

COUNSELLING PRACTICES AS A BENCH-MARK FOR BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION – IMPLICATION FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT-Human society today is highly characterized by moral decadence. This phenomenon is mostly perpetuated by youths who are the bedrock of any society. In recognition of the pivotal role of youths in sustainable development, this paper had examined counselling practices as a bench-mark for behaviour modification – implication for youth development. The paper examined counseling, behavior modification and its characteristics as well as behavior modification approaches. The paper pointed out the counseling practices, principles and approaches to counseling that are relevant for behavior modification. Also, it examined the principles of behavior modification, which are instrumental to youth development and their effective functioning in society.

Keywords: Counselling practices, bench-mark, behaviour modification, – implication, youth development,

INTRODUCTION

In the world today, the society is highly characterized by moral decadence owing to the fact that people welcomes immoral behavior without shame or remorse. Youths are the pivotal organ and fulcrum of every human society (Uzoigwe, 2013). They are the bedrock of any society. Youths comprise of all young people between the ages of eighteen (18) and forty (40) years, who are citizens of the federal republic of Nigeria (National Youth Policy, 2005). Youths in any society are known to be the leaders of tomorrow. Therefore, their role in sustainable development cannot be over-emphasized. But they have been given less attention by some authorities towards integrating them into the process of national development.

It is in recognition of the role of young people in sustainable development that the United Nations (1985) created the consciousness in many nations of the world by declaring the year (1985) an international youth year for development and peace. According to Lawson (2000) Sustainable Youth Development (SYD) refers to intentional efforts of other youths, adults, communities, NGOs and government agencies towards providing opportunities for youths to enhance their interest, skills and abilities into their adulthoods. It is the process through which young people acquire the cognitive, social, economic skills and abilities required for them to function affectively in society (Rayares, 2002).

However, the youths have over the years neglected their role in sustainable development and abandoned the ethics and values of the society. Instead, many of them engaged in all manner of deviant behavior that bring shame and economic backwardness to the society. Youths nowadays

commit all manner of deviant behaviours including drug abuse, bribery and corruption, sexual promiscuity and prostitution, armed robbery, gangsterism/cultism, drug addiction, indecent dressing, lawlessness, terrorism, kidnapping, civil unrest, and a host of other criminal behaviours to mention but a few (Aweda, 2009; Idensi, 2010).

These deviant behaviours by youths do not only affect one country. The menaces have spread to almost every aspect of society and this has a direct negative impact on the society. Several measures have been put in place to tackle the menace of deviant behaviours by youths. Despite these measures put in place by government, acts of prostitution, drug abuse, cultism, bribery and corruption, sexual promiscuity and prostitution, armed robbery, gangsterism/cultism, drug addiction, indecent dressing, lawlessness, terrorism, kidnapping, civil unrest have continued to increase. Cult groups and their unscrupulous activities have continued unabated (Ogunife, 2003), drug use among citizens have continued to increase (Nwaogu, 2010), prostitution has been on the increase (Bonke, 2006) and every other criminal behaviours including murder, rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny/theft, serious motor vehicle offenses with dangerous consequences, arson and hate crimes.

The reasons for deviant behavior among youths have always been attributed to youth unemployment. Hence, the Nigerian government had over the years embarked on several programmes aimed at economic development and empowerment of the citizenry, with the youths as the target group (Omoruyi & Osunde, 2004). Some of these programmes include: the National Poverty Eradication Programme (NAPEP), National Directorate for Employment Scheme (NDE), National Youth Empowerment Scheme (NYES) and most recently the 'YOU WIN' youth empowerment programme introduced by the Goodluck Jonathan's administration. In the midst of all of these, little attention had been given to youth counselling.

Counseling is the act of assisting a client to have a positive perception about things. Counselling service aims at making the client understand himself better by providing solutions to the client's immediate problem (s) by maintaining personal stability in educational, vocational, personal/social aspects. Youths indulgence in deviant behaviours implies that they have behavioural problems which only counseling can solve. In this paper, counselling practices as a benchmark for behaviour modification – implication for youth development will be examined.

CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

The Concept of Counselling

The term counselling was earlier associated with serious personal problems such as alcohol dependency and marital breakdown (Tony, 2005). In recent years however, the term has been widely used in different spheres of life including, education, management, vocation and many others. Counseling is the act of assisting a client to have a positive perception about things. It aims to assist the client to possibly perceive things from a different point of view from what the initially perceive it, to enable the client function effectively. Counseling can enable a client to develop positive feelings, experiences and behaviours that would facilitate positive change.

In the opinion of Roy (2011), counselling services are offered to a person that is undergoing a problem and deserves professional assistance to enable him overcome such problem. She maintained that such a problem could keep the individual disturbed and under tension; unless resolved, the development of this individual will continue to be hampered. Counseling therefore is a specialized service carried out by professionals or trained personnel in personality development and in the act of handling exceptional individuals or groups.

As explained by Willey and Andrew cited in Roy (2011), counseling is a process involving two individuals, one seeking assistance and the other a professionally trained person helped solved

problems to orient and direct him to words a goals. Which needs to his maximum development and growth? Counseling services are therefore required for individuals having developmental problems because of the handicap they suffer in any area of emotional either because of hereditary factors or environment conditions.

Adegoke (2004) opined that counselling is the heart of the body of structure known as guidance. To Adebowale (2012), counselling service aims at making the client understand himself better by providing solutions to the client's immediate problem (s) by maintaining personal stability in educational, vocational, personal/social aspects. Hence, the students' problems in these areas can easily be solved if only the individual student can open up, ready to be helped and participate fully in solving the problem at hand (Adebowale, 2012).

The Concept of Behavior Modification

Behavior in a broad sense refers to overt behavior that is readily observable, covert behavior such as thoughts that are generally inferred from what the person tells us, various emotions, and subtle activity of the nervous system. In all cases we define the behaviors as objectively as possible within the confines of the practicality of the situation and the limits of our technology.

Behavior modification, as the name implies, is concerned with behavior; it is the application of experimentally established principles of behavior to problems of behavior. Behavior modification is therapeutic approach that is based on conditioning in order to change or modification behavior. It is an empirically demonstrated behavior change techniques aimed at increasing or decreasing the frequency of behaviors. Behavior modification alters an individual's behaviors and reactions to stimuli through positive and negative reinforcement of adaptive behavior and/or the reduction of behavior through its extinction, punishment and/or satiation. Behavior modification is a therapeutic technique that has its root from the work of B.F. Skinner, a famous psychologist who is today regarded as the "Father of Behaviorism." Skinner's theory of operant conditioning holds that behavior is governed by reinforcement (rewarding desired behavior) and punishment (punishing undesirable behavior) stimuli.

Thus, behavior modification is similar to operant conditioning and based on the principles of operant conditioning. Behavior modification is now known as Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) which is more analytical than it used to be. The aim of behavior modification is to extinguish, or stop or replace an unwanted behavior with a desired behavior. Behavior modification involves making specific behavior occur more or less often by systematically managing its cues and consequences (Boundless Business, 2015). In behavior modification, extinction eliminates the incentive for unwanted behavior by withholding the expected response.

Behavior modification relies on a form of learning known as conditioning. There are two major types of conditioning - classical and operant conditioning. Classical conditioning relies on a particular stimulus or signal. An example of this would be if a family member came to the kitchen every time you baked cookies because of the delicious smell. The second type is known as operant conditioning, which involves using a system of rewards and/or punishments. Dog trainers use this technique all the time when they reward a dog with a special treat after they obey a command. Behavior modification was developed from these theories because they supported the idea that just as behaviors can be learned, they also can be unlearned. As a result, many different techniques were developed to either assist in eliciting a behavior or stopping it. This is how behavior modification was formed.

Behavior modification arose from the school of psychology called *behaviorism*, an approach that suggests the study of psychology should emphasize the understanding, prediction, and control of behavior. Behavior modification had been widely used by scholars such as Edward Thorndike

and Joseph Wolpe. The term was frequently used by Edward Thorndike in his 1911 article titled "Provisional Laws of Acquired Behavior or Learning" (Martin & Pear, 2007). Furthermore, the term was used by Joseph Wolpe and his research group in the 1940s and 1950s the term was used (O'Donohue & Ferguson, 2006). Since then, behavior modification has strictly come to be referred to approaches for increasing adaptive and desirable behavior through reinforcement and decreasing maladaptive and undesirable behavior through extinction or punishment.

Behavior Modification often is helpful for individuals who have compulsive behaviors, children with aggressive behaviors, and children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Counselors and behavior therapists assist clients in constructing desired behaviors by extinguish unwanted behaviors using the principles of reinforcement (Mcfield, 2009).

CHARACTERISTICS OF BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

According to Cates (2007), behavior modification has the following characteristics:

- behavior modification techniques are often applied (not theoretical) by individuals in everyday life.
- Behavior modification techniques are based on research on learning
- behavior modification emphasizes scientific method
- In the process of behavior modification accountability is placed on everyone involved.

In the opinion of Miltenberger (2002) behavior modification has the following characteristics:

- behavior modification procedures are designed to change behavior
- they are guided by theory and philosophy of behaviourism
- behavior modification procedures are based on behavioral principles
- behavior modification procedures are involves specific changes in environmental events that are functionally related to the behavior.
- behavior modification deemphasize past events as causes of behavior

In addition, behavior involves actions not labels, involves physical dimensions such as frequency, intensity, duration and latency, can be observed, described and recorded, has an impact on the physical and/or social environment, is lawful and may be overt or covert. Therefore behavior modification is characterized by the following:

- Focus on behavior Excesses, Deficits and Appropriate circumstances
 - Based on basic behavioral principles
 - Emphasis current environmental events – Antecedents and consequences
 - Procedures are clearly described
 - Measurement of both Immediate and long term behavior change
 - Little emphasis on past (except for reinforcement histories)
 - Rejection of 'underlying causes' – Explanatory fictions
- Medical model vs. behavioral model

THE NEED FOR BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION IN SOCIETY

The society is today characterized by moral degradation where immoral behaviours like bribery and corruption, sexual promiscuity and prostitution, armed robbery, gangsterism/cultism, drug addiction, indecent dressing, lawlessness, terrorism, kidnapping, civil unrest, and a host of other criminal behaviours have become the order of the day. To worsen the situation, religion that was suppose to prepare the minds of young people so that they eschew evil and learn to do what is right is in crises of moral decadence. Several scholarly works like those of Aweda (2009), Idensi (2010) Ugwueye (2002), Obiora (1999), Iheanacho (2010), Ejizu (2008), Uwaegbute (2013) as enumerated by Uwaegbute (2015) have all decried the rampart cases of moral decadence among Christians in

Nigeria, pointed out corruption, criminality, sexual immorality, deception, injustice etc as problems that have characterized contemporary Christianity.

On the other hand, Islamic religion has in recent years become a fertile ground for insurgency and terrorism. Right from the September 11th 2001 bombing of the world trade centre in the United States of America by Usama Bin Laden, there have being global waves of violence and terrorism across the middle east in particular and the world at large. Nigeria as a country has witnessed these kind of religious violence through the actions of the deadly “Boko Haram” sect –a group that is against Western Education and civilization.

APPROACHES TO BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

Behavior modification techniques as stated by Huitt and Hummel (1999) are aimed at achieving the following:

- Develop a new behavior: To teach a child to act in a manner in which he has seldom or never before behaved, reward successive steps to the final behavior (also called shaping).
- Strengthen a behavior: To encourage a child to continue performing an established behavior with few or no rewards, gradually require a longer time period or more correct responses before a correct behavior is rewarded.
- Maintain an established behavior: To change reinforcers when a previously effective reward is no longer controlling behavior, present it just before (or as soon as possible to) the time you present the new, hopefully more effective reward.
- Stop inappropriate behavior: To stop a child from acting in a particular way, you may arrange conditions so that he receives no rewards following the undesired act.
- Modify emotional behavior: To teach the client to avoid certain types of situations, simultaneously present to the child the situation to be avoided (or some representation of it) and some aversive condition (or its representation). To help a child overcome his fear of a particular situation, gradually increase his exposure to the feared situation while he is otherwise comfortable, relaxed, secure or rewarded (Huitt & Hummel, 1999).

Behavior modification is not concerned about understand the origin, why or how a particular behavior is being exhibited. Rather, behavior modification focuses on modifying the behavior in order to bring about positive change. Behavior Modification techniques can be used with both children and adults and often is used in conjunction with other treatments such as Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (adults) and Play Therapy (children). Behavior modification just like relies on the following: reinforcement (positive and negative), punishment (positive and negative), extinction, shaping, fading and chaining (Martin & Pear, 2007), flooding, systematic desensitization and aversion therapy.

Reinforcement (Positive and Negative)

Positive reinforcement: Positive reinforcement is a widely used behavior modification technique that encourages certain behaviors through a system of rewards. It is achieved by pairing a positive stimulus to a behavior. In behavior therapy, it is common for the therapist to draw up a contract with the client establishing the terms of the reward system.

Negative Reinforcement: Negative reinforcement is the opposite of positive reinforcement. It is the pairing of a behavior to the removal of a negative stimulus. Negative reinforcement is a method of training that uses a negative reinforcer. A negative reinforcer is an event or behavior whose reinforcing properties are associated with its removal. A common example of this is being on time for work or making sure work is done correctly to avoid disciplinary action from a supervisor. In this case, disciplinary action is the negative reinforcer and, of course, getting to work on time or doing work assignments correctly is the desired behavior.

Punishment (Positive and Negative): In addition to achieving desirable behavior, behavior modification can also discourage undesirable behavior through punishment. Punishment is the application of an aversive or unpleasant stimulus in reaction to a particular behavior. It is designed to weaken behaviors by pairing an unpleasant stimulus to a behavior. There are two types of punishment—positive and negative punishment. When misused, more aversive punishment can lead to affective (emotional) disorders, as well as to the receiver of the punishment increasingly trying to avoid the punishment.

Extinction: In behavior modification, extinction eliminates the incentive for unwanted behavior by taking away the reward for that behavior. An example of this is using time-out, in which a child is separated from the group when he or she misbehaves. This technique removes the expected reward of parental attention.

COUNSELLING AS A BENCHMARK FOR BEHAVIOURAL MODIFICATION

The main objectives of counselling are to assist individuals to have self-understanding and to help them overcome obstacles to their personal growth and development. Thus, counseling assists the individual to have a balanced personality (Osakinle & Falana, 2011). Professionally, counsellors acquire through training, the skills to deal with maladaptive or deviant behaviours as well as inculcate societal values in the individual. These values as stipulated in the National Policy on Education, section 1; subsection 3 includes the following:

1. respect for the worth and dignity of the individuals
2. faith in man's ability to make rational decisions
3. moral and spiritual values in inter-personal and human relations;
4. shared responsibility for the common good of society;
5. respect for the dignity of labour; and
6. promotion of the emotional, physical and psychological health of all children (FRN 2004).

Types of Counselling

Counselling is divided into two major types, namely: individual counselling and group counselling.

(a) **Individual Counselling:** Individual Counselling is a one-on-one counseling that occurs between the professionally trained Counsellor (Therapist) and his client (Counsee). The goal is to help the client understand himself, clarify and direct his thought, in order to make a worthwhile decision (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006). Through this, clients' problems are alleviated, thereby leading to change in the client either by altering maladaptive behaviour, learning the decision making process or preventing problems (Ojo, 2005).

(b) **Group Counselling:** Group Counselling on the other hand is a form of counselling that takes place between the professionally trained counsellor and a group of individuals. Members of the group must be clients/counsees who share a common problem similar. The clients are all expected to participate and express their feelings with the counsellor helping to open up the problem using the professional skills, competence and knowledge (National Open University of Nigeria, 2006).

Classification of Counselling

There are many areas where individuals are faced with life challenges that require behavior modification. Counselling for behavior modification can therefore be classified according to the different areas of life which individuals could encounter problems. These categories as grouped by Mallum (2000) and Omoni (2009) include: educational, marital, personal social, rehabilitation and vocational counseling.

- (a) Educational Counselling: This aspect of counseling deals with problems associated with teaching, learning and education in generally.
- (b) Marital Counselling: This aspect of counseling deals with problems that could emanate from married life beginning from spouse selection to life in the matrimonial home.
- (c) Personal Social Counselling: This aspect of counseling deals problems including personality and life in general.
- (d) Rehabilitation Counselling: This aspect of counseling deals with problems emanating from life disruptions such as accidents, retrenchment, alcoholism or drug abuse, trauma, and natural mishaps etc.
- (e) Vocational Counselling: This aspect of counseling deals with problems from work and training, career choice and career adjustment.

Basic Principles of Counseling

The basic principles which should be considered by a counsellor seeking to modify behaviour are as follows:

- 1) Counselling activities should be based on the need and total development of the individual. The counselor should identify the needs of individual and design the programme activities to meet such needs.
- 2) Counselling should be provided in such a way that human dignity and worth is ensured, giving preference to development of the individual and encouraging the individual to attain maximum satisfaction, realizing his or her potentials and have self-awareness.
- 3) Counseling is a sequential, continuous and developmental process. It is a process which is an integral part of the total behavioural modification or educational process throughout the life of an individual.
- 4) Counseling activities should emphasize the will of the individual to learn more about himself and the world around him in an accurate and systematic manner. This is because without such knowledge, the individual would not be able to exercise intelligently the rights to free choice in educational, vocational and personal-social fields.
- 5) The counsellor should practice within ethical and moral limits such that clients would feel secure and confident in themselves and the counseling service.
- 6) The goal of counselling should be based solely on clients' needs and not on the needs of the counselors.

Basic Principles of Behaviour Modifications

Counseling for behaviour modifications is based on on certain principles. If a counsellor must modify undesired behaviour exhibited by a client, the counsellor must understand the basic principles on which behaviour modification revolves around. These as enumerated by Osakinle and Falana (2011) are as follows:

- 1) All behaviours are learned by conditioning in the environment and learning is inferred from a subject's behaviour.
- 2) Behaviour is a function of the interaction of hereditary and environmental variables.
- 3) Maladaptive behaviour is learned and can be unlearned using the same principles as adaptive behaviour. Behaviour modification can be brought about systematically by gradually introducing changes in the environment.
- 4) Behaviour modifiers are concerned with specific, precise and current problems.
- 5) Behaviour modification can be achieved using a number of techniques such as: reinforcement, punishment, modelling, role-play stimulation and counter-conditioning (Osakinle & Falana, 2011).

Counsellors should be able to modify behavior using the following steps:

- a) Show films on repercussions of cultism and other anti-social behaviour such as exam malpractice, sexual immorality, robbery etc and giving opportunity for former victims to give testimonies.
- b) Encourage clients to reveal and deny the source of the undesired behavior.
- c) Organise orientation programmes for the client, pointing out the dangers/evils inherent in the undesired.
- d) Assist clients to have a good understanding of themselves and emotional conflict that impact their lives, to offer effective means of coping with personal problems and to assist them in effectively pursuing their positive goals.
- e) Work in close relationship with family of the clients in order to facilitate a conducive environment for the client that would not engender or lure him or her back to the modified behaviour.
- f) Counsel parents/guardians and seek their cooperation in certain areas as it affects their children and wards (clients).

Approaches to Counselling

There are different approaches to counseling that can be applied in behavior modification. However, these approaches can be grouped into the following three headings:

(a) Indirect Approach: The indirect approach to counselling is also regarded as the client-centred approach. In this approach, the counselee is allowed to express self while the counsellor only listen with rapt attention and intermittently, when necessary, approach rely on the tenets of the client-centred theory as their major counselling skill.

(b) Direct Approach: This is just the opposite of the indirect or client-centred approach. In this counselling approach, the talking is done by the counsellor who uses questions and various counselling skills to elicit responses from the counselee about the problems at hand. Here, the counsellor dictates the pace and directs the counselee based on what can be made out of the sparing responses gathered from the counselee.

(c) Eclectic Approach: This approach to counseling does not rely totally on either the indirect or direct approach. Rather it finds the two approaches named above with any other suitable one handy during counseling sessions. It thereby relies on chosen skills that suit the counseling session at hand, from all the available approaches, to resolve the counsellee's problems.

IMPACT OF COUNSELLING ON BEHAVIOUR MODIFICATION

Osakinle and Falana (2011) examined the impact of counselling on behaviour modification in relation to the prevalence of cultism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria which have led to destruction of private and public properties, disruption of academic activities in schools, massive killing of innocent individuals and a host of other problems. It was revealed that counseling had enormous impact on behavior modification. Hence, it was concluded that counsellors in tertiary institutions have arduous roles to perform by organizing frequently and periodically orientation programmes for students old and new, staff members to reduce emotional conflicts in schools. In addition, that counsellor should work in close relationship with student affairs and other service units of the institution to facilitate conducive environment of learning.

An analysis of counselling at work and its associated activities has found a range of benefits to individual employees and the organization. Research by McLeod (2001) reported a positive correlation between the provision of counselling and net workplace benefits. Research findings reported by Hughes and Kinder (2007) showed that counselling support can have a significant positive impact on employees' job performance. Similarly, Sutherland and Hatton (2002) found out

that an organization that provides ‘confidential help’ (counseling services) to employees is likely to be highly productive.

Chan (2011) conducted a study on the effectiveness of workplace counselling in improving employee well-being (workplace stress, burnout and depression) and performance. The result of the study indicated that workplace counselling improves employee well-being; the intervention helps employees in alleviating symptoms of workplace stress, burnout and depression. However, workplace counselling seems to have neutral effect on employee performance. The researcher concluded that workplace counselling should be used as a tool to restore employees and potentially improve employees’ and organisational performance.

Izzat (2014) carried out a study on significance of workplace counselling on increasing job performance in an organization. The results of the study revealed a significant effect of workplace counselling on employee job performance. Similarly the result of a study on evaluating the workplace effects of ea p counseling by David, John and Richard (2012) revealed that workplace counselling resulted in a positive impact on the workplace as measured using the scales of the Workplace Outcome Suite.

William (2012) conducted a study in Chicago to determine the effect of counseling program on youth violence and school engagement. The program model uses group counseling and nontraditional sports activities to strengthen adolescents’ social-cognitive skills – including self-regulation and impulse control, social-information processing (the ability to accurately infer the intentions of others), future orientation, personal responsibility, and conflict resolution. The results of the study revealed that youths’ counseling program:

- Reduced violent arrests by 8.1 arrests per 100 youth during the program year, a reduction of 44 percent;
- Reduced arrests for crimes categorized as “other,” including vandalism, trespassing, and weapons possession, by 11.5 arrests per 100 youth during the program year, or 36 percent; and
- Reduced the likelihood of attending a school inside a juvenile justice setting in the year after the program by 53 percent.

CONCLUSION

Some of the moral decline experienced in society today results from lack of adequate education, training and counseling of the youths. It is an indisputable fact that for a society to be morally upright, it’s youths who are the future leaders must live up to their ethical and moral values expectation of the society. If the youths are exhibiting deviant behaviours, parents and the authorities should organize counselling programmes for them. This is because counseling can serve as a bench-mark for behavioural modification among youths.

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