

COUNSELLING PRACTICE AS INITIATIVE FOR PEACE BUILDING, CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND MANAGEMENT IN NIGER DELTA REGION

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Abstract: The study investigated counselling practice as initiative for peace building, conflict resolution and management in Niger Delta Region. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the investigation. The study's sample was comprised of 387 Niger Delta residents across the nine (9) states. The simple random sampling technique was used to arrive at the sample. The questionnaire titled "Counselling Practice as Initiative for Peace Building, Conflict Resolution and Management Questionnaire" was designed and used to collect data. A reliability coefficient of 0.63 was obtained for the items on the questionnaire. The researcher with the help of 10 research assistants personally visited the various sampled communities in the region to administer the instrument. The data were analysed using coefficient of determination of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation for research questions and hypotheses. The findings of the study show among others that there is a positive and significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta region. Based on the findings of this study it was recommended among others that Government, community leaders and stakeholders in the oil firm should prioritize aggressive counselling programmes to establish peace-building mechanisms in the region.

Keyword: Counselling Practice, Peace Building, Conflict Resolution, Conflict Management

Introduction

The discovery of fossil fuel in 1956 in Oloibiri present day Bayelsa State, and in recent time other neighbouring states has been bedevilled by the absence of development (basic amenities – water, electricity, good road and unemployment) amidst environmental contamination (oil spillage, gas flaring) which has led the Niger Delta region underdeveloped. The Niger Delta region is rich in oil and other natural resources which hold 90 percent of Nigeria economy. The struggle for control by Niger Deltan states (Ondo, Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, Rivers, Imo, Abia, Akwa Ibom and Cross River) had engendered crises between the Niger Deltans. Different ethnic groups Urhobos and Itsekiris; Urhobos and Ijaws, Ijaws and Itsekiris among the notable ones had clashed severally giving rise to ethnic militia groups and this led to the has historically been a flashpoint of tension between local communities, the government, and multinational oil companies. The resultant conflicts ranging from environmental protests to armed militancy have left deep psychological scars and fostered cycles of violence and distrust (Oniyama, 2024).

The region has long grappled with multifaceted conflicts stemming from environmental degradation, economic disparities, and political marginalization.

Conflict cases in region took a different dimension when the agitations for better living conditions and environmental sustainability in the Niger Delta heightened, abduction and demand for ransom spread out to the eastern region, cultism and political thuggery were carried out with ease cover. The conflicts in the Niger Delta date back to the early 1900s beginning with conflicts between foreign oil companies or corporations and a group of Niger Deltans that degenerated into militancy sabotage of oil prospects and eventually kidnappings which led to lose of lives and properties and prevalence of violence and insecurity. In an attempt to ensure that peace and security prevail in the area counselling practices have emerged as pivotal tools in fostering peace, resolving conflicts, and managing disputes within the region by government and other stakeholders. By equipping individuals and communities with skills in dialogue, empathy, and non-violent communication, counselling initiatives have contributed significantly to the region's stability.

Counselling practice is important since the community is an environment with an increasing number of problems and residents are faced with many challenges emanating from the youths which when control can impact positively on the oil rich area. Counselling is a personal relationship in which one person attempts to help another person toward understanding and solving his social problems (Oviogbodu, 2018). According to Adekoya (2016) counselling practice is a learning process in which individuals learn and understand themselves and their environment and make the right choice of behaviours that will help them develop, grow progress, ascend, mature, and step up in social activities. The inclusion of counselling as a service delivery system in Niger Delta communities acknowledges the fact that emotional health is an important aspect of both learning and personal development. Despite acknowledging the significance of community counselling, there are still gaps in their implementation and efficacy. For instance, Fleming and White (2024) established that even though communities have put in place counselling services, there are few professionals to offer those services. Additionally, this variation in program quality leads to variability in the outcomes of counselling interventions for residents, potentially diminishing their positive impact in the oil rich communities which underscores the necessity for a systematic review to enhance the effectiveness of counselling in communities.

Karcher (2020) ascertains the impact of counselling on community engagement which is noted for having counselling features boosted self-esteem. Okorodudu (2021) stated that following these principles of counselling respect for client autonomy, confidentiality, empathy, non-judgmental attitude, cultural sensitivity, professional boundaries, ethical and legal standards, self-awareness, trust, and a collaborative approach are fundamental to effective support outcome to community and the society. These counselling principles are founded on supporting and fostering personal development and cordial relationship among oil company and community members.

Ogagavwodia (2023) examines how education counseling influences the promotion of peace-building specifically in Ughelli North Local Government of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria and its ability to reduce structural violence experienced in the region with the adoption of quantitative descriptive survey method. The study used questionnaire with a sample size of 1000 residence. The results from the test of correlation between peace education counseling and

national peace building showed a significant relationship between the two variables with a mean score of above 164 in support of a significant relationship as against less than 25 against. According to **Egbe (2013)**, trauma-focused counseling interventions in conflict zones like the Niger Delta help individuals reintegrate emotionally and socially, reducing tendencies toward retaliatory violence.

Adekola (2016) highlights that integrating counseling into community dialogue initiatives in the Niger Delta significantly reduced youth restiveness and improved cooperation between conflicting parties. Amadi and Abdullah (2012) found that youths exposed to structured counseling programs showed greater inclination towards peace and entrepreneurship than their non-counselled counterparts. Ogunyemi (2009) argued that psychoeducational group counseling in oil-host communities improved intergroup relations and promoted a culture of peace and coexistence. According to Oviogbodu (2015), post-amnesty programmes that included counselling components contributed to deradicalization and reintegration of ex-militants, reducing conflict levels in the region. Adekoya (2017) found that structured community counseling reduced the frequency of violent clashes in Delta State by facilitating dialogue. Iwuagwu (2014) noted that many counseling interventions in the Niger Delta were short-term and donor-driven, lacking sustainability and failing to address deep-rooted grievances.

Olanrewaju and Folarin (2013) argued that while counselling can help individuals cope, it does not significantly reduce conflict if root causes persist, limiting its overall impact on sustainable peace. **Eregba (2010)** highlighted that failure to involve broader community stakeholders in counselling-based peace initiatives led to minimal long-term impact on conflict dynamics. Despite the role of counseling in schools and communities in the surrounded area, the general attitude of youth towards conflict and violent has become a source of great concern to all the stakeholders in the oil sector and community. Could this attitude towards conflict and violent be attributed to the ineffectiveness of the fundamental principles that guide the therapeutic process that provide ethical, empathetic, and effective support to residents. This necessitated the researcher to carried out counselling practice as initiative for peace building, conflict resolution and management in Niger Delta region

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What is the impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region?
2. What is the impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region?
3. What is the impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region
2. There is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region
3. There is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region

Methods

The correlational research design was used in this investigation. A correlational design is a design that is used to examine research the extent of the impact that exists between two or more variables. Because the researcher is interested in researching the relationship between the counselling practice as initiative on peace building, conflict resolution and conflict management a correlational research design is appropriate. The population of the study comprised all the states in Niger Delta. There are nine (9) states in the region with an estimated population of 20, 000000 residences according to google bureau statistics. The study's sample was comprised of 387 Niger Delta residents across the nine (9) states. The choice of the sample size was based on the recommendation of Krejcie and Morgan as cited by Ubiebi-Uyoyo (2022) that when a population is above 100,000 the sample size should be 387. The simple random sampling techniques were used to draw 43residents from each state that make up the Niger Delta. The instruments that was used for data collection is questionnaire. The questionnaire is titled "Counselling Practice as Initiative for

Peace Building, Conflict Resolution and Management Questionnaire". The questionnaire is divided into five sections: Section A contains demographic information about the respondents such as their gender, community and state.

Section B contains four scales: The Counselling Practice Rating Scale (CPRS), Peace Building Rating Scale (PBRs), Conflict Resolution Rating Scale (CRRS), and the Conflict Management Rating Scale (CMRS). Each scale consists of 10 items statements. Participants were asked to rate the items on a four-point scale ranging from 1 to 4, with 1 indicating Strongly Disagree (SD), 2 indicating Disagree (D), 3 indicating Agree (A) and 4 indicating Strongly Agree (SA). The instrument's face and content validity validity was determined by experts from Guidance and Counselling Department. The instrument's reliability was done in Anambra State to evaluate whether the instruments exhibit internal consistency, the data was analysed using the Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient which yielded a coefficient of 0.63 showing that the instrument is consistent and reliable. The researcher administered the questionnaire to the community residents directly with the help of 10 research assistants. The goal of the study was presented to the community heads who gave approval before the distribution questionnaire. To avoid loss, copies of the questionnaire were obtained immediately. The data were analysed using inferential statistics. To answer the research questions, coefficient of determination was used. At the 0.05 level of significant, Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the null hypotheses to determine the significant relationship between the depend and independents variables.

Results

In line with the data obtained from field work, the researcher presents and discusses the result of the respondents.

Research Question 1: What is the impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region?

Table 1: Coefficient of Determination of impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region

	N	R	r ²	r ² %	Decision
Counselling Practice as Initiative Peace Building	387.077	.006		0.6	Positive Impact

Table 1 showed the r-value of 0.077 as the amount of impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region. The coefficient of determination (r²) is .006 and the amount of contribution of counselling practice as initiative to peace building is 0.6. The result showed a positive impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building.

Research Question 2: What is the impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region?

Table 2: Coefficient of Determination of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region

Variable	N	R	r ²	r ² %	Decision
Counselling Practice as Initiative Conflict Resolution	387.97	.94	94		positive impact

Table 2 showed the r-value of 0.9 as the amount of impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region. The coefficient of determination (r²) is 0.94 and the amount of contribution of counselling practice as initiative on Conflict Resolution is 94. The result showed a very strong positive impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution.

Research Question 3: What is the impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region?

Table 3: Coefficient of Determination of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region

Variable	N	R	r ²	r ² %	Decision
Counselling Practice as Initiative on Conflict Management	387.068	.005	0.5		Positive Impact

Table 3 showed the r-value of 0.068 as the amount of impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region. The coefficient of determination (r²) is 0.005 and the amount of contribution of counselling practice as initiative to conflict management is 0.6. The result showed a positive impact of impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management.

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region.

Table 4: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region

variable	N	R	r ²	r ² %	p-value	Remark
Counselling Practice as Initiative	387					
Peace Building	387	.077	.006	0.6	.047	Significant

Alpha =0.05

Table 4 shows a Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis output of the significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region(r= 0.77, alpha level =0.05). Testing the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of .047 is less than the alpha level of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis therefore rejected. This indicates that there is a significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta Region. The R-

square (r^2) value of .006 showed that 0.6% of variance in peace building was accounted for by counselling practice.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region

Table 5: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region

variable	N	R	r^2	r^2 %	p-value	Remark
Counselling Practice as Initiative	387					
Conflict Resolution	387	.97	.94	94	.976	Not Significant

Alpha =0.05

Table 5 reveals a Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis output of the significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta Region. The computed R-value of .97 and a p-value of .976 were shown, testing the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of .976 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis therefore accepted. This indicates that there is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region

Table 6: Pearson Product Moment Correlation of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region

variable	N	R	r^2	r^2 %	p-value	Remark
Counselling Practice as Initiative	387					
Conflict Management	387	.068	.005	.5	.076	Not Significant

Alpha =0.05

Table 6 reveals a Pearson Product Moment Correlation output of significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region. The computed R-value of 0.068 and a p-value of .076 were shown, testing the null hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05, the p-value of .076 is greater than the alpha level of 0.05. Thus, the null hypothesis therefore accepted. This indicates that there is no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta Region. The R-square (r^2) value of .005 showed that 0.5% of variance in conflict management was accounted for by counselling practice.

Discussion of Results

Impact of counselling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger delta region

Data relating to first research question and its corresponding hypothesis indicated a positive and significant impact of counseling practice as initiative on peace building in Niger Delta region. The reason for this finding is that counselling helps individuals and communities to foster interpersonal and intergroup communication and facilitate emotional healing. Through career and life-skills counselling, youths are empowered to pursue alternative livelihoods rather than militancy, decreased involvement of criminal or militant activities. This finding agreed with the finding of Amadi and Abdullah (2012) who found that youths exposed to structured counselling programs showed greater inclination towards peace and entrepreneurship than their non-counselled counterparts. The finding also agreed with Adekola (2016) who stated that integrating counselling into community dialogue initiatives in the Niger Delta significantly reduced youth restiveness and improved cooperation between conflicting parties.

Impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger delta region

Data relating to second research question and its corresponding hypothesis indicated a positive and no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict resolution in Niger Delta region. The reason for this finding is that

counselling promotes empathy, tolerance, and understanding across ethnic and community lines that strengthens social cohesion and rebuilds trust eroded by conflict. This finding agreed with the finding of Egbé (2013) who stated that trauma-focused counselling interventions in conflict zones like the Niger Delta help individuals reintegrate emotionally and socially, reducing tendencies toward retaliatory violence.

Impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger delta region

Data relating to third research question and its corresponding hypothesis indicated a positive and no significant impact of counselling practice as initiative on conflict management in Niger Delta region. The reason for this finding is that counselling has been effective in reducing youth restiveness and violence through behavior modification and psychosocial support **but poor implementation and**

Lack of trained professionals, neglect of structural issues behind conflict, limited reach and community participation led to no impact.

This finding agreed with the finding of Eregha (2010) who highlighted that failure to involve broader community stakeholders in counselling-based peace initiatives led to minimal long-term impact on conflict dynamics. This finding also agreed with the finding of Adekoya (2017) found that structured community counselling reduced the frequency of violent clashes in Delta State by facilitating dialogue.

Conclusion

In line with the findings of this study, it is concluded that, counselling practice is an initiative for peace building, conflict resolution and conflict management in Niger Delta region. It can also be concluded a positive and significant impact of counselling practice in peace building, conflict resolution and conflict management existed in Niger Delta region.

Recommendations

1. Government, community leaders and stakeholders in the oil firm should prioritize aggressive counselling programmes to establish peace-building mechanisms in the region

2. Counselling centres with professional counsellors be established, employed and deployed to the Niger Delta communities and schools to manage conflicts among oil firms and youths.
3. Niger Delta youths that encourage education and development should be engaged so as to give the individuals in the region a sense of importance.

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