

## CHAPTER TWELVE

**The Role of Counsellors in Improving Students' Mental Health and Psychological Well Being at Corona Virus Pandemic****Chinyere Catherine Ngwakwe, & Lydia I. Dabo**

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**Abstract**

This chapter was able to discuss the role of counsellors in improving students' mental health and psychological well-being in this corona virus pandemic. The chapter x-rayed how the COVID 19 came to be by stating brief history of the deadly disease. It has equally thrown light on the effects of this pandemic in the life of students and adults. The chapter also discussed the effects the COVID 19 has on the mental and psychological well-being of students. It equally discussed the role of the counsellors in helping the students at home to maintain a well-balanced mental health and psychological well-being. Ways in which they can maintain a balanced mental health as discussed in this chapter include, Counsellors Finding time to call students and parents, using online tools to build a sense of student community as well as Recognizing populations who may need the most support among others. Conclusions and recommendations were made among which are **that** the Federal, State and Local Governments should make extra effort in training counsellors in e-communication. This will give room for them to have a wider knowledge on the range of online counselling activities. Students will have opportunity to relate with counsellors on line as it is in developed countries.

**Keywords:** Counsellors, Mental Health, Psychological Well Being, COVID-19

**Introduction**

As the corona virus (COVID 19) pandemic sweeps across the world, it is causing widespread concern, fear and stress all of which are natural and normal reactions to the changing and uncertain situation that every one finds themselves in. The issue facing each and every one of us is how we can manage and react to the stressful situation unfolding so rapidly in our lives, communities, societies and nation and the world at large. In a situation like this, there is need to seek help, advice and consolation from both within and outside the home. Such help and advice can be sought from counsellors who are professionally trained to help individuals solve their problems through the process of counselling. Counselling is a process where the client and counsellor work together to come up with different ways of resolving various challenges. Counselling is an opportunity to talk about what troubles a person and to be listened to in a way which assists one to understand himself better, including his thoughts, feelings and behaviour. The process that occurs when a client and counsellor set aside time in order to explore difficulties which they want to discuss may include the stressful or emotional feelings of the client. The act of helping the client to see things more clearly, possibly from a different view-point can enable the client to focus on feelings, experiences or

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behaviour with a view of facilitating positive change. A relationship of trust and confidentiality is paramount to successful counselling.

Counselling is a way of helping people to solve their own emotional, social, personal or interpersonal problems. Counselling is not giving advice, or solving your problems on behalf of anyone. In counselling, the counsellor guides one to look at problems in an objective way. The counsellor shows different dimension to understanding the situation at hand. The counsellor helps the individual to know his strengths and weaknesses without being judgemental. Counselling involves the exploration of problems in an environment that is both supportive and objective. It also involves the identification of alternative courses of action that might solve a problem. The counsellor suggests strategies for managing and altering patterns of upsetting thoughts, feelings and behaviour especially at a time like this of corona virus (COVID 19) pandemic.

Students have major concerns on their minds that may interfere with their success, happiness, and satisfaction in life. When one thinks about students, their mind may major in the role of their academic success. Their mental balance is needed in many situations. Such situations could be family problems, homesickness, identity, loneliness, loss of motivation, pain, problems with food or body image. When students cannot cope up with the situations, the student loses his mental health. In developing countries, the decline of mental health has increased and neglects the social dimensions, family and personal touches remained the irreversible effects (Matliwala, 2017). It has been reported that person-centred counselling is effective for clients with common mental health problems such as anxiety and depression.

**Brief History and Origin of COVID 19 Pandemic**

Although the origin of the pandemic is so controversial, some scientists say that it is likely that COVID 19 originated in bats. They also say that based on their experience with other outbreaks such as Ebola, Lassa Fever, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), Tuberculosis (TB) as well as our long history of malaria and HIV. The scientific consensus is that COVID 19 has a natural origin meaning that it has been proved to have originated from animals to human beings. The novel human corona virus disease (COVID 19) has become the fifth documented pandemic following malaria, TB, Ebola and Lassa fever/HIV. The term coronavirus itself refers to an extensive classification of viruses, which cause infections of the sinuses, nose and the upper throat. The name 'Coronavirus' was derived from the fact that the virus has a similar appearance to a crown, when observed under a microscope while the vast majority of coronavirus pose a little threat to human life the newly identified COVID-19 can be deadly.

Madhav, Oppenheim, Gallivan, Mulembakani, Rubin, & Wolfe (2017) stated that Corona virus are viruses that belong to the pathogenic family of influenza, filovirus ( such as Ebola virus), flavivirus (such as Zika virus) that have caused epidemics and pandemics due to the fact that they are ribonucleic acids(RNA) that have high mutation rates. They also unleash what is generally referred to as severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) hence it is sometimes referred to as SARS-COV. Furthermore, they posited that because they are pathogenic organisms that have high rate of mutation, they pose great health risk to the society. They are therefore biological microorganisms

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that are responsible for the spread of the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and which in most cases exert severe complication on the respiratory system.

According to Puck (2020) as the Corona-Virus (COVID-19) pandemic spreads globally thousands of deaths have forced decision makers to cancel sporting events, restrict international travels as well as discourage common social interactions. Furthermore, he submitted that the above development has led governments of nations to demand that people self-quarantine themselves and this he noted is currently disrupting the daily lives of people. Moreover, he noted that while industries, businesses and financial institutions, markets are being put in disarray, our traditionally long held social values like hugging and shaking hands are being sanctioned because of fear of transmitting the virus.

According to Madhav, Oppenheim, Gallivan, Mulembakani, Rubin, & Wolfe (2017) there are three theories that relates to pandemics threats in the modern world namely the pathogenic, the spark and spread risks as well the bio- terrorism theories. They noted that pandemics have occurred throughout history and appear to be on the increase due to rise in viral pathogenic diseases from animals. Furthermore, they posited that the spread risk theory relates to the influence of globalization which has ushered an age of increased global travel, integration, urbanization and greater exploitation of the natural environment. Moreover, they stated that bio-terrorism which has to do with the use of chemical weapon may also be a possible source.

Pandemics have been defined by Madhav et al (2017) as a large-scale outbreak of infectious disease that can engender disease or even death on a wide geographic area resulting in significant economic, social and political disruption. The Chambers Dictionary (2000) defined the above word as an epidemic that covers a wide area, a wide spread epidemic or one affecting whole people. On the other hand, an online English Dictionary defines pandemic as a disease that hits a wide geographical area and affects a large proportion of the population. From the foregoing the above word as used in this context refers to Corona virus as a great threat to the lives, health, economy and overall wellbeing of the global community.

The corona virus disease (COVID 19) is a highly transmittable and pathogenic viral infection caused by Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome corona virus 2 known as (SARS-COV 2). The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared that the corona virus outbreak originated in Wuhan, China, last December, 2019 and from there it started spreading across Europe, Asia and Africa with America, Spain, Italy and some other Asian countries having high records of mortality rates and confirmed cases. As of May 30<sup>th</sup>, the global death toll surpassed 365,000 amid more than 5.9 million cases. Over 2.5 million people recovered from this deadly disease worldwide according to data collected (Hopkins, 2020). The COVID 19 pandemic in Nigeria is part of the world wide pandemic of corona virus disease 2019 caused by severe acute respiratory syndrome corona virus 2. The Federal Ministry of Health had confirmed a corona virus disease (COVID 19) case in Lagos State. The first case in Nigeria was announced on 27<sup>th</sup> February, 2020, when an Italian citizen in Lagos tested positive for the virus caused by SARS.cov 2. On 9<sup>th</sup> March 2020, a second case of the virus was reported in Ewekoro, Ogun State, a Nigerian citizen who had contact with the Italian

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man. Since then, the virus has crept into all the states in Nigeria except Cross-River State. As of May, 31<sup>st</sup> the death toll in Nigeria surpassed 314, having 10,819 cases confirmed and 3239 cases discharged. This is recorded in 35 states in Nigeria out of the 36 states having Cross-River State yet to record any index case.

COVID-19 can cause mild to severe symptoms affecting the throat, nose and sinuses ( the upper respiratory tract) or the windpipe and lungs (the lower respiratory tract).One of the most shocking characteristics of the new COVID-19 virus is the way in which it spreads with exceptional ferocity from person-to-person. While some of these affected experience extremely mild symptoms (or no symptoms whatever), others require immediate and extensive medical care. Common symptoms include fever, cough, fatigue, shortness of breath, and loss of smell. While the majority of cases result in mild symptoms. Some progress to viral pneumonia, multi-organ failure. The time from exposure to onset of symptoms is typically five days but may range from two to fourteen days. The virus is primarily spread between people during close contact, often via droplets produced by coughing, sneezing, or talking. The droplets usually fall onto the ground or onto surfaces rather than remaining on the air over long distances. People may also become infected by touching a contaminated surface and then touching their face. While on surfaces, the amount of virus declines until it is insufficient to remain infectious, but it may be detected in a laboratory for hours or days. It is most contagious during the first three days after the onset of symptoms appear and in later stages of the disease.

**Mental Health and Psychological Well Being in Human Lives**

Mental health is a key part of our successful life and our overall well-being. The World Health Organization (WHO) states that there is no health without mental health. Our capacity is dependent on our mental health. It is the source of our collective and individual ability as people to reach our full potential. Mental health refers to the way in which we are aware of our own abilities so we can cope well with the difficulties of life. If a person is emotionally balanced then, he can be capable of working productively and giving a contribution to his or her community, state and the nation at large. A range of factors can affect our emotional well-being. These include genetics, prolonged stress, physical illness and shocking events such as COVID19. Environmental issues such as the economic, political and social climate can also have an impact. Mental health is that aspect of psychology that is essentially important because lack of mental health breeds maladjusted behaviour. Mental health persons accept responsibilities, make their own decisions, plan ahead and set realistic goals. Mental health according to Nnachi, (2018) is characterised by the individual's mental state generated by the positive condition or event of the environment such as joy, happiness, freedom, love, acceptance, appreciation, recognition, affection, peace and safety. In order words, when a student is mentally healthy especially at this period of COVID 19, such student will be happy within the environment he/she find themselves, they will equally be well adjusted, live their lives within the acceptable norms of the society, the student will be focused and will be able to set realistic and attainable goals for his/herself while waiting when all these challenges will be over. Mental health goes beyond mental illness and it includes a degree of maturity of the mind and emotional development within the confines of the student's biological age. Bukoye and Rasaq, (2008) includes mental health to be efficient production, buoyant satisfaction of basic motives, self-

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concept, competence and integrity, sustained flexible and integrated mobilization of resources under stress and commitment to others to social goals. In the light of the above definition, the students need a conducive environment, love, care and freedom in this period of corona virus (COVID 19) in order to achieve good mental health. Also, the students should be helped to build self-confidence and positive self-concept and be given opportunities to explore their environment. The students if taken adequate care of will develop an emotionally balanced, calm, socially adaptable, reasonable and good tempered in this period.

World Health Organization (WHO) takes the impact of the crisis on people's mental health very seriously and is monitoring the situation together with national authorities while providing information and guidance to government and the public. They asserted that mental health includes our emotional, psychological and social well-being which affects how we think, feel and act. It also helps determine how we handle stress, relate to others and make choices. Mental health is important at every stage of life of every human being from childhood to adolescence through adulthood. On the other hand, psychological well-being is a state of well-being and wellness of an individual which may include a person's overall sense of well-being, psychological functioning and affective states of the human mind. Both physical health and mental health can influence our psychological well-being. They added that psychological well-being also includes having good mental health, high life satisfaction and sense of positive relationship with others. Psychological well-being refers to someone's overall functioning in relation to his/her feelings. It is also referred to as the inter and intra individual level of positive functioning that can include one's ability to cope with problems when they happen. But as COVID 19 pandemic sweeps across the world, it is causing a widespread of concern, fear and stress as it has really affected virtually all the sectors around and all over the world.

**Effects of COVID 19 on Students' Mental Health and Psychological Well-Being**

Many of the questions focused on specific population groups following the disruptive effects of COVID 19 crisis; what could the impact of the COVID 19 crisis be on student's and adult's mental health. This is indeed an unprecedented time for everybody, especially for students and youths that face the enormous disruption in their lives. Students are likely to be experiencing worry, anxiety and fear and this can include the type of fears that are very similar to those experienced by adults such as a fear of dying, a fear of their relatives dying or a fear of what it means to receive medical treatment in the name of corona virus (COVID 19), fear of how long they are going to stay at in the lockdown period, what is going to be the outcome after this period of corona virus (COVID 19) lockdown and so many questions that will be going on in their mind.

As part of the measures to curtail the increase in spreading of this virus, schools were closed, the students will now have less opportunity to be with their friends and continue to get the social support that is essential for good mental and social well-being. Being at home can place some students at increased risk and exposure to child molestation from most of the students that may be at home doing nothing as the going says "an idle person is the devil's workshop". Some may witness interpersonal violence if their home is not a safe place.

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According to UNAIDS, (2020) said that the corona virus disease 2019 (COVID 19) pandemic and the social distancing measures which has made many countries to implement has caused disruptions to daily routines, part of it being suspension of schools nationwide and because of this, many students and children are out of school. For children and adolescents with mental health needs, such closures mean lack of access to the resources they usually have through school. School routines are important coping mechanisms for young people with mental health issues when schools are closed, they lose an anchor in life and their symptoms could relapse. Now that schools have been closed down since March, 23<sup>rd</sup>, some lock themselves up inside their rooms, refusing to do anything, for some children/students with depression, there will be considerable difficulties adjusting back to normal life when school eventually resumes.

Students with special education needs such as those with “autism” (ie inability to relate properly) spectrum disorder are also at risk. They can become frustrated and short tempered when their daily routines are disrupted. In view of this, parents are advised to create a schedule for their children to reduce anxiety induced by uncertainty. Meanwhile, Colleges and universities students are stressed about hostel evacuation and cancellation of anticipated events such as their non -concluding of their examinations, exchange studies and graduation ceremonies. Some lost their part time jobs as local businesses are closed down. Students in their final years are anxious on when they will write their final year examinations and about the labour market they are going to enter soon, college students are more vulnerable, especially with the current academic and financial burden. Social distancing can result in social isolation in an abusive home, with these abusive words are likely to be made worse during this time of economic uncertainty and stress. Jianli (2020) reported of domestic violence towards the children at home. There are increased rates of child abuse, neglect and exploitation among some children whom their parents are not at home to take adequate care of them.

**The Role of Counsellors in Improving Students’ Mental Health and Psychological Well Being at Corona Virus Pandemic**

Counselling is a relationship characterized by mutual respect, effective communication, genuine and complete acceptance of the client by the counsellor and concentration on the need, problems and feelings of the client. It is also a relationship which facilitates growth and change in the client to become more freely and fully functional (Omoegun, 2012). It is a dynamic and purposeful relationship between two people in which procedures vary with the nature of students’ needs but in which there is always mutual participation by the counsellor and the student with the focus of self-clarification and self-determination. Modo (2008) defined counselling as a helping relationship between the counsellor and the counsellee. It is aimed at helping the counsellee adjust properly to family, school, peer association, and society in general. Okonkwo and Anagbogu (2008) opined that counselling is a process of helping a troubled person to understand himself and his work so as to feel and behave in more personally satisfying manner. Okoye, Adejumo, Achebe and Obayan (2010) defined counselling as an interactional relationship designed to facilitate the personal development of information leading to effective decision taking and awareness of self. Counselling can be done individually or in groups. The essence of both counselling types is to yield in the individual or group of persons self-development for excellence in life’s endeavour. With the

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disruptive effects of COVID 19 including social distancing currently dominating the daily lives of these students, it is important that the counsellors call and video chat and be mindful of and sensitive to the unique mental health needs of the students at home. The anxiety and fears should be acknowledged and not be ignored but better understood and addressed by the counsellors. Students and Children of all ages may be feeling increased stress and isolation as they remain at home during the ongoing coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, and it is important for counsellors to continue to check-in on students even though they can no longer meet face-to-face at school, including their families, neighbourhoods, schools and religious groups, as well as the ways those systems interact to contribute to students and children development. With schools and other organizations temporarily closed, many of those systems have been temporarily lost.

On top of that loss of support, many families are now dealing with frustrations related to economic stability, job loss, health concerns and other stressors that could impact students directly and indirectly. Counsellors are often concerned even over long weekends and long breaks about not having eyes on certain students, but this is entirely different. According to Durbar, (2020) she said that at this point, there are so many unknowns about employment and money that things can shift quickly, even for families who are very functional under the best of circumstances. Dunbar equally said that counsellors and teachers are doing the right thing by finding time to check-in with all families, not just those who are considered high-risk, in an attempt to gauge how they are coping with the current situation. She hopes school systems recognize the value that counsellors can add to help students and families continue to feel connected despite the physical distance. Below are some of the guidelines the counsellors can use to support the students while they are still at home, (Durbar,2020);

- i. **Find Time to call Students and Parents:** Counsellors who interact with students face-to-face are usually able to pick up on nonverbal cues that indicate something is bothering a student, however that option goes away when interactions are moved online. Although many counsellors are already juggling so many demands on their time, as well as potentially their own families, Dunbar, (2020), recommends that counsellors try to find time to call individual students and/or families to check on their well-being and offer support. Even five minutes could mean a lot to some students and their families.
- ii. **Use online tools to Build a Sense of Student Community:** Tools like Flip-Grid or Seesaw allow students to share photos and videos that classmates can watch and comment on in their own time. Counsellors and educators can use these tools, as well as other online learning forums, to ask students to share their own view on how it has been with them since the lockdown or since they have been at home because of this COVID 19 holidays, to ask students to share their high and low points for the week or describe how they are feeling each day using an emoji or Graphic Interchange Format (GIF). Answers to these questions can help counsellors determine which students might be in urgent need of support. A simple Google form also works well, even if sent to a handful of students per week to avoid becoming overwhelmed by responses.
- iii. **Use Telehealth Resources to keep up with Students in need:** Although public health guidelines for social distancing suggest counsellors should avoid meeting with clients face-

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to-face, if possible many counsellors are able to conduct sessions via secure telehealth applications. Dunbar recommends that school counsellors share a list of clinical mental health counsellors that families can reach out to for services if necessary.

- iv. **Maintain the Cohesion of a Therapy Group through Online Tools:** Free applications like Basecamp a project management resource focused on collaboration could help provide a continued sense of community and support for students who had been meeting in group sessions. For example, a counsellor who had been hosting a regular session for students whose family members struggle with substance abuse could create a specific group for those students on Basecamp. This would allow them to carry forward the cohesion and rapport of the group sessions in a private setting while still adhering to social distancing guidelines. It is important to update consent forms to reflect a change of group format. Connection and community are what people really need now more than ever before. People need a sense of community so they feel supported and encouraged and, with so many unknowns now, these connections are so important, (Dunbar, 2020).
- v. **Recognize Populations who may need the most Support:** According to Dunbar, (2020), she noted that the age group of students who will likely be most negatively impacted by the rapid changes brought on by the coronavirus pandemic will be teenagers, who value their budding independence and peer relationships, both of which have now been stifled. In addition, many teenagers are missing out on traditional milestones like getting to know some other places, attending prom and graduation while also coping with the uncertainty of what their postsecondary education will look like in the fall. Additionally, historically vulnerable populations are likely to become even more vulnerable during a time of crisis. Students who receive extra support or services at school will no longer have those available. It is important to keep in mind the potential impacts of these disruptions or interruptions.
- vi. **Prioritize Mental Health as Learning Moves Online:** Parents of young students may worry that children will lose progress they have made in subjects like math and literacy while schools are closed. Dunbar noted that, even with educational concerns, making sure that children are able to find stability and feel as though things will be fine should be a top priority.

### Conclusion

This chapter discussed the role of counsellors in improving the mental health and psychological wellbeing of students in this COVID 19 pandemic. This pandemic has really created a lot of havoc in the lives of the students that stays at home as we as affecting the economy and other areas of people's lives. The paper concluded that the counsellor should have knowledge of internet resources in order to attend to the students when they are not in school. The paper mentioned areas where the counsellors could concentrate when taking care of this students in this COVID 19 era. Such areas are finding time to call the students and their parents to know how they are doing or if there is need for help. The counsellor could as well through the call be able to determine the population of the students they are supposed to take off and some other ways mentioned in the paper. With the disruptive effects of COVID 19 including social distancing currently dominating

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the daily lives of these students, it is important that the counsellors call and video chat and be mindful of and sensitive to the unique mental health needs of these students as they stay at home.

### Suggestions

Based on the writings of this work, the following suggestions were made:

1. The Federal, State and Local Governments should make extra effort in training counsellors in e communication. This will give room for them to have a wider knowledge on the range of online counselling activities. Students will have opportunity to relate with counsellors online as it is in developed countries.
2. Government and NGO's should establish more counselling centers in and outside the school environment. There should be at least three counsellors to every community where students on holidays can go and interact with these counsellors in case the need for it arises.
3. The schools and other educational bodies should equally assist the government in providing functional counselling centres where the professional counsellors are given a free hand to practice the profession without hitch or barrier outside the school environment. This would encourage students and people needing the service can visit them in their newly established centers especially now they needed them most.
4. Moreover, individual counselling for satisfactory achievement should be made available for both students and their parents while the counsellors should be given its due respect as a specialized function possessing the required competencies.
5. Moreover, counselling associations and bodies existing in Nigeria should engage in campaign drives to enlighten people as to their importance and relevance in all aspects of the society. In addition, counselling practitioners should engage in continuing education both internationally and locally to update their knowledge and training as professionals.

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