

CHAPTER

9

The Need for Counselling Parents of Special Needs Persons in Nigeria

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Introduction

In Nigerian culture as in other parts of the world parents attach importance to child bearing after marriage in every home and the dream of every parent is to have a perfect, normal, strong, smart and healthy baby. This kind of expectation is because the arrival of a special needs person into a Nigerian family is seen as a retribution for an evil, a punishment awarded to a parent from gods or angry ancestors for a sin committed, or as a result of violating the law of the land or family's cultural belief. As a result, some family see the special need person as an unwanted person, a misfit, an outcast, an intruder and a kill joy. Such person are denied of care and the provision of basic needs.

Consequently, when the expectation of a parent to have a normal child becomes a reality, the parents would feel proud, exited and be jubilating because they have been successful in producing a strong, smart, normal and healthy baby. However, if their baby turns out to be blind, deaf or with any physical deformity at birth or later in life, such parents may feel disappointed, shakened and resentful. Despite the affection, guidance and control parents gives to any child, in the case of special need person they still find themselves helpless and not having the knowledge and information about the disabilities which their

children or youth suffer from. They do not know the appropriate place to take their special needs person to for proper diagnosis, program and services needed by both parents and their special needs person. They have difficulty in making proper educational placement and choosing career for them. They also lack emotional support which they need to pass through their moment of crisis, stress and confusion.

Parents are the most important and vital resource in the training of their special needs person. Yet for some mysterious reasons, the parents of special need persons are often seen as the enemy, wicked, ungodly or sinners by the members of the family or neighbors due to lack of guidance and counseling on the arrival of a special needs person in the family. As "counseling" is like applying balm to wounds to bring relief, the psychological trauma caused by the disadvantaged circumstances of their special needs persons need to be cap with counseling. They need to be counseled on what to do, where to go to get aid for themselves and for their special needs person. They must also be helped to adjust their minds and feelings to the nature and implication of disabling condition as well as prevention of subsequent occurrence. They need to be counseled on how to adjust to the difficult situations and be well educated on how to cope and manage their special needs persons. They must also be helped to learn how to deal more effectively with the reality of the problems in question or be persuaded to adopt more positive methods of discipline and care. Again, they need to be reassured that their situation is not hopeless or helpless as they may think.

Furthermore, a special needs person has special educational needs if he has a significant greater difficulty in learning than the majority of persons of his age, and if he has disability which either prevents or hinders him from making use of educational facilities of a kind generally provided in the regular schools or within the area of the local authority concerned for his age. This group of special needs persons are also in need of counseling as the case may be. Therefore, the need for parents of special needs persons to be counseled or assisted to gain broader understanding of the

physical and emotional development of their disabled persons is paramount.

What is Counseling?

The word “counseling” means consultation; discussion, and deliberation, exchange of ideas, advice or process of decision making. Counselling is like applying balm to wounds to bring relief as earlier mentioned. It is a service designed to help an individual analyze himself by relating his capabilities, achievements, interests and mode of adjustment to what new decision he has made. For instance, in an open ended situation and face to face situation, the individual is enabled to make a right choice to illuminate a darkened situation and lighten a burden. In addition, counseling involves advising, instructing, and educating the counselee on the right way to take in order to arrive at a designed result. Infact, counsellig is a process of helping an individual find solutions to his problems.

Yusuf (2000) defines □counseling as a series of direct contacts with the individual which aims to offer assistance in changing attitude and behaviors. However, Perez (2001) writes that effective □counseling consists of a definite structured, permissive relationship which allows the client to gain an understanding of himself to a degree which enables him to take positive steps in the light of new orientation. By this implication it means that, counseling is a process whereby people help others by facilitating growth and positive change through an exercise of self understanding.

Who are the Special Needs Persons?

Special needs persons are generally referred to as exceptional people, they are children, youths and adults with one form of disability or learning difficulty or the other such as persons with hearing impairment, persons with visual impairment, persons with mental retardation, persons with other health and physical impairment, persons with learning disabilities, persons with speech disorders, persons with multiple disabilities, persons with

Gifted and Talented who because of their disabilities or impairments need special education services in order to live a useful life in the society. However, Swanson (2000) described special needs persons as those who due to anatomic, organic defects, dysfunctional and psychic disorders, retardation and giftedness encounter great difficulties in availing themselves of the normal form of schooling, family life, vocational and leisure time activities. They are handicapped and this creates a need for special books and equipments to further growth and achievement.

Purpose of Counseling

The purpose of counseling is to improve the special needs child's ability to make social adjustment and to make enjoyment of his living. (To prevent delinquency through programme designed for early identification, appropriate referrals and implementation of behavioural change programmes). In addition, it is to make it possible for the child to develop better attitude towards school attendance and learning, and to help both parents and teachers to treat the child with respect, love and care.

However, with respect to the special needs children, their latent potentials are not well developed compared to normal children. Where the latent potentials are well developed, the presence of one type of impairment or the other may seriously damage the expression of such potentials. All these therefore, further amplify the necessity for early counseling of these children, which can only be accomplished if the parents themselves are well counseled on these handicapping conditions. When this is solved, parents will be in a better position to accept their fate, adjust to situation and also counsel their children with a view to achieving the various goals which counseling service is set to achieve in their special needs children.

Constraints Militating against Parental Counseling and Special Needs Education

Before the advent of the missionaries into Nigeria, special needs persons were more or less regarded as "human waste". They

were regarded as people who did not have anything to offer to the society but rather constituted social burden to the system. However, “around the 1940’s attempt to provide formal custodian, vocational and educational services to the special needs children in Nigeria were initiated by the missionaries” (Abang 2005). Subsequently, more attention was later rendered to the education and generally welfare of the special needs persons by the Nigerian government and non governmental organizations.

The National Policy on Education (2004) stated that “the aim of educating the handicapped is to provide adequate education to children and adults in order that they may fully play their roles in the development of the nation, and to provide opportunities for exceptionally gifted children to develop at their own pace in the technological development”

Laudable as these objectives appear, they may not be achieved because of many reasons. Prominent among these reasons are:

- Lack of proper and adequate awareness of the parents of majority of the special needs persons about the government’s provision for special needs persons and the fact that these persons are educable and trainable: This is not surprising because majority of these parents are illiterate and live in rural areas and urban slums, more disturbing is the fact that even some of the literate parents of these special needs children have negative attitudes toward these children because of one reason or the other.
- Non-implantation of law: It is unfortunate that the responsibility of policy makers about special needs persons in Nigeria rests in the hands of individuals with little or no idea on issues relating to special needs persons. These officials naturally view investment on special needs persons as a form of charity or a waste thereby making the policy in-effective.
- High cost of assistive devices: the learning assistive devices for special needs persons are difficult to get, that means one can not lay hand on them easily. More disturbing, the available ones are too expensive for most parents to afford

thereby, making parent-child and child-parent interaction, teaching and learning more difficult.

- Lack of proper and adequate awareness of parents of special needs children counseling service: At the arrival of special needs children in the family, parents are at loss, feeling rejected and confused as to where to go for help. Peradventure, if they are at alert or aware of counseling service it might help lighten their burden. Moreso, some of these parents are often ashamed or feel coward as to interact and share their feelings with other parents for help, for the fear of disgrace and embarrassment.
- Lack of specialist counselors in most of the special schools in the country: The three tier government failed to include provision of specialist counselors in their plan. Thus, there are no special counselors in most special schools available to guide the parents of special needs persons on what to do. Again, teachers of special needs children are those making efforts with the little knowledge they had to encourage the parents, worst still, majority of these teachers are not specialists. In the same vein, even if there are any counselors posted to any school, majority of them are not professionals. Therefore, the need for proper counseling of the parents of the special needs children cannot be overemphasized if the objectives set out in the National Policy on Education is to be achieved.
- Inadequate training facilities and lack of special teaching equipments and materials in most special schools in the country: At present, very limited special schools are available for these children throughout the federation, worst still, the very few schools available are ill-equipped and mismanaged, due to inadequate qualified teachers and lack of special teaching equipments and materials required for the effective teaching and learning of this special group of students.

For instance, special equipments and teaching materials such as hearing aids, audiometers, ear mould, sign language text books, projectors, television, brailing equipments,

typewriters, abacus, mobility- equipments, and special recreational facilities should be provided. Apart from the provision of these teaching materials and equipments, it is essential to provide adequate residential and inclusive educational facilities for all these schools. In the same vein, the teaching of special needs children can only be effective if they are in an environment where their activities can be well monitored and this can only be achieved in a residential and inclusive educational system.

- Lack of employment opportunities after graduation: At present the few special needs graduates are finding it difficult to get employed due to societal and employers negative attitude toward the special needs graduates thinking that they are unproductive and unfit for the job, this lukewarm altitude tend to discourage other special needs persons and their parents alike in wanting to pursue, care or waste their money on their education.
- Lack of sufficient statistical data about special needs children: The important of statistical data in the provision of special amenities for this group of persons cannot be overemphasized. At present there is no accurate fact concerning the number of special needs persons in the different handicapping conditions in the country. The absence of such Information makes planning difficult. Thus, there is the need for the government to embark on a nationwide census of special needs persons.
- Other factors militating against the realization of the objective stated earlier on are: Lack of appropriate legislation to back up the policy, inadequate funding, and negative social integration of the special needs children, lack of adequate qualified teachers and lack of sufficient vocational training centres. Thus, before the effective realization of the National Policy about the special needs children can be achieved, government must find solutions to the entire problems highlighted above.

Counselling Parents of Special Needs Persons

Parent counseling is of paramount importance in the upbringing and training of their special needs persons. This is because, parents of special needs persons faces more problems than normal ones in times of medical care and rehabilitation of their disable persons. Similarly, the birth or arrival of a special needs person in the family at any developmental stage may bring bitterness, fear, psychological and emotional disintegration or problems. In addition, most parents of special needs persons look upon this unexpected situation as a calamity and disaster. During this crisis and period of stress, some parents perceives the special need persons as an extension of themselves and may feel ridiculed, socially rejected, ashamed or embarrassed.

Consequently, the fear of extra burden and great problems such as financial and management of their persons that the impairments in these persons imposed on the parents are another factors. Certainly, after the shocked of having a special needs person and the accompanying feelings of depression, denial, anger and alienation, most parents or families need understanding and supporting counselor who remains involves in helping them to share the burden and guiding them through the difficult phase of bringing up a disable person. They need guidance and conselling in order to work toward assisting the special needs persons to reach their maximum potentials or better their lives.

Samson (2000) states that parenting disabled person is an awesome responsibility which requires special guidance and counseling to enable the parents learn less painful ways of dealing with mental, physical and emotional adjustment required by the parents of a child. Gidado (2001) also confirmed that having a disabled child born into a family and grow to adulthood is one of the most stressful experience a family or parents can endure. Parent or family should be made to know or understand that the special needs persons has needs which they wants to meet such

as need for love, recognition, acceptance, approval, and dignified treatment. Thus, adequate emphasis should be laid on the counseling of parents of special needs persons by the specialists or by the professional counselor. In another development, the professional counselors on ground who is to counsel this group of parents must be very knowledgeable in the area he or she wishes to interact with the individual parent. Infact, his knowledge in that field must be wider and richer than that of the counselee. Thus, it is expected that a counselor for the parents of special needs children must be well versed is almost all the different forms of impairments. He must have knowledge of the professionals in the field, where to refer the parents to and posses the ability to encourage and guide them. He must also be knowledgeable about causes, symptoms, characteristics, prevention of subsequent occurrence and management of all the various impairments. Further still, it is the duty of the counselor to help both and teachers to treat the child with respect, love, and care and to encourage them to share their feelings with those who can render them assistance. The counselor must be able to treat the individual parent equally by recognizing their worth and dignity. He must also possess the ability of secret keeping that is, ensuring confidentiality of all personal information shared with him/her by the parents. It is only when the counselor is able to achieve this that he or she can successfully handle the problems of parents of special needs children as well as handling problems of their special needs persons. However, Adeniran (2006) explained two types of counseling services which are normally needed by the parents of special needs children and their children as well. These counseling services include: Adjustment □counseling and Informational counseling, these services can be rendered to the parents directly.

The first step in counseling the parents of special needs children is to give adjustment counseling, that is, to help them adjust to the difficult situations and let them realize that their children are not liability and social embarrassment to them because they are gifts from God. They should be encouraged to

regard their children as human and not to blame anybody as the root cause of the problem. They should also be encouraged to accept, love and care for their children. The counselor should help remove fear, anxiety, guilt and grief in parents. He should encourage them to seek for scientific solutions to cope with the problems imposed by their children and absorb social stigma. This point needs to be well emphasized because according to Telma (2001), no parents anywhere in the world, usually make provision for the feeling that any of their children can ever come out disabled. Therefore, it is usually a serious embarrassment for any of these parents to eventually discover that one or more of their children came out disabled or with special needs. The parents need to be assured that having special needs child can happen to anybody, that is not peculiar to them alone and what they need is to make effort to adjust quickly to the situation before the problem further compound for both parents and the affected child.

One cannot but agree with Adulogun (2001) that one of the major functions of the counselor is helping the parents of special needs clients adjust effectively to their situation and that of helping them to avoid the temptation, rampant among many of either blaming themselves or others (gods/human beings) as possible cause of the disability in question.

In this regard, the counselor must be ready to provide "Information counseling" to the parents, that is, information on agencies and organizations that deal with the special needs children such as various NGOs, professionals, counselor services, hospitals and rehabilitation centers, employment opportunity for the special needs persons, educational services, evaluation and diagnosis, referral and placements of special students. He must be well knowledgeable about the various etiologies of handicapping conditions.

Apart from helping the parents to identify the various causes of disability in children, youth or adult the counselor should help them to consider all the ramifications of such a disability and what needs to be done to remedy the situations in good time. This is the state that the informational counselling aspects of the

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counselor's function needs be brought in. The counselor should be able to educate the parents on how and where they can obtain adequate diagnosis, education and remediation (where possible) for the disability in question. Thus the counselor must be knowledgeable about different special education institutions around, costs and the program they run.

Apart from the above, the counselor should be able to reassure the parents that their special needs child can still be useful and successful in life by telling them specific cases of special needs individuals who, because of the adequate attention given to them in the earliest time, have been able to get over their disabilities and make success in life. By citing such cases, these parents would definitely become further reassured that all is not lost with their special need child. They need to be counseled about the need for them to accept the child as a part of the family and then placing their faith and sufficient conviction that through appropriate effort and cooperative understanding of all family members, a lot can still be done to remedy the situation.

Another level of informational counseling which can be given to the parents of special needs children is on what is usually referred to as preventive counseling. This is the type of counseling which requires the counselor to tell these parents what they need to do to prevent their "subsequent children" from falling into the same ugly experience as the one being treated. With respect to this type of counseling, the following recommendations were advanced by the writer for a successful implementation on the need for counseling parents of special needs persons.

The parents should be educated on the need to avoid some of the causes mentioned below among many unmentioned such as: self medication, loud noises, alcoholic drinks, smoking, ototoxic drugs especially during the first trimester of pregnancy and should avoid malnutrition, and blow on the stomach during pregnancy, in addition blood marriage should also be discouraged by both partners.

From the above discussion, it can be seen that the point of emphasis about the adjustment and informational counseling of

parents of special needs children is very important. Another important point to note by the counselor is, his ability to help these parents to establish contact with professionals who can diagnose, educate or offer gainful employment to their special needs children. Subsequently, in whatever school the special needs person is placed, the parents must continue their collaborative role.

Counselling Special Needs Persons

In counseling special needs persons, similar attempts, need be made to them equivalent the type of counseling service made available directly to their parents. These include as earlier mentioned, "Adjustment and Informational counseling". Although these services are needed essentially at two basic levels for special needs persons, they are those to be given to them directly and those to be given to them indirectly through their parents, peers, teachers, and their potential employers.

However, in counseling the special needs persons directly, they must first and foremost be helped to adjust their minds and feelings to the meaning and implications for their impairments. They need to be reassured that their present conditions is not peculiar to them alone and that their disablement is not hopeless and helpless as they may think. This implies that the counselor's cognitive field with respect to various handicapping conditions must be sufficiently broadened. The counselor must be aware of the nature, implication and prevention of the different categories of disabling conditions, and be able to communicate and relate with them freely. Without this knowledge, the counselor will not be able to "interact" very well and effectively with the special needs persons.

Consequently, the counselor must note that in helping a special need client to adjust to his condition requires giving him counseling on how to plan effective strategy for improving his other positive aspects of self and then helping him to determine how to manage most of his existing handicapping conditions so as to help him control as much as possible, the obstacles they can

present to his progress in life. It is in this regard that “informational counseling” aspect of his service becomes particularly significant. The information that is most relevant in this regard, is concerned with the issue of where to obtain adequate diagnosis for the specific type of special need and assessment of the extent of his chance of gaining effective education in spite of all his conditions, and subsequently, the opportunities he will have for entering into some gainful employment after receiving relevant training. To be able to carry out this function very well the counselor must have first hand information about the various job opportunities available and abilities of the special needs persons. To be able to counsel them on how to obtain effective remediation for their particular special need the counselor needs to make adequate effort to acquaint himself with relevant information concerning agencies and the appropriate health organizations that are known to possess specialists personnel and resources for arresting further complication of the particular disabilities affecting his largest client.

Apart from the afore mentioned roles, the counselor should also be able to assist the special needs persons in identifying source of financial assistance both for his education and health and also goes in making contact with such bodies. The counselor should also keep his clients abreast of all recent discoveries and innovations in science which will enhance their education, social interactions and usefulness to both him and the society at large. All these functions expected of a counselor calls for his being knowledgeable and being well informed about the various facets of the special needs persons situations.

Conclusion

One cannot as individual be left on his or her own and allowed to develop on his/her inherent potentials as earlier mentioned in the definition of counseling, it is aimed at assisting individual parent of special person to appreciate and discuss herself or himself, and a way of helping him/her find solution to her problems. By doing this the individual parent will be able to know whether they are capable of achieving the goals he has earlier set for himself.

Apart from parent of special needs person's self actualization, counseling will also enable the individual concerned to understand his/her environment both animate and inanimate better and how they interact and affect even himself. The parents of special needs persons and their children or youth will learn to appreciate their problems and limitations and also how to relate to others with their immediate and distant environment. Through counseling they will be made to realize that their problems are not peculiar to them alone and that there are other people with worst problems than they have. Thereafter, they will be able to gain the assurance that there is no problem that defies solution. All these will assist them knowing how to tackle and solve their problems and consequently achieve their set goals. Consequently, the achievement of inherent potentialities by an individual is affected by the environment, among other factors. Thus, even though an individual disabled person or their parents may possess the ability to achieve a particular goal if the proper motivating and stimulating environment is ignorant of their realization of the goal may be a mirage rather than reality. Through proper and prompt counseling of parents and their special needs persons such militating factors can be identified on time and thus enabling the individual concerned to achieve the set goals. Thus, from the above discuss, the importance of counseling to the success of parents of special needs persons in the upbringing and rehabilitation of their disabled persons cannot be overemphasized

Recommendation

The following recommendations were advanced for a successful implementation on the needs for counseling parents of special needs children:

- There must be proper and adequate awareness of parents of special needs children about government's provisions for education of special needs children.
- Government should create awareness of counseling service for parents of special needs children through mass media, health centers, hospitals, mosque and churches in urban and

rural areas in order to ameliorate family crisis or effect of special need child on the family. This will go a long way in making the counseling of parents of special needs children a reality.

- Government should infuse inclusive educational system into the National Policy on Education and make mandatory.
- Parents of special needs persons should be part of decision-making bodies that affect their children or youth welfare whenever government intends to enact laws and legislation on the education and rehabilitation of their special needs persons.
- Government should always make professionals who has ideas on issues relating to special needs persons as the officers in charge of special education and social welfare unit in the ministry of education.

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