

COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR PEACE AND UNITY: AWARENESS AMONG YOUTHS IN NSUKKA LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA OF ENUGU STATE

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Abstract

This study explored the counselling services for peace and unity: awareness among youths in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State. Three specific objectives and corresponding research questions guided the study. Descriptive survey research design was employed. The population was all youth in Nsukka L.G.A, four wards were randomly selected at twenty (20) youths per ward, eighty (80) youths formed the sample for the study. The instrument used for data collection was a 15-item questionnaire titled "counselling services for peace and unity among youth inventory (CSPUYI). The instrument was validated by three experts; two from the Department of Guidance and Counselling and one in Measurement and Evaluation from the Department of Science Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State in order to establish its face validity. The internal consistency aspect of the reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha method which yielded an overall index of 0.66. Data collected were analysed with mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions raised. The findings of the study revealed among others that many youths are not fully informed about the availability of these counselling services or their potential role in promoting peace and unity. Based on the findings and conclusions drawn from the study, it was recommended among others that awareness campaigns should be implemented to inform youths about available counselling services and their role in fostering peace and unity.

Keywords: Counselling services, Peace, Unity, Awareness and Youth

Introduction

In today's increasingly interconnected world, the quest for peace and unity remains a pivotal challenge, particularly among the youth who are often at the forefront of societal

change. Enugu State, a region with a rich cultural heritage and diverse population, is no exception. The youth in Nsukka L. G. A. of Enugu State, like their counterparts globally, are navigating a complex landscape marked by social, economic, and political pressures. Against this backdrop, counselling services have emerged as a crucial tool for fostering peace and unity.

Peace is a state of tranquillity and harmony characterized by the absence of conflict, violence, and discord. It involves not only the cessation of war or strife but also the establishment of conditions that promote social stability, justice, and mutual respect (Mamman, *et al*, 2022).

Peace is both an individual and collective experience; it encompasses personal inner calm as well as broader societal conditions where individuals coexist harmoniously. Achieving peace requires addressing various factors, such as inequality, discrimination, and historical grievances, which can fuel conflicts. Effective communication, diplomacy, and conflict resolution strategies are essential in fostering and maintaining peace. In communities, peace contributes to overall well-being, economic development, and social cohesion

Unity refers to the state of being united or forming a whole, often in the context of shared goals, values, or identity. It involves bringing together diverse individuals or groups to work collectively towards common objectives while respecting and valuing differences. According to Mamman, *et al* (2022), unity fosters a sense of belonging and cooperation, helping to overcome divisions and build stronger, more cohesive communities. In a social context, unity is crucial for addressing collective challenges and achieving common goals. It involves promoting inclusivity, collaboration, and mutual support. When individuals or groups unite, they combine their strengths and resources, creating a more resilient and effective community. Together, peace and unity are fundamental for creating a harmonious and thriving society. They enable individuals and groups to collaborate, resolve conflicts amicably, and build a more just and equitable world.

Counselling services are professional support systems designed to help individuals navigate personal challenges, emotional difficulties, and life transitions (Chigbu, *et al* 2024). These services provide a safe and confidential environment where clients can explore their feelings, thoughts, and behaviours with a trained counsellor. Counselling services is a practice meant to enhance individual's needs through the provision of adequate educational, vocational and personal social-social information. Counselling services comes in form of individual and group counselling. Both counselling services are used to attain self-understanding and direction.

Ifeoma and Obiora, (2023) are of the view that counselling services is a significant means of functionalizing and sustaining education through its array of qualitative services meant to make education goals meaningful and achievable to their recipients. Counselling services can be effectively integrated into the community to support the younger generation in their journey towards a more cohesive and harmonious future.

Counselling is unique and second to none in providing assistance to teachers, students,

parents, school administrators and curriculum planners in fulfilling the policies of education as it applies to each of them (Ifeoma & Obiora, 2023). The primary goal of counselling is to facilitate personal growth, resolve issues, and enhance overall well-being. According to Okenyi, *et al* (2019), Counselling encompasses various approaches, including cognitive-behavioural therapy, psychodynamic therapy, and humanistic therapy, among others. Each approach offers different techniques and strategies to address specific concerns, such as anxiety, depression, relationship issues, or stress.

Counselling services offer a structured environment where young individuals can explore their personal and collective identities, address conflicts, and build resilience (Okudo & Nwudu, 2022). They provide a platform for discussing sensitive issues, resolving misunderstandings, and developing a deeper understanding of oneself and others. By focusing on conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, and interpersonal skills, counselling can help bridge divides and promote a culture of harmony.

Counselling services have a multi-faceted impact on promoting peace and unity among youths in Nsukka L.G.A. They not only equip individuals with essential skills for managing conflicts and building relationships but also contribute to a broader culture of empathy and inclusivity. By addressing stigma and encouraging positive social behaviours, counselling services play a crucial role in fostering a harmonious community. Despite all these benefits above, there is often a general lack of awareness among youths in Enugu State about the availability and benefits of counselling services (Chukwuemeka & Onwukwe, 2021). Many may not know where to seek help or the potential benefits of these counselling services for mental health and personal development. Accessing counselling services for youths may face several barriers and challenges according to Akinyemi and Akinyemi (2022), these barriers could be lack of awareness, stigma and cultural beliefs, limited availability of services, financial constraints, inadequate infrastructure and resources, language and communication barriers; and lack of training and professional development

A study by Mamman *et al* (2022), showed that there is severe disunity amongst the youth and that youth play a great role in influencing peace and unity in their various communities. Omalare- Omolola (2022), revealed that, counselling services play a major role in enhancing social and emotional adjustment among the students in secondary schools in order to promote peace and enhance their academic attainment. A study researched by Ogbebor and Olusanya (2021), concluded that counselling services improve youth communication skills which is a pathway to social harmony. A research was carried out by Eze and Eze (2020) indicated that counselling equipped students with peace initiatives. Evidence from literatures indicate that counselling service is a panacea for peace and unity in any nation but not many studies were found on the counselling services for peace and unity: awareness among youths in Nsukka L.G.A of Enugu State. Hence the need for this study.

Objectives of the study

1. To assess the current level of awareness about counselling services among youths in Nsukka L.G.A
2. To identify the impact of counselling services on promoting peace and unity among youths in Nsukka L.G.A
3. To explore barriers and challenges to accessing counselling services for youths in Nsukka L.G.A

Research Questions

Three research questions guided the study:

1. What is the current level of awareness among youths in Nsukka L.G.A regarding counselling services and their role in promoting peace and unity?
2. How have counselling services impacted the peace and unity of youths in Nsukka L.G.A?
3. What are the main barriers preventing youths in Nsukka L.G.A from accessing counselling services?

Methodology

The study was carried out using descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey research design The population for this study was all youth in the Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, a total of 10,221 (Enugu State Population Commission, 2018). Nsukka Local Government Area is divided into eleven wards, four wards were randomly selected at twenty (20) youths per ward, eighty (80) youths were used for the sample. The instrument used for data collection was a 15-item questionnaire titled “counselling services for peace and unity among youth inventory (CSPUYI). The instrument was validated by three experts; two from the Department of Guidance and Counselling and one in Measurement and Evaluation from the Department of Science Education, Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Abia State in order to establish its face validity. The internal consistency aspect of the reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha method which yielded an overall index of 0.66. The instrument has three clusters with four-point response scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagree (D), strongly disagree (SD), which has weights of 4, 3, 2 and 1, respectively. On the sport method of administration of the instrument on the respondents is used by the researchers for the study to ensure a hundred percent return of the questionnaire. Arithmetic weighted mean which criterion is 2.50 for any item considered as a factor while an item that is below this value is considered not being a factor is used for the data analysis.

Results

Research Question one: What is the current level of awareness among youths in Nsukka L.G.A regarding counselling services and their role in promoting peace and unity?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of level of awareness among youth in Nsukka L. G. A.

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	DECISION
1	I am aware of the counselling services available in Nsukka L.G.A.	1.27	.03	DISAGREED
2	I understand how counselling services can contribute to promoting peace among youths in Nsukka L.G.A.	1.32	.07	DISAGREED
3	I believe that counselling services play a significant role in helping youths resolve conflicts and enhance unity in Nsukka L.G.A.	3.57	.06	AGREED
4	I feel that there is sufficient information and resources available to educate youths about the benefits of counselling services in Nsukka L.G.A.	3.77	.08	AGREED
5	I know where to seek counselling services if I need help with issues related to peace and unity.	1.73	.02	DISAGREED
	Cluster Mean	2.33		
	Cluster SD		.12	

The analysis of data presented on the above table suggests that youths in Enugu State have a relatively low level of awareness and understanding regarding counselling services and their role in promoting peace and unity. While there is some belief in the significance of counselling services, the general trend shows a lack of strong awareness and knowledge about available resources and their benefits.

Research Question two: How have counselling services impacted the peace and unity of youths in Nsukka L.G.A?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of how counselling services impacted the peace and unity of youths in Nsukka L. G. A.

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	DECISION
1	Counselling services have improved my understanding of the importance of peace and unity in my community.	3.02	.21	AGREED
2	My interactions with counselling services have influenced me to adopt more positive behaviours towards conflict resolution.	3.01	.23	AGREED
3	Through counselling, I have gained better skills in communicating and collaborating with others from diverse backgrounds.	3.07	.20	AGREED
4	Counselling services have helped me develop a greater appreciation for the diverse cultures and perspectives within my community.	3.05	.21	AGREED
5	I feel more motivated to participate in community activities that promote peace and unity as a result of my counselling experiences.	3.07	.22	AGREED
Cluster Mean		3.04		
Cluster SD			0.26	

Table 2 reveals that counselling services have had a positive impact on youths' perceptions and behaviours related to peace and unity in Nsukka Local Government Area. Youths generally agree that counselling improves their understanding of peace, enhances their conflict resolution skills, develops communication and collaboration abilities, fosters appreciation for diversity, and motivates participation in community activities. The consistency in responses, as reflected by the low standard deviations, suggests strong agreement across these areas.

Research Question 3: What are the main barriers preventing youths in Nsukka L.G.A from accessing counselling services?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation of the barriers preventing Youth in Nsukka L.G.A. accessing counselling services

S/N	ITEMS	MEAN	SD	DECISION
1	Lack of awareness about the availability of counselling services is a major barrier for youths in Enugu State.	3.09	0.32	AGREED
2	The stigma associated with seeking counselling services discourages youths from accessing them.	3.00	0.22	AGREED
3	Limited financial resources or high costs of counselling services are significant obstacles for youths in Enugu State.	3.05	0.25	AGREED
4	Inadequate availability of trained counsellors in my community affects youths' ability to access counselling services.	3.03	0.28	AGREED
5	Transportation issues and lack of convenient locations make it difficult for youths to access counselling services in Enugu State.	3.02	0.21	AGREED
Cluster Mean		3.06		
Cluster SD			0.26	

Table 3 indicates that respondents perceive several significant barriers to accessing counselling services, including lack of awareness, stigma, financial constraints, shortage of trained counsellors, and transportation issues. The high mean scores for each item suggest a strong consensus on these barriers, with minimal variability in responses, indicating a clear and consistent view of the challenges faced by youths in Enugu State regarding counselling services.

Discussion of Findings

The result from research question one revealed that while there is some level of awareness regarding counselling services among youths in Nsukka L.G.A of Enugu State, it remains insufficient. Many youths are not fully informed about the availability of these services or their potential role in promoting peace and unity. The finding is in line with that of Mamman et al (2022) and Chukwuemeka and Onwukwe, (2021) who stated that the level of students' awareness of counselling services in Niger and Enugu State is low. This suggests a critical need for enhanced outreach and educational initiatives to improve awareness and understanding of counselling services.

Data presented in table two showed that Counselling services have been shown to positively influence youths' perceptions and behaviours towards peace and unity. There are improvements in their understanding of peace, adoption of positive conflict resolution

behaviours, and skills in communication and collaboration. A study by Omalare-Omolola (2022) supports this view, revealed that, counselling services play a major role in enhancing social and emotional adjustment among the students in secondary schools in order to promote peace and enhance their academic attainment.

The result from research question three identified several significant barriers to accessing and benefiting from counselling services. These include lack of awareness, stigma associated with seeking help, financial constraints, inadequate availability of trained counsellors and transportation issues. These barriers collectively hinder the full utilization of counselling services and impact their effectiveness. The work of Akinyemi and Akinyemi, (2022) supported this view.

Recommendations

To address these challenges, the following recommendations were put forward for educational stakeholders:

Increase Awareness: Government and counsellors should implement targeted awareness campaigns to inform youths about available counselling services and their role in fostering peace and unity. This can include community workshops, social media campaigns, and collaborations with local schools and youth organizations.

Reduce Stigma: Government and counsellors should develop programs to combat the stigma associated with seeking counselling. They could include public discussions, testimonials from individuals who have benefited from counselling and educational programs that normalize mental health support.

Improve Accessibility: Government should address financial barriers by exploring subsidized or free counselling services for those in need. Additionally, increase the number of trained counsellors in various communities and consider mobile counselling units or tele-counselling options to overcome transportation issues.

Enhance Training: Government should invest in training and development programs for counsellors to ensure they are equipped to handle the diverse needs of youths and effectively contribute to promoting peace and unity.

Conclusion

Counselling services have the potential to significantly contribute to peace and unity among youths in Enugu State, but overcoming the identified barriers is essential for maximizing their impact. By enhancing awareness, reducing stigma, improving accessibility, and expanding the availability of trained professionals, the effectiveness of counselling services can be substantially improved, leading to a more harmonious and supportive community for the youth of Enugu State.

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