

EFFECTIVE COUNSELLING SKILLS FOR REMEDIATING SCHOOL VIOLENCE AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examined counselling skills needed for remediating school violence in secondary schools in Nigeria. Specifically, the paper discussed conceptually the key terms - counselling skills and school violence for clarification; relevant issues in school violence in Nigerian secondary schools were reviewed and counselling skills needed for remediating school violence were discussed literally. Ecological Systems Theory propounded by Bronfenbrenner in 1979 was used as the theoretical anchorage while the qualitative-expository approach was used to discuss the review. Based on the review school violence was identified to have been caused by several factors which included poor impulse control, mental health conditions, access to weapons, dysfunctional family dynamic and domestic violence. School violence has attendant effects on victims that require empathy, and empowerment. It was suggested that working together with students and stakeholders, would help to point out areas counsellors could focus to address the root causes of violence, provide support by utilizing positive coping strategies, promote a culture of respect, understanding, and nonviolence in schools. The paper therefore recommended the utilization of essential counselling skills such as active listening, empathy, conflict resolution, and empowerment. Collaboration skills could help to play a critical role in creating safe, supportive, and inclusive school environments.

Keywords: *School Counsellors, Counselling Skills, School Violence, Success, Academic Achievement*

Introduction

School violence has become a major concern in secondary schools in Nigeria, with report of incidents ranging from bullying to physical assaults. This has raised questions about the safety and security of students within these educational institutions (Obilor & Ikpa, 2021). Bullying problem has remained pervasive and a growing concern for all stakeholders of education who desire to make school climate a safe haven

(Aluede & Adegoke, 2011). From the secondary school context, some violent behaviours among students that threaten the school peace include: grievous harm/wounding, assault, rape/indecent assault, stealing, burglary, receiving stolen property, forgery, unlawful possession, threat to life, malicious damage, defilement and cultism and so on.

One of the factors contributing to school violence in Nigeria is drug abuse. The use of drugs and

alcohol among students has been on the rise, leading to impaired judgment and an increased likelihood of engaging in violent behaviour (Aliero, et al., 2023). Drug abuse can contribute to a culture of violence within schools, making it more likely for students to be exposed to and involved in violent incidents. Furthermore, a lack of adequate infrastructure and resources in schools has made it difficult for educators to effectively address issues of school violence (Aborisade, 2024a). Without proper support systems in place, teachers may struggle to intervene in conflicts or provide students with the necessary guidance and counselling to prevent future acts of violence. In addition, overcrowded classrooms and a lack of supervision can create an environment where incidents of bullying and physical violence go unnoticed or unaddressed (Obilor & Ikpa, 2021).

In recent times, there is the growing need for diverse counselling skills in secondary such as conflict resolution skills and active listening skill to effectively communicate with students who may be experiencing or perpetrating violence (Anyin, 2021). By building trust and rapport with students, counsellors can create a safe space for them to talk about their experiences and emotions. This can help identify underlying issues that may be contributing to violent behaviour and develop strategies to address them. Also, it is expected that counsellors must have a deep understanding of the root causes of school violence in Nigeria. This includes factors such as poverty, peer pressure, family dysfunction, and exposure to violent media (Iyekolo, et al., 2021). By having a comprehensive understanding of these factors, counsellors can tailor their interventions to address the specific needs of each student and prevent future instances of violence (Aliero, et al, 2023).

Additionally, counsellors may also need strong crisis intervention skills to effectively respond to incidents of violence as they occur. This includes knowing how to de-escalate volatile situations,

provide support to victims, and work with school administrators and law enforcement to ensure the safety of all students. By having a clear plan in place for dealing with emergencies, counsellors can help minimize the impact of violence on the school community. Therefore, this paper examines counselling skills for remediating school violence in secondary schools in Nigeria. The specific objectives of this paper include the discussion of the following: counselling skills and school violence clarification, some issues of school violence in Nigerian secondary schools in recent times, causes and effects of school violence and counselling skills needed for remediating school violence.

Conceptual Clarification

Some of the major terms considered germane to this study are conceptually clarified in this study:

School counselors: A school counsellor is a certified/licensed professional that provides academic, career, college readiness, and social-emotional support for all students (Anyin, 2021). There are school counsellor positions within each level of schooling (elementary, middle, high, and college). By developing and following a school counselling program, school counsellors are able to provide students of all ages with the appropriate support and guidance needed for overall success. Therefore, school counsellors are trained professionals that play a crucial role in helping students navigate the ups and downs of their academic and personal lives. They are there to provide support, guidance, and resources to help students succeed in school and beyond (Oparaduru & Ukwueze, 2022). Whether it's academic struggles, social challenges, or personal issues, school counsellors are there to listen, provide guidance, and help students develop the skills they need to overcome obstacles and reach their full potential.

One of the main responsibilities of school counsellors is to help students set and achieve

academic goals. They can help students create a plan for academic success, whether it's improving grades, preparing for college, or exploring career options. School counsellors can also help students develop study habits, time management skills, and effective problem-solving strategies to help them succeed in school (Aliero, et al., 2023). In addition to academic support, school counsellors also provide social and emotional support to students. They can help students navigate issues such as bullying, peer pressure, and relationships. School counsellors are trained to provide a safe and confidential environment where students can discuss their feelings and concerns and receive guidance on how to cope with difficult situations (Nwamma, 2022). They are there to provide students with the support and guidance they need to overcome challenges, develop essential skills, and achieve their full potential. By building strong relationships with students, school counsellors can help create a positive and nurturing environment where students feel valued, supported, and empowered to reach their goals. Furthermore, school counsellors in Nigerian secondary schools help students with career planning and exploration.

Nwamma (2022) submitted that they provide information on various career paths, college admissions requirements, and job training programs. School counsellors work with students to assess their interests, strengths, and goals and help them develop a plan for their future. They also assist students in finding internship and job opportunities that align with their career aspirations. Buttressing this, Aliero, et al. (2023) added that school counsellors play a critical role in the success and well-being of students in Nigerian secondary schools. They provide guidance, support, and resources to help students overcome academic, personal, and career challenges. School counsellors contribute to creating a positive and supportive school environment where students feel empowered to achieve their full potential. Their dedication to

helping students thrive academically and personally makes them invaluable members of the school community.

School Violence: School violence refers to violence that takes place in a school setting. This includes violence on school property, on the way to or from school, and at school trips and events (Aborisade, 2024a). It may be committed by students, teachers, or other members of the school staff; however, violence by fellow students is the most common. This shows it can be anything that involves a real or implied threat—it can be verbal, sexual, or physical, and perpetrated with or without weapons (Obilor & Ikpa, 2021). School violence is any activity that can create a disturbance in an educational system. It includes verbal and physical altercations and also bullying through electronic means or social media, threats, weapon use, or gang activity.

School violence can take many forms. These are some of the types of school violence. First is physical violence, which includes any kind of physical aggression, the use of weapons, as well as criminal acts like theft or arson. Second is psychological violence, which includes emotional and verbal abuse. This may involve insulting, threatening, ignoring, isolating, rejecting, name-calling, humiliating, ridiculing, rumor-mongering, lying, or punishing another person. Third is sexual violence, which includes sexual harassment, sexual intimidation, unwanted touching, and sexual coercion (Uyenne, 2021). Fourth is bullying, which can take physical, psychological, or sexual forms and is characterized by repeated and intentional aggression toward another person while another case is cyberbullying, which includes sexual or psychological abuse by people connected through school on social media or other online platforms. This may involve posting false information, hurtful comments, malicious rumors, or embarrassing photos or videos online.

Cyberbullying can also take the form of excluding someone from online groups or networks.

Theoretical Framework

This paper was anchored on Ecological Systems Theory propounded by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1979. The major tenet of Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory is that human development is influenced by various environmental systems, ranging from immediate settings (e.g. family, school) to broader societal contexts (e.g., culture, policies). Hence, the theory is concerned with issues of change and development in contemporary societies, especially as they relate to socio-environmental changes like how deviance and violence is learnt in societies and the need to devise and sort out techniques of tackling development problems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

The theory states that, as the population of a society increases in size, behaviour of individual members of the society changes as the society exert more pressure on individuals for change. In the case of school violence, this theory is relevant to this paper because it highlights that behaviours such as aggression or bullying are influenced not just by the individual (e.g., the violent student) but also by multiple levels of change in the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Also, the theory guides Counsellors on the use of active listening and empathy skills to understand how dynamic changes within the home and school can cause violence in students. For example, counsellors may explore peer influences that contribute to violent behaviour. The relationship between the student's school life and home life is important.

Counsellors can engage parents and teachers in collaborative strategies to address violence. This may include conflict resolution and anger management training for students. The theory helps Counsellors to recognize how the community environment influences school

violence. This includes exposure to community violence or societal norms that tolerate aggression (Savitz-Romer & Nicola, 2022). Counselling interventions might also involve community leaders or mentors in reducing violence. Nigeria's diverse cultural backgrounds influence students' behaviours and responses to authority. Counsellors need cultural sensitivity and conflict resolution skills to work with students from different ethnic and social backgrounds effectively.

Research Methods

The design of the study or research design is the spec-analysis of the data and procedure needed to attain a research fit. For this paper, the qualitative - expository research design was adopted for this study. Saunders and Thornhill (2003) noted that the qualitative-expository research design is aimed at widening or awakening prospective readers to the values of a discovery by reviewing or discussing its inherent benefits. Hence, the expository research design was used in this review. This was chosen because the research sought to awaken prospective readers or information users.

Data collected for this paper were majorly from secondary sources. The secondary data collected for the review of previous literature were from textbooks, electronic journals, newspapers, and other internet sources. Hence, the researchers were simply trying to make generalizations based on content review from previous literature on effective counselling skills. Hence, secondary data from textbooks, electronic journals, newspapers and other internet sources were solely used to draw inferences from reviews and make generalizations. The technique of analysis was basically the descriptive-expository approach. Since the data collected are solely qualitative in nature, the content analysis method was used to analyze data and inferences were drawn on the basis of the researcher's views in relation to the position of scholars from previous literature.

School Violence in Nigerian Secondary Schools

From the secondary school context, some violent behaviours among students that threaten the school peace include: attempted murder, suicide, grievous harm/wounding, assault, rape/indecent assault, stealing, burglary, receiving stolen property, forgery, unlawful possession, threat to life, malicious damage, defilement and cultism and so on. The committal of these atrocities has increased among students over the years (Aborisade, 2024b). School violence committed by secondary school students can be grouped into the following forms: robbery, rape/indecent assault, assault, breach of peace, secret cultism, stealing and burglary. It has been observed that the secret activities among student cultists are rampant in schools. Fellow students are oppressed, maimed and killed. Teachers are harassed and so many withhold discipline from suspected cultists which in turn may lead to general breakdown of law and order (Ezemenaka, 2021).

School violence in recent times appears to be a learned practice from outside the school system but imported by students into schools by socialization with others. The situation is causing serious concern to school management, parents and some of the students, whose education may be adversely affected (Aborisade, 2024a). The prevailing situation cannot be ignored otherwise the schools will become centres for breeding criminals instead of being places where discipline and other teaching and learning activities hold. In the secondary schools, there are alleged criminal cases most of which are not reported to the appropriate law enforcement agencies. Such cases include teachers being threatened by students in the course of discharging their lawful duties. Clashes of rival cult whose memberships are secondary schools' students or dropouts. In the midst of all these problems, there is a growing hopelessness over the dwindling standards of secondary education due to facilities and staff personnel shortages, as well as poor attitude of teachers to work especially in the public schools

(Ogba & Igu, 2019; Uyanne, 2021).

In secondary schools in most part of Nigeria, there are instances whereby students assault their teachers with weapons, and threaten their teachers. It was in this regard, Osiesi, et al. (2023) noted that teachers tender their resignation in some schools where their security is at stake in preference of better schools where students are less or non-criminal. Erinoshio (2007) rightly observed that our schools and colleges have lost their sacred value as character formation centres and have become breeding grounds for thugs, secret cults, gangsters, rapists and prostitutes, violence and juvenile delinquencies of different sorts. These behaviours worry students, parents, teachers, counsellors, school principals, educational administrators, religious leaders, communities and the entire society (Ogba & Igu, 2019).

In the last few decades, particularly since the early eighties, the issues of school violence and demand for school safety by members of the public have become topical (Ogba & Igu, 2019). This is because the school system has allegedly become a breeding ground for wild and indiscriminate behaviours among student instead as opposed to goals of secondary education in Nigeria. In 2021, 24.5% and 20.9% of criminal cases were committed by secondary school students while in 2022 in the South West and North central zones respectively (Victor-Akinyemi, et al., 2024; Halima, 2024). 2342 out of 10,423 cases charged to the court in the South East zone, were secondary schools products or un-completers of the school that had to be charged to juvenile court according to the relevant laws (Aborisade, 2024b).

The report further had it that many of the cases in juvenile court include incidences where a student or group of students' carry weapons such as knives to schools to assault their teachers, burn down classrooms, lay ambush for staff personnel, and even set fire on school property during a

student riot. It can be affirmed that these cases of violence obviously dominate the issues of today school management and are not limited to private or public; day or boarding; large or small schools within the towns, villages and hamlets of Nigeria (Igu & Ogba, 2019).

Causes of School Violence

While it is not always easy to know what causes school violence, one of the possible causes of school violence is poor academic performance. Poor academic performance puts a student in conflict with other students, teachers, and even their parents. This creates a stressful atmosphere around the student, increasing the number of negative interactions they have with adults and their peers (Iyekolo, et al., 2021). Also, a student who has a history of violence is more likely to engage in further violence. This risk factor increases if the lack of emotional regulation that contributed to previous acts have not been properly addressed (Igu & Ogba, 2019).

Poor impulse control and mental health conditions are also potential causes of school violence. Students who struggle to moderate their emotions or their reactions to stimuli may be more likely to act out (Halima, 2024). A child or teenager with a mental health condition may not know how to manage the powerful symptoms they experience, making it one of the common causes of school violence. Mental health concerns can isolate students and put them at risk of bullying.

Witnessing or being a victim of violence may result in school violence. This is because children and teens learn behaviour through modeling. Seeing their parents, guardians, teachers, or any other adults resorting to violence shows them that it may be the only way to deal with their emotions and resolve their problems (Victor-Akinyemi, et al., 2024). Furthermore, dysfunctional family dynamic and domestic violence and abuse are another set of potential predictors of school

violence. This is because a child or teenager who does not have the right amount of supervision or whose parent or guardian is so preoccupied with their own struggles that they neglect their child is more likely to engage in violence. This occurs because the child does not have a model for what emotional stability looks like (Uyenne, 2021). Similarly, children and teens who have experienced or witnessed domestic violence develop trauma that impedes emotional processing as well as learning. This can isolate the child from peers, affecting their view of the school environment.

Having easy access to weapons encourages impulsive actions. Halima (2024) pointed that it also puts the child at risk of self-harm. This is because children and teens learn through seeing others, being surrounded by delinquent peers makes it more likely for them to follow that example. Delinquent behaviour makes violence more likely. Also, living in poverty or in a community where crime is high encourages the child to model that behaviour. Poverty also correlates to the development of other risk factors and causes of school violence, such as mental illness and domestic abuse.

Effects of School Violence

Children who are victims of violence or exposed to it in some capacity sometimes believe that becoming violent is the only way they will ever be safe. When they commit violence, they may experience a sense of satisfaction when their emotional need for strength or safety is satisfied (Smiley, et al., 2021). That is short-lived however, because they start to fear punishment or retribution, which triggers anger that can sometimes lead to more violence if they're scared of what might happen to them if they do not protect themselves. Victims of school violence may get physically injured and experience cuts, scrapes, bruises, broken bones, gunshot wounds,

concussions, physical disability, or death. Emotionally speaking, the child might experience anxiety, or rage. Their academic performance may suffer because it can be hard to focus in school when all you can think about is how to avoid being hurt again (Aborisade, 2024a).

School violence is traumatic and can cause considerable psychological distress. Traumatic experiences can be difficult for adults too; however, when someone whose brain is not fully developed yet experiences trauma, especially if it's over a long time, their brains can switch to survival mode, which can affect their attention, concentration, emotional control, and long-term health. Children who have experienced school violence are at risk for long-term mental and physical health conditions, including attachment disorders, substance abuse, obesity, diabetes, cancer, heart disease, and respiratory conditions (Smiley, et al., 2021). The more adverse childhood experiences someone has, the greater the risk to their physical and mental health as an adult.

Children who witness school violence may feel guilty about seeing it and being too afraid to stop it. They may also feel threatened, and their brain may react in a similar way to a child who has faced school violence. Additionally, when children witness traumatic experiences, their basic beliefs about life and other people may be changed as they may no longer believe that the world is safe, which can be damaging to their mental health. For a child to be able to take care of themselves as they get older, they need to first feel safe and cared for. Learning to cope with threats is an advanced lesson that has to be built on a foundation of feeling safe and self-confident (Aborisade, 2024b; Obilor & Ikpa, 2021). Others are proactive and try to work with the school or challenge the school, if necessary, to try and keep their child safe.

Counselling Skills for remediating School Violence

School violence is a pressing issue that can have devastating consequences for students, teachers, and the entire school community. In order to address and control school violence, counsellors play a crucial role in providing support, guidance, and intervention strategies. In this section, five essential counselling skills - active listening, empathy, conflict resolution, and collaboration for remediating school violence were discussed.

Active listening skill: Active listening is a communication technique that involves fully concentrating on what a student is saying, understanding their message, and responding in a thoughtful and empathetic manner (Nwamma, 2022). By actively listening to students who may be experiencing difficulties or displaying violent tendencies, counsellors can create a safe and supportive environment in which students feel heard and understood (Oparaduru & Ukwueze, 2022). This can help to de-escalate potentially volatile situations and prevent instances of violence before they occur. Also, counsellors can gain valuable insights into the root causes of violent behaviour and provide appropriate support and interventions by actively listening to students' concerns,

In addition to creating a sense of trust and rapport with students, active listening can also help counsellors to identify underlying issues that may be contributing to violent behaviour (Eggenberger, 2021). By listening attentively to students' concerns, counsellors can uncover factors such as bullying, abuse, mental health issues, or other stressors that may be driving violent behaviour. This insight enables counsellors to develop tailored interventions and support strategies that address the root causes of violence and promote positive behaviour change. Furthermore, active listening can help counsellors to effectively communicate with students who may be resistant or hesitant to seek help. By demonstrating

genuine empathy and understanding, counsellors can build a bridge of trust with students and encourage them to open up about their feelings and experiences. This can be particularly beneficial for students who may be struggling with anger, aggression, or other emotional challenges that can lead to violence.

Empathy skill: Empathy is the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, and in the context of school violence, it can help counsellors connect with students on a deeper level (Molina, et al., 2022). By showing empathy towards students who may be experiencing issues such as bullying or aggression, counsellors can better understand the root causes of their behaviour and provide effective interventions to address the underlying issues. Empathy also allows counsellors to create a safe and supportive environment where students feel comfortable expressing their emotions and seeking help. By demonstrating empathy towards students who may be struggling with anger, frustration, or feelings of isolation, counsellors can help them feel heard and validated. This can help prevent instances of school violence by addressing students' emotional needs and providing them with the necessary support to cope with their challenges.

Furthermore, counsellors with strong empathy skills can effectively deescalate confrontations and prevent conflicts from escalating into acts of violence (Altavilla, et al., 2021). By demonstrating understanding and compassion towards students in conflict, counsellors can help them resolve their issues in a peaceful and constructive manner. This can contribute to a more positive school climate where students feel supported and valued, reducing the likelihood of violent incidents occurring. In addition, empathy can also help counsellors identify early warning signs of potential violence and intervene proactively to prevent harm (Oparaduru & Ukwueze, 2022). By empathizing with students who may be exhibiting behaviours indicative of

aggressiveness or distress, counsellors can intervene early to provide them with the necessary support and resources to address their issues. This proactive approach can help prevent incidents of school violence before they occur and promote a safer and more inclusive school environment for all students.

Conflict resolution skill: Conflict resolution skills feature under the vital counselling skill of problem solving. It is considered a crucial skill for counsellors because it could help navigate conflicts and misunderstandings in a nonviolent and constructive manner. One important conflict resolution skill for counsellors is teaching students effective communication techniques. Many conflicts arise from misunderstandings or miscommunication, so teaching students how to express their thoughts and feelings clearly and respectfully can help prevent conflicts from escalating into violence (Nwamma, 2022).

By equipping students with these communication skills, counsellors empower them to resolve conflicts peacefully and maintain positive relationships with their peers. In addition to effective communication, counsellors can also teach students problem-solving skills to help them resolve conflicts on their own. By guiding students through a structured problem-solving process, counsellors can help them identify the underlying issues contributing to the conflict, brainstorm possible solutions, and evaluate the pros and cons of each solution (Lewis, et al., 2022). This not only empowers students to take ownership of their conflicts but also helps them develop critical thinking skills that they can apply in future situations.

Empowerment skill: Another important counselling skill for controlling school violence is empowerment skill. By empowering students with knowledge, resources, and skills, counsellors can help students build self-esteem, confidence, and resilience (Levy & Lemberger-Truelove, 2021). Empowerment can help students develop a

sense of agency and control over their lives, which can reduce feelings of powerlessness and helplessness that can lead to violence. Empowerment skills for counsellors involve teaching other stakeholders of the school how to effectively communicate to build trust and rapport with students who may be experiencing violence or have concerns about safety.

Additionally, counsellors need to be able to communicate effectively with teachers, administrators, and law enforcement to ensure that appropriate interventions are put in place (Cross, et al., 2021). By empowering counsellors with strong communication skills, they can effectively convey concerns, gather important information, and work collaboratively with others to address school violence.

Collaboration skill: Collaboration is considerably another essential counselling skills for controlling school violence (Brigman, et al., 2021). One of the main reasons why collaboration skills are important for school counsellors is the need to work with teachers, parents, and other school staff members to identify and address potential risks for violence. By collaborating with these stakeholders, counsellors can gather valuable information about students who may be at risk of engaging in violent behaviour. This information can then be used to develop intervention strategies and provide appropriate support to these students before any violent incidents occur (Geesa, et al., 2022).

Oparaduru and Ukwueze (2022) pointed that counsellors must also work closely with mental health professionals and external agencies to address the underlying causes of violence in schools. Collaborating with experts in the field of mental health allows counsellors to gain a better understanding of the psychological factors that contribute to violent behaviour among students. By working together, they can create comprehensive treatment plans and support systems to help students or staff to deal with their

emotions in a healthy way.

In addition, counsellors need to collaborate with community organizations and law enforcement agencies to ensure that students have access to the resources they need to prevent violence. By forging partnerships with these external entities, counsellors can provide students with opportunities for mentorship, counselling, and community engagement to promote positive behaviour and prevent violence (Geesa, et al., 2022). Collaboration with law enforcement agencies like the Nigerian Police, and paramilitary organisations can also help counsellors create emergency response plans and safety protocols to mitigate the impact of violent incidents in schools.

Conclusion

School violence in secondary schools in Nigeria is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach to address. By addressing the underlying causes of violence, providing support for students and educators, and fostering a safe and inclusive school environment, counsellors and other school stakeholders can work towards creating a future where all students can learn and thrive without the fear of violence. Therefore, counselling skills play a vital role in managing school violence in Nigeria. By having trained and competent counsellors who are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge, schools can create a safe and supportive environment for students to learn and thrive. Through effective communication, crisis intervention, trauma-informed care, conflict resolution, and cultural competence, counsellors can help prevent and address instances of violence within the school system. It is essential for schools in Nigeria to prioritize counselling services as a key component of their violence prevention efforts.

Suggestions

The following suggestions were made to guide policy formulation:

- i. it is crucial for policymakers and educators to prioritize the safety and well-being of students in order to address the issue of school violence in Nigeria. To achieve this, there is need for implementing anti-bullying programmes, providing training for teachers on conflict resolution and behaviour management and creating a supportive environment where students feel comfortable reporting incidents of violence.
- ii. the government at all levels need to be a focus on addressing the root causes of school violence, such as poverty, unemployment, and drug abuse, in order to prevent future violent incidents from occurring.

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