

## **COUNSELLOR EDUCATORS AND PRACTISING COUNSELLORS PERCEPTION OF ETHICAL ISSUES IN COUNSELLORS EDUCATION IN ENUGU STATE**

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### **Introduction**

Every well established profession must have a code of ethics to guide the conduct of its members. In other words, for every well established association, to progress in its activities they must have some laid down rules and regulations. These rules and regulations act as norms which guide the moral conduct, duty and judgement that guide members in their dealings with one another, members and the general public they serve. According to Ifelunni (2017), every association to be able to progress in its daily activities, have some laid down norms which guide members in their dealings with one another and members and the general public they serve. In doing this, Ifelunni maintained that, the counsellor respects the integrity and promotes the welfare of his client. Ethics are therefore the yardstick upon which members, conduct or behaviours are adjudged as good (ethical) or bad (unethical) (Ifelunni, 2017).

Ethics simply refer to standards of right and wrong, that part of science and philosophy dealing with moral conduct, duty and judgement (Ude, 2016). Ethics have been defined by Eze (2006) as the system of moral principles, and rules of the conduct. Ifelunni (2017) defined ethics as a science of morals that guides the conduct of members of an association like CASSON, MAN, CAN, an organisation or members with commonly shared ideology. The implication is that these bodies have “dos” and “dont’s” that enhance their growth and help them maintain some prestige. Especially because, by its nature it must adhere to high ethical standards backed with the necessary legitimate and legal requirements. Operationally in this study therefore, ethics are the criterion upon which counselling association, conducts or behaviours are adjudged as ethical or unethical.

In dealing with ethical issues in Guidance and Counselling in Nigeria, we shall concern ourselves with those codes of ethics meant to guide the moral conduct, duty and judgement of counsellor in practising his profession, since

the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) does not have a standard code of ethics for counsellors. According to Ifelunni (2017), there are many ethical issues for counsellor education which include; expert witness, libel and slander, right to privacy, malpractice and criminal liability. Okobiah and Okorodudu (2006) noted that ethical issues for counsellor education include; ethnical responsibilities, client's right, confidentiality, client's welfare, socio-moral behaviour, honesty and responsibility, legal requirement and consideration. Due to limitation in writing, this research work shall focus on right of privacy and malpractice. Also, observation indicate that counsellor educators and practising counsellors in this studied areas are misdemeanour. That is, exhibiting unethical behaviour.

In counselling, client has a right to privacy which is the right to live a life of undue interference in one's affairs by other individuals especially the good aspect. This implies that individual should not be under careful observation in his affairs. Privacy of information is very vital in counselling and a counsellor can be sued for an invasion of the right of privacy for failing to protect a client's privacy (Ifelunni, 2017). Thus, the right of privacy according to Nwoye (1990) is attempted to urge against careless or unguarded publication by counsellors, of statement which, although true, might be damaging to their clients. For instance, a counsellor publishing his client vital information during counselling exercise without the client's permission. In such situation, it is regarded as unethical and such a counsellor can be sued. The law of the right of privacy therefore imposes an additional obligation for counsellors to exercise due care over the volume of data they handle especially the outcomes of psychological tests (Ifelunni, 2017). The right of privacy in context of this study therefore means the undue interference in client's affairs by counsellors.

Another ethical issue of interest in this work is malpractice. Failure to act correctly or legally when doing a job could be regarded as malpractice because it could cause injury or loss. Malpractice, according to Merriam (2017) is a dereliction of professional duty or a failure to exercise an ordinary degree of professional skill or learning by one (such as a physician) rendering professional services which results in injury, loss or damage. It is an injurious, negligent, or improper practice (Merriam, 2017). Malpractice is also defined as behaviour or conduct by a professional that is improper or causes injury (Heny, 2015). In other words, malpractice is behaviour in which someone breaks the law or the rules of their profession in order to gain some personal advantage. Malpractice can be defined as professional incompetence, lack of skill or an exhibition of unethical behaviour in the performance of one's duties (Ifelunni, 2017). This malpractice arises when one who is adjudged to be

highly competent fails to perform. In such a case, the individual could be liable for either criminal liability or civil liability. Operationally in this research work, malpractice can be defined as counsellors incompetence, lack of skill or an exhibition of unethical behaviour in the performance of their duties. When such situation arises, it is regarded as unethical in counsellors education and counsellors should endeavour as much as possible to eschew it.

Practising counsellors and counsellor educators no doubt, owe ethical responsibilities to their client, the institution in which they work and ultimately to the society. This is a reality, because according to Essuman (1991), when a counsellor accepts to work in an institution, it is implied that in principle, he is in agreement with the general policies, practices and regulations of the institution. Where a counsellor discovers that his professional beliefs, principles and ethics are at loggerheads with the policies and goals of the institution, he would need to consider leaving the institution to avoid unethical conduct or rather malpractice that would tarnish the image of his profession. Also, practising counsellors and counsellor educators are expected to behave ethically in their professional duties (activities) towards themselves, their clients and the public (Essuman, 1991). A counsellor who behaves unethically is expected to correct the crime immediately so as to retain his status as a counsellor. A counsellor is expected to use legitimate accepted ways to improve himself professionally. He must not seek self improvement at the expense of his colleagues through damaging their personality or worth. Counsellors also must be law-abiding to their country and their profession. They must not claim to possess qualifications which are beyond what they have (Essuman, 1991).

The counsellor is expected to respect the integrity and promote the welfare of his clients at all time. He is expected to accept every client for counselling. Counsellors employed in the school system or in institutions are employed to render their counselling services for clients have no right to claim remunerations from their clients. Any information given by the client in a counsellor counselling session is to be kept in confidence have the obligation not to reproduce, modify or appropriately published test or some portions of them without seeking appropriate permission from the authors or publishers. The counsellors must ensure that tests and approval materials he uses to gather client data are valid, reliable and appropriate. Also, before administering a test to a client, the client must be briefed on the purpose of his taking the test to assume him that it is for his good or that it would not in any way harm his person when the testing is meant for research purpose (Essuman, 1991). Practising counsellors and/or counsellor educators who in any way contravenes this ethical responsibilities is liable to be sued.

A major reason for the existence of counselling is the fact that people have problems that they are unable to resolve by themselves. When such problems occur, counsellors are the most qualified to handle the situation. Practising and/or educator counsellors are the same with little difference. A practising counsellor is that trained counsellor in secondary schools or primary schools that engaged in formulating and providing clients with real and simulated work as well as with social experiences that correct and extend that decision making and interpersonal skills (Berdie, 2002). Kurpius (2008) defined a practising counsellor as a consultant responsible for introducing intervention strategies to be designed towards the developmental and preventive process of the clients. In this study therefore, practising counsellor is one that has training and certification in the discipline – guidance and counselling who uses his or her expertise to assist others in their different concerns in secondary and primary schools.

Counsellor educators are counsellors in tertiary institutions who become responsible for developing and implementing systematic curriculum activities and progress, designed to facilitate self development (Pine, 2006). This may thus explain why Berdie (2002) indicated that the prominent functions performed by counsellor educators include; teaching, training and consulting. Operationally in this study therefore, counsellor educators means counsellors in tertiary institutions whose duty include, teaching, training and consulting.

In Enugu State, it appears that practising counsellors and counsellor educators are not adhering to the ethical issues or rather responsibilities in their profession. The rationale for the guess is that parents, students, stakeholders in education among others are complaining bitterly that the practising counsellors do not respect the integrity and promote the welfare of their clients at all time. In secondary school for example, counsellors do not accept every client for counselling. They demand remunerations from their clients and as a result many students avoid their services. Be that as it may, counsellor educators in tertiary institutions administer, score and interpret test indiscriminately. They administer test to clients or students without telling them the purpose of the study. More importantly, counsellor educators publish tests without seeking appropriate permission from the authors. In the support of the above assertion, Ude (2016) posits that practising counsellors in secondary schools charge high consultancy fees from their clients. Eze (2006) also noted that secondary school counsellors propagate false information to the public. Turby (2012) added that tests administered by counsellor educators in the tertiary institutions are not valid, reliable and appropriate. Ugwu (2004) earlier noted that counsellor educators release test data of their clients to

parents, friends and well wishes without the consent of their client (testee). This is a clear indication that practising counsellors and counsellor educators are not adhering to the ethical issues or rather responsibilities in Enugu State. It is against this background that the researchers are motivated to examine the counsellor educators and practising counsellors perception of ethical issues in counsellors education in Enugu State.

Available literature and observation point to the fact that practising counsellors and counsellor educator do not adhere to ethical issues in their profession in Nigeria, especially in tertiary and secondary schools in Enugu State. Parents, students and stakeholders in education are of the opinion that practising counsellors and counsellor educators do not respect the integrity and promote the welfare of their client at all time. In secondary schools for instance, counsellors demand remuneration from the clients. Also in tertiary institutions, counsellor educators administer, score and interpret tests indiscriminately. They also publish tests data without seeking appropriate permission from the testees. Supposing that this scenario is actually true of practising counsellors and counsellor educators in Enugu State, could this unethical responsibilities have arisen due to counsellors lack of consideration of ethical issues?

The researchers are worried that assuring that ethical issues are not considered, it will certainly tarnish the image of the profession in Enugu State and the image of the counsellors in particular in Enugu State of Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that the present study investigated counsellor educators and practising counsellors perception of ethical issues in counsellor education in Enugu State.

The questions which the researchers posed to guide the study are:

1. To what extent do counsellor educators consider right of privacy on perception of ethical issues in counsellors education?
2. To what extent do practising counsellors consider malpractice on perception of ethical issues in counsellor educator?

The following null hypothesis formulated guided the study and was tested at  $P < 0.05$  level of significant.

There is no significant difference between counsellor educators and practising counsellors on perception of ethical issues in counsellor education.

## **Method**

The design for the study was a descriptive survey to determine the counsellor educators and practising counsellors perception of ethical issues in counsellors education in Enugu State. The population of the study was 47

counsellor educators and 277 practising counsellors in Enugu State. There was no sample because the entire population of both counsellors was used for the study due to manageable number of the counsellors in this area.

The instrument used for data collection was researchers developed questionnaire titled “counsellors perception of ethical issues in counsellors education” (CPEICE). The instrument has two parts. Part one focused on respondent personal data while part two were nine items put in two clusters. Cluster A elicited information on extent counsellor educators consider right of privacy on perception of ethical issues in counsellors education. Cluster B addressed the extent practising counsellors consider malpractice on perception of ethical issues in counsellors education. The items in the instrument were placed on four point rating scale of Very High Extent (VHE), High Extent (HE), Low Extent (LE) and Very Low Extent (VLE). The face validity of the instruments was determined by giving the draft to three experts with one in the field of Measurement and Evaluation and two in Guidance and Counselling unit in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability of the instrument were determined through internal consistency measure using Cronbach Alpha technique. Thus, the instruments were administered to 20 randomly selected counsellor educators from Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka and 60 randomly selected practising counsellors in secondary schools in Anambra State. The analysis of data collected gave Alpha coefficient values of 0.91, and 0.81, respectively for the two instruments.

The researchers personally administered copies of the questionnaire to the respondents. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while student t-test analysis was used for testing the null hypothesis at 0.05 probability level. The following real limits of number were used for decision. Mean scores of 3.50-4.00 Very High Extent, 2.50-3.49 High Extent, 1.50-2.49 Low Extent and 0.50-1.49 Very Low Extent.

## Results

**Table 1: Mean and standard deviation on extent counsellor educators consider right of privacy on perception of ethical issues in counsellors education.**

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
1.	Counsellors keep any information given by the client in a counselling session confidence.	3.50	0.40	VHE
2.	Counsellors do not reproduce test data of client without permission.	3.60	0.60	VHE
3.	Test data are not to be released to anybody without the consent of client.	3.51	0.70	VHE

4.	Counsellors do not modify test data of client without permission	3.50	0.41	VHE
	Grand mean	3.53		VHE

**n=324;  $\bar{X}$  = 3.50-4.00 = Very High Extent (VHE)**

Data presented in Table 1 reveals the extent counsellor educator consider right of privacy on perception of ethical issues in counsellors education. Result shows that item 1-4 have mean scores which fall within mean range of 3.50-4.00 indicating Very High Extent of counsellors perception of ethical issues in counsellors education. The grand mean of 3.53, further indicates the fact that counsellors educators consider right of privacy in counsellor education. Furthermore, the closeness of the standard deviation scores on the extent counsellors consider right of privacy responses indicate the less variability of the scores from the mean tendency. This data suggests that both counsellors consider to a very high extent the right of privacy in counsellor education.

**Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Analysis on Extent Practising Counsellors Consider Malpractice on Ethical Issues In Counsellor Education**

S/N	Item Statement	$\bar{X}$	SD	Remark
5.	Counsellors respect the integrity and promote the welfare of his client all the time.	3.80	0.49	VHE
6.	Counsellors accept every client for counselling	3.90	0.60	VHE
7.	Counsellors do not demand remuneration from their client.	3.82	0.70	VHE
8.	Counselling keep any information by the client in counselling session confidence.	3.52	0.50	VHE
9.	Counsellors do not take undue advantage from the client.	3.50	0.57	VHE
	Grand mean	3.71		

**n=324;  $\bar{X}$  = 3.50-4.00 = Very High Extent (VHE)**

Data presented in Table 2 reveals the extent practising counsellors consider malpractice in counsellor education. Result shows that items 5-9 have mean scores, which fall within mean range of 3.50-4.00 indicating Very High Extent of counsellors consideration of malpractice in counsellor education. The grand mean of 3.71, further affirms the fact that counsellors consider malpractice in counsellor education. However, the closeness of the standard

deviation scores of the responses for all the items indicates less variability that exists among the responses. The data on the Table suggest that counsellors to a very high extent consider malpractice in counsellor education.

**Table 3: t-test on counsellor educators and practising counsellors on perception of ethical issues in counsellor education**

Groups	$\bar{X}$	SD	N	df	t-cal	t-crit	Decision
Counsellor educators	3.80	0.58	47	322	0.11	1.96	Not rejected
Practising counsellors	3.70	0.60	277				

The data analysis in Table 3 shows that the mean for counsellor educators is 3.80, and practising counsellors is 3.70. The t-test analysis to find out whether there exists a significant different between the mean ratings of counsellor educators and practising counsellors on perception to ethical issues shows no significant difference between the two groups. This is based on the t-calculated (0.12) which is lower than the t-critical of (1.96) at 322 degree of freedom. Based on the above result, the null hypothesis is not rejected, meaning that there is no significant different between counsellor educators and practising counsellors on perception of ethical issues in counsellor education. This suggests that being in tertiary institution or secondary schools is not a factor in considering ethical issues in counsellor education.

### Discussion

From the result of data analysis in Table 1, it has been found that counsellor educators and practising counsellors in Enugu State to a very high extent consider ethical issues in counsellor education. This is because both counsellors to a very high extent agreed that; counsellors keep any information given by the client in a counselling session confidential, do not reproduce test data of client without permission, do not release test data to anybody without the consent of clients, and do not modify test data of client with permission. The above research outcome is in agreement with Okobiah and Okorodudu (2006), which posit that counsellors consider the client's right, confidentiality, client's welfare among others in counsellor education. Also, Essuman (1991) notes that counsellors consider the right of privacy in counsellor education by keeping information from the client in counselling session confidential. From the findings it is clear that both counsellors consider right of privacy in counsellor education. This is true because, counsellors are aware that, who in any way contravenes this ethical issues is liable to be sued. The implication of this is not surprising because counsellors are expected to behave ethically in



their professional duties (activities) towards themselves, their clients and the public.

From the result of data analysis in Table 2, it has been found that counsellors consider malpractice to a very high extent in counsellor education. This is reflected in their very high extent in counsellors respecting the integrity and promoting the welfare of his client all the time, counsellor accepting every client for counselling, in not demanding remuneration from their client, keeping their client information in confidence and does not take undue advantage from their client. The findings support earlier findings of Ifelunni (2017) who noted that counsellors major responsibility is to respect the integrity and promote the welfare of his client. Further (Essuman, 1991) in the support of the above, posit that counsellors does not demand remuneration from their client before counselling. With this, it is therefore clear that counsellors consider malpractice in counsellor education. This is because any information given by the client in a counselling session is being kept by counsellor in confidence. This findings is not surprising because, counsellors owed ethical responsibilities to the client, the institution in which they work and ultimately to the society. However, significant difference between the mean scores of counsellor educators and practising counsellors on perception of ethical issues in counsellors education do not exist. The result revealed that there is no significant difference, which means that both counsellors is important and necessary in perception of ethical issues in counsellor education.

### **Conclusion**

It is not astonished that counsellors to a very high extent consider ethical issues or rather responsibilities in counsellor education. This is because, counsellors understand that unethical conduct not only tarnish their image but also, tarnish the image of the profession.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the research findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) should organize workshops on ethical issues or rather responsibilities to remain counsellors from time to time their ethical professional responsibility in counsellor education.
2. Counsellors should at all time consider the ethical issues when counselling to achieve their purpose and their profession.

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