

Preponderance and Consequences of Deficiencies of Self Care on Professional Practices of Nigeria Counsellors

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Abstract

Majority of counsellors in Nigeria seems to be too concerned about wellness of the clients and inept in handling their own care while handling precarious situation at the seemingly neglect of their own self-care. It is disheartening and worrisome that most of the counsellors appears to neglect their own self-care or well-being. It appears as if either the curriculum planners appear ineptitude to incorporate counsellors' self-care into the curriculum or the trainers inadvertently omitted training of counsellors' about self-care in the training of Nigeria Counsellors'. These researchers recommended that the Nigeria curriculum planners must incorporate counsellor care into the national curriculum and to be imbibed by curriculum implementers. Also, the curriculum planners must look into and borrow from the American Counselling Code of Ethics (2005). Doing and implementing this could enhance congenial and healthy practices of Counselling in Nigeria.

Keyword: *Counsellors' Self Care, Wellness, Professional Practice, Deficiencies*

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I. Introduction

Counsellors are responsible for helping clients achieve their mental health goals [American Counselling Association (ACA) 2010b]. However, Counsellors are not able to be effective if they do not engage in a healthy level of self-care (Emerson & Markos, 1996; Lawson, Venart, Hazler, & Kottler, 2007; Venart, Vassas, & Pitcher-Heft, 2007). Self-care is a broad term referring to any actions or experiences that enhance or maintain counsellors' well-being (Eckstein, 2001).

Individuals in professional counselling and other helping professional spend a great deal, if time and energy focusing on others and sometimes neglect themselves and their own need (Skovholt, 2001). This neglect can lead to a variety of consequences that impair the counselling professional including burnout, impairment, vicarious trauma, compassion fatigue and secondary traumatic stress (Emerson & Markos, 1996, Lambie, 2006; Lawson et al, 2007; Pearlman, 1999, Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995; Valent, 2002; Venart et al, 2007). For counsellors balancing self-care and other care is an ongoing challenge (Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001). Ethical Standards support the notion that counsellor self-care must be a priority for practicing professional (ACA, 2005; Lawson et al, 2007).

Creative approaches to self-care may help counsellors gain an increase awareness of their professional practice and needs, and the creative process allows counsellors to engage in self-care in a dynamic, well-rounded manner (Duffcy, Haberstroh & Trepal, 2009; Puterbaugh, 2008; Robbins & Pehrsson, 2009). In 2004, the ACA conducted a study exploring the prevalence of impairment among ACA members. The study showed that 63.5% of counsellors know a counsellor who they would consider to be impaired, the participants shared that supervisors (54.3%) and colleagues (64.2%) were aware of the counsellors' impairment (ACA, 2010a). Additionally, 75.5% of the counsellors' responding to the survey reported that they believed that the impaired counsellors pose a risk to the counselling profession (ACA, 2010a)

Counsellors adhering to the ethical codes related to counsellor self-care, program accredited under the 2009 CACREP standards are required to incorporate self-care education into counsellor training programs demonstrates the value and significance of impairment prevention in the counselling profession (Richards, Campenni & Muse-Barke, 2010, Roach & Young, 2007; Schure, Christopher, & Christopher, 2008; Witmer & Young 1996; Yager & Tovar-Blank, 2007)

It is heartbreaking and worrisome that self-care of counsellors appears to be deficient in the training of counsellors in Nigeria and particularly Southwest Nigeria. In the training of counsellors undergraduate, there appears as if self-care of counsellors seems to be absent in the curriculum and training of professional counsellors. Counsellors were trained to show empathy to their clients but it was rather unfortunate that despite the depth of training of counsellors in Nigeria, there appears to be dearth of training about how counsellors must take care of themselves. It was recently, that these researchers who are counsellors realized that just as our numerous clients that we are also humans.

As counsellors we were trained to shower empathy on our clients that share their tragic, painful experiences with us, not realizing that just as these clients are undergoing agonies and pains, most of the pains experienced by these clients appears to be parts of counsellors too that, counsellors equally agonise like them. Counsellors put their clients in their own shoes, but who puts the counsellors in their shoes too? Counsellors as human just like their clients are susceptible and vulnerable like their clients but in our training we were taught not to by any way be clouded by our experiences in handling our numerous clients facing various challenges. In most cases, professional counsellors seem to be disenfranchised in terms of empathy and self-care. This is because most of these professional counsellors just like the troubled clients appears to manifest, personal, socio-personal, mental, health challenges and so on, but unfortunately they seem not to be acknowledged. Counsellors themselves while pursuing their onerous task of counselling, most often even the married counsellors appears to neglect their families and personal health whereas they are being empathic for their troubled clients, even though they could be troubled themselves.

The neglect of self-care of counsellors appears to seemingly impact on the performance of duties and roles of counsellors and their practices in Nigeria and particularly the Southwest Nigeria. In most of the establishments in Southwest Nigeria, there are non-hospitable environment for counsellors to practice. Because of societal disposition to counsellors most of the heads of establishments and administrators of schools seems not hospitable to counsellors, there appears to be seemingly dearth of facilities in most schools, these could be in terms of furniture, office space, computer, electricity, electronics to mention but few, all these seems to impact on the health and self-care of counsellors in their various locations. The attitudinal disposition of the government and administrators to counsellors seems to be imparting in self-care of counsellors.

Counselling is a helping relationship between a psychologically and professionally trained person and a troubled or troubled persons who is/ are vulnerable and that needs professional or specialized assistance that will help the troubled person or persons gets relieved and equipped with coping resources to face future challenges. Counselling as though helpful to the clients, it is rather unfortunate that even though a one to one relationship, that despite the fact that counsellors are seriously concerned about the well-being of clients, counsellors often forgets that they are human beings that are equally vulnerable like their clients. There appears to be dearth of records even in the training of counsellors about type of care to be given to counsellors that are susceptible to lots of challenges.

Most often, the domains of counsellors such as physical mental, psychological, emotional, social and morals are equally challenged. This is because if the well-being of the counsellors is equally challenged and inadequate, it appears to bear correlates to the relationship of the counsellor with the clients. A counsellor that is emotionally perturbed and aroused can hardly effectively impact on the life of the troubled client but most often unfortunately the counsellor either misconceives or appears to belief that he has enough coping resources to face harrowing challenges and that he or she is not equally vulnerable. There are occasions when clients narrate tragic and heartbreaking ordeals to counsellors and counsellors are required to give empathy to such clients, we need to give warmth and unconditional regard but who empathizes with counsellors in return, when we are susceptible to these varying emotional laden ordeals, no one appears to care about the condition of the counsellors

Taking Care of Counsellor Self

Taking care of oneself is a principle that applies directly to counselling. If one is gasping for air he or she cannot help other people. Counsellors who neglect their own mental, physical and spiritual self can eventually run out of oxygen and cannot effectively help their clients because all of their energy is going out to the clients and nothing is coming back to replenish the counsellors' energy. It is rather unfortunate that many counsellors fail to put this into practice, experts caution and maintained that counsellors who ignore their own needs will find their outlook on the profession going quickly downhill.

Wellness is one of the critical factors in being a healthy counsellor. Counsellors are asked to give adequate empathy to their clients, counsellors listen to tragic emotionally difficult stories. While providing empathy to our clients to share their stories, the client is not there to provide us empathy. So somehow, when one does that work on daily basis one should have an outlet to receive things back. Otherwise one ends up depleting oneself and one don't have anything more to give.

Elizabeth Venart remarked that offering empathy is imperative in the profession but this also opens the counsellor up to feeling the client's pain while being emotionally attuned and available to clients increase our

vulnerability in the work. Yet, we cannot be effective in our work if we are not emotionally attuned and available. It is important for counsellors to understand that there are risk factors inherent in the work and that noticing signs of stress or distress is a sign of ill health, no one is immune to the effect of the work.

Counsellors should view their emotional responses to their work as an expected part of empathic engagement rather than something they are doing wrong, they are more likely to seek support, talk about stress with colleagues and engage in self-care practices to support their overall wellness.

Reasons Why Counsellors Should Enhance Their Wellness

♣ Counselling is a profession dependent upon our ability to be authentic and attune empathically because it is through this process of careful attunement that healing and growth occur.

♣ Research consistently demonstrates that the quality of the therapeutic relationship is more predictive of counselling outcomes than any other factor.

♣ Since the “self” of the counsellor as an essential component of effective counselling, it is vital that counsellors nourish their own wellness.

♣ When we are well we better able to connect with our clients, more attentive and creative in our work and less likely to make clinical errors or violate boundaries.

♣ If you are maintaining the wellness of your client that is if you say they should do certain things, do it yourself, don't just be a counsellor in theory and not in doing.

♣ Counsellors wellness and impairment are on a continuum from well to stressed to distressed to impaired. Counsellors must continually monitor where we are on that continuum and address any early signs of stress so we don't move further down the continuum. We are instruments of healing; we must also be healed if we are not healed too we are not promoting wellness.

Self-Checkup

It is essential for counsellors irrespective of work schedules to know how he or she is doing.

Tips for Counsellors to Identify their Challenges or Level of Wellness

◆ Mild feeling of resentment toward certain clients or feeling burdened by certain clients can be a suitable indicator that something is not right.

◆ Loss of direction, that is to take sloppy logistics by starting sessions late are signs of challenge to the practicing counsellors

◆ Feeling irritated about clients, experiencing low level of energy having problems develop at home, losing ones sense of humor, it is expected that counsellors must be humorous because humor is a great therapy.

◆ Counsellors must remember that stress and the accompanying symptom are indicative of how the work is affecting them.

Ways of Taking Self Care

A variety of ways exist to improve self-care; self-awareness is the first step in creating lasting change

★ Create and pay ongoing attention to the balance in your life

★ Balance between work and play, all work without play makes Jack a dull boy

★ Learn simple strategies to nurture yourself within your day, nourish yourself with enough water good food or nutrition and movement and exercise

★ Enrich your life outside of work by taking vacations spending time with family or significant others

★ Taking time to mediate and pray

★ Do some special things with another part of your brain that differs from your normal routine, not all the official work all hours

★ Integrating relaxing activities such as yoga, deep breathing and listening to music after session.

★ Maintaining boundaries is a crucial element of self-care. Lack of professional boundaries can create feelings of being overwhelming, bitter and angry.

★ Avoid taking unwarranted calls from clients after office hours, don't set office hours or work overtime when there is no real need. I have a client that calls me odd hours to ask for financial assistance even when on holiday: as counsellors we must set limits for ourselves

★ Avoid putting clients before your own family, friends and self, doing this could be dangerous

★ Avoid long or unusual work hours, large case-loads, case-loads with high amount of trauma, no vacation or off days and no holidays, all contribute to counsellors becoming unhealthy in mind, body and spirit and hence impacts the quality of care provided to even client

★ Counsellors must journal on regular basis, this is done by updating and reading professional literature, research revealed that people who journal on regular basis are less susceptible to illness

★ Don't forget to infuse a sense of humor and play into your life. This helps you and your clients remember that life need not always be so serious. In fact, humor is healing, it is a great therapy. Humor help clients to speak their minds and see the humor in situation. There are even contemporary publications on the efficacies of humor in resolving psychological challenges.

Regulating of ones Schedule

The nature of the work can stand in the way of wellness, many counsellors struggle to get through the day, they are encumbered by too much work stress, fatigue, anger and resentments.

- Counsellors work must be only a part of his or her life, don't invert your entire life in the work, doing this could be killing While you are helping others, who is helping you?
- Set boundaries, by including commitment to self and your personal life, strike a balance
- Although, counsellors are always full of wellness tips for others, knowledge doesn't always translate into action for themselves, we are not so different from our clients when it comes to this, there is often a gap between what we know in our heads to make sense and how we like our lives.
- Having a supportive environment can help immensely in improving counsellor wellness, an impoverished environment is killing to counsellors' job. Counsellors must be encouraged and adequately equipped.
- Creating personalised wellness goals and committing to them in the company of colleagues can support counsellors in turning plans into reality.

Availability of Facilities

A foundation for wellness should be built before counsellors even enter into their professional lives. It is rather unfortunate that in counsellor education, we don't do as good of a job teaching about risks and how to avoid them or manage them if you pump into them.

- When counsellors are isolated particularly in rural areas or working in a sole private practitioner maintaining wellness can pose an even bigger challenge without other colleagues to learn from, stress is likely to build unimpeded.
 - Provision of internet facilities amenability to Email, Facebook and the likes can enhance connection with people and reduce most of the burdens of counsellors.
 - Checking on local, state, regional and national association for networking possibilities and attending professional conferences to meet other helping professionals, researchers, others in your geographic zones.
- Kramen-Kahn (2002) suggests the following questions to determine one's current level of personal self-care, he remarked; do you;

- appear competent and professional?
- appear warm, caring and accepting?
- regularly seek case consultation with another professional while protecting confidentiality?
- at the end of a stressful day, frequently utilize self-talk to put aside thoughts of clients?
- maintain a balance between work, family and play?
- nurture a strong support network of family and friends?
- use healthy leisure activities as a way of helping yourself relax from work? If work is your whole world, watch out! You do not have a balanced life?
- often feel renewed and energized by working with clients?
- develop interests in your professional work?
- perceive clients' problems as interesting and look forward to working with clients?
- maintain objectivity regarding clients' problems?
- maintain good boundaries with clients, allowing them to take full responsibility for their actions while providing support for change?
- use personal psychotherapy as a means of maintaining and/or improving your functioning as a psychotherapist?
- maintain a sense of humor? You can laugh with your clients, it is not a crime to joke and laugh with ones clients.
- act in accordance with legal and ethical standards?

Warning Signs that Counsellors are Worn Out

The following can be symptoms that there could be dwindling self-care of counsellors;

- Disturbed sleep, eating or concentration.
- Isolation from family, friends and colleagues.
- Inability to take regularly scheduled breaks.

- Enjoying work less than the past, or previously
- Boredom, disinterested or early irritated by clients.
- Experienced recent life stressors, such as illness, personal loss, relationship difficulties, financial problems or legal trouble.
- Emotional exhaustion or drained after meeting with certain clients.
- Thinking of being elsewhere when working with clients.
- Self-medicating, overlooking personal needs and overlooking one's health.
- Finding work less rewarding and satisfying than in the past.
- Feeling depressed, anxious or agitated frequently.
- Enjoying life less than the past.
- Experiencing repeated headaches and other physical complaints.
- Sitting staring into space for hours and cannot concentrate on one's work.

Positive Coping Behaviours

- Taking regularly scheduled breaks.
- Taking vacations periodically and don't bring work with me.
- Having friends, hobbies and interests unrelated to work.
- Exercise regularly, have a healthy diet and maintain an appropriate weight.
- Limiting one's work hours and case load.
- Participation in peer support, clinical supervision, personal psychotherapy, and or journaling as preventive strategies.
- Attending to religious and spiritual side.
- Regular participation in relaxing activities, hear meditation songs, reading, music and so on.
- Participation in activities one enjoys and look forward to.

According to Barnett (2008) Negative or Maladaptive Coping Practices

- Self-medicating alcohol, drugs and food.
- Seeking emotional support and nurturance from clients.
- Squeeze more into the day, get more done and measure success by how many tasks I complete and by how much I can accomplish in a day.
- I isolate, avoid colleagues and minimise the significance of stresses in one's life.
- I know that distress and impairment are for others and don't take seriously the warning signs I experience.
- I believe that everything will turn out fine just because I say so! (Barnett 2008).

Ways of Ensuring Healthy Lifestyle of Counsellors

For a counsellor to be healthy and to maintain his or her integrity, the onus rest on the professional counsellor to ensure an ideal self-care. He must possess the following to maintain his stability in the profession. Olofintoye, Falana and Olusegun (2018) positioned the following;

1. He must be a professional in qualification and practice. He must possess a bachelor's degree in Guidance and Counselling for the first degree, he must upgrade himself or herself in post-graduate degree in the field of Counselling, he/she must be a member of the professional body of guidance and counselling.
2. He must be adept in psychological theories, principles and practice. A counsellor without the knowledge of theories, is an unethical counsellor, he or she is likely to do more harm than good. His knowledge in theories, makes him/her coordinated, articulated, enables him to know causes of problems and remedies as positioned by previous scholars in the profession of counselling and psychology. It enhances the stability of the counsellor and expertise in the profession.
3. He must be disciplined and must be an epitome of good character. He must display exemplary behaviour worthy of emulation. He must be honest, authentic sincere and trustworthy. This is because perception of people about him tells on his/her care and the professional practice.
4. He must have high degree of empathy; he must be warm to the client. He must be a good listener and must put always the client in his own condition. He must be authentic, truthful and genuine person. This is because perception of people about him tells on the efficacy and proficiency of his practices. Empathy is ensured when a therapist truly hears clients and the meaning that are important to them at that moment when therapist let them know that their own private personal meanings have been heard. They may feel relieved.
5. He must move according to significant global and technological dictates; he must be internet compliant. This is because issues of behaviours are now global, versatile and regularly updated on the internet,

he must be integrated and dynamic. He or she must not be found wanting in the field of technology. He must be encyclopedia of knowledge because issues are presented to him in diverse forms.

6. He must be psychologically stable and tolerant. He or she pays attention to verbal and non-verbal cues doing this enhances tolerance. He or she must possess minimal encourager to enhance verbalization. Sutton and Stewart (2008) list a number of minimal encourager or prompts a counsellor must possess that demonstrates he is listening, these are in the forms of nods, gestures, I see, yes, humor and so on. Doing all these enables the clients to verbalize.

Barnett and Sarnel (2003) Recommendation on Daily Life about how to Maintain Self-Care.

- Make adequate time for yourself, schedule breaks throughout the day.
- Do things that are congenial and you enjoy. Engage in hobbies, like games, resort and so on.
- Take care of yourself physically and spiritually.
- Take care of the relationships in your life.
- Say (No!) when it is required.
- Don't isolate yourself.
- Keep in mind that self-care is a good thing.
- Watch out for warning signs, such as violating boundaries, self-medicating, wishing patients would not show up, finding it difficult to focus on the task at hand, boredom, fatigue, and/or missing appointments.
- Watch out for distress, burnout, and competence problems in your colleagues.
- Conduct periodic distress and competence self-assessments and seek help when it is needed.
- Focus on prevention.
- Make time for self-care.
- Seek out personal psychotherapy.
- Use colleague assistance programmes.
- Participate in peer support groups.
- Accept that you are human, in need of assistance and a work in progress.
- Don't try to be perfect, to have it all, or do it all. Know your limits and be realistic.

Research Rationale

It appears heartbreaking, worrisome and disheartening that there seems to be deficiency or lacuna in the Nigeria curriculum in terms of self-care of counsellors. Despite the depth of training of trainees in the art of counselling, counselors appear to be ill equipped in his or her own self-care. Just like the troubled clients, counsellors that shares in the grief and pains of their numerous clients are also human and who is having nobody to shower empathy on them. As locus parent's in the pains of the clients, they even personally often forget that they are also vulnerable just like their troubled clients. The inability to acknowledge this often times makes them susceptible to challenges in their professional practices most of the counsellors as humans face challenges that could be mental, personal, health, socio-personal just like the clients that demands for empathy. All these imparts on the self-care of counsellors and bears correlates on their professional practices.

Significance of the Study

The study could be of benefit to curriculum planners, lecturers, prospective researchers, personnel offering hospice services, psychologists, counsellors, trainees, school administrators, students and so on. They could learn the expediency of counsellors' self-care and how to assist professional counsellors. Curriculum planners could incorporate into the national curriculum areas that could equip counsellors in their self-care to enhance their professional practice. Counsellors and students could learn areas that could enhance self-care to enhance their professional practices. Prospective researchers could learn areas that could enhance their contribution to equipping the self-care of counsellors in their various domains.

II. Recommendations

Based on the above discovery, the curriculum planners could incorporate into the national curriculum, these things that will enhance trainers to equip prospective counsellors in enhancing the self-care of professional care givers or counsellors. Also, there should be continuous training and seminars for counsellors on the necessity to take care of themselves while performing the duty. The school administrators, both private and public should be made to provide facilities that could enhance the self-care of counsellors in their various establishments. There should be continuous orientation and awareness for the members of the society about the need to enhance self-care of counsellors.

III. Conclusion

Just like clients, counsellors are equally vulnerable to challenge. Most often, empathy is shown to clients because it appears as if they are the only ones susceptible to pains whereas by their calling, they always face the pains that clients bear in their counselling encounter. Sequel to this, counselling trainees must be imbued in the counselling care, because care for counsellors is very important so that they will be able to efficiently and effectively carry out the arduous role of counselling.

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