

Help-Seeking: A Qualitative Study of Help-Seeking Behaviours of Students in Public Secondary Schools in Northeast Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Researchers from Western countries have studied how adolescents seek help, displaying that many young people are apathetic towards seeking professional counselling. However, using Western samples to highlight the common help-seeking behaviours (HSBs) of adolescents has significantly created a gap in the literature amongst members of indigenous communities in Northeast Nigeria. The literature is yet to understand the dynamics that help promote the HSBs of learners in public secondary schools in the community. Differently, previous studies have been delimited to learners as samples, thus discounting validations by school counsellors and managers. This study employed the Focus Group Discussion (FGD) technique for twenty-four student samples and in-depth interviews with four teacher-counsellors and four in-school administrators to explore the phenomenon of study in a real-world context. Using NVivo 10 software to analyse participants' data corpus, the study has generated five emergent themes, namely: (i) Responsibility; (ii) Communalism; (iii) Value and belief norms; (iv) Counselling management in schools, and (v) Multicultural biases. As recommendations, the study suggests the need for counsellors to be multiculturally versatile—be aware of cultural interfaces and implications on

counselling relationships as much as build linkages—advocacies, collaborations via the school Parents Teacher Association (PTA) and honour confidentiality in counselling.

Keywords: Collectivism, help-seeking behaviour, northeast Nigeria, public secondary schools, school counselling

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INTRODUCTION

Although Western counselling continues to flourish in many communities (Duan et al., 2011), indigenous populations have continued to explore community counselling. To help members take direction or search for meanings and ultimate truths, traditional help providers, religious leaders, adults, family and members of kinship groups, all assist members in attending to their problems and mental well-being, following their established code of conduct (Alunga & Anovunga, 2017; Okocha, 2015; Rowe et al., 2014; Senyonyi et al., 2012). Despite their commitment to a plethora of indigenous support infrastructures, literature has continued to highlight the reliance by young people on family when it comes to help-seeking following subsisting cultural values about childrearing and the family notion of help-giving as a moral burden and duty. The concept of trajectory and conception by the cultural approach of networks about the evolution of paths for seeking support have encouraged the child to connect with family predominantly for help (Courcy & des Rivières-Pigeon, 2021; Lau & Takeuchi, 2001). Despite the stern authority over children and their choices, the supportive climate and emotional renaissance offered by family provide the environment that best meets the needs of children in terms of help-seeking (Bejanyan et al., 2015; Kotlaja, 2018; Reid et al., 2010).

Traditional African cultural perspectives define human personality from interpersonal relations because of the culture of interconnectedness, sharing, and

cooperation among Africans (Asiimwe et al., 2021; Bojuwoye & Moletsane-Kekae, 2018). In Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory, interactions occur on a fairly regular basis amongst individuals, leading to care and planning for others, including engagement in multipart tasks or activities for members to acquire new skills and knowledge—sacrificing for the common good as emblematic of group membership norm (Merçon-Vargas et al., 2020; Seo, 2010). This norm extends to non-biological relations—but individuals who are knitted by clanship or descendance blood or webbed by collectivist culture who help to communicate with members who are desirous for help—consistent with the 'village model' in Africa (AlHorany, 2019; Asiimwe et al., 2021; Emelifeonwu & Valk, 2018; Pryce et al., 2017).

The primacy of value and beliefs in help-seeking draws public concern as clients now bring their spiritual life into therapy and therapeutic conversations (Blair, 2015). The centrality of religious values and beliefs to African Americans and Arab Muslims, for instance, could be understood by how the communities explore help-seeking or construct their HSBs (Alhomaizi et al., 2018; Hays & Lincoln, 2017). Literature has emphasised the multidimensionality of spirituality to human flourishing and treatment, and thus, the link between spirituality and quality of life (QoL; Choudhry et al., 2016; Cornish & Wade, 2010; Deb & Strodl, 2018; Pandya, 2017; Parker & Hanson, 2019). However, this perspective on help-seeking by young

people is yet to be documented by studies in Northeast and Northern Nigeria, thus opening a new vista for studies on school counselling practice in Northeast and generally in Nigeria, considering that Northern Nigeria is predominantly a Muslim community (Balogun, 2012; Hallouch, 2018; Ohaja et al., 2019).

Recent, in-depth assessments of school counselling services have been carried out (Cooper, 2006; Mckenzie et al., 2011), including studies on factors that inhibit students from gaining access to such services (Cooper, 2006). Astonishingly, findings have shown that commitment to school counselling services is influenced chiefly by learners' experience in counselling relationships with counsellors (Knight et al., 2018). Although guidance counselling goals and objectives are highlighted in Nigeria's National Policy on Education (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1987, 2004, 2014), one of the infractions to counselling administration in schools is the location of counselling offices, which often are non-protective of the identity of learners. Aside from the problem of confidentiality, in African culture, individuals should keep their needs and problems secret resilience-wise, consequently causing an impasse in the effective discharge of the work of the counsellor (Goss & Adebowale, 2014; Oluwatosin, 2014; Omoniyi, 2016).

The constellation of these findings has serious implications on diversity and ecological differences regarding professional counselling and clients from diverse and non-western communities working to tackle

issues in a holistic and non-reductionist manner both theoretically and practice-wise (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2013; Lazarus et al., 2009; Sakız & Sarıçalı, 2019). Following findings by the literature of HSB, the current study was driven by the need to identify how learners in public secondary schools in Northeast Nigeria construct their HSBs given their lived experiences as young people who require repeated demands for help as no previous study has delved into this domain of the learner.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The study employed qualitative research methods to study participants' thoughts, feelings and experiences in real-world settings to make sense of their world (Novek & Wilkinson, 2019; Tharbe et al., 2020). With three sets of participants and counselling as a programme, using a multiple case study approach becomes apt to investigate the phenomenon of study from a wider perspective (Creswell, 2013). Further, this design allows data collection from various venues at multiple time points (Varpio et al., 2017) and data analysis within and across research participants for legitimization of findings (Gustafsson, 2017; Lam et al., 2016).

Sampling and Recruitment

This study was approved by the Faculty of Education Universiti Malaya, Malaysia in 2020. Permission to engage students from public secondary schools was secured from two State Ministries of Education

in Northeast Nigeria. The sample had 24 student participants aged 18 and above, recruited purposively across single-sex and coeducational schools (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Taherdoost, 2016), thus making parental, proxy or third-party consent unimportant. Additionally, there were four nonprofessional (teacher-)counsellors with more than six years of counselling services selected via snowball sampling, including four in-school administrators who have served between 10–12 years recruited via convenience sampling (Etikan & Bala, 2017; Taherdoost, 2016). The study specifically selected Senior Secondary 3 (SS3) students in their final year who demonstrated a willingness to disclose personal information, were open-minded, and could engage in discussions (Robinson, 2014). The selection criteria included proficiency in English, gender, and religious affiliation.

Participants consented to audiovisual recordings of sessions and participation in member checks with informed consent and voluntary participation forms signed. In line with ethical obligation, participants were given pseudonyms and assured of confidentiality and safety of session contents, information, and disclosures against the knowledge of third-party including assurance of protection of their privacy and human dignity (Arifin, 2016; Farrugia, 2019; Lloyd-Hazlett et al., 2018; Zhang et al., 2019). Ethically, this study avoided internal and external suppositions from research conceptualisation up to report writing for purposes of trustworthiness (Sorsa et al., 2015; Tufford & Newman, 2010).

Formulating the Instruments

Formulating instruments for the study was guided by a review of the literature (Doody & Noonan, 2013; McIntosh & Morse, 2015) respecting adolescents and HSB (Alhomaizi et al., 2018; AlHorany, 2019; Campbell & Wilson, 2017). Guided by four distinct phases, the study gained some insights into themes in HSB, first on the vitality of help-seeking to human functioning. This domain led to a few questions for the study one of which is ‘Tackling your (*their*) problems, what is your (*students*)’ opinion about getting help from people?’ There were also findings on networking and consulting—safety netting, thus leading to generating questions that covered this area of need, for instance, ‘Solving your (*their*) problems; may I know the first source you (*your students*) contact for help?’ and ‘What other sources are also important to you (*your students*) to approach for help?’ Creedal affiliation/values appear central to help-seeking, and thus one of the questions: ‘In your opinion, what important beliefs guide your (*students*)’ readiness to go for help?’ There are links across personal factors, help-seeking and school counselling. These findings have elicited drawing questions on these features: ‘Going for school counselling, tell me what issues affect your (*students*)’ interests in doing this.’ Finally, the instruments were subjected to expert assessments, including a preliminary test, using a different sample to help develop instruments for the study (Hamilton & Finley, 2019).

Data Collection Method and Procedure

The study employed the use of in-depth face-to-face interview technique to generate data from nonprofessional/teacher-counsellors and in-school administrators to help researchers gain meanings and experiences often not easily observed by participants (Rossetto, 2014; Tavory, 2020) and focus group discussions-FGDs to allow interactive discussions amongst students (Balasubramaniam, 2019). With oral discussions held discretely in participants' schools for three days at times convenient for members, the data gathering commenced from November 2020 through May 2021, with sessions lasting between 70–95 minutes for FGD and 65–90 minutes for interview participants. As ground rules, FGD participants sought for respect of opinions and contributions by members with mobile phones put into vibration mode or silence.

Analysing the Data

Data for the study were analysed starting with verbatim transcription (Aga Mohd Jaladin, 2013; Tharbe et al., 2020) by two researchers who listened independently to the 12 verbatim audiotaped manuscripts on a school basis. Using NVivo 10 software to develop stratified sets of codes arranged around nodes in different layers, the study adopted thematic data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This outline assisted researchers in identifying data/codes relevant to topics in the study, appraising the codes to see their levels of agreement or compliance (Elliot, 2018). Next, codes

were collapsed, reworded, ranked, and categorised, given their value and importance to generate emergent themes, which were organised into groups for analysis and interpretation (Parameswaran et al., 2019). The use of member-checks/roundtable discussions assisted the study in confirming or disconfirming primary and secondary themes in addition to helping the study confirm or note omissions or commissions in reporting the lived experiences/social nuances by participants (Moore & Llompart, 2015; Tharbe et al., 2020).

RESULTS

Throughout the interviews, participants' data revealed the influence of ecological contexts and the impact of learners' proximal community of development on how they construct their HSBs with impacts on the use of school counselling. The themes and their categories are presented below.

Responsibility

Largely, participants were unequivocal about the degree of bonding and natural attachments between learners and members of their immediate family, specifically parents. This factor explains the common belief that fulfilling learners' help-seeking needs is primarily a responsibility vested in the family. Members of extended families also play a role in advice-giving, as kinship connotes duty and burden-sharing. Dependence on members of their immediate family for economic and emotional sustenance coerces learners to tolerate notions by their families; thus,

habitually, help-seeking from home. An important emphasis by participants is the level of warmth and care that the family provides to create a sense of nostalgia in learners and thoughts about home in moments of advice-seeking.

For instance:

Parents are the first source of life to the child in terms of love and care. This is why students are home-sick when they have need for advice ... to discuss their problems closely, a kind of allegiance (Hajiya, an in-school administrator).

The belief that advice-giving is a social responsibility exclusive to family infringes on learners' worldviews and extends to their understanding of help-seeking. For example:

They feel it's their duty, a natural duty... they feel they're more obliged as parents or family to advise and guide the student. This perspective affects the sensitivity of the child; nearly in everything; including getting help (Lami, a teacher-counsellor).

Supportive roles are rendered by siblings toward advice-giving. According to participants, this development further builds attachments and confidence in learners regarding the family and why they resort insistently to members to manage their problems. By affirming the relevance of siblings, it was observed that:

Apart from my parents, I meet people in my family for help also; like my sisters and my brothers...

they're like counsellors, too (Patience, an FGD participant).

Mostly, siblings are preferred to parents on educational and gender-specific problems as learners are shy to lay gender-specific issues to parents in some cases:

Elder brothers and sisters help to counsel their younger ones as in choosing careers, higher institutions or in gender affairs... some are shy or careful to discuss femininity or masculinity with parents (Happiness, a teacher-counsellor).

On issues pertaining to mental health, learners prefer siblings:

I like to take the problem to my sister, like it's something on hygiene and health, women affairs, family health or like am not happy or feel confused (Alice, an FGD participant).

Learners also like to communicate their problems to kinsfolks, specifically, the extended relations who share the same ancestry and historical lineage, as they tend to have confidence in such individuals. For example:

Also, I have people who advise me from our other families—from the same grandfather and great-grandfather; sometime from my mother and sometime from my father side... many (Kadijah, an FGD participant).

In terms of service harmony, accessibility by kinsfolks further invigorates the mindset and readiness of learners to bare minds

to kinsfolks. This position was feasible from the participants' submissions. As an example:

The extended families help a lot in every family, they're always there; ready to advise... in utmost good faith, so students take advantage to discuss with these people (Musa, a teacher-counsellor).

Some participants commented that interrelations are a key factor among kinsfolks. This constituent attunes members with happenings to others, enabling often an atmosphere for help-giving or problem-resolution:

But how does the system work... the people discuss their problems together, by so doing they're in the picture of the goings in the family and the kind of help the victim demands (Abdullahi, an in-school administrator).

Theorising this custom could be located within the domain of Life-course theory, which defines the transition to adulthood within the larger systemic and historical context (Pryce, 2017).

Several participants commented on learners' dependence on family, which, according to them, crafts the path for how learners engage in help-seeking, given that they rely on family in terms of support and subsistence. It was observed that:

They students are on their parents' pay perk... they live on the family to eke out a living, even for their emotional support. If they turn defiant, they risk their

rights (Hashim, an in-school administrator).

Authenticating how parental notions can influence the use of formal help-seeking, one of the participants remarked:

Everything you need is from your parents, or your family. So, you don't raise your voice ... you're afraid to say no; yes, even for where to seek help (Esther, an FGD participant).

In summary, age has foisted reliance by learners on family, leading to docility and acceptance of family's positions, more importantly, that of parents. This development has implications for HSBs of learners as they are nostalgic about most of their affairs as young people.

Communalism as a Factor

This theme expresses other aspects of the learner as learners' social community and sympathy for communitarian life impact their worldviews as members of collectives. For example, highlights on the duty-of-care, neighbourliness, and elderliness suggest these elements have an impact on how learners construct their HSBs. Owing to the duty-of-care, learners comport to sharing problems with non-familial individuals with the domain provoking advice-seeking from such members in the community:

It's natural that we feel belonged, family or no family; you counsel the child; like your own; you can go extra miles, to try to solve her problem... like she's your child (Hajiya, an in-school administrator).

One of the features of duty-of-care is its ability to engage learners proactively in the disclosure of problems. For example:

Right from the beginning, you like feel their interest in you, in your problem, so you don't hide your problem; you speak out, ready to say your problem as it is (Jamiluddeen, an FGD participant).

This culture infuses learners with the assurance of commitment to problem-solving by non-familial care- or help-givers and a repeat of sessions by learners:

They appreciate the commitment by local help providers, so they're comfortable to go back... freely without pressures (Happiness, a teacher-counsellor).

Another way learners obtain help is to engage enthusiastically, persons of non-biological affinities in the same compound or neighbourhood having enjoyed the benefits of mutual cohabitation for years for help or advice-seeking.

You try to understand the mood swings of the people here. Your next door neighbours have access to your child—yes; to counsel, scold the child for misconduct (Lami, a teacher-counsellor).

There are no restrictions to what learners discuss with neighbours owing to trust and skilfulness in advice-giving; themes often involve issues in personal—and social life:

The topic they discuss with people in the yard or their area varies; it

depends on why they're pressed for help; can be on anything (Talatu, an in-school administrator).

There is value attached to old age and elderliness. This constituent determines whom the learner consults for help-seeking, expressive of the belief that being a senior citizen is axiomatic of possession of wisdom and intellect, which are consequential in indigenous counselling to help direct how best to solve a problem as in the following:

'*Ai*' [a local idiosyncrasy], many people like to go to elders for advice because what the elder see, the child cannot, even if he climb an *Iroko* tree... they elders have knowledge; experience... so they advise base on these (Abdussalam, an FGD participant).

Recourse to experience, elders provide examples and illustrations that are vivid and rich to help young people resolve the quagmire of difficulties they encounter. This rare feature has a way of attracting learners to senior citizens for advice-seeking. This perception was illustrated thus:

Whenever I go to elders for advice, I learn more... they give clear examples, different stories, history... so you learn (Salvation, an FGD participant).

One of the participants also commented:

... they elders are philosophical, sometimes they go folklores to drive a point, teach morals (Hashim, an in-school administrator).

Some participants observed that, unlike school counsellors, elders have the power to enforce advice or sanction learners to heed advice as age is respected:

In counselling we give direction and learners may turn deaf ears, elders will sanction; enforce and they children must heed, and cooperate (Helen, a teacher-counsellor).

In summary, communalism influences commitments by individuals to the well-being of members, irrespective of divides. This concept has an impact on the way of life of members such that individuals consult others in the community for assistance.

Value and Belief Norms

This theme refers to the theological life of learners and meddling in the domain of their HSBs. Given their faith lines, learners imbibe diverse values and beliefs that provoke their disposition to use spiritual therapies, engaging family practices and religious pedagogies, including meeting clergies for counselling or advice-giving. The following accounts exemplify these positions. For example, on the use of spiritual therapies for problem intervention, one of the testimonies reveals:

Students seek spiritual guidance if they sense the matter is between them and God; don't like to expose the problem to others; strictly spiritual (Talatu, an in-school administrator).

Learners resort to the use of spiritual therapy when personal efforts to tackle their difficulties become elusive, for example:

... they learners sometimes believe in mystical powers, so they like to invest their personal efforts (Happiness, a teacher-counsellor).

However, differences exist in how learners explore spirituality or religion as sources of therapies, subject to family practices and religious pedagogies to which learners are exposed. For example, waking to observe midnight prayers, giving charity, and offering prayers for uncertainties are common practices tried by families in help-seeking situations, and learners imbibe these virtues:

Like we do in the family, sometimes I do *tahajjud*, *istikhara*, or give *sadaqah* when there's problem, like they teach us in the *Madrasah*; also I fast Monday, Thursday or for three days like my father do, I also read Qur'an to beg Allah for solution (Maryam, an FGD participant).

A Christian participant revealed:

Like my parents, I am a prayer warrior... anointed. I pray many times, I believe in the Father, I talk to Him, I read the Bible, give tithe and fast when am in problem. Father has never fail me (Faith, an FGD participant).

Clergies also help provide counselling services. The perspectives of these figures are highly revered, given the appeasement and comfort that learners derive from guides by clergies, and reasons why the general public contacts these personages for help, including learners:

Most of us go to these religious leaders for help. First, you derive immediate comfort ... something appeals to you as if the problem is over, your spirit is lifted instantly, you have hope, depending on your religious group (Abdullahi, an in-school administrator).

There are changes in inner-self, with immediate gratification derived by learners from this medium of help-seeking:

Like students achieve some internal satisfactions and immediate relief—gratification when they go to Imams or Pastors for assistance (Happiness, a teacher-counsellor).

One of the participants recounted:

One of my Pastors use to help me with counselling; you can meet any of them to help you (Alice, an FGD participant).

Though spiritual therapy might be anomalous to mainstream counselling, this medium of help-seeking is becoming important to spiritually-inclined persons in informal counselling settings (Alhomaizi et al., 2019; Campbell & Wilson, 2017) and important to non-state actors (Ali, 2016; Al-Krenawi, 2016).

School Counselling Environment

The nature of school counselling environments was causative to attitudes that characterise responses to counselling services by public secondary school learners in Northeast Nigeria. This theme portrays how the culmination of threat factors in

school counselling rooms, confidentiality factors and loss of poise visiting the school counselling rooms affect the penchant of learners to seek help in schools, as recalled by participants. In scenic terms, participants reported the following experiences. For example:

Our counselling office is too open. They used plywood to divide the library and the office; I feel people hear what I discuss. To me, the place is not ok; it's not worth it (Solomon, an FGD participant).

This development impacts the state of mind of a few learners who visit their teacher-counsellors for help.

Its like the whole world is watching me; I feel I was doing something wrong... worried since the room is not hiding (Raabi, an FGD participant).

Timing the appropriate moment to see the teacher-counsellor becomes an important factor in seeking counselling services in schools, as learners are aware of the implications of their actions. One of the comments highlighted:

I observe that students who like to come for counselling don't feel at ease... more like sneaking in, watching when to come... like it's a taboo (Musa, a teacher-counsellor).

Confidentiality or breach of privacy remains one of the mind-boggling issues that draw the attention of learners, threatening and cautioning the traffic to the school counselling room or appointment with the

counsellor. It is evident from one of the accounts:

I fear that the counsellor will expose what I say to her, even a delicate information... many don't trust her... we hardly go (Jamila, an FGD participant).

This development leads to droopiness, a reaction displayed by learners to register their displeasure and unwillingness to meet the counsellor when they find themselves in counselling rooms, for example:

Funny, you see them display nonchalant attitude, turn the other side, avoid eye contact... so their body language speaks volumes of you... no trust; they save their breath (Helen, a teacher-counsellor).

This display of lifelessness while in the counselling room results in a precarious demonstration of nondisclosure of difficulties by learners. The ensuing verbatim illustration consolidates this position:

Some counsellors release information recklessly, so students feel unsafe, but for their own good; to protect them, like life in danger, modify misconducts... but they don't like it (Hajiya, an in-school administrator).

Another problem often demonstrated when learners appear perchance in the school counselling room is feasible loss of poise if they avoid being lifeless, displaying discomposure by their countenances.

The first time I was in the office, like I have fever. During math

class, I have stomach problem... the teacher did not understand, and I don't know how to explain to him, so he send me to the counsellor. they think... am... am. I was shaking... can't explain myself (Faith, an FGD participant).

This encounter has a tendency to expose learners to dread and insecurity as well as loss of vibrancy:

I have listened to cases of students becoming dumbstruck, feeling virtually insecure when teachers refer them to counsellor's office (Hashim, an in-school administrator).

Participants complained that the lack of buoyancy and enthusiasm often leads to deplorable situations like crying and feigning ill dispositions:

Some of them end up crying, some take permission shortly on arrival to visit the restroom or cook things like headache, eye trouble (Helen, a teacher-counsellor).

From findings, counselling as a school programme in Northeast Nigeria has yet to come to terms with local and secular knowledge to enlist the complacency of learners in help-seeking mainstream counselling.

Multicultural Biases

This theme reflects how multicultural issues, for instance, contravention of basic rules, panic about the counsellor's age, power relation, ethnicity, language and

communication barriers impinge learners' interests in school counselling. Obviously, differences in religious ideologies and abuse of these ideologies could serve as conflict drivers among religiously different individuals in the community and reason why learners fail to subscribe to attempts that seemingly contravene basic religious rules, regardless of urge and need for help. The verbatim explanation below is one of the perspectives in this direction:

I don't feel like going for counselling here. Our counsellor is a male counsellor; young. In Islam, a girl who can marry should not sit alone with a man not from her family because something bad may happen between them (Khadija, an FGD participant).

From an Islamic viewpoint, there is a tendency for a bi-directional display of emotional gratification or feeling the other by individuals of diverse genders who are secluded. This article projects a value conflict between the counselling norm of isolated sitting and the religious perspective alluded to by participants. For example:

There are complaints always on why we allow young girls sit in concealment with the male counsellor; they complain of human factor, religious and social consequences (Hajiya, an in-school administrator).

Another participant lamented:

There're insinuations and allegations if you're a young

unmarried chap as a counsellor. Because you sit with students, especially females, people suspect you, not that you are doing your counselling work (Musa, a teacher-counsellor).

Ostensibly, disparities exist between the learner and the counsellor in terms of age and power relations. Given these, it is perceived that the counsellor could overwhelm and manipulate the counselling session, especially in settings involving a religiously different learner and teacher-counsellor:

When your religion is different, they think you may exploit the learner as a counsellor... as someone elderly (Lami, a teacher-counsellor).

Fear of evangelism or Islamisation compounds the problem of distrust attached to the counsellor's age and power, given differences in religion between the teacher-counsellor and the learner as majors and minors. For example:

People who don't agree with Western counselling fear the school counsellor may preach evangelism, Islamise or abuse; the PTA has been helpful, trying to educate (Hashim, an in-school administrator).

This allusion has implications on counselling management in schools in terms of balanced staffing, sensitivity to gender and religion:

I believe time heals everything. Due to human differences, we pair a Muslim and a Christian in school counselling job gender

sensitivity in mind (Talatu, an in-school administrator).

To address misinformation that trails counselling services in schools, participants suggested mass education programmes to advocate positive understandings regarding the school programme. One of these opinions reads:

One catches more flies with honey than with vinegar; we can change people's attitude ... their behaviour by enlightening them; use the PTA to create awareness; to desensitise their views as per counselling in schools (Happiness, a teacher-counsellor).

Language and communication barriers also create a bifurcation due to linguistic differences, particularly a cultural split and gaps in communication between learners and teacher-counsellors. The following illustrates one of these concerns:

If I don't know how to describe the problem in English, I talk in *Hausa*, but the counsellor won't understand what you mean (Isaac, an FGD participant).

This barrier leads to the involvement of a third party by teacher-counsellors to translate comments by learners, which, in a sense, has continued to disparage the counsellor as well as dissuade learners from using school counselling services:

Sometimes, they try not to communicate in English but in local language. So, what do you do... I involve a native speaker to

listen to the student and explain to me... but they look depressed, hate the counsellor, and try not to come again (Happiness, a teacher-counsellor).

Phenomenologically, learners perceive the involvement of a third party as a breach of privacy and contempt for their human persons:

It's like the counsellor expose our secret. I also feel like they don't respect us because we're children (Abdussalam, an FGD participant).

Ethnicity and social background also impact counselling utilisation by learners in schools. One of the contentious cultural barriers here is ethnic meanings attached to the casting of glares at elders or strangers. Though eye contact is vital in psychotherapy, it is culturally disapproved by members of the public in Northeast Nigeria. For example:

The counsellor will shout, lift your head up; look at my face... don't be shy... but this is not how we're train if you sit with an elder or a visitor (Michael, an FGD participant).

Another participant observed:

You need to understand the cultural values here and meanings attached to them like students avoid your eyes when talking (Helen, a teacher-counsellor).

Accounts by participants are explicit, categorically showing that people carry their cultural beliefs into their day-to-day activities. Despite the need for counselling to tackle their burgeoning challenges, issues

in multiculturalism affect how learners make intentions and attitudes to help-seeking in the community.

DISCUSSION

This study highlights new insights into factors that stiffen the proclivity of public secondary school learners to utilise counselling services in Northeast Nigeria by using a qualitative study method. One of the major findings that explain the less favourable attitudes by the learners to school counselling is their predilections for the community's therapeutic practices for advice and information-seeking. Until now, very little is known about the quantum of counselling learners in public secondary schools in Northeast Nigeria obtain and how they construct their HSBs. Thus, this study contributes to the literature by revealing that despite the provision of Nigeria's National Policy on Education for counselling practice in schools, there is a tremendous reliance by learners on community social support as the tendency for professional help-seeking was virtually non-apparent in learners. The finding is consistent with a recent study which found the family in Nigeria is prime to how children construct their behaviours (Ibrahim, 2015), while family assumes a dominant position generally in the literature of HSB (AlHorany, 2019; Chan & Quinn, 2012; Huey et al., 2013).

Different from findings by extant studies in Northeast and Northern Nigeria, the current study highlights the overwhelming cultural practice and role of others in advice-giving, owing to the community's

core value of camaraderie, antecedents and cognate experience in matters of problem-resolution. This domain of the community is consistent with social capital, which, when fragmented into bonding and bridging, has an ultimate mission of helping as networks consist of individuals who share similar social identities with emotional support provided through frequent contact by members (Schenk et al., 2018; Senyonyi et al., 2012). In effect, the dominant influence of relational and affective ties would explain reasons why community inclusion, collective identity and mutual support as contexts would provide impetus for learners as distinctive citizens in Northeast Nigeria to blend with members of the community for purposes of common ground solutions—keeping to rules of social interaction that 'grease the wheels' and ensure that 'others' wheels are greased' (Camara et al., 2014; Manderson, 2010).

Of course, a broad range of responses and positions emerged relating to how learners obtain help as well as construct their HSBs; there is uniformity and homogeneity in domains that influence the attitude to learners' HSBs as demographic factors try to influence the personality of the learners into decision leading to help-seeking. Hitherto, the issue of diversity, which defines personality and a fundamental value in help-seeking, was not considered eminent in how learners construct their HSBs. However, given findings by studies, Fietzer et al. (2018) reported the concept of personality as a hierarchy with broader traits—typical of those of the five-factor

personality model, which include elements such as conscientiousness, agreeableness, and openness. While the broad trait of openness does indicate a general orientation of being cognitively flexible, for instance, and open to new experiences, the narrow trait of culturally diverse friendships exerts influence when individuals encounter cultural groups distinct from theirs, as documented by Fietzer et al. (2018). Thus, it could be summarised that the proximal community of development of public secondary school learners in Northeast Nigeria explains the backlashes that school counselling has suffered over time, owing tremendously to value conflicts.

CONCLUSION

This study has found a few bizarre reasons previously not discovered by literature as valuable to non-western communities in help-seeking situations. With the findings of this study, it is essential to consider the unique nature of Northeast Nigeria in terms of diversity and multiculturalism. In essence, school counsellors need to be attuned to local cultures, person-in-context and kind-of-person in the community of the study. This position becomes coherent, following the argument that counsellors in contemporary schools are not only expected to advise students about college but to police for drugs, reduce teenage pregnancies, maintain records of dropouts, and address tempers of irate parents while helping battered and neglected children (Dahir et al., 2019).

Recommendations

Given the sociocultural context of Northeast Nigeria, certain stereotypical judgments are rife against Western counselling, for instance, fear of possible manipulations of learners by school counsellors. Other endemic factors, such as the dread of breaches pertaining to doctrinal/ideological positions and perceived proselytisation, pose serious challenges to school counselling in Northeast Nigeria. This challenge is a sensitisation for school counsellors to think locally but act globally, specifically dealing with learners from diverse sociocultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds to facilitate and aid the use of counselling services by learners from the community of this study.

Thus, given the participants' data, this study suggests that school counsellors need to be multiculturally versatile—be aware of cultural interfaces in the community and implications on counselling relationships by having knowledge of other cultures and skills to engage learners from differing cultures and backgrounds. Second, there is also a need to build linkages—advocacy cum collaboration within and outside the school to promote departure from current apathy to school/western counselling through an alliance with PTAs as suggested by participants. Third, simultaneously, learners are becoming crestfallen—highly dissatisfied when their human persons and dignity are abused by disclosing information to others. In effect, school counsellors would need to honour confidentiality and privacy

of information within the ethical boundary of the counselling profession.

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