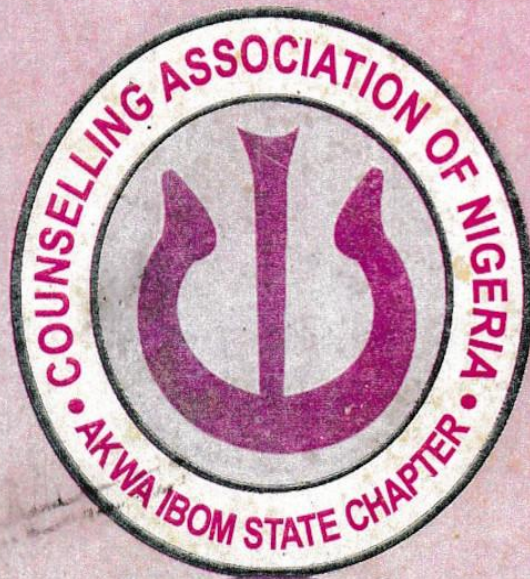


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ETHICAL ISSUES AND THE PRACTICE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING IN UYO LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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Abstract

This study considered ethical issues and the practice of guidance and counselling in Uyo Local government Area. Two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study. An instrument titled, Ethical Issues and Counselling Practice Questionnaire (EICPQ) was used to gather data for the study. The result of the Independent t-test revealed that both confidentiality and respect for the client has a significant influence on the practice of guidance and counselling. These results have implications for guidance and counselling in that the counsellors must have an intimate and a sound sense of the moral oughtness of each situation in which they are called upon to give counsel. The study recommended among other things that counsellors should protect the clients from unauthorized disclosures without the consent of the individual except when the client, another person or the society can be harmed.

Introduction

In life, one is bound to seek guidance or counsel from another to enable him get over difficulties which prevents him from functioning effectively. The nature of the problem often determines whom one goes to. For instance, the degree or magnitude of the problem and the expertise of the help giver are usually considered before a final decision is taken on whom to consult.

In the traditional Nigerian society, children tend to confide in their peers and men confide in fellow men. Women feel comfortable

confiding in men which bring the issue of Oedipus complex of Sigmund Freud to bear. The religious inclined people prefer going to their pastor if a Christian, while Moslems will go to an 'Imam or Alfa'. Older people do not feel comfortable telling their problems to young counsellors. Common observation in the larger society shows that instead of an individual seeking counsel from a trained counsellor, he prefers an untrained person.

The counsellor or any other person cannot help anyone unless he knows what the root problem is. This is because, many times the things they say are not the **real cause** of their difficulties. A lot of things if not all when viewed from **the person** that needs help or from the help giver's side has to do **with the rightness** of behaviour or actions of individuals, classes, **groups or the society** at large. Taking a critical look at the society **people lack the sincerity** of mind to do what is good, what ought to be done, **but rather, they tend to do** those evil things that ought not to be done. **Issues that bother on what kinds of things are right or wrong as stated in Etuk (2003) fall within the domains of ethics.** According to **Geddes and Grosset (2002), ethics is defined as a study of standards of right and wrong. It is also seen as a system of conduct or behaviour or moral principles.**

Ethics in counselling is not an abstract or academic issue, it is a necessary and active thread that runs throughout every aspect of practice with the intention of acting at all times in the best therapeutic interest of clients as members of society. Counselling is intended to promote individuals adaptability to changing life demands by helping clients develop or enhance a variety of personal-social, coping and decision making skills or by helping clients to alter dysfunctional or undesired patterns of living.

Counselling as a profession does not seem to be very effective as one would have wished due to the fact that qualified counsellors are not employed and sent to the schools. There are very few qualified counsellors in the schools. The ones who are acting as counsellors in some schools are those they call career masters and mistresses who do not have any professional training in counselling even though some of them may be graduates. There are teacher counsellors who combine teaching with counselling which would not allow them to carry out effective counselling.

Children (clients) would not go to teacher counsellors because they carry canes. A teacher counsellor stays in the staff room with **other teachers** and this does not allow for confidentiality. The **principals in some schools** for instance try to thwart the effort of the **counselors most especially now** that it is stipulated that school

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counsellors should not teach but concentrate solely on counselling services. To them the counsellors are not doing anything because they do not teach. These teacher counsellors who are afraid that they might be victimized, witch-hunt by their principals decide to keep quiet and dance to the tune of the head of the school to the detriment of the students and other staff. Sekuk, Rumfat and Ogbonna (2003) observed that criminality and delinquency have wrecked great havoc on the society as manifested in armed robbery, drug abuse, cultism, sexual immorality and cold blood murder including ritual killings. Akpan (2003) in support of the above observation posited that, the drop out rate of students is on the increase as a result of the aforementioned social maladies in the society. In school setting for example, observation reveals that most students to be above the laws, smoke, engage in sexual immorality, and show no respect to teachers.

At present, indigenous societies and cultures in Nigerian society have undergone various transformation processes. Discipline and moral code of conduct at home and at school have diminished due to influence of technological advancement which has made the society a complex one, lacking in ethical principles. Everyone is interested in human behaviour, like the way they think, why they think, feel, respond, explode and act the way they do. To a lot of people, to seek counselling from a counsellor is to admit to being a failure.

From what has been discussed so far, the role of ethics in human life is very fundamental as it concerns mainly human conduct. John (2005) asserted that ethics provides man with the necessary information needed for his proper conduct by revealing to him why certain actions are good or bad, right or wrong, praise worthy or blame worthy. By so doing, ethics helps to solve man's moral problems by fashioning out an acceptable framework for evaluating our moral judgement. Nugent (1990) posited that ethics helps the individual to understand when he is responsible for his activities and how to resolve the conflict. Ethics can make an individual to be more objective in his assessments of morality as it is a known and acceptable fact that a moral individual will rise above sentiments and discharge his duties accordingly (Archibong, 2010).

The relevance of ethics to the society is a serious issue in the sense that our contemporary society has witnessed a steady decline in traditional and societal value system. The importance of ethics to the society cuts across every discipline, profession and every facet of life. In every society, morality plays a very significant role in life for it is in the demonstration of moral values that life's most important experiences are weighed and verdicts given. That is, an ethical insight

is a very crucial instrument for handling moral problems in different professions of life.

In the view of Omoregbe (1990) the most important aspect of development is the moral development of human personality. To separate ethics from society is to destroy it. Morality is the soul of society. Therefore any endeavour that is carried out at the exclusion of ethics is defective. Professional ethics therefore is perceived as a set of principles which discusses in broad terms the professions responsibilities to the public, to clients, and to fellow practitioners.

Confidentiality and the practice of counselling

The counsellor's foremost ethical concern is his relationship with the client and maintaining the confidentiality of that relationship and the client's right to self determination and autonomy. Within the context of professional ethics observing the principle of confidentiality means keeping information given by or about an individual in the course of a professional relationship secure and secret from others.

The ethical standards of guidance and counselling generally hold that the counsellor has a primary obligation to respect the confidentiality of information obtained in the course of their professional work (American Psychological Association, 1990, Principle 5). Kotow (1986) took a strong stand in favour of absolute adherence to confidentiality. He observed that any kind of breach of client confidentiality causes harms that are more serious than hypothetical benefits. Ibrahim (2003) pointed out that the practitioner should keep in confidence information relating to representation of a client except required by law. It should also be noted that the ethical requirements for confidentiality are relative not absolute (Herlit5y and Sheeley, 1987). This implies that a counsellor cannot convey to a client the impression that the client is free to divulge information of any kind without fear of having the confidence broken by the Counsellor.

Respect for the Client and Practice of Counselling

A very important standard in the ethical principles of all counselling professions is that the counsellor respects the integrity, dignity and welfare of the clients regardless of who the client is. As stated in American Psychological Associations (1992, Principle 4), in order to meet this standard, counsellors must inform their clients as to the purpose and nature of treatment and the client's freedom of choice regarding participation. Clients should also be informed of any modifications during the course of treatment and consent obtained. The client has the right to discontinue treatment and cannot be

compelled to continue. Eze (2006) observed that the primary objective of any action man engages in should not only be geared towards personal happiness but, the concern for others should be put into consideration. According to Birdsall and Hubert (2000) in "mandated counselling this standard is challenged regularly. This is a situation where children are referred by parents or teachers to the counsellor for counselling when they exhibit undesired or unacceptable behaviours in school. In this instance, little or no realistic choice is offered the client as he enters counselling reluctantly as a "pre treatment induction" before eventually agreeing to treatment. Counselling can only be effective when there is an establishment of a trusting relationship between the client and the counsellor.

The problem in this study is to find out how **ethical issues** (confidentiality and respect for the client) affects the **effectiveness** of guidance and counselling practice.

Hypotheses

In order to provide a guide in this study, two null hypotheses were formulated as follows:

- (i) Confidentiality has no significant influence on the effective practice of guidance and **counselling** in Uyo Local Government Area.
- (ii) Respect for the client has no significant influence on the effective practice of guidance and counselling in Uyo Local Government Area.

Methodology

(a) Research Design

The study employed a survey research design

(b) Population and Sample

The target population for this study was made up of all senior secondary students in Uyo Local Government Area for 2009 school year. The total number of students was 5900. A sample of 600 students randomly selected from the population were used for this study.

(c) Instrument

The instrument (Ethical Issues and Counselling Practice Questionnaire (EICPQ) was constructed for the study. The instrument was made up of two sections. Section 1 was concerned with the personal data of the respondents. Section 2 embodied issues concerned with the variables of the study. The items in this section were sixteen in number. The responses were divided into a four point rating scale: (1)

Strongly Agreed (2) Agreed (3) Disagreed and (4) Strongly Disagreed. This scale carried 4, 3, 2 and 1 points respectively.

Some specialists in Guidance and Counselling, and Tests and Measurement in the University of Uyo ascertained the face and content validity of the instrument. The instrument was further subjected to a test-retest method in order to ascertain its reliability. Hence, the instrument was administered to 50 students randomly selected from the secondary schools in Uyo Metropolis.

The data collected from the exercise were subjected to appropriate statistical analysis. The computed result showed a high correlation coefficient value of 0.89. So the instrument was considered to be highly reliable.

(d) **Administration of Instrument**

The instrument EICPQ, was administered to the randomly selected 600 respondents. The instrument was collected at the end of the exercise for analysis using t-test.

(e) **Results**

The results of the analyses in respect of the null hypotheses are shown in Tables 1 and 2

Table 1: t-test analysis of the influence of confidentiality on effective practice of guidance and counselling.

Groups	N	\bar{x}	SD	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value	Df	Decision
Those who agreed that counsellor confidentiality has influence on counselling practice	209	3.0	1.18	14.55	1.96	598	Rejected
Those who did not agree that counsellor confidentiality has influence on counselling practice	391	1.4	0.42				

$P > .05$

The result in Table 1 shows that the calculated t-value of 14.55 is greater than critical t-value of 1.96 with df of 598 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis that confidentiality has no significant influence on effective practice of guidance and counselling was rejected. This implies that confidentiality has a great influence on effective practice of guidance and counselling.

Table 2: t-test analysis of the influence of respect for the clients on effective practice of guidance and counselling

Groups	N	\bar{x}	SD	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value	Df	Decision
Those who agreed that counsellors respect for client has influence on effective practice of guidance and Counselling	211	3.15	2.01	9.67	1.96	598	Rejected
Those who did not agree that respect for clients has influence on effective practice of guidance and counselling	389	1.70	1.40				

$P > .05$

The result in Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 9.67 is greater than critical t-value of 1.96 with df of 598 at 0.05 level of significance. Therefore the null hypothesis that respect for the client has no significant influence on the effective practice of guidance and counselling was rejected. This implies that respect for the client has significant influence on effective practice of guidance and counselling.

Discussion

The result of the analysis shows that confidentiality and respect for the client has significant influence on the effective practice of guidance and counselling. These results support various literature and researches already done in these variables. Like those of the findings on confidentiality supports the works of Kottow (1986), Ibrahim (2003). Every counsellor must come to grips with the thorny issue of the limits and guidelines of confidentiality of information. According to Corey (1991), no genuine therapy can occur unless clients trust the privacy of their revelations to their therapists. Based on the result, there is need

to keep information given by or about an individual in the course of a professional relationship secure and secret from others.

The result that respect for the client has a significant influence on effective practice of guidance and counselling supports what is stated in American Psychological Associations (1992, Principle 4) and the work of Eze (2006) The clear intent of respect for the client is that the counsellor does not engage in activities that are contrary to the ethical principles concerning the rights of clients.

Implications of the Study for Guidance and Counselling.

This study has serious implications for guidance and counselling in the following ways:

- 1) The counsellor must have an intimate and a sound sense of the moral oughtness of each situation in which he is called upon to give counsel.
- 2) The counsellor and the client have to discover their common ground as there are always limit to what any counsellor or the process of counselling can achieve both in extent and in depth. It is therefore necessary for the counsellor to be aware of limits and be willing to explain them,.
- 3) Counsellors should know that counselling differs from other helping professions. It is not a therapy that one person applies to docile others.
- 4) The counsellor should be discriminatory in his counselling, realizing the individuality of each case. He must be a person to whom other people can open their hearts with confidence knowing their trust will never be violated.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the results of this study, the following recommendations have been made.

- 1) Counsellors should protect the clients from **unauthorized disclosures** without the consent of the **individual except** when the client, another person or the **society can be harmed**.
- 2) Counsellors should be given an office with **furniture and equipment** needed for him to work **effectively**. **This will allow for confidentiality**.
- 3) Counselling Association of Nigeria (**CASSON**) should monitor the ethical behaviour of professional **counsellors**

with clients to prevent emotional damage to clients by the development of ethical codes which will help to clarify the professional's responsibilities to clients and society.

- 4) Government should employ trained counsellors and send to schools.

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