WORKPLACE COUNSELLING SERVICES IN NIGERIA: PROSPECTS, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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Abstract
In most developed countries of the world, counselling services sometimes referred to as Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) have been introduced in organizations for the benefit of their employees. The main purpose of rendering counselling services in organizations is to help and support workers and equip them to face and overcome difficult times in their lives. Counselling is the assistance and help rendered by an expert or a professional counsellor to people undergoing various problems and challenges in order for them to resolve these problems and lead normal and productive lives in their homes and work environment. This article examined workplace counselling services in Nigeria and other parts of the world. The roles of counsellors in organizations, prospects, importance and benefits of workplace counselling were outlined. The paper further highlighted the challenges faced by workplace counselling as a result of certain factors that are likely to hinder the delivery of the services in Nigeria. Recommendations made included an urgent need for professional associations to create awareness on the need, importance and benefits of workplace counselling in organizations in Nigeria.

Keywords: *Workplace, Counselling, Employee Assistance Programme, Workplace counselling, Professional counsellors.*

Introduction
Organizations in most developed countries of the world have realized the importance of having stress-free yet motivated and capable workforce. This is because the main purpose of rendering counselling services in organizations is to help and support workers and equip them to face and overcome difficult times in their lives (Werner & DeSimone, 2009).Workplace counselling is that area of professionalism that focuses on both work related and personal problems which can include coping with crisis, conflict with others, development of personal insights and improving relationships(Greenwood, Deweese & Inscoe, 2006). Reddy (1987) explains it as a situation where professional counsellors are assigned to help employees whose performance at work is perceived to have deteriorated because of personal problems arising from stress and emotional problems. Coles (2003) on the other hand, noted that since the workplace is a significant domain of a person's world, the inner world of a person and family life may be reflected by work relationship and vice versa.To Cheng (2012),workplace counselling may be defined as the provision of brief psychological therapy for employees of an organization, which is paid for by the employer. It is an 'external' service, such as an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), typically comprising face-to-face counselling, a telephone helpline, legal advice and critical-incident debriefing. Workplace counselling offers the employer a service that is valued by employees. It has the potential for savings by reducing sickness absence, takes pressure off managers through the availability of a constructive means of dealing with 'difficult' staff or situations, and contributes to its reputation as a caring employer (McLeod & Henderson, 2003).

On the same subject, Payne (2012) introduced another dimension when she explained that a line manager in an organization could trigger a referral after observing that a team member is unable to cope with his assigned duties or that the employee's usually high performance and productivity standard is dropping. In such circumstance, the line manager may seek to refer the particular employee for counselling to support the employee and potentially improve his performance, his understanding of team dynamics and minimize the risk of a negative impact on the firm with regards to the firm's current project or performance generally. She

argues further that counselling can be delivered to employees in a number of ways which may be to employ a counsellor directly in a workplace setting or make counselling available to employees through an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). An EAP, she explained, addresses an employee's difficulties with a wide range of support and information and counselling is key aspect of the comprehensive service EAP offers (Payne, 2012). "Workplace counseling, as a functional role, could help organizational development from a more humanistic perspective rather than solely from a management view;that is, workplace counselling might have potential contribution to the business growth" (Cheng, 2012).

Cheng (2012) states further that workplace counselling is a sub-stream in the counselling professions and works for employees' mental health. Its development according to Pickard (1997), is roughly conceived into three stages; the initial stage which concerns counselling in organizations and applying counselling to organizational settings. The second stage which he referred to as counselling for organizations; that is, blending organizational needs with counselling services where Employee Assistance Program is commonly employed. The last stage is organizational counseling (Cheng, 2012). The development of workplace counselling according to Cheng (2012) indicates a shift of management philosophy towards employee care. Workplace counseling, therefore, represents a partnership relationship with organizational management which conforms to 'micro-climate facilitating enhanced management (Hill, 2000).

Role of Counsellors
Professional counsellors are specially equipped with many other skills apart from providing counselling interventions. Researchers have identified roles that workplace counsellors can play in organizations. They can help in the advancement of organizational health through strategic people management (Mitchell, 1992). Navare (2008), described the role of a counsellor in an organization as that of an expert who can come up with strategies to help employees manage stress, personal issues or work related problems. The researcher went on to describe the person of the counsellor as one who is mature, knowledgeable, experienced and capable of upholding the ethical principle of confidentiality, which are necessary for effective counselling. A counsellor can also help a client examine in detail, the behaviour or situations which are proving troublesome and to find an area where it would be possible to initiate some changes. This is of great importance in an organizational setting as it may help the client to look at the options open to him in order to enable him decide the best for himself (Hughes & Kinder, 2006). A counsellor can also help a client undergoing problems identify his/her areas of strength, which are critical for the resolution of the problems having clearly understood them from the perspective of the individual client. This makes the counsellor easily approachable and accessible to serve as an educator for the client's communities (Kuhn,Gordon,& Webber, 2006). A counsellor is to learn to accept and respect clients and as the relationship develops, so also does trust between the counsellor and the clients, enabling the clients to look at many aspects of their lives, their relationships and themselves which they may not have previously considered (Hughes & Kinder, 2007).

Prospects, Importance and Benefits of Workplace Counselling
Many corporate organizations in Nigeria are unaware of the prospects and importance of workplace counselling. They also do not seem to recognize the benefits their organizations and particularly the employees who suffer emotional problem can get from having workplace counsellors cater to their needs (Health and Safety Executive: HSE, 2004). Counselling at work helps people identify the causes of work-related problems, such as low productivity and poor performance (Greenwood et al., 2006). Mwosa (2010) argues that counselling is important in the workplace basically because of organizations' selfish intention. He posits that employers are interested in the productivity and performance of their staff because they are in business to produce, they have tight deadlines to meet and a few staff members with which to meet them. If employees are unhappy, anxious, or stressed they will not be able to perform well on their jobs. Their

productivity and performance will go down. In addition, their interpersonal relations both at home and on the job may suffer even when they ordinarily do not have interpersonal relations' issues. This creates stress and impacts negatively on their performance.

Cole (2002) argues that organizations try to avoid uneconomic use of their human resources, and the provision of counselling services may be one way of sustaining employee performance, achieving business targets and showing commitment to employees as individuals. Following a research review of the evidence into the effectiveness of workplace counselling commissioned by the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy, Greenwood et al. (2006); McLeod& Henderson (2003) found strong evidence of individual benefits from workplace counselling, concluding that people who make use of workplace counselling typically report high levels of psychological distress, equivalent to that found in out-patient psychiatric populations. The study also discovered that "Significant benefits" for clients can be achieved in three to eight sessions of counselling; only the most severely disturbed clients appear to require long-term counselling help or referral to a specialist service. Counselling interventions are generally effective in alleviating symptoms of anxiety, stress, and depression. Two-thirds of the studies have shown that, following counselling, levels of work-related symptoms and stress return to the normal range for more than fifty percent (50%) of clients (Greenwood et al. 2006).

A study by Leeds and Sheffield Universities (Borrill, Wall, Bolden, Carter, Hardy, Haynes, Rick, Shapiro & West, 1988) evaluated two National Health Service (NHS) trust staff counselling services, finding a significant reduction in the proportion of clients with significant levels of psychological disturbance (87 per cent at intake to 27 per cent after an average of five sessions). Another study by Cooper (1991) into counselling provision in the Post Office found marked reductions in symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as significant organizational benefits. Research findings of McLeod and Henderson (2003) revealed that "over 90 per cent of employees who make use of workplace counselling are highly satisfied with the service they have received, would use it again if necessary, and would recommend it to colleagues" (Greenwood et al., 2006).

A careful examination of the importance of workplace counselling can be gleaned from the point of view of an employee who may experience stress in the place of work as a result of his or her inability to cope with work demands or within the environment in which he or she works. This may lead to decreased productivity and reduction in physical or mental health. The costs to the organization, if taken into consideration, may be high in terms of reduced productivity, absenteeism, staff turnover, and potentially, legal cases arising from stress-related claims. The cost to the individual may also be high, for example, undermining quality of life, relationships, self-esteem and health (Young & Valach, 2012).Vignesh Hebbar, Associate Vice President India, Marlabs Software once remarked that; "Organizations have realized the importance of having a stress-free yet motivated and capable workforce and therefore, many companies have introduced counselling services in their organizations and are making it a part of their culture." Stress and anxiety have become a part of everyone's life and there is no such thing as a stress-free employee. Stress is not always work-related, however problems such as inability to find work-life balance and other personal issues can cause stress. The only solution is to deal with it positively, and it is in the organization's interest to take the initiative to encourage employees to opt for such counselling sessions (Werner & DeSimone, 2009).

Workplace Counselling in other Countries
In the United Kingdom, "Counselling in one form or another, has been taking place in various organizations since the early 1900s" (Carroll, 1996). The researcher however revealed that what seems to be missing or what is not clear, is the impact organizations have made on the provision of counselling services and how

counselling services can be "tailor-made" to fit different organizations". The author also revealed that workplace counselling in organizations in the United Kingdom is on the increase. More and more organizations, both within the private and public sectors, are paying counsellors to work with their employees. Counselling service provision in these organizations take the form of either in-house counselling, where counsellors are also employees of the organizations or external provision where Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) provide counselling (Carroll, 1996).

The findings of a researcher in Malaysia revealed that the Malaysian workforce is a ground ready and fertile for the growth of employee counselling programmes (Tong Hing Tham, 1998).Writing on the benefits of counselling and workplace counselling services in India, Navare (2008) outlined the benefits to include:

- Reduction in the cost related to turnover, burnouts, absenteeism and accident-related disability.
- Improvement in employee performance and increase in productivity.
- Counsellors playing the role of business partners to manage behavioural problems brought about by organizational changes.
- Addressing the unfortunate educational system that does not equip people with living skills.

Professional counsellors can teach people how to manage themselves and enhance personal growth. On the position of workplace counselling in India, the researcher stated that there is need to build capacity in the profession. This is because counselling service at the workplace shall bring back work life balance and serve as a developmental model rather than only a problem-solving model (Navare, 2008).

In Australia, Employee Assistance Programmes (EAPs) which include counselling and other services are currently offered around the country. This includes; facilitating better communication, reducing stress, contributing to a more satisfying workplace and enhancing workplace harmony with home and family life. All these are of immense benefits to employers and employees in Australia (Relationships Australia, 2013).

In Hong Kong, employees displayed little knowledge about workplace counselling. They are only concerned about confidentiality and the ability of workplace counsellors to be independent and neutral. Employees in Hong Kong have a preference for workplace counsellors who will have a good knowledge of the operations, management and culture of their organizations which will lead to a healthy and interactive relationship between employees and workplace counsellors (Cheng, 2012).

In Nigeria, workplace counselling remains relatively new and untapped in-spite of its prospects and its importance as a specialized medium for assisting workers in the developed world. While the researcher is of the view that it is possible to practice workplace counselling in Nigeria, possible problems and prospects should be considered (Oramah, 2013). Researching on and predicting the future of global workplace counselling, Buon (2004) talked about the significant development of workplace counselling over the past ten years. The researcher noted the emergence of Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) market. The EAP started in the United States of America (USA) and has continued to grow in Asia, Oceania and Europe. The researcher also noted that the programme was running successfully in South Africa, China, Japan, Finland and Russia (Buon, 2004). The Employee Assistance Programme, (EAP) according to Payne (2012) refers to assistance rendered to employees in an organization who are going through personal, emotional, family or work related problems, to assist them in solving or overcoming the problems and lead healthy lives both at home and in their various organizations. The above can be done through counselling. One of the common key aspects of the comprehensive service EAP offers is counselling (Payne, 2012).

Factors that hinder awareness of Workplace Counselling:

i.   Ignorance and lack of understanding

It is difficult to explain the lack of enthusiasm shown by some of Nigeria's corporate organizations towards workplace counselling and the failure to include it in their welfare packages to address the many work related mental health concerns of their employees. Although, there is yet to be any published research study to determine the lack of enthusiasm by the corporate bodies, one cannot but consider the problem of ignorance and lack of understanding of emotional problems by those at the helm of affairs at the many corporate institutions in the country. According to Harnois and Phyllis (2000), employers tend to take the view that work and/or the workplace are not etiological factors in mental health problems but that whatever the causal factors, the prevalence of mental health problems in employees make mental health a pressing issue in its own right and the workplace is an appropriate environment in which to educate individuals about, and raise their awareness of mental health problems. Employers and enterprises have lagged behind in their understanding and acceptance of the pervasiveness, treatment and impact of mental health problems as the organization operate from day to day in pursuit of its goals and objectives. Lacking in knowledge about workplace counselling and how beneficial it could be to their businesses might not be unconnected with the fact that most human resources management and public administration training programmes do not cover adequately the area of mental health and employment (WHO, 2000).

Employers tend to concern themselves with things that are visible (manifest disabilities, as opposed to those things that are not visible as in the case of emotional problems) which counsellors and psychologists are trained to deal with. Employers would rather make provisions for physical disabilities that are visible and direct their concerns toward manpower planning and the drive for growth and earnings without putting the wellbeing of their employees at the heart of everything they do (Barden, 2004). For example, Joseph Cadbury stated that, the real goal of an employer is to seek for employees the best life of which they are capable (Barden, 2004).Although there is absolutely nothing wrong with institutions focusing on profit making as their major objective, addressing the many emotional problems of their employees could turn out to be the elixir they need for enhanced productivity and improved earnings. While counselling and the services counsellors offer are well known in the country's educational sector, that claim cannot be made in the case of corporate organizations in Nigeria.

A personal experience

> *One of the very few institutions to offer workplace counsellingin the country was a foremost telecommunication giant which requested the services of professional counsellors to render counselling services for its staff. The request was made by the organization specifically for the employees who were in the customer care unit of the organization. The nature of their every day job is peculiar. It requires them to receive and respond to enquiries and complaints from customers who subscribe to the company's mobile telephone facilities. As the drive by the mobile phone company to increase patronage grew, so were the complaints from clients about the quality of the telecom services which put customers' care employees under serious pressure. The workplace counselling contract was not only part of the staff well-being package provided by the organization, it was intended to address and smoothen the many problems clients had using the firm's telephone lines.*

> *At the beginning of the project, attitude of members of staff was lukewarm for two reasons; firstly, there was a low level of awareness among the employees who had before then relied on family, religion and spirituality as against real professional help. Secondly, the staff saw it as a form of witch-hunting. They felt counsellors were brought in to listen to their*

complaints and problems, screen them for identification and pass on the complaints/problems to the management who may decide to use the complaints against them whenever the need for down-sizing presents itself. There was a four week awareness and sensitization programme before the commencement of the on-site counselling sessions. Personal encounters with some of the staff will remain memorable. Many of them agitated for a job or career change because they felt they were being used as mere telephone operators which some of them referred to as "glorified receptionists". As university graduates they felt they should not be engaged in such low skill jobs. Many threatened to quit their jobs which invariably could have had a negative impact on the fortunes of the telecommunication giant. However, favourable outcome of the counselling sessions became evident. Instances when employees or their supervising officers cameinto the counselling room; unhappy, tearful, dejected and stressed out, had a change in moodafter having a session of counselling. Troubled and angry employees left the room relieved and satisfied. Which translated to increased productivity of the employees as reported by some of these employees on subsequent visits. Clients who came into the counselling room out of curiosity ended up spending time discussing their personal and work related problems with counsellors on duty (Omoegun, Nwadinigwe and Ahimie, 2014).

One would have expected the project to continue but it was on for only twenty months after which the institution changed hands by way of acquisition. As a result, the contract for the workplace counselling was not renewed. The organization has since then changed hands more than three times, making it difficult to determine the impact of workplace counselling on the fortunes of the organization.

A research aimed at investigating the felt need for workplace employee counselling at a manufacturing company based in Lagos, was carried out in the year 2002. One hundred and ten (110) employees were randomly selected out of the five hundred and fifty three (553) staff strength of the corporate office of the company, as participants for the study. The exploratory research design was employed for the research and data was collected through structured interviews (Babalola, 2013).At the end of the research study, the following conclusions were drawn: The majority of employees of the company (61% of the sample) were unaware of the concept of workplace employee counselling. 25% of the sample had a partially correct idea of employee counselling. They knew that it was related to helping an employee in distress, advising, creating self-awareness and personality development. The last 14% of the sample had an incorrect understanding of the concept (Babalola, 2013).

The researcher explained what employee counselling was all about to participants. The post-test revealed that 69% of the sample agreed that there was a perceived need for employee counselling in the company. According to these participants (69% of the sample), most employees need assistance to solve their personal and work related problems, to improve employee relationships and overall culture of the workplace. The remaining 31% were of the opinion that employee counselling was not needed as an institutionalized process in the company. Of this 31% who felt there was no need for employee counselling, 57% stated that the company had a family culture and informal relationships among employees. This in their opinion could be leveraged upon.Out of the 110 participants selected for the research, 78% felt that counselling is an important Human Resource (HR) function, while 22% disagreed on the importance of employee counselling as a part of HR

function. 83% of the total number of participants was unaware of companies practicing employee counselling in Nigeria.

The results of the research revealed that the majority of the sample under study were of the opinion that employee counselling was needed in the workplace (company) and that it would benefit the organization. It was however discovered that the awareness about the concept of counselling and employee counselling in particular was very low. Recommendations were made on the need for organizations to employ the services of the following professionals:-

- ➢ *Employee Data Analyst*
- ➢ *Employee Counsellor*
- ➢ *Employee Conflict Resolution Manager*
- ➢ *Employee Stress Auditor. These professionals can either function as new departments in organizations or as external consultants. It was also recommended that organizations either train their human resource personnel staff or employ professional and qualified Employee counsellors.*

Another research aimed at exploring the level of awareness and the absence of workplace counselling in Nigeria's corporate institutions was carried out in 2014. A survey of 310 corporate organizations made up of 115 large, 112 medium and 83 small scale institutions, was carried out to investigate the level of awareness of workplace counselling and the benefits of the services to the organizations and the employees. Participants in the research study included front desk officers, human resource managers, medical and legal officers representing the various divisions of the respective organizations. The research findings were presented to show the level of awareness of workplace counselling in the identified institutions in Lagos metropolis. The study also highlighted certain factors that may have been responsible for the low level of awareness and lack of enthusiasm by top management of the corporations to include workplace counselling in their welfare packages. These were discussed and a number of strategies were recommended to enhance awareness of workplace counselling and its application in work settings that would not only boost corporate earnings but contribute to the health and wellbeing of employees and the society at large (Omoegun, Nwadinigwe &Ahimie, 2014).

Over the years in Nigeria,the provision of counseling services had been confined to academic institutions. Inspite of that early exposure, some academic institutions do not even make provision for full time counsellors within their institutions' staff strength. Rather, professional counsellors are often cajoled to teach rudimentary courses in their respective institutions of engagement (particularly, primary and secondary schools) instead of providing counselling services to pupils in accordance with the dictates of their profession. This is often done where those required to teach those courses have not yet been engaged. This departure from their career path has continued to be a source of great concern to professional counsellors in Nigeria. If primary and post primary institutions' administrators that are already exposed to counselling services have that kind of attitude towards counselling, what does one expect from corporate organizations, where management of such organizations are ignorant of the need for workplace counselling.

ii. Misconception about CounselIing

The misconception about counselling and what a counsellor does could be another reason for the ambiguity surrounding the profession. For example, Shepard (2004) opined that some employers are convinced that there is a lack of clear image of the unique role counsellors play in the lives of employees and their efforts to

grow institutions they work for. Those who work as professional counsellors are confident that they know what counselling is and when given an opportunity, are ready and eager to tell others what they do. However, when challenged to provide a crisp, comprehensive, and boundary-setting definition of counselling, counsellors may have a hard time trying to explain in a nutshell, the meaning of counselling or convince the uninformed of the importance of counselling. This may be because of the diversity of counselling approaches, its grounding in many theoretical perspectives, and the range of human problems for which counselling can be helpful.

This definitional challenge is made all the more difficult because of the myriad of uses and activities for which the term "counselling" is applied (Gladding, 2004). The misconception about counselling is global as attested to in the following expressions made by counsellors from other parts of the world:

- In Egypt for example, counsellors are perceived as people who invade their client's privacy and because of that, most of the men do not allow their wives seek the help of professional counsellors (Eltantawy, 2013).
- In Mexico, the populace believe that those who seek help from counsellors are crazy people(Salinas,2013),
- In Asia, the people are familiar with counsellors and their importance, but counsellors' role is still misunderstood because if someone has to visit a counsellor, it means that that person is not normal (Cheong, 2013;Shallcross, 2013).

iii.　　Culture, Beliefs and Religious Preferences

While misconception may be a reason, some experts attribute the low level of awareness of the potentials of workplace counselling to certain socio-cultural beliefs which is common place in Africa and other parts of the world. Pasachoff, Cohen and Pasachof (1970) remark that educated Africans still believe that the super-natural and demons are causes of emotional problems rather than psychological causes. Nigerians have always gone back home to their clan to seek remedy for whatever emotional problems they may have. Egbochukwu (2012) had maintained that the extended family, the clan, and the village, make society supportive; no individual regarded him/herself as alien as traditional counselling was readily sought and provided. Here, family structure and support is strong and everybody believes that they can counsel. Guez and Allen (2000) mentioned in their study that many children in Africa do not respond to talking in counselling sessions for a variety of reasons which is not unconnected with the fact that they (children) are expected to be submissive to authority. They may not have been encouraged to express their feelings, or they lack the experience of having an adult who listens to them. As a result, they often react with suspicion or resistance to a teacher who is a counsellor.

While it is difficult to draw a conclusion on the common factors that contribute to the inability of corporate organizations to embrace workplace counselling, one may be tempted to assume that one of them might be the importance of clients' beliefs and preferences. For example, Nickles (2011) posited that **m**ost potential clients believe religious issues are generally appropriate in counselling sessions and even display a preference for discussing spiritual and/or religious concerns. Africans strongly believe in religious and spiritual interventions hence, the finding of a research revealed that 81% of respondents wanted professional counsellors to integrate beliefs and values into therapy (Kelly, 1995).

Several factors contribute to clients' beliefs and preferences in including spirituality and religion in their counselling sessions. Clients with higher levels of past spiritual experiences believed that discussing religious concerns was more appropriate than those with lower levels of past spiritual and/or religious experiences (Rose, Westfield, & Ansley, 2001). Nigeria is acclaimed to have the largest population of church attendance (89%)in the world. Those who have psychosomatic issues may prefer to seek the church minister's

intervention (Bolu, 2012) than to discuss the issue in a workplace where the employee might be referred to a professional counsellor. In fact, people tend to see the professional counsellor as a last resort (Hinson & Swanson, 1993).While Wills (1992) sees the help of a professional counsellor as something to be considered only after attempts by people to handle things on their own or in concert with individuals close to them have failed (Vogel, & Wade,2009).

Several other writers have drawn attention to the importance of socio-cultural beliefs in psychotherapy. The belief in demonic causation, coupled with an intense denial of mental illness (arising from existing social taboos and stigmas), complicates the prospects for the uses of western psychological treatment in African contexts (Foulkes, 1979 & Wolman, 1976). This is aside the socio-cultural beliefs within Africa and its lineages which some scholars consider one of the factors complicating the prospects for the use of counselling treatment in African contexts (Uzoka, 1980).

iv. Government's insensitivity to mental health problems

According to the Australian Psychological Society (2011), emotional problems are common and for one (1) in every five (5) persons, the problems can be severe enough to justify seeking professional advice. There are health professionals who are also referred to as mental health professionals who can render help when people have emotional problems or mental health issues. These professionals are; general practitioners, psychiatrists, psychologists, psychotherapists or counsellors. Psychotherapists and counsellors can help with emotional and mental health problems. Although there is an overlap between counselling and psychotherapy, the focus of counselling is more likely to be on specific problems or life difficulties while psychotherapy is concerned with deeper and longer-term issues (Australian Psychological Society, APS, 2011).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO) (2014), mental health is more than just the absence of mental illness. It is a combination of a number of factors that can affect the wellbeing of an individual. It involves having a sense of self-worth (that is, recognizing one's own potential as an individual). Mental health means having the ability to cope well with the normal stresses of life, such as social dilemmas, decision-making and day-to-day emotions. It also involves being an active part of a community (that is having a job, contributing time and skills, or simply, having a positive impact on others). All these issues or challenges are what professional counsellors are trained to address. Professional counsellors are trained to assist and help individuals who are going through various challenges to achieve their potentials.

In Nigeria, there has not been any legislation over issues concerning mental health. What is available is a draft on Mental Health Bill at the National Assembly, which is yet to be passed into law. Mental Health was adopted into the country's primary health policy and since its adoption, the policy has not been fully implemented and has remained unrevised (WHO& Ministry of Health, 2006). However, it is expected that when the draft Mental Health Legislation Bill is passed, it will protect the rights of persons with mental disorders, ensure access to treatment and care, discourage stigma and discrimination and set standards for psychiatric practice in Nigeria (Jack-Ide, Uys & Middleton, 2012).

For many, "stress" represents something of an unknown quantity and the only way to know and understand it is to develop management standards to help employers measure their performance and the key areas of stress at work and identify areas for improvement. For example, the government of the United Kingdom under the Health and Safety at Work Act, 1974 and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulation, 1999, mandates employers to undertake risk assessment for health hazards at work and take action to control it. The six aspects of work which if managed poorly could create stress in the workplace according to Kantor (2009) are as follows:

- Demands - such as workload and work environment.
- Control - a person's individual influence over how their job is carried out.
- Support - from the organization; management and colleagues.
- Relationships - to reduce conflict and deal with unacceptable behaviour.
- Role - understanding of what the job entails; what is expected and needed.
- Change - how change is managed within the organization. (Health and Safety Executive, HSE, 2004).

Concerning mental health matters, the International Labour Organization (ILO) had long recognized the importance of documenting the extent of disabilities among the labour force and setting up effective preventive and rehabilitative programmes. The International body observed that employees' mental health problems and their impact on an enterprise's productivity and disability/medical costs are critical human resource issues (Harnois &Phyllis,2000).In Nigeria, Deloitte Corporate Services Limited in 2011 noted that it is not uncommon for workers to suffer work related injuries which have rendered some incapacitated without any compensation to ease their ordeal. In Nigeria, matters concerning mental health are neglected according to the World Health Organization (WHO& Ministry of Health, 2006).

The research conducted by WHO, indicated that the existing Mental Health Policy document in the country was first formulated in 1991 to address mental health issues and its components including advocacy, promotion, prevention, treatment and rehabilitation. Since its formulation, no revision has taken place and no formal assessment of how much it has been implemented has been conducted (WHO& Ministry of Health, 2006). The seemingly lack of interest and the lackadaisical attitude of the government to issues concerning mental disorders may be responsible for the way the issues had been handled and that clearly demonstrates the extent to which Nigeria's society understands and accepts mental disorders. The enacted Workmen's Compensation Act, 2004 which was meant to compensate employees for loss suffered following industrial and other work related mishaps was found to be ineffective. Its several shortcomings led to its repeal and replacement with the Employees Compensation Act, 2010 which has been found to be inadequate, out dated and faulty in several respects. Even though, Section 8 Sub-section (1) and (2) (a), (b), and (c) of the new Act, provides compensation for mental health (Employees, Compensation Act, 2010).It was also observed that the Social Insurance Trust Fund Management Board (NSITF) a separate body is statutorily empowered by the Act to administer and implement the provisions of the Employees' Compensation Act, 2011 thereby, precluding employers from administering their one percent (1%) mandatory monthly contribution for the benefit of their workers as it concerns their mental health and wellbeing(Deloitte Corporate Services Limited, 2011).

Conclusion

All over the world, people and organizations are becoming more interested and embracing workplace counselling. The world is getting more complex and people undergo daily stress, problems and challenges of living. Problems arise, not only in people's homes and personal lives but in organizations where they work. If these problems are not addressed, they affect the individuals not only emotionally, but at times physically leading to low productivity in the workplace. The prospects, importance and benefits of workplace counselling cannot be ignored in a country like Nigeria in-spite of the many challenges and factors that can hinder the awareness of workplace counselling in organizations in the country.   While organizations in other countries seem to be making progress in the provision of workplace counselling for their employees, it appears that the same cannot be said of organizations and the workforce in Nigeria.

Recommendations

There is an urgent need for professional counsellors to create awareness on the prospects, importance and benefits of workplace counselling in organizations. This can be done through frequent workshops and

seminars organized by the professional associations in the country.Sensitization programmes should be organized for various institutions and organizations to expose them to the benefits of workplace counselling on employee productivity and less money spent on medical bills.Other allied professions such as the healthcare institutions can assist by referring counselling related problems/issueswhich require counselling interventions to professional counsellors instead of treating such issues as medical problems. Factors that hinder the practice of professional counselling in general and workplace counselling in particular can be addressed if the government assists by granting the professional associations' legislative backing. Professional bodies should ensure proper monitoring and supervision of practitioners to avoid proliferation of counsellors in all sectors of the economy.

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