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Counselling needs of challenged children: Experience of special education teachers in Rivers State of Nigeria

DR. PATRICK IKECHUKWU ECHEBE

Department of Educational Psychology Guidance and Counselling, Faculty of Education University of Port Harcourt
Phone: 08038667292 Email: Patrick.echebe@uniport.edu.ng

UGOH ALOYSIUS CHINEDU

Ignatius Ajuru University of Education Rivers State, Nigeria
Phone: 08037426607: chinedumugoh@gmail.com

Corresponding author: Patrick.echebe@uniport.edu.ng

ABSTRACT

To study specifically intends to identify the various challenges experienced by the physically challenged and contributes to knowledge in the aspect of assisting them cope with their situation. The researchers observed that counsellors and therapists are not found in most schools for the physically challenged in Rivers State. The study tried to find out the counselling needs of these children, their problems and emotions, the way they express these and the ways in which the counsellors can bring interventions. Four research questions were formulated to guide the study. Extensive literature review was carried out. A descriptive case study research design was used. The population of the study consists of students, teachers, workers and helpers in special education schools and centres in the state. The percentage method of data analysis was used to rate the relevant factors studied. The research findings included the following needs of the population of the children, their problems and how these problems are vented, as well as how counselling can bring out helping interventions. Relevant conclusions and recommendations were also made.

KEYWORDS:

Needs, Challenged, help, intervention, ratings.



Introduction

The physically challenged are those people with one disability or the other from birth, body malfunction or accident. Counselling is one area of need for the physically challenged children in our society. This is informed by emotions invoked by being a physically challenged child. The problem of being a handicapped child is not just the handicap, but the emotions invoked by the feelings that one is handicapped Beresford (2012) and Jones (2013).

According to Beresford it is these emotions apparent in the behavior and attitudes of the physically challenged that necessitate interventions of counsellors. By physically children, we mean the physically handicapped and those visual, auditory, speech and mental challenges. Others include those who have emotional maladjustment, those with learning disabilities, the slow learners and the hyperactive children, among others.

Generally, the aims and objectives of guidance and counseling are to make individuals live a worthy and fulfilled life, Nwoye (2018). These aims and objectives also stand relevant for the physically challenged individuals. In Rivers State there are special Education Centres, school for the blind, deaf, mentally, retarded, physically challenged and so on. All these centres are owned by the government and private individuals and each of them has counsellors.

It is also observed that there are no deliberate policies for posting or employment of counselors to these centres. It is, therefore necessary to investigate the aspects of counselling services by counselors for the challenged children.

According to Martins (2015), the mental retardation and developmental disability population has a rate for diagnosed psychiatric disorders at 2-3 times that of the general population in America and Europe. He further posits that at least 30% - 40% of his study population had a diagnosed disorder and many had serious difficulties, adding that, there was a high rate of physical disorders accompanying psychological issues, which were complicated. He reported that these persons suffered from serious mood disorders including depression, phobia, psychosis, aggressive behavior. Martins worked with staff in developing intervention strategies so that these individuals could live happier and more productive lives. Most of his subjects benefited from psychotherapy. Azavendo (2010) was corroborated by Martins that these person experience mood disorder and other challenges.

As a therapist Gullo (2011) says that these persons can be helped to educational resources, or be an advocate in helping them through new changes and medical breakthroughs, adding that psychotherapy helps them reduce their burden and allows for therapeutic interventions.

However, it was the objective of this research to navigate the various areas of developmental challenges of the handicapped, discuss their needs and the need for the services of therapist and counsellors for this population. This study investigated the needs of physically challenged children, the various problems in their behavior and ways the counsellor can be of help to the physically challenged children.

Beresford, Sloper and Newman (2012), belief that the challenged persons and handicapped. According to them, the challenged persons include the physically impaired, mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, visually impaired and those with speech disorder.

There are certain needs of the physically challenged and other challenged children in our environment. Gullo (2011) and Martins (2015) discussed the needs of physically challenged children. They opined that providing hope, parents being open about the situation of their children, job

placement, and sexual abuse are some of those areas of needs of physically challenged children. Hope is provided through visitation to the counsellor, and expression of empathy. There is also the need for parents to be open about the situation of their children. There should be a follow-up when these challenged children are placed in work places. Counsellors should endeavor to do a follow-up, and also protect them from all forms of abuse especially sexual abuse.

There are certain problems faced by these children as explained by Schnutzer (2013), and Azavedo (2010). According to Schmitzer, these problems include depression, understanding social issues and loss of counsellor or therapist through transfer. Azavedo saw mood disorder, phobia, psychoses, and aggressive behavior as problems of these children.

Ahama, Ahmad and Beresford (2010) identified different ways of caring for physically challenged children. They stated that these include therapy at regular intervals, directing them, to educational resource and medical facilities, connecting them with tutors, organizations and proper treatment sources. Counsellors should protect them from harm, make them aware that they are different in some ways from other physically challenged children. These children want to love and to belong in their own special way. On the issue of available facilities for the care of the physically challenged. Azavedo says that these children need treatment approaches like behavior focused approaches, and cognitive behavioural solution, and approaches.

The purpose of this study was to find out the needs and problems of physically challenged children, the ways in which they went their problems, and how counsellors can help them through counselling interventions. If this is achieved, the child may now be helped to receive some amount of education, get some vocational training, be self-dependent, and even keep healthy and clean themselves. Through this process and method, their burden resulting from their handicaps can be reduced and enable them meet new challenges.

Specifically, the purpose of this study include the following:

1. Identifying the needs of the physically challenged children.
2. Identifying the emotional problems expressed by the challenged children and
3. Identify those areas of counselling interventions that can be of help to these growing children.

Statement of the Problem

The problem of the study that led to the choice of this topic was inadequate counselling for the physically challenged in Special Education Centres and Special Schools or the physically challenged children. The research became necessary, now so that the counselling situations in the centres can be identified, see the magnitude of the problems and find out ways of improving on the situation.

In this study, the researchers attempted to find out the counselling situation in these schools and centres, the needs of the physically challenged, their problems, how the problems manifest overtly and covertly and ways in which the children can be helped. The research is related to the previous investigations by martins (2015), and Gullo (2011) who investigated the needs of the physically challenged children, their problems, how to take care of them and the place of the counsellor in helping the physically challenged in Europe and America.

Research Questions.

The following research question are raised to guide the study

- i. What are the needs of physically challenged children as expressed by them?
- ii. What are the problems that make counselling necessary for challenged children as observed by those working with them?
- iii. What are the ways in which challenged children vent their emotional problems, as observed by those working with them?
- iv. What are the ways in which the counsellors can help on the challenged children through counselling intervention?

The research will be useful to teachers and specialists like psychotherapist and psychologists that work with the challenged children. If other associated emotional are reduced through counselling, the therapists, counsellors, psychologists and other helpers in the centres will achieve better results.

If the counselling interventions reduce the problem of the physically challenged, they will live more useful lives and be self-supporting and more independent. The children will look on themselves with value and have enhanced self-esteem.

Effective counselling will promote integration of the challenged children with normal children. This will encourage parents of the challenged children and make their burdens less.

The result of this study, too will help to add knowledge to the therapist in our schools and centres. This will help them to become more effective in their work.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The design was a descriptive case study. This study design was used because the researcher gathered information from staff who worked with the physically challenged using questionnaire. This design was used to ensure that a proper understanding of the situation was available.

Population

The aim of this study was to see how much counselling intervention would help to alleviate the problems of physically challenged children. The researchers recognized that the problem of the physically challenged is not just the handicap itself, but also the emotions expressed by the handicap. The person who are in position to provide this picture clearly, therefore, are those working with the handicapped directly, and the challenged children in their schools and centres.

The population of the study was made up of physically challenged children and staff in each of the centres and schools. They were drawn from special school for the handicap in Port Harcourt with 41 physically challenged children and fifteen (15) members of staff. The other centres were the child special school D/line Port Harcourt with 49 children and 14 staff; Port Harcourt, behavioural Health/Autism Clinic Elowhonic with 62 Children and 16 members of staff; Otana Special School for the Handicap with 48 children and 18 members of staff and the Adolescent Project (TAP) Iribe with 40 children and 8 members of staff. This research sampled 50 members of staff as respondents for the study.

Study Sample

The random sampling method was used in the study and in each centre, the researcher used balloting method to choose the respondents. There were five (5) centres and for each centres ten (10) respondents were drawn, giving a total of 50 respondents.

Methods of Data Collection

The study used questionnaires method to get responses from the respondents. Fifty (50) copies of the questionnaire were administered and collected directly from the respondents. This was to avoid losses. The questionnaire method was used because the researchers deemed it suitable for the study design. The researchers ensured content validity by ensuring that the questionnaire covered such areas such as the needs of the challenged children, their problems ways of caring for them and place of the counsellor in the helping process.

Method of Data Analysis

The percentage method of data analysis was used to analyse the information gathered. The reasons for counselling if necessary were weighted in percentage.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1: What are some of the needs of physically challenged children expressed by them?

Table 1

S/No	Needs of Physically challenged children	Level of Importance	Level of importance in percentage
i	Need to visit counsellors	6	12%
ii.	Need for parents to expose them for care	4	8%
iii.	Vocational training and employment needs	8	16%
iv.	Need for less anxiety and less stress	27	54%
v.	Need self defense	5	10%

From the above responses and rating in level of importance, the needs are as seen and rated in Table 1. The need for less anxiety and less stress was rated highest (54%), followed by the need for vocational training and employment (16%), the need to visit counsellors (12%), the need for self-defense (10%), and the need for parents to expose them for care (8%). The level of importance as in each of the tables was weighted in percentage. The fifty (50) respondents indicated their options while responding to the questionnaire. Each item was analyzed using the percentage method of data analysis. The higher the percentage, the higher the level of importance, indicates such as a more predominant problem among the challenged children. The respondents whose views were rated in this research were specialists in their various fields of specialization such as the teachers of the blind, emotionally disturbed, mentally retarded and so on.

In their findings, Gordon, parker, Lughian and Heslop (2012), identified these needs, they say that these needs are to be satisfied by the counselor in his counselling interventions.

Research Question II: What are the various problems that necessitate counselling for physically challenged children since you have been working with them?

S/No	Problems faced by challenged children	Level of Importance	Level of importance in percentage
I	Problem of Depression	4	8%
ii.	Loss of therapist	3	6%
iii.	Problem of employment	8	16%
iv.	Problems of Psychosis	7	14%
v.	Problems of Aggression	4	8%
Vi	Problem of Lifestyle	6	12%
vii	Problem of drug abuse	10	20%
Viii	Problem of sexual abuse	2	4%
ix	Problem of marrying	2	4%
x	Problems of living better life	4	8%

A careful observation of Table II indicated that the problems of the challenged are as follows: the problem of substance abuse tops the table with 20%, followed by those of employment, psychosis, lifestyle, depression, living better life, loss of therapist, sexual abuse, and marriage. Although the problems may not appear serious, they were found to be present, Bereford and Oldman(20111) had also identified some of these problems as those that necessitate counselors' intervention.

Research Question III: What are the ways in which challenged children express their emotions?

S/No	Ways challenged children express their emotions	Level of Importance	Level of importance in percentage
i.	Depression	9	18%
ii.	Aggressive Behaviour	5	10%
iii.	Anxiety	6	12%
iv.	Drug abuse	10	20%
v.	Sexual abuse	6	12%
vi.	Intermittent ranges of danger	10	20%
Vii	Self-injury	4	8%

Depression, aggressive behavior, anxiety, drug abuse, sexual abuse, intermittent ranges of anger and self-injury are some of the ways in which challenged children express their emotions as identified by available research findings. Rating of the ways the children express their emotions is seen in Table (III) above.

Topping the table is substance abuse, intermittent ranges of anger, depression, anxiety, sexual abuse, aggressive behavior and self-injury.

Research Question IV: What are the ways in which the counsellors can be of help to the physically challenged children?

S/No	How Counsellors can be of help to the physically challenged	Level of Importance	Level of importance in percentage
1	Counsellor meeting with the family	4	8%
ii.	Counsellor meeting with the individual	6	12%
iii.	Counsellor operating open door policy	4	8%
iv.	By making clients understand their level of disabilities	5	10%
v.	Helping them to improve on self-esteem	6	12%
vi.	Helping to make them know they have identity	4	8%

vii.	Counsellor helping parents to avoid isolation of their challenged children	6	12%
viii.	Developing bond between children and counsellor	8	16%
ix .	Counsellor helping client to develop independence and self help	7	14%

Various ways emerged as to how counsellor would be of help to the challenged child, as can be seen from Table IV; and the rating as established through the responses of the research subjects. The rating was done from the responses of the research subjects. The data gathered was analyzed using the percentage method of data analysis. The higher the percentage the more important the way in which counsellors and be of help to the physically challenged. Topping the various ways is the development of bond between children and the counsellor. This was followed by counsellor meeting with the individual child (12%); helping them to improve on self-esteem and helping parents to avoid isolation of their children; then counsellors helping client to develop independence and self-help. These were followed by counsellor meeting with the family, operating open door policy and helping them to know they have identity.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendation:

Summary of Findings

The findings of the research are in line with previous findings made by Quine (2010) in his work on physical disability: a psychosocial approach; and Annals of the American Psychological Association (2011) on counselling needs of the mentally disabled. The main purpose of this study was to find out the needs of the challenged children, their emotional problems and how counsellors could be of help to them. Four research questions were formulated to guide the study, and data were collected through questionnaire which were analyzed using percentage method of data analysis.

Based on the analysis of data collected, the following findings emerged:

- i. The need of challenged children was established as follows: Need for the challenged children to visit counsellors, parents to present them for the therapeutic and counselling care; need for vocational training, lessen anxiety and stress and need for self-defense. These needs agree with findings of Triangle (2010) and Quine and Sloper (2010).
- ii. The problems that made counselling necessary include: depression, loss of therapist, employment, psychosis, aggressive behavior, life style, substance abuse and sexual abuse. Others include problems of marriage and living a better life.
- iii. The following were seen to be the ways challenged children vent their emotions: depression, aggressive behaviour, anxiety, substance abuse, sexual abuse, intermittent ranges of anger and self-injury.
- iv. On how counsellors can be of help to the challenged children, the following findings were made: counsellors meeting with the families of the challenged and individual child, operating an open-door policy, making clients understand their disability, and helping them to develop high self-esteem. Others include helping them know they have identity, parents avoiding isolation, developing bond between client and counsellor, and helping client to develop autonomy. Mukherjee, sloper, Beresford and Lund (2010) also identified these as ways in which the counsellors could help the challenged children.

Study Implications

From the results got from this study, the following implications may be inferred:

- i. Counsellors will become aware of the needs of challenged children, so they will take steps to meet their counselling needs.
- ii. The counsellors will be aware of the problems that make counselling necessary for the challenged children and so encourage counsellors to help their children.
- iii. Counsellors will become knowledgeable of the level of importance of the problems that confront the challenged child and how to help lessen their effects.

Conclusion:

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions are made:

- i. Challenged children need to be carefully observed by counsellors so that counsellors can be aware of the needs of these children.
- ii. Counsellors have to find ways through which the needs constitute problems to the challenged children.
- iii. Counsellors can now help the challenged children through appropriate methods of intervention so that the problem of the challenged children can be less.

Recommendations

Based on the implication of this study, the following recommendations are made to promote the welfare of the challenged children and enhance their adaptability and self-support:

- i. Every school or centre for the challenged child should have specialist staff who understand the needs of these children
- ii. Counsellors are to be posted to these schools to work with the challenged children.
- iii. Various level of government should be encouraged to provide schools, rehabilitation centres and counselling personnel to help the challenged children.
- iv. Counselling Association of Nigeria should focus on counselling for the challenged children in their workshops and publications.

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