Social Workers In Nigerian Local Government Service And Reduction Of Unemployment And Substance Abuse Among Youths: An Advocacy

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ABSTRACT: *Many young people who are faced with the problem of unemployment seem to feel helpless, they experience varying degrees of stress, and a good number succumb to use of psychotropic substances as a coping strategy. In many communities, use of drugs by youths – both employed and unemployed has become a severe social pathology, necessitating urgent redress. Although local governments in Nigeria are yet to operate facilities with full psychological services, they are the largest employers of social workers. It becomes incumbent that social workers are adequately equipped and utilized to discharge their responsibilities better. This paper highlights the major aspects of the problem, examines roles of the social workers, and governments, and shows how cognitive restructuring may be applied to assist vulnerable youths.*

Keywords: *cognitive restructuring; unemployment; social workers; substance abuse.*

I.   INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse is the current terminology that envelops drug abuse, and use of psychoactive substances which have no medicinal value. A substance is abused when its use (e.g. a drug) is not prescribed by a competent physician or other licensed personnel, or when people (especially youths) experiment with substances that alter mood and mental functioning due to negative curiosity, or peer pressure. Usually, such use of substances eventually impairs the users physical, mental and social functioning, and harms the individual, the society, or both (Uwaoma,2007).

The most frequently elicited reasons for substance abuse are –

(a) Peer pressure and need for acceptance and status within a group. It is this need for acceptance and to be liked that endear young people to peers, who consequently influence their choices and habits.

(b) Alleviation of adverse psychological situations like anxiety, fear, low mood, a feeling of societal rejection (feeling of insecurity or inferiority), or a need to show superiority or dominance over others have also been shown to lead to use of substances. Akin to this is the more personal reason of trying to ward off a state of negative assessment (may be occasioned by poor performance), or to improve performance.

(c) Some people become victims of substance abuse because of low pain tolerance. They abuse medical prescriptions, especially those that contain psychoactive substances like Morphine.

(d) Pleasure seeking individuals, people who like a lot of fun may take drugs out of curiosity, just to experience the feeling; many in this category eventually get trapped and become addicts.

The use of psychotropic agents for recreational purposes or for other non-medical reasons has transcended medical, social, and economic problems, and is fast assuming a disaster proportion among youths in the Country. This assertion is predicated on reports by the National Drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). Indeed, Obot & Karuri (2003), and NDLEA (2007) support the view that increasing number of young people are acquiring the drug habit, that minors are getting involved, and that more substances are being introduced. However, the commonest drugs of abuse among youths and in motor parks in Nigeria include alcohol, marijuana, nicotine, heroine and cocaine (Bajulaiye, 2005). These drugs, in addition to causing or predisposing users to severe medical complications, also cause perceptual cacophony and complete disorganization of personality. Drug misuse has consistently predicted surge in crimes-armed robbery, assassinations, kidnapping, 419, and all forms of aggressive behaviours which are reported very frequently in Nigeria.

Lawal (2012), observes that illicit drug use represents one of the many possible mal-adjustive ways that an individual may react to internal or external stressors, including unemployment. He notes however that existing rehabilitation programs seem ineffective probably because they are predicated on faulty assumptions, and that the motivating factors in the initiation of drug use by individuals have not been addressed. One of such motivating factors is unemployment, although accentuated specific personality traits, socio-demographic modifies like gender, family structure, and type of residential area have been found to significantly influence drug habit. Hence, understanding the roles of local governments and social workers in the task of reducing unemployment and substance abuse becomes critical to the achievement of the millennium development goals.

Local governments in Nigeria, being the most accessible to majority of The People, is expected to solve the fundamental problems of community life, as well as enable individuals in rural areas to actualize themselves in a harmonious environment. Local Governments are also the largest employer of social workers in the Country. Until recently, local government areas differed quite significantly because of cultural and geographical characteristics, which made it sensible to assume that a uniformed pattern of governance may hinder development. However, with the spate of high technology information and communication, and consequent globalization, most local government areas now face similar fundamental problems. Leaders in government must therefore be able to harness all factors of production within jurisdiction (especially human resources), so as to be able to deliver good governance that facilitate development. It is in this light that versatility of knowledge and skill in managing human resources becomes an imperative. Accordingly, the issue of substance abuse and youth unemployment must be treated with the urgency they deserve, and the first steps are: the appreciation of professional responsibility, and the proper application of scientific methods.

This paper shall therefore highlight the responsibilities of social workers, and show how they may use the cognitive restructuring technique to assist both unemployed youth and substance abuse persons. It may be important to note here that the urgent need for local governments to operate psychological services centers is not precluded by this paper.

Social Work

Social work profession is one of the most demanding of the helping professions, but has not really taken its pride of place in Nigeria, probably because Nigerians still enjoy a lot of social support from their families. It must be born in mind that notwithstanding the fact that family support systems have a lot of positive assistance (physical and psychological) to afford members, with increase in urbanization, globalization, pursuit of education and economic breakthrough, as well as reduction in family size, it has become rather impossible for family members to take adequate care of both psychological and physical needs of one another. Friendships in Africa have also been likened to extended family relations, which give succor to 'friend' at times of distress. This also cannot be overstretched considering that current socio-economic and political realities join to limit the resources available for 'the other person'.

More importantly, the complexities of modern life which places heavy pressures that tax and often exceed people's adjustive mechanisms bring to the fore the need for prompt and sustained assistance and proactive measures so as to avoid catastrophic break down in intra personal, interpersonal and intergroup peace, and consequent psychopathology. It becomes expedient that a people (professionals) adequately skilled within the context of a milieu should become involved, so as to effect speedy resolution of conflicts, prevent maladjustive behaviours, hence improve the standard of living and general well-being of the populace.

For the avoidance of doubt, the field of social work envelops such tasks as: helping the physically and mentally challenged to make the best out of life(thereby complementing the services rendered by medical professionals and psychologists especially at the level of rehabilitation), assisting people to resolve issues in daily living such as: relationship problems, housing, unemployment, substance abuse, providing psychosocial support to people with incurably and/or special health conditions(like HIV/AIDS), and assisting communities deal with problems of low school enrolment, truancy, youth involvement in anti-social and high-risk behaviours, teenage pregnancy and family conflicts (Chechak, 2008 & Reckley, 2008). Reckly adds that in the US, 60% of mental health professionals are clinically trained social workers.

The roles of social workers are not restricted to their employment by governments. Social work demands a good knowledge of psychology for efficient performance, and as mentioned earlier, must be viewed as the helping profession it is. It is this consideration that informed our introduction of the cognitive paradigm of counseling.

In a nutshell, social workers working for local governments must get to the grass roots and use their skills to:
  (a) Work on disturbed members of the communities and their family members (eg For drug addicts)
  (b) Work on institutions in the community so as to bring forth institutional changes that are germane for community development
  (c) In a very special way, work on the unemployed youths in group sessions and as individuals to sharpen their perceptions of reality and assist them to take responsibilities.

For the cognitive psychologist, these are done through refuting irrational beliefs and core philosophies of life, and enabling the clients to internalize rational thinking and approach to issues.

II.   COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING

This is a psychotherapeutic paradigm that enables people to adopt more rational and constructive ways of thinking about their problems. It involves attempt to identify, dispute, and change maladaptive or irrational ideas (self defeating beliefs or cognitive distortions) that trigger negative emotions and problem living.

Cognition is the process of evaluation of one's internal and external environment, it is also used to connote thought processes, ideas, and perceptions and problem solving faculties. In psychology, cognitive theorists posit

that human behaviours are resultants of individuals' thought processes and perceptions, and that for every given reaction, it is not necessarily the stimulus that is reacted to, but the evaluation of the stimulus made in relation to self. They explain that all humans have basic values, goals and assumptions about the world, and that these underlying values, goals and assumptions form the 'core' and basis of individual assessment of the desirability or otherwise of events and objects in their lives, and consequently determine how to react to the events or objects.

Values refer to those things in life one considers most important for example; health, family, honesty, being accepted, hard work, and care. While goals, which often develop from values refer to those things that one seeks out of life (Obi – Nwosu, 2009). Examples, of some common general goals are

- Maintaining health and avoiding pain and discomfort
- Being successful with work
- Being liked, accepted and respected
- Having financial security along with certain material possessions, which helps one to feel happy and comfortable

All humans grow up with certain basic assumptions about the way the world is supposed to be or to operate. Some of these assumptions include:

- All pain and discomfort is temporal and goes away with natural healing or proper Medicare.
- Hard work and genuine effort must be rewarded with success.
- People who do good deeds will be rewarded with good fortune, while those who are bad will be punished with some kind of misfortune (often stated thus: People get what they deserve).

These values, goals and assumptions together constitute a person's basic philosophy of life. They are learned and internalized in the process of growth and development. They are acquired from parents or other significant persons including superiors in school and workplace as part of the culture of a particular milieu. It is pertinent to remark here that these basic underlying beliefs are often implicit, in that one may not be directly or consciously aware of them.

Cognitive distortions may develop from childhood, as a result of unfortunate and difficult experiences and/or observational learning. People become more prone to cognitive distortions when under stress, because stress induces the desire for cognitive shortcuts that result in less accurate and more extreme interpretations and reactions. Maladaptive behaviours (including substance abuse and involvement in crimes) are driven by distorted thinking about one's life experiences (including unemployment) and cause unnecessary suffering (Binggeli,2010).

Cognitive restructuring has two basic steps of: a, identifying the thoughts or beliefs that are influencing the distorted emotions, and b, evaluating them for their accuracy and usefulness using logic and evidence and if warranted, modifying or replacing those thoughts with ones that are more accurate and useful. In cognitive behavior therapy (CBT), the therapist (or counselor) guides the clients through the process of becoming more aware of their self-talks, and helps them to evaluate, and when appropriate to modify their own thinking. In essence, the counselor (in this context, the social worker) teaches the clients a process that will enable them distinguish distorted thinking from rational (more accurate and useful) ones. Beck (1991) emphasizes that this is best done as a collaborative process in which clients are assisted in taking the lead as much as possible. Therefore, in this context, the counselor should be able to identify the irrational (distorted) thoughts and self-talks which has promoted substance abuse among individuals in the community, as well as distorted beliefs about unemployment and employment, especially in respect of underemployment and self employment. Clients are lead to make discoveries (discover themselves), not labeled as irrational thinkers or pigeon-holed into the world of the counselor. Home work, in which clients are made to practice refutation of unhealthy thoughts and beliefs is an indispensable component of this technique. A worksheet such as one presented by Binggeli (2010), is very useful.

Cognitive restructuring worksheet

1. Situation		*2. Emotions/ratings*
3.Automatic Thoughts/ratings		*4. Evaluate &modify thoughts*

The following are instructions regarding how to use this worksheet.
Part I: Identifying emotion-causing thoughts. Instructions: When one is experiencing a negative emotion use the following procedures to identify the emotion-causing thoughts.

1. Situation: Briefly describe the situation that led to the emotions.
2. Emotions / ratings: Identify the emotions being experienced and any physical sensations. Emotions can be described by single words, such as sad, nervous, afraid, angry, guilty, or ashamed. Then, rate the intensity of these emotions using the scale below.

0---------10 --------- --------- ---------- ---50---- ------------ -----70-- ---------- --------- ---------100%
Not at all   **medium**   **a lot**   **most ever felt**

   3. Automatic thoughts / ratings: Identify the thoughts or images connected to the emotions and record them in brief simple declarative sentences or statements. (These thoughts are called "automatic" because they tend to occur automatically or habitually). Questions that may help to identify thoughts are:

1. What is going through one's mind as this emotion is being felt?
2. What is one telling self about this situation?
3. What is one afraid might happen?
Once one identifies a thought, one can further explore the meaning of the thought to him/her and record these thoughts. Questions that may be helpful are:
1. If this thought is true, what does this say about the individual?
2. What does it say about one's life, and future?
3. What is the worst thing that could happen if it is true?
4. What does this mean about how other people think about one?
5. What does this mean about how one thinks of other people?
6. What images or memories does one have in this situation?
Once a number of thoughts have been identified, put a star by one or two of the thoughts that seem to be producing the most emotion ("hot thoughts"). Then, rate the degree of belief that each hot thought is true (0-100%).
Part II: Evaluating and modifying thoughts
The second part of cognitive restructuring involves evaluating the automatic thoughts and perhaps developing a new perspective that is more accurate and useful.
Instructions: Choose one or more "hot thoughts" to work on. It is best to focus on only one or two of these thoughts at a time.
1. Identify any cognitive distortions: Identify if the thought contains any cognitive distortions (refer to the list of common cognitive distortions).
2. Evaluate and modify: Evaluate the accuracy and usefulness of the thoughts, and if warranted, modify the thoughts in a more accurate and useful direction.
Some questions can help to evaluate the accuracy of a thought:
1. What is the evidence that supports or contradicts this thought?
2. Is there an alternative explanation? Is there another way of looking at it?
3. Am I overestimating the probability of the negative event occurring? What is the worst that could happen? What is most realistic?
4. Am I overestimating the severity of the consequences of the event (should it occur)? Is it really a terrible catastrophe if X happens? Could I cope with it?
5. Does X have to = Y (e.g., "Does not having a dating partner = being a loser?")
6. If a friend had this thought, what would I tell them?

Some questions can help you evaluate the usefulness of a thought:
1. What are the advantages of telling myself this? And what are the disadvantages?
2. What might be a more useful or helpful way of thinking about this?
3. To the degree that this belief is true, what should I do about it?
Be sure to record any data that contradicts the thought, and the more rational thoughts that might have been composed. Summarize the new perspective: Summarize or highlight the key points that has been discovered as a result of the work just done, them go back and re-rate the degree of belief in the hot thoughts and the intensity of original emotions and note whether there has been a change in emotions.

III. UNEMPLOYMENT

   This is a state that describes absence of a job for a person or persons who are able to work. In this context, it is the fact of an employable person (or employable people) not having work to do, which would accrue regular income/payments to them. This status of 'employed' is therefore one which describes somebody who has a job that pays regularly. When the regular payment 'by' a job is commensurate with input and adequate fringe benefits are attached, the job becomes described as 'gainful employment'.

Employment and gainful employment could be in the civil or public service, in the private sector or as self employment. Government, organized private sector and small businesses offer employment to individuals depending on needs of the organizations and skills of those seeking jobs, while a good percentage of skilled persons create employment for themselves as "sole traders". In most parts of the developed world, the economy is private sector driven, portraying that more people are gainfully employed by private organizations and as 'sole traders' than they are by the public sector.

IV. CONCLUSION

The social contract theory of state origin provides the fundamental explanation of the principles of democratic governance. It explains that the existence of government was necessitated by the urgency to avert wars and chaos, which existed in the state of nature. Accordingly, men accepted freely to forgo their individual executive and legislative rights, and to hand same over to common power(s) for common good; this way, they hoped to preserve their lives, freedom and property (Nwoko, 2006). By extrapolation, government now has overall control over all factors of production through legislative and executive powers. It is therefore obvious, that government actions and inactions are primarily the causes of employment or unemployment. It is the responsibility of government to create employment-either directly (as in the civil and public service) or indirectly through creating enabling environments for businesses to germinate, develop and survive.

At the local government level, the government owes the duty of educating the people properly. This primary responsibility must never be relegated by any government with human face. Education must be rich enough in curriculum to impact skills (trade skills) as well as the right attitudes to the environment, and discipline. Indeed, Okoye (2003) abundantly explains that when one goes to an institution of learning and acquires only 'trade' skills, the person is not educated; he/she has rather schooled. 'Schooling without education' is therefore the most disturbing cause of unemployment which governments must urgently address. It must be emphasized that governments in Nigeria have not ever provided enough facilities in institutions to facilitate proper acquisition of 'trade' skills. This situation complicates the scenario so much that it is safe to assume that up to 50% of school graduates possess neither trade skills nor proper education- they are unemployable! Local Governments can also create employment by engaging in economic/business concerns, and by helping youths to form co-operatives through which soft loans could be obtained.

The rate of substance abuse among youths in Nigeria has become unprecedented, and calls for urgent measures if a national emergency must be averted. To this end, governments must enforce all laws on substance abuse, build adequate rehabilitation centers, and eschew corrupt practices that insult the sensibilities of youths. This is in addition to provision of adequate educational infrastructure and employment opportunities. Local governments particularly should brace up to the challenge of managing primary education properly as well as revitalizing adult and non formal education.

Social workers should not be made redundant or armchair personnel. They should be empowered to provide adequate service to the communities. The use of cognitive restructuring paradigm is recommended to assist youths to change their unhealthy perceptions, and imbibe more positive orientations that engender productivity and discourage resignation or drug use.

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