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at Century's End

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## THE HELP SEEKING BEHAVIOUR AND PATTERNS OF PRESENTING PROBLEMS OF CLIENTS: A FIVE - YEAR REVIEW OF THE SITUATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA COUNSELLING CENTRE

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### INTRODUCTION

Any educational setting including tertiary institutions should provide opportunities for the development of each student in different spheres of life including intellectual, cognitive, social and psychological development to mention a few.

Students in a learning environment may face other problems which may not be academic problems. Through counselling services, these students could be assisted in their over-all development if they are provided services that would enable them to learn about themselves, their environment and the methods for handling their roles and relationships. Counselling Centres in a University setting could also provide avenues to assist students with the decision-making process in educational and career matters as well as resolving interpersonal conflicts.

University Counselling Centres have a significant role to play in higher education as counselling services should be an integral part of the educational mission of any University. Such Centres will provide avenues for staff in the helping profession to assist students in their development. Counsellors are also advocates for student needs, programme development, teaching and consultation activities that support the efforts of the faculty and staff in improving the University environment (Kiracofe et al., 1994).

Counselling Centres within Universities could also provide specific services such as individual and group counselling and psychotherapy, crisis intervention, outreach programmes that could provide skills to students and consultation with other Units that are concerned with the welfare of students in general.

Depending on the goal of establishing such a Centre and the needs of the Institution in which it is located, such a Centre could also serve as a training site for students during practical and internship. Professionals in Counselling Centres could also conduct research on issues related to the behaviour of students in general and make available the findings of such research to each Institution.

### HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA COUNSELLING CENTRE

Early in 1989, the Vice Chancellor of the University of Botswana convened a meeting to discuss the need for counselling services at the University. A needs assessment was later conducted by Navin (1989) to determine the perceptions of the University of Botswana community with regards to counselling services. Navin's (1989) report indicated a strongly felt need for counselling services and that a Counselling Centre be established in the University.

In the pursuit of the establishment of a Counselling Centre, the Academic Planning Committee and the Senate of University of Botswana agreed that the plans for a Counselling Centre be included in the University's submission for the National Development Plan (NDP) 7 (1991/92-1996/97). A consultant, Dr. Paul A. Jarvis jointly sponsored by the University of Botswana and the Academic Specialist Programme of USIS was appointed in 1990 to advise the University on the establishment of the Centre.

Jarvis (1990) report as per the Terms of Reference for the consultation:

- 1) articulated the philosophy and rationale for the development of counselling services.
- 2) identified functions and services which the Counselling Centre should provide and the appropriate modality for their delivery.
- 3) advised on the appropriate organizational structure of the Counselling Centre.
- 4) provided analysis of the staffing requirements for the proposed Centre including the outline of job descriptions and required qualifications for each position.
- 5) provided analysis of the physical facilities and equipment required to establish and maintain the proposed Counselling Centre in the University.

- 6) provided estimate for recurrent budget requirements for the proposed Centre.
- 7) advised on the appropriate linkages with referral agencies.
- 8) provided a plan for implementation of the recommendations.
- 9) advised the University on the appropriate linkages between the Counselling Centre and the proposed academic programmes in Guidance and Counselling.
- 10) advised the University on other matters relevant to the development of the Counselling Centre.

In pursuit of the implementation plans for the establishment of the Counselling Centre, the Centre became operational on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February 1993, with the appointment of the writer as the Director of the Counselling Centre. This paper is thus a reflection on the challenges involved in starting a new Counselling Centre and putting in place both human and material resources needed to provide a comprehensive service in a University Counselling Centre.

#### THE HELP SEEKING BEHAVIOUR OF STUDENTS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA

The help seeking behaviour of students in a University Counselling Centre may depend on a number of variables some of which may include one or a combination of the following:

- i) Lack of awareness of the services available in such a Centre.
- ii) Lack of confidence in receiving help from such a Centre.
- iii) Fear of seeking help in such a Centre to avoid appearing incompetent to fellow students and others.
- iv) A pathy to seeking professional help.

Information on help seeking behaviour of students could be helpful in determining appropriate intervention strategies to assist students in seeking help. It is informative to determine the utilization of Campus Counselling Centres and in which problem areas are clients seeking help. Relevant information collected may be helpful in addressing issues faced by clients and the contributing factors to help seeking behaviour of different groups. Stone and Archer (1990) argue that University Counselling Centre must develop services

specifically designed to meet the needs of racial/ethnic minority students because of their specific needs. The situation at the University of Botswana may not be exactly similar to the one referred to Stone and Archer. Nevertheless, in a homogeneous group in terms of race as found at the University, there is the need to recognize various groups that may have problems seeking help.

Atkinson et al (1990) investigated the relationship between background variables such as acculturation, ethnicity, gender and problem concerns and help seeking. Atkinson and his colleagues found that acculturation was positively related to help seeking attitudes (Atkinson et al, 1990) and negatively related to willingness to seek help for specific problem concerns. That is, highly acculturated students were more likely to express positive help-seeking attitudes, but were likely to indicate a willingness to seek help than were less acculturated students (Gim et al. 1990).

Solberg, V., Ritsma, S, Davis, B.J., Tata, S.P. and Jolly, A. (1994) explored if Asian-American students' severity of problems and willingness to seek help from University Counselling Centres were related to previous counselling experience, gender and ethnicity. Results of their study indicated that previous counselling experience was related to higher ratings for substance abuse concerns and willingness to seek help from a University Counselling Centre to address academic, interpersonal and substance abuse concerns.

Staff at the University of Botswana Counselling Centre have observed that some clients visited the Centre with friends or preferred to participate in individual group guidance or group counselling rather than participate in individual counselling or psychotherapy. Clients visiting the Centre with friends had remarked that this action:

- i) gave them the confidence to seek help as they could not visit the Centre alone.
- ii) protected them from their colleagues identifying them as being incompetent to handle their issues, if they were seen going to the Centre alone.
- iii) would not single them out, as they were not sure of what the outcome of the visit would be in terms of administrative sanctions from the University for any misbehaviour expressed during counselling sessions.

Students need to be re-assured as to the confidential nature of counselling and would also need to know the importance or advantages of seeking professional help.

## PATTERNS OF PRESENTING PROBLEMS AT THE UNIVERSITY OF BOTSWANA COUNSELLING CENTRE

Counselling Centre practitioners for many years have also been interested in the problems that confront College or University students. A range of studies have been conducted to confirm that students who utilize services in such Centres, have a broad range of problems. For instance, on the basis of their review of research, Stone and Archer (1990) concluded that the level of psychopathology among Counselling Centre clients increased during the 1980s and likely would continue to do so in the 1990s, (Sharkin, 1997, Stone and Archer 1990).

The discussion of patterns of presenting problems at the University of Botswana would cover the period of 1993/94 to 1997/98 Academic sessions. It is felt that the coverage of a five year period of counselling services would provide sufficient time to determine the pattern of presenting problems in the Centre. It is also assumed that students at the University of Botswana would have been familiar with the Centre and the services available given the publicity of the Centre and its services since its inception.

The problems presented by students were collated from the reports submitted by each staff of the Counselling Centre annually which also formed part of the annual reports of counselling services provided in the Centre. The presented problems of students were analyzed using a modified Mooney Problem Checklist (College Form, 1950).

The problem areas were categorised as follows:

- i) physical and health
- ii) financial
- iii) social relations
- iv) sexual relations
- v) social-psychological
- vi) personal-psychological
- vii) morals and religion
- viii) home and family
- ix) future security and wellbeing
- x) academic and study and
- xi) university adjustment

## PROBLEMS PRESENTED BY STUDENTS DURING ACADEMIC SESSIONS

During 1993/94 Academic Session, 125 male students made 288 visits to the Centre compared to 189 female student who made 454 visits to the Centre. The total number of students who utilized the Centre was 314 students out of 4,518 students in the University, representing about 6.95% of the overall student population. Counselling services were provided by two members of staff.

The problem areas of most concern to the students were in the following order: academic and study, University adjustment, sexual relations and social relations. The number of visits recorded by students from various faculties were in this order: Sciences, Social Sciences, Humanities and Education.

During 1994/95 Academic Session, 756 visits were made by 324 male students and 908 visits were made by 349 female students. Six hundred and seventy three (673) students utilized counselling services out of 5,132 student population representing about 13.1% of the student population. Counselling services were provided by four staff members. The problem areas of most concern to students were in the following order: academic and study, future security and well being, university adjustment and sexual relations. The number of visits recorded by students from various faculties were in this order: Science, Social Sciences, Education and Humanities.

During 1995/96 Academic Session, 525 visits were made by 204 males and 699 visits were made by 293 females. Four hundred and ninety seven (497) students out of 6,360 student population, utilized counselling services in the Centre. This represented about 7.8% of the student population.

The problem areas of most concern to students were in the area of academic and study, University adjustment, future security and well being and sexual relations. Counselling services were provided by three counselling staff. The number of visits recorded by students from various faculties were in this order: Science, Social Sciences, Humanities and Education.

During the 1996/97 Academic Session, 620 visits were recorded by 278 male students compared to 448 visits recorded by 167 female students. That is 445 student out of 7,313 student population. This represented 6.09% of the student population. Counselling services were provided by three counselling staff.

The problem areas of most concern to students were in the following areas: academic study, personal-psychological, social psychological and sexual

relations. The number of visits recorded by students from various faculties were in this order: Science, Social Sciences, Humanities and Education.

Table 1 indicates the summary of problem areas of most concern to clients, from 1993/94 academic session to 1997/98 academic session.

Table 1: Problem area in order of frequency

	1993/94	1994/95	1995/96	1996/97	1997/98
Problem Area of Concern in order of frequency	Academic Study	Academic Study	Academic Study	Academic Study	Career Issues
	University Adjustment	Future Security & Well being	University Adjustment	Personal Psychological	Academic Study
	Sexual Relations	University Adjustment	Future Security & Well being	Social Psychological	Personal Psychological
	Social Relations	Sexual Relations	Sexual Relations	Sexual Relations	Sexual Relations

## DISCUSSION

In comparison to the whole University student population, the percentages of students that utilized services in the Centre from 1993/94 to 1997/98 academic session were 6.95%, 13.1%, 7.81%, 6.09% and 6.11% respectively. These percentages seemed to suggest the need for outreach programmes for students not utilizing services in the Centre. The Centre thus adopted the following strategies to reach out to students not utilizing services in the Centre in order to increase the utilization of counselling services to students.

### Intensified Publicity:

To intensify publicity about the services available, Centre Brochures were printed and distributed in places commonly used by students such as the Library, Refectory and Student Hostels. Leaflets about the Centre were also periodically distributed. The Centre also utilized the University Newsletter to periodically publicize its activities.

### Involvement of Students Representative Council (SRC):

Each session, staff of the Counselling Centre met with members of the SRC to explain the services available in the Centre and co-opted the SRC each session, as sources of dissemination of information about the services available in the Centre. The Centre also contributed articles on counselling issues in student publications.

### Peer Counselling Approach:

Notices were displayed for volunteer peer counsellors who could undergo rudimentary training in counselling skills. Such peer counsellors were to serve as contacts for clients who might not want to visit the Centre by themselves initially. Student Representatives in Hostels and Class Representatives for different academic programmes were also identified as possible peer counsellors. The Centre did not achieve much success with this approach. Efforts are being made to determine the lack of co-operation from students with the approach.

### Hostel Warden and Faculty Tutors:

The Centre relied on referrals from Hostel Wardens, for students who often violated hostel regulations or were involved with other misbehaviour in general. Similarly, the Centre met annually with Faculty Tutors in charge of academic programmes to establish working relationship. The Faculty Tutors were to identify students who missed lectures or whose academic performances were on the decline. Such students were referred to the Centre for follow-up.

### The Campus Clinic:

The Counselling Centre also collaborated with the Campus Clinic where services for medical/health problems were provided. Social-psychological or personal psychological/emotional problems identified in the Campus Clinic were referred to the Counselling Centre while health problems identified among clients visiting the Centre were referred to the Campus Clinic.

### Posters/Flyers

The Centre prepared periodic posters/flyers for students during each session. Such flyers were targeted to new students, examination periods or final year students seeking employment/further studies. The Centre also produced a number of flyers on different problem areas.

### IMPLICATIONS OF THE PRESENTED PROBLEMS

The Centre identified the problem areas of most concern to students during each session and planned a variety of preventative measures for such problem areas the following session. This was done through the provision seminars, group guidance and counselling for students in such problem areas.

The co-operation of Hostel Wardens, the University Security and Faculty Tutors in Academic Departments were usually sought in the identification of students at risk.

### VISION OF THE CENTRE

The University of Botswana Counselling Centre officially became the Careers and Counselling Centre with the restructure of the Student Affairs Division with effect from August, 1998. A Deputy Vice Chancellor was appointed for the Student Affairs Division and the Centre was mandated to provide comprehensive career services and counselling services.

The Centre is actively involved with HIV/AIDS issues within the University Community. It collaborates with other Units and Agencies with similar vision to assist clients in HIV/AIDS prevention. The Centre intends to submit for funding a project proposal titled: Counselling for HIV/AIDS Prevention: A participatory Peer-Education Programme to foster HIV/AIDS Preventative Behaviours Among University of Botswana Students.

It is envisaged that through the career services available from the Centre, students would be assisted to establish and pursue fulfilling careers, contribute economically to the society and adapt to the increasing complexity of the world of work. It is also anticipated that through the counselling services, students would acquire appropriate skills, develop positive attitudes, insights and understanding about themselves and their environment, which are necessary for optimal growth and development within and outside the University Community.

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