

*Duties of Professional Counsellors in Promoting Unity in Nigeria*

**DUTIES OF PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLORS IN PROMOTING UNITY IN NIGERIA**

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**Abstract**

*In Nigeria, there are issues of insecurity, disintegration, lawlessness and heightened corruption among others. The input of professional counsellors cannot be overemphasized especially when stakeholders are formulating policies for national integration. Hence, it is on this premise that this study investigated the role of counsellors in promoting Unity in Nigeria. The research design adopted for the study was the descriptive survey type. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted in selecting the respondents that participated in the study. Purposive sampling technique was used to select 460 respondents for the study. The instrument used in gathering the required data was a self-developed questionnaire titled Duties of Counsellors in Promoting Unity Questionnaire (DCPUQ). Three null hypotheses were generated and tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance using t-test statistical tool. The result obtained revealed that there was significant difference in the role of counsellors in promoting unity based on gender, educational qualification and length of years in service. Based on the findings of the study, it was recommended that more school counsellors should enlighten the students on the need for unity and integration among Nigerians. Seminars and workshops should be organized by counsellors in collaboration with the government, Non-Governmental Organizations and other stakeholders in order to discuss and tackle contemporary issues on National integration and unity.*

**Keywords:** Counsellors, Unity, Duties, Professional, Nigeria

**Introduction**

Disunity among people of various tribes and cultures in Nigeria is an issue that is of concern to the government and various religious organizations. This is reflected in the actions of Boko haram insurgency in the country. The disintegration in Nigeria is caused by unresolved ethno-religious conflict which is fueled by lack of cordiality among the various multi-religious and multi-ethnic groups (Salawu, 2010). According to Akwara, Udaw and Onimawo (2001) socio-political instability and lack of unity are the basic crisis that threatens our co-existence as a nation. Onifade (2013) explained that equal dissemination of natural resources will automatically promote national integration in any nation.

Since the return of democracy the craze to amass wealth by the politicians has been the major cause of violence and national disintegration in Nigeria. Adeleye (2014) reported that the Civil war of 1967-1970 was believed to have been fought to keep Nigeria as one country, but the consequences of that war has led to disintegration. The revealed cases of corrupt governors showed the inadequacies in our political scene. The lack of dedicated and charismatic leader has deterred the progress of the country

(Adeleye, 2014). The major problem is the inability of our political leaders to consider ways of promoting unity and co-existence among the various tribes in Nigeria. Militants in the Niger Delta have continuously demanded for some certain privileges which when denied ended in insurgence, security threat and further disintegration (Onifade, 2013). Wanogho (2011) stated that the activities of the Islamic terrorist group, Boko Haram and the its global connections with ISIS (*Islamic State in Iraq and Syria*) has become a concern among Nigerians. The social restiveness of our youth and militancy are great challenges to national integration and peaceful co-existence in the country. Onifade (2013) observed that Nigerian's efforts at achieving national integration might not be realized. Adeleye (2014) noted that like South Africa, there is a need for more National conferences. Campbell (2012) suggested that the way forward is for the government to consciously and deliberately deemphasize racism, ethnicity, religious bigotry, and cultural segregation. Iyaji (2000) advocated for national integration as a policy in order to promote state building.

Sababa and Domiva (2012) has observed that the survival of Nigeria as a nation depends largely on our degree of tolerance not only in economic, social and political stability but to a large extent, on the ability of every citizen to possess some measure of common understanding, attitudes, beliefs, skills and purposes. These attributes can be inculcated in youths very early in their educational development. Thus, the importance of guidance and counseling in this respect cannot be over-emphasized. Olorungbemi (2012) mentioned that the government should expedite action to legally enact law that backs up the counseling profession; this is because the trained counsellor can help to ensure effective national unity.

The counsellors are empowered and trained to promote healthy relationship in the society. They are trained therapists who engage in the preventive and curative intervention programmes. The counsellor and the client often cooperate and collaborate to find solutions to problems. Adeoye (2004) defined counselling as a specialty in the field of psychology whose practitioners assist clients to improve their well-being, alleviate distress, resolve crisis and increase their ability to be creative, innovative and make appropriate decisions. Passer and Smith (2007) noted that human behavior is environmentally controlled. The behaviorist explained that behavior is learnt and can be unlearned. Counselors can help to develop new skills, encourage peaceful co-existence among various parties, improve communication and negotiation skills at the same time modify maladaptive behavior. According to Agbakwuru and Opara (2013) the counselor can promote national integration and peaceful co-existence by identifying the problems militating against this process. They can set goals and select techniques that will be useful in each community. The counsellor, through the assistance of Counsellor Association of Nigeria (CASSON) can move from one community to another where there are problems engaging in enlightenment programmes on the need for national stability and integration. Enlightenment campaign by the counsellors in seminars and workshop can emphasize on the gains of national stability and integration.

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Sokari (2006) emphasized that effective use of information is necessary for people's liberation from ignorance, misconception and national disability. The application of rational emotive therapeutic process of Albert Ellis can help change the thoughts of many Nigerians who engage in acts that continually encourage disintegration. Counsellors can restructure the thought pattern of the upcoming youths by discouraging sectionalism, violence and disintegration (Idzua & Anande, 2012). Group therapy, modeling, use of reinforcement can also be used by school counsellors to promote stability and sense of national integration among the youths (Ekoja, 2009).

#### **Statement of Problem**

Since independence, unifying of various religious and ethnic groups has become a major challenge in Nigeria. Despite the various efforts of the government to establish a nation with common identity, the unifying gap has continued to widen. For example, the establishment of National Unity Schools, National Youth Service Corps and the Nigerian symbol were all designed to promote unity yet there is still disintegration. Ibrahim and Chaminda (2017) worked on re-positioning Nigeria towards sustainable national unity. Osimen, Balogun and Adenegan (2013) looked at ethnicity and identity crisis in Nigeria while Adeleye (2014) carried out a research on observable obstacles to national unity and social-political stability. Most of the research work has not actually focused on the input counsellors in solving the problem of disunity in Nigeria. Owing to the gaps identified above, the research study investigated the duties of professional counsellors in promoting unity in Nigeria.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of the study was to examine the duties of professional counsellors in promoting Unity in Nigeria. The study intended to find out the influence of variables such as gender, educational qualification and years in service on the duties of counsellors in promoting Unity in Nigeria.

#### **Research Questions**

1. What are the duties of professional counsellors in promoting Unity in Nigeria?

#### **Research Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference in the duties of professional counsellors in promoting unity in Nigeria on the basis of gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the duties of professional counsellors in promoting unity in Nigeria on the basis of educational qualification.
3. There is no significant difference in the duties of professional counsellors in promoting Unity in Nigeria on the basis of years of service.

## **Methodology**

The research design used for this study was the descriptive survey method. The target population of the study consisted of all professional trained counselors in Nigeria. A multi-stage sampling procedure was adopted in selecting the respondents that participated in the study. At the first stage, a cluster of six geo-political zones was considered. The purposive sampling technique was adopted to select five out of the six geopolitical zones based on population and location. Two states were randomly selected in each of the five geo-political zones. As such, a total of 460 (10 counsellors in each of the selected states) respondents participated in the study. The major instrument was tagged Duties of Counsellors in Promoting Unity Questionnaire (DCPUQ). Items in the questionnaire were derived from information obtained from the review of related literature. The instrument had two sections. Section A dealt with the demographic data of the respondents while Section B consisted of items on the duties of counselors in promoting unity. The 4-point Likert Type Scale response format was adopted for use on Section B as thus: Strongly Agree: 4 points; Agree: 3 points; Disagree: 2 points; and Strongly Disagree: 1 point.

In order to ascertain the validity of the instrument, the questionnaire was given to four experts from related field of study in University of Ilorin to checked for the content validity. The suggestion of these experts was considered in the final draft of this questionnaire. The reliability of the instrument was established using test-retest method within an interval of four weeks. The instrument was administered on 20 primary school counsellors in Ilorin metropolis. The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to compute the correlation co-efficient of the instrument. A reliability index of 0.68 was obtained. Hence the instrument was deemed statistically reliable.

## **Results**

### **Demographic Data**

This section presents the results of data obtained from the respondents in frequency counts and percentages

**Table 1:** Distribution of Respondents Based on Personal Data

<b>Personal Data</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Male	276	60.0
Female	184	40.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>460</b>	<b>100.0</b>
<b>Educational Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
First Degree	368	80.0
Postgraduate	92	20.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>460</b>	<b>100.0</b>

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<b>Years of Service</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
1 – 10 years	345	75.0
11 – 20 years	115	25.0
Above 20 years	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>460</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 indicated that 460 respondents participated in the study out of which, 276 (60%) of the respondents were males, while 184 (40%) of the respondents were females. On educational qualification, 368 (80%) of the respondents have first degree, while 92 (20%) of the respondents were having a postgraduate degree. The table also shows that 345 (75%) of the respondents have spent between 1 – 10 years, while 115 (25%) have spent between 11 – 20 years in service.

**Research Question One:** *What are the duties of professional counsellors in promoting unity in Nigeria?*

**Table 2:** Mean and Rank Order on the Duties of Counsellors in Promoting Unity

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Counsellor's duties in promoting unity include:</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Rank</b>
1	advocacy visits/trips	3.05	1 <sup>st</sup>
9	behaviour modification and adjustment	3.00	2 <sup>nd</sup>
7	Rehabilitation	2.85	3 <sup>rd</sup>
15	organizing seminars/workshops on how to tackle contemporary issues	2.75	4 <sup>th</sup>
14	inculcating conflict resolution skills	2.62	5 <sup>th</sup>
10	awakening the spirit of reconciliation among the youth	2.60	6 <sup>th</sup>
3	assertive training	2.57	7 <sup>th</sup>
13	reduction of deviancy among in-school adolescents	2.55	8 <sup>th</sup>
2	encouraging the spirit tolerance among various ethnic groups	2.54	9 <sup>th</sup>
11	helping people of all ages improve on their communication skills	2.52	10 <sup>th</sup>
4	teaching of negotiation skills to people of all age groups	2.51	11 <sup>th</sup>
5	community counselling for awareness and attainment of uniform goals	2.49	12 <sup>th</sup>
8	cognitive restructuring of clients with psychological concerns	2.47	13 <sup>th</sup>
12	developing clients coping strategies to problems	2.42	14 <sup>th</sup>
6	dialoging with aggrieved groups	2.38	15 <sup>th</sup>

Table 2 shows that items 1, 9 and 7 (*Counsellor's duties in Promoting Unity include advocacy visits/trips; behaviour modification and adjustment; rehabilitation*) with mean scores of 3.05, 3.00 and 2.85 ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>. while ranked last is Item 6 with mean score of 2.38. Since eleven out of the fifteen items have mean scores that are above the mid-mean score of 2.50, then it can be said that majority of the respondents attested that counsellors have a role in promoting unity.

**Hypothesis One:** *There is no significant difference in the duties of professional counsellors in promoting Unity in Nigeria on the basis of gender.*

**Table 3:** t-test Showing the Duties of Counsellors in Promoting Unity Based on Gender

<b>Gender</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Cal. t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
Male	276	49.08	5.64	458	10.51*	0.001
Female	184	44.25	3.23			

\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$

Table 3 shows a calculated t-value of 10.51 and a p-value of 0.001. The calculated p-value is less than the alpha value at 0.05. The hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant difference in the duties of professional counsellors in promoting Unity in Nigeria on the basis of gender.

**Hypothesis Two:** *There is no significant difference in the duties of professional counsellors in promoting Unity in Nigeria on the basis of educational qualification.*

**Table 4:** t-test on the Duties of Professional Counsellors in Promoting Unity Based on Educational Qualification

<b>Edu. Qualification</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Cal. t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
First Degree	368	47.87	5.10	458	6.00*	0.02
Postgraduate	92	44.25	5.47			

\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$

Table 4 shows a calculated t-value of 6.00 and a p-value of 0.02. The calculated p-value is less than the alpha value at 0.05. The hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant difference in the duties of professional counsellors in promoting Unity in Nigeria on the basis of educational qualification.

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**Hypothesis Three:** *There is no significant difference in the duties of professional counsellors in promoting Unity in Nigeria on the basis of years of service.*

**Table 5:** t-test on the Duties of Counsellors in Promoting Unity in Nigeria on the Basis of Years of Service

<b>Years of Service</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Cal. t-value</b>	<b>p-value</b>
1 – 10 years	345	48.26	4.04	458	8.26*	0.01
11 – 20 years	115	43.80	7.19			

\*Significant,  $p < 0.05$

Table 5 shows a calculated t-value of 8.26 and a p-value of 0.01. The calculated p-value is less than the critical t-value. The hypothesis is rejected. Hence, there is a significant difference in the in the duties of professional counsellors in promoting Unity in Nigeria on the basis of years of service.

### **Discussion**

The study revealed that the major duties of professional counselors in promoting unity include advocacy visits. Advocacy visit can be source of enlightenment on the need of national integration. Advocacy visit are necessary especially when there is a major social problem in an area that needs the attention of major stakeholders (Agbakwuru & Opara, 2012).

Male and female counsellors differed in their opinion on the roles of counsellors in national integration. It has been observed that gender have influence on perceptions especially on topical issues of national relevance. However, Adeleye (2014) noted that Nigerians are not convenient with the current disunity and instability in the country. Awoyemi (2012) recommended the need for private and public counselling practices as a solution to the multidimensional disunity confronting Nigerians.

The educational qualification of the respondents influenced their views. Counselling services are provided in a range of ways depending on the counsellor's level of training (Bukoye, Adeoye & Oyinloye, 2012). It is expected that the views of a degree holder as it relates to national stability and integration will be different from their counterparts with higher degrees. In the discharge of their responsibilities as counsellors in issues of national integration, Akinyemi (2010) emphasized that the contemporary Nigeria society with different challenges of instability and disunity needs qualified, competent and certified counsellors to assist the government in taking informed decisions.

Respondents also differed based on the years of service. Onifade (2013) observed that the efforts of the government at achieving national unity could be difficult. Wanogho (2011) explained that through personnel efforts, Martin Luther was able to de-emphasized racism, ethnicity, religion, cultural affiliation, and all the potential bottle

necks, in order to achieve peaceful co-existence. This he did by organizing lectures, seminars, workshop, and rallies and without regards to race, ethnic divide, cultural and religious affiliation. In achieving national integration history could repeat itself if these process are followed. Adeoye (2004) confidently expressed that the experience of a counsellor counts in releasing valid and useful information that will bring about useful adjustment. In doing this, counsellors, also organize seminars, lectures, *in situ* training, train the trainer, workshop, etc as a form of enlightenment.

### **Implication for Counsellors**

The counselling association, as a matter of urgency must ensure that legal recognition is given to counselling profession in Nigerian. This will enable counsellors to contribute their quota towards national integration. Awoyemi (2012) pointed out that the absence of enabling framework in form of a degree or act of parliament is one of the greatest challenges confronting Counselling profession.

### **Recommendations**

The Association of Professional Counsellors in Nigeria (APROCON) should have representatives in every committee inaugurated by the Government to focus and assist people in areas faced with national crisis in order to provide the required counselling services to the people in such areas. The Federal government should give the counselling profession the maximum encouragement and support in order for them to be able to participate in national issues that can promote unity. School counsellors should enlighten the students on the need for unity and integration among Nigerians. Seminars and workshops should be organized by counsellors in collaboration with the government, Non-Governmental Organizations and other stakeholders in order to discuss and tackle contemporary issues on National unity and stability.

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