

ISSN 0189-0263

THE COUNSELLOR



VOLUME 4. NO 1 1982

JOURNAL OF THE
COUNSELLING ASSOCIATION OF NIGERIA

JULY 1982

COMMUNITY COUNSELLING: A PROPOSAL FOR COUNSELLING IN NIGERIA FOR THE 80s

Amos A. Alao

Nigeria, like many other African countries is advancing in many areas of development, there are efforts to advance technologically and educationally. Changes are also noticeable in the Socio-economic stratum of the individual. However, these changes, noticeable in the individuals and in the communities cannot be assumed to proceed at the same pace. Equally noticeable are some problems in our communities that seem to prevent the individual and the community at large from realizing their maximum potential.

Counselling, is one of the emerging professions that is contributing to the resolution of some of the problems faced by the individual daily, in the country. Counselling, as a helping profession, has its many approaches and procedures by which help is made available to the client. The case of community counselling is made here as an area to explore alongside with the other counselling areas taken into consideration in general counsellor preparation.

Hiemstra (1972) observed that, developing and providing a rationale for a definition of community is complicated because of the dynamic nature of society. He also pointed out the different notions that exist in the conception of community. Some of the notions include, the moral community and the human community to mention a few. Dentler (1968) on the other hand, sees the community as a place within which one finds all or most of the economic, political, religious and familial institutions around which people group to co-operate, compete or conflict.

The notion of community in this paper will be restricted to people, co-operating and co-existing, conscious of the problems in their immediate environment and ready for effective solution. The assumption here is that any set of individuals or groups, ready to co-exist and co-operate in their relationships could become a viable entity referred to, here, as the community. Thus, Community Counselling, in this paper is directed to the programmes and services that could be made available to such identified group(s). The identification of factors that could cause problems and affect relationship and the provision of the necessary interventions to remedy any short-coming there-of.

Lewis and Lewis (1977) identified a number of settings in which the Community Counsellor could work. Such settings include, educational institutions, mental health facilities, community agencies that deal with specific problems or special groups of consumers, rehabilitation agencies, human service agencies and correctional settings.

THE AFRICAN COMMUNITY

Working and interacting in groups is not alien to the African Culture. The notion of collective consciousness in Africa had been observed by Mbiti (1970) and Herskovits (1958). Although tribal differences could be observed sometimes in the Africans, these two scholars argued that these were minor in comparison to the binding nature of their communality. Nobles (1972) suggested that the guiding beliefs of these people supported their regional communality.

THE NIGERIAN COMMUNITY

The Nigerian Community has the same characteristics enumerated in the Traditional African Community. the notion of "collectiveness" is evident in the Nigerian Society. Group members in the community have co-operated on a number of "community projects" while members within the community have contributed financially and morally to the education of individuals within it. The Nigerian community like any other community is undergoing changes. The guidance role of some essential units within the community, need to be given consideration while discussing community counselling.

Essien (1978) observed that one aspect of the present day Nigerian Society which has been of great concern to the youth is the instability generated by the rapid changes that have been occurring in our ways of life. The rush, from rural to urban centres and the growing need of guidance to assist the individual, to identify alternatives is becoming apparent.

The youth in the Nigerian community receive guidance from these essential community units; the family, peer groups, school teachers and significant others.

THE FAMILY

The family, sometimes regarded as the home-teacher, is an essential community unit, the role of which could have positive or negative influence on the general mental health of its member. While looking at the social influences upon the development of persons, we are likely to recognize the important role the family plays. It is possible to develop family counselling programmes in the school system, to help children make a better adaptation to the learning environment through improved home-environments.

The importance of the structure and the organization of the family as a social group has to be recognized in the study of any community. The nature and the variation into Nigerian family is no exception to this rule.

White (1973) indicated that the family is the prime source for the establishment of healthy and growthful living as well as the breeding group for our pathology. Thus, realizing the importance of the family in personality formation and development, the Nigerian counsellor would need to explore the roles which our nuclear, polygamous or extended families, play in the total development of the individual in the community.

The Peer Group:

It is generally recognized that by age 8 or 9, the child interacts more and learns from his peers. About this period, the transfer of affiliation and loyalty from adults to the peer group is nearly complete. It is thus, not unlikely as parents, to observe the child, losing some of his or her affections and confiding nature in us. The urge to leave home to join other playmates may mean leaving home and class assignments undone. The behaviour of the child, should not be taken on a face value but with meaningful understanding and interaction.

The Classroom Teacher:

Many conditions in the Nigerian community also seem to suggest the need for guidance of pupils while enrolled in the school system. Guidance and Counselling services are essential at every level of schooling and education to cater for the affective development of the pupils in addition to their cognitive development.

Significant Others:

The Community Counsellor, would also need to be aware of the role of other significant 'community teachers' such as adults, the church, religious organizations, the mass media as well as recreational agencies. If it is assumed that the time spent by our youth in the home is on the decrease, then, the 'community teachers' need to be equipped with relevant and adequate community resources, programmes and facilities, to remedy any short coming of the other community units.

Social Problems:

The community is sometimes confronted with a number of other problems, some of which could be social. Dentler (1968) defined social problems as an event that is viewed as a deviation or a break down of, some social standard that groups believe must be upheld if human life, or the order of activities that maintains and gives meaning to life is to continue. Thus, identifying those social problems that exist in our communities and the awareness of the appropriate counselling interventions to remedy them could contribute to the healthy growth of the community.

Equally important to the Nigerian Counsellor is his or her awareness of the areas in Community Mental Health that could enhance his or her effectiveness in the community.

Bloom (1975) enumerated as one of the characteristics of the Community-Mental-Health, the tapping of new sources of workers in that area, rather than viewing the traditional professions of psychiatry, social work, psychiatric nursing and clinical psychology as the only suppliers of mental health personnel, the community-mental-health profession seeks to create new types of workers, such as the Community Counsellor. The Nigerian Counsellor would also need to be aware of programmes to prevent crisis and encourage development in the Community.

Furthermore, knowledge by the Nigerian Counsellor, of the religion and belief system of the people in the community, the power structure and counselling strategies for achieving change could make him or her an effective counsellor in the community.

Community Counselling Programme:

Thus, with the fore-gone rationale, the writer suggests the inclusion of Community Counselling as an area to be explored in our Nigerian Universities during the Counsellor Preparation and (or) as a refresher course for personnel already trained in Guidance & Counselling. Knowledge in Individual and Group Counselling is suggested as a pre-requisite to training in Community Counselling. The following contents are further suggested as areas to be explored while acquiring skill in Community Counselling

I. The Nigerian Family

- 1.1 Structure
- 1.2 Organization
- 1.3 Trends in the past and present
- 1.4 Strategies for the healthy family.

II. Social Problems and the community

- 2.1 Identification of problems
- 2.2 Possible causes
- 2.3 Possible solution.

III. Mental Health and the Community

- 3.1 Person - centered programmes & prevention of crisis
- 3.2 Family centered programmes and prevention of crisis
 - 3.21 Marital relationship
 - 3.22 Parent education - (Children behaviour, child rearing etc).
- 3.3 Society centered programmes
 - 3.31 Planning community projects
 - 3.32 Community activities
 - 3.33 Community education
 - 3.34 Social interaction

IV. 4.1 Religion and belief system in the Nigerian society

V. 5.1 Power structure in the Nigerian Urban and rural communities

5.2 Power structure and Decision making in the community

VI. 6.1 Counselling strategies for Achieving change in the community

THE NEED FOR COMMUNITY COUNSELLING

Community Counselling has its other advantages, as the cause and cure of the problems experienced by individuals could sometimes be found within the community. The individual, during the growth experience relies on his immediate environment, as a source of learning, acquisition of skills and general support and community counselling to some extent could create an environment free of psychological frustrations.

It is common knowledge that Guidance and Counselling which have been long established in other countries, seem to be relatively new and sometimes misunderstood in Nigeria. There is the possibility to reach a larger segment of Nigerian population through community counselling, by the very few, counsellors now in existence in Nigeria. As the country makes its strides in the 80s, knowledge of, and training in community counselling could be one of the ways to combat this shortage in personnel while efforts are being made to train others in the Counselling profession. Dealing with several people at the same time has its own advantage over the one - to one relationship.

Therefore, planning strategies to change the whole community through effective counselling could have more noticeable results as more clients could benefit and the community itself could provide a medium for 'try-out'. Furthermore, the few personnel now available in counselling, could extend their services to a large population through Community Counselling. Planning for a larger number of people undoubtedly increases the pool of helping resources.

Other advantages that could be derived from Community Counselling are the possibilities to provide both developmental and preventive services. Developmental services would include efforts to make individuals within the community learn a number of personal skills, through the provision of direct services or by making the environment itself suitable for individual growth.

The developmental approaches or programmes according to Morrill *et al* (1974) not only promote positive growth for those with problems but also for those who are about to have them. Thus, the preventive and the developmental programmes that could be made available in our communities would contribute to the positive growth of the society at large as it progresses in the 80s. An organized and planned programme to resolve problem both in our rural and urban communities is vital to the speedy development of the nation as a whole. It sounds logical that professionals, who offer services to individuals and groups, should also have responsibility to the community. Those in such helping profession, need to recognize the interplay between the individual and the environment, as the community appears to link individuals and groups together and the individuals and groups with the society.

Bennet *et al* (1966) suggested that the community counsellor would need to assess and modify the reciprocal relationships between individuals and the social systems in which they interact. The Nigerian society is undergoing changes in many facets and Community Counselling could be a viable counselling area to meet the different community needs now emerging.

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