

THE INFLUENCE OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING SERVICES AND STRATEGIES ON WOMEN EMPOWERMENT IN BENUE STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The study investigated the influence of Guidance and Counselling Services and Strategies on Women Empowerment in Benue State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The population of the study comprised 11,541 rural and urban widows. The sample size of the study was 360 respondents drawn from 3 Local Government Areas each, representing a Senatorial Zone. A research-designed questionnaire titled: Influence of Guidance and Counselling Services and Strategies on Women Empowerment (GCSS-Q) was validated by experts. The reliability of the instrument was established using Crobach Alpha with a reliability index of 0.73. Descriptive statistics was used for data collection. Mean Scores and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions while the t-test was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The result indicated that, guidance and counselling services and strategies help women to understand their self-worth and to exercise their right. The study concluded that guidance and counselling services are necessary for empowering women especially in Benue State. The study recommended among others that efforts should be made by the Government to train more Counsellors to enable them reach out to many communities to disseminate information on women empowerment.

Keywords: Guidance and Counselling, Services, Strategies, Women Empowerment

Introduction

Women precisely in communities of Benue State and Nigeria in general have been seen suffering unwarranted torture and deprivation in the name of widowhood practice which results in all forms of abuses, social and economic hardship, hence propelling the zeal for this study to be connected. Widowhood is one of the events in life, which women go through. It is the loss of husband, breadwinner and supporter. There is no doubt that widowhood is a big problem, which is affecting a large percentage of women today. As we all know, a highly dependent woman may find it very difficult carrying on the daily responsibilities of her family alone. This is because she has been used to her husband providing for the family. This in effect, explains why in most cases, the women will be too confused to know that she is supposed to come to terms with the fact that she can never bring her husband back to life, and as such, should start thinking on how to adjust to her new role as the head of the family (Shehu, 2015).

Guidance and counseling is the process of helping individuals discover and develop their educational, vocational, and psychological potentialities and thereby to achieve an optimal level of personal happiness and social usefulness. Counselling, is essentially democratic in that the assumptions underlying its theory and practice are first, that each individual has the right to shape his own destiny and, second, that members of the community are responsible for ensuring that each person's choice shall serve both his own interest and those of society (Olawoye, 2014). It is implicit in the philosophy

of counselling that those objectives are complementary rather than conflicting. Guidance, in this sense, is a pervasive activity in which many persons and organizations take part. It is afforded to individuals by their parents, relatives, friends and by the community at large through various educational, industrial, social, religious and political agencies and, particularly, through the press and broadcasting services.

Guidance and counselling services provide a broad spectrum of personnel services to the clients which will facilitate their growth and development at all levels of experiences. Therefore, the researcher looked at the key elements of the guidance as portrayed by Shertzer and Stone in Adikwu (2019) as follows:

Orientation service: This service can be interpreted as assistance given to individual or individuals that will make them understand and adjust to any environment or policy.

Appraisal service: This involves the use of test and non-test instruments to collect, analyse and interpret data on individuals. The information accruing from appraisal service helps individuals to understand themselves better.

Information service: This service gathers important information concerning educational and personal – social opportunities about a personality and his or her world.

Placement service: This service is geared towards the satisfactory adjustment of the individual to the next situation whether in school or on the job.

Counselling service: This service is offered in order to help individuals better understand their confused feelings, ideas, fears and hopes.

Assessment service: The assessment service is designed to collect, analyse and use a variety of objective and subjective personal, psychological, and social data about a person.

Research service: Through research, Counsellors discover relevant information that can improve learning and understanding. Research service should be an on-going process which professional Counsellors should embrace and encourage

Referral service: This is a special termination of contact and occurs when it is decided that another person or agency should be involve in helping process. By this, it is meant that referral service is rendered when the client has to be transferred to another helper or helping agency.

Follow-up and evaluation service: This service is design to ascertain the extent to which the guidance program previously carried out by the school is meeting the objectives for which it was established. This service enables students, counsellors and teachers to determine the effectiveness of any placement done.

Empowerment enhances the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. Central to this process are actions which both build individual and collective assets, and improve the efficiency and fairness of the organizational and institutional context which govern the use of these assets (World Bank, 2014). Empowerment, according to Oxfam in Azikiwe (2017), involves challenging oppression which compels millions of people to play part in their society in terms of which are inequitable or in ways which deny them their human right. The need for empowerment arises from the inability of an individual or a group of people to actualize their dreams and reach their greatest potentials due to artificial barriers created by individuals and other groups within the same society (Azikiwe, 2017).

A woman is an adult female human being. The term woman is also used sometimes to identify a female human regardless of age, as in phrases such as 'women's right" (Ijere, 2016). Womanhood is the period in a female's life after she has transitioned from girlhood. Many cultures have rites of passage to

symbolize a woman's coming of age, such as confirmation among some Christians or just the custom of special celebration of a special birthday, generally between the ages of twelve and twenty one years for a woman (Ijere, 2016).

Numerous empowerment strategies had been put in place to equip women, politically, economically and educationally in Nigeria. These strategies according to Okpoko (2014), include widening women's access to education, encouraging their full participation in cash economy, getting women to participate in politics and reviewing laws on status of women. The 1999 constitution provided promotion and protection of women's right in Nigeria. The Federal government adopted the national policy on women in July, 2000. This policy provided, inter-alia, for affirmative action to increase to 35 % women's representation in the legislative and executive arms of government. The Federal Government has also set up the National Women Development Centre as a parastatal to the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs. The Centre is primarily in-charge of research studies on women's issues (Woman Aid Collective, 2008).

Nigeria has evolved strategies to empower women politically, educationally and economically. Indeed, many states and towns that make up Nigeria have also benefited from these initiatives and it has not excluded Benue State. Some of these programmes are organized by women themselves, government and non-governmental bodies at community levels to support programmes at state, national and international levels. These initiatives include, formation of women organisations that engage in development-oriented activities to tackle social problems such as inequality in political, economic and education sectors, male dominance, maternal and child health, child marriage and other related problems. Other approaches to this initiative include economic empowerment which focuses on improving women's control over material resource. This could be achieved by organizing women for savings and increasing women access to credits, income generation, skills training and other related activities. These empowerment strategies also involve consciousness rising and accumulation of knowledge and ideas, for it is acknowledged that women empowerment requires awareness of complex factors causing women subordination. This is achieved through educational and other literacy related activities.

This study is therefore motivated by the plight of urban and rural widows in Benue State: It seeks to examine the level of illiteracy, poverty, inferiority complex and gender discrimination. Thus, influenced the need for guidance and counselling services and strategies on women empowerment in Benue state.

Statement of the Problem

In 2021, women population for Nigeria was 104 million which constitutes almost half of the entire country's population of 210 million (National Population Clock, 2021). This numerical strength has not been translated to equal treatment in the society. Apart from numerical strength, women have great potentials to evolve a new economic order, thereby helping in accelerating social, economic and political empowerment and consequently transforming the society into a better one (Adikelu, 2015). Nigerian women, in urban and rural areas are crucial factor in production. They are largely responsible for the production of crops, agro-based food processing, and preservation of crops and distribution of yields from centers to market in both urban and rural areas. Nigerian women are contributing their quota to the development of the nation, but these potentials seem not to have been fully tapped due to some constraints.

Despite their numerical strengths and sheer effort in food supply chain, disparities still exist between men and women in education, employment and income opportunities, and control over assets, personal

security and participation in the development process. This may be as a result of lingering constraints including poor economic condition of Nigerian women, lack of adequate legislation and policies to support the rights of women, unequal access to education, limited access to land, lack of assertiveness among women and others. Level of education, income level, and men's perception on the need for women's participation in development have been viewed as determining factors in widow's participation in developmental processes (Bisnath, 2017). This has led to various problems amongst the women folks, including sexually transmitted diseases, poverty, forced marriage, or even child/underage marriage, amongst others. Hence, there is need to empower women through guidance and counselling who may not have access to print or electronic media and most of who are illiterates.

Under-representation of Benue widows in educational, economic and political programmes could lead to serious setback in development and, thus, the need for women empowerment cannot be over emphasized. More so, empowerment involves raising consciousness and knowledge, and the ability to key into such programme, which could be achieved through guidance and counselling.

This study therefore, seeks to examine the influence of guidance and counselling services and strategies on women empowerment and their well-being across the urban and rural areas in Benue State.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to investigate the influence of guidance and counselling services and strategies on women empowerment in Benue State, Nigeria.

- i. identify guidance and counselling strategies employed for women empowerment in Benue State.
- ii. examine the influence of guidance and counselling services on women empowerment in Benue State.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised:

1. What are the guidance and counselling strategies available for women empowerment in Benue State?
2. What is the influence of guidance and counselling services on women empowerment in Benue State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested to determine whether guidance and counselling services and strategies have influence on empowerment of widows in Benue State.

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean score rating of urban and rural women on the factors that hinder guidance and counselling strategies available for women empowerment in Benue State

H₀₂: There is no significant difference between the mean score rating of urban and rural women on the influence of guidance and counselling services on women empowerment in Benue State.

Methodology

The study investigated influence of guidance and counselling services and strategies on women empowerment in Benue State, Nigeria. A descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study which was guided by two research questions and two null hypotheses. The population of the study was 11,541 urban and rural widows. 360 widows from the Society for Widows and Orphans were used as samples for the study. A research-designed questionnaire titled: Influence of Guidance and Counselling Services and Strategies on Women Empowerment (GCSS-Q) was validated by experts.

The reliability of the instrument was established using Cronbach Alpha with an overall reliability index 0.73. The questionnaire had 20 items structured on a four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (4 points), Agree (3 points), Disagree (2 points) and Strongly Disagree (1 point). Direct delivery and retrieval method was used by the researcher in administering the instrument. Mean Scores and standard deviation were used in answering the research questions, while the t-test was used in testing the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

The result indicated that guidance and counselling services help women to understand their self-worth and know their rights. Findings showed that counselling strategies on empowering women was possible through the use of local radio stations, local language and training of women peer educators among others. Women empowerment influences widows through knowledge of their rights and how to prevent violence against them while cultural and traditional beliefs as well as under-aged marriage were factors militating against empowerment of women in the area.

The study revealed that, an empowered widow; will empower others, will not discriminate against the less privilege, will be sincere in her dealings with others and will prevent violence against widows in the rural and urban areas under study.

Results

Research Question One: What are the guidance and counselling strategies available for women empowerment?

Table 1: Mean score rating on guidance and counselling strategies available for women empowerment.

S/N	Statement	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Counselling on local radio stations in local languages can be used to empower women.	2.93	0.88	Agreed
2.	Training of women peer educators can empower widows.	3.20	0.82	Agreed
3.	Visitation to women organisations by counsellors can be used to educate women.	3.31	0.84	Agreed
4.	Village community day for women can be used to Counsel women.	3.11	0.86	Agreed
5.	Use of counsellors to sensitise the women from village to village	3.21	0.82	Agreed
Sectional Mean/Standard Deviation		3.15	0.84	Agreed

No of widows = 360.

Analysis of data in table 1 indicates that the respondents are in agreement with the influence of guidance and counselling strategies on women empowerment in Benue State. The sectional mean of 3.15 showed a high level of agreement with statement towards the respondents’ uses of the guidance and counselling strategies. That, training of women peer educators can empower widows, use of Counsellors to sensitize women from village to villages and counselling through local radio stations in local languages.

Research Question Two: What is the influence of guidance and counselling services on women empowerment in Benue State?

Table 2: Mean score rating on guidance and counselling services on women empowerment in Benue State.

	Statement	N	Mean	SD	Decision
1.	Counselling helps women to understand their self-worth	360	3.30	0.85	Agreed
2.	Counselling helps women to know their right to make determined and positive choices	360	3.20	0.87	Agreed
3.	Counselling helps women to rightly assess resources and opportunities after empowerment	360	3.40	0.84	Agreed
4.	Counselling creates awareness to available economic opportunities	360	3.25	0.86	Agreed
5.	Counselling minimises inferiority complex among women	360	3.24	0.85	Agreed
Sectional Mean/Standard Deviation			3.29	0.84	Agreed

No of widows = 360.

Table 2 shows guidance and counselling services on women empowerment in Benue State. The sectional mean of 3.29 revealed that guidance and counselling services aided in on women empowerment in the study area. The respondents agreed to the statement that counselling; minimizes inferiority complex among women, create awareness to available economic opportunities, helps women to ascertain their rights and to understand their self-worth.

Hypotheses

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

H₀₁: There is no significant difference between the mean score rating of urban and rural women on the factors that hinder guidance and counselling strategies available for women empowerment in Benue State.

Table 3: t-test analysis of no significant difference in the mean score rating of urban and rural women on factors that hinder guidance and counselling strategies available for women empowerment of in Benue State.

Group	Mean	SD	Df	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value	Level of Sign	Decision
Urban	3.40	0.55	358	0.651	1.960	0.05	Accepted
Rural	3.11	0.73					

Table 3: The result of the t-test analysis revealed that calculated t-value is 0.651 while the critical t-value is 1.960. Since the calculated t-value of 0.651 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 358 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is also therefore accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference between urban and rural widow on the factors that hinder influence of guidance and counselling strategies available for women empowerment in Benue state.

Ho2: There is no significant difference between the mean score rating of urban and rural women on the influence of guidance and counselling services on women empowerment in Benue State.

Table 4: t-Test analysis of no significant difference between the mean score rating of urban and rural women on the Influence of guidance and counselling services on empowerment of in Benue State.

Group	Mean	SD	Df	Calculated t-value	Critical t-value	Level of Sign	Decision
Urban	3.33	0.54	358	0.262	1.960	0.05	Accepted
Rural	3.18	0.59					

Table 4: The result of the t-test analysis revealed that calculated t-value is 0.262 while the critical t-value is 1.960. Since the calculated t-value of 0.262 is less than the critical t-value of 1.960 at 358 degree of freedom and 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference between urban and rural women on the influence of guidance and counselling services for women empowerment in Benue state.

Discussion

The study found out that guidance and counselling services had an influence on women empowerment in Benue State through helping them to understand their rights, access various opportunities and how to minimize inferiority complex in the society. The above findings are in line with the result of Olaleye (2014), who in his work found that empowering women through guidance and counselling services provides them access to opportunities for economic progress. The findings are also supportive of the result of Akaegwu (2015), who also found out that women in Cross River State were empowered through access to opportunities to education and economic activities.

The study identified guidance and counselling strategies on women empowering in the area to include using local radio and local languages to disseminate information, training of women peer educators and visitation to widows organizations. Others include the use of village community day and Village to Village sensitization by counsellors. The findings above are in consonance with the result of Osadebe (2014), and Akachukwu (2015), who in their respective studies found out that using local radio and local language as counselling strategy helps to empower women for active participation in the community.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is concluded that guidance and counselling services are necessary for empowering women especially the widows in Benue State. This will help them to exercise their rights, protect themselves and provide them with opportunities for economic decisions towards alleviating their problems in the society.

The researcher therefore conclude that: guidance and counselling strategies will energize women to understand themselves and their worth towards contributing to the economic, social, and cultural orientation of the population under study.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Counsellors should organize seminars and workshops for women to create more awareness on the need to provide more counselling services to the widows’ for their empowerment in the society.

2. Since there is no significant difference in the mean score rating of rural and urban women on influence of guidance and counseling services and strategies on empowerment of widows, training and counselling on local radio stations should be used to empower widows.

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