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COUNSELLING SECONDARY SCHOOL CHILDREN FOR LIFE ADJUSTMENT AND MENTAL HEALTH EDUCATION IN COVID-19 ERA IN NNEWI NORTH OF ANAMBRA STATE

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ABSTRACT
The study examined counselling for life adjustment and mental health education in covid-19 era in Nnewi North Local Government Area of Anambra State. The study which was anchored on two research questions adopted descriptive survey design. The population of the study consists of eight secondary schools in Nnewi North LGA. The entire population was used for the study which is purposive. The respondents are the guidance counsellors of these schools numbering 8. The instrument was self-designed and titled "Counselling Mental Health Education Questionnaire" (CMHEQ). Face and content validity of the instrument was determined. Test retest method was adopted to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The result yielded 0.68 when subjected to Pearson Moment Co-relation Coefficient which was adjudged reliable. Administration of the instrument was carried out by the researcher. All copies of the questionnaire distributed were retrieved due to fill on the spot method and frequent visits to the schools. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The findings revealed among others that school counsellors are not even aware of the symptoms of mental health issues and are therefore highly incapacitated in helping vulnerable children. The researcher therefore recommended that workshops, conferences, symposium and seminars should urgently be organized for the guidance counsellors to acquaint them with the importance of life adjustment and mental health education to enable the counsellors identify and guide the victims and their parents on life adjustment. This definitely positions them to live a normal life as there is ability in disability.

Keywords: Counselling, Life Adjustment, Mental Health Education, Covid-19 Era and Secondary Schools.

Introduction

From time immemorial, advice and guidance has been one of the ways of assisting somebody who is heavy laden. It helps the beneficiary to bare their mind on issues bugging them as well as seek solutions to them. It is always said that a problem shared is a problem half solved. In schools, children are helped out in special areas aside the academic so as to enable them achieve their dreams and aspirations as well as attain their desired potentials and self-worth. This is why counselling service is necessary in schools especially in secondary schools. Consequently, schools employ the services of the guidance

counsellors to avail the children the opportunity of life adjustment that could cushion the effect of actualizing their dreams thus leading a meaningful life.

People react differently to certain events they meet in the line of their daily life events and there is bound to be changes of event which is a natural phenomenon. This reaction to changing situations depends on the capacity to cope with such life circumstances be it positive or negative changes, it carries with some kind of stress. The ability to cope with the stress determines the level of coping mechanism one has. If the coping mechanism is low, the person is liable to some mental health conditions like anxiety disorder, eating disorder, traumatic disorder, panic disorder, depression and a host of others (Community Care Health Centre (2021). On the reverse side, ability to identify this abnormality from the onset and seek the services of counselling psychologist results to restoring the patient to leaving a normal life. It is against this back ground that school guidance counsellors should be at alert in helping out to dictate and identify children who exhibit symptoms of mental health issues and assist such children adjusts of normal life this should be done through counselling for life adjustment and mental health education in secondary schools.

One may feel that children do not get stressed up but that is a fallacy. Many children are so susceptible that the changes that occur in their body system during growth and development are enough to throw them off especially during adolescence period when not well guided and counselled. This is applicable to those with low coping mechanisms. Those with high coping ability scale through with or without guidance or counsellor. Apart from bodily changes which could put stress on children, there are other family problems which could aggravate mental health conditions in children like witnessing domestic violence (Onyekuru & Thompson, 2012). It is obvious that set of children converge in school for active teaching/learning process which constitute additional stress thus projecting them to impending risks of falling for the mental health challenges if not checked.

Apparently, school children are from different family backgrounds. Many of them have lots of family issues bothering them as a result of broken homes, single parenting emanating from divorced marriage, step father/mother syndrome and a host of others. The problems seem too much for frail children to bear coupled with their academic work. Most of the school children are being used as domestic servitude and/or hawkers. They work morning and night trying to satisfy their task masters thus projecting them as unprepared, not ready and strangers to the academic environment. The resultant effect is that teaching/learning interactions are severely challenged. Sequel to this, there is absolute need to assist this type of students from impending dangers of sliding into depression which is counter-productive. This is where the need to inculcate in them life adjustment and mental health education early in life comes into play.

The Concept of Counselling

The word counsellor has been defined by experts in different ways according to their disposition and view-points. It is an interaction between an expert in counselling psychology and a client who desire to solicit assistance in solving life

challenge(s). It is described as an avenue which is purposefully set aside to help clients discover and become part and parcel of their development which is geared toward self-actualization (Iruloh, Ernest-Ehibudu & Echebe, 2009). In his own submission, Onyekwuru (2012) citing Ekechukwu, (2009:3) posited that counselling is a one-to-one association between a person troubled with personal issues which needed to be shared with a trusted one who is professionally trained to render such assistance. To Umezulike & Eneasator (2012), counselling is a continuous process during which a client is assisted in solving personal problems through interactions.

From the above expositions, counselling involves two persons, one of which is heavily laden with issues of life and needed to confide in an expert in the field of counselling psychology to assist them unearth this trigging problems and possibly proffer solutions to them. It is a continuous process in that the counsellor needs to do a follow up with the counselee to ensure that the client does not slide back into the bottom-pit of the initial problems. In counselling, communication is very paramount since it is the medium of interaction used throughout the counselling session. The counselee and the counsellor collaborate to solve identified difficulties.

Mental Health Education

Mental health is the individual's psychological condition. It deals with intellectual and emotional state of an individual which reflects in the general well-being of the individual be it physical or social. Community Care Health Centre (2021), reaffirmed that mental health is the basement of the overall health of a person, stressing that once the mental health is negatively affected, the entire body system becomes abysmal. Similarly, Kelemen, Harmant, Gravrila, Nache, Pluss& Stassen (2016) lucidly put that mental health is the condition of being stable physically, emotionally socially and otherwise in the face of life difficulties. It is the ability to deal with stress and other challenges of life and still maintain a healthy living. It is certain that when these difficulties in one's life is not adequately managed, it could result to mental ill health this is the reason Kelemen et al concluded that it is better prevented because mental disorder has some irreversible consequences and could affect individuals of all ages including school children. Canadian Mental Health Association Care in Kelemen et al (2016) acknowledged the repercussion of incompetency in managing life challenges and identified 10 tips of mental health as follows:

1. Accept your worth and aspire for self-actualization
2. Develop the spirit of sharing.
3. Build a good and happy home.
4. Select good friends who are there for you.
5. Set your priorities and attend to them in that regard.
6. Be proactive.
7. Deal courageously with stressful situations.
8. Manage efficiently any alteration in the path of life.
9. Deal with your emotions.
10. ave a spiritual director.

On another dimension, Community Care Health Centre (2021) espoused that the following constitute mental health conditions:

1. Depression: this is also referred to as major depressive disorder. It is mood malady that marked with feeling of sadness, lack of interest in daily routine (Goldman, 2019). Could be caused by loss of closed relative and/or other major negative life changes.
2. Anxiety disorder: this is a kind of mental health condition that puts one is fearful or dreaded condition. The person is more often than not in an extreme nervousness which disrupts normal life activities,
3. Panic disorder: this is an intermittent feeling of fear which supersedes the normal panic when met with strange happenings. It occurs even where there is no danger and distorts normal breathing.
4. Bipolar: this is a situation whereby the individual is between extreme happiness and extreme anger. It is the fluctuation of mood in an excessive manner. It swings in-between severe depression and mania.
5. Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD): this is a brain problem that exhibits inattentiveness and as such disrupts sitting still and behaviour management and it could start from childhood (Bhargava, 2021).
6. Schizophrenia: this mental illness involves psychosis which affects the person from distinguishing between what is real and what is imagined thus projecting the victim to live in the world of fantasy (Bharndari, 2020).
7. Eating disorder: this is an unhealthy eating habitwhich is discernible by having too much passion for food. It may be in other to lose weight. This type of eating disorder is termed anorexia nervosa. It concerns binging, after which the person indulges in act that could lead to vomiting and/or purging.
8. Addictions: this is a situation of clinging unto a particular behaviour or use of substance. It is crave for some kind of behaviour, action or habit which could lead to over indulgence in alcohol and/or drug usage. These days there are phone addiction, game addiction etc. addiction here is meant to be compulsory use of substance irrespective of its health implications.

In the wake of the above listed mental health challenges, there is need to seek a helping hand to assist control and adjust to normal life which could only be achieved through a school counsellor.

Symptoms of Mental Health Conditions

Mental health conditions are disorders caused by lots of activities that may crop up in one's life time and which could not be condoned by the victim. Life itself is full of activities, ups and downs, sadness and joy and a whole lot of them. Some people at the same time are so gullible that such changes could over whelm them and throw them into having some mental health issues. These mental health conditions do not just start spontaneously rather it takes time, show signs and when not treated, could escalate to more severe mental disorder which could lead to eventual death. The symptoms should not be over-looked so as to arrest the situation on time stemming from the above pronouncement, Mayol Clinic (2019) itemized the symptoms to include the following:

1. Being unhappy all the time.
2. Lack of concentration;
3. Unnecessary panic or apprehension all the time.
4. Heightened mood alterations.

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5. Being solitude.
6. Insomnia and boredom.
7. Fantasy, disillusionment, paranoid and phantasm.
8. Maladjustment behaviour displayed in tackling life challenges.
9. Lack of interest in virtually all aspects of life.
10. Prone to alcohol or substance misuse.
11. Incline to anorexia nervosa or binging in terms of feeding.
12. Exhibit violent behaviour at any slightest provocation.
13. Suicidal thought.

Nwankwo, (2013) expressed further that some of the characteristics of mental health conditions include;

- Feeling of incapacitated and apprehensive when faced with difficult circumstances.
- Dodge hectic environments instead managing them
- They are very rigid in their approach and see themselves as perfect and are more or less egocentric
- Poor interpersonal relationship.

All the above listed signs are psychological driven, physical signs could also be inform of abdominal disorder, general weakness or pains as well as feeling perturbed. The person constantly feels unwell without any identifiable ailment.

Counselling for Life Adjustment

The school counsellor has enormous roles to perform in other to help identify and control the escalation of such problems and partnering with the client to lead a meaningful life. Everything about life is centred on change as seen in the changes that take place during growth and development, starting schooling, certification, getting job, entering family life, bearing children and all the rest of them. This change may be in positive or negative direction which more often than not results to stress, fatigue, anxiety, insomnia, depression and all of that when not adequately managed. Sequel to this, life adjustment counselling becomes the only available option.

Life adjustment counselling is a treatment given to somebody who cannot cope with changes that occur in human life the treatment is done usually by a therapist. Sonder Behavioural Health and Wellness (2021) perceived the trauma undergone by people with life adjustment disorder and declared that such people certainly deserve to be encouraged, sensitized and inspired to develop positive concept about themselves failing which the imminent ill health could be aggravated. To Restore Psychology (2021), stress in one's life is inevitable but the management determines the mental health. According to the scholars, any disruption in one's routine of life is visited with stress whether positive or negative change. Those who cannot effectively manage the stress as a result of life transition (life adjustment disorder) are susceptible to mental health challenges which require the services of a counselling psychologist (therapist).

Secondary school children are known to be with the age of adolescence and are stressed with the changes that occur within this period. This places them at a very high risk of suffering life adjustment disorder if not well counselled and guided. Some of them find it difficult to cope with these challenges of adolescence not to talk of when saddled with other problems relating to troubled marriage and stuffs like that. This alone is capable of throwing them into

a state of mental quagmire unless the services of the counselling psychologist is sought and utilized.

Counselling Strategies for Life Adjustment

Adjusting to life transition is very delicate especially for those who lack the mechanisms of tackling life changing situations be it in the positive or negative direction. It is premised on this that Swift & Greenberg (2015) expatiated on the eight management procedures that the counsellor could adopt to keep the client on the right path. These strategies are as under listed:

1. Provide role induction: expose to the client what counselling for life adjustment involves. Specify their client and counsellors roles.
2. Incorporate client preferences into the treatment decision-making process:
3. Help plan for appropriate termination.
4. Provide education about patterns of change.
5. Strengthen early hope.
6. Enhance motivation for treatment.
7. Foster the therapeutic alliance.
8. Discuss treatment progress with your client.

Maddock, Blair & Ean (2021) posited that there are many ways of intervening in mental health crises to enable the victim cope with pressing circumstances in daily life activities. In this regard listed the under stated intervention strategies;

a) Social support
b) mind-body therapy
c) dialectical behavioural therapy
d) Acceptance
e) Commitment therapy
f) Peer support
g) Mental health services
h) Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)
i) Breathing exercise
j) Hypnosis
k) Imagery
l) Psychodrama
m)Therapeutic touch
n) Counselling
o) Integrated therapy etc.

Covid-19 Era

Covid-19 era is the period during which the deadly coronavirus ravaged many countries of the world Nigeria not an exception. The highly contagious disease led to total lockdown of all life activities including closure of schools. According to United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2021) corona virus popularly known as covid-19 is a global crises which devastated socio-economic activities of the affected countries. Even when schools finally recommenced, there are lots of changes as there was introduction of face masks, constant hand washing with soap amidst running water, use of alcoholic based hand sanitizer, avoiding touching of surface areas, physical distancing, keeping rooms well ventilated (World Health Organization (WHO, 2019).

The emergence of covid-19 is brought with it a lot of changes in the former way of life and could cause mental disorder when not appropriately managed. This is the reason secondary school children should be adequately taught life adjustment and mental health education so as to enable them scale through in times like this.

Purpose of the study

The study is set out to determine the symptoms of mental health challenges among secondary school children and ways of assisting them lead normal lives in Nnewi North LGA of Anambra State.

AJEMATES

Specifically, the study is meant to ascertain the following:

1. Find out the symptoms of mental health issues among secondary school children in Nnewi North LGA of Anambra State.
2. Determine ways of assisting victims of mental health conditions lead meaningful lives among secondary school children in Nnewi North LGA of Anambra State.

Research Questions

1. What are the symptoms of mental health challenges among secondary school children in Nnewi North LGA of Anambra State?
2. What are the ways of assisting children identified with mental health issues with life adjustment and mental health education in Nnewi North LGA of Anambra State.

Research Method

The study adopted descriptive survey design. The population comprised of the eight secondary schools in Nnewi North LGA of Anambra State. Purposive sampling method was used which implies the use of the entire population which is 100%. The respondents are the guidance counsellors of these schools numbering 8. The instrument was self-designed and titled "Counselling Mental Health Education Questionnaire" (CMHEQ). Face and content validity was certified. Test retest method was adopted to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The result yielded 0.68 when subjected to Pearson Moment Co-relation Coefficient which was adjudged reliable. The instrument was the Likert four point scale of Strongly Agreed (SA), Agreed (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). This scale is weighted as 4+3+2+1=10/4=2.5, therefore the criterion mean is 2.5 which signifies Agreed while anything short of that stands for Disagreed. Administration of the instrument was carried out by the researcher. All the questionnaires distributed were retrieved due to fill on the spot method and frequent visits to the schools. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions.

Presentation of Results

All the data collected were utilized and analysed to answer the research questions.

1. What are the symptoms of mental health challenges among secondary school children?

AJEMATES

Table I: showing the response of the respondents on the symptoms of mental health challenges among secondary school children.

S/N	Item statement	Mean	SD	Remark
	Do you agree that these are the symptoms of mental Health conditions among children.			
1.	Short attention span and being easily distracted.	2.00	1.00	Disagree
2.	Making careless mistakes in school work.	2.00	1.87	Disagree
3.	Appearing forgetful or losing things.	1.90	1.2	Disagree
4.	Being unable to stick to tasks that are tedious or time consuming.	2.10	2.3	Disagree
5.	Appearing to being unable to listen to or carry out instructions.	2.00	2.2	Disagree
6.	Tends to day dream	2.5	1.0	Agree
7.	Does not like to sit at a place for the lesson	2.30	1.4	Disagree
8.	Being violent or hostile to others	2.4	2.9	Disagree
9.	Sleeping too much and tiredness	1.5	2.1	Disagree
10.	Appearing very fearful all the time.	2.8	1.5	Agree
	Aggregate	**2.15**	**0.34**	**Disagree**

Table 1 revealed that the respondents disagreed with listed symptoms of mental health conditions in area under study with the mean rating scores ranging from 1.4 to 2.3 with the standard deviation of 1.00 and 2.9 respectively. It is only in two items that the respondents agreed that they are the symptoms of mental health issues with the mean rating scores standing between 2.5 to 2.8 and the standard deviation of 1.0 and 1.5 correspondently. The aggregate mean gave rise to 2.15 and the standard deviation yielded 0.34.

2. What are the ways of assisting children identified with mental health issues with life adjustment and mental health education.

AJEMATES

Table 2: showing the response of the respondents on the ways of assisting children identified with mental health issues with life adjustment and mental education.

S/N	Item statement	Mean	SD	Remark
	These are the ways of assisting children identified with Mental health issues with life adjustment and mental health education.			
1.	Promote social and emotional competence and build resilience among students.	2.5	0.5	Agreed
2.	Help to ensure safe and positive school environment.	2.0	1.58	Disagreed
3.	Teach and reinforce positive behaviour and decision-making.	2.0	0.7	Disagreed
4.	Encourage children to help others.	2.00	0.7	Disagreed
5.	Switching the clients mind set from the traumatic experience that affected his line of thought.	1.8	1.0	Disagreed
6.	Special training on how to adjust to life changing situations.	2.00	0.7	Disagree
7.	Counselling interventions	2.8	1.5	Agreed
8.	Strengthen early hope	2.4	1.6	Disagreed
9.	Enhance motivation for treatment	2.5	1.0	Agreed
10.	Discuss treatment progress with your client	3.0	1.4	Agreed
	Aggregate	**2.3**	**0.3**	**Disagreed**

Table 2 showed the response of the respondents on the ways of assisting children with mental health conditions with a total 6 out of 8 responses disagreeing on the listed items while only 4 respondents agreeing on those items. The mean rating scores stretching from 2.5 to 3.00 and standard deviation of 1.0 to 1.4 for those that agreed while the mean rating scores for disagreed respondents ranges from 1.8 – 2.4 with the SD of 1.0 -1.6 in that order. The aggregate mean and SD yielded 2.3 and 0.3 accordingly.

Discussion of Findings

The first finding of this study is that most guidance counsellors in Nnewi North LGA are not aware of the symptoms of mental health issues. Consequently, cannot identify children who are battling with mental health disorder. The resultant effect is that with time if not controlled could escalate to a more serious mental disorder which could be irreversible thus posing danger to the child's well-being which eventually reflects negatively on the society at large. This has affirmed what researchers observed in the past as posited by Mayol Clinic (2019) and Nwankwo (2013) that early dictation is necessary so as to assist the child lead a meaningful life that benefits not only the child but the community where he lives.

Another finding of the study revealed that the ways of assisting children with mental health condition is not being effectively carried out by the school counsellors in the schools under study. This is shown by the rate of disagreement on the proposed ways of counselling the victims. The implication

is that when this calibre of children is not adequately counselled, a mere anxiety disorder could lead to depression and subsequent suicidal attack thus eventual death. It is for this reason that Swift & Greenberg (2015) advocated fostering therapeutic alliance to avert accelerating to unimaginable level.Maddock, Blair &Ean (2021) acknowledged the gravity of this ailment in one's entire life and emphasized that teaching of life adjustment and mental health education is paramount in the educational system. This is to help children who are not capable of handling life changing situations to leave a normal life.

Conclusion

From the study, the researcher concluded that some school counsellor can neither identify the symptoms of mental health conditions nor device ways of assisting them to lead meaningful life. This exposes these children to having these ailments aggravating which if dictated on time and addressed would not have been that drastic. Where these symptoms are identified and drastically fought, the incidences of mental health condition would go down the drain many children would be recovered back to functional life activities which definitely promote the economic status of not only the child and the family but also the entire nation.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is urgent need to acquaint the counselling psychologists with the knowledge of life adjustment and mental health education through seminars, workshops, symposium etc. to enable them identify and recognize the symptoms so as to assist the child and parents bring the patient back to normal living for the betterment of the entire society.
2. The government and other stake holders in education should embark on sensitization tour to enlighten the parents, teachers and community members on the various ways of assisting a person with mental health issues to curtail the rate at which youths indulge in committing suicide in recent times.

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AJEMATES