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Law and social work practice in Nigeria: a need for effective collaboration

Christopher Ndubuisi NGWU and Anthony Obinna IWUAGWU

ABSTRACT

Positive collaboration between social workers and lawyers is important in social work because law plays some critical roles in the practice of social work. The aim of this paper therefore, is to examine the needs, challenges of effective collaboration and similarities between social workers and lawyers in Nigeria, in the service of clients so that each profession can increase its understanding of the other discipline. It considers also the location of relationship between social work and law practice and explores areas of convergence. We employed in-depth interviews (IDIs) as instruments for data collection for this study, using a sample of 10 social work educators and 10 practicing lawyers at University of Nigeria, Nsukka and Enugu campus respectively, targeting participants with long working experience. The interviews focused on the strengths and weaknesses of collaborative models which use all of their valued knowledge, training and ability to care for clients. The data collected were analyzed thematically. Findings showed that the law and social work professions are interwoven professions given their similarities. Results also showed the importance of collaboration between lawyers and social workers as well as the barriers that has impeded such collaboration among professionals. It is therefore of utmost importance that right measures are taken to overcome these impediments and laying a foundation for effective collaboration between the two professionals.

KEY TERMS: collaboration, lawyers, Nigeria, professions, social work educators, social workers

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INTRODUCTION

The connection between the law and social work practice is mind boggling. Law plays various significant roles in social work practice. Initially, from a biological point of view, the legitimate framework is a fundamental piece of a client's social condition. This particular study provides an important link between social work practice and the law. It recognizes the fact that law is central to social work regulating practice, ensuring accountability and provides professionals with the power and the authority to work effectively. Like social work itself, the law is subject to content development and change. This helps students to gain knowledge of basic law aspects that help them understand problem situations within the context of legal framework in developing societies /countries particularly in East Africa and how to better intervene in social work. In Africa countries, collaboration between the two professions is wobbling and has not taken good shape, hence the essence of this research. In a bid to bridge the gap, this qualitative study involved the use of semi structured interviews, using 10 social work educators and 10 practicing lawyers in the University community, our data shows that the interwoven relationship between social work and the law calls for more active collaboration between the two professionals in Nigeria.

BACKGROUND

The problem

While there are numerous difficulties in interdisciplinary cooperation between social work and law, the first (and a particularly unavoidable) one was the distinctions in the language, customs, and standards of the teaming up callings (Stephanie, Stephanie, Quirin, Evan and Carrie, 2015). Each is expected to learn and value the other. Issues where social work and the law over-lap have reliably tested socio-legitimate experts and the moves guarantee to proceed. The cover uncovered significant interdisciplinary issues, which are best tended to when certain conditions are met (Kwonyike, 2017). The authors therefore seek to examine the process of a collaborative effectiveness between social workers and lawyers in developing countries, including Nigeria in the service of clients so that each profession can increase their understanding of the other discipline. Social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing. Joint effort between social workers and lawyers has been specifically noteworthy to schools of social work because of the expanding recurrence with which social workers intercede with customers associated with the overall set of laws (Forgey and Colarossi, 2003). Literature has shown that factors mitigating effective collaboration between lawyers and social workers in Nigeria include such views as the lack of awareness of the roles of Social workers on the part of lawyers and justice system in Nigeria, differences in some common issues such as professional ethics, education and training background, style and practice methods as potentially conflicting for such collaboration. Social work happens where people work together to create social development. As per International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2018) social work is a training based calling and a scholarly discipline that works with social change and improvement, social cohesion, and empowerment and freedom of individuals. We advocate the use of a social work generalist approach which will add to a more viable lawyer- client relationship, which will thus improve the general adequacy of criminal equity activities (Carolyn, and Carrie, 2004). In contemporary social work talk, researchers and experts have progressed the Grand Challenges (Uehara et al., 2013) to advance exchange and strategy change about a scope of civil rights issues. Social workers are relied upon to have abilities in between proficient coordinated effort and in working with the strengthening of those frequently avoided from choices that influence their lives (Schoeneman, 2017). Based on the aforementioned problems of effective collaboration between the two professions, this study therefore aims to examine the process of a collaborative effectiveness between social workers and lawyers in developing nations, including Nigeria in the service of clients. This review was directed by the accompanying research questions: (1) In what ways can the two callings (social work and law) advantage one another? (2) What are the variables militating against effective collaboration between social workers and lawyers in Nigeria? (3) What are the similarities between the two professions?

Collaborations between law and social work

The convergence of law and social work has broad ramifications for social work practice in areas such as child welfare (Orji, 2016). As per Galowitz (1999), a portion of the assorted fields of training for social work incorporate the accompanying: clinical administrations, emergency intercession, psycho-social appraisal support, social approach examination, local area improvement, and so forth. Laws also govern many relationships of interest to social workers including landlord-tenant, employer-employee, physician-patient, spouses and parent-child relationships. Social workers can arrange with legal counselors and help in the execution of social liberties for teenagers, prisoners' recuperation, and prostitutes, poor and destitute that might require real assistance (Chowdhury, 2017). These are expected essentially to the weakness of numerous buyers of social administrations who likewise regularly need legitimate support or in any case are compelled to get associated with the overall set

of law. At the point when legal counselors and social workers do not team up viably or collaborate effectively, it is accepted to come from the various techniques for training and socialization that produce lawyers and social workers. The Social workers in private practice will be able to assist the legal profession in the quest to “preserve relationships between litigants or potential litigants which may have become strained or destroyed by the adversarial nature of litigation” (Elzabe, 2014). The social work practitioners have not yet internalized the unambiguous role of social work in defending the rights of the under privileged in African society (Mtetwa and Muchacha, 2013). Therefore, social work roles cannot be complete without the effective collaboration existing between lawyers and social workers in Africa. Social work is a professional approach to ameliorating social problems (Chitereka, 2009) and these problems may arise from the non-cooperation of the two callings which makes their clients to suffer.

Many ethical issues in social work require some knowledge of the law. Social workers treat each person in a caring and respectful fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity (Jane and Wizner, 2003). Some parts of the social work process, such as assessment, have clearly defined procedures guided by law and local or national policy. It is important that we consider the legal and policy context of social work. We always make sure that professional decisions comply with the law. Some tasks may be short and discrete, but many are longer term and more complex, such as assessments. You will also find that tasks often overlap and are revisited over a period of involvement with a service user (McPhail, 2011). It is important that we understand our powers and duties and the supporting frameworks for implementing law, e.g. statutory guidance, legal documents etc.

Coordinated effort is especially important in the social work and lawful callings on the grounds that real bury proficient issues frequently emerge at a few events when the acts of the two callings cover. In a collective relationship, all gatherings included have obligations regarding some piece of the result and proportionally talk with each other (Orji, 2016). Collaboration is a dynamic and intricate notion, with multiple attributes that suggest interconnectedness. Law plays a number of important roles in the practice of social work. Social workers need to understand these laws in order to help their clients. Legislation provides social workers with certain powers as well as duties which social workers are legally bound to fulfill. It therefore makes it a duty for the local authority to investigate and provide services as well as having the power to protect the children.

Truly, social workers have assumed an assortment of jobs and have given a scope of administrations to lawyers for destitute clients. As per Orji (2016), the two callings can possibly advance cooperation between specialists of law and social work in zones where their practices combine. In the time past, proposal was made to set up these joint degree programs accepted that shared learning would happen inside them. The two callings endeavor to help individuals, a large number of whom are defenseless, and the two of them perceive that each case is one of a kind. The legitimate and social work callings are both directed morally. Social workers need a sound understanding of law in order to implement and defend their use of powers and duties Social workers can play an important role in the delivery of justice especially to the weaker sections. Social work can network with law and help in the implementation of social justice for juveniles, prisoners’ rehabilitation, prostitutes, poor and needy who are in need of legal assistance (Chowdhury, 2017).

Factors that may hinder effective collaboration of lawyers and social workers

There are various complex clarifications behind inadequate facilitated exertion between social work and law in most of the underdeveloped countries which might incorporate, the hardships in realizing when and how to team up, moral worries about varying norms of classification, impression of the job of experts in the other field and perspectives on the idea of the callings (Galowitz, 1999). A portion of the conventional social work standards appear to be alien in African settings. The social work rule of individualization, for instance, is un-African as it advances independence but then life in Africa is common (Mabvurira, 2020). African morals are philanthropic morals, the sort of morals that puts a lot of accentuation on human government assistance. The worry for human government assistance might be said to establish the center point of the African axiological wheel. This direction of African morals takes its motivation, without a doubt, from the humanistic viewpoint that describes customary African life and thought (Gyekye, 2011). The coordinated effort among legal counselors and social workers keeps on being a region in which there is a strain between the legal framework and the social work profession (Lorie, Elisabeth, Howard and Denise, 2002). Notwithstanding, lawyers and social workers should expect difficulty and strain in teaming up to address a normal customer. The two professions have secrecy as their basic belief however the legal counselors have various norms for classification which can cause strife between the two professions, sets that in certain occurrences social workers accept that activities the law grants requires would abuse moral norms of social work or activities that would disregard law are important to consent must regard their clients' security and keep up the secrecy.

In any case, social workers in some cases experience conditions in which lawful principles conflict with profession's moral norms and their convictions about good obligation to moral guidelines in the calling. Studies have demonstrated that some social work practitioners grasp the feeling that each law ought to be followed, paying little attention to a social worker's closely-held conviction about their sensibility. Those in contradicting camps

accept that social workers should oppose daze compliance to the law due to their conviction or acknowledgment that a few laws are unreasonable and destructive to our clients and society. The social work professionals have not yet disguised the unambiguous job of social work in relating with lawyers and safeguarding the freedoms of the under privileged in the public arena (Mtetwa, 2013). In Africa, these moral disarrays exist as difficulties to proficient practice because of the presence of social and communalistic values of social consideration. These values put the law and the practice into professional collision (Casimir and Samuel, 2015). Social workers and lawyers interface with individuals from grouped establishments reliably, yet social aptitudes are a central point of convergence of social work guidance, these capacities are not tended to in genuine practice. Interdisciplinary practice in which social workers and lawyers learn relational aptitudes together and have an occasion to rehearse them through help learning openings are an approach to solve problem. (Stephanie, Stephanie, Quiring, Evan, Carrie, 2015). Despite the benefits of integrated practice, there are also challenges that must be addressed for a successful practice, including conflicts in professional ideology and ethics between lawyers and social workers, and differing responsibilities surrounding legal privilege and social workers' responsibilities to report risk or harm to authorities (Maylea, 2019). The professions should take an active role in overcoming these impediments and in laying the groundwork for individual lawyers and social workers to work together effectively

Similarities between law and social work

Law plays a number of important roles in the practice of social work. First, from an ecological perspective, the legal system is a vital part of a client's social environment. Many social work clients are involved in legal systems, such as child protection, criminal justice, or mental health. Social workers need to be aware of the laws that regulate each system in order to help clients navigate their way through these systems more effectively, and to be able to advocate for law reform to improve the goodness of fit between clients and their socio-legal environments. Laws also govern many relationships of interest to social work clients, including vendor/purchaser, spouse/spouse, and parent/child relationships etc. Thus, knowledge of the law should provide practitioners with a practical understanding of their clients' rights and responsibilities in a broad range of social relationships. Social workers and lawyers often share similar roles and titles, such as advocate and counselor (Coleman, 2001). On the surface, the positions may seem very different for a social worker versus a lawyer; however, for either to be successful, similar interpersonal skills are required. Lawyers, like social workers, are constantly working with people—many of whom are under serious stress, which requires focused and skillful management to their respective relationships and a capacity for empathy. Beyond similar professional expectations and roles, social workers and lawyers—especially those providing legal aid assistance—often work with the same types of clients (Taylor, 2006). Lawyers and social workers are guided by discrete commitments. Lawyers are guided above all else by a client's solicitations and objectives, while social workers serve the eventual benefits of the clients, which might be diverse in certain circumstances (Jada, 2015). This issue frequently emerged in psychological wellness court. Every professional must work under their obligation, despite the fact that the two objectives are in struggle Shared Orientation (Jada, 2015). One of the fundamental things that lawyers and social workers share is the direction of our work.

African Ubuntu theory

The idea of ubuntu is found in most African societies; however the word varies by language (Mugumbate and Chereni, 2019). It is an idea thought to trace all the way back to pre-colonial days and part of a long oral practice. Ubuntu alludes to an assortment of qualities and practices those individuals of color of Africa or of African beginning perspective as making individuals real people. While the subtleties of these qualities and practices change across various ethnic gatherings, they all highlight a certain something – a genuine individual person is important for a bigger and more critical social, collective, cultural, natural and profound world. Ubuntu social work alludes to social work that is hypothetically, academically and essentially grounded in ubuntu (Mugumbate and Chereni, 2020). Ubuntu should not be taken as illustrative of all moral idea on the landmass, nor should it be perceived as a constant, recorded practice. One of the more normal adages related with moral idea in some African settings is "I am because we are" or, alternately, "An individual is an individual through other persons". In Igbo talking spaces of southeast Nigeria, Ubuntu is communicated as *Igwebuikie* implying that meeting up of a group is their solidarity where they can accomplish much better than small time's solidarity. Also, in traditional Burundi, there were institutions, and practices that are used to maintain social cohesion among the different communities at the grassroots level (Muchiri, Murekasenge and Nzisabira, 2019). Cooperation is a dynamic and mind boggling thought, with numerous traits that propose interconnectedness. Collaboration is a dynamic and perplexing idea, with various characteristics that recommend interconnectedness. One will discover such an articulation in a wide scope of social orders, from South Africa. 'As Mandela said, our most profound good commitment is to turn out to be all the more completely human and to avoid self-centeredness (Mandela, 2011).

In sum, our normative conception of relationship inspired by African philosophy recognizes that our need to take care of others, as much as our need to be cared for, is central to living well. Therefore, it is imperative that lawyers and social workers collaborate in order to help clients in our convergence areas. The two purposes for living might conceivably propel collaboration between experts of law and social workers in areas where their practices join. Coordinated effort is especially important in the social work and lawful callings on the grounds that real bury proficient issues frequently emerge at a few events when the acts of the two callings cover. Coordinated effort is especially important in the social work and lawful callings on the grounds that real bury proficient issues frequently emerge at a few events when the acts of the two callings cover. Mupedziswa, Rankopo and Mwansa (2019) stipulate that community strength comes out of community support, and that dignity and identity are achieved through the values of mutualism, empathy, generosity, and community commitment. This suggests that adopting Ubuntu minimizes individualism in addressing challenges that hinder effective collaboration between social work and law in Nigeria. The theory therefore does not view collaboration as the sole responsibility of the two professions but a collective effort between the two professions, community members, clients and their families. The professionals and their clients belong to a community. That is the reason why collective efforts are encouraged in addressing the issues of effective collaboration, applying Ubuntu in collaborative ventures through values of humanness, human dignity, empathy and human solidarity as stated by the Code of Ethics of Social Workers in Zimbabwe (Mugumbate & Nyanguru, 2013). To practice effectively and ethically, social workers need a working environment that upholds ethical practice and is committed to standards and good quality services (IFSW 2012). In all contexts, social workers maintain a dual focus on both assisting with and improving human wellbeing and identifying and addressing any external issues that may impact on wellbeing or may create inequality, injustice and discrimination (Okafor et al., 2020; Ngwu et al., 2022). African social ethic is expressed in many maxims that emphasize the importance of the values of mutual helpfulness and reciprocal obligations (Gyekye, 2011). A morality of duty is one that requires each individual to demonstrate concern for the interests of others. The ethical values of compassion, solidarity, cooperation, interdependence, and social well-being, which are counted among the principles of the communitarian morality, primarily impose duties on the individual with respect to the community and its members (Gyekye, 2011).

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted phenomenological (descriptive) and exploratory (contextual) research design. Phenomenological method aims to describe, understand and interpret the meanings of experience of human life while the goal of exploratory research is to formulate problems, clarify concepts and form hypotheses. Exploratory research is usually conducted when the researcher has only few studies for reference. The study was carried out in Enugu State, South East Nigeria. Qualitative research design was adopted for this study because its aim is to seek in depth views on the subject under research and not necessarily to raise generalization on law and social work. The researchers followed ethical standards by utilizing participant information sheet which contains objectives of the research and the respondents were promised confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were also issued a consent form and only those who indicated willingness were surveyed. Ten social work educators from the department of social work, University of Nigeria, Nsukka and ten practicing lawyers from the faculty of law, Enugu Campus of the University were involved in this study. The practitioners/educators have been practicing or teaching these professions for about twenty years and all were aged between 45 and 55 years. They responded to an invitation sent through their heads of departments, and they were involved in a two-stage research process which is the right to opt out and/or decline at any point. The practitioners/educators in this study are not in any way representing the views of their departments where they are working but their personal judgments using their experiences and choices. The study was designed in part as an exploratory pilot to explore ways of enhancing their experiences and choices. A research assistant with specialist knowledge of law was employed for reviewing and interpreting -the data on the issues of law while the author who is a social worker handled the social work angle. The study was approved by a university research ethics committee and through the governance arrangements within the participating two departmental authorities. No reports were provided to the participating departments, thus participants' identity remained protected.

FINDINGS

Views on the need for collaboration between lawyers and social workers

When the views of respondents were sought on the collaboration between social work and law, participants were of the opinion that the inter-link between law and social work cannot be overemphasized and there is great need for each profession to understudy the other because their roles overlap and are equally complimentary. Emeka (not real name) one of the social work educators had this to say:

Any social work student who is inclined to social work practice must be familiar with the laws and their roles, values and functions of the legal profession which they will come in contact with, in the course of their practice. For those opting for the practice of law, they are also familiar with the social welfare policies and practices to acquaint themselves with social work modus operandi” A practicing lawyer with social work degree.

Another respondent (Okon) elaborated on this claim of need for collaborative relationships thus:

It is nice for lawyers and social workers to collaborate between each other. Moreover, the cooperation will seek to improve social justice in Africa through the delivery of these services and this can be possible through the interdisciplinary training between them. ...both professions are seeking to address the welfare of their clients and for this singular act; the two professions need to practice collaboratively. I will continue to advise the two professions to identify the challenging areas in order to find a lasting solution to ineffective collaboration between social work and law practice in Nigeria. For a successful practice in court matters, a social worker must have the legal knowledge, to know the laws connected with everyday matters such as begging, prostitution, offences against children. (Okon, a practicing lawyer-Nsukka magistrate court).

Views on the similarities between the roles of social workers and lawyers

The two professions connect with themselves in searching for the base of issues and arrangements, and serve her clients comprehensively. As indicated by Jane, et al (2003), they develop cultural competence and respect for differences and seek to understand the nature of social diversity and oppression with respect to race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, age, marital status, political belief, religion and mental or physical disability. Judith commented thus; on the issues of similarities between social workers and lawyers:

It is clear that we perform related functions in many fields of law and social work practice, such as child protection, criminal justice, mental health etc. Social Work and the Law often work hand in hand. Social workers need to know the law to Advocate for Policy. Lawyers have several important roles in Social Work and their legal system is a vital part of a client's social environment.. Social Workers are involved in legal systems and, interface with other organizations. The two professions have ethics that guide our practice. Most are coded into State, federal and international laws. The two disciplines are similar in many ways.(Judith, a lecturer, University of Nigeria, Nsukka).

Though, with the recent happenings in the courts where the two professions are involved in the issues of family cases and child protective services, both advocate for the interest of these clients. Therefore, for a successful practice of the two professions, there must be a need for the two professions to collaborate effectively in order to produce good results. Collaboration between social work and law practice in Nigeria is a very good development across all cultures especially the continent of Africa. The partnership of the two professions will help to promote the common good of the people and assist the weaker members of our society in the areas of child rape, child abuse, domestic violence content, unemployment, the infirm, the disabled, and the elderly. Collaboration between social workers and lawyers in many developed nations has been recognized and adopted as one of the best options of delivering services to our clients in court related work with families. This is an important issue in social work practice because the professional interaction will continue to enlarge in court related issues (Yusuf, a practicing lawyer in Nsukka magistrate court).

One good thing about this collaboration is that it can be a more satisfying and fulfilling professional and personal experience for all. The sharing of practice experiences to assist our clients can result in increased motivation. No doubt, this can also result in increased satisfaction in being able to learn from and rely on the other professionals. This partnership will certainly reduce the stress that lawyers used to experience (Bonaventure, a social work educator, University of Nigeria, Nsukka).

From the participant’s responses as well as their body language, it was clear that it was a more fulfilling model for each of the professions involved. A typical comment by one of the lawyers was that the collaboration “showcased an avalanche opportunity of interacting and learning from each other. This experience gave both social workers and lawyers the ability to work together for change. Collaboration between social workers and lawyers offers more creative and better service for the clients. It can result in the professionals being engaged in more creative problem-solving to promote justice. Collaboration empowers the professionals to serve our clients in new and better ways. A good relationship existing between social workers and lawyers is a way to serve our

clients better. As noted by Goodmark in Fordham Law Review (1996) "Collaborating with other professionals allows us to approach our clients' needs in a more holistic way, and to tease out some of the root causes of those problems by increasing our sensitivity to the full range of client's needs. The process of collaboration also prevents tunnel of visions of seeing the client's problems as one that falls within the expertise of the professional".

Factors mitigating effective collaboration between lawyers and social workers

Participants believe that the major reason for poor collaboration between the two professionals in Nigeria is basically the lack of awareness especially from the part of the justice system and lawyers and this is owing to the non-professional status of Social Work profession in Nigeria. The views of two participants were surveyed thus;

You must be aware of something and its importance before you will think of using it. To start with, most lawyers are ignorant of the social work profession. Some had not even heard the name before. The level of awareness of Social Work in Nigeria even though is fast growing compared to the past; it is still a far cry from what should be. ... Well, I believe that the lack of professional status of Social Work in Nigeria is a major factor for this lack of awareness. The government of Nigeria is yet to professionalize social work practice and as such legal professionals are not in a hurry to seek their collaborative services. The ministry of justice and the court system in Nigeria where necessary employ the services of a psychologist instead of a social worker. This boils down to the lack of awareness championed by non-professionalization of Social Work (Okon, a practicing lawyer in Nsukka Magistrate court).

We are trying our best through collaboration with some NGOs and some legislators to increase social work awareness in this part of the world. I believe that if most people especially the legal system gets to know what social workers could offer to the court system, they would seek better collaboration to handle cases (Esther, a social Work educator, University of Nigeria, Nsukka).

Another participant's narrative gave better clarity on education and training background as a mitigating factor and a source of tension for lawyers and social workers collaboration in Nigeria. He said:

Our vision may be intertwined but they are different and so is our training and education. While most lawyers are trained to be prosecutors, social workers are trained to understand for instance, the causes of deviance and ways to eradicate such causative agents. Therefore, lawyers may not see the strong need to collaborate with social workers because they work more with evidences of crime and prosecution as provided by law (Chukwuma, a social work educator, University of Nigeria, Nsukka).

Social Workers I have encountered are always interested to justify why a crime happened and often takes the plane away from the criminal and argue that the society is the real cause of crime. How do I put up with such a person in collaboration? We are really wired in different ways of thinking. If we continue to blame the society and other factors for people's misbehavior, then crime and deviance will never stop (A practicing lawyer, Nsukka Magistrate Court).

DISCUSSION

The demand of inter-professional collaboration between social work and lawyers is that social workers and lawyers be able to understand each other and negotiate successfully for the benefit of clients. Learning in such a complex area of practice should not be left to chance or limited to cognitive learning experience. This study investigated the barriers to effective collaboration between lawyers and social workers in Enugu State, Nigeria. Findings show that the majority of the participants pointed vast similarities between the two professions. Participants also agreed on the importance and need for lawyers and social workers to collaborate in their practice. They were equally in agreement that certain factors act as cogs in the wheel of such collaborative professional relationship in Africa. Emphasis was placed on lack of awareness, the non-professional nature of social work in Nigeria, among others such as differences in ethics, professional training and education. It is therefore of utmost importance that active roles are taken to overcome these impediments and laying a foundation for effective collaboration between the two professionals.

Specifically, the majority of the participants were of the view that law and social work has many things in common from training to practice and their twin objective is to promote social justice and human rights. Previous studies supported this finding of similarities between social work and law (Orji, 2016). In recent times the demand for social workers in court has spiraled (Adrian, 2011). Findings also show that the importance of lawyers and social workers collaboration is far-reaching and is greatly encouraged for a better welfare and social justice system. Corroborating this finding is the study of Han, Carnochan, and Austin (2005) when they pointed out the need for continuous collaboration between lawyers and social workers, especially in court related cases. Analysis

further revealed that the importance of lawyers and social workers collaboration notwithstanding, they hardly ever collaborate especially in Nigeria. This is because there are numerous barriers that impede such collaboration between the two professions, especially in the areas of professional ethics. The findings are consistent with previous observations (Bridges, et al, 2011) where barriers to effective collaboration between lawyers and social workers were outlined.

In the mitigating factors to such effective collaboration between lawyers and social workers, factors such as poor awareness of social workers was found to be prevalent. This has been argued to be a resulting effect of the non-professional status of social work in Nigeria. Many studies have also reported the non-professional status of social Work in Nigeria as a great impediment to the professional practice and awareness (Okoye, 2013; Ngwu, 2014; Onalu, Chukwu and Okoye, 2020). The overall role of education and training differences was also revealed when participants averred that the differences in lawyers educational training and background is among the many factors serving as an impediment to effective collaboration between the two professions.

Further, this finding corroborated the African ubuntu theory as a unifier in the inter-professional collaboration category and findings of this study on vast similarities between law and social work and the importance of collaboration between the two professions. When ubuntu is used in social work writing (e.g. Sekudu, 2019), it is typically used in a rather descriptive way to support the argument that people need to come together in mutually supportive and respectful ways. According to Adrian (2011), ubuntu requires a strong ethic of commitment to eliminating division and othering, and to championing unity across diversity (in terms of race, language, culture, religion, gender, sexuality, age and so on). ubuntu has, for the most part, been limited to the idea of mutual aid – people helping each other in a spirit of solidarity. This article endeavours to extend and deepen the ubuntu concept to strengthen its potential as a theory informing social work practice. Social workers and lawyers should therefore be encouraged to discover the underlying nature of a problem; and gaps, incongruities, and disturbances are important stimuli for professional practice.

This study has some limitations such as, but not limited to the use of a single locality for the study, hence for better quality inferences, future studies should be carried out in other areas. The sample for this study is equally small and cannot be generalized, therefore future studies on this area should combine both qualitative and quantitative data gathering and analysis so that a wider audience could be reached and surveyed. The limitations notwithstanding this study can potentially impact researchers, scholars, professionals and educators of law and social work and thus, influence greater level of collaboration.

IMPLICATIONS

This study has reiterated the importance of understanding the collaboration between lawyers and social workers in caring for their clients as this has implications for training and practice of social work in three levels. Firstly, social workers employ micro-level work in collaborating with lawyers to find housing, health care and social services for clients requiring such services. Individual and family counseling also fall under this category, as do certain kinds of mental health and substance abuse treatment. Secondly, the two professions can collaborate in mezzo-level practice to improve organizational functioning and service delivery and community well-being for vulnerable populations and thirdly, a macro social worker and a lawyer can work together in helping clients at a non-profit level to access adequate medical care, health education and to develop support programs and community outreach initiatives to assist various populations (Kauffmann and Barnett, 2021).

Social work is a very complex, dynamic, and interdisciplinary profession that supports human society and well-being at every level. Social work collaborates with other professionals and organizations to provide services, improve conditions, and create opportunities for growth, recovery, and personal development. A social worker must reflect a social philosophy that is well grounded in a value that makes him to manage risks and challenges associated with the effective collaboration between lawyers and social workers in their practice, especially in a multi-cultural and communistic environment (Casimir and Samuel, 2015). Collaborating with other professionals allows us to approach our clients' needs in a more holistic way, and to tease out some of the root causes of those problems by increasing our sensitivity to the full range of client's needs. The search implications for social work practice call for adequate knowledge and skills in addressing the needs of the clients and their families. Based on the spirit of Ubuntu, human service professions like social work and law are expected to assist their clients to harness their energies and knowledge in the promotion of the goals of social development (Mupedziswa et al, 2019).

CONCLUSION

This study investigated on what's law got to do with social work practice in Nigeria, a need for effective collaboration in Enugu State, Nigeria. Effective collaboration between social workers and lawyers have implications on how these professions develop and implement appropriate services, policies and programmes to alleviate their client's burden. Findings showed that the importance of lawyers and social workers collaboration

is far-reaching and is greatly encouraged for a better welfare and social justice system. Analysis further revealed that the importance of lawyers and social workers collaboration notwithstanding, they hardly ever collaborate especially in Nigeria. This is because there are numerous barriers that impede such collaboration between the two professions. Emphasis was placed on lack of awareness, the non-professional nature of social work in Nigeria, among others such as differences in ethics, professional training and education. It is therefore of utmost importance that active roles are taken to overcome these impediments and laying a foundation for effective collaboration between the two professionals.

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