

## ***Multiculturalism as a Hindrance to Professional Counselling Practice in Nigeria***

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Wikipedia indicates that Nigeria has more than 250 ethnic groups with varying languages and customs, creating a country of rich ethnic diversity. The largest ethnic groups are Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo accounting for 62% of the populations while the Edo, Ijaw, Kanuri, Ibibio, Ebira, Nupe, Gwari, Jukun, Urhobo, Igala, Idoma and Tiv comprises 33%, other minorities make up the remaining 50%. The middle belt of Nigeria is known for its diversity of ethnic groups including the pyem, goemari and kefyar.

There are minority groups for other nations such as Niger, Ghana, Britain, America, Syria, Lebanon who have settled in big cities for commercial activities or company employees.

The number of languages estimated and listed is up to five hundred and twenty one (521). The official language of Nigeria, English was to facilitate the cultural and linguistics unity of the country. The major languages spoken in Nigeria represents the three families of African languages; the majority are Niger-congo languages such as Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa is Afro-Asiatic; and Kanuri, spoken in the northwest, primarily Borno state in part of Nilo-saharan family. Even though most ethnic groups prefer to

communicate in their own languages. English as a first language is used for education, business transactions and for official purposes. English as a first language is used by small minority of the country's elite and it is not spoken at all in some rural areas. English is also the medium of communication in Nigerian educational institutions which offer counselling as a means of helping individuals to identify their potentials, strengths and weakness, so since English is spoken by small minority then counselors are hindered to communicate with clients outside school communities unless such speaks the local language of the community.

In the area of religious diversity, the Wikipedia posited that, Nigeria is home to a variety of religions which tend to vary religiously. This situation \*\*\*\*\* regional and ethnic distinctions and has often been seen as source of \*\*\*\*\* conflict amongst the population. It is in this direction that a Canada-based group called "Ontario" consultants on religious Tolerance asserted that, it is generally believed that religious distribution of the Nigeian's population is about 50% Muslims, 40% Christians and 10% of indeginous faiths, Muslims follows the religion of Islam which was brought in the year 610AD by Prophet Muhammad in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. The scripture if the Islamic religion is the Qur'an which Muslims believe to be revelation from God. The Qur'an contains guidelines on all aspects of Muslim's life. There are other religious books such as Hadith which is the accepted, the sayings, actions and approvals of the prophet of Islam which is also relied upon heavily by Muslims. The interpretations coming from both the Qur'an and the hadith are what often causes conflicts and sects within Islam which do have adverse effect on the thinking of some muslims.

On the Christian faith, Tikumah (2009), indicated that Christians adhere to the religion of Christianity which was founded by Jesus Christ who lived in Israel two thousand (2000) years ago. The Bible is to Christian as the Qur'an is to Muslims.

Tikumah continued to assert that, the indigenous faith also referred to as African traditional religion (ATR) consists of beliefs in the power of objects and spirits of various kinds including the spirits of ancestors who are believed to be monitoring and watching over life on earth after their transition to the spiritual world. Counselling such a population would require a counsellor who is informed of such beliefs and can understand the world view of such people of issues.

Considering the various diversities, a counsellor trained in the western oriented theories which were developed in environments completely alienated from the Nigerian setting would have a lot challenges especially in the areas of faith, morality, dogma, ethnics, ceremonies, burials etc. A counsellor faced by clients who could be of the same faith but of different dogma could have a problem of the way each of them view articular event in life.

In this view, Tikumah (2009) asserted that, the basis of friction between the adherents of these three faiths in Nigeria both doctrinal and ethical. Muslims and Christians are united in condemning the African traditional religion as pagan and amoral because of African traditional religion worshipping idols and not believing in one God as found in both Islam and Christianity. However while Muslims profess respect for Jesus Christ, they view Christians as equally idolatrous for conceiving God as a divible being. God the father, God the son, God the Holy Ghost. They particularly disdain as an two promorphic the idea of God the son and continued that Jesus Christ, whom Christians

believe to be the son of God was no more than a human prophet and messenger of God. Christians on the other hand accuses Muslims of practicing a fake Christianity. Not only they do not believe that the prophet Muhammad is a true messenger of God but also they accuse him of plagiarizing the Bible conveniently to form the \*\*\*\*\*. Furthermore both Muslims and Christians accuse each other of poor moral standards. For instance while the Muslim accuses the Christian women walking in nude (because she leaves her arms and legs bare), the Christians views the woman's practice of reiling herself from head to toe as primitive and oppressive to the woman and for that matter immoral in itself.

Apart from the inter-religious differences, there are also intra-religious differences for example Muslims are divided along Sunni, Sufi, Salafi and Shi'te while Christians are divided along Catholic, Protestants and Aladora. Those differences accounts alot in applying counselling theories to clients because the client could have an orientation which do not accept the approach from theory as such the counsellor could be in delimma of what to do or how to go about arising such clients.

### **MULTICULTURAL HINDERANCE TO PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLING PRACTICES.**

Multiculturalism is a generic term that indicates any relationship between and within two or more diverse groups. A multicultural perspectives takes a consideration the specific values, beliefs and actions influencing by a client ethnicity, gender, religion, socio-economic status, political views, sexual orientation, geographic region and historical experiences with the dominant culture. Multiculturalism provides a conceptual frame work that recognizes the complex diversity of a pheralistic society

while at the same time suggesting bridges of shared concern that bind culturally different individuals to one another (Pedersen, 1991, 2000). Nigeria is a multicultural society with the various ethnic, tribal, geographical, religious beliefs and affiliations coming into play at any national activity. The counsellor who finds himself in such situations must identify the various hindrances so that he can achieve a meaningful success. Before dividing into discussion, it should be borne in mind that societies in Nigeria have their traditional approach to counselling which \*\*\*\*\* was used and found to be successful with clients, with the modern approaches to counselling which are from different cultural and geographical orientations hindrances are expected.

It is in line with the above that, Corey (2013), asserted that contemporary therapy approaches are ground on a core set of values which are neither value neutral nor applicable to all cultures. For example the value implicit in most traditional counselling theories include emphasis on individualism, the separate existence of the self, individual, as the foundation for maturity and decision making and responsibility resting with the individual rather than the group. These values of individual choice and anatomy do not have universal applicability. In some cultures, the key values are collectivist and primary consideration is given to what is good for the group. Regardless of the counsellors orientation, it is crucial to listen to clients and determine why they are seeking help and how best to deliver the help that is appropriate for them.

Most modern counselling approaches stressed the importance and uniqueness of individual, an attitude reflected in the concept of I-thou relationship, the one-to-one encounter and the belief that the client must take responsibility of himself or herself. In many cultures in Nigeria however, the basic psychological unit of operation is not the

individual but the family, the group or the collective society. For example, many Hausa's, Igbo's and Yoruba's and even smaller tribes defines their identities within the family constellation. Whatever a person does reflects not only that person but on the entire family as well. Important decisions are thus made by the entire family rather by individual. This shows the roles of traditional titles, village, family elder's etc. counsellors who may have to work with clients from such cultures may see their clients as "dependent" lacking in-maturity or avoiding responsibility when they refuse to respond to certain questions from counsellors or refuse to take a decision. The \*\*\*\*\* five labels do much harm to the self-esteem of clients.

Verbal expression of emotions by clients is seen as a necessary parameter for successful counselling, those clients that for obvious reasons of language barrier, pronunciation or cultural inhibitions are not able to express themselves could be seen as Dane (1998) and Hewing (1999) as "Inhibited" lacking in "spontaneity" or repressed. Thus, in the counselling process such client should be forced to violate their cultural norms and termed as having negative personality traits. The modern approaches of counselling failed to realize major differences in communication styles and the use of non-verbal forms of communication or the use of contextual for example, in the Hausa/Fulani culture a girl is only expected to nod her head on announcement of a suitor whom she approves.

Connected to verbal expressions in the issue of openness and of intimacy where clients are expected to disclose and discuss the most intimate and personal aspect of their lives. However, cultural, religious, political and geographical location may make some clients unwilling or unable to engage in such disclosure (Ridley, 1984 and Sue &

Sue 1999). Such issues are those relating to a section or tribe in Nigeria, religious and cultural practices discussion on which may cause social or security problems. Here clients are hindered not to go into serious discussions for the unity of the country.

The conception of family system could also be major hindrance to professional counselling practices in Nigeria because in the western oriented approaches to counselling, family is seem to include the husband, wife and the immediate offspring. The definition of family in Nigeria is quite different. For example, there is the polygamous family where there is husband and more than one wife, in Muslims culture up to four while in some traditional societies upto one hundred. There is also the extended family consisting of aunties, uncles, grand parents and evidence \*\*\*\* members. The concept of family may even extend not to only aunts and uncles but to neighbors and tribal members. Thus the counsellor may have redefine family counselling in the extended manner.

## **INDIGENOUS COUNSELLING IN NIGERIA**

Indigenous counselling is considered as old as man because at any point on time in the history of man, there existed a system or techniques of arising individuals who are psychologically or spiritually troubled. Mallam Bulus and Ibenecho (1986) asserted that, individual in every society grabbled daily with experiences, pressures and problems which are verified in nature and intensity. That some are able to handle those problems with ease while other have to seek for help. This in their opinion marks the origin of counselling. Mallam (1989) opined that universality of problems and problem solving devices are common phenomena in all cultures. People with problems he further

asserts, continually sought help to solve them. That in the traditional part in the Nigerian situation, problem solving was the religious Mallamai, the elders wizards and soothsayers, the babalawo, the dibra. He argued further that before western counselling was begun there existed in most part of African formidable psychotherapeutic counselling programmes clothed in rituals and believably supported by the gods. Makinde (1984) explained that:

***“Before counselling came to adopt its present mode of viewing clients and thereby intensely or before counselling ever reached its present sophistication, there already existed within the scientific attitude and construct of the Yoruba man a body of seemingly incontrovertible facts as well as concepts, theories, methods, techniques and view points that had proved fruitful for him”.***

Makinde (1984) continued to stress that, counsellors in the indigenous settings include the following:

Uzenakpo among the Ibibio, Dibia and Ogbata among the Igbo, Bukaye and Mallaman duba among the Hausa, Babalawo among Yoruba and Obazi among Igala-Tiv. He points out that those practitioners often combined counselling with divination and telepathy. He likened them to the African teachers who for years has combined teaching with counselling, school administrators and discipline.

Bascon (1969) and Abimbola (1969) argued that it was the Babalawo's counselling functions such as information giving, consultations and careful diagnosis of problems that led the Babalawo's to move intricate and sophisticated modes associated with divination and hyperaesthesia. They argue further that hyperaesthesia which is a sense perception and feeling of sensation cannot be divorced from counselling. That the use



of divination by indigenous practitioners in the equivalent of the western counsellors use of psychological test. Jacobs (1977) asserts that the practitioners play the roles of counsellors, judges, comforters etc.

The foregoing discussion have shown clearly that, due to multiplicity of Nigerian culture people have different means of indigenous counselling which is still respected in some cultures, and such is still given religious and spiritual importance. The cultural beliefs in the settings are in the areas of God, divinities, ancestors and witches.

Gotom (1975) further explained some of the beliefs as:

1. **God:** He is considered as the ultimate one, the most powerful and the creator of all things. Adasu (1985) describes Him as the owner of the sky, creator of all things, the giver of life and health and the final judge of all men. Parinderl (1974) also sees God like that. That He is almighty and all knowing and so His blessings must be required in all things. This concept seems to prevail in all indigenous counselling sessions. Both the counsellor and the counsellee recognize the presence of God in the relationship. That explains why both need to have faith in Him if anything must work. He is called upon through prayers and sacrifices to pour his blessings and salvation as it is He who has the secret to the problems.
2. **Divinities:** These are viewed to operate within the directives of God. They are nature gods and are also appealed to for the necessary help. They are believed by the Yoruba, TV etc. as be gotten by God.
3. **Ancestors or Personal Deities:** These are those who have rejoined God. They are not limited to time and space. They are treated as intermediaries between God and Man. The concept assumes that the dead are within and always and near

than before although they are not worshipped. Their presence is usually recognized in indigenous counselling.

4. **Witches:** These forms the world of the living dead beings. They are according to Mbiti(1969) both human and spiritual and are both men and women. They are said to be both invisible and intangible.

These beliefs form the basis upon which the indigenous counsellor function and clients appear for solution to their problems. The approaches continued to manifest in the society up to the introduction of the modern counselling, but the possible short-coming of the modern which still give room to indigenous counsellor to be patronized in that, modern counselling is administered through the formal school system to which a great majority have no access especially to the northern part of Nigeria and the paucity of qualified counsellors where the school are established. The individuals have no option when confronted with problems rather go for indigenous intervention. Also still in the northern part of the country, some people are still skeptical about western education and programmes attended to which also could appear to be a hinder from the approach to modern theoretical concepts. Thus arising from the foregoing discussion, hindrances are seen to appear as a result of the multicultural approach to issues from time immemorial.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based upon the foregone discussions, this paper recommends that:

1. Counsellors should first and foremost begin by becoming aware of their own cultural values, basis, stereotypes and assumptions about human behavior.
2. Counsellors should begin the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding of the world views of culturally different clients.
3. Counsellors should begin the process of developing culturally appropriate interventions strategies in the counselling process. This involves developing not only individual counselling and communication skills not system intervention skills.

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