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Roles of guidance and counseling in combating social-emotional stigma among victims of sexual assault in Nigeria

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to determine the roles of guidance and counseling in combating social-emotional stigma among victims of sexual assault in Nigeria. The study focused on twenty five (25) public senior secondary schools with female students in Jalingo metropolis, Taraba State. A self-structured questionnaire were administered to students who are victims of sexual assault within the schools and the data collected from the results were analysed using descriptive statistics of frequency and percentage. The finding of this study reveals that majority (89%) of students who were assaulted sexually are also stigmatized by their perpetrators, friends and colleagues. Furthermore, this study reveals that the stigmatization greatly affects the victims' social relations, interaction and/or academic achievement as there are no effective measures within the schools' system to combat the social-emotional stigma against them. This study concludes that a number of female students in public senior secondary schools in Nigeria have been sexually assaulted at one point or the other which often results in social and emotional stigmatization within the school. It is therefore recommended that the professional counselors and the school administrators should collaborate in providing workable measures in combating the likely social-emotional stigma that may be meted on the victims through emotional support, reintegration, reconciliation and re-socialization processes.

Keywords: Guidance, counseling, social-emotional stigma, victims, sexual assault

1. Introduction

Guidance and counselling is essential students/pupils personal services which are organized for all school levels (Oviogbodu & Okorie, 2015) ^[14-15]. In others words, guidance is a continuous process throughout the school career of students at all levels of education. The development and management of effective guidance programme extend from nursery schools through the secondary schools to the colleges or tertiary education level (Lai-Yeung, 2014) ^[10]. Guidance is not just viewed as an integral part of educational programme throughout the students' school life but it also includes the overall wellbeing and development of the students (Oviogbodu, 2015) ^[14-15]. This is because it helps the students meet their divergent and increasing developmental needs, problems and concerns in the face of the external and internal crises and challenges they face daily. To this extent therefore, guidance and counselling (G&C) programmes are specialized and well construed psychological activities target at offering "normal" people the ability to enhance their productive capacity, to the "subnormal" such as, the socially challenged and mentally distorted in order to reawake the self-reliant potentials and productivity (Anagbogu & Nwokolo, 2015) ^[3].

Just like every other person in the society, the school children are also undergoing some of the most difficult times and periods in their lives in the course of their studies (Attahiru & Chukuma, 2016) ^[5]. The transition from childhood to adulthood they experienced is a difficult one, even among the most balanced child from a relatively stable background (Ayis, 2016) ^[6]. Apart from the societal influence and that of the family, another major influence that affects the young person's life is the schools and the schools' environment. The changes associated with adolescence, to develop a sense of responsibility, to make definite and considerable personal decisions also comes with some sexual tendencies and exposure which must be handled and guided carefully. At the adolescent stage, which is commonly experienced at secondary school level, students become more vulnerable to social vices and assaults (Attahiru & Chukuma, 2016) ^[5].

In the schools' environment today there is a rise in cases of sexual assaults especially on the female and vulnerable students from their male students' counterpart and their teachers alike (Prabha & Lekha, 2020) ^[16].

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The assaults commonly experienced among secondary school student include verbal, physical and emotional assaults which often affects the social and emotional stability and development of the students. Students who suffered sexual assaults are often socially and emotionally stigmatized by their friends, colleagues and even the society at large leading them to self-isolation, withdrawal, depression and even academic under-achievement. In order to address the issues of the negative consequences of the social-emotional stigma such as harassment, backbite, negligence and avoidance, there is need for effective special G&C services targeted at helping the victims (Prabha & Lekha, 2020) ^[16]. This is so because G&C service is aimed at establishing the maximum development and self-realization of human potentials for the benefit both individual and the society irrespective of the social and emotional challenges faced. Therefore, this program assists learners in harmonizing their original values, abilities and interests towards developing their full potentials in school. There is an increasing need for G&C services across secondary schools in Nigeria because of the myriad of challenges facing personal, emotional and social development of the students. One of such challenges prominently reported more than ever before is the cases of sexual assaults against the female students in schools. It is against this backdrop that this study focused on how the schools G&C services have helped combat the social-emotional stigma among victims of sexual assaults among female students of secondary schools in Taraba State, Nigeria.

1.1 Problem Statement

All over the world, it recorded that sexual related abuses on girls of school age are on the increase, as over 19.7% of females globally faced sexual abuse before the age of 18 years (Prabha & Lekha, 2020) ^[16]. In Nigeria recently, the issue of sexual of assault is on the rise especially among secondary school students. The female students are falling victims of this social disorder which has affected them socially and emotionally thereby resulting in under achievement in their academics, poor personality development and social segregation. Also, the stigmatization arising from the occurrence of such victimization has further increased the need for G&C services targeted for such purpose specifically (Gok, 2018) ^[8]. The idea of G&C although not relatively new in our educational systems, inconsiderable little progress has been made to set up administrative functional structures for the provision of its services to victims of sexual assaults in secondary schools (Modo, Sanni, Uwah & Mogbo, 2018) ^[12]. To this extent therefore, there is need for programmes and services to be provided for students who have been assaulted sexually to help them combat with the social and emotional stigma that comes with it as a result.

It is based on the identified problems that this study developed the following research questions: What are the efforts of G&C units in the prevention female sexual assaults; What are the roles played by G&C units in crises intervention of sexually assaulted females and; How have the G&C units combat the social-emotional stigma of sexually assaulted females among secondary schools students in Taraba State?

1.2 Research Objectives

The focus of this study is to determine the roles of guidance

and counseling in combating social-emotional stigma among victims of sexual assault in Nigeria. In order to achieve this, the study seeks to attain the following specific objectives:

1. To evaluate the efforts of G&C units in the prevention female sexual assaults among secondary schools students in Taraba State
2. To identify the roles played by G&C units in crises intervention of sexually assaulted females among secondary schools students in Taraba State
3. To determine the roles G&C units in combat the social-emotional stigma of sexually assaulted females among secondary schools students in Taraba State

2. Conceptual Review

The concepts reviewed in this study include guidance and counseling. According to Suleiman, Muraina and Suleiman (2019) ^[17] the term guidance refers to a cluster of regularized and formalized services that provide help to given individuals that requires adjustment, interpretation of information, planning and choice. Guidance involves providing assistants to individuals or a group of individuals to provide them the ability to for self-direction and to effectively relate their basic and/or special needs to requirement; demand and; opportunities of educational, occupational, social and psychological situations. Akinade (2012) ^[2] on the hand, defines guidance and counseling as a process of assisting individual(s) to become completely aware of his/her self and the approaches in which he/she can respond deliberately, to the influences to surround his/her environment. It further helps him/her in establishing some personal understanding and meaning for this behavior, so as to classify and develop some sets of values and goals for future behaviour.

On the other hand, Oviogbodu (2015) ^[14-15] sees counselling as a number of procedures that help in assisting individuals to solve their problems. Counseling is more involved emotionally, in the affective realm and personalized learning, that is, emotions, values, feelings and attitudes. Counseling, more often, is described as a face-to-face interpersonal relation/interaction and/or communication between two group of persons or people, in which one person/group usually refers to as 'the counselor(s)' helping another usually refers as 'the counselee(s)' to make an informed decision(s) and to ensure they have the ability to act upon them. According to Haruna, (2015) ^[9], counseling, overtime, has been used to represent extensive varying strategies that include giving of recommendation, assistance in the instance of hassle and/or needs, giving of data, encouragement, and check interpretation. Counseling is further considered as a manner by means of ability and capacity of which the counselor (helper) expresses care and subject towards the individual with a problem; it helps that individual's non-public increase and brings about the adjustments through self-knowledge (Macharia, 2015). Counselling is established as a relationship between an involved individual and a person with need(s). This relationship is commonly a person to man or woman, though sometimes it might also involve more than two people (Suleiman, Muraina & Suleiman 2019) ^[17].

Guidance and counseling have at several points been used synonymously and conjointly. The conjointly use of guidance and counseling means that it is a process of assisting individual or group to understand and cope with their problems.

3. Review of empirical studies

Bashari (2020) ^[7] in his study examined the challenges in performing the roles of G&C services among secondary schools in Jigawa state. The study used conceptual analysis that was evaluated based on the contents of the literature and reveals that some of the challenges facing effective functioning system of G&C includes non-cooperative counselees, inadequate time, little or no parental supports, lack of funding, inadequate facilities, inadequate qualified counselors, inadequate supports from schools' administrators and stakeholders. It was therefore concluded that majority of secondary schools students are facing serious challenges of understanding and responding to guidance and counseling services as such having serious social, psychological, emotional and academic challenges.

Muraina, Musa and Muhammad (2020) ^[13] provide the advantages of online world counseling, its implications, challenges and prospects for counselors and counselees in Nigeria. It was stated that applied sciences can improve the face-to-face counseling thereby lowering the stress on each counselor and consumer in the realm of counseling. This is an indication that, the traditional face-to-face channel of guidance and counseling is a challenge in itself to the provision of the services. According to Adane (2015) ^[1], lack of creativity and commitment by professionals in promoting the profession in schools is considered as one of the major challenges facing the services. In line with this, Yusuf (1998) stated that in secondary schools, some guidance and counseling personnel's motivation and preparation to provide the service to the needy students are the challenges experienced majorly. Similarly, Yirgalem (2013) points out that most of the secondary schools do not have a separate office room for guidance and counseling services.

Additionally, Adane (2015) ^[1] stated that absence of substantive manual, guidelines and job descriptions of the services of guidance and counseling in schools and not clearly stated procedures to evaluate or assess the professionals regularly or at the end of the academic year are also part of the challenges that to continue to hinder provision of effective guidance and counseling services in secondary schools. From the review of literatures and other related studies, there is no evidence that any study focused on the roles of G&C services in combating social-emotional stigma faced by sexually assaulted female students. This therefore makes this study to be unique and necessary for consideration.

4. Methodology

In this study, descriptive research design that focused on

qualitative data collection was used. This is to ensure that the study describe the situation as it were at time of the conduct of the study. The study focused on the twenty five (25) out of the twenty six (26) public senior secondary schools with female students in Jalingo metropolis, Taraba State. The population of the female students is three thousand five hundred and fifty seven (3557) (Directorate of planning, research and statistics, Taraba State, Jalingo (2021)). In order to determine the representative sample for the study, Yameni (1967) formula was used to obtain a sample size of three hundred and ninety six (396). A self-developed and reported questionnaire based on the objectives was used to collect data on the current roles of guidance and counseling service in combating the social-emotional stigma of sexually assaulted female students at the secondary schools.

In order to achieve the objectives of this study, the research worked with the schools' administrators and/or teacher counselors to obtain the records of those female students who have been assaulted in the previous six months. Students at the schools filled out the simply organized questionnaire that involves leading questions on the roles played by the guidance and counseling unit in combating sexual assaults and its social-emotional stigma. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that the respondents simple check their opinion in a two point scale (1 = yes; 0 = No). Before the actual commencement of the data collection of this study, the questionnaire was pilot-tested using 30 students of two secondary schools located in Taraba state but outside Jalingo metropolis area. The schools in which the pilot-tests were conducted were mutually excluded from the sampled schools for the study. The pilot-tests helped to check the reliability of the questionnaire by using Cronbach alpha coefficient and the results revealed a reliability coefficient as 0.80 which is reasonably within the acceptable range.

Following the completion of the questionnaire, the data collected were sorted and coded and subsequently analysed quantitatively using statistical package for social scientist (SPSS v 25) to report the descriptive statistics such as the frequency and percentage of the responses.

5. Results, Analysis and Discussion

The retrieved questionnaires, after sorting revealed that, out of the 395 questionnaire administered, two hundred and ten were validly filled to be used for the analysis of this study. The valid responses were coded and the results are presented based on the social demographic data and the objectives of the study.

Table 1: Social Demographic data

| S. No | Social demographic data (N = 210) | Yes | | No | |
|-------|---|-------|---------|-------|--------|
| | | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| 1. | Sexually assaulted in the school | 210 | (100.0) | 0 | (0.0) |
| 2 | Feel differently after the sexual assault | 196 | (93.3) | 14 | (6.7) |
| 3. | Treated differently by those who were aware of the sexual assault | 187 | (89.0) | 23 | (11.0) |
| 4. | Social relation, interaction and/or affairs changed after the assault | 182 | (86.7) | 28 | (13.3) |
| 5. | Report the case to the school principal or teacher counselor | 80 | (38.1) | 130 | (61.9) |
| 6. | Visit the G&C unit or have any counseling session afterward | 25 | (11.9) | 185 | (88.1) |

The table 1 reveals the social demographic data of the respondents; (100.0%) of them have being sexually assaulted in the school, (93.3%) Feel differently after the

sexual assault; (89.0%) were treated differently by those who were aware of the sexual assault and; (86.7%) have their social relation, interaction and/or affairs changed after

the assault. However, (38.1%) of them report the case to the school principal or teacher counselor while (11.9%) of them visit the G&C unit or have any counseling session afterward. This is an indication that the appropriate respondents were been considered for this study, and

majority of them are being stigmatized socially and emotionally in the school. The finding of this study is supported by the report of (Prabha and Lekha, 2020) [16] which also indicated that school age females are often assaulted sexually and stigmatized thereafter.

Table 2: Roles of G&C in sexual assault prevention

| S. No | Roles of G&C in sexual assault prevention (N = 210) | Yes | | No | |
|-------|---|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| | | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| 1. | Formal teacher-student relation and personal communication | 155 | (73.8) | 55 | (26.2) |
| 2 | Safety tips on sexual assault in day-to-day class activities | 20 | (9.5) | 185 | (90.5) |
| 3. | Threat and punishment/sanction sexual assaults and related offences | 39 | (18.6) | 171 | (81.4) |
| 4. | Appropriate channel of reporting sexual assault offences | 53 | (25.2) | 157 | (74.8) |
| 5. | Regular awareness and orientation on sexual assault in the school | 10 | (4.8) | 200 | (95.2) |

In table 2, the result of the roles of G&C in sexual assault prevention which indicates that there is formal and friendly teacher-student relation that allows for reporting and personal communication (73.8%). However, majority of the respondents feels that there are no safety tips on sexual assault in day-to-day class activities (90.5%); no threat and punishment/sanction sexual assaults and related offences (81.4%); no appropriate channel of reporting sexual assault offences (74.8%) and no regular awareness and orientation

on sexual assault in the school (95.2%). This analysis reveals that the roles of G&C are not effective in the prevention of sexual assaults in secondary schools. This finding is very consistent with the studies of Bashari (2020) [7]; Muraina, Musa and Muhammad (2020) [13] lack of creativity and commitment by professionals in promoting the profession in schools lack of creativity and commitment by professionals in promoting the profession in schools and inadequate human and material resources.

Table 3: Roles of G&C in crises (sexual assault) intervention

| S. No | Roles of G&C in crises (sexual assault) intervention | Yes | | No | |
|-------|--|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| | | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| 1 | The response is usually adequate | 43 | (20.4) | 187 | (79.6) |
| 2. | The response is usually timely | 92 | (43.8) | 118 | (56.2) |
| 3 | The response allows for expression of trauma, pains and fear | 67 | (31.9) | 143 | (68.1) |
| 4 | Allow victim to have a voice and choice in the matter | 12 | (5.7) | 198 | (94.3) |
| 5 | Evaluate the psychological needs of the victims | 66 | (31.4) | 144 | (58.6) |
| 6 | Legal options for the victims in case of unsatisfied school approach | 8 | (3.8) | 202 | (96.2) |

In addition, the table 3 presents the roles of G&C in crises intervention when sexual assaults occur, where they exist, (79.6%) believe The response is usually inadequate; (56.2%) believe the response is usually untimely; (68.1%) believe the response does not allows for expression of trauma, pains and fear; (94.3%) believe victims are not allow to have a voice and choice in the matter; (58.6%) believe that victims psychological needs are not evaluated and; (96.2%) believe that legal options for the victims in case of unsatisfied school's approach are not provided. The

analysis indicates that the G&C does not provide any crises intervention to the victims of sexual assault which is one of the cardinal responsibilities and functions of G&C programmes for victim of sexual assault and related abuses. This finding agrees with the studies of Prabha and Lekha, (2020) [16] Bashari (2020) [7]; Makinde, (2017) [11]; Attahiru and Chukuma (2016) [5]; which also believed students are not given the required the G&C services they deserve for their personality and academic development.

Table 4: Combating the social-emotional stigma of sexually assaulted victims

| S. No | Combating the social-emotional stigma of sexually assaulted victims | Yes | | No | |
|-------|---|-------|--------|-------|--------|
| | | Freq. | % | Freq. | % |
| 1 | Personal assessment and educational achievement of the victims | 52 | (24.8) | 158 | (75.2) |
| 2 | Restoration of hope/peace through rappers and strengths | 101 | (48.1) | 109 | (51.9) |
| 3 | Understanding the thoughts of the victims via cognitive intervention | 67 | (31.9) | 143 | (68.1) |
| 4 | Emotional support and emotional-based response and intervention | 25 | (11.9) | 185 | (88.1) |
| 5 | Reintegration, reconciliation and re-socialization exercises of victims | 49 | (23.3) | 161 | (76.7) |

Table 4 presents the ways of combating the social-emotional stigma that comes with sexual assault of victims in secondary schools; only (24.8%) of them said they were given Personal assessment and educational achievement of the victims; (48.1%) of them said they were given restoration of hope/peace through rappers and strengths; (31.9%) of them said their thoughts were never understood through cognitive intervention; (11.9%) them received emotional support and emotional-based response and

intervention while (23.3%) undergo reintegration, reconciliation and re-socialization exercises after the sexual assault. The analysis shows that victims of sexual assault in schools are not helped to combat the social-emotional stigma they face within the school. Prabha and Lekha, (2020) [16]; Arfasa and Weldmeskel (2020) [4] supported this finding by providing that victims of sexual abuse are often left to their faith without any form of social and emotional rehabilitation and management.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study concludes that a number of female students in public senior secondary schools in Nigeria have been sexually assaulted at one point or the other. Such kinds of assaults are often popularized by the perpetrators among their friends and colleagues which often results in social and emotional stigmatization of their victims in the school. This situation greatly affects the social relation, interaction and/or affairs of the sexually assaulted victims. As they often do not report the cases, the offenders are usually unknown and unpunished. Even though, there seems to be formal and friendly teacher-student relationship within the schools, the system does not allow or support for reporting and personal communication that could enhance such confidence among the students.

Also, the study posits that there are no effective preventive measures to curb sexual assault within the school as the school does not pay sufficient attention to such social vices. To that extent, the G&C services do not provide any crisis intervention to the victims of sexual assault which is one of the cardinal responsibilities and functions of G&C programmes for victims of sexual assault and related abuses. Victims of sexual assault are not helped to combat the social-emotional stigma they face within the school and therefore are left to suffer in silence and pains which significantly and negatively impact on their social, personal, academic and psychological development.

To this extent therefore, this study provides a number of recommendations: Firstly, the school administrators should ensure that there is substantial information dissemination on the issues of sexual assaults, methods of preventions and appropriate ways discouraging such acts within the school premises. Secondly, the teacher counselors and even the general teachers should be trained professionally on how to counsel the students against social vices such as sexual assaults and how victims should be treated. Lastly, the professional counselors and the school administrators should collaborate in providing workable measures in combating the like social-emotional stigma that may be meted on the victims through emotional support, reintegration, reconciliation and re-socialization processes.

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Appendix: Instrument of Data Collection

| S. No | Social demographic data | Yes | No |
|--------------|--|------------|-----------|
| 1. | Have you been sexually assaulted in the school? | | |
| 2. | Did you feel differently after the sexual assault? | | |
| 3. | Were you treated differently by those who were aware of the sexual assault? | | |
| 4. | Did any of your social relation, interaction and/or affairs changed after the assault? | | |
| 5. | Did you report the case to the school principal or teacher counselor? | | |
| 6. | Did you visit the G&C unit or have any counseling session afterward? | | |
| | Roles of G&C in sexual assault prevention | | |
| 7. | Formal and friendly teacher-student relation to allow for personal communication | | |
| 8. | Safety tips on sexual assault in day-to-day class activities | | |
| 9. | Threat and punishment/sanction sexual assaults and related offences | | |
| 10. | Appropriate channel of reporting sexual assault offences | | |
| 11. | Regular awareness and orientation on sexual assault in the school | | |
| | Roles of G&C in crises (sexual assault) intervention | | |
| 12. | The response is usually adequate | | |
| 13. | The response is usually timely | | |
| 14. | The response allows for expression of trauma, pains and fear | | |
| 15. | Allow victim to have a voice and choice in the matter | | |
| 16. | Evaluate the psychological needs of the victims | | |
| 17. | Lay out legal options for the victims in case of unsatisfied school approach | | |
| | Combating the social-emotional stigma of sexually assaulted victims | | |
| 18. | Personal assessment and educational achievement of the victims | | |
| 19. | Restoration of hope/peace through rapports and strengths | | |
| 20. | Understanding line of thoughts of the victims through cognitive intervention | | |
| 21. | Emotional support and emotional-based response and intervention | | |
| 22. | Reintegration, reconciliation and re-socialization exercises of victims | | |

| Reliability Statistics | |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
| .800 | 3 |