an individual succumbs to the rigous of life around him/her and could no longer carry out the functions of daily living he is

declared to be mentally ill. Therefore mental health refers to an adaptation to distress by mobilizing internal and external resources to minimize stress. No wonder Pender (1987) defines mental health as the ability of an individual to withstand the stresses imposed by the environment. Because of the stress that are found in the environment, home, work place, schools, hospital and church, the individuals including school counsellors in Anambra state, may be destabilized mentally or otherwise during the discharge of their duties.

The school counsellor is one who is professionally trained to handle peoples' problems in any of these broad areas such as educational, vocational and socio-personal (Nesse,2005). In view of the fact that the school counsellor is professionally trained to handle peoples' problems, he/she has to be a mentally healthy person. Oduh (2004) and Hahie, Myers and Sweeney(2004) define a mentally healthy person as one who is able to weather the storms of life without causing undue distress to others. In the same vein American Psychiatric Association (2006) and Atkinson (2006) listed some characteristics of a mentally healthy person as emotional stability, maturity of character, psychological strength to withstand stress, ability to recognize reality, ability to love and keep relationship with others, ability to work in one's field, presence of effective conscience and the gratification of some psychological and physiological needs without hurting others. Moreso, Elomba (2004) and Nesse (2005) mentioned professional competency of the counsellor, frustration tolerance, does not brood over past mistakes, self – actualizing, enjoyment of good interpersonal relationships, independence, and being optimistic as characteristics of a mentally healthy counsellor. The basis understanding is that if the counsellor desires the arrest of maladjustment among school children, it becomes imperative that the counsellor should be well adjusted. According to Nwobi(1997) adjustment is the process and condition of being in harmony with the physical and social environment in which the individual lives, indicated by the absence of symptoms of stress and by the ability to maintain good personal relationship with each other. For Sulaiman(2006)Adjustment is the modification in human behaviour accompanied by a feeling of acceptance of such behaviour in consonance with prevailing environment demands on an individual. However Nwobi(1997) and Sulaiman(2006) opined that there are areas of adjustment needed by psychologists and counsellors such as diplomacy, modification of behaviour, being more rational, giving room for individual difference amongst others. From the above definition it is very pertinent for the counsellor to be well adjusted. This is because if the counsellor is maladjusted, then he/she will not be able to take care of the maladjustment among school children. Therefore the main purpose of the study is to find out the stress, mental health and areas of adjustment needed by a school counsellor in Anambra State.

The following research question and hypotheses guided the study.

### **Research question**

1. What are the areas of adjustment needed by the school counsellor?

### **Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of areas of adjustment needed by the school counsellor in urban and those in rural areas.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean scores of areas of adjustment needed by the school counsellor in the senior secondary school and those in junior secondary school.

### **Research Method**

This is a descriptive survey design. This was considered appropriate because questionnaire was used to elicit information from the respondents on the areas of adjustment needed by school counsellors in Anambra state. The study was carried out in all the senior secondary schools and all the junior secondary schools in Anambra state. The population comprised all the 130 school counsellors in Anambra state, made up of 76 school counsellors in the senior secondary schools and 54 school counsellors in the junior secondary schools. (source-planning, research and statistics (PRS) departments of Post Primary Schools Commission (PPSC) and Anambra State Universal Basic Education (ASUBEB) (2008) The sample was a census one which according to Akuezilo and Agu (2003) is a survey in which all the members of a given population are used for the study. Data was collected with researchers developed questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed through extensive literature review and based on the purpose of the study. It has two sections A and B. Section A elicited information such as age, location and type of school while section B contained 12 questionnaire items. The respondents were asked to rate the items on a 4-point scale of strongly agree to strongly disagree.

The instrument was face and content validated by three experts, one from Guidance and Counselling Department, one from Educational Psychology and one from Measurement and Evaluation, all from Faculty of Education, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The corrections from the experts were effected in the final draft of the questionnaire. The Cronbach alpha procedure for testing

reliability was applied. In doing this 20 Counsellors in secondary schools in Delta State were given the instrument and the mean ratings for the items were coded and subjected to statistical analysis. It yielded a coefficient alpha value of 0.78 which was considered high enough for use. With respect to data collection a total of 130 copies of the questionnaire were administered by hand to respondents with the help of two research assistants. Through this process 130 properly completed questionnaires were returned. Statistical tools used to answer the research question was the mean while t- test statistics was used to test the two null hypotheses at 0.05 significance level. Decision rule, items having mean score of 2.50 and above is agreement on a 4- point scale while all mean scores below 2.50 is disagreement.

## Results

**Table 1:** mean scores of school counsellors on the needed areas of adjustment.

S/N	Items	X
1.	Being diplomatic with others.	3.60
2.	Willingness to help others.	3.20
3.	Giving room for individual difference.	3.50
4.	Having a favourable social attitude to all.	3.35
5.	Inculcating in the minds of clients the need to take a positive decision.	3.55
6.	Modifying environmental circumstances by behaviour.	3.40
7.	Overcoming any deep-seated personality disorder through the help of other qualified professionals.	3.65
8.	Satisfying the emotional relationship of the client in an Interpersonal situation.	3.75
9.	Examining and changing personal belief if they have negative impart on the client.	3.30
10.	Developing a more rational philosophy of life.	3.10
11.	Using self-disclosure to enhance effective relationship between the client and the counsellor.	3.00
12.	Increasing communication to meet relevant social, emotional and task needs.	3.40

In table one above all the items had a mean score of 2.50 and above indicating that all the counsellors agree that all the items above, are the areas of adjustment needed by the counsellors.

**Table 2:** test of difference between urban and rural based counsellors on the areas of adjustment needed by the counsellors.

Variables	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-Crit
Rural	76	3.60	0.92	128	1.51	1.96
Urban	54	3.30	0.85			

Table 2 presents the t- test analysis of the difference between the mean scores of the urban counsellors and rural counsellors' perception on the areas of adjustment needed by the counsellor. It can be observed that the calculated t- value of 1.51 at 0.05 level of significance is lower than the table t- value of 1.96. Therefore the hypothesis is accepted indicating that location is not a significance factor in the respondents' mean scores on the areas of adjustment needed by the counsellor.

**Table 3:** t – test of difference between senior secondary school counsellors (SScllor) and junior secondary school counsellors (JScllor) mean score on the areas of adjustment needed by the counsellor.

Variables	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t- Crit
SScllor	106	3.52	1.74	128	1.20	1.96
JScllor	24	3.45	1.82			

Table 3 above presents the t – test analysis of the difference between the mean scores of the counsellors of senior secondary school (SScllor) and counsellors of junior secondary school (JScllor) on the areas of adjustment needed by the counsellor.

It can also be observed that the calculated t-value of 1.20 at 0.05 level of significance is lower than the table value of 1.96. therefore the hypotheses is accepted. There is no significant difference in the respondents' mean scores on the areas of adjustment needed by the counsellor

### Discussion

It has been revealed in this study that all the items examined such as being diplomatic with others, giving room for individual difference, inculcating in the minds of clients the need to take a positive decision, modifying environmental circumstances by behaviour, overcoming any deep-seated personality disorder through the help of other qualified professionals, satisfying the emotional relationship of the client in an interpersonal situation, examining and changing personal belief if they have negative impact on the client, developing a more

rational philosophy of life, using self-disclosure to enhance effective relationship between the client and the counselor and increasing communication to meet relevant social, emotional and task needs are all areas of adjustment needed by the counsellor. This finding is in line with Nwobi(1997) and Sulaiman (2006) who earlier observed that the areas of adjustment needed by the school counsellors include being more rational, using self-disclosure to enhance effective relationship, giving room for individual difference, examining and changing personal belief in order to help the client.

The study further reveals no significant difference in the responses of counsellors due to school location and school type. These findings as indicated in tables 2 and 3 indicate a universal acceptance of the areas of adjustment needed by the school counsellor irrespective of their location and type of school. This may be due to the fact that areas of adjustment needed by school counsellors are still areas of need no matter the location and type of school the counsellor is practicing in. Also they should be tested during their practical training in such a way that by the time they leave school for regular practice, they will be properly adjusted as against the result of the study. Thus any counsellor who is properly adjusted is a mentally healthy counsellor as rightly noted by Elomba (2004).

### **Conclusion**

This study was Stress, Mental health and Adjustment of the school Counsellors in Anambra State. The findings of this study has confirmed the old proverb that "A blind man cannot lead a blind man" hence the physically and mentally adjustment of a school counsellor against the maladjusted student. No wonder the Government, in National Policy on Education (2004) recognized maladjustment and in appropriate decisions among school children and brought in counsellors to take care of the situation. Therefore if the needs of the school counsellors are met then the school children's needs will be met also in all the major areas of their needs.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings the following recommendation are made:

1. Government should encourage the counsellors to be properly adjusted by organizing refresher courses, seminars, workshops and conferences in that respect.
2. Right from their training, the counsellors should be tested for proper adjustment by their lecturers before they go out to practice in the field.

3. The government should help the counsellors to adjust properly by providing all counselling infrastructures like private room, computer, fan, chair, table, cassette player, internet, books etc which will help in counseling the children for more positive results.

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