

## WORKPLACE COUNSELING: MISSING LINK TO BETTER PRODUCTIVITY AMONG NIGERIAN EMPLOYEES

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### ABSTRACT

*Nigerians are believed to be very strong, hardworking and goal-oriented. This is manifested in the high degree of adaptability to cope with all forms of challenging situations. Meanwhile, the frequency of physical and mental breakdown among workers is becoming alarming due to lack of patronage or in some cases absence of guidance counselors in workplace setting. The purpose of this study therefore was to establish the availability and degree of patronage and consultation of guidance counselors in workplaces. Survey research design was adopted. Two research questions and two hypotheses were formulated. The population comprised members of staff of three higher institutions in Lagos, one bank and an insurance company. 180 respondents constituted the random sample out of the population. A 25 - item questionnaire was used for data collection. It was validated by two experts and the reliability coefficient found to be 0.851. It was also personally administered to all the respondents. The data generated was analyzed with SD, mean, t-test and ANOVA. The results showed in part that most of the higher institutions of learning have guidance counselors while private institutions do not. It showed further that staff hardly consulted the counselors, where they were available to discuss their problems. Most of the staff believe that counselors are employed to serve the needs of students. It was therefore recommended in part that serious awareness should be created about the need for provision of counselors and counseling services in all private and public workplaces for better work efficiency.*

### Background of the Study

The world at large is presently witnessing serious economic recession. This melt down is not only biting on the masses but perhaps being much more felt by all public and private organizations - whether local, national, multinational, or international. Almost numberless of them are forced to close down with myriad of employees jolted out of work. The organizations that seems to be surviving the economic down turn have axes to grind because their fates are still in the balance for not knowing what might become of them, more so that the recession is leaving no stone unturned. In the same vein, the staff and employees who are lucky to still be retaining their jobs are not finding

things funny. They are jittery of the eventuality of the pendulum of job loss might swing in their direction any time.

Prior to the recession, Nigerian labour force are prone to and actually undergoing so much stress. This arises from the fact that unemployment and underemployment are the order of the day in Nigeria. Hence, those in employment are made to combine the task of two or more staff. In most cases, they cannot complain for fear of loss of the job that may even be fetching a meager salary, more so that jobs are not easy to come by outside. This is also because numberless unemployed and over-qualified people abound outside that are willing to

take the same offer and even promise to work better and harder.

This is the situation of things in Nigeria labour market. The very direct implication of this is that employees are predominated by stress bombarding them from so many uncontrollable variables. There is the stress from the fear of possible loss of job, from insignificant salaries to cope with expenses and responsibilities, stress from too much work-load, lack of promotion and so on.

Recently, the stress of employees is further heightened by the mass lay off of staff by employers of labour in Nigeria. This is much more pronounced in the banking and insurance companies. For instance, so many banks were forced to merge which reduced the total number of banks to only 25 that were able to meet up with the N25 billion capital base expected of each bank. This led to the lay - off of so many bankers. Much more recent information says that further merging will still take place because many of the banks are performing below expectation. Among the bankers, the retention of their jobs have now been tied to ability to meet up with the specified number of investors and volume of money they are able to attract into the bank within a given period of time. This is coupled with the great stress of resuming latest by 7.00 am and closing late.

It is no doubt that Nigerians are hard-working, rugged and adapt very easily to any difficult situation. Despite this, there should be avenue for every staff to relief himself of tension. In Nigeria, annual leave is a missing terminology in the dictionary of many employers of labour. This is in addition to their staff working from Monday – Saturday. Of every week of course; all works and no play will make every Jack a dull boy. To alleviate tension, and to enhance employee effectiveness and better productivity, both staff and employers need counseling. This is why this study sees workplace counseling as a major outlet and therapy to managing Nigerian employees stress - if embraced.

### **Workplace Counseling - Literature Review**

Workplace counseling appears to be a far – fetched concept in Nigeria. This is due to a lot of reasons such as the belief that counseling is meant for mad people and students, fear of the counselor divulging one's secret, fear of what people will say and so on.

On the other hand, advanced nations of the world are used to workplaces counseling. According to Kinder (2005), workplace counseling in Britain probably originated from occupational welfare services that were introduced towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to him, the role of this counseling type was to help employees on practical issues such as coat-drying and rest-room facilities as well as other well-being issues. Since the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, workplace counseling has grown dramatically, particularly in the area of Employee Assistance Programmes (Cole 1997).

According to Mcleod and Henderson (2003), workplace counseling refers to the provision of brief psychological therapy for employees of an organization, which are paid for by the employer. These due observed further that:

*“workplace counseling typically comprises face-to face counseling, a telephone helpline, legal advice and critical-incident debriefing. In an in-house service, counselors may be directly employed by the organization. It therefore offers employees a facility that is confidential, easily accessed, provides a properly qualified and supervised practitioner, does not raise the threat of a diagnosis of psychiatric disorder and promises to alleviate distress within a reasonably short period of time”*

In the opinion of Reddy (1993), the centre of gravity of counseling universe is moving inexorably to the workplace. This is due to the fact that workplace counseling is highly beneficial to both the employers and employees. To an employer, it offers a service that is valued by employees, has the potential for savings by reducing sickness absence, takes pressure off managers through the availability of a constructive means of dealing with difficult staff or situations, and contributes to its reputation as a caring employer. Workplace counseling is often viewed by employers as an insurance policy against threat of compensation claims made by employees exposed to work-related stress (Mcheod & Henderson 2003).

In the advanced countries, the trend of workplace counseling has been generally welcomed in the society.

This is because it has widened the availability of

counseling of people who could not normally afford to pay for such a service, and has provided organizations with a tangible way of showing 'care' to their workforce (Kinder, 2003). In answer to the work ability of workplace counseling, Carol & Wlaton (1991), Oner, 1999) observed that provision of workplace counseling has steadily expanded over the past 20 years, with more than 75% of medium and large organizations in Britain and North America making it available to their staff.

Nigerian employees are no doubt prone to a lot of stress. One common example is the mental health issue at work which always affect more than the person under stress. Managers may who may not be performing effectively as they once were. This could be caused by so many factors. Whatever the cause, stress, anxiety and pressure will continue to impact on staff and efficiency, until it results in illness, depression and a decrease in job satisfaction. This calls for the need for counseling in workplace to diagnose and help employees proffer appropriate solution to them.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The objective of this study was to:

- Establish the availability or otherwise of guidance counselors in Nigerian public and private work places;
- Establish the degree of patronage of the counselors by employees as a predictor of their productivity in workplaces.

### **Research Questions**

1. Do guidance counselors exist in Nigerian workplaces and to what extent?
2. What is the extent to which employees patronize the counselors in workplaces?

### **Research Hypotheses**

HO<sub>1</sub>: There will be no significant difference in the opinion of public and private institutions staff about their patronage of counselors.

HO<sub>2</sub>: There will be no significant difference in the opinion of higher institutions, banking and insurance companies' staff about availability of guidance counselors in their respective organization.

### **Research Design**

Survey research design was adopted in executing

this study. A representative sample of the population was selected for the study. More so, a survey questionnaire was used for the data collection.

### **Population, Sample and Sampling Technique**

The population for this study comprised the academic staff of Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka, Yaba College of Technology and University of Lagos. It also comprised all the staff of Bank PHB in Yaba area of Lagos and also those of AIICO Insurance Company in the same area.

The sample comprised staff selected from the three institutions. Sixty staff (60) was selected from each of the three organizations. Stratified random sampling technique was adopted in the sample selection.

### **Rationale for the study**

The result of this study will be of immense benefit to both employees and employers of labour in Nigeria and the world at large. It will get employers of labour informed about the need for organizing counseling sessions for their employees, the frequency of the counseling and the benefits of it for the benefit of the workplace and the employees. It will also educate them about the need for counselors in most organizations.

The result of this study will equally educate the workers about the importance of counseling for their personal lives, and for the security of their jobs. It will get them informed about common workplace problem such as stress and stress factors that can affect them physically, psychologically and emotionally. It will help them to be more effective at work too.

### **Instrument for Data Collection:**

Questionnaire was the only instrument designed and used for data collection in this study. It was personally designed by the researchers based on the purpose of the study, research questions, hypotheses, the dependent and independent variables in the study. The questionnaire consisted of three sections labeled A, B and C. It consisted of a total of 25 items. Section A contained six items that sought for biographic information of the respondents - such as sex, nature of work etc.

Sections B and C were made up of 19 items that

sought for information to MiMPu the research questions and to test the hypotheses. Each of the Hans was made up of an opinion statement followed by four options. The options were structure in the Likert-scale format. The options include Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (SD) and Strongly Disagree (SD). The respondents were instructed to tick the most appropriate option as far as they were concerned.

### Validity of the Questionnaire

The questionnaire draft was given to two senior lecturers who are specialists in Education Evaluation and Research at the Federal College of Education (Technical) Akoka for validation. They were also given the purpose of the study, research questions and hypotheses. They helped to correct all the contextual and grammatical errors in line with the purpose of the study. They also knocked out some of the items and substituted with others. In addition, they recommended other areas of modification to some of the items. These were effected by the researchers. All these efforts helped to ensure that the instrument had high content and construct validities.

### Reliability of the Questionnaire

Twenty validated copies of the questionnaire were

pilot - tested on twenty respondents selected from other companies other than those used for the study. Through split-half method of estimating reliability, the data generated was divided into two equal halves and correlated statistically with Pearson's product moment correlation. The reliability estimate was found to be 0.851 and above. This coefficient indicates that the questionnaire was highly reliable.

### Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The questionnaire was personally administered to all the respondents by the two researchers. They were given one week to complete them after which they were collected back. It was re-administered to some of the respondents who claimed to have lost the initial copies.

The data generated with the questionnaire for the main study was analyzed with frequency, percentage, standard deviation, mean, t-test and ANOVA.

### Data Analysts and Presentation

**Table 1:**

#### Availability of Guidance Counselors in Nigerian Workplaces

S/N	AVAILABILITY OF COUNSELLOR	Bank		Insurance		Higher institution	
		F	%	F	%	F	%
1.	There is/are employed counselors in my place of work	6	10	2	3.33	60	100.00
2.	The counselor is meant to serve the staff	1	1.67	2	3.33	20	33.33
3.	The counselors are meant to serve our clients	6	10	2	3.33	60	100.00
4.	The counselors are only consulted when the need areas	6	10	2	3.33	8	30.00

As shown in Table 1, all the three organizations under study have guidance counselors. All the respondents in the higher institutions observed that they have guidance counselors. On the other hand, only 10% and 3.33% in banking and insurance companies respectively indicated that they had an employed counselor. On the other hand 33% of higher institution staffers belief that the counselors are to serve them while majority belief that they were employed to serve their students.

**Table 2:**  
**Extent of patronage of counselor by staff in workplaces**

S/N	Statement	F	%	SD	Mean	Remark
1.	I have been consulting the guidance counselor	8	4.44	1.01	9.46	Disagree
2.	The staff see the counselor as one of them and hardly consult them for their problems	114	63.33	2.14	2.68	Agree
3.	The counselors are always engaged with attending to clients/students rather than Staff	126	70.00	2.36	3.02	Agree
4.	The counselors are not really employed to attend to staff	165	91.67	1.86	2.91	Agree
5.	Only senior officers know the counselors for who they are	138	76.67	2.05	2.58	Agree

The analyzed data in Table 2 shows the extent to which members of staff know and patronize counselors in their workplaces. It shows that only less than 5% have ever consulted their counselors. More than 63% see the counselors as part of the normal staff. About 70% of the counselors engaged in attending to clients. Also more than 91% of the staff belief that the counsellors were solely employed to attend to clients/students rather than staff. More than 76% observed that the counselors are only known by senior staff.

**Table 3**  
**T-test of mean opinion of public private institution staff about their patronage of counselors**

Staff	N	SD	X	df	P	t-cal	t-crit	Remark
Public	60	1.14	1.47					
Private	120	2.03	1.11	173	0.05	1.52	1.96	HO <sub>1</sub> Accepted
Source of variation	Df	Sum of squares	Mean square	F-calc.	f-crit	Remark		
Organization	2	96.32	48.16					
Within	177	232.27	15.24	3.16	4.71	Accept HO <sub>2</sub>		
Total	179							

Level of significant = 0.05

The first hypothesis is as tested in Table 3. The result gave a t-calculated value of 1.52. The corresponding critical value is 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance and 178 degrees of freedom. Since the critical value is greater, the null hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there is no significant difference in the opinion of public and private organizations staff about their awareness and patronage of guidance counselors in their respective organizations.

In Table 4, the means of the opinion of staff in banking, insurance and higher institutions of learning about availability and patronage of counselors by the staff are analyzed. It shows that the F-calculated value is 3.16 while its corresponding critical value is 4.71

at 0.05 level of significance and 2 and 177 degrees of freedom. The null hypothesis was accepted because the calculated F-value was smaller than the critical value.

### Discussion and implications of findings

Recently, Nigerians in South Africa were accused of taking their jobs rendering their citizens jobless. Similar scenario occurred in London in late 2008 where the indigenes embarked on a mass protest of accusing foreigners of taking their jobs. Nigerians are also found to be the leading accuse in this case. We consider this a positive and good indictment

because it implies that Nigerians are hard workers and not gold-diggers. They are ready to engage in any work to survive. It further implies that we see and create job opportunities where none seems to exist.

Meanwhile, Nigerians work too relentlessly to the detriment of their wealth. We have become so used to pressures to the extent that some employers of labour can be described as task-masters. This is because are subjected to all forms of stress without provision for therapy. The first finding of this study reveals that only and 3% of insurance companies make provision for organizations. On the other hand, staff of higher institutions indicated that they have counselors in their workplaces. The implication of this is that majority of Nigerian workplaces and employers have no counselors. It further implies that counselors seem to be associated with school setting where they are employed for vocational and career choice amour, learners (Amao-Kehinde, et al, 2009).

To worsen the situation, the study further reveals that the few organizations where counselors are employed, they art not meant to serve the staff but clients or students. This is opposed to what obtains in advanced nations where workplace counseling are increasingly been embraced (Dyer, 2002). According to Mcleod (2001), any employer who offers a confidential-counseling service with access

to treatment may have some protection from prosecution. This implies that work place counseling is beginning to have a legal backing and a must to employers of labour in advanced world.

The study shows further that less than 5% of the 180 respondents have ever consulted counselors for their problems. This according to another finding is because majority of the staff see the counselors as one of them. According to the Counsellors Guide of UK (2000-2009) employers should provide counseling services for their employees. The guide stated the reason for this to include:

*"Providing psychological therapy for stressed employees can have many beneficial effects. Counseling in the workplace can help reduce symptoms of anxiety and depression, improve mental health, lower levels of sickness and increase job satisfaction and commitment. It provides an effective method of understand the pressure caused by occupational stress and offers a supportive remedy."*

Among other things, the study reveals that there is no significant difference in the opinion of public and private organizations staff, and staff of higher institutions, banking and insurance companies about the degree of availability of counselors in their respective organization and their patronage of same. This means the staff seldom consults the counselor even when they are available. This implies that Nigerian employees don't go for counseling, more so that most employers of labour do not provide for workplace counseling. As opposed to this, the counseling guide stressed that workplace counseling is suitable and recommended for any staff suffering from depression, anxiety, mental health problems, addictions, eating disorders, bereavement, anger management so on.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The first purpose of this study was to establish the availability or otherwise of counselors in Nigerian workplaces. Based on the finding of this study, it can be concluded that only higher institutions of learning can be said to have guidance counselors. It can be concluded further that both staff and their employers do now know the roles of counselors in workplaces

other than the school system where they serve students.

Another purpose of the study was to determine the extent to which staff patronizes the counselors as determinant of their effectiveness and productivity. Based on the result of this study, we concluded that the employees hardly consult counselors for any of their problems. We further concluded that the fact that Nigerian employees don't consult counselors is a major missing link to their efficiency and productivity. If a client's problem is affecting the quality of their life, interactions with others or their general well - beings, counseling is an option that is definitely worth exploring for better efficiency and productivity (the counseling guide, 2000-2009).

Based on the findings the following recommendation are proffered

1. The Counseling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) in collaboration with government should mount a serious educative and awareness programme to convince employers to provide counselors and counseling services in all private and public workplaces for better work efficiency and productivity. This should be done on radio and television. The provision of counseling services will ensure that staffs always have somewhere to turn to when life's pressure build up.
2. There should be frequent publication by CASSON about the causes of stress and the ways to manage them effectively.
3. Counselors should be provided with frequent Counseling Skills Training in work environment. This will help to provide managers, supervisors and staff with
  - Improve listening skills;
  - Improved communication skills and effective language patterns;
  - The ability to defuse anger and distraction;
  - The ability to identify limitations, and to work with others at resolving difficulties.
4. So many employees have problems and are looking for a trustable individual who will not divulge their secret as counselors. Hence, all counselors must remain bourn; by

their Code of Ethics and Practice, as well as by whichever professional body they belong to. Part of the code of Ethics states that:

- No information is exchanged with a

third party, unless with prior client consent; and

- The content of the meeting remains private and confidential

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