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SCHOOL COUNSELLORS AWARENESS OF THE COUNSELLING ETHICS AND THEIR READINESS TO IMPLEMENT THEM IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ANAMBRA STATE.

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Abstract
This study investigated school counsellors' awareness of the counselling ethics and their readiness to implement them in secondary schools in Anambra State. Four research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. The study employed descriptive survey research design. The population of the study consisted of all the school counsellors in Secondary schools in Anambra State. The sample size for the study comprised one hundred and ninety-four school counsellors in both public and private secondary schools in Anambra state. A self-developed instrument titled School Counsellors Awareness of Counselling Ethics Questionnaire (SCACEQ) was used for data collection. Data collected for research questions and hypotheses were analyzed using percentage scores and t-test statistics. From the findings of the study, majority of the school counsellors were not aware of the professional values in counselling ethics. Majority of the school counsellors were aware of the personal moral qualities in counselling ethics. Also, majority of the school counsellors were not ready to implement the counselling ethics. Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made. The researcher recommended among others that Government or its agencies managing Post Primary Schools should periodically organize in-service education programmes such as conferences, workshop, seminars for counsellors to up-date their knowledge and intimate them on counselling code of ethics.

Keywords: Counsellors Awareness, Counselling Ethics, Readiness, Implementation, Secondary Schools.

Introduction

Guidance and Counseling programs have gone through an evolution over several decades. Since the inception of guidance and counselling in Nigeria in the early 1960s, there have been numerous shifts and changing dynamics in an attempt to address a new need from a changing Nigerian society. The entire educational system in Nigeria is aware of the need of guidance and counselling services to the students in both secondary and tertiary institutions. Counselling depends on clients being able to trust their counsellors. They trust their feelings of vulnerability to counsellors who are committed to using their knowledge and skills to act in the best interests of their clients. Professions honour and protect this trust by setting ethical standards for their practitioners and expecting them to act ethically. Counselling practice is guided by code of ethics and standards which provide a common base for the application and interpretation of assessment and evaluation tools in counselling work (Ajagbawa, 2014). Hence, school counsellors need to be aware of

the counselling ethics in order to provide multicultural guidance to the changing culturally diverse populations.

In the opinion of Ishak, Amat and Bakar (2014), ethics involves an analysis of what is socially and culturally acceptable, the agreed on should and ought's of human actions in a particular society. It cannot be separated from morality that deals with human conduct where judgements are made as to whether human acts conform to the accepted rules of righteousness or virtue. Ethics pertains to beliefs we hold about what constitutes right conduct. They are moral principles adopted by an individual or group to provide rules for right conduct and represent aspirational goals or the maximum standards which are set and enforced by professional associations (Uk-essays, 2018). In this study, ethics is defined as standards of conduct based on a set of professional values and moral decision making regarding professional behavior.

School counsellors work with students as individuals and in groups to whom they supply professional services concerning educational, vocational and personal/social development. School counsellors are expected to work in ways which promote clients' control over their own lives and respect clients ability to make decisions and engage in personal change in the light of clients own beliefs and values. In order to effectively achieve these, school counsellors are expected to comply with the counselling ethics which makes explicit the values underlying their practices.

Counselling ethics are outlines of what are considered acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. According to *American Counselling Association* (2014) Counselling Ethics codes provide professional standards for counselors with the purpose of protecting the dignity and well-being of clients. In counselling, ethics underpin the nature and course of actions taken by the counsellor. According to Ajagbawa (2014), the purpose of counselling ethics are to a) clarify for its members the common code of ethics adopted and held by its members to guide their conduct, b)help to support the mission of the association which is to promote career development of all people over the life span, c) establish through the codes, the principles that help counsellors define ethical behaviour and conduct, d) provide ethical guidance to helping counsellors making professional decisions on ethical matters especially when conflicted and e)serve as a guide to both professional practitioners as well as the clients being served to understand their expectations and the limitations of the engagement. British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (2010) identified three approaches to expressing ethical commitments. They are: professional Values, ethical principles and counsellors' personal moral qualities.

In the same vein, Thagard (2013), Professional values combine cognitive representations such as concepts, goals, and beliefs with emotional attitudes that positive or negative valence. Values are the key assumptions that underlie the questions that counsellor asks the clients, the answers he expects or gets and what defines the very assumptions upon which the communication is seated between the two (Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008). The fundamental values of counselling according to BACP (2010) include a commitment to:

- Respecting human rights and dignity
- Protecting the safety of clients
- Ensuring the integrity of practitioner-client relationships
- Enhancing the quality of professional knowledge and its application
- Alleviating personal distress and suffering
- Fostering a sense of self that is meaningful to the person(s) concerned
- Increasing personal effectiveness
- Enhancing the quality of relationships between people
- Appreciating the variety of human experience and culture
- Striving for the fair and adequate provision of counselling and psychotherapy services

The above values are important because they will help the counsellor dissuade himself in all circumstances that his personal values do not get on the way of information sharing with client in assisting the client to deal with the counselling situations.

The ethical principles are set out here to inspire members towards best practice. The values that a counsellor has internalized informs the principles that underlie his practice. The counsellor is obliged to honour and promote the fundamental rights, moral and cultural values, dignity and worth of clients. They must respect clients' rights to privacy, confidentiality, self-determination and autonomy. BACP (2010) documents captured six basic ethical principles that form the foundation of functioning at the highest level as a professional. They are:

Autonomy: The principle implies respect for the client to be self-governing. Clients have the right to self-determination and to be shown dignity and respect for making their own lawful decisions. The principle of autonomy opposes the manipulation of clients against their will, even for beneficial social ends.
Being trustworthy**:** This principle implies honouring the trust placed in the counsellor by his client. Counsellors must strive to ensure that clients' expectations are ones that have reasonable prospects of being met; honour their agreements and promises; regard confidentiality as an obligation arising from the client's trust and restrict any disclosure of confidential information about the clients.
Beneficence: This principle implies a commitment to promoting the client's well-being. The principle of beneficence means acting in the best interests of the client based on professional assessment.
Non-maleficence: This principle implies a commitment to avoiding harm to the client. It involves avoiding sexual, financial, emotional or any other form of client exploitation; avoiding incompetence or malpractice; not providing services when unfit to do so due to illness, personal circumstances or intoxication.
Justice**:** The principle of justice requires being just and fair to all clients and respecting their human rights and dignity. This also means showing respect for diversity of persons, without prejudice to colour, race, belief, gender, sexuality, social context, and mental and physical abilities.
Self-respect: This means fostering the counsellors' self-knowledge and care for self. They are also responsible for looking after their own needs and health. So, a counsellor will only commit to a practice that they can offer being aware of own expertise, training, health and wellbeing and let the client know if anything changes.

The counsellor's personal moral qualities are of the utmost importance to clients. Personal qualities to which counsellors and psychotherapists are strongly encouraged to aspire include:
Empathy: This means the ability to imagine and share another person's feelings and experiences. It is the ability to understand the client from his own point of view.
Sincerity: a personal commitment to consistency between what is professed and what is done.
Integrity: commitment to being moral in dealings with others, personal straightforwardness, honesty and coherence.
Resilience: the capacity to work with the client's concerns without being personally diminished.
Respect: showing appropriate esteem to others and their understanding of themselves.
Humility: the ability to assess accurately and acknowledge one's own strengths and weaknesses.
Competence: the effective deployment of the skills and knowledge needed to do what is required.
Fairness: the consistent application of appropriate criteria to inform decisions and actions.
Wisdom: possession of sound judgement that informs practice.
Courage: the capacity to act in spite of known fears, risks and uncertainty.

The quality of counselling services rendered to client is affected by many factors of which one of them involves non-implementation of the counselling code of ethics. Counsellor's behavior can affect the well-being of the client positively. However, the reverse might be the case if the counsellor who rendered the service does not do that according to the detects of the code of conducts. The counselling ethics serves as guidelines for professional practice of the counsellors. Counsellors who provide services by adhering strictly to the counselling code of ethics will not only promote professionalism in the profession, but will be able to provide a professional service that leaves a mark in their client's life (Ishak et al., 2012). Despite the important benefits of adhering to counselling professional ethics, it is not certain if secondary school counsellors in Anambra State are aware of the counselling ethics as mentioned above. It is due to this fact the current study seeks to investigate the school counsellors' awareness of the counselling ethics and their readiness to implement them in secondary schools in Anambra State.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this study was to determine the school counsellors' awareness of the counselling ethics and their readiness to implement them in secondary schools in Anambra State. Specifically, the study sought to determine as fell:

1. What is the level of school counsellors' awareness of the professional values in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State?
2. What is the level of school counsellors' awareness of the ethical principles in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State?
3. What is the level of school counsellors' awareness of the counsellor's personal moral qualities in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State?

4. What are the counsellors' perceptions of readiness to implement counselling ethics in secondary schools in Anambra State?

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study

1. The level of school counsellors' awareness of the professional values in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State.
2. The level of school counsellors' awareness of the ethical principles in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State.
3. The level of school counsellors' awareness of the counsellor's personal moral qualities in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State.
4. The counsellors' perception of readiness to implement counselling ethics in secondary schools in Anambra State.

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in awareness of the professional values in counselling ethics between public and private school counsellors in Anambra State.
2. There is no significant difference in awareness of the ethical principles in counselling ethics between public and private school counsellors in Anambra State
3. There is no significant difference in awareness of the counsellor's personal moral qualities in counselling ethics between public and private school counsellors in Anambra State

Methods

This study is primarily based on descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey research design is a form of research design which seeks to describe events, conditions and occurrences as they are without any manipulation of what caused the events been described.

There are six educational zones in Anambra state and the population of the study comprises 208 counsellors from both public secondary schools and private schools in Anambra State. Public secondary schools have a total number of 168 counsellors (PPSSC: Awka 2018), while private secondary schools have total number of 40 counsellors (PPSSC, Awka, 2018). The sample consist the entire 208 counsellors in the public and private secondary schools in Anambra state. The rationale for using the entire population is because it is small and can be managed by the researcher. In other words, there was be no sampling of the school counsellors.

The instrument is a questionnaire, named School Counsellors Awareness of Counselling Ethics Questionnaire (SCACEQ). The questionnaire was structured by the researcher using information from background of the study and research questions. The instrument has two sections A and B. Section A contains personal data of the respondent while section B contains 29 items. It has 3 point response options of aware, not sure, not aware for research questions 1,2 and 3 while research question 4 has response option of yes, not sure and no and has weighted values of 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The researcher presented copies of the questionnaire together with purpose of the study, research questions and hypotheses to three experts, – two from Guidance and Counselling and one from Measurement and Evaluation all of whom are from Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Nigeria. The experts made a careful scrutiny of the items to ensure their appropriateness and adequacy as well as their relevance, clarity and language expression. The experts' constructive criticism and suggestions for modifying the instruments were considered. With the modification, the instrument was therefore deemed suitable for the study.

To determine the reliability of the questionnaire, the scores from 30 respondents in the trial testing of the instrument were used in establishing the internal consistency using the Cronbach Alpha procedure. The internal consistency reliability estimate yielded 0.79 which means it good for the study. The researcher administered the instruments through direct delivery method, with the help of six trained research assistants. However, a total of 194 questionnaires was collected and used for the purpose of data analysis (. The data collected from the research questions were analyzed using percentage score while the hypotheses was analyzed using t-test.

Presentation of Results

Research Question One

The level of school counsellors' awareness of the professional values in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table one: showing the mean and standard deviation of school counsellors' awareness of the professional values in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State.

S/N	Items	Aware	%	Not aware	%
1	Respecting human rights and dignity	194	100	0	0
2	Protecting the safety of clients	88	45	106	55
3	Ensuring the integrity of counsellor-client relationships	148	76	46	24
4	Enhancing the quality of professional knowledge and its application	66	34	128	66
5	Alleviating personal distress and suffering	41	21	153	79
6	Fostering a sense of self that is meaningful to the person(s) concerned	112	58	82	42
7	Increasing personal effectiveness	63	32	131	68
8	Enhancing the quality of relationships between people	111	57	83	43
9	Appreciating the variety of human experience and culture	31	16	163	84
10	Striving for the fair and adequate provision of counselling and psychotherapy services	62	32	132	68
	Percentage Average		47%		53%

Table 1 presents the opinions of respondents on level of school counsellors' awareness of the professional values in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State. The table shows that of the 194 school counsellors that participated in the study, 47% of the students were aware of the professional values in counselling ethics. Besides, 53% of the school counsellors were not aware of the professional values in counselling ethics. Hence, majority of the school counsellors were not aware of the professional values in counselling ethics.

Hypothesis one

There is no significant difference in awareness of the professional values in counselling ethics between public and private school counsellors in Anambra State.

Table two: Summary of t-test on awareness of the professional values in counselling ethics based on school type

School type	**N**	**X**	**SD**	**df**	**α**	**t-cal**	**t-crit**	**Dec.**
Public	158	2.41	0.61	192	0.05	0.63	1.98	NS
Private	36	2.22	0.54					

Table 2 shows that public schools obtained a mean score of 2.41 while private schools obtained a mean score of 2.22 from the School Counsellors Awareness of Counselling Ethics Questionnaire. The calculated t-value is 0.63 while the critical t-value at 192 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level is 1.98. Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical t-value, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in awareness of the professional values in counselling ethics between public and private school counsellors in Anambra State.

Research Question two

The level of school counsellors' awareness of the ethical principles in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table three: showing the percentage score school counsellors' awareness of the ethical principles in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State.

S/N	Items	Aware	%	Not aware	%
11	Respect for the client to be self-governing	73	38	121	62
12	Being trustworthy	191	98	3	2
13	Commitment to promoting the client's well-being	138	71	56	29
14	Commitment to avoiding harm to the client	187	96	7	4
15	Being just and fair to all clients and respecting their human rights and dignity.	186	96	8	4
16	Fostering the counsellors' self-knowledge and care for self	14	7	180	93
	Percentage Average		68%		32%

Table 3 presents the opinions of respondents on level of school counsellors' awareness of the ethical principles in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State. The table shows that out of the 194 school counsellors that participated in the study, 68% of the school counsellors were aware of the ethical principles in counselling ethics. Moreover, 32% of the school counsellors were not aware of the ethical principles in counselling ethics. Hence, majority of the school counsellors were aware of the ethical principles in counselling ethics.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference in awareness of the ethical principles in counselling ethics between public and private school counsellors in Anambra State

Table four: Summary of t-test on awareness of the awareness of the ethical principles in counselling ethics based on school type

School type	**N**	**X**	**SD**	**df**	**α**	**t-cal**	**t-crit**	**Dec.**
Public	158	2.51	0.76	192	0.05	0.87	1.98	NS
Private	36	2.32	0.61					

The result shows that the calculated t-value is 0.87 while the critical t-value at 192 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level is 1.98. Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical t-value, the null hypothesis is therefore upheld. This implies that there is no significant difference in awareness of the ethical principles in counselling ethics between public and private school counsellors in Anambra State

Research Question three

The level of school counsellors' awareness of the counsellor's personal moral qualities in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table five: showing the percentage score school counsellors' awareness of the counsellor's personal moral qualities in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State

S/N	Items	Aware	%	Not aware	%
17	Ability to imagine and share another person's feelings and experiences	159	82	35	18
18	Commitment to being moral in dealings with others, personal straightforwardness, honesty and coherence.	167	86	27	14
19	The capacity to work with the client's concerns without being personally diminished	178	92	16	8
20	The ability to assess accurately and acknowledge one's own strengths and weaknesses	95	49	99	51
21	The consistent application of appropriate criteria to inform decisions and actions	92	47	102	53
22	Possession of sound judgement that informs practice	85	44	109	56
23	The capacity to act in spite of known fears, risks and uncertainty	63	32	131	68
24	The effective deployment of the skills and knowledge needed to do what is required	73	38	121	62
25	Showing appropriate esteem to others and their understanding of themselves	152	78	42	22
26	A personal commitment to consistency between what is professed and what is done	62	32	132	68
	Percentage average		58		42

Table 5 presents the opinions of respondents on level of school counsellors' awareness of the counsellor's personal moral qualities in counselling ethics of secondary schools in Anambra State. The table shows that out of the 194 school counsellors that participated in the study, 58% of the school counsellors were aware of the personal moral qualities in counselling ethics. Moreover, 42% of the school counsellors were not aware of the personal moral qualities in counselling ethics. Hence, majority of the school counsellors were aware of the personal moral qualities in counselling ethics.

Hypothesis three

There is no significant difference in awareness of the counsellor's personal moral qualities in counselling ethics between public and private school counsellors in Anambra State

Table Six: Summary of t-test on awareness of the counsellor's personal moral qualities in counselling ethics based on school type

School type	N	X	SD	df	α	t-cal	t-crit	Dec.
Public	158	2.13	0.43	192	0.05	0.92	0.98	NS
Private	36	2.32	0.61					

The result shows that the calculated t-value is 0.92 while the critical t-value at 192 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level is 1.98. Since the calculated t-value is less than the critical t-value, the null hypothesis is therefore upheld. This implies that there is no significant difference in awareness of the counsellor's personal moral qualities in counselling ethics between public and private school counsellors in Anambra State

Research Question four

The counsellors' perception of readiness to implement counselling ethics in secondary schools in Anambra State.

Table seven: showing the percentage score of counsellors' perception of readiness to implement counselling ethics in secondary schools in Anambra State.

Readiness	N	%
Ready	136	70
Not Sure	39	20
Not Ready	19	10

Table 7 shows that out of the 194 school counsellors that participated in the study, 136 students representing 70% of the school counsellors were ready to implement the counselling ethics as stated above. Besides, 39 school counsellors representing 20% of the respondents were not sure of the implementation of the counselling ethics and 10% were not ready to implement it. Hence, majority of the school counsellors were not ready to implement the counselling ethics as stated above.

Discussion of Findings

The result in research question one indicated that the majority of the school counsellors are not aware of the professional values in counselling ethics. The reason might be because, in most countries including Nigeria, ethical conduct in counselling is not part of the legal framework which outlines the importance of professional associations providing guidelines and codes of conduct for affiliated professionals. The study corroborates the work of Oluwatimilehin and Owoyele (2009) that reals that practicing counsellors are not always part of school staff. Moreover, the result in the corresponding hypothesis shows that there is no significant difference in awareness of the professional values in counselling ethics between public and private school counsellors in Anambra State

The result in research question two shows that the majority of the school counsellors were aware of the ethical principles in counselling ethics. Besides, some school counsellors were not aware of the ethical principles as stated in the questionnaire. It seems reasonable to assume that there still many obstacles that need to be addressed to ensure that counselling code of ethics is bought to the awareness of school counsellors. Also, the corresponding hypothesis shows that there is no significant difference in awareness of the ethical principles in counselling ethics between public and private school counsellors in Anambra State.

The study also revealed that majority of the school counsellors are ready to implement the counselling code of ethics in their professional services in secondary schools. This is because the very labeling of counselling as a helping professional suggests that one has assumed the responsibilities of the profession in providing for the students and serving the public. These responsibilities include acceptable standards of performance or competence, an accepted code of personal conduct in relationships with clients and the public and a commitment to contribute to the public well. A profession's commitment to appropriate ethical and legal standards is critical to the profession's earning, maintaining and deserving the public's trust. Adhering to such guidelines is, therefore, the responsibility of all school counsellors (Gibson & Mitchell, 2003).

Conclusion

This study investigated the school counsellors' awareness of the counselling ethics and their readiness to implement them in secondary schools in Anambra State. Following the findings of this study, the following conclusion is drawn:

- Majority of the school counsellors were not aware of the professional values in counselling ethics.
- Majority of the school counsellors were aware of the personal moral qualities in counselling ethics.
- Majority of the school counsellors were aware of the ethical principles in counselling ethics.
- Majority of the school counsellors were not ready to implement the counselling ethics

Recommendations

Sequel to the findings and discussions from the study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Government or its agencies managing Post Primary Schools should periodically organize in-service education programmes such as conferences, workshop, seminars etc for counsellors to up-date their knowledge and intimate them on counselling code of ethics.
2. Counsellors under the auspices of the Counselling association of Nigeria (CASSON), should be encouraged to produce Counselling Code of Ethics and make it available to school counsellors.

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