

Ethical Code as a Panacea to the Challenging Effects of Economic Depression on Counsellors' Service Delivery

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Abstract

This paper discussed Ethical Code as a Panacea to the Challenging Effects of Economic Depression on Counsellors' Service Delivery. The researchers looked at economic depression and its characteristics, and pointed out that Nigerian counsellors, as members of the society, are equally affected by effects of economic depression, and that code of ethics could help to keep counsellors on track during service delivery. The authors explained that economic depression, considering its effects, could be a drawback to counsellors' service delivery as hunger, low income, poor health status are among the effects of economic depression. In order to maintain an acceptable standard in counselling service delivery during the era of economic depression, the authors conclude that constant use of professional code of ethics for counsellors in Nigeria is very necessary. Recommendations were made that code of ethics should be published and made accessible, available and affordable to all those who are practicing counsellors and those graduating from guidance and counselling departments of degree awarding institutions.

Keywords: Ethical, Code, Economic, Depression, Counsellors, Service, Delivery

Introduction

Economic depression is the total slowdown of economic activities and financial systems in any nation that do experience economic depression. Depression on the economy could be seen as unplanned change in the society which is responsible for individuals' suffering within a period of time. Depression is a severe and persistent recession and a state of declining in economic activities which causes the falling output of the society and increase the rate of unemployment (Adar, 2002). Ugwu (2016) averred that economic depression is often described as a more severe form of a recession that leads to extended unemployment, a spike in credit defaults, broad declines in income and production, currency devaluation and a deflationary economy. The Nigerian economic depression has become a pressing issue to the entire citizens of the country which Nigerian counsellors are not excluded. The effects of this severe economic downturn include: low personal income, high price of goods and services, low quality products, poor service delivery, shutting down of businesses, poor skill acquisition, low self concept, high cost of living which result to poor living standard, poor market system and operation, high dependency on foreign supplies and so forth. In line with this, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER) (2017) gave a precise definition of a depressed economy to be a significant decline in economic activities spread across the economy and lasting for more than few months, and it is shown clearly through the wholesale and retail sales, industrial production, employment, real income and gross domestic product.

In order to ensure that Nigerian counsellors maintain their dignity as regards to effective service delivery, the authors deem it fit to reveal the importance of code of ethics to counsellor by highlighting on ethical code as panacea to the challenging effects of economic depression on counsellors' service delivery.

Concept of code of ethics

Ethics is the conduct of a profession that binds the behaviour of members of such profession. It is a science of morality which establishes human behavior, character and action which may be judged as good or bad, right or wrong (Nwamuo, 2014). Ethics is concerned with what is right or wrong, good or bad, fair or unfair, responsible or irresponsible, praise worthy or blameworthy (Pritchard, 2006). More so, Babalola (2004) posits that ethics deals with a set of rules that tend to be adopted and upheld by a group of people such as educational ethics, counselling ethics, medical ethics and so on. Code of ethics is therefore a set of rules that specify what behaviour or actions are expected of members of a professional body or organization. According to Arunsi, Nnawuihe and Mbah (2016), code of ethics deals with the standards of right and wrong in the relationship between the professional and his/her client, and when it deviates from the moral standard it is termed unethical. Code of ethics consists of guidelines that specify the expected behaviour or actions of members of a professional

organization or body. It is an encompassing list of activities stretching from general behaviour to counselling relationship. Nwamuo (2014) articulated the following as the importance of code of ethics in counseling services:

- It provides a position or standard of the profession in deciding on what he/she should do when situation of conflicts arise in his/her work.
- It helps to clarify the counsellor's responsibilities to the client and protects the client from the counsellor's violation of or his failure to fulfill these responsibilities.
- It gives the profession some assurance that the practices of members will not affect its general functions and purposes.
- It gives society some guarantee that the services of the counsellor will demonstrate a sensible regard for social codes and moral expectations of the community in which he works.
- It offers the counsellor some grounds for safeguarding his own privacy and integrity. A code of ethics is adopted for security purposes to the vulnerable clients, counsellors and society.

A Counsellor and counselling services

A counsellor is a person or an individual who is professionally trained so that he/she will be competent to help individuals to gain greater self-understanding, improve in decision making, changing skills for problem solving and developmental growth. According to Ugwuegbulam (2014) a counselor is an individual who is formally trained in guidance and counselling leading to the award of a degree from a degree awarding institution.

Counselling is the service offered to the individual who is undergoing a problem and needs professional help to overcome it. Counselling is a more specialized service requiring training in personality development and handling exceptional groups of individuals. Counselling requires a lot of time for the client to unfold the problem and gain an insight into the complex situation. According to Willey and Andrew (2012), counselling involves two individuals, one seeking help and the other a professional trained to help solve problems and direct clients towards a set of goals. Counselling is a process of assistance extended by an expert in an individual situation to a needy person.

To this extent, counselling relationship is a professional one. It is a learning process that is interactive oriented and focuses on human personal development. Counselling is an assistance given to an individual by a professional counsellor to understand his/her problems or challenges, have insight into how to overcome them by taking informed decisions. The focus of counselling is usually on the positive strength of the individual (client). These positive strengths are mobilized for effective utilization in

resolving the challenges. Nwamuo (2001) viewed counseling as “a relationship between a professionally trained, competent counselor and an individual seeking help in gaining greater self-understanding and improved decision making and behavior-changing skills for problem resolution and developmental growth.”

Objectives of counselling

According to National Policy on Education (FRN, 2004), objectives of counselling are based on the following:

- To give students career information and to assist them to make appropriate and realistic vocational choices.
- To produce students who are well adjusted, socially and emotionally, to fit into and function effectively in the society.

The two objectives of guidance and counselling by the Nigerian National Policy on Education is not comprehensive. In the views of Nwachukwu (1996), the objectives of guidance and counselling should include the following:

- Enhance a positive regard for self, acceptance of self and acceptance of others.
- Help the student to identify his interests, abilities and aptitudes.
- Motivate the child to keep himself in an optimal state of mind.
- Help the student in planning his educational programme in such a way that it will be consistent with his post high school plans.
- Enhance the children’s understanding of themselves.
- To offer assistance in formulating tentative educational and occupational plans based upon thorough self-study.
- Promote increased self-direction, problem-solving and decision-making by the children.
- Assist the child in developing his potentials to its optimum.
- Develop the ability to relate with others without sacrificing one’s individuality.
- Help the student to understand his achievement in relation to his ability.
- Ensure the development of a sense of responsibility and self-understanding that permits the students to react with confidence to their environmental demand and to explore with personal security the choice open to them.
- To assist teachers and parents in understanding the needs and problems of their children.
- Develop in the youngsters, sensitivity to the needs of others resulting in social interest and the desire to co-operate with others.
- To help the child identify those things that stand on his way against his optimum achievement of his school subjects.

These objectives could be achieved through effective counselling services. Counselling services are required for individuals having developmental problems because of the handicap they suffer emotionally either because of hereditary factors or environmental conditions. According to University of Ibadan Bulletin (UIB) (2015),

counselling services are those activities that bring a trained professional person called counsellor together with someone who is seeking for help either to improve in career decision making, relationship building, to resolve family issues, alcohol/drug issue, for self-concept grooming, interpersonal relationship at work and so forth. Nwamuo (2001) added that counselling services are those services rendered to clients by a professionally trained counsellor. Nwamuo continued that their activities may include private counselling which is between the counsellor and client, family counselling or group counselling in this case, more than one or two individuals are receiving help from the counsellor.

Counselling service delivery and economic depression

In Nigeria, counselling services are yet to gain a balanced fit because her citizens have varied perceptions especially regarding counselling as a school based activity for basic school children. Even the educated citizens also view counselling services as extra-cost because they have no job and earn low income (Ikedirionye, 2017). The major thing that is distracting Nigerian citizens from going to the counsellors for help in their psychological, educational and economic challenges, is the economic situation of the country. For instance, Ugwu (2016) narrated that a graduate who studied banking and finance and could not be employed to work in bank, which is his/her initial interest, could start driving taxi, because he/she do not have the work connection. Do you think that such person will see it necessary going for counselling? The answer is no.

Gradually, counselling services to majority is irrelevant. This is why guidance counsellors are being looked upon as lazy people looking for what to say (Brock, 2010). The above are not the only challenges counsellors are facing in terms of their job delivery. Economic depression has been described as an era of low income, unemployment, increased living expectancy and increased migration. Brock (2010) averred that depression have effects across all sectors of the society including the counselling services. Brock continued that the general characteristics of such situation are usually low income, bribery temptation and migration. These effects are now discussed as they affect the guidance counsellors' job delivery.

1) Low income: When one is in the state of low income, he/she does experience hunger, ill-health, poor education, constantly in search of supplementary jobs and incessant psycho-social problems. The case of guidance counsellors is not different; he/she will be faced with the above challenges. In counselling service delivery, hunger which is a painful sensation or exhausted condition that one feels from want of food, will have negative impact on the service delivery. In relation to Nigeria, it is the scarcity of food, either for a short period or consistently for many years. Hunger is a situation surrounded by food insecurity and results in malnourishment. Continually, people who are poorly fed live in untidy environment, overstress themselves, and commonly get sick. Ill-health mostly occur because one is living, eating and doing

what he/she is not supposed to do or live where he/she is not supposed to reside. Other aspects of low income reflections on the guidance counsellor are poor education background for offsprings and additional work load. In this situation, the counsellor is worried and could take an unprofessional decision. Therefore, the code of ethics becomes very necessary for every counsellor to hold onto as a manual for operation, so that a temporary state of low income will not overtake the pride of counselling service delivery.

2) Bribery temptation: This is a common language in most developing countries of the world which Nigeria is among. Ugwuadu (2014) lamented that bribery is not a culture but sometimes warms up whenever one is willing to satisfy his/her economic needs but not trying to match his/her needs with his/her income. For Nigerian counsellors, clients, boss, individuals and organizations may require more than the counsellors expected from them promising a financial compensation to the counsellor. Any individual, organization and boss doing this, must have considered that the counsellor is in need of finance to top up. Therefore, it becomes very necessary to back the counsellor with constant advise as stated in the code of ethics. This will cause the counsellor to resist such temptations for bribe.

3) Migration: According to Adar (2002), the major cause of people's migration/relocation is search for better work. Nigeria Immigration Reports (2013), (2014), (2015) and (2016) have shown that a good number of Nigerians leave the country in search of better life. This is because, above 50% of these migrants expressed that their going abroad is for job purposes. This situation is a general issue and so counsellors are not excluded. The most dangerous effect of migration is loss of quality and professionalism; this is because most graduates travelling abroad for job are likely not to fill in their exact status and qualifications which means that their profession will be abandoned. The code of ethics is truly important and because supporting the counsellors with right advice may turn many who want to travel abroad to require for official operational certificates that could make them relevant wherever they found themselves and to continue their professional jobs.

Conclusion

The word "safe" is a common word among the countries that feels very unsafe. This is why code of ethics is highly needed among counsellors especially in period of economic depression. From the meaning and importance of code of ethics, every counsellor wishing to live safely during economic depression must always abide by and make constant use of the code; as this is not only for the good of the counsellors but the society at large. Therefore, these authors conclude that the constant use of professional code of ethics by counsellors in Nigeria is very necessary especially, at a period of unplanned change in the economic sector.

Recommendation

In order to keep the Nigerian counsellors on track as regards to service delivery in a depressed economy, it is recommended that:

1. Code of ethics should be published and made accessible, available and affordable to all those who are practicing counsellors, and equally to those graduating from guidance and counselling departments of degree awarding institutions.
2. The use of the ethics should be properly monitored by the management board or executive body of the Counselling Association of Nigeria.
3. Government should provide quality and relevant counselling tools needed for counselling service delivery to encourage and ensure effective counselling service delivery in Nigeria.
4. Counsellors should ensure that they consult their code of ethics always so that their moral/conscience will always be awake while doing their job.

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