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Marriage Counselling in Multicultural Society, Nigerian Experience (Pp. 249-255)

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Abstract

This paper discusses marriage counselling in Multicultural society: Nigerian experience. The researcher sees Multicultural Counselling as a helping relationship, which involves two or more persons with different culture, beliefs and environment. The paper discusses how multicultural counselling can be applied in marriage in the society with different culture, beliefs, norms and environment. This is because the counsellors should be able to understand the cultural conditioning, of their clients and the socio political system of the society which they are part of. The counsellor should be able to challenge societal values which may likely influence their practice with diverse clients. The demonstration of competence in marriage counselling involves beliefs, attitude, knowledge and skills. The paper also discusses the

problems facing the multicultural counselling which include cultural bias among counsellor, lack of knowledge among counsellors and interference of pastors and elders in the counselling profession. Some recommendations were made as follows; development of awareness of cultural values and biases on the part of the counsellors. Counsellors should be aware of the cultural background of each counselee. Counsellors should try to understand the feelings of their clients who are culturally diverse. Counsellors will develop the understanding of the cultural adaptation and finally, counsellors should develop and use appropriate counselling strategies and techniques.

Introduction

Marriage is known to be a legal union of man and woman as husband and wife. This union may involve individuals from different cultural background, thus bringing into the union different philosophies, beliefs, ideas and languages etc. Even in marriage where couples come from the same cultural background, there may be differences due to family background, education, exposure, and understanding etc which individual couples bring to the relationship. Based on this, the most important issue in marriage is adjustment. The couples must adjust to their new environment, wants and other circumstances surrounding the marriage where there is lack of adjustment and good marital relationship, problem may abound resulting to the couple to seek for marriage counsellor. The counsellor as an expert or a professional will schedule counselling for them in order to assist them return peace and understand themselves better.

Counselling is a process through which individuals are help to improve their understanding of themselves and their relationship with others; as well as to have greater depth in understanding the conditions within which they live (Okeke 2001).

Okorodudu (2010) sees counselling as a process involving a professional trained individual in the application of psychological principals and practices in assisting individuals and groups to cope with their life adjustment needs in the society. All these definitions are working towards helping different individuals and groups to understand themselves and adjust in their environment, even when they come from different backgrounds.

Marriage generally brings different individuals from different background to live together. Some couples may have different cultural background, beliefs, norm, language etc yet they come together for marriage. On the other hand, couples may meet a counsellor who is from different cultural background for

counselling. For instance, an Igbo counsellor counselling couples from Hausa with different religious background culture, beliefs, language etc. When this type of counselling arises, it is called multicultural counselling.

Multicultural counselling is a helping relationship which involves two or more persons with different culture, beliefs and environment. According to Jackson (1987) it is a relationship in which counsellors and clients differ, with respect to cultural background value, and life styles. He went further to say that these differences may be real or perceived. Therefore whether counselling is multicultural depends on the real or perceived cultural differences and similarities. Similarly Axelson, (1993) defined multicultural counselling as the interface between counsellor and client that takes the personal dynamics of the counsellor or clients into consideration alongside the emerging changing, and/or static configuration that might be identified in the culture of the counsellor and the client. Perderson (1994) widely gave his own definition of multicultural counselling as a helping relationship which involves the counsellor and the client with ethnographic variables such as ethnicity nationality, religion and language, demographic variables such as social, educational and economic and affiliation including both formal affiliations to ideas. He added that each person has many different cultures or identities with each identity becoming relevant at different times and places. Therefore multicultural counselling encompasses all the components of the many different cultural environments in a democratic society, together with the pertinent theories, techniques and practice of counselling.

Application of multicultural counselling in marriage

A counsellor who is faced with multicultural counselling should be aware of this, an effective counsellor should endeavour to understand his/her cultural conditioning, the cultural condition of his/her clients, and the socio-political system to our society which they are part of Corey (200) in order to acquire this understanding, a counsellor should be aware of any cultural values, biases, and attitudes they may hold. Moreover a multicultural counsellor should be able to challenge values she/he holds about culture, which may likely influence his/her practice with a diverse client. Furthermore he/she should know that to become an effective multicultural counsellor is not a day work. It is an ongoing progress towards perfection.

Sue, Arredondo, and Mc Davis (1992) and Arredondo and her colleagues (1996) have developed a conceptual framework for competencies and

standards in multicultural counselling which marriage counselling is one of them. The dimension of competency involves three areas;

- i. beliefs and attitude
- ii. knowledge
- iii. Skills.

Beliefs and Attitude

Beliefs and attitude refers to counsellors moving from not being culturally unaware of their personal differences, biases, values or problems to full awareness of the influence of personal biases, values or problems to his counselling practices. In regard to this a multicultural marriage counsellor should make sure those variable do not interfere during counselling. To achieve this, the counsellor makes sure they creates a collaborative helping relationship by understanding the vantage point of their clients. They should respect the clients' religious and spiritual believes, values, home background, socio economic background of the couples etc. They should be comfortable with the differences between them, their clients and others in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, beliefs family background, socio economic status, education etc. Instead of maintaining that their cultural heritage is superior they should accept and value cultural diversity. Multiculturally skilled, counsellors should realize that the traditional theories and techniques sometimes, may not suit all clients for all problems. They should monitor their programmes of functioning through consultation, supervision and further training.

Knowledge

Multicultural counsellors should be knowledgeable about their own culture. They know how it affects them personally and professionally. Because they understand the dynamic of oppression, racism, discrimination, and stereotyping, they are in a position to detect their own racist attitude, beliefs and feelings (Corely 2005). On the other hand they should be able to understand the worldview of their clients, and also learn about their client's cultural background, beliefs, home/family background. They should not impose their values and expectations on their clients from differing cultural background. Multicultural skilled counsellors should understand that external, socio political forces influence all groups and how these forces operate in the treatment of minorities. These barriers prevent minorities from utilizing the mental health services available in their communities. These

counsellors should possess knowledge about the historical background, traditions, and values of the client population with whom they work. (Corely 2005) multicultural marriage counsellors should know about the family structure, diversity in family language and communication, family background and family culture of the couples. The knowledge of these variables will enable them to help the couples to seek the indigenous support system where they are lacking in knowledge. They also seek for resources to assist the clients where necessary. The greater their depth and breadth of knowledge of culturally diverse groups the more effective they become.

Skills

Skills and intervention strategies is very important of counselling profession especially in the area of culturally diverse clients. It is the responsibility of the counsellors to educate their clients on how therapeutic process works. Multicultural marriage counsellors should use methods, strategies and defined goals, which is consistent of their clients. They should modify and adopt their interventions to accommodate cultural differences. They should not force their clients to fit in within one counselling approach, but should recognize that counselling techniques may be culture-bound. They should be able to send and receive verbal and non verbal messages accurately and appropriately bearing in mind the family differences. They should be willing to seek out educational consultative and training experiences. They should consult with other multiculturally sensitive professionals on issue of culture. This will help them determine where and when referral is necessary.

Problems militating against the application of Marriage Multicultural Counselling in Nigeria

Corey (2005) identified two possible barriers or problems that may hinder the multicultural counselling as;

Adherence to specific counselling theory or method may limit the success of counselling, since many cultures do not share the values implied by the methods. Another barrier is language as the most important stumbling block to effective multicultural counselling and assessment, because there is no counselling process when clients cannot express the complexity of their thoughts and feelings.

In Nigeria today, there are many couples/clients that cannot speak English except their language, in this case there will be no effective counselling if the counsellor does not understand the clients language.

Another problem is that most of the counsellors are culturally biased resulting to rigidity in their culture and feelings. This inflexibility is one of the barriers in cultural diversity. Also some counsellors are not knowledgeable about multicultural counselling. Perhaps it could be one of the reasons why multicultural counselling has not circulated as expected. Moreover because of lack of knowledge among the counsellors there may be misdiagnosis and inappropriate placement and referrals.

In some part of our country, culturally, they believe that the right people to settle serious matters are the elders, and the chiefs. They believe in these traditional counsellors hence anything outside this is useless. Based on this, some clients are reluctant to open up to the counsellors there by creating difficulty in counselling relationship.

Recommendations

The researchers recommend the following to improve multicultural counselling in Nigeria:

- (1) The counsellor should develop awareness of their own cultural values and biases.
- (2) Counsellors should try to be aware of the cultural background of each counsellee.
- (3) Counsellors should try to understand the ways in which culturally diverse counsellees feel towards the work.
- (4) Counsellors will develop the understanding of cultural adaptation which has the stages of enthusiasm, critical adjustment and adaptation and stage of reentry into one's original culture.
- (5) Counsellors should develop and use appropriate counselling strategies and techniques. The techniques are summarized as follows:
 - (a) Recognize the issue (problem)
 - (b) Use questions appropriately
 - (c) Involve family as need arises
 - (d) Address privacy
 - (e) Do referral where necessary

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