

## Assessing the Awareness of Peer Counselling in Relation to Gender and Age Variables Among Nigeria and Benin Republic out of School Youths

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### **Abstract**

*Youths and adolescents are most times faced with lot of challenges. Aside the challenges faced, there is also the confusion and indecisiveness of who to talk to, confide in and pour out their state of emotions to. In real sense, youths would prefer someone within their age-range. Peer Counselling is a relatively new phenomenon that train and supervise students that are selected as counsellors to provide interpersonal helping activities to their peers. It is on this basis that the study focused on the awareness of peer counselling among out- of-school youths in relation to age and gender variables. The study adopted survey research design and two null hypotheses were formulated. A total number of 323 out of 3200 youths from Nigeria and Benin Republic who attended a youth conference in Nigeria participated in the study. The Instrument used for the study was self- developed by the researchers and vetted by experts. Pearson Product Moment Correlation was used to analyze the two research hypotheses. Result obtained from Hypothesis one revealed that there is a significant relationship between gender variable and awareness of peer counselling ( $r = 0.949, P < 0.05$ ). Also, hypothesis two result showed that ( $r = 0.912, P < 0.05$ ). Hence, this is an indication that significant relationship exists between age variable and awareness of peer counselling among out-of-school youths. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that counselling psychologists should create awareness on the roles of peer counsellors in catering for the needs and mental health of youths.*

**Keywords:** Age, Awareness, Gender, Peer counselling, Youth,

### **Introduction**

Most of the time, most youth will prefer to talk to a friend, members of his/her peer group or someone they perceived has the same mindset as they. Youth like the adults also experience challenges in different ways which they mostly keep to themselves. Youth keep issues to themselves because of fear of whom to confide in among the adults and to worsen situations, some of these adults seem not readily available or approachable to the youth. It is believed that most youth spend significantly more time with their peers than with younger children or adults. Peers are known to play crucial roles in the lives of growing youth hence the relevance of peer counselling to proffer help in time of need and to serves as a means to access the professionally trained counsellors.

Ackummey 2003 opined the principles of peer counselling is simply directing the peer pressure in a very positive way toward the offering of help by the young to their peers who

have all kinds of concerns and interests, be it emotional, academic, social or disciplinary. Peer counselling is targeted at helping peer counsellors serve as a channel for clients to be connected to professional counsellors. Astiti, 2019 stated further that Peer Counselling is a form of counselling carved out by nonprofessional personal under the supervision of a professional counsellor that is systematic in the form of mutual assistance and mutual support between peers in dealing with various life problems or efforts to develop self-potential. Some research claimed peer counselling originated in the 60s and started with paraprofessional movement. It is also widely believed that in the past fifteen years, Peer counselling has been used within the tertiary institution.

### **The Concept of Counselling and Peer Counselling.**

Counselling is the provision of professional assistance and guidance in resolving personal or psychological problems. According to American Counselling Association NCCA 2010, Counselling is the service offered to the individual who is undergoing a problem and needs professional help to overcome it. Counselling is further seen as a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education and career goals. All these definitions of the concept of Counselling help to better understand the concept of Peer Counselling as it also involves training the selected peers. Peer counselling gives an enabling environment where both the trained peer counsellor and counselee can explain thoughts, feelings, look at critical emotional issues and concerns that may want to jeopardize the wellbeing of the counsel at the moments. According to Dabir and Stone, 2012 among the purposes of counselling service is to help develop students' character, youth or students' ability to avoid problems and relate vocational interests to coursework and life in general. Counselling services is also designed to promote achievement whether among students and youth.

Peer counselling in general is a process in which trained and supervised students offer amongst others listening support and problem-solving ideas to help them resolve or cope with their issues and concerns. According to American Psychological Association (2022), Peer counselling is counselling by individual who has a status equal to that of the client, such as college student trained to counsel other students or an employee trained to counsel coworkers.

In addition, Peer counselling from Sigilai & Bett, 2013 view is an interactive relationship between age groups to influence positive change. Simply put, peer counselling assist individuals to explore and resolve difficulties they face, clarify conflicting issues and helping that person discover alternative ways of managing themselves and help them decide what action would bring solutions they desired.

### **Importance of Peer Counselling**

Peer counselling is important because it has the ability to prevent mental illness within school setting and the larger society. This is possible because a professional trained counselling psychologist may not be on ground but a trained peer counsellor can fill in the gap at the spot.

Other importance of Peer Counselling is its ability to enable peer counsellors use past related experience to resolve others challenges. Studies with humans suggest that lack of harmonious peer relations during the developmental stage is related to poor mental health later in life. Salsabila, Wirgantara & Salsabila, 2020 supported this importance of peer counselling by their study on the role of Peer counselling on mental health. The result of their study proved that peer counselling has influence on mental health.

Allen and Antonishak, 2008 argued that peer Counselling is founded on the premise that young people are more likely to change their behavior if peers they like and trust advocate change of social norms on community context. It promotes discipline among their peers by helping them to understand themselves and their friends. This is buttressed by the findings of Kavula,2014 who studied the effect of principals' use of peer counselling: suspension of indiscipline students; students' expulsion and use of class meeting with students for collaborative decision making on students' discipline in Kitui county, Kenya. The result of the study revealed that peer counselling has played significant role in helping to promote discipline among students in public schools.

Peer counselling has the capacity to increase peer support for those passing through unpleasant challenges. Ndidi,2005 ascertained this importance of Peer counselling by stating that students are more likely to respond more positively to messages heard from their peers and are more likely to ask questions disturbing them and discuss challenging problems as well. Another importance of Peer counselling is the capacity to help in the personality and social development of youths. Muslikah, Hariyadi and Amin,2016 stated peer counselling can provide suggestions that have a positive impact in adolescents. Peer counselling has the ability to help clients experience independence and self-control which are very meaningful for students/youthful age.

Peer Counselling can be used at many age levels to address problems such as drug/substance abuse, unwanted /teenage pregnancies, loneliness, friendship, stress management, widowhood among other related challenges of life. Peer counselling is also known as Peer assistance, it helps students/ peers to care about others and proof their caring skills into practice. Research support that children aged eight -to- twelve tend to form groups or mouse packs is indicating an earlier age for peer orientation. Peer counsellors are trained to provide a nonjudgmental listening posture that encourages others to express and explores their worries. Peer Counselling reinforces the value of discussing problems and difficulties experienced by the students amicably without resulting into violence that is, talk it out rather than, act it out. Peer Counsellors are usually volunteers or selected through network, sociometric, interests and other peer or friend opinions/ descriptions. Peer counsellors act as bridge between professional counsellors and intending clients or students who will not want to see the school counsellor direct or a counselling psychologist. In other words, peer counsellors can be a link between the person who needs help and the service provider Santrock (2001) believed Peer counsellors are trained through classroom instruction, role playing and skill

building activities to help fellow peers. Peer counsellors are trained on active communication skills, listening skills, assertiveness and ethics of the profession particularly on how to maintain confidentiality and other basic counselling skills. Peer Counsellors can be carried out in a variety of guidance services, providing peer individuals in the form of help but peers are not only people of the same age, but that have the same life experience in various ways (Salmlati, Rosmawati & Lestari, 2018). The training of peer counsellors can span weeks of intensive training and sometimes, retraining is inevitable. It is not everyone can be peer counsellor because it is not all that can be empathetic.

The process of peer counselling ensures peer counsellor, the clients and the community benefit tremendously from the service. Peer counsellors gain skills in active listening and can use their participation on their curriculum vitae to help gain employment. Gender are attitudes, feelings and behaviors that a given culture associates with a person's biological sex as per the American Psychological Association in 2012. Arthur (1998) stated that the way in which male and female students cope with social adjustments differ. He stressed further that males tend to suppress stress via isolation and escape while female tend to engage in self-blame. Gender influences roles played by men and women, how they make and take decisions and the nature of life adventures they dive into.

Bururia, Marangu & Nyaga, 2014 in a study where they examined the contribution of Peer Counselling to School behavior Change in Secondary Schools in Maara sub-County, Kenya. The research addressed issues related to youth. The study had the assumption that Peer counsellors are academically sound above average students making them effective academic tutors. These researchers are of the opinions that peer counselling utilizes role-playing and modeling to change behavior. Therefore, Counselling skills such as mentoring, role modelling and academic tutoring of students were assessed. One of the results of this study agreed that peer counsellors are important in mentoring other students as they addressed youth related issues.

A study conducted by Andoh-Robertson, Kwofie & Kploanyi (2021) titled Influence of peer counselling on Academic Achievement and Social Adjustment of Students in the University of Mines and Technology (UMaT), Ghana showed there was no significant difference among the gender of students exposed to peer counselling, the result further indicated that peer counselling was able to effect social adjustment among male and female students. Research by Micheal, where he sought the opinions of secondary school pupils on the effects of peer counselling for bullying services in their school, the study focused on social support for bullying related problems. The opinions of the pupils were sought on the pupils' willingness to use the service relative to other potential sources of support, what gender and age of peer counsellor would they preferred. The results revealed they preferred to seek help from the peer counsellors to their teachers and siblings. In addition, the result showed preference of a particular gender and one of a specific relative age closer to their ages. Also,

significant difference was obtained between girls and boys and between users and non-users of the service.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The issue of consulting or visiting a professional Counsellor whether on campus or in the larger society has been of a great concern. Students mostly finds it difficult to visit counselling centers for reasons best known to them. Actually, this could be due to lack of awareness of the functions of a school counsellor or a professional counsellor situated in a community. The youths mostly want to divulge their emotional issues or problems to their age mates or someone that is closer to their age or that have the same mind sets. Despite the fact that most schools are mandated to provide counselling services, most youth would rather keep their problems to themselves. Professional Counsellors most of the time, volunteer to work outside the school community yet the youth will find it difficult to access or make use of the counselling service. In addition, it appears not too many people are aware of the concept of Peer counselling as claimed by a writer in the case of Indian where it is believed that Peer counselling is not very popular.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to determine:

1. the awareness of out of school youths on the concept of peer counselling
2. the access by out of school youth to the services of peer counselling irrespective of their gender and age.
3. utilization of peer counsellors to reach the large number of youth population in most of our African countries.

It is in an attempt to find solution to these; the concept of peer counselling became paramount. Peer culture has been in existence from time immemorial, common among Africans. Gestalt theory of learning by Wolfgang Kohler anchored this study (the theory dwell on the importance of an individual awareness of their environment and how it integrates with their previous knowledge and experience).

### **Null hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses guided the study:

**Null Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between Awareness of peer counselling and gender issues of respondents.

**Null Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant relationship between Awareness of peer counseling and Age issues of respondents.

### Methodology

A Survey research design was adopted for this study. The population were made up of three thousand, two hundred and nine youth across the nations of Nigeria and Benin Republic. The population were out of school youth who gathered for an annual conference at Iwo, Osun State of Nigeria. The sample consisted 323 male and female out of school youth with age ranging from 12-23. The samples were randomly selected. The instrument-questionnaire was self- developed based on the need of the study and available related literature. The instrument was also vetted by Experts in the profession. The Reliability coefficient of the instrument was 0.82. The instrument has three sections and has three points Likert rating scale of Yes, No and No idea. The researchers administered the instrument personally. Two null hypotheses were set to guide the study. The hypotheses were tested and analyzed at 0.05 level of significant. Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC). PPMC was used to find the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

### Presentation of Results and Discussion.

**Table 1:** Analysis of demographic variables in frequency and percentages

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	176	54.5
Male	147	45.5
Total	323	100.0
<b>Age:</b>		
12- 14	11	3.4
15 – 18	84	26.0
19 – 22	136	42.1
23 years and above	92	28.5
Total	323	100.0
<b>Education:</b>		
Secondary	42	13.0
College	37	11.5
Polytechnic	61	18.9
Monotechnic	13	4.0
University	170	52.6
Total	323	100.0
<b>Tribes:</b>		
Yoruba	242	74.9
Igbo	8	2.5
Hausa	27	8.4
Others	46	14.2
Total	323	100.0
<b>Country:</b>		
Nigeria	267	82.7
Benin Republic	56	17.3
Total	323	100.0

Table 1 showed the descriptive analysis in frequencies and percentage distribution of the items of the demographic variables: On the gender status, 176 representing 54.5% are female and the rest 147 or 45.56% are male. This shows that females are numerically higher than the male. A total of 11 representing 3.4% are between 12-14 years while 94 or 26.0% are between 15-18 years as against 136 or 42.1% who are within 19-22 years and the rest 92 or 28.5% are from 23 years or above. This shows that majority are either within ages 19-22 or from 23 years and above. On educational institutions, 42 or 13.0% possess secondary education while 37 or 11.5% possess college education as against 61 or 18.9% that possess polytechnic while 13 or 4.0% possess Monotechnic education and the rest 170 representing 52.6% possess university education. This clearly depicts that majority of the respondents possess university education.

On Tribe, 242 or 74.9% are Yoruba by tribe while 8 or 2.5% are Igbo by tribe as against 27 or 8.4% that are Hausa and the rest 46 or 14.2% are other tribes such as Nigerian other tribes or Benin Republic tribes. On the respondent's country, 267 representing 82.7% are Nigerians and the rest 56 or 17.3% are in Republic. This shows that most of the respondents are Nigerians.

**Null Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between Awareness of peer counseling and gender issues of respondents

**Table 2:** Pearson product Moment correlation statistics on relationship between Awareness of peer counseling and gender issues of respondents

Variable	n	Mean	SD	Df	Correlation index r	Critical r	P value
Awareness/knowledge	323	39.235	6.105				
Gender issues	323	15.232	2.345	321	0.949**	0.113	0.000

\*\**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

The outcome of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics showed that significant relationship exists between Awareness of peer counseling and gender issues of respondents. The p value of 0.000 was of lower value than the 0.05 alpha level of significance at a correlational index r level of 0.949. This implies that gender issues significantly influence the level of awareness of peer counseling among respondents.

**Null Hypothesis 2:** There is no significant relationship between Awareness of peer counseling and Age issues of respondents

**Table 3:** Pearson product Moment correlation statistics on relationship between Awareness of peer counseling and Age of respondents

Variable	n	Mean	SD	Df	Correlation index r	Critical r	P value
Awareness/knowledge	323	39.235	6.105	321	0.912**	0.113	0.001
Age issues	323	10.052	1.774				

**\*\*.** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

The result of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation statistics showed that significant relationship exists between Awareness of peer counseling and Age of respondents. The p value of 0.001 was lower than the 0.05 alpha level of significance at a correlational index r level of 0.912. This implies that irrespective of the Age of respondent, there are peer counsellors of that age brackets to attend to them, Therefore, the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant relationship between Awareness of peer counseling and Age issues of respondent was rejected.

## Discussion of Findings

### Relationship between Awareness of peer counseling and gender issues of respondents

The findings on Relationship between Awareness of peer counseling and gender issues of respondents showed that the more the level of awareness of peer counseling, the higher their efficacy to solving gender issues and vice versa. Kwofie and Kploanyi's studies on the Influence of peer counselling on Academic Achievement and Social Adjustment of University students In UMaT, Ghana showed there was no significant difference among the gender of students exposed to peer counselling. The result stressed the fact that peer counselling has the capacity to effect social adjustment among male and female students. The two major findings of Kwofie and Kploanyi are in line with the present findings that the awareness of peer Counselling has significant relationship on the respondent's gender. The implication of this result is that Peer counselling is known among both male and female and can be used to counsel them as situation arises and warrants. To confirm these findings further, the study of Andoh-Robertson, Kwofie and Kploanyi (2021) affirmed that male and female students would not be more socially adjusted than their male counterparts when exposed to peer counselling.

### Relationship between Awareness of peer counseling and Age issues of respondents

The findings showed that irrespective of the age of respondent, there are peer counsellors of that age brackets to attend to them the more the level of awareness of peer counseling the higher their efficacy to solving different Ages related issues and age is not a barrier to access a peer counsellor. The findings is in line with the findings of Micheal on the effects of Peer Counselling for bullying services in respect to Gender and Age and the choice of other relative potential sources pf counselling supported these findings. In addition, Bururia, Marangu & Nyaga ,2014 affirmed the result of this study.



## Conclusion

The conclusion of this study is that the awareness of peer counselling by the respondents has a relationship with their age and gender. These two variables endear the respondents to the concepts of peer counselling and that peer counselling has the ability of the services to help meet their needs of youths with regards to gender and age-related issues. Based on the conclusion, more awareness of peer counselling should be created and more Peer Counsellors should be selected and trained to address different gender and age-related issues of out of school youth.

## Recommendations

Based on the outcome of the study, the following recommendations are put forward by the researchers:

1. Counselling and Developmental Psychologists should create more forums where more youth will become aware of peer counselling services and learn to utilize the service.
2. There is urgent need for the State or the federal government to select and train more qualified peer counsellors in all parts of the Society, whether in the school, workplace, hospitals among others to boost and assist the out of school youths in all facets of life.
3. The State and the Federal Government of Nigeria should motivated and encouraged the available peer counsellors through incentives and remunerations
4. Each youth should be attached to a peer counsellor in their immediate environment so that all forms of decadence associated with youth can be arrested before it gets out of hand

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