Peace Studies and Practice
Journal of the Society of Peace Studies and Practice

2024 Edition, Vol. 13, No. 1
Pp 69-76

COUNSELLING AS AN ALTERNATIVE MEANS OF ENSURING PEACEFUL CO-EXISTENCE AMONG NIGER DELTANS

E.E. ONIYAMA

Abstract
The Niger Delta region has been faced with recurring conflicts ranging from resource control struggle, to ethnic conflicts. This trend has seen to large scale destruction of lives and properties. Various scholars identified that there is lack of peace-building mechanisms in the region, and this creates room for the escalation of conflict in the region. Therefore, this This is research focuses on the use of counselling as an alternative means of ensuring peaceful co-existence among residence in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. The methodology adopted in this paper is the exploratory method with a touch of exposition. Findings from the study shows that Since counselling is one of the effective means of ensuring peace among people. The study concludes that the aforementioned process can bring peace and it is therefore recommended that effective counselling be introduced and implemented in the area of this study. Also, counselling of aggrieved residents for behavioural and cognitive-behavioural changes, were suggested to curb crises in the Niger Delta region and foster peaceful co-existence.

Keywords: Alternative Means, Counselling, Peace, Peaceful Co-existence

Introduction

Man, by nature is gregarious. This is in line with his bio-sociological characteristics. In course of man's existence; in his bid to earn a living and satisfy his needs he must come in contact with other people. There is almost no way man can exist alone. This is even the foundation of the creation of woman by God as a help mate to man. As man cannot provide for his needs alone he is always in contact with others that are equally struggling to live. Meanwhile, the resources to cater for man's needs are limited yet his needs are many and changing. Thus, there is the likelihood of clash of interest among men. This brings the phenomenon of give and take among men; the essence of peaceful co-existence.

Man must co-exist in symbiotic living and if he is not at peace with one another strife will occur often. The Niger Deltans; states comprising; Ondo, Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Imo, Abia, Akwa Ibom and Cross River are people blessed with abundant natural resources especially crude oil. This element had made people to migrate to this area for its prospect. This had engendered crises between the aborigine and even strangers or settlers (migrants).

The struggle for the oil wealth and the degradation of the environment had caused crises among the Niger Deltans. Different ethnic groups Urhobos and Itsekirs; Urhobos and Ijaws, Ijaws and Itsekiris among the notable ones had clashed severally giving rise to ethnic militia groups and this led to the

militarization of the environment with heavy presence of Nigeria military and the police forces (en.m.wikipedia.org).

The conflicts in the Niger Delta date back to the early 1900s beginning with conflicts between foreign oil companies or corporations and a group of Niger Deltans with various names; to with Niger Delta Avengers piloted by Henry Okah, Soboma George, Tompolo just to mention but a few. This degenerated into militancy sabotage of oil prospects and eventually kidnappings which led to lose of lives and properties and prevalence of violence and insecurity.

In an attempt to ensure that peace and security prevail in the area; government had severally attacked the militants killing many and subsequently enforced military presence in the area. Besides the federal government in 2009 proposed the Amnesty programme but become very effectual in the regime of President Musa Yaradua (Bhattacharyya, 2015; Okinbaloye, 2016). This made many militants to surrender their arms; yet the presence of peace and security seem a far cry from the expected. Apart from the crises emanating from struggle for oil wealth; there is the struggle for self-determination by some group in the South-East that had led to violence and killings of themselves and others. The federal government also brought in the military and police forces yet the struggle had not abated.

The import of the foregoing is that tackling the Niger Deltans insecurity and the like with amnesty granted to some people and presence of military and police forces seem not yielding the desired results. It is therefore pertinent to look elsewhere for feasible solution and there comes counselling. Counselling is a relationship between a counsellor(s) and a counselee or group of people in which the counsellor creates an enabling environment for the counselee(s) to learn to understand him/themselves, the prevailing environment and behaviour that facilitates development. The American counselling Association in conjunction with American Association of State Counselling Boards in Vision 2010-2020 cited in Akinade (2012) defined counselling as "a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals' families and group to accomplish mental health, wellness and education and career goals." To Oniyama (2015:9) Counselling:

> "is an intimate helping process where a counsellor who is more matured, experienced and emotional stable enters into an interactional encounter with a counselee who is experiencing a problem and thus less emotionally stable with the view of helping the counselee resolve the problem or issue or concern at hand with the objective of relating well with himself and with others and live in more rewarding life in the environment he finds himself".

Flowing from the definitions above; counselling involves one to one discussion in which the counselee learns about himself and others for proper adjustment to prevailing condition or environment. People in the Niger Delta need to learn more about themselves and others in a heart to heart talks to engender peaceful co-existence. This is borne out of the fact that after crisis, wars or the ancillaries; it is through negotiating table that the entire issue is resolved. Thus, it is pertinent albinitio to engage Niger Deltans to learn more about themselves, others and the environment for peaceful co-existence. The object of this paper therefore is to explore and expose how counselling can be used as an alternative means of ensuring peaceful co-existence among Niger Deltans.

Conceptual Clarifications

The major concepts in this write up is counselling and peaceful co-existence; Niger Deltans are just people. The two concepts are

clarified here seriatim.

Counselling. There is no universally acceptable definition for this concept. In 1937 a counsellor in America called Brewer went out collating the definitions of the word counselling and got two hundred and fifty (250) by now we should be having millions of definitions. However, counselling is a relationship encounter between a counsellor and a counselee in which the counselee is made to learn adaptive skills for a more rewarding life. According to Nwankwo (2017:9) counselling:

> "is a specialised service given by professional counsellor, from his or her heart of hearts to a client to help him or her resolve personal problem being experienced or prevent the individual from encountering particular problems which could be vocational, educational or personal social in nature, under a warm, cordial and threat-free atmosphere that can bring about the desired behaviour change".

The definition above reveals that counselling is a relationship between a counsellor and a counselee whereby the counsellor helps the counselee resolve his problems or concerns and also learn to change maladaptive behaviour for effective relationship with self and others. In essence counselling is both curative and preventive. It is concerned with influencing behaviour change voluntarily. Counselling to Agbajor (2017) is a service offered to individual who is experiencing problem and needs professional help to overcome it.

Similarly, Akinade (2005) defined counselling as "the application of mental health, psychological, or human development principles, through cognitive, affective behavioural or systematic intervention strategies, that address wellness, personal growth, or career development, as well as pathology." This definition presupposes that counselling deploys cognitive – behavioural strategies to facilitate human growth and resolve his pathologies. It is worthy to note that the definition of counselling has not really change with time; it is all about using behaviour change strategies to build and rebuild adaptive behaviours in humans.

The Concept of Peace

Peace can be seen in two perspectives; that of an individual – personal peace and of a place or environment – environmental peace. Peace when seen in relation to an individual is a situation in which a person experience calmness of mind devoid of stress, fear and the like. This is in line with the definition of peace by Aminu (2003) "it is a mental condition free from stress, trauma, and emotional disaster. Similarly, Onyela (2023) defined peace as "mental quiet, tranquillity, amity, concord, completeness, well-being and security, harmony in personal, national, or international relations and public, national, international relations and public order. To Ogunsanya (2014) peace in line with spiritual perspectives means "a state of mind in which there is the presence of inner calm, harmony, tranquillity, accord, serenity and understanding" (Aminu, 2023). Peace when looked at in respect of a place, environment or nation; is the absence of war or conflict. Peace at both perspectives is state in which the individual has inner peace devoid of conflict and war in his environment.

The Concept of Co-existence

Co-existence implies people to live together in a place. It means different people living on their own but being within and among other people. It is the living or existing together at the same time or in the same. Co-existence may not imply absence of conflict but it includes "the simultaneous presence of banal tensions and conflicts of interest.

The Concept of Peaceful Co-existence

The concept of peaceful coexistence implies people living together at the same time or place

or both. When this is tied to peace; peaceful co-existence therefore implies people living together in the same place and or the same time with relative calmness, wellness, tranquillity devoid of conflict and war. It is the process of living together in peace rather than constant hostility (Scherrer, 2008). In terms of societal parlance, peaceful coexistence involves a harmonious society that is in a good social state and a good social ideal of humanity. In this kind of society, all people work according to their ability, play their proper roles, and live in harmony. It is generally believed that a harmonious society means a powerful and prosperous nation, with ethnic unity, economic prosperity, social stability, honest and capable political administration, happiness of people, and peaceful coexistence guided by harmonious ideas. (Lin, 2017).

Theoretical Framework

The problem of peaceful co-existence can be linked to unmet needs, delay in meeting needs, clash of interests, marginalization, greed, avarice, pride and a host of others. A critical look at all these factors reveal that they are integrated in human behaviour. Some communities or ethnic groups over the years had internalised certain behavioural patterns, and that are what they use in relating with others and if such are discordant; issues could arise. Flowing from this; there is the need to work on human behaviour for the better so that peaceful co-existence can be ensured. There are lots of psychological theories that can be employed in the above regard but these will be narrowed down to three; which are Behavioural Theory championed by J.B. Watson; Cognitive- Behavioural Theory by Albert Ellis and Reality Theory by William Glasser.

The behaviourists let by J.B. Watson proposed and researched on behaviourism and revealed that behaviour is learnt based on satisfaction or dissatisfaction an organism receive as it ekes a behaviour. That if an organism exhibits a behaviour and gets reward or satisfaction; such behaviour continues and if there is punishment such behaviour will stop. That through this process behaviour is formed; if bad or maladaptive behaviour is formed; the process of unlearning the learned will start. This theory was fostered by; 1. P Pavlov, E.L. Thorndike, B.F. Skinner and others. The sum of the theory is that behaviour is learnt and unlearned through the process of stimulus – responses chain. The second theory is Cognitive-Behavioural theory of Albert Ellis. It is a theory coined from cognitive and behavioural theories. The theory is of the view that human action is precipitated by the perception or belief an individual has on a situation or issue. That the cause of human problem is not what that happened but the interpretation of the event; which is the individual belief system. It is the contention of this theorist that if man thinks positively he will behave rationally and the reverse is the case. To him thought and action go hand in glove.

Another theory that has implication to peaceful co-existence is Reality Therapy of William Glasser. William Glasser in 1965 developed the reality therapy. The kernel of his theory is that man has two major aspects in life; the need for love and self-worth and the concept of responsibility. To him every human being needs to love and beloved; that one is worthwhile to oneself and to others. While on the second limb; an individual need to be responsible for his action (Ekwelundu, Obi & Ofojebe 2023; Safyanu, Muhammad & Muazu, 2019; Uwe, 2005, Umoh, 1989 & Glasser 1965). The theory presuppose that all human beings have same needs but that not all human beings fulfil the needs exactly the same way. That when man's needs are fulfilled; he experiences comfort and satisfaction but when the needs are not fulfilled man experiences pain and discomfort. This group are unable to operate on the basis of right, responsibility and reality. The implication of this to promoting peaceful co-existence is that; people who having conflict

with others need to be trained to learn what they ought of have learnt during normal growth to enable function effectively in the society. In essence; it should be applied in changing the behaviours of those with maladaptive behaviours. For the purpose of this paper; the cognitive behavioural counselling theory will be adopted.

Literature Review

Paphitis et al. (2023), conducted research on mental health and psychosocial support and peacebuilding in North-East Nigeria Throughout the Mental Health and Psychosocial Support MHPSS group intervention, there was a strong focus on combined psychosocial and peacebuilding elements, including strategies to de-escalate conflict, and build resilience at a personal, family and community level. Participants were encouraged to recognize what makes them and their community resilient, as well as how they marshal both internal and interpersonal resources to cope with and manage problems. At the final stage of the counselling sessions, one-to-one assessments were conducted. Stepped care is provided to those with ongoing severe presenting symptoms; those recipients are referred to a psychologist. After the completion of the final session, community mental health support groups were composed. The group structure of the therapy easily translates into a supportive group model that allows recipients to continue groups using a peer-to-peer support structure, with lead peer facilitators selected through a voting process within the groups themselves. Group leaders receive ongoing mentoring and support from the counsellors. Findings shows that counselling programme in North-East Nigeria is promising as an integrated peacebuilding measure that helps to bolster confidence that the intervention can be effective in the complex and challenging situations it was designed for. Furthermore, using a toolbox approach, this intervention was able to cater to the needs of the individuals in the group as opposed to using a 'one size fits all' approach. This may have increased the effectiveness of the intervention, and future studies should investigate the most beneficial mechanisms within the intervention.

Sravanthi, Sarada and Nasreen (2018) studied counselling and its effect on conflict resolution skills among young adults in India. The aim of the study was, to find out the effect of counselling on conflict resolution skills among young adults pre and post counselling. The current article presents the mean differences of conflict resolution skills among young adults before and after counselling. To conduct the study a sample of 120 young adults belonging to the age group of 20-40 years were selected. To measure the conflict resolution skills among young adults Conflict resolution skill questionnaire consisting of six domains such as physical, emotional, family, financial, academic & career-related and problem-solving skills was used. Highly significant mean differences were observed in all the domains of conflict resolution skills. Young adults after intervention were better able to manage conflicts with respect to career, emotional, problem-solving skills domains. Therefore, it was found that counselling techniques were effective in enhancing conflict resolution skills and enhancing better ways to deal with the conflicts.

One of the issues with conflict among people disturbing peaceful co-existence is the maladaptive values of humans in the society. Certain values like greed, avarice, belief that the wealth of the nation belongs to one particular group of people and thus should enjoy it alone bring about resentment of others. As a result of this there is the need for value reorientation.

Longe and Fashina (2008) noted that societal values can answer the question of what is important to the society. They went further to reveal that counselling can help in instilling in Nigerians values of faithfulness, loyalty,

truthfulness, justice, peace, dignity, honesty and patriotism. In the same token. Obikoya and Bright (2023) reported that counselling can be successfully used as value re-orientation agents for nation building. This came out of their studies on the role of the counsellors as value re-orientation agents in secondary schools in Rivers State. The study employed a descriptive survey research design. Three hypotheses were generated of which the major one has to do with the most effective method of value re-orientation; 542 counsellors and teachers served as sample and questionnaire was used to collect the data. The result of the study showed that counselling is the best technique to be used in value-re-orientation. Again, Enwla and Adebiyi (2005) worked on the effects of Rational Emotive Behaviour and Reality Therapies on socialization problems of visually impaired students. The study adopted the pre-test, post-test control quasi experimental design using a 3 x 2 x 3 factorial matrix, 48 visually impaired students from Federal College of Education (special) Oyo served as sample of the study. The result of the study indicated that the two therapies are effective in enhancing socialization of the visually impaired students. The implications of the above is that; counselling is effective in changing behaviour and also in building behaviour. It therefore means it can be used to foster peaceful co-existence among people since co-existence is behavioural in nature. However, efficacious counselling is in changing and building behaviour most of the works were done using students especially adolescents. Yet the effects of counselling can be extended beyond the school to the general society; this become the import of this paper.

Some researchers (Muhammad, Bagudu & Ibrahim, 2023; Hamza & Haruna, 2023; Ekwelundu, Obi & Ofojebe, 2023; and Oyesola, Onyegirim & Onwuasoanya, 2022) had attested to it that Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy can help in modifying human maladaptive behaviours. Their researches were mostly based on young ones but which can be extended to all and sundry in the general society inclusive of the Niger Deltans. They need to learn and re-learn that though their needs may not have been met, met haphazardly or denied; they still need to embrace others and allow others to benefit from the wealth coming from their region; this way crises can be minimized.

Methodology

The method adopted in this paper is the exploratory method with a touch of exposition. This paper relied solely on literature review and looked at literature on the efficacies of counselling in helping to build and rebuild individuals and group in the society. Since peaceful co-existence is behaviour based; research works and literatures on how counselling had been used and how it can be used to shape and modified behaviour were looked at.

As can be gleaned from the foregoing section of this paper; three theoretical stances of behaviour building and change were discussed. At this section; the Rational Emotive Behaviour Therapy of Albert Ellis is discussed on how it can be used to foster peaceful co-existence among Niger Deltans. The theory proposed that man's ill actions are based on wrong beliefs; that the self-talks man say to himself about occurrences are the basis of irrational behaviours. This conflicts between and among people are borne out irrational thoughts. People in the Niger Deltans are akin to believe that the wealth emanating from the crude oil in their region ought to be enjoyed by them maximally and as this seems a far cry; the struggle to make their aspirations come to fruition precipitates crises and conflicts. In essence with this theory Niger Deltans need cognitive re-structuring they need to be taught that though the wealth of nation comes mostly from their region; it is close to being common wealth and that they need to adopt a “give and take position”, this type of education can best

take place through counselling on individual or group bases in the different settings.

Findings

This paper is exploratory and expository in nature that did not collect and collate empirical data nor involved in manipulation of variables which makes the discourse of finding somewhat difficult. However, but inference from literatures reviewed; revealed that discontentment leads to clash of interests and crises or clashes. It is evident that counselling can be used as a means of ensuring peaceful co-existence among Niger Deltans as it had worked in other settings.

Conclusion

This paper centered on the use of counselling as an alternative means of ensuring peaceful co-existence among Niger Deltans. It was discovered that crises had been in the Niger Delta borne out by clash of interest and struggle for the control of the wealth from the oil prevalent in the region. The Federal Government had tried and still trying to tackle the crises by the grant of amnesty to repentant militants and the populating of the area with arm forces to counter insurrections there but peace had not been restored. It had been found that counselling can help shape and reshape behaviours and thus should be applied in this area.

Recommendation

From the conclusion drawn above; it is hereby recommended that; the presence of military and other forces in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria, should be reduced.

Massive and aggressive counselling programmes should be designed and implemented in the Niger Delta region, so as to entrench peace-building mechanisms in the region.

Consequently, counselling centres with qualified counsellors be employed and deployed to the Niger Delta region both in schools and out of school settings.

References

Agbajor, T. E. (2017). Fundamentals of Guidance and counselling: A simplified approach. Cee-Emmy-Ikye ventures

Ajodo-Adebanjoko, A. (2017). Towards ending conflict and insecurity in the Niger Delta region. Accord.

Akinade, E.A. (2005). Dictionary of Guidance and Counselling (Counselling psychology). Olu-Akin publishers.

Akinade, E. A. (2005). Modern behaviour modification; principles and practices. Bright ways publishers.

Aminu, H. W. (2023). Indigenous peace Education Approach in Nigeria: Culture of peace in perspectives. Noun International Journal of Peace studies and Conflict Resolution (NIJPCR) 3(1). 116-129.

Bhattacharyya, S. (2015) Natural resources and violent conflict in Africa; Isola facts from fictions. Available from: <blogs.csae. ox.9c.uk>2015/11 natural-r (Accessed 27 November, 2024).

Ekwelundu, C. A., Obi, I. E. & Ofojebe, E. N. (2023). Relative effectiveness of cognitive behavioural and reality therapies on internet addiction among secondary school adolescents in Anambra state. The counsellor 46(1), 490-505

Eniola, M. S. & Adebii, A. B. (2005). Effects of rational emotive behaviour and reality therapies on socialization problems of visually impaired students. The Nigerian Journal of guidance and counselling. 10(1); 161-168.

Garba, C. H., Sababa, L. K., & Ajj, L. M. (2023). Effect of Cognitive Behavioural

Therapy (CBT) on social media addiction among tertiary institution students in Taraba State Nigeria. The counsellor, 46(2); 197 – 210

Glasser, W. (1965). Reality therapy. A new approach to psychiatry. Harper and row.

Hamza, D. & Haruna, A.I. (2023). Efficacy of religiously modified cognitive restructuring counselling technique on aggressive behaviour among the pupils of Almajiri Integrated schools in Gombe – metropolis. The counsellor 46(1), 44-54.

Lin, L. (2017). Democracy and the Rule of Law in Contemporary China. Retrieved from https://www.sciencedirect.com/book/9780128119303/building-the-rule-of-law-in-china (Accessed on 20th October, 2024).

Longe, O. O., & Fashina, A. Y. (2008). The need for value clarification in Adolescents' behavioural Adjustment and social re-orienting. The case of Nigeria core virtues. Conference proceedings for the 33rd Annual National Conference of the counselling association of Nigeria (CASSON) held at the University of Ilorin, Kware, State, August 2008.

Muhammad, S. A. Adamu, B.A. & Ibrahim, M (2023). Effectiveness of group cognitive behaviour Therapy on psychological distress of imates awaiting trial in Zaria correctional centre Kaduna State, Nigeria. The counsellor, 46(1), 113-128.

Nwankwo, O. C. (2017). Behaviour modification; Principles and Applications. Pam Unique publishers Coy. Ltd.

Obikoya, O. G., & Bright, I.B. (2022). The role of counsellors as value re-orientation agents in secondary schools in Rivers State Nigeria. The counsellor 45 (2) 123-138.

Okinbaloye, S. (2016). Politics today: A look at the militancy in Niger Delta Channels Television News, Nigeria 28 August, 10:28.

Oniyama, E. E. (2015). Basic Educational Guidance and Counselling (4th Edn). Eke Graphic publishers.

Onyela, F. (2023). Peace Education: A panacea for harmonious living in Nigeria. Noun International Journal of peace studies and conflict Resolution (NIJPCR) 3(1) 60-75.

Paphitis S, Akilu, F, Chilambo N, et al. (2023). Toward an integrated approach for mental health and psychosocial support and peacebuilding in North-East Nigeria: programme description and preliminary outcomes from 'Counselling on Wheels. BJPsych Open. 2023; 9(6): 575

Rean, E. N., & Ako, J. A. (2001). Counselling for peaceful co-existence in Nigeria under a democratic setting. Edited Conference proceedings for the 33rd Annual National Conference of the counselling association of Nigeria (CASSON) held at the University of Ilorin, Kware.

Safyanu, A., Muhammad, A., & Muazu, A. J. (2019). The Counsellor, 38(1), 135-151.

Scherrer, C. P. (2008). Prevention of violent conflict by structural accommodation. Encyclopedia of Violence, Peace, and Conflict (Third Edition). 3(1), 393-442.

Sravanthi, R., Sarada, D., and Nasreen, B. (2016). Counselling and its effect on conflict resolution skills among young adults Journal of Education, Society and Behavioural Science. 26(1): 1-9.

Uwe, E. A. (2005). Theories of counselling and psychotherapy. The University of Calabar press.

Umoh, S. H. (1989) Reality therapy in A. Uba (Ed). Theories of counselling and psychotherapy. Patrice continental press.