

APATHY TOWARDS COUNSELLING SERVICES AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVEMENT AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS, NIGERIA.

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated undergraduates' apathy towards counselling services and the strategies for improving the counselling services the university of Lagos. Descriptive survey was adopted as the design for the study. The population of the study were all the undergraduate students in the 12 faculties of the university. The sample for the study were 144 (50 male and 94 female) students who were willing to participate in the study using google form. A 30-item questionnaire was designed by the researchers and deployed to the students through their WhatsApp accounts. Data collected were analyzed using frequency, percentages and mean score for the research questions. While the t-test statistics was used in testing the hypotheses stated. The result of the study revealed students are aware that counselling services exist in the university. They however have varied reasons why they do not attend the centre. The respondents suggested establishing counselling units in all the faculties, employing younger counsellors among other strategies for improvement. The test of hypothesis one stated showed a significant difference in the perception of the respondents' apathy towards counselling based on gender, with a T-test value of -2.7057, $P=0.0468$ which was significant at 0.05 level of probability ($p<0.05$). While the test of hypothesis two showed significance influence of religion on students' apathy towards counselling with a T-test value of 5.3057, $P=0.8345$, which was significant at 0.05 level of probability ($p<0.05$). Based on the findings of the study, recommendations were made which include enlightenment programmes, introduction of online counselling, and establishment of counselling units in all the faculties.

Keywords: Apathy, Counselling services, Undergraduates, Strategies, University

INTRODUCTION

University undergraduate years coincide with adolescence stage of life. This is because majority of students who get admitted into the Universities for first degree programmes are usually between the ages of 15 and 19 years (Ibijola, 2017). These students are in the stage which is referred to as a period of "storm and stress." That is, adolescence stage of life. Support services such as school counselling are needed by the students in order to cope with varying challenges that the unfolding life presents (Yahaya, 2018). University students need counselling to cope with vocational, educational and socio-personal challenges that abound within the University campuses. Counselling is a very vital aspect of the educational system. This is why the National Universities Commission (NUC) made it mandatory that all tertiary institutions in Nigeria must have a functional, vibrant and effective counselling and human development unit, which is a unit in the students' affairs division. According to the Former Executive Secretary of NUC, Prof. Julius Okojie, this was to "ensure that Nigerian universities provide psychological, behavioural and other learning support services to students" (NUC; 2013). The counselling unit is established to assist the students in their educational, vocational and socio-personal challenges and problems while studying in the school. Students oftentimes are faced with challenges such as adjusting to the school environment, interpersonal relationship problems; which may include student-student challenges, student-lecturer challenges, student-non-academic staff challenges, examination and study habit issues, cultism, drug use and abuse, sexual harassment, to mention a few. There is

no gainsaying that students need counselling and help from trained professional who would assist them in managing and coping with these challenges.

Counselling is an integral part of any human organization. At one point or the other in a person's life one may require the assistance of a counsellor in taking decisions, making adjustment, choosing career, managing interpersonal relationship and handling other life challenges and problems. Counselling is a process of assisting an individual to discover veritable ways and means of meeting up with personal, social, occupational and general life challenges. In other words, counselling gives an individual the opportunity to discuss his or her problems with professionally trained counselling therapists who are skilled in using different therapeutic methods in assisting an individual in finding solutions to his or her problems and challenges.

Amao-Kehinde (2017) says that counselling "has been used to denote a wide range of procedures including advice giving, support in times of trouble or needs, encouragement, information giving and test interpretation." Ojukwu (2010) sees counselling as "the help offered to an individual to assist the person to understand himself and his environment, so as to make and carry out decisions and plans that holds potentials for the achievement of satisfactory life goals. Ekwe and Nwanmuo (2008) defines counselling as "a relationship in which the counsellor and the client (counselee) work cooperatively and collaboratively to find solutions to problems." Ejikeme and Ejikeme (2015) see counselling as "one of the guidance services rendered by professionals in the field of guidance and counselling."

Akinade (2012) sees counselling as "a number of procedures used in assisting an individual in solving problems which arise in various aspects of his life or assisting to maximize his overall personal development so that he could be more effective, satisfied, and more useful to the society in which he lives." Okonkwo (2006) says that counselling is a "developmental process whereby an individual is assisted to understand, accept and utilize different methods and attitudes in the attainment of his aspirations. UNESCO (2000) defines counselling as "a learning-oriented process, which occurs usually in an interactive relationship, with the aim of helping a person learn more about self, and to use such understanding to enable the person to become an effective member of the society. Raunic and Xenos (2008) in their study found out that only a very small percentage of between 2% to 4% of university students seek counselling services with females being more likely to use them than males.

Kamunyu, Ndungo and Wango (2016) in their own study discovered that some students are reluctant to seek help from counsellors. The reasons adduced in their study for that include gender of the counsellor, social mistrust in the counselling service, lack of confidence in the counsellors, location of the counselling centre and perception of the students about counselling. In another study, Czyz, Horwitz, Eisenberg, Kramer and King (2013) discovered that barriers to students seeking help include perception that the treatment is not needed, lack of time, preference for self-management and stigma. The study also revealed difference in gender, race and severity of problem in help seeking behaviours of the students. Setiawan (2006) in a different study found out that counselling seeking behaviour was low among the students in Indonesia. Vogel, Wester, Wei & Boysen (2005) in their own study found out that gender has a significant effect on counselling seeking behaviour of students. Flansburg (2012) studied six factors: stigma, gender, culture, experience & knowledge, fear and accessibility. The study revealed that these six factors have impact on students' use of the counselling services.

Statement of the Problem

University education and life, especially during the undergraduate days, expose an individual to a lot of challenges. This is because the students are making transitions and adjustment to a new educational system and atmosphere. Many students can make this transition and adjustment and



coping with challenges of university life without necessary help and assistance from any professional. **However**, a lot of students may not be able to adjust to the new environment without help. Yet there is apathy on the part of students in seeking help and professional counselling from the counsellors. Majority of students prefer to seek advice from other people such as their religious leaders, classmates, roommates and other who may end up giving them the wrong counsel thereby compounding their problems. What is the reason for students' unwillingness to make use of the counselling unit in arriving at decisions that assist them in finding solutions to their problems and devising ways of coping with the challenges they face on campus? This is the main thrust of this paper as it is designed to ascertain the factors responsible for students' apathy towards counselling services in the University of Lagos. The University of Lagos, a cosmopolitan university situated at the heart of Lagos, the business hub of Nigeria attracts students from different ethnic and religious background. This comes with a lot of challenges as it is of a cosmopolitan city. The University management in its wisdom set up Campus wide Counselling Committee during the 2018/2019 session in all its campuses (apart from the statutory University Counselling Unit situated at its Akoka and Idi-araba Campuses. The Management appointed a 20-man Counselling Committee in 2019 drawn from the Counselling units, Department of Psychology and Department of Guidance and Counselling to provide counselling to both staff and students at the different centres. These centres operated for three academic sessions, but witnessed low turn-out of staff and students. This informed the present study to ascertain the cause of the apathy witnessed in order to improve centers. This is because counselling is important and is needed to address different issues of drugs, suicidal ideations and attempts and other social vices in the university promptly.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to ascertain the factors responsible for students' apathy towards counselling services in the University of Lagos. Specifically, the study aims to:

- Ascertain students' views about the counselling unit/ services in the University
- Find out reasons why the students do not go to the counselling centres for help.
- Determine strategies for improvement of the counselling services available to students.

Research Questions

1. What are the views of the students on the counselling services provided in the University of Lagos?
2. What are the perceived reasons why the students do not go to the counselling unit for help?
3. What are the strategies for improving the counselling services provided for students?

Hypotheses

Ho1: Students' apathy towards the counselling does not significantly differ by gender.

Ho2: There is no significant influence of religion on students' apathy towards counselling.

METHODS

The study adopted a descriptive survey method. This design is considered appropriate for the study because the study involved collecting data from a sample of students regarding the factors responsible for their apathy towards counselling services in the University. The Population of the study was the entire undergraduate students in all the 12 faculties of the University of Lagos, Nigeria. The instrument for data collection was a 30-item self-structured 4-point Likert scale questionnaire. The instrument was validated by experts in the field of Guidance and Counselling from the University of Lagos. The reliability of the instrument was determined using split half



method and it was subjected to Pearson's product moment to determine the internal consistency of the instrument. This yielded a reliability coefficient of 0.86. This was considered high enough for the instrument to be used for the study. The researchers administered the instrument directly to the respondents, using google form. This ensured that majority of the copies of the questionnaire were retrieved. Data collected were analyzed using frequency, percentages and mean score for some of the research questions, the criterion mean was taken as 2.50 (the average 1+2+3+4 divided by 4 is 2.5). Therefore, the cut-off point for accepting or rejecting an item was fixed at 2.50 (Criterion), while the t-test statistical tool was used in testing the hypothesis stated.

Participants

The target population for the study comprised all the undergraduates in the 12 faculties of University of Lagos, Nigeria. A total of 144 students (n= 144) participated in the study via a Google form link which was uploaded on their WhatsApp platforms within five weeks. The socio-demographics of participants are presented below in Table 1.

RESULTS

Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

Age of Respondents			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
18-20 years	36	34.34	34.34
21-23 years	72	35.73	70.07
24-26 years	15	14.39	84.45
27 and above	12	3.48	100
Total	144	100	
Year Level			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
100	14	9.72	9.72
200	38	26.39	36.11
300	46	31.94	68.05
400	24	16.67	84.72
500	22	15.28	100
Total	144	100	
Religion			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
Christianity	108	75.0	75.0
Islam	36	25.0	100.0
Gender			
	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative
Male	54	35.0	35.0
Female	90	65.0	100.0
Total	144	100	

Source: Authors' Survey, 2024



Table one shows the demographic characteristics of the respondents. As for the age of the respondents, 36(34.34%) were between 18 and 21 years, 72(35.73%) were between 21 and 23 years, 15 (14.39%) were between 24 and 26 years and 12 (3.48%) were 27 years and above. For the year levels, it was shown that 14 (9.72%) respondents were in 100 level, 38(26.39%) were in 200 level, 46 (31.94%) were in 300 level, 24 (16.67%) were in 400 level while 22 (15.28%) were in 500 level. For the Religion of the respondents, it was shown that 108 (75.0%) were Christians while 36 (25.0%) were Muslims. Also, in the same table, the gender of the respondents shows that 90 (65%) were female while 54 (35%) were male.

Research Question 1:

What are the views of the students on the counselling services provided in the University of Lagos?

Table 2: Learners' views about the counselling unit/ services in the University
Have you heard of Counselling services and centres available on the campus before now?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative.
Yes, I have	87	60.42	60.42
No, I have not	42	29.17	89.59
Not Sure	15	10.42	100
Total	144	100	

Have you or any of your friend attended the counselling unit before?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative.
Yes	24	16.67	16.67
No	102	70.83	87.50
Maybe	18	12.5	100
Total	144	100	

If you are having any challenge or problem, would you attend the counselling unit?

	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative.
Yes, I will	63	43.75	43.75
No, I won't	42	29.17	72.92
May be	39	27.08	100
Total	144	100	

Source: Authors' Survey, 2024

Table 2 revealed respondents views about the counselling centre. 87 (60.42%) of the respondents agree that they have heard about the counselling centre, 42 (29.17%) said they have never heard about the counselling centre. While 15 (10%) are not sure whether they have or have not heard about the counselling centre. When asked if they or their friends have attended the counselling centre, 24 (16.67%) agreed that they or their friends have attended the centre, 102 (70.83%) said they have never visited the counselling centre while 18 (12.5%) do not have any idea of having attended the counselling centre. They respondents' responses to the item on if they will attend the counselling centre if they have any challenge or problem revealed that 63 (43.75%) agreed that they will attend the centre if they have any problem, 42 (29.17%) say they will not attend the centre while 39 (27.08%) say maybe they will attend the counselling centre if they face any challenge or problem.

Research Question 2:

What are the perceived reasons why the students do not go to the counselling unit for help?

Table 3: Perceived reasons for students not visiting the counselling unit for help

Responses	Frequency and Percent				Mean	Remarks
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree		
Counselling is just advice giving, I do not need it	12(8.3%)	14(9.7%)	69(47.9%)	49(31.3%)	1.92	Disagreed
Counselling can help in solving human problems and challenges.	60(41.7%)	78(54.2%)	3(2.1%)	3(2.1%)	3.35	Agreed
Counselling is not needed to solve human problems and needs	0(0%)	3((2.1%)	87(60.4%)	54(37.5%)	1.64	Disagreed
The counselling services available do not meet my needs as a student	6(4.2%))	48(33.3%)	84(60.4%)	6(4.2%)	2.38	Disagreed
The time schedule for the services does not suit my own time schedule.	3(2.08%)	81(56.3%)	39(27.1%)	3(2.08%)	2.33	Disagreed

Source: Authors' Survey, 2024

Table 3 presented the perceived reasons why students do not attend the counselling centre. The mean scores of all the items were all below the criterion mean of 2.50, counselling is an advice giving (1.92), counselling is not needed to solve any human problem (1.64), the services available do not meet students' needs (2.38) and the time schedule for the counselling services do not suit the students (2.33), these shows that the respondents disagree to these items except item 2 on the table which has a mean score of (3.35) which show that the respondents agree that counselling can help in solving human problems and challenges. This is an indication that the respondents understand the vital role of counselling in attending to their needs as students.

Research Question 3:

What are the perceived strategies for improving the counselling services provided for students?

Table 4: Perceived Strategies for improving counselling services for students

	Frequency	Percent
Provide online services so that students who do not have time to attend the services at the unit can benefit from the online one	120	83.33
All the faculties should have functional counselling unit with friendly staff	18	12.5
Employ more young counsellors who would understand the students better	18	12.5

The unit should embark on enlightenment programmes around the campus to sensitize students on the need for counselling

84

58.33

Source: Authors' Survey, 2024

Table 4 presented perceived strategies for counselling for students. 120 (83.33%) respondents chose online counselling, 84 (53.33%) suggested enlightenment programme about the counselling centre on the campus, 18 (12.25%) suggested that all the faculty should have functional counselling centre while 18 (12.5%) also suggested that younger counsellors should be employed by the University to attend to students at the counselling unit.

Test of Hypotheses

Ho1: Students' apathy towards the counselling does not significantly differ by gender.

Table 5: Independent Samples t-test on the mean responses of the perception of the respondents on perceived apathy towards counselling based on gender.

VARIABLE	GROUP	N	\bar{X}	STD DEV	STD ERROR	DF	T	P	REMARK
Apathy towards counselling	male	54		1.6741	0.9172	143	0.5295	0.0468	-
	female	90	1.6620	0.0353	0.0250				

S= Significant (p<0.05)

The result on Table 5 shows a significant difference in the perception of the respondents' apathy towards counselling based on gender. T-test value of -2.7057 was obtained, P=0.0468 which was significant at 0.05 level of probability (p<0.05). Hence, the hypothesis testing that there is no significant difference in respondents' perceived apathy towards counselling based on gender was rejected. Therefore, gender does not significantly affect students' apathy towards counselling

Ho2: Students' apathy towards the counselling does not significantly differ by students' religion.

Table 6: Independent Samples t-test on the mean responses of the perception of the respondents on perceived apathy towards counselling based on student's religion.

VARIABLE	GROUP	N	\bar{X}	STD DEV	STD ERROR	DF	T-value	P	REMARK
Apathy towards counselling	Christian	108		1.5441	0.8170	143	5.3057	0.8345	-
	Muslim	36	1.7620	0.0353	0.0250				

S= Significant (p<0.05)

The result on Table 5 shows a significant difference in the perception of the respondents' apathy towards counselling based on their religion. T-test value of 5.3057 was obtained, P=0.8345 which was significant at 0.05 level of probability (p>0.05). Hence, the hypothesis which state that, there is no significant difference in respondents' perceived apathy towards counselling based on students' religion was not rejected. Hence, students' religion has influence on Students' apathy towards counselling.



DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

From the findings of the study, it was revealed that the students have heard about the counselling centre. That means they are aware of the counselling centre in the university. However, majority of them as can be seen from the result have never attended the centre for any purpose. This corroborates the findings of Raunic and Xenos (2008) who reported that only a very small percentage of the respondents in their own study seek counselling services with females being more likely to use them than males. It also goes in line with the findings of Kamunyu, Ndungo and Wango (2016) who discovered that some students are reluctant to seek help from counsellors. However, the findings of this present study showed that students are willing to attend the counselling centre should the need arise.

The respondents disagree that counselling is just advice-giving, this also reflected in their response to the item on whether counselling is needed to solve human problems.

The respondents in the study revealed that the counselling services provided, do not seem to be meeting their needs as students and that the time schedule does not allow them to visit the centre. On the strategies to be used in improving the counselling services, the respondents agree that online counselling should be introduced, all faculties should have functional counselling units to make it easy for students to access the units when the need arises and that enlightenment programmes should be used to sensitize the students on the importance of counselling to the undergraduate students. This is understandable, with the spate of digital and social networking in the world Nigeria inclusive, online counselling is the alternative means of counselling rather than waiting for a client to attend physically to the counselling centre, there should be online counselling platforms provided for students. They can access counselling services using their different social and digital platforms.

The test of hypothesis one revealed a significant difference based on gender on the perceived apathy towards counselling among the respondents. This present study corroborates the findings of Wei and Boysen (2005) and Flansburg (2012) who in their separate studies found that gender has significant effect of help seeking behaviour among students. This is understandable as females are easily willing to seek help than males. Test of hypothesis two revealed significant influence of students' religion on apathy towards counselling among students in the University of Lagos. This goes to show that religious background can affect one's behaviour or participation in a course of action. This is in line with the studies of Darroch (2011) and Brenneman (2022) which revealed that religious beliefs influence help seeking behaviours.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that:

- The counselling Unit should look into provision of online counselling platform for the students to be in line with this present digital age.
- The University should establish and adequately equipped counselling units in all the 12 faculties of the university.
- Enlightenment programmes should be mounted regularly to sensitize the students on the need for them to use the counselling centre and services for the different challenges and problems as students in the university.

Conclusion

Counselling is an important helping service which is provided to individuals as the need arises. In any university system, counselling services are required to assist students in their academic, vocational and personal-social challenges and problems. Creating awareness and getting students to patronize the counselling unit on the campus is very important. This will enable them to gain maximally from the services provided at the centre.



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