

## PSYCHO-SOCIO VARIABLES INFLUENCING ETHICAL PRACTICES AMONG PRACTISING COUNSELLORS IN OYO STATE, NIGERIA

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### Abstract

The study investigated psycho-socio variables (counsellor self-efficacy, adversity quotients and professional commitment) influencing ethical practices among practising counsellors in Oyo State, Nigeria, using the descriptive survey design. Two hundred practising counsellors randomly selected from four zones in Oyo State were used for the study. Four standardized and validated scales (counsellor self-efficacy 0.87, adversity quotient 0.97, ethical practices 0.79, professional commitment 0.71) were administered to the participants to obtain data required. Two research hypotheses were tested in the study at 0.05 level of significance. The Pearson product moment correlation and multiple regression analysis were the main analyses in the study. The result from hypotheses showed that counsellor self-efficacy, adversity quotient, professional commitment had significant influence on ethical practices. The results also revealed that about 27.8% variance in the occurrence of ethical practices of the participants were accounted for by the combination of the independent variables. Based on the findings, it is concluded that participants' professional commitment, counsellors efficacy and adversity quotient are vital for effective professional ethics observance. It is recommended that stakeholders in the counselling profession organize appropriate strategies and policies that will enhance professional commitment of counsellors.

**Keywords:** Counsellor self-efficacy, Adversity quotient, Ethical practices, Professional Commitment

### Introduction

The extent to which unethical practices among practicing counsellors in Nigeria call for attention (Eze, 2014; Makinde, 2010; Egunyomi, 2008; Akinade, 2005). The rate at which practicing counsellors deviated from their professional role is quite alarming and adequate research is yet to be given due to other pressing issues. The discipline of counselling, relatively ancient in origin describes an important instrument of educational, social, personal and industrial transformation for any society. This is because the nature of counselling emphasizes a psychological helping relationship that pursues individuals' need for adaptive attitude and insight, self-exploring and maximizing potentials with the inclusion of an evaluated personal growth and development. Further, its characteristic technical expertise on the use of resources coupled with a justifiable demand for accountability favours years of successful evidence-based practice (Eze, 2014; Makinde, 2010) and solution-focused packages that have revolutionized many nations. Counselling is often perceived the heart of psychotherapy. Little wonder it is enthroned in the philosophy of education in Nigeria as relevant in the development of sound and effective citizens, fully integrated into the society (National Policy of Education, section 8; 1, 1999).

However, from a professional perspective based on theoretical underpinnings, its vast descriptions (Eze, 2014; Ugoji, 2009) bequeath the counsellor with an enormous role that only a properly trained, psychologically stable and morally conscious individual can undertake. Through the integration of theory, research, and practice, sensitivity to multicultural issues and with a broad range or predictive, the counsellor helps people improve their well-being, alleviate distress and maladjustment, resolve

crises, and increase their ability concerning living functioning lives. The counsellor can satisfy unfulfilled nurturing needs by rescuing people with problems, as well as participating in intimate relationships while always maintaining control (Makinde, 2010) with professional ethical precision vital for order.

Professional ethics are rules, regulations and codes of conduct that guide practices within a profession as well as the basis for quality delivery of services. Note that the basis for professional ethics is simply the quality delivery of services. As such, ethical standards have been delineated to describe the best practices of professionals and to ensure high quality of practice (Egunyomi, 2008). Professional ethics for counsellors generally include but are not limited to autonomy, normal efficiency, beneficence, justice, fidelity and veracity. These key ethical issues come with their corollaries making ethical expectations become more broad and complex with multicultural and geographical regions of the world. To this, it is believed that an understanding of the counsellors' self-efficacy, commitment and adversity quotient will provide more insight into their professional ethical practices.

For instance, counsellor self-efficacy being the focus of many kinds of research in the past couple of decades is defined as one's beliefs or judgments about his or her capabilities to effectively counsel a client soon (Tang et al., 2014; Egunyomi, 2008). The concept describes the degree to which a counsellor considers himself as capable of counselling activities. Larson and Daniel (2018) conceptualized counselling self-efficacy as encompassing three broad sub- domains of perceived ability to: perform basic helping skills; manage session tasks, and; negotiate challenging counselling situations and presenting issues. This corresponds with the theoretical position that counsellor self-efficacy is a primary mechanism between simply knowing how to counsel and executing effective counselling actions (Larson & Daniel, 2018).

Studies abound indicating that higher counselling self-efficacy is related to perseverance in the face of challenging counselling tasks and an increased ability to receive and incorporate evaluative feedback (Martinez & Smith, 2019; Adeyemo & Agokei, 2010). Hence, based on the strong positive relationship between counselling self-efficacy and counselling outcomes and the impact increased self-efficacy may have on reducing anxiety among professional counsellors, researchers have asserted that cultivating self-efficacy in counsellors needs to be a primary objective of counsellor training programmes (Martinez & Smith, 2019). In this light, professional counsellors are ethically charged with ensuring that they are competent to meet demanding required standards set.

Adversity Quotient is about how an individual responds to life, especially the tough ones. It measures how the individual responds and deals with everything, from everyday hassles to the big adversities that life can spring on the individual. According to Johnson and Wiedenfeld (2014) Adversity Quotient (AQ) is well-defined as one's capability to face and handle challenges and change them into opportunities to succeed. The phenomena have enjoyed recent studies across countries such as India, Indonesia, China, the Philippines, and Malaysia (Ahmad Zamri Khairani & Syed Mohammad Syed Abdullah, 2018; Bingquan, Weisheng, Udong. Wenxiu, 2019; Darmawan, Budiyo, & Pratiwi, 2019). In Nigeria, the counselling profession is relatively young and still budding hence the practitioners are faced with varied adversities ranging from the demand of the profession to the reality of their practice. Counsellors are expected to observe behaviour in any form, analyze motives, handle confrontations, reflect on feelings and experts at efficiently developing trusting and productive relationships. They are inspired to become knowledgeable generalists, renaissance scholars and devourers of truth in any palatable form, all in a beneficent model that would aid the unfolding of the abstract and mystery called the human mind. Hence, the counselling profession is about the most challenging emotional experience an individual can undertake with strict intense academic and clinical pressures that to have to be contained and exceeded, While coordinating their self in a full optimally functioning model in response to the client(s), counsellors are expected to systematically deal with varied spontaneous reactions as required by professional ethical standards.

In lieu of prior traditional counselling before the current western introduction, expectations of counsellors are often superficial and counterproductive to professional ethics. Is Numerous undocumented pieces of evidence suggest that mundane 'regular' misbehaviours Dressing greater

threats to the scientific enterprise of counselling than those caused by high-profile misconduct cases such as fraud. The resulting stress if unresolved produces issues and some emotional reactions that may interfere with their ability to think clearly and respond helpfully to clients. Adversity quotient reflects the science of resilience, attempts to measure the capability of an individual to handle adversities in life. The focus is not the adversity but the reaction of individuals towards the adversity which determines if it will bring disappointment, sadness, despair and hopelessness or happiness, growth and success for them. Further, according to Somaratne, Jayawardena and Perera (2017) adversity quotient consists of four dimensions which are control, ownership, reach, and endurance. These four pillars of Adversity Quotient suggest that higher levels of these cognitive dimensions contribute to better performances in the face of adversity (Hung and Chin, 2013). Individuals having high adversity quotient continue to move forward successfully and keep rising in their life as they can endure considerable adversities.

Commitment can be described as being willing to give time and energy to something that is believed in, or a promise to do something and an act of binding oneself intellectually or emotionally to a course of action. Professional commitment on the other hand is seen as individuals' perspective towards their profession and the motivation that they have to stay in their job (Gallagher & Mclean, 2001). For counselling professionals' commitment is explained by adherence to principles of ethical practice, effective interaction with clients, reliability, competence, commitment to continuous improvement of competence, pride in the profession, appearance, flexibility and good behaviour outside work. Several models have been suggested to describe professional commitment in the workplace. Nonetheless, all models of professional commitment have implications for an employee's staying with (at leaving) their profession. Bagraim, (2003) noted that common to the models is the understanding that commitment is a psychological state that (a) characterized the employee relationship with their profession and (b) has implications for the employee's decision to continue or discontinue membership of their profession.

Based on this with regards to counselling professional commitment, it could be said that the quality of counselling delivered depends a great deal on the level of counsellors' involvement concerning the profession and the professional contentment that one feels. Hence, with levels of professional commitment, it is most likely that there would be adherence to professional ethics. For instance, Garbarino and Johnson (1999) offer a further refinement of the 'commitment trust theory'. They suggest that commitment and trust are important in studies revealing factors that might affect professional commitment could be physical, cultural predicting the future behaviour of high relational (loyal and consistent) clients.

Moreso, regulatory factors, personal background, organizational support and commitment, salary levels, degree of autonomy, overwork, levels of stress in the work, gender, educational achievement, diversity of roles occupied, values and attitudes towards the job (Clausen & Borg, 2010; Shier & Graham, 2010).

In summary, being a counsellor is an intellectually and emotionally challenging task (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003) which could breed anxiety. This anxiety, in turn, can lead to impaired clinical judgment and performance (Skovholt & Ronnestad, 2003; Urbani, Smith, Maddux, Smaby, Torres-Rivera, & Crews, 2002). Larson (1998) suggests that training programs grounded in self-efficacy theory hold promise for addressing these issues as well as cultivating counsellors who can successfully meet the challenges of the profession. Hence, as efficacy and commitment among other counselling attributes and skills are vital to the outcome of counselling sessions, there is a great need to pay close attention to rules and regulations that describe how best to be ready to counsel, particularly with practicing counsellors.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The main purpose of this study was to address an important gap in the counsellor education literature by investigating ;

1. the relationships between counsellor self-efficacy, adversity quotient, professional and the ethical practices of practising counsellors.
2. a predictive relationship between professional commitment, counselling self-efficacy, adversity

quotient and professional ethics in counselling.

### **Hypotheses**

The following research hypotheses were tested in the study.

- i. There will be no relationships between counsellor self-efficacy, adversity quotient, professional and the ethical practices of practising counsellors.
- ii. There will be no predictive relationship between professional commitment, counselling self-efficacy, adversity quotient and professional ethics in counselling

### **Methodology**

The survey design was adopted in this study. This approach does not involve the manipulation of any of the variables in the study. They are studied as they currently exist in the repertoire of the participants. Based on convenience and availability, two hundred (200) participants were recruited for the study. The participants were practising professional counsellors carrying out their practices in schools and their enterprise. In addition, 84 (66.7%) of the participants were female, and 42(33.3%) were male. Their participant's ages range from 27years to 38years with a mean age was 33.72 years (SD = 11.88). The Counsellor Commitment Scale: The scale is an adapted version of the career commitment scale developed and validated by Carson and Bedeian (1994), based on the conceptualization and definition of career commitment as one motivation to work in a chosen vacation. This implies high counselling commitment while decreasing scores imply the Converse. The scale consists of twelve (12) items designed in a 5-point Likert format. Increasing Scores has reported internal consistency of 0.76 and a reliability coefficient of 0.87 using a two-week test-re-test procedure. The Counsellor Activity Self Efficacy Scale (CASES): The scale is a 21 item scale adapted from the original 41 items self-report measure of counselling self-efficacy developed by Lent et al. (2003). The original scale consists of a 10- point Likert-type scale in which respondents rate their confidence from 0 (no confidence at all) to 9 (complete competence). The CASES has been reported to have a high reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.97 (Lent et al 2003). A pilot test with pre-service counsellors from a university other than those in study produced a scale alpha of 0.62.

Adversity Quotient scale (AQ); the adopted version of adversity quotient developed by Mohd & Ahmad & Nordin (2020) was used. The scale has 15 items that measure the four main constructs of AQ, namely Control, Ownership, Reach, and Endurance, and the items were based on a four-point Likert Scale. The items also fulfilled all of the main assumptions of Research including items fit, unidimensionality, local independence, item polarity, and gender differential item functioning analysis. This instrument can help the stakeholders identify the person with problematic AQ for guidance besides guiding the practitioners to holistically investigate the pattern of AQ. The Cronbach's alpha (CA) was 0.79 and considered satisfactory for internal consistency. The adapted version has also demonstrated a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.72.

Professional Ethics Observance scale (PEOS); is a 12-item self-developed scale that assesses the participants' perceptions of their capability to demonstrate and fully engage in expected and provided rules and regulations in counselling without hindrance as well as providing effective counselling to client satisfaction. The scale contains twenty items scored on a 4 point Likert-type scale (high scores = high professional ethics observance). Internal consistency, using Cronbach's alpha coefficient is .71.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

Data was analyzed, using Pearson Product Moment Correlation to determine the relationship among the variables investigated.

### **Results**

#### **Hypothesis One**

There will be no relationships between counsellor self-efficacy, adversity quotient, professional and the ethical practices of practising counsellors.

**Table 1:** Correlation matrix showing the relationship between study variables

Variables	Mean( $\bar{x}$ )	S.D	1	2	3	4
Professional ethics	37.73	9.21	1.00			
Counsellor self-efficacy	145.17	11.71	.34	1.00		
Adversity quotient	46.70	11.94	.37	.23	1.00	
Professional commitment	34.61	7.63	.41	.47	.39	1.00

The above table shows there are significant negative relationships among the four variables in the study with professional commitment and professional ethics being the most potent having the strongest relationship at an r-value of -0.41.

### Research Hypothesis Two:

There will be no predictive relationship between professional commitment, counselling self-efficacy, adversity quotient and professional ethics in counselling.

### Summary of Regression Analysis between predictor Variables and Professional ethics

	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj R <sup>2</sup>		Sig.
	0.528	.278			
Predictors			F-RATIO	Beta	T
Counsellor self-efficacy			.210	3.038	.003
Adversity quotient			1.56	2.458	0.15
Professional commitment			.414	7.757	.000

Going by the result presented in table 2, the three independent variables (counselor self-efficacy, professional commitment and adversity quotient), jointly yielded a coefficient of multiple regression (R) of 0.528, a multiple correlation square (R<sup>2</sup>) of 0.278 and an adjusted multiple correlation square (R<sup>2</sup>) of 0.277. This shows that 27.7% of the total variance in professional ethics observance among the participants is accounted for by the combination of the three independent variables. The table as well indicates that the analysis of variance of the multiple regression data produced an F-ratio value which was significant at 0.05 level of [F(3,299)= 80.282, P<0.05]. The findings thus, confirm the influence of professional commitment, counsellor self-efficacy and adversity quotient on professional ethics observance.

### Discussion of Findings

The analysis of relationship among professional commitment, counselling self-efficacy, adversity quotient and professional ethics observance as shown in the correlation matrix of table 1 indicates that there is a significant positive correlation between the three independent variables and the criterion measure. This suggests that as the participants among professional commitment, counselling self-efficacy, adversity quotient increases their adherence to professional ethics increases.

The multiple regression analysis in Table 2 shows that professional commitment, counselling self-efficacy, adversity quotient could significantly predict adherence to professional ethics observance of the participants. The magnitude of this relationship in predicting the adherence to professional ethics observance of professional counsellors is reflected in the values of coefficient of multiple R (.278) and multiple R adjusted (.277) as shown in table 2. Thus, it can be said that 27.7% of the total variance in the adherence to professional ethics observance of counsellors is accounted for by the combination of professional commitment, counselling self-efficacy, adversity quotient. The F-ratio value [F(3,299)= 80.282, P<0.05] which is significant at 0.05 level further attests to the fact that the predictive capacity of the independent variables is not due to chance factors.

Concerning the extent to which each of the three independent variables contributes to the prediction, it could be ascertained from table 2 professional commitment is the most potent predictor in this study. Previous researches (Burton & O'Reilly, 2004; Lam, 2011; Roach& Sauermann, 2010) have shown professional commitment to be explained by strong intrinsic motivation to the work itself, which the



profession represents. As such, Hunter and Curallba, (2016) acknowledged that professional commitment describes an individual loyalty to a chosen career, colleagues doing similar work, and the professional norms agreed upon by that group of colleagues. The professional norms agreed upon by that group of colleagues forms the criteria for professional ethics. Hence, the results indicate the professional commitment provides a theoretical explanation that the effort to increase adherence to professional ethics focused at the level of professional commitment may indeed be worthwhile. Notably, high professional commitment concerning specific professional settings may lead individuals to approach that setting more. Hence, there is a contention that a multidimensional understanding of professional commitment could have important implications for understanding the psychological bond between a professional and their particular profession. The current finding indicates that professional commitment accounts for a large percentage of the adherence to professional ethics and should not be considered inimical at any instance.

Counsellor self-efficacy is the next predictor of adherence to professional ethics among the participants. The findings of this study further affirm the reports that self-efficacy is a determining factor for behavioural intentions and performance. It is noted that higher counselling self-efficacy is related to perseverance in the face of challenging counselling tasks and an increased ability to receive and incorporate evaluative feedback (Adeyemo & Agokei, 2010; Larson & Daniels, 1998). The implication is that with high counsellor self-efficacy among professional counsellors there is an increasing tendency for effective adherence to professional ethics. Furthermore, the concept of counsellor self-efficacy is highly germane to the understanding and application of counselling skills, an endeavour that ensures adherence to professional ethics. Hence, Bandura's philosophy of the self-efficacy construct included his theory that self-efficacy beliefs affect how people think, act, feel and motivate themselves concerning all aspects of their lives. The finding, therefore, affirms the instance that counsellor self-efficacy is central to the study of professional performance and adherence to ethics. This submission is valid in this instance.

The investigation also reveals that adversity quotient is a significant predictor of adherence to professional ethics observance. The counselling profession is besieged by vast cultural, social and psychological challenges that adherence to ethics does not necessarily reduce its challenge but place a control. Hence, it is understandable that Seeing and staying strong beyond even enormous difficulties an essential skill for maintaining hope such as the Adversity quotient could relate to the occurrence of professional ethics observance. Prior studies in this regard show AQ as a good predictor of compliance (Ahmad Zamri Khairani & Syed Mohammad Syed Abdullah, 2018; Bingquan, Weisheng, Xudong, & Wenxiu, 2019; Darmawan, Budiyo, & Pratiwi, 2019). People who have high AQ tend to often be able to clearly understand the reasons for their failure caused by adversity and are willing to assume all responsibilities. They can take effective actions on time and to learn from their mistakes and be neither elated by success nor disturbed by failure. A focused person concentrates on a limited number of goals but strives hard to reach them. The finding, therefore, affirms the instance that adversity quotient is central to the study of professional performance and adherence to ethics. This submission is valid in this instance.

## Conclusion

Becoming a professional counsellor has been seen explained to be complex, developmental a hectic. Professional counsellors do not exist and or work in a vacuum. The profession like every other organized profession is guided by varied multiplicity and corollaries of rules and regulations, In most cases, the inventory of these rules are simply corollaries of specific major ones based on cultural, religious, economic. social and even political inclinations. With these ethics come challenges that tends to make the professional take the risk of bending the rules to suit situations. The same applies to the counselling profession such that counsellors face the same kind of pressures about ethics as to other professionals. Hence, it is therefore important to understand the factors that make professionals conform to professionalism.

Be more guided by professional ethics, regardless of the factors that may subsequently challenge their remaining firm to the rules. The findings of this study suggest that professional commitment, counsellor

self-efficacy and adversity quotient can be viewed as temporal reference points that guide adherence to professional ethics among Counsellors, Taken together, the results show that the three independent variables account for a large percentage of the adherence to professional ethics and may influence other antecedent variables on professional behaviours. Possibly, the most important finding of this study is a general conclusion that, for these participants, professional commitment, counselor efficacy and adversity quotient are vital for effective professional ethics observance.

### Recommendations

1. Encouraging, counsellor self-efficacy, adversity quotient and strengthening professional commitment among counsellors would build the necessary confidence to become effective professionals.
2. Fostering professional ethic observance through the mechanisms of professional commitment, counsellor self-efficacy and adversity quotient appears to have an important role to play in counsellor development
3. Appropriate strategies and policies for enhancing professional commitment. counsellor self-efficacy and adversity quotient training would be of immense benefits to professional counsellors.
4. Synergizing these variables (professional commitment, counsellor self-efficacy and adversity quotient) in a training programme for counsellors targeting professional ethical practices in counselling is promising. Such training would also enable them to cope with the risk associated with professional practices and enhance their ethical observance.

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