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IMPACT OF AGING PROCESS AND COUNSELLING STRATEGIES IN MANAGEMENT OF THE AGED

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Abstract

The study focused on the Impact of Aging and Counselling strategies in Management of the Aged. The design of the study was descriptive survey and two research questions guided the study. The population of the study consists of 160 counsellors, which incidentally served as sample since population is small. The instrument for data collection was 38 item questionnaire titled ''Impact of Aging and Counselling Strategies in Management of the Aged Questionnaire'' (IACSMAQ) with reliability estimate of 0.80. The findings revealed that Aging impacted on the Aged in various ways such as depression, anxiety, disability, stress, loneliness among others. Hence the need for counselling services. While counselling strategies include cognitive behaviour therapy, reminiscence therapy, improved mental health among others. Based on the findings the [redacted] researchers recommended among others that professional counsellors should be employed in elderly institutions and society should shun negative

Keywords: Aging, Anxiety, Depression, Cognitive behaviour therapy, Counselling.

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stereotype against the Aged.

Introduction

Old age is the last stage of human development as well as retirement stage. Aging is the process of growing old. Gerontologists are the scientists who study the biological, psychological and social aspects of aging. They indicated that aging population should not be seen as a group. But the Aged should be significantly stratified into Young Old ranging from 65 years to 74 years, the Old Old from 75 years to 84 years and Oldest Old from 85 years upwards. The differences among these stages are based on the following terms; living independently, working needs and health needs.(Benokraitis,N,V 2005).Aging is associated with biological, physiological, psychological and cognitive impairment. It involves a gradual impairment of biological structures and functioning. These changes may have direct impact on the ability of the organs to function and negatively affect the individual as a whole. Hence both bodies and mind are affected, this undoubtedly cause physical decline and psychological issues. Old age is associated with negative stereotype such as sleazy, poverty, wrinkles, absent mindedness, unfriendliness, unattractiveness, frailty, unable to learn or change, cognitive impairment among others if compared with younger ones. The physical changes in the body could be accompanied with mental changes which may culminate into emotional and behavioural changes thus affecting mental health of the Aged. Two of the most common mental health problems for older people are depression and dementia. Depression is a mental disorder characterized by pervasive sadness and other negative emotions that interfere with the ability to work, study, sleep, eat and enjoy pleasurable activities. It has devastating effect on the brain structure and function.

Older adult stage is associated with grief and loss which may be in strength, retirement, loss of spouse, child, or friends. The Aged may not easily let go numerous things which they normally do during their mid life stage for example their job which has become habitual. Facing the reality of retirement such as financial strains, loss of position of authority and diminish sense of purpose may result to psychological disorders coupled with its attendant inactivity may cause the Aged to be anxious and depressed. Studies have indicated that loosing independence, pride, and confidence are the most psychological issues of the Aged. Not being able to do basic activities could isolate the Aged and undermine their self esteem, hence the Aged becomes vulnerable. The loss of loved one

may cause the Aged to experience extreme forms of mental issues such as anxiety, depression and suicidal ideation. The death of a spouse often means not just the loss of a life companion but a whole way of life. Unfamiliar tasks like managing the finances and cooking meals becomes responsibility of the surviving Aged spouse. This could be a source of worry to the surviving Aged spouse. Friendship may change since close relationship during marriage is based on being a couple. All these sudden changes are likely to impact on the Aged spouse negatively.

Research evidence by Hasen B,A and Kltz R,L(2018) indicates that older adults experience many transitions . Loss of spouse, physical limitation, cognition variance, change in career, income fluctuations, retirement and loneliness as a result of aging could raise psychological problems that may necessitate counselling of the Aged. Studies have indicated that older adults often experience mild decline in the areas of visual and verbal memories, and visio-spatial abilities. For instance the ability to remember and name objects takes time to remember. This decline in hearing, vision, body strength, appetite and energy level could cause emotional issues to the Aged.

As the Aged are battling with retirement syndrome, physical weakness, cognitive decline and mobility issues, isolation and loneliness may set in. This may cause the Aged to loose confidence which may give rise to development of psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression. On retirement, the societies see them as incompetent group who has nothing to offer. The society discriminate against old people based on their age as they are associated with myth of senility, a kind of notion that old people show forgetfulness, confusion and inattention. In some society their language is full of ageist words and phrases that denigrate the Aged. Such negative stereotype can generally disparage elderly people such as ''Senior citizen'', ''Old cargo'', ''Dead wood''. In some societies the elderly were once the source of all wisdom. Unfortunately recent advances in science, technology and other areas have made some ideas of the elderly to become obsolete and outdated hence the younger generation do not accord the Aged the respect expected of them as it was during the olden days. This situation predispose the Aged to view their life as a spent force or wasted life which may culminate into mental health issues like anxiety, depression and aggression. This could render the Aged to go into life of hibernation in order to shun insolence from younger people. Hence the need for counselling of the Aged to navigate old age period with ease. Some of these

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Aged experiences a degree of cognitive decline as they age, thus impairing their memory, coupled with mood swing and reduction of energy level. If these natural declines are not checked, it could culminate into anxiety and this could result to high vulnerability of the Aged.

Research has indicated that there is a tendency for the Aged to experience dementia. Dementia is the loss of mental abilities which mostly occur at later life. (Brynes, 2001).The most common form of dementia is Alzheimer disease, a kind of degenerative disorder which attacks the brain and impairs memory, thinking and behaviour. Medical researchers have linked Alzheimer to genes that cause a dense deposit of protein and debris called '' plaques'' along with twisted protein ''tangles'' that kills nerve cells in the brain. According to neuroscientist, Alzheimer spreads like a wild fire destroying more and more brain cells as it progresses. After two years, the disease engulfs the entire brain in some patients thus rendering Aged to be cognitively inactive. Such Aged may not partake in daily activities which could worsen their mental state (Thompson, 2003). Cognitive impairment can cause potential problems related to inability to eat, or insufficient access to food, leading to malnutrition. Some of these Aged may not know when they are hungry, may shun food when presented and continue to engage in abusive words against the caregiver for starving him or her. This could be linked to dementia effect. Research has indicated that medical illness such as stroke, heart attack, cancer, Parkinson disease and hormonal disorder can cause anxiety and depression. Stroke patients experience deterioration of social functions due to communication limitations and may have difficulty in understanding the meaning of what another party says. This may cause the Aged to experience extreme form of frustration and depression.

Aged all over the world needs care, love and attention. Aging process is associated with both psychological and sociological problems which may interfere with the wellbeing of the Aged. Therefore there is need to engage the services of a therapist like a counsellor who will help the Aged to transit and navigate old age with good mental health and wellness. Psychological counselling is perceived as a treatment which could significantly improve older individuals psychological and behavioural functioning. The Aged people as a group need geriatric counselling, a specialized form of therapy aimed at addressing the unique mental health needs of the elderly. This type of counselling help older adult cope with age related issues such as anxiety, depression, stress, loneliness and psychological impact of chronic illness. It also

provides support for life transitions, grief and loss enhancing their overall quality of life.

The core aim of counselling is to help the client understand himself and meaningfully live in their environment. As people advance in age, a lot of changes put the Aged in dilemma which may necessitate counselling. Counselling provides for an informal social support to older people in difficult situations thus offering positive changes in the life of the Aged causing the Aged to enjoy wellness. Counselling equip the Aged with personal control, autonomy and competence needed to reduce the negative stressful life situations and help the older adults progress through the period of aging. Geriatric counselling specifically helps elderly to manage their emotions, find new sources of enjoyment and meaning as well as find new support system. It can help people face their fears of death and deal with grief as friends and family members pass on. Counselling strategy means a broad general helping efforts such as prevention and treatment, whereas counselling methods is more concerned with offering specific skills in the helping process. The preventive strategy is synonymous with guidance. This is based on selecting and managing one's life style to promote wellness and make less or prevent chronic deteriorative diseases not to over whelm the Aged. Counsellors are equipped with so many therapies that can be applied in management of the Aged to navigate aging process such as coping skills, cognitive behaviour therapy, interpersonal therapy, exercise, occupational therapy, animal assisted , music, laughter, art, reminiscence, group therapies among others. Research evidence though foreign has indicated the efficacy of the counselling strategies listed in this work. Unfortunately there is no literature evidence on the impact of Aging process and Counselling Strategies in Management of the Aged in Anambra state. Hence the researchers embarked on this research work.

Statement of problem

Old age is a retirement stage. The Aged is expected to spend extra time with friends and family members in excitement. Unfortunately this period is associated with numerous psychological, physical and social challenges which can hinder elderly peoples' capacity to live a fulfilled life. This could be as a result of financial insecurities, reduced connections, living alone, decreased physical health and mental issues among others. All these may lead to dependency, loneliness, inability to engage in activities of daily living which may undermine

self esteem and confidence in the life span of the Aged. The worst is that these conditions are often neglected by their family members and society. The Aged are observed aging with regrets and pains. Some of these Aged are abandoned in the institutions or homes where their family members rarely visit. The society as well has a kind of negative stereotype about old people whom they regard as people who have nothing to offer. They see them as ''deadwood'', ''Old Cargo'' and ''Spent force'' to mention but a few. Hence they are prone to psychological, physical and social problems which the society tries to solve through medication or neglect. These medications given to the Aged such as anti depressant may not last. As soon as the effect of drugs elapsed the Aged may bounce back to psychological issues like anxiety, stress and depression. However counselling therapies have been suggested to last for life as clients may be equipped to learn the techniques of self management which become automatic and habitual in handling their problems.

Counselling as a helping profession has all it takes to help people live a meaningful life. A therapist counsellor can help, direct and guide the Aged to feel better, contented and live a meaningful life. The counsellor can help the Aged get involved with daily activities based on his abilities, enable them maintain a sense of identity and self esteem thus benefit from the elders abundance knowledge, wisdom and wealth of experiences they have accumulated over the years. Research evidence though foreign has indicated the impact of Aging process and Counselling Strategies in Management of the Aged. However there is no literature evidence on the impact of Aging process and Counselling Strategies in Management of the Aged in Anambra state. It is against this backdrop that the researchers embarked on this study.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to find out the Impact of Aging process and Counselling Strategies in the Management of the Aged. Specifically the study determines the Impact of Aging process and the Counselling in the Management of the Aged.

Research questions

1. What are the Impact of Aging processes on the Aged?
2. What are the Counselling Strategies in the Management of the Aged?

Method

The design for the study is descriptive survey type in which a group of people/ item is studied by collecting and analyzing data from items considered to be representative of the entire group. The population of the study is 160 counsellors from public schools (P.P.S.S.C Awka, 2024).Since population is small, there is no need for sampling. All the counsellors in the state public schools were used in carrying out the research. The instrument used for data collection is a structured questionnaire on" Impact of Aging Process and Counselling Strategies in Management of the Aged Questionnaire" (IAPCSMAQ).The questionnaire is to extract and elicit information from the counsellors. The data was analyzed using arithmetic weighted mean. The instrument has two parts. Parts A and B. Part A seeks information on personal data of the respondents while B part contain items. The items have two sections A and B. The section A measures Impact of Aging process on the Aged while Section B measures Counselling Strategies in Management of the Aged. The questionnaire is designed in the modified Likert four point scale format involving Strongly Agreed (SA)4 points, Agreed (A)3 points, Disagreed(D) 2 points and Strongly Disagreed (SD)1 point. The instrument for this study was validated by two experts from Guidance and Counselling and an expert from Measurement and Evaluation. The researchers adopted direct approach in the administration of the questionnaire on the respondents to enable them opportunity to appeal for their cooperation. The data collected were analyzed through the use of statistical weighted mean. The mean score items was computed and any score above 2.50 was accepted while anyone below a mean score of 2.50 was rejected.

Results

The questionnaire has section A for Impact of Aging process on the Aged while section B is for Counselling Strategies in Management of the Aged.

Research question one: What are the Impact of Aging processes on the Aged?

Table 1: Counsellors' responses on Impact of Aging processes on the Aged.

S/N	ITEM	MEAN	DECISION
1	Disability	3.46	Agreed
2	Anxiety	3.56	Agreed
3	Stress	3.40	Agreed
4	Depression	3.56	Agreed

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5	Aggression	3.03	Agreed
6	Loneliness	3.25	Agreed
7	Communication difficulty	3.03	Agreed
8	Immobility	2.56	Agreed
9`	Poor immunity	2.56	Agreed
10	Hoarding	2.68	Agreed
11	Financial strain	3.21	Agreed
12	Enjoyment	2.01	Disagreed

A glance at table 1 indicates that counsellors on the average responded affirmatively to all the items except item 12 regarding the Impact of Aging process on the Aged. This was deduced from the fact that the mean scores of all the items on the table were higher than the decision mean except item 12.

Research question two: What are the Counselling Strategies in the Management of the Aged?

Table 2: Counsellors' responses on counselling strategies in the management of the Aged.

S/N	ITEMS	MEANS	DECISION
1	Animal assisted therapy	2.93	Agreed
2	Cognitive behaviour therapy	3.81	Agreed
3	Interpersonal relationship therapy	3.56	Agreed
4	Music therapy	3.37	Agreed
5	Laughter therapy	2.93	Agreed
6	Art therapy	3.0	Agreed
7	Reminiscence therapy	3.40	Agreed
8	Group therapy	3.25	Agreed
9	Exercise therapy	3.21	Agreed
10	Occupational therapy	3.31	Agreed
11	Problem solving therapy	3.38	Agreed
12	Strengthening relationship	3.0	Agreed
13	Enhanced quality of life	3.18	Agreed
14	Improved mental health	3.56	Agreed
15	Understanding life content	2.93	Agreed
16	Addressing Emotional and Psychological needs	3.0	Agreed
17	Use of clear language	3.18	Agreed
18	Building rapport	3.03	Agreed
19	Involving family and Care giver	3.40	Agreed
20	Encouraged independence		

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	and Empowerment	3.21	Agreed
21	Crisis Management	3.37	Agreed
22	Utilizing Technology	2.93	Agreed
23	Addressing physical health concern	3.0	Agreed
24	Emotional support	3.37	Agreed
25	Continuous professional development	2.93	Agreed
26	Scolding and ignoring	2.00	Disagreed

A glance at the table 2 indicates that the respondents on the average responded affirmatively to all the factors on the items from 1-25 items, except item 26 regards to counselling strategies in the management of the Aged. This was deduced from the fact that mean scores of all the items on the table 2 were higher than the decision rule of 2.50 except item 26.

Discussion

The findings of the study on table 1 indicates that aging process impacts on the Aged through the following ways such as Depression(3.56),Anxiety(3.56), Disability(3.46),Stress(3.4)Loneliness(3.25)Communication difficulty(3.03) Hoarding(2.68), Financial strain (3.21),Aggression(3.03)Immobility (2.56),Poor immunity (2.56),except enjoyment (2.0). The findings were consistent with earlier research by the World Health Organization (WHO) 2017 which indicates that around 15% of the geriatric population has a mental health disorders. These high rates of psychological problems among the older people are related to anxiety, depression, impaired health and mobility, aggression, financial strain and elder abuse. Other researchers Chan A,Malhotra C,Malhotra R,Ostbye T(2021): Cadmus (2020) confirmed the impacts of anxiety, depression and aggression on the Aged. These may occur as a result of loneliness, poor health, financial strain resulting from retirement, diminished sense of purpose upon retirement which could lead to psychological distress and dependency. However the findings differ with Bernard D.P. (2012) who indicates that some Aged made tremendous achievement at old age, citing De Bekery an inventor of artificial heart who performed his final surgery at the age of 90 years old and concentrated on his laboratory work till he died at age of 98 years without being depressed and frustrated.

The findings from the table 2 indicates potential effects of different counselling therapies and strategies counsellors can apply in counselling and management of the Aged ranging from cognitive behaviour therapy(3.81), interpersonal relationship(3.56), improved mental health(3.56)involving family member and

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caregiver(3.40), reminiscence therapy(3.40), emotional support(3.37), crisis management(3.37), music therapy(3.37). occupational therapy(3.31),problem solving therapy(3.28),group therapy(3.25), encourage independence and empowerment(3.21),exercise therapy(3.21),enhanced quality of life(3.18),use of clear language(3.18), building rapport and trust(3.0). art therapy(3.0), strengthening relationships(3.0), addressing emotional and psychological needs(3.0), addressing physical health concern(3.0), utilizing technology(2.93) continuous professional development(2.93),understanding life content(2.93), laughter therapy(2.93), animal assisted therapy(2.93) are counselling strategies except scolding and ignoring(2.00)respectively. Analysis of the Aging theories indicate that aging is not a disease but it is bound to happen as far as life continues, therefore there is need for counselling to alleviate the psychological and health issues associated with the Aging processes. Counsellors need to familiarize members and caregivers on the challenges confronting the Aged, especially physical, health and psychological issues to enable the Caregivers and family members to contain the issues with the Aged. Counsellors as indicated on table 2 maintain that cognitive behaviour therapy has the highest potentials in counselling and management of the Aged. Mental health issues of the Aged are better handled with psychological means as some of the problems of the Aged have psychological origin. Therefore there is need to use psychological means such as Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) to handle these issues successfully. The CBT enable the Aged to express their feelings, thought and concerns in a non judgmental way. The counsellor provides empathetic listening attitude which can make a world of difference in the life of the elders. CBT help the Aged to view an event without threatening. Both the counsellor and the Aged explore the events critically and come out with solutions to the problem through rational means rather than irrational means which may be their source of vulnerability. The counsellor helped the Aged to face the fact, and challenge irrational thoughts, feelings and behaviours that may be the cause of their anxiety and depression. For many elders life can become lonely especially if they have lost their loved ones or live far away from their family. The CBT may help the Aged to readjust to life and live meaningfully. The study on table 2 is in line with the findings of Holland, Chong, Currier, O Hara and Gallagher-Thompson (2015) which investigated meaningful life among individuals with geriatrics depression. The researchers indicated that the CBT improved the emotional disorders of the

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Aged and enhanced their meaningful living. Hence the need for counselling the Aged.

In addition to the above therapy is the efficacy of interpersonal therapy (IPT). It also concur with earliest research work by Miller (2008)who posits that interpersonal therapy(IPT) is easily adaptable to older population and may be specifically useful for grief management and development of coping skills for the transitions to long term care. IPT is also found to be a promising approach for older clients suffering from suicidal from ideation. Man is a social animal and is equipped to relate with each other. The interpersonal relationship therapy helps to calm stress response which chronically wreak havoc on our physical and emotional health. Positive relationship help the Aged to relate better, stay healthier and live long. Depression, anxiety and cognitive decline are common concern among elderly. With good interpersonal relationship, depression and anxiety could be reduced thus enhance quality of life of the Aged.IPT help older people to maintain good relationship with people around them as social connectedness decreases anxiety and depression.

The study is also in agreement with the findings of Hauer, K, Rost,B, Rutschle, R. Optitz, H.Specht,N.Bartsch,P and Schlierf D(2012) who posit that exercise is essential for older people as it fosters emotional wellbeing, physical health and longevity. Exercise has been linked to reduce dementia and other cognitive disorders. It reduces depression and anxiety. It reduces number of falls. Exercise enable the older people to mix with outsiders as well as help mood changing hormones to be released into the body system and reduce anxiety and depression.

The study also supports the findings of Punwar A and Peloquim S (2000) who maintain that occupational therapy involves the use of purposeful activity or intervention designed to achieve functional outcome that promote mental health, prevent injury and improve and restore the highest possible level of independence and self esteem which the Aged cherished.

Photographs taking earlier by the Aged could help to lower anxiety and depression of the Aged. All these help to give credence to the findings of Subramaman and Woods (2012) who emphasized that discussing positive experiences and events using various prompts like photographs and videos can be useful in improving memory of dementia patients. These researchers also maintain that reminiscence therapy can also enhance mood and lower depression among the elderly.

The study also is in agreement with the findings of Mathew, Sundar, Subramaman and Parmar (2016) who emphasized that music lowers depression and loneliness. Music can be a source of emotional supports to the elders. It goes a long way to heal battered emotions of the Aged and relieve their tensions and anxiety thus helping them to live meaningful life. Also this work is in line with the findings of Lee, Seo, Lee and Jung (2016) who shows that laughter enhance reduction of stress, depression and improve sleep quality. as it touches the innermost part of the Aged to relieve tensions and battered emotions of the Aged.

The study also concur with the findings of Masika Yu and Li(2020) who emphasized that art therapy enhance healthy aging as art therapy improved cognitive function and reduced depression and anxiety. Finally the study supports the research work of Tevares and Barbosa Blair A.Hassan and Rebecca L.Koltz (2018) who indicated that group therapy helps to reduce social isolation as the Aged suffers loneliness and isolation. When these Aged are grouped together in counselling they enjoy all the benefits of group therapy. While scolding and ignoring the Aged can predispose the Aged to anxiety, aggression, stress and depression. Therefore scolding and ignoring are not counselling strategies in management of the Aged as indicated by the counsellors.

Conclusion

Aging is a gradual process and inevitable as far as life exists. It is not a disease and is bound to happen. It is associated with psychological and behavioural problems such as cognitive, physical, mental decline which may confront the Aged. Hence the need for Counselling and Management of the Aged. Counsellors are equipped with so many counselling strategies they can use in management of the Aged. These therapies help the Aged to navigate aging process such as cognitive behaviour therapy, interpersonal relationship therapy, music and reminiscence therapies among others.

Recommendation

Based on the findings, the researchers gave the following recommendations.

The federal government should make provisions for employment of professional counsellors who will provide counsellings services to the Aged in elderly institutions or even at" Aging place" that is their community.

The society should be reoriented to shun negative stereotype against the Aged as ''Dead wood" '' Old cargo'' .The society should desist from stigmatizing them.

Counsellors education/curriculum should be widened to include geriatric counselling to enhance professional growth in counselling of the Aged.

The Aged should acquire coping skills to enable them navigate aging process successfully.

More awareness campaign especially through social media should be embarked upon by the counsellors and psychologists to sensitize Aged people of Anambra state about the benefits of these counselling therapies in dealing with their emotional and psychological distress.

The government should make provisions for the retirees in areas of paying them pensions and gratuity, give them free medical care and other essential services to enable the navigate old age.

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