Influence of Ethics on the Counselling Practices in Rivers State

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Abstract: The study investigates the influence of counselling ethics on the counselling practices in Rivers State. The objectives of the study were to determine the influence of counselling values, ethical principles and personal qualities of the counsellor on counselling practices in Rivers state. The population of the study was all registered counsellor in counselling association of Nigeria (CASSON) and Association of Professional Counsellors of Nigeria (APROCON). Simple random sampling techniques was used to select 50 (19 males and 31 females) counsellors from five local government area Rivers State. The instrument for the study was self-designed questionnaire which consisted 22 items. Instrument was validated by experts in guidance and counselling department of University of Port-Harcourt. The reliability of the instrument was done using Cronbach Alpha formula which gave reliability index of 0.87. Mean and standard deviation was used to answer the research questions and z-test statistic was also employed to test hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The study found that counselling values, ethical principles of counselling and personal qualities of the counsellor are of a great influence to the practice of counselling in Rivers state. The study recommended that Professional counselling services should be made available in all significant social organizations to enhance the practice of counselling within the state

Keywords: Influence, ethics, counselling, practices, values, principles, qualities

INTRODUCTION

The practice of professional counseling, like that of psychology and social work has its roots in the early humanistic, behavioral, and cognitive theoretical traditions (Sexton, 1999). "Counselling is a learning process in which a counsellor helps an individual or individuals learn, understand themselves and their environment and be in a position to choose the right type of behaviors that will help them develop, grow, progress, ascend, mature and step up, educationally, vocationally and socio personally" (Ebizie, Enajedu, & Nkechi 2016). Counselling is encompasses all spheres of human life. It is an instrument for providing guidance and direction for any individual who are left with the option of making decision. Counselling is a transformative process of helping people to learn all that are to be learnt both in and outside the school (Orewere, Ogenyi & Dogun 2020).

Counselling practice is an essential aspect of the society that whose significance and contribution to human race cannot be overemphasized. Studies by Hayes and Morgan (2011) has it that, there was consensus that people come to guidance counsellors with a wide range of issues of varying severity which include family concerns, such as marital break-up or parental pressure, peer issues such as bullying and relationship problems, academic areas such as concerns about exams, teachers and future career; issues to do with the self, such as suicidal ideation, aggression, self-harm, pregnancy, concerns about sexuality, abuse, depression, anxiety and eating disorders.

Counseling is a process in which clients learn how to make decisions and formulate new ways of behaving, feeling, and thinking. America Counselling Association (2011) asserted that counselors focus on the goals their clients wish to achieve. Clients explore their present levels of functioning and the changes that must be made to achieve personal objectives. Thus, counseling involves both choice and change, evolving through distinct stages such as exploration, goal setting, and action. ACA (2014) further stated that counselling could be seen as a professional advice given by a counselor to an individual to help him in overcoming from personal or psychological problem. Counselling practice is essentially saddled with responsibility to facilitate the growth and development of their clients in ways that foster their interest, welfare and promote formation of healthy relationships.

Counselling practice has long being recognized as the one of the essential support in helping individuals to achieve their potentials. The practice of counselling is widely carried out in all ramification of the society such as school, hospitals, religious places, homes, business, and so on. Its importance necessitated that Hayes and Morgan (2011) proposition, who says counselling should be available when necessary, on an individual and/or group basis, to assist people in their personal and social, educational and career development. In this regard, Syed, (2011) posited that counseling deals with personal, social, vocational, empowerment, and educational concerns. Counselors work only in areas in which they have expertise. These areas may include intra- and interpersonal concerns related to school or college adjustment, psychological health, aging, marriage/ family issues, employment, and rehabilitation. Furedi as cited in Jenkins (2017) argued that counselling seeks to exaggerate normal problems of transition and manageable anxiety in order to create a role for itself in apparently providing 'solutions' to these problems'.

All counsellors face a variety of decisions as they strive to practice ethically in their work with clients, yet the issues related to ethical dilemmas and decision making are compounded for counsellors working in small communities and rural areas. Prevailing standards in training, ethical codes and regulations, which are usually developed in urban areas, are not so easily applied in rural and small-community practice (Shank, 1998).

ACA (2014) when counselors are faced with ethical dilemmas that are difficult to resolve, they are expected to engage in a carefully considered ethical decision-making process, consulting available resources as needed. Counselors acknowledge that resolving ethical issues is a process; ethical reasoning includes consideration of professional values, professional ethical principles, and ethical standards.

Ethics are a set of moral principles or rules of conduct for an individual or group. Akinade as cited by Syed (2017) saw ethics as normative in nature and focus on principles and standard that governs relationships between individuals, such as counselors and clients. Amakiri and Eremie (2017) stated that many people think ethics has to do with a set of social conventions or a religious decree. In professional philosophy ethics is the study of what is good and bad. In

counselling, ethics underpin the nature and course of actions taken by the counsellor. Counsellors and others in helping professions are expected to behave in an ethical manner (Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors, 2016). Ethics including ethical codes and principles aim to balance the power and ensure that the counsellor operates for the good of the client and not for self. The concept of ethics relates to moral consideration. Moral entails values, principles and standard guiding an individual's practice. Ethical codes offer counsellors an outline of what are considered acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. In a region (such as Rivers State) where counselling is not regulated through licensing, ethical codes provide a valuable tool for developing and maintaining ethical conduct. In line with this Syed (2017) posited that counselling ethics helps to fosters dependence in clients. Ethics in counselling helps the counsellors to develop the ability to build healthy counseling environment, self-reflecting on their own strengths and weakness in helping the clients, self-regulating their own moods when conducting the session, and self-motivate to develop peak performance (Amakiri & Eremie, 2017).

Professional bodies of counseling have developed ethical standards which they have made available to the practitioners. Professional organizations for practicing counseling and psychotherapy are

- American Psychological Association (APA)
- British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy (BACP)
- American Counseling Association (ACA)

The development of ethical codes for counsellors by these professional bodies is due to the following reasons as enlisted by Syed (2017)

- Help professionalize and protect an association by government and promote stability within the profession.
- Help control internal disagreement.
- Protect practitioners from the public.
- Protect clients from incompetent counselors especially in malpractice issues.
- Clients can also use codes to evaluate questionable treatment from the counselor.

British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (2011) categorized ethics of counselling into three, which are values, principles and personal moral qualities. These ethics were developed to enable the counsellors be able to respond to differences in clients' abilities, needs and culture. According to Ajagbawa (2014) posited that counselling values are cognitive processes because the individual is enabled to make choices amongst an array of alternative actions when confronted with a dilemma/situation and at the same time emotional because those cognitive decisions are influenced by the intrinsic attractiveness or aversion which the brain associates with the current pattern of action. American Counselling Association (2014) has it that the fundamental values of counselling profession involves; enhancing human development throughout the life span; honoring diversity and embracing a multicultural approach in support of the worth, dignity, potential, and uniqueness of people within their social and cultural contexts; promoting social justice; safeguarding the integrity of the counselor–client relationship; and practicing in a competent and ethical manner. In alignment with American Psychological Association, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (2011) posited that counselling values include a commitment to:

1. Respecting human rights and dignity
2. Protecting the safety of clients
3. Ensuring the integrity of practitioner-client relationships
4. Enhancing the quality of professional knowledge and its application
5. Alleviating personal distress and suffering
6. Fostering a sense of self that is meaningful to the person(s) concerned
7. Increasing personal effectiveness
8. Enhancing the quality of relationships between people
9. Appreciating the variety of human experience and culture
10. Striving for the fair and adequate provision of counselling and psychotherapy service

The ethical values inspires and provides a conceptual basis for ethical principles of counselling. One of the most essential assumption that bring about the questions counsellors ask clients are ethical values of counselling. It defines the expected answers and triggers the line of communication between the counsellor and the client (Joann Harris-Bowlsbey, 2008). It is in this view that Ajagbawa (2014) stated that the core values of counselling, help to strengthen the relationship and setting for the counselling work, and they are represented by the Counsellor's commitment to. He further posited that generally, when practitioners apply these core values to guide their work, their intervention will foster a more qualitative counsellor-client relationship.

Ethical principles' means the rules which people are committed to because they see them as embodying their values and justifying their moral judgments (Barnes & Murdin, 2001). In the counselling practice, the adoption of the ethical principles of counselling helps to direct attention to ethical and professional conduct (Ajagbawa, 2014). Following the principles guiding counselling practice enables the counsellors to know his limits and issues to leave unquestioned. Ethical principles provide a more solid framework for decision making than do ethical code of standards. With a vivid recall and serving as a reference point, these principles can guide the counsellor in making decisions when confronted with ethical dilemma or moral confusion (Ajagbawa, 2014). It is abiding in the ethical principles of counselling that counsellors reserves no moral right to judge the client and treat him in a bias manner (Gibson, 2004). American Counselling Association (2014), Barnes and Murdin (2001) succinctly enunciated the ethical principles of counselling as follows;

1. Autonomy, or fostering the right to control the direction of one's life;
2. Non-maleficence, or avoiding actions that cause harm;
3. Beneficence, or working for the good of the individual and society by promoting mental health and well-being;
4. justice, or treating individuals equitably and fostering fairness and equality;
5. fidelity, or honoring commitments and keeping promises, including fulfilling one's responsibilities of trust in professional relationships; and
6. veracity or dealing truthfully with individuals with whom counselors come into professional contact. (ACA, 2014)

BACP (2018) posited that personal moral qualities are internalized values that shape how we relate to others and our environment. They represent a moral energy or drive that may operate unconsciously and unexamined. This moral energy or drive is ethically more beneficial when consciously examined from time to time and used to motivate our

ethical development or shape how we work towards a good society. High levels of compatibility between personal and professional moral qualities will usually enhance the integrity and resilience of any relationship.

Counsellor's personal qualities is one of the major determinants of successful counselling profession. Although individual qualities different, but it is essential that counsellors possess certain personal characteristics that are helpful in dispensing counselling practice professionally. Personal qualities of the counsellors are meant to be aspirational and a reference point to what standard is expected in the counselling profession (Agbajawa 2014). BACP (2018) identified the key personal qualities to which members and registrants are strongly encouraged to aspire which include:

- **Candour:** openness with clients about anything that places them at risk of harm or causes actual harm.
- **Care:** benevolent, responsible and competent attentiveness to someone's needs, wellbeing and personal agency.
- **Courage:** the capacity to act in spite of known fears, risks and uncertainty
- **Diligence:** the conscientious deployment of the skills and knowledge needed to achieve a beneficial outcome
- **Empathy:** the ability to communicate understanding of another person's experience from that person's perspective
- **Fairness:** impartial and principled in decisions and actions concerning others in ways that promote equality of opportunity and maximise the capability of the people concerned
- **Humility:** the ability to assess accurately and acknowledge one's own strengths and weaknesses
- **Identity:** sense of self in relationship to others that forms the basis of responsibility, resilience and motivation
- **Integrity:** commitment to being moral in dealings with others, including personal straightforwardness, honesty and coherence
- **Resilience:** the capacity to work with the client's concerns without being personally diminished
- **Respect:** showing appropriate esteem for people and their understanding of themselves
- **Sincerity:** a personal commitment to consistency between what is professed and what is done
- **Wisdom:** possession of sound judgment that informs practice

Ethics in counselling is a major part of the counselling profession that enables professional discharge of practice according to standard. Most counselling association design their ethical codes so as to guide and inspire counselors toward the very highest ethical ideals of the profession.

Purpose of the study

The main purpose of the study is to determine the influence of ethics on the counselling practices in Rivers State. In specific terms, the study sought to

1. Determine the influence of counselling values on the counselling practice in Rivers State.
2. Determine the influence of ethical principles of counselling on the counselling practices of Rivers State.

3. Determine the influence of personal moral qualities of the counsellor on the counselling practices of Rivers State.

Research Question
The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the influence of counselling values on the counselling practice in Rivers State?
2. What is the influence of ethical principles of counselling on the counselling practices of Rivers State?
3. What is the influence of personal moral qualities of the counsellor on the counselling practices of Rivers State?

Hypothesis
The following hypotheses were formulated at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female counsellors on the influence of counselling values on the counselling practice in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female counsellors on the influence of ethical principles of counselling on the counselling practices of Rivers State.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female counsellors on the influence of personal moral qualities of the counsellor on the counselling practices of Rivers State

METHODOLOGY
The study was carried out in Rivers State. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. The population of the study was all registered counsellors in Counsellors Association of Nigeria (CASSON) and Association of Professional Counsellors of Nigeria (APROCON). Simple random sampling techniques was used to select ten (10) counsellors from five local governments in Rivers state. The sample comprised of professional counsellors in educational institutions, prison, health sector, schools, NGOs, rehabilitating centres and government agencies. In specific, the total sample size was 50 counsellors (31 females and 19 males). The instrument used for the study was a self-designed questionnaire which was structured in four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The instrument was validated by two experts in the department guidance and counselling University of Port-Harcourt. The reliability test of the instrument was carried using Cronbach Alpha Formula. The reliability coefficient index obtained was 0.87, which affirmed that the instrument for the study is reliable. Administration of the instrument was done by the researcher using electronic mail and face-to-face interaction with the respondents. Mean and Standard Deviation was used to answer the research question. Z-test statistical tool was used to test the hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS
Research Question 1: What is the influence of counselling values on the counselling practice in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean responses of the respondent on the influence of counselling values on the counselling practice in Rivers State.

S/N	Item	Male=19			Female=31		
		Mean	S.D	Rmk	Mean	S.D	Rmk
1	Respecting human rights enables clients to feel dignified	3.05	0.65	Agreed	3.20	0.90	Agreed
2	Protecting the safety of clients gives the counsellor basis for advice and action	2.69	1.08	Agreed	3.22	0.84	Agreed
3	Ensuring the integrity of practitioner-client relationships helps to define the depth of questioning.	3.63	0.83	Agreed	3.44	0.62	Agreed
4	Enhancing the quality of professional knowledge and its application helps to strengthen expertise	3.21	0.95	Agreed	2.58	0.71	Agreed
5	Alleviating personal distress and suffering helps the clients to see need for counselling.	2.89	0.79	Agreed	3.02	0.73	Agreed
6	Fostering a sense of self that is meaningful to the person(s) concerned enhance collaboration and communication	3.09	0.90	Agreed	2.86	0.98	Agreed
7	Increasing personal effectiveness helps to improve in counselling profession	3.43	1.08	Agreed	2.91	1.06	Agreed
8	Enhancing the quality of relationships between people helps in achieving counseling goals.	3.66	0.98	Agreed	3.52	0.74	Agreed
9	Appreciating the variety of human experience and culture boosts the clients confidence to communicate effectively	3.05	0.87	Agreed	3.00	0.65	Agreed
	Grand Mean & S.D	**3.19**	**0.90**		**3.08**	**0.80**	

Field Survey, 2020

Table 1 shows the mean responses of male and female counsellors on the influence of counselling values on the counselling practice in Rivers State. Based on the criterion mean value of 2.50, the items 1 to 9 that were represented were remarked to be accepted. The study showed that counselling values in positive terms, influence the counselling practices in Rivers state.

Research Question 2: What is the influence of ethical principles on the counselling practices of Rivers State?

Table 2: Mean responses of the respondent on the influence of ethical principles of counselling on the counselling practices of Rivers State

S/N	Item	Male Counsellors=19			Female Counsellors =31		
		Mean	S.D	Remark	Mean	S.D	Remark
10	Autonomy enables the counsellor encourage clients, when appropriate, to make their own decisions and to act on their own values	3.00	0.89	Agreed	3.21	0.73	Agreed
11	Non-maleficence guides counsellor in emphasizing taking decision that are socially acceptable without harming others	3.08	0.83	Agreed	3.01	0.76	Agreed
12	Beneficence enables counselors to priotize promoting and contributing to the welfare of the client.	3.02	0.68	Agreed	2.96	0.89	Agreed
13	Justice promotes diversity in counselors view of issues before passing judgement	3.41	1.02	Agreed	3.21	0.90	Agreed
14	Fidelity enhances the trust of clients-counsellor relationship	3.22	0.98	Agreed	3.09	1.00	Agreed
15	Veracity helps to clients' conveyance of issues to counsellors.	3.05	0.91	Agreed	3.01	0.70	Agreed
	Grand Mean & S.D	**3.13**	**0.89**		**3.08**	**0.83**	

Field Survey, 2020

Table 2 presents male female counsellors' responses on the influence of ethical principles of counselling on the counselling practices of Rivers State. Based on the mean decision rule earliar stated, all the items presented on this question were adjudged to be accepted. This implies that ethical principles of counselling influence the practice of counselling in Rivers State.

Research Question 3: What is the influence of personal moral qualities of the counsellor on the counselling practices of Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean responses of the respondent on the influence of personal moral qualities of the counsellor on the counselling practices of Rivers State

S/N	Item	Male Counsellors=19			Female Counsellors=31		
		Mean	S.D	Remark	Mean	S.D	Remark
16	Candour quality enables counsellors to render advice	2.77	0.63	Agreed	3.04	0.82	Agreed

	wholeheartedly						
17	Care feature motivates counsellor to go extra mile to ensure the welfare of the clients	3.09	0.70	Agreed	3.01	0.63	Agreed
18	Courage enhance justice in counselling	3.00	1.02	Agreed	2.89	0.75	Agreed
19	Diligence helps to boost professional competence	3.32	0.91	Agreed	3.23	0.92	Agreed
20	Empathy enables counsellors to understand issues quickly	3.20	0.84	Agreed	3.11	0.68	Agreed
21	Respect enhance counsellors' mode of communication and actions	3.13	0.81	Agreed	3.40	0.83	Agreed
22	Sincerity boosts clients conviction in the counsellors advice	2.97	1.10	Agreed	3.32	0.56	Agreed
	Grand Mean & S.D	3.07	0.86		3.14	0.74	

Field Survey, 2020.

Table 3 also revealed the mean responses of the respondent on the influence of personal moral qualities of the counsellor on the counselling practices of Rivers State. The table showsd that all the items that were represented have mean values that are beyond the criterion mean (2.50). This warranted the judgment of agreement in all the items in the table.

Hypothesis

H_{01}: There is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female counsellors on the influence of counselling values on the counselling practice in Rivers State.

Table 4: Z-test analysis on the mean response of male and female counsellors on the influence of counselling values on the counselling practice in Rivers State

Groups	N	Mean	S.D	Df	Lev. signi	Z-cal	Z-crit	Remark
Male Counsellors	19	3.19	0.90					
				48	0.05	0.45	1.68	Accepted
Female Counsellors	31	3.08	0.80					

Research Data, 2020

Table 4 shows the summary of z-test statistics carried on the mean response of male and female counsellors on the influence of counselling values on the counselling practice in Rivers State. The table revealed that the obtained z-crit value (1.68) is greater than the calculated value of z (0.45). Therefore, the mean responses of counsellors on the influence of counselling values on the counselling practice in Rivers State is of no significant difference.

H$_{02}$: There is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female counsellors on the influence of ethical principles of counselling on the counselling practices of Rivers State

Table 5: Z-test analysis on the mean response of male and female counsellors on the influence of ethical principles of counselling on the counselling practice in Rivers State

Groups	N	Mean	S.D	Df	Lev. signi	Z-cal	Z-crit	Remark
Male Counsellors	19	3.13	0.89					
				48	0.05	0.20	1.68	Acceped
Female Counsellors	31	3.08	0.83					

Research Data, 2020

Table 5 presents the summary of z-test statistics carried on the mean response of male and female counsellors on the influence of ethical principles of counselling on the counselling practice in Rivers State. The table revealed that the obtained z-crit value (1.68) is greater than the calculated value of z (0.20). Therefore, the null hypothesis is upheld. This implies that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of respondents on the ethical principles of counselling on the counselling practice in Rivers State.

H$_{03}$: There is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female counsellors on the influence of personal moral qualities of the counsellor on the counselling practices of Rivers State

Table 6: Z-test analysis on the mean response of male and female counsellors on the influence of personal moral qualities of the counsellor on the counselling practice in Rivers State

Groups	N	Mean	S.D	Df	Lev. signi	Z-cal	Z-crit	Remark
Male Counsellors	19	3.07	0.86					
				48	0.05	0.30	1.68	Accepted
Female Counsellors	31	3.14	0.74					

Research Data, 2020

Table 6 shows the summary of z-test statistics carried on the mean response of male and female counsellors on the influence of counselling values on the counselling practice in Rivers State. The table revealed that the obtained z-crit value (1.68) is greater than the calculated value of z (0.30). Therefore, the mean responses of counsellors on the influence of counselling values on the counselling practice in Rivers State is of no significant difference.

Discussion of Findings
Research question one sought to determine influence of counselling values on the counselling practice in Rivers State. Results showed that counselling values in positive terms, influence the counselling practices in Rivers state. This is in line with Ajagbawa (2014) who posited that the core values of counselling, help to strengthen the relationship and setting for the counselling work, and they are represented by the Counsellor's commitment to. He further posited that generally, when practitioners apply these core values to guide their work, their intervention will foster a more qualitative counsellor-client relationship. Ethical values brings about the priority of the counsellor with the clients, triggers the line of communication between the counsellor and the client (Nile and Joann, 2017).

Secondly, the study sought to determine the influence of ethical principles of counselling on the counselling practices in Rivers State. Findings showed that ethical principles of counselling influence the practice of counselling in Rivers State. This findings is in conformity with Ajagbawa (2014) who stated that, in counselling practice, the adoption of the ethical principles of counselling helps to direct attention to ethical and professional conduct. Still in line with the findings ACA (2014) stressed that ethical principles provide a more solid framework for decision making than do ethical code of standards. These principles can guide the counsellor in making decisions when confronted with ethical dilemma or moral confusion (Ajagbawa, 2014).

Lastly, the study sought to determine the influence of personal moral qualities of the counsellor on the counselling practices of Rivers State. Findings revealed that the personal quality of the counselor is an enhancer to professional counselling practice. The personal qualities of the counsellor is a major catalyst to professional counselling practice. This is again in collaboration with Agbajawa (2014) who stated that personal qualities of the counsellors are aspirational and a reference point to what standard is expected in the counselling profession. BACP (2018) also noted that ethics of counselling practice is integrated upon certain characteristics. It further stated that the qualities of the counselor is a major instrument for effective practice of counselling.

CONCLUSION
The study has sought the influence of counselling ethics on the counselling practice in Rivers state. Based on the findings of the study it is worthy to conclude that counselling ethics is of a pronounced significance in the practice of counselling. Counselling ethics is an essential bearing of counselling profession, which determines the standard and priority of the counsellor in the field.

RECOMMENDATIONS
The study recommended that;

1. Counsellors in Rivers State should be provided with clear ethical codes and standard for counselling without assuming that counsellors are aware of necessary expectations in counselling practice. This will enable counsellors to be functioning within the restricted codes that are being provided.
2. Counselling practice in some recognized social organization should be place under close supervision to ascertain that counsellors abide with ethical codes of counselling association.
3. Professional counselling services should be made available in all significant social organizations to enhance the practice of counselling within the state.

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