

COUNSELLING PRACTICES FOR SPECIAL NEED POPULATIONS

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Abstract

The paper discussed the need for change of approach for counselling services from the hitherto school setting, to a more generalized view of the whole fabric of the society thereby limiting its scope to special need populations who by the nature and peculiarity of situations demand a specialized approach in order to resolve their psycho-social and academic problems. The task of counselling as observed in this paper, therefore, is giving the individual the opportunity to define, explore, discover and adopt ways of living a more satisfying and resourceful life within the social, educational and vocational groupings within which he or she identifies or finds him/herself. The paper examined the counselling needs of a segment of the special population viz: the Youth, Drug Abused, Handicapped/physically challenged and retirees, and preferred certain strategies for counselling such groups. Recommendations were also given for meeting the challenges counselling faced in order to address the issues of the populations such as that. Such that the Counsellor based training Curriculum in our Universities and Colleges of Education should be broadened and enlarged, so that trainees would come to terms with the specific needs of counselling clients with special problem during practical attachments. The paper concluded by employing the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) to brace up and face the enormous challenges of Counselling the special need populations.

Introduction

Counselling outside the school setting is receiving increased attention globally because of the existing complexities of life ranging from urbanization, globalization

and technological break through which is bringing a lot shift in people's way of life either by way of job creation and adaptation to it or by way of living in urban and rural areas. Individuals today face a lot of challenges some are natural, or through illness and accidents or as a results of man's innovation and creation, thus making them to require a special assistance in order to cope with demanding situation in which they found themselves. Counselling which is aimed at helping individuals to resolve critical life issues can be at hand to see how such groups could be assisted.

The growing economic hardships of our times, unemployment problems, health related issues, growing demand for accommodation by individuals, the traumas of political and religious upheavals all make certain people fall into some anxieties that may lead them to require special attention and thus in turn make them special population. The thrust of this paper is to identify some of these groups and come up with the appropriate counselling strategies that can be used to assist them.

Yakubu (2000) asserted that a special population is any group of people identified with certain empirical evidences or features that distinguished them from the normal persons. These make them "a special population" that are cannot help admiring them in a special way, due to the features that make them strange from all others. It should however, be noted that the features do not only involve negative qualities but also positive ones. Anything that makes one look or behave different from others make one a special.

Counselling is viewed as a personalized, intimate interview or dialogue between a person experiencing some emotional, social, educational, physical, and vocational problems and a professional counsellor. It can also be seen as a service that helps individual to solve problems and learn to cope with these problems that are not easy to solve. This is why the special needs population can be focused so that they are assisted out of their needs. Counselling is designed to remove the emotional, psychological and personal social roadblocks placed in the way of an individual by the multi-dimensional problems of the day to day life.

The involvement of counselling with special population therefore is to improve and possibly remedy the challenges, facing people with special needs. The educational challenges facing these category of people are quite obvious and they need new strategies in resolving through counselling. This is because according to Ipaye (1981), the individual learns new ways if interacting, new ways of obtaining information, new ways of making decisions, and new ways of responding to the environment and new

ways of interacting. The task of counselling therefore as seen by Ipaye (1981), Denga (1990), Mallum (1983), Okon (1983), Akinboye (1982) and Bulus (1989) is to give the individual the opportunity to define, explore, discover and adopt ways of living a more satisfying and resourceful life within the social, educational and vocational groupings within which he or she is identified or finds himself or herself. The challenges of life has made some people feeling as not existing well, but through education as a tool for moral, social, economic, political and technological development, has affected some changes in human lives and the society as well. Human communities have used education to improve their standard of living, develop new methods and skills of production, so is the need of counselling practices for special need populations.

Special Need Population

Depending upon the context one wishes to stand, the earlier definition which states that special population is any group of people identified to be different from other people, is adopted in of this paper. Yakubu (2000) presented the following as special need population:

- (1) Drug abused
- (2) Handicapped
- (3) HIV/AIDS patients
- (4) Stressful and anxiety patients
- (5) Retirees
- (6) Widows and widowers
- (7) The women
- (8) The Adolescents
- (9) The negative self concept people
- (10) The Nomads
- (11) The unemployed
- (12) The orphans
- (13) The riverine people
- (14) The prisoners, etc.

However, Bulus (2009) also identified the following as special need population:

- (1) Marital and family segments
- (2) Women
- (3) The aged
- (4) Exceptional persons

- (5) Youths
- (6) Victims of crises
- (7) Workers
- (8) Persons requiring rehabilitation and reintegration.

Having seen the varied views on special populations, this paper focused on the following, which does not exhaust the groups but for convenience of presentation. The groups are: The Youths, Drug Abused, Handicapped/Physically challenged, and retirees.

The Youths

Carew (2009), opined that, the youths constitute a fairly good size of the national population. The characteristics of the youths and the need to effectively serve them make it imperative for counsellors to respond to their concerns. Psychologists and sociologists generally agree that the period of youth is characterized with high demonstration of energy, zest and unrest. In line with this, Bulus (2009) stated that, issues surrounding the youths include: choice of friends, consequences of complex changes in society, unemployment, drug addiction, cultism, examination malpractices, consequences of physical, emotional and psychological changes etcetera. Counsellors would need coping skills to meet the youth desires and aspirations. They require personal counselling for all the concerns to make wise rational and scientific lasting choices/decision by the society.

The youth that fall into the category of special population can be identified as the Area Boys, militant youth of Niger Delta and creeks, the religious fanatics, the truants and drug abused. The area boys are most often used by politicians for political campaigns and vote rigging and thereby discarded after elections to cause havoc to members of the general public. The militants for social and economic reasons rake havoc in the Niger Delta thereby causing shortfall in Petroleum products activities which affects Nigeria's international trade and power production in the country. Some unpatriotic Nigerians and misguided individual here used youths to create religious crisis, especially in the Northern part of the country. The repercussions of such religious crisis have turned out to be expensive in terms of human lives and property. The social and psychological damage cannot be quantified. Some of the indicators of crisis among youth as opined by Nwakaibie (2006), are sexual promiscuity, drug abuse, cultism, amorality and behavioural disorders that have reached alarming proportions and demand counsellors paying attention to them.

It is in this regard that Denga (2009) opined that counselling psychology is replete with behavioural contingencies that can be used to modify maladaptive behaviour, chronic frustration, misplaced aggression, excessive love for cupidity (or money) and other assorted or variegated cargo of criminal behaviours. In order to modify maladaptive behaviour, Lar, Okpede and Bulus (1992) suggested the following techniques:

1. **Negative Reinforcement:** This involves punishment for exhibiting unwanted behaviour. It ranges from painful physical stimulation and deprivation to weaker reinforcer such as verbal criticism, hostility or simple expression of dislike.
 2. **Positive Reinforcement:** This means rewarding people for exhibiting a specific wanted behaviour.
 3. **Extinction:** This is otherwise referred to as the ignore technique in counselling, it is used to refer to the process of returning a behaviour to its original or pre-reinforcement level. It also connotes the gradual elimination of a new response through rewards of the reinforcers.
 4. **Shaping:** This involves initiating planned changes in another's behaviour and actually keeping track of the progress and positively reinforcing those behaviours that begin to appropriate the desired end product more and more.
 5. **Modelling:** This refers to the process whereby elaborate sequences or complex sets of behaviours are initiated. It involves a situation where people who do not know how to act have to rely on others around them, imitating their behaviours.
 6. **Response Cost Technique:** This involves making an individual to lose or forfeit something that is of value to him/her as a result of a negative/unwanted behaviour.
 7. **The Time out Technique:** This involves the removal of offender from a reinforcing environment and situation to a non reinforcing environment and situation where he is to stay alone for a while to pay for his behaviour.
 8. **Systematic Desensitization Technique:** This involves helping people who manifest fear in the presence of certain objects or persons and incidences.
- These techniques can also be applied to other specialized populations.

Drug Abused

The youths are the most vulnerable group of drug abuse; therefore there is need for an understanding of why many youths have the need to abuse drugs, which would go

along way in counselling them. The following were identified by Yakubu (2000) as the possible causes of drug abuse:

1. The drive towards modernization
2. Excessive use of drugs made or induced young ones to experiment as well.
3. Seeking of pleasure
4. To help cope with personal problems and psychological stress.
5. Young ones trying to protest against norms imposed on them by the society.
6. Increase in international contacts as to imitate life styles
7. Social factors such as peer influence.
8. Poor self-image and frequent experience feelings of lack of self-esteem.
9. Marital disharmony, family stress and the break up of families are important factors.
10. The desire to achieve in a competitive world like the case of Diego Maradona in USA 1994.
11. Ignorance
12. Mass media.

It can be noted from the above that, there is no single causes of drug abuse. It is however generally agreed that certain reasons for abuse are important, such as availability of drugs, a vulnerable personality and social pressure. According to Abayemi (1990) many drug users, particularly adolescents taking non-prescribed drugs appear to have personality disorder before taking drugs as shown by poor school record, truancy, delinquency and dropout. Such drug-abusers often seems to be without resources to cope with the challenges of day-today life, They are inconsistent in their feelings and critical of society and authority; some drug abusers give a history of mental illness or personality disorder in the family, or they come from severely disorganized background. Abayemi (1990) opined that a history of childhood unhappiness is common among drug abusers.

Drug abusers are prone to many social and psychological problems, for according to Oladele (2007) in many cases, individuals not only break the law by obtaining their drugs, but engage in illegal activities to obtain money needed to buy the drugs. He can also create illegal network of channels for drug distribution and sale. The individual dependent on drug often makes the acquisition of drugs a way of life, living little time for work or school.

Drug abuse poses the greatest threat to the health and survival of mankind. For instance, alcohol can cause liver disease, like cirrhosis, hepatitis and cancer. Many drug abusers die of HIV/AIDS. Many of the HIV – positive population are drug users who injected themselves with infected needles. Many babies born are exposed to illicit drug while in the womb. Such children suffer damaging effects both mentally and physically and painful withdrawal symptoms.

Drugs have destroyed several homes. Parents who crave for drugs rarely provide for their children with a stable and loving home. Children who grow in environment where drugs users live take to the streets as “area boys” or street urchins or even get involved in drug themselves.

Often people involved in drugs are responsible for crimes such as mugging, armed robbery, murder, drug trafficking, and increased risk of homicide and prostitution.

The counselling strategies that can be employed for drug abused individuals or groups should include the following:

- (a) confrontation
- (b) accurate education
- (c) assertiveness training
- (d) decision making strategies
- (e) Peer cluster involvement (Adegoke, 2003:72).

Handicapped/physically challenged

The handicapped/physically challenged according to Carew (2009) consist of physical, social, psychological, mental and economic individuals who deviate from the normal population. The term challenged have been interchangeably used with disadvantaged or handicapped for whom special education should be provided. Some times the term “exceptional” individuals, is used for special education and in that case the gifted and talented consist of this categorization. The challenged group of individuals (especially in the school system) are those that would need special education because their abilities, emotionality, mental, behavioural and social characteristics are different from the normal population (Mba 1991). The categories into which individuals that are handicapped or physically challenged include:

- (1) the hearing disabled,
- (2) the mentally retarded

- (3) The physical and health impaired.
- (4) The speech and hearing – impaired
- (5) The visually – impaired
- (6) Children with behaviour disorders (disturbed hearing behaviour)
- (7) The gifted and talented,

Individuals with one kind of disability or the other needs special kind of attention in order to fit into normal life with the generality of the population in terms of adjustment and information. In line with this Nwoye (1998), asserted that, the counsellor should however remember that they need the adjustment and informational services at two basic levels: namely those to be given to them directly and those to be given to them indirectly through their parents, the peers, their teachers and their potential employers.

In counselling the physically challenged directly, the first thing to do for them is to help them adjust their minds and feelings to the meaning and implications of their challenged conditions. To help them in this regard the counsellor needs to apply much of his professional counselling skills such as that of empathy, rapport building, and adequate cross-checking of feelings, effective communication and unconditional positive regard.

To be able to use these skills in counselling the physically challenged, the counsellor needs first of all to get his cognitive field sufficiently broadened concerning the nature and implications of the different categories of challenging conditions. And this implies that he needs to read a lot concerning the needs and problems of the various challenging conditions so as to be able to gather enough relevant information that might help him to be able to correct in good time any prior misconceptions he may be entertaining concerning the various individuals challenged by one specific disability or the other.

Helping a physically challenged client to adjust to his condition requires giving him counselling on how to plan an effective strategy for improving his other positive aspects of self and then helping him to determine how to manage most of his existing challenging conditions so as to help him control as much as possible, the obstacles they can present to his progress in life.

The informational strategy that could be employed for the physically challenged is on the issue of how to help clients to understand the true nature and implication of his

particular challenging situation. And then, to go ahead from there, to help him identify the known strategies for handling the disability.

Information that is most relevant in this regard, is that concerned with the issue of where to obtain adequate diagnosis for his specific type of handicap, and then an assessment of the extent of his chances of gaining effective education in spite of all his conditions, and subsequently the opportunities he will have for entering into some gainful employment after receiving relevant training. To counsel them on how to obtain effective remediation for their peculiar handicap the counsellor needs to make adequate effort to acquaint himself with relevant information concerning the agencies and appropriate health organizations that are known to possess the specialist personnel and resources for arresting further complication of the particular disabilities troubling his target client.

The physically challenged client indeed can also be helped to be relevant of much of his anxieties if he is helped to identify and relate with all relevant philanthropic organizations both local and international, which can come to his aid, in his effort to negotiate effectively for assistances from such organizations.

The Retirees

The beginning of retirement marks a new phase in people lives. When one crosses the boundary between employment and retirement, questions of meaning will inevitably arise, if they have not been acknowledged. Even if there has been some thought about those questions, taking retirement provides an actual live experience rather anticipated experience. How do we find meaning in retirement? What will one do with the rest of his/her life? How can one build structure in his life to take the place of work? To be engaged in a worthy struggle might be essential to people's survival. How can one make his/her life a worthwhile contribution to humanity? These are just some of the types of questions that are relevant to the retire (Tambawal 2008). These questions and similar ones make the retirees special population because they are saddled with the situation of disengaging from the bubbles of life, to retirement and its attendant problems.

Tambawal (2008) asserted that professional literature have identified certain psycho social effects of retirement on retirees which calls for counselling such as disbelief or denial which according to Christy & Anyim (2005), is the situation in which one is in a fantasy. He is not sure whether he is dreaming or smoothing real is happening. Another problem as identified by Akinade (2003) is anger where a retiree may be annoyed either with self, the employer; anyone in his family he suspects has

contributed to his fate. Anxiety disorder, depression and substance abuse are also identified by Christy and Anyim (2005) as being part of the problems encountered by retirees.

The identified problems call for a concerted effort from the counselling world to help retirees adjust to normal life. In counselling retiree therefore, Egong, Akepami and Usani (2005) suggested a normal programme for counselling, where they indicated that: to assist the retiree to adapt to another style of life on retirement, duration of which should be six months. The specific objectives of the training programme are as follows:

- (1) participate in pre-retirement orientation programme,
- (2) attend seminars and workshops on skills acquisition for alternative job,
- (3) learn how to make use of pension benefits,
- (4) Acquire interpersonal skills for new life.

For counsellors to do this effectively Nwoye (1990), identified the following steps to be taken:

- (a) identification of the problem for which counselling remediation is sought;
- (b) Definition, in behavioural terms of the specific goal to be achieved in the face of the problem is in need of resolution.
- (c) Behavioural assessment and determination of the baseline data regarding the occurrence and intensity of the problem under attention;
- (d) Determination and selection of the treatment strategies to be applied for the achievement of the goal that has been specified.
- (e) Evaluation of the counselling outcome vis-avis the goal but in advance of treatment strategies applied.

Okpede (1998) identified the following as the counselling needs of retirees which should be the focus:

- (a) Vocational counselling
- (b) Readjustment counselling
- (c) Dietary counselling
- (d) Grooming counselling

Retirement as a programme that inflicts psychological, social, economic and mental disadvantages on the victims can be seen to require specialized attention, and this is

from no other source than counselling, a need to be properly groomed to welcome and cope successfully with it when it comes.

RECOMMENDATION

1. The counsellor based training curriculum in our Universities and Colleges of Education should be broadened and enlarged, so that trainees would come to terms with the specific needs of counseling clients with special problem during practical attachments.
2. Specialized training be given to individual counsellors instead of been generalist, the would be counsellor should trained in such a way he can conveniently and professionally handle issues relating to his specialization, like in medicine and law where people specialize in particular areas.
3. An increased public awareness on the role of counsellors in our midst should be undertaken by both print and electronic media.
4. The practicum for trainee counsellors should be conducted not only within the school setting but also within specialized areas and population, so that trainees will come to face the life situations of clients.
5. A collaborative working relationship be formal between counsellors and others in the helping relationship, by sociologist, psychologist, psychiatrists, etc. so that ideas can be shared and meaningful assistance could be given to clients.

Conclusion

Counselling as a profession that is gaining acceptance in our school and non-school setting due to its approach in resolving human problems. Specific planning and approaches need to be in place for counselling special populations. Therefore, there is need for more expanded and specialized training of the would be counsellors and the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) needs to brace up to face the enormous challenges of counselling special populations.

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