

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING: A SINE QUA NON TO MENTAL HEALTH

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Abstract

Mental health is a gift from God and it is used to designate one who is functioning at a high level of behavioral and emotional adjustments and adaptiveness. Guidance and counselling is a helping relationship by which individuals or groups are assisted by a competent or professional guidance counsellor in solving whatever issue is at hand. Some of these issues may be personal or group involving social, educational, health, spiritual, mental, financial, business, vocational and recreational matters. This paper x-rays guidance and counseling, the ubiquity of guidance and counselling, mental health, guidance and counselling a sine qua non to mental health. The paper concludes that guidance and counselling in every facet of one's life is vital to mental health, and thus, recommends professional counselling for mental wellbeing.

Introduction

It is observed that happiness and satisfaction in every aspect of one's life influences his emotional life to a great extent. A person who is confronted by frustration, inadequacy, impossible demands and lack of interest becomes dissatisfied with himself, with others and with life in general (Iheanacho, 2000). This in fact means that the basis, the very core of his mental hygiene is being affected, and gradually he loses perspective and his grip of life.

In order to prevent issues that will cause us avoidable emotional stress, that will erode our mental health, we need counsel. Every purpose is established through counsel, and there is safety in the midst of counsellors.

Guidance and Counselling

Guidance and counselling are two words that are always used together because of their close affinity, though they are different, with their different meanings. Shertzer and Stone (1981) define guidance as the process of helping individuals to understand themselves and the world. Other authors such as Ipaye (1983) and Bulus (1986) have defined guidance as assistance given to students to achieve self-knowledge and direction.

Guidance, however, does not function in a vacuum, it has many services. The counselling service has been identified as the focus of guidance programme. Hence, Bulus (1986) observes that guidance and counselling are two sides of the coin.

The erroneous belief about guidance and counselling, and ignorance of its role in our daily life has robbed many of its benefits, especially of their mental health. Many people think of counselling as giving advice or offering solutions to problems (Fuster, 2000). This has made some to be scared of going for counselling since they do not want anybody to tamper with the ivory towers of ideas they have built for themselves. More so that people prefer 'curative' to 'preventive' treatment in their life issues even health. Therefore, we have been trying to discourage people from using the word 'problem' in defining or talking about counselling.

Counselling is a helping relationship entered into by the counsellor and counsellee mainly to help the individual to sharpen his perception of the issues at hand with a view to facilitating his "getting into grips with the issue. Therefore, when a counsellee comes for help with a personal issue, he has to change something in himself to solve it. This may be a change of attitude, of perception of self or of others, of habits or in general a change in behaviour. There is no permanent solution to any issue without some change in the counsellor. How this is done, is the exclusive preserve of the trained or professional counsellor. Hence, it is a good thing to consult them for the sake of our mental health.

The Ubiquity of Guidance and Counselling

Guidance and counselling are ubiquitous as seen from their various definitions and they are needed anywhere there are people. The special nature of counselling depends upon the settings in which counselling is conducted. The institutions using the services of counsellors have been the schools, universities and other educational agencies because counsellors' training and experience equip them with skills, insights and talents necessary for research and teaching. Guidance and counselling as a discipline of study is found in education or psychology. In the developed countries like the United States of America, it can be found in either of these areas, but in Nigeria, it is found mainly in education. In whichever case it is found however, its area of focus remains the study of man and his world, with particular reference to how man grows and develops, the nature of man's world as it relates to man's significant life needs (vocational, marital, educational and social), what motivates man and how he can be helped to formulate and achieve fulfilling life goals, how he meets with problems in attempting to achieve his various life needs, and the various specialized, techniques and orientations which have been found effective in giving him succour (Nwoye, 1990). Therefore, guidance counsellors work also in community, and privately supported service agencies (Non-Governmental Organisations) such as rehabilitation centres, mental health clinics, and family service agencies or as professional staff of various hospitals, of home for the aged and rehabilitation centres for juvenile delinquents. Prison departments and reformatories can be mismanaged without the professional services of guidance counsellors. Because counselling has a very wide range of application, counsellors are employed in other settings such as the military service, financial institutions, and insurance companies and in all types of industrial establishments. Their services are also valuable in the police force and other Para-military services such as Federal Road Safety Commission (FRSC), immigration, customs, etc. In the United States for example, a growing number of guidance counsellors are in private practices. One can therefore conclude that there are employment opportunities for counsellors not only in terms of the remunerative nature of the profession, but satisfaction is derived from helping others to plan and reach their goals,

Thus, as viewed by Durojaiye (1986, p.3) counselling involves the development of interaction between a counsellor and person in a perceived temporary state of indecision, confusion, malfunction, habit disorder, distress or despair, the process of counselling, which necessarily lasts over many short durations (say half to one hour) meetings between the counsellor and the counsellee helps the counsellee to make his own decisions and choices, to resolve his own confusions, to correct his behaviour disorders, to evolve new habits and to overcome distress and despair. Counselling so defined may relate to educational, personal and vocational areas of life.

It is from this stand point that counselling is usually considered to be an essential or core aspect of the total guidance programme, which requires much knowledge, learning, expertise, insight and maturity, to handle with success, since guidance and counselling is ubiquitous.

Mental Health

Mental health is generally used to designate one who is functioning at a high level of behavioural and emotional adjustment and adaptiveness and not for one who is simply, not mentally ill (Iheanacho, 2000). Donaldson and Donaldson (1993) further stress that mental health is not just the absence of mental disorders. Comwell and Cornwall (1997) defines mental health in terms of behaviour and personality, which fit in with the norms of the society in which one lives.

Fusler (2000) considers mental health as a gift of God, and that we realize its value when a close friend or relative has a nervous breakdown. He opines that mental health has to be carefully looked after, else it will deteriorate. For it is not something we are given once for all, it is a job we have to keep working at all the time. Therefore, since mental health is not just the absence of mental disorder, but a state in which a person is able to fulfil an active functioning role in the society, interacting with others and overcoming difficulties without suffering major distress, abnormal or disturbed behaviour, we need to be counselled to avoid things that will cause us avoidable emotional stresses.

Guidance and Counselling; a Sine Qua Non to Mental Health

The definition of guidance and counselling brings out the fact that talking is therapeutic and that counselling is a talking cure. This is because man cannot solve all his life's problems alone, for we are each created to be a solution to another man's problems. Since happiness and satisfaction in every aspect of man's life influences his emotional life largely, he needs the help of his fellow man. For a person who is confronted by frustration, inadequacy, impossible demands and lack of interest becomes dissatisfied with himself, with others and with life in general. This means that the basis or the very core of his mental hygiene is being affected, and gradually he loses perspective and his grip of life. Guidance and counselling can help us handle issues that could cause us emotional stresses. This is done by helping the individual to sharpen his perspective of the issues at hand with a view to facilitating his getting into grips with the issue at hand. This will then prevent one from nervous breakdown due to irrational and illogical reasoning.

Therefore, guidance and counselling is a necessary condition for attaining mental health, since frustrations or stresses that go along with the nature of man's world as it relates to man's significant the needs (vocational, marital, educational and social) will be avoided or well handled thereby removing or reducing emotional maladjustment, which can lead to mental disorder.

Recommendations

The value of guidance and counselling cannot be overemphasized, seeing that it is ubiquitous since it is necessary in every facet of our life for our mental health. There is therefore the need to

- (1) Set-up counselling centres in strategic locations within different communities.
- (2) Employ counsellors in every place man can be found such as the schools, universities, churches, marriage registry, hospitals, prisons, social welfare centre, all types of industrial establishments, psychiatric or mental health clinics, financial institutions, rehabilitation centre, and settings such as military and Para-military service.
- (3) To undertake public lectures and seminars using all the available media facilities to enlighten society on the importance of seeking assistance of professional counsellors in resolving their life issues such as marital, spiritual, vocational, financial, educational., health, etc, in order to maintain their mental health.

Conclusion

Nervous breakdown as a result of poor mental health is an undesirable thing because of its devastating effects on loved ones such as friends or relatives. There is the need to enlighten society on the dangers of poor mental health and how to avoid it. So, the society should be enlightened and motivated to seek the services of professional guidance counsellors in handling issues such as marital.

vocational, health, educational, business, social, personal and group that might over stress their emotions. Above all, professional counsellors should be employed and given the co-operation to function in every organizational set up.

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