

Theoretical Perspective of Traditional Counselling

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ABSTRACT

This article was developed based on the qualitative literature research and descriptive design. The primary aim of study was to explore the theoretical framework of traditional counselling from an African perspective. Between these two broad families lie derivative forms of counselling. Traditional counselling involves a broad perspective that enhances learning for transformation and social integration of cultural values, customs and practices that are peculiar to each human society. Counselling as a casual but purposeful contact and interaction between people has an origin as ancient as the genesis of humankind. It can be viewed from a continuum perspective: on one end is a traditional form of counseling practiced from an Afro centric orientation, and on the other modern forms of counseling practiced from a Eurocentric orientation. The research question was: What is traditional counselling and its theoretical framework? The study revealed that the concept of traditional counselling is rooted in traditional systems of knowledge and sociocultural values, customs and practices; and the key elements that inform the theoretical framework of traditional counselling from an African perspective are the cultural context, collective belief system, and initiation rituals. Traditional systems of knowledge deemed essential for each generation are passed on successively from one generation to the next by elderly people who do not only have the necessary wisdom and experience, but also adored with social competences and skills. Therefore, the conceptualisation of traditional counselling is dynamic, complex and multifaceted.

Keywords: traditional counseling, theoretical framework, culture, values, belief system, traditional custom and practice

INTRODUCTION

This article was developed based on the qualitative literature research and descriptive design. The primary aim of study was to explore the theoretical framework of traditional counseling from an African perspective. What is traditional counseling and its theoretical framework? Counseling as a casual but purposeful contact and interaction between people has an origin as ancient as the genesis of humankind. It can be viewed from a continuum perspective: on one end is a traditional form of counseling practiced from an Afrocentric orientation, and on the other modern forms of counseling practiced from a Eurocentric orientation. Between these two broad families lies a derivative form of counseling such as psychosocial counseling, child counseling, couple counseling, career counseling and AIDS counseling. There are several classifications of modern counseling based on different theoretical orientations, resulting in specialization and focused approach by the practitioner-counselors. An elaboration of the various modern counseling models is outside the scope of this article. Much

has been written about the different modern counselling models, clearly defining both the theory and practice of the various orientations, as well as the taxonomy of generic problems and their diagnosis, treatment and management.

The focus of this article is on traditional counselling which is an under-researched field, with inadequate scholarly documentation on its theoretical framework and applicable approaches. Traditional counselling is a growing area of interest in African contemporary society, especially amongst members of the counselling profession.

Helping another person experiencing psychosocial or emotional distress and mentoring someone to achieve a life goal can be one of the most enabling human services. Traditional counselling is essentially a community affair and anyone can be in attendance depending on the scope of problem and nature of its representation. When a developmental problem affects a particular community, every member is obliged to take responsibility in its resolution.

CONCEPT OF TRADITIONAL COUNSELLING

The concept of traditional counselling is rooted in traditional systems of knowledge and sociocultural values, customs and practices. Traditional systems of knowledge deemed essential for each generation are passed on successively to the next generation by elderly people who do not only have the necessary wisdom and experience, but also adored with social competences and skills. The collective wisdom of Africans generally is that elderly people are regarded as a valuable resource in the community. They are the repositories of traditional knowledge, the embodiment of cultural competences, the experts in social skills, and the cherished models for emulation at the family and community levels. This view is supported by Ampim (2003) who states that 'an elder is someone who is given the highest status in African culture because she has lived a life of purpose, and there is nothing more respected than living a purposeful life...she is a living model for the other groups in the society to emulate' (p.2).

The sociocultural life of Africans generally is anchored on recognition of traditional norms and practices, ancestral worship, religious cults, and sexual-related taboos (Taylor, 2006). These values are cardinal in shaping people's beliefs and attitudes. The conception of sexual-related taboos and ancestral worship translates into the collective belief system inherent in traditional systems of knowledge, cultural customs and practices. Traditional knowledge is applied through avenues such as traditional ceremonies, initiation ceremonies, ritual ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, social ceremonies, and religious ceremonies. These avenues are important not only for sustainable social integration and the perpetuation of cultural identity for a common good of the society and individual wellbeing, but also for the practice of traditional forms of counselling from an African perspective.

Counselling as casual but purposeful contact and interaction between people has an origin as ancient as the genesis of humankind. The term counselling is used to describe a variety of different activities; and different people have different views on what counselling is and its context of application. Some people believe that it is a means of giving good advice, teaching on morality, mentoring for initiation, and guidance on marriage and social issues. Sometimes it relates to information-giving only. All these views are correct. From a conventional perspective, counselling is a process that involves a special type of helping relationship between a counselor and client that is purposively

interactive and ameliorative. Traditional counselling applies indigenous forms of helping people experiencing various problem situations and those that wish to take a transitional commitment such as initiation at puberty and marriage or are aggrieved through loss of a beloved one due to physical illness, injury or accident. Forms of traditional counselling refer to the various methods or approaches used by traditional counselors during the process of their interaction with clients in a culturally acceptable environment, using appropriate interventions that are tailored to meet the clients' needs, expectations and aspirations.

The commonly practised forms or approaches of traditional counselling are: marriage counselling, pastoral counselling, adherence counselling, initiation counselling, family counselling, community counselling, and bereavement counselling. Depending on the scope of problem situation and its representation, traditional counselling approaches promote active involvement of the family and community in problem identification, resolution and management. The emphasis is on collectivism against individualism, and relationships between the individual client, his family and the community. This collectivist paradigm ensures that the desired behavioral and attitudinal change not only benefit the affected individual or couple or family, but also the community as a whole. From an African perspective, this collectivist inclination builds stronger sociocultural bonds, promotes more cohesive avenues of problem resolution, and enhances desirable social behavior change for a common good of the society.

People in all societies, at all times, have experienced emotional or psychological distress and behavioral problems; and in each culture, there have been well-established indigenous ways of helping people to deal with such difficulties. Indigenous ways have existed for equal the age of human creation; and they aptly connote traditional ways of doing things based on traditional systems of knowledge and cultural practices. People in different cultures and societies globally have distinct ways of assisting those experiencing social, psychological, behavioral, emotional, familial, spiritual, and physical problems. Traditional counselling is closely linked to indigenous ways of doing things which was based extensively on oral history, that is, traditional knowledge and social skills pertaining to some critical issues, customs or practices were handed down from one successive generation to another orally. Oral history as a source and method has

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been central to the development of African historiography and no element has served as a clearer signature of and for the traditional oral source within the programs of recovering the African past (Giles-Vernick, 2006).

The words traditional and indigenous are used in the context of the original experience of the sacred, cultivated by the African people and the concrete expression of that experience within the different ecological and socio historical settings (Ejizu, 2013). Being traditional does not mean static or unchangeable, but rather in keeping with the original sense of the term it means that the living experience of cultural customs and practices are handed down from one successive generation to another in perpetuity. These reflect the period, circumstances and cultural factors surrounding a particular generation that acts as a reference point. Tradition and culture are indigenous entities, they are dynamic and in constant flux. Traditional counselling has always been part of the fabric of all human cultures and societies, present in the very midst of peoples and communities worldwide from time immemorial. It is beset by cultural nuances and takes place in the local environment, offered by the local people, reflects a mirror of the society in which it is offered, and has always been part of the human experience since the ancient times. Like in the past, it takes place within the kinship system, family and community; and its orientation is predominantly directive, prescriptive and authoritarian in nature. Generally, every member of a family or community would wish to know the outcome of the traditional counselor-client interaction. This is so because the traditional counselling process integrates family support and community involvement in its application. Based

on this understanding, it is manifest that in individual counselling contacts confidentiality is not assured between the person offering counselling help and the one being counseled. The traditional counselor and client are both members of the same community, and perhaps the same extended family circle. Contextually, the problems experienced by the client are not very alien to the traditional counselor. Yet boundaries exist. Traditional counselors are knowledgeable and experienced people whom clients freely contact when in need of counselling help. In addition to the helping role in resolving problem situations, traditional counselling integrates mentorship on sociocultural issues such as initiation at puberty and promotion of harmonious coexistence to foster sound community life. As a social service, many people utilize traditional counselling when faced with psychosocial concerns and other problems in their daily living based on cultural heritage and familiar interventions that yield tangible process outcomes. 5 The art of traditional counselling is intergenerational. In most instances, it is offered by elderly people and those socially appointed as leaders at the community level. These people apply traditional counselling approaches that are embedded in the African values and cultures. There are many providers or practitioners of traditional counselling at community level which include: traditional leaders (chiefs, village headmen and other eminent people), religious leaders (clergymen or women with leadership roles in the church), traditional healers (diviners, herbalists and spiritualists), elderly family members, grandparents, and traditional marriage counselors. These are collectively referred to as traditional counselors in the context of traditional counselling practice.

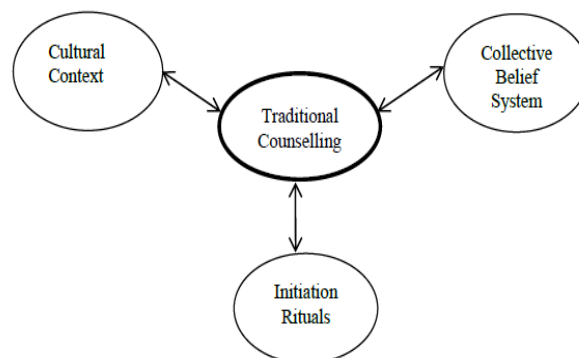


Figure1. *Theoretical framework of traditional*

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF TRADITIONAL COUNSELING

Traditional counselling involves a broad perspective that enhances learning for

transformation and social integration of cultural values, customs and practices that are peculiar to each human society. Traditional counselling is oftentimes regarded as part of formal interpersonal interaction and communication that is integral to

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community life. What is the theoretical framework of traditional counselling? What are the key elements in traditional counselling theory and practice? Based on the literature review (Ampim, 2003; Colson, 2006; Giddens and Sutton, 2009; Janssen, 2007; Jigau, 2007; McLeod, 2013; Nasry, 2013; Repetto, 2002; Taylor, 2006), there are three key elements that inform the theoretical framework of traditional counselling from an African perspective: cultural context, collective belief system, and initiation rituals (Figure 1). The multicultural theory can adequately inform the theoretical framework of traditional counselling when an African perspective is integrated. These key elements are elaborated here under.

CULTURAL CONTEXT

The term culture is novel and broad. It can mean different things to people at different times and circumstances. Culture refers to a general process of intellectual, spiritual and aesthetic development; a particular way of life, whether of people, period or group; or the works and practices of intellectual and artistic activity (Storey, 2009). It includes much more than belonging to a categorical group and encompasses a society's shared universal values and beliefs such as individualism, collectivism, equality, freedom, autonomy, historical background and evolution (Yali and Revenson, 2004), as well as the arts and other intellectual achievements, customs and civilization of a particular time or people (Giddens and Sutton, 2009). These broad and inclusive descriptions of culture suggest that there are variable factors which define a people's culture that are learned, assimilated and integrated over time. Culture is complex, dynamic, and bears both overt and covert differences that are unique to each human society. The concept of culture has serious implications for traditional counselling theory and practice. Understanding the sociocultural context of a client's behavior and belief system is an essential psychological ingredient to accurate assessment, amelioration and management of his problems.

The African cultural life has been unique from time immemorial. The most notable features are the chieftaincy, village headship, tribal clanship, extended family system, initiation rites, totems and rituals, ancestral worship, religious cults, witchcraft, social and traditional ceremonies (Taylor, 2006). In rural communities of most African countries, people live in relatively small villages in which they know each other very well, they share many things in common, and the social behavior of individuals is monitored and

controlled by elderly and eminent people in each community. There is direct observation of what people do and how they behave, and quite often, direct action is taken to deal with social deviance through scorn, censure or exclusion; or in extreme cases court action. In dealing with an individual client or group of clients, the traditional counselor involves the family or community during the traditional counseling

process. Advice and guidance is given to the family or members of the local community when young people are being initiated at puberty or prepared for marriage, when people are in bereavement, and when people attend traditional ceremonies, religious ceremonies, ritual ceremonies, and social ceremonies. Children are advised on many aspects of social norms and moral conduct, including induction on acceptable social behavior and collective responsibility in conformity with community life.

Most concerns or problem situations affecting an individual are dealt with at the family level initially. Depending on severity and complexity of the problem situation or social issue at hand, it may be referred to the village headman prior to succeeding referral to either the village committee or the zone committee. When there is failure or dissatisfaction of a problem resolution at the zone committee level, the matter is referred to a Chief who is the final authority and her counsel is binding, and it cannot be disputed or challenged. These indigenous approaches of traditional counselling can be referred to as family counselling and community counselling respectively.

Activities such as initiation ceremonies, ritual ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, social ceremonies, and religious ceremonies are practised to symbolize the cultural heritage and traditional value systems. They are an avenue for sharing information on traditional knowledge, customs and practices that are acknowledged as essential and worthy perpetuation for a common good of the society. Besides, they are intended to promote indigenous ways of knowing and doing things as part of the African cultural heritage expressed through ceremonies and other interpretive messages. The historical continuity of a culture endemic to a particular human society is fundamental to the interconnectedness of all things that define its traditional values, beliefs, customs and practices (Grayshield, 2010). Society exists and exerts credence where people behave and interact with one another based on mutual recognition, acceptance and respect; and culture

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plays a significant role in the sphere of social life as it is central to the development of any human society (Giddens and Sutton, 2009). Traditional systems of knowledge and sociocultural norms underlie the basis of traditional counselling theory and practice.

The institution of marriage is an important cultural heritage in most African countries. Marriage is a legally recognized union between a man and woman in which they are united sexually, cooperate economically, interact socially, and live together productively as a unified entity. Marriage is a very important institution in almost all human societies worldwide; it has survived human existence as an instrument for social interaction, procreation and protection from extinction; and it can be a critical factor in achieving happiness throughout the family life. The African traditional context of marriage is buttressed by the payment of a bride-price or dowry that forms a basis of the union and family obligations. From an African context, the institution of marriage represents the behaviors, norms, expectations and values that are associated with legally, socially and culturally recognized marriages between women and men.

A successful marriage is not only measured on the basis of fundamental aspects of stability, longevity and prosperity, but also on the number of children born. Children are the adornment of a home, an investment for the couple, and a lineage of the family. They constitute links in the ancestral chain for generations in perpetuity as a lifeline of the family and clan genealogically. For most people, getting married and bearing children are important transitional life events on their ladder to womanhood, manhood and adulthood. Marriage counselling is offered to a couple intending to marry or experiencing marital and other psychosocial problems; and it is commonly practiced at the community level in most African countries. Although most people wish to maintain nuclear family status, the exigencies of retroviral disease, poverty, and unlimited number of children per family have all contributed towards the extended family obligations. In many instances, orphaned children have to be supported and cared for by extended family members or grandparents. Orphan child-headed families are an emerging phenomenon and progressively moving toward institutionalization not only in Zambia, but in most African countries as well. This poses sociocultural challenges that would be difficult to contain in the succeeding generations. Religion is another important institution in the cultural life of not only the African people, but also other people in almost all the continents worldwide. Religious gathering

is at the centre of human creation and it is strongly connected with personal identity formation and group belongingness. Religious history reveals that human beings have defined their existence in consort with or relation to some supernatural, omniscient and omnipotent beings in the celestial realms. In expressing this interdependence, most people resort to religious gatherings as a form of maintaining communication and communion with the heavens above. It is also a cultural expression. Religious leaders are representative shepherds of God responsible for the caring of people on earth. In discharging this shepherding function, they play a dual role namely, the ecumenical or spiritual function which involves caring for the people from a biblical context and the pastoral counselling function which involves caring for the people from a human relations context. The epicenter of these functions is mostly the church and community. Religious gathering constitute a formidable social network that is perceived desirable and relevant to the peoples' social life and wellbeing for it ultimately unifies them into a religious brotherhood and sisterhood, and a religious family or community.

Traditional herbal remedies constitute yet another symbol of cultural heritage in the African cultures and societies. Traditional medicine plays an important role in the provision of primary health care. Traditional healers provide affordable and accessible primary health care that is culturally appropriate and traditionally convenient. For instance, most Africans in both rural and urban communities use traditional healers for their primary health care needs, especially the relatively poor people who cannot afford the cost of modern medicine and transport costs to the sparsely located health facilities. From an African perspective, the traditional healer is a psychiatrist, medical doctor, fortuneteller, diviner, social worker and traditional counsellor, all rolled into one. Traditional healers are a valued category of people in the community as they possess the cultural knowledge and social skills to make an impact on health promotion.

The implication of these observations is that traditional healers combine their practice of healing with adherence counselling through the provision of primary health care at the community level. What seems to be a central factor for their traditional healing practice is the aspect of determining the occurrence of physical illness and ritualistic approach to resolving some of the problems presented to them, especially in the context of extrasensory phenomenal concerns and richness enhancement. Inadvertently, most people

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rely on traditional healers because their herbal treatment is easily accessible, readily available, and practically affordable. It is given in the context of a patient's culture, beliefs and values, as well as within the confines of his expectations and aspirations. Traditional medicine is shrouded in ritualistic observance and practice. Traditional healers offer adherence counselling that focus on advice and guidance related to taking the herbs or actions of containing the rituals. They have an obligation to counsel, inform, guide and advise their clients on the many aspects that surround the herbal treatment, observance of rituals related to the herbal remedies, and sexual prohibitions related to traditional taboos and customs.

COLLECTIVE BELIEF SYSTEM

The culture of people in any human society is partly determined by their value and belief systems which influence the pattern of their social behaviors and actions. Values and beliefs are an important component of the people's lives as they are used to interpret, judge and evaluate external situations or events (Milkman and Wanberg, 2007). Beliefs in luck, fate or chance are generally associated with failure to engage in constructive behaviors and depression in the face of chronic illness. The social behavior of people varies from one culture to another. Expressive social behavior drives the actions of people through their lifespan; and behavior is one of the primary currencies used by natural selection. The evolutionary history of natural selection is anchored on lifespan developmental issues such as transition changes and adaptation. When behavior changes are disconcerting especially during pubescence and senescence for instance, they affect attitudes toward the changes unfavorably. The reverse is true when the changes are deemed beneficial or gainful to the individual. This is the locus of the collective belief system: individuals believe in both the seemingly good and bad things that affect their behavior, communication patterns, or interpersonal interactions and relationships with other people.

Values represent the base upon which a person builds a satisfactory personal existence (age, geographical area, generation); they are crystallized through social models and personal experiences (cultural, professional, societal); and they represent the fundamental or universal paradigm such as autonomy, equality, liberty, solidarity, justice and fairness (Jigau, 2007). Values are an enduring belief that a specific end-state or mode of conduct is preferable. There are

two categories of values: terminal values refer to desirable end-states or goals such as wisdom, comfort, peace and freedom; whereas instrumental values refer to the means by which the end-states are to be achieved, for instance through ambition, honesty and competence (McLeod, 2013). The values of people are a representation and reflection of their prior experiences during the lifespan developmental journey. They are derived from socialization and culture, environmental influences, and education among many other factors. All these aspects contribute to the determination of how a person ought to act or react when confronted with problem situations. In the context of this understanding, it is plausible to infer that people's attitudes and feelings about their culture, what is good or bad, what is acceptable or not, what is preferred or not, and why people act the way they do all lay a sound foundation for the collective belief system.

The value and belief system may be influenced by four factors: syncretism, totemism, universalism and culturalism (Nasry, 2013). Syncretism relates to a reconciliation or fusion of differing systems of belief especially with partial success or heterogeneous result; totemism represents an emblem of a clan or family that is revered as its founder, ancestor or guardian; universalism refers to the common conception of the origin of the universe and people; and culturalism refers to traditional customs, norms and values enshrined in a particular human society that defines its beliefs and practices. From an African perspective, the origin of the universe and of ancestors as a people is a mystery whose reality was revealed at genesis through spirit mediums. The revelation may have occurred near a river, lake, rock, cave, mountain, tree or any such other notable emblem. These yield the notion of totems and rituals, ancestral religion and customs, and special shrines that serve as places of intimate personal memory and repository of traditional knowledge, although ritual practices are much more diverse and fluid. The mythical interpretation of the universe is an active part of everyday life and a vital social force. It not only supplies accounts of the people's origin, but also relates past precedents to current traditional beliefs, actions and behaviors that are conveyed to successive generations in perpetuity.

The totemic character is inherent and a symbolic figure to all the individuals of a given clan. Totemic ritualism is influenced by a collective belief system that has evolved through a blending

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of various beliefs, values and customs as a result of enlightenment, evangelization, socialization and globalization. For the vast majority of African traditional protagonists, it is the collective belief in and reverence of the ancestors, fear of spirits, totems and symbols, ritual sacrifice, initiation rituals, divination, and charms as well as their interrelationships and interconnectedness to the enhancement of life and genealogical continuity that are fundamental issues of the traditional consciousness (Ejizu, 2013). This observation permeates through modernity and it is an expressed social behavior of many traditionalists in contemporary African countries.

There are several thematic beliefs that underlie the value systems of most African cultures and societies. The most notable ones are: an acceptance that human action can influence natural forces; a reliance upon the mediation of spirits of the dead who are revered possessing new powers over the living and influence human lives and actions; the importance given to shrines and cult ceremonies; reliance on charms or herbal medicines to enhance power, wealth and provide safeguards; recognized categories of spiritual entities and nature of religious cults; and the belief that much misfortune is caused by human greed and malevolence (Colson, 2006). The history of witchcraft, spirit possession, and experiences of extrasensory perception is old and deep-rooted and is part of the African culture (Udelhoven, 2008). Witchcraft is closely linked to magic and sorcery; and sorcery is a form of destructive magic.

The social interpretation of witchcraft is that evil and misfortune is embodied in the person of a witch and it involves covert actions by people to cause misfortune. The interplay is between one person and the other, usually arising from envy, jealousy and resentment; motivated by the desire for inheritance, revenge, malice, and appropriation of magical power; or for economic gain, enrichment and prosperity. Magic is the umbrella term categorized according to whether its application is for offensive, defensive, divination or communication purposes given that witchcraft is derived from the same empowering herbal medicines which can be used for personal protection such as from bewitchment, for public common good such as traditional herbal treatment, and for evil such as placating bad luck, inducing physical illness or causing mysterious death. In Africa generally, religion and witchcraft constitute a recognizable component of most people's everyday life and worldview. Many

forms of authority, power and wealth easily attain an interpretive association with witchcraft. For individual problems, many people either find an acceptable answer in witchcraft or supernatural influence, or both. In many traditional belief systems in Africa, mental health problems, bad luck, and sudden or mysterious death are attributed to either the influence of ancestral spirits or bewitchment (Sorsdahl, Fisher, Wilson and Stein, 2010). These issues are typical and embedded in the culture and collective belief system: they are a part of cultural life of the people in both rural and urban communities alike. They represent a paradigm of causation of human problems, some of which are amenable to traditional counselling and healing. They are an integral dimension to the discourses surrounding the role and practice of traditional healers for several centuries from the distant past until presently.

Closely linked to the issue of witchcraft is the aspect of places of power and land shrines which are permanent features of the landscape regarded inherently sacred or as the source of spiritual power. Spiritual forces associated with places of power are defined differently from the spirits appealed to at land shrines that are reputed to have a link to the community stemming from their past experience as a people. Spirits associated with places of power are known as natural spirits and those associated with the dead ancestors are known as ancestral spirits. The interpretation and experience of these extrasensory phenomena is common among many cultural groupings at the community level. They constitute a prevalent belief that finds solace in traditional healers who divine not only their occurrence, but also the causation of physical illness among members of the family. Land shrines are associated with invisible entities or spirits and are thus objects of veneration by the people in a particular community. Therefore, it is apparent that both natural spirits and ancestral spirits are important factors in the aetiology of human disease causation and the practice of traditional herbal medicine from an African perspective.

INITIATION RITUALS

A rite is a principle act, or set of rituals that are performed according to prescribed social rules and customs. The performance of rituals revolves around a deeper understanding or involves an appreciable level of indigenous knowledge, social skills and competences. The process of initiation is based on a prescribed set of rituals to

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start a new phase in life; and it involves transformation, progression, and maturation (Simonsen, 2000). Initiation rituals have been a central part of traditional cultures of the African society from ancient times. They are an important component of the cultural life of most human societies not only in Africa, but also in other continents worldwide. Important milestones such as birth, puberty, marriage, adulthood, and death are typically marked by special celebratory and ritualistic ceremonies at the individual, family and community levels; and state funerals are a common feature at the national level, including memorial service in remembrance of a deceased relative at the family level. Ritual ceremonies are an embodiment of the African cultural life and a symbol of traditional values, beliefs, customs and practices. Ritualism is a common feature in contemporary society and many people practice rituals as part of cultural norm, religious service, or sheer traditional requirement. A ritual is a prescribed order for performing a religious service or performance of actions in rite; or a procedure regularly followed. The prescribed order of performance is not only limited to religious service, but also encompasses other sociocultural actions and rites, including those performed by traditional leaders and traditional healers. Ritualism is the regular or excessive practice of rituals, although this view bears a rather negative connotation. Equally, it is limiting to conceptualize rituals in the context of genealogical continuity only. The performance of rituals ought to be viewed as an important cultural norm and traditional practice. The basic assumption about ritualism is that it can be interpreted in many different ways and bears variable functions. For instance, ritualistic actions may include church attendance, initiation, marriage, birth, death, and spiritual healing, including the act of sex. There are many other aspects of life in which rituals are performed or whose attendance and practice is based on some procedure that is ritualistic. Based on this understanding, it is apparent that rituals are part of the cultural life of people and ritual performance is a normal traditional custom and practice not only in the African society, but also in most other human societies worldwide.

Nearly every human society has rituals to mark the passing of a stage in the life of an individual; and all rituals are events with a social meaning and symbolic actions. Rituals have important cultural, social, psychological and symbolic dimensions to people who take part in ritual practice. From an African context, the initiation

rituals only preface the beginning or conclude the days, weeks, or even months and years of sustained instruction, coaching, mentoring and counselling. The primary function of rituals of socialization and transformation is consistent with the structural functionalist paradigm (Simonsen, 2000). According to this paradigm, the community represented by the authority of elders becomes responsible for discharging the primary functions of rituals for the benefit of the society at large. The girls and boys at puberty are transformed from the autonomous maturing persons into a pool of social entities whose role is to contribute to the reproduction and sustainability of the whole community and to perpetuate genealogical continuity (Janssen, 2007). Through this process, the structure of society is confirmed, sustained and perpetuated from one successive generation to another. The process of pubertal rituals involves initiation counselling and mentoring.

The African interpretation of childhood refers to a period spanning from conception to about fifteen years of a child's life, and it integrates early teenage and pubescence. The initiation rituals are more pronounced at the birth of a child, whereupon the infant is initiated into the world through a ritual naming ceremony. The birth of an infant is regarded as a special gift from the celestial realm; and it is cherished with religious intensity. The ritual of naming a child may take place at the household level, family level, or church level; and through consultation with a traditional healer. The latter is a prerequisite in situations where the traditional healer previously prescribed herbal remedies for infertility or any sexual dysfunction to a couple prior to conception. At the church level, a child may be subjected to a ritual and naming ceremony whereupon he is given a Christian name in place of or in addition to the African name that was given at birth initially.

The child can also be taken to a traditional healer or religious leader when he falls sick where he is subjected to further rituals as part of the healing interventions. In more rural communities of Africa generally, the rituals may include tying strings and wearing a talisman especially prepared with herbal concoctions around the child's neck, waist, arm or leg. This is intended to protect the child from bewitchment, evil spirits, bad luck or physical illness. Traditional healers are instrumental in these arrangements; and they act as a cherished fountain of traditional knowledge and cultural practices at the community level. In contrast, every child has a

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mission to accomplish by virtue of a life goal that permeates through all the main stages of his development from childhood through adolescence to adulthood.

The adolescent stage is viewed more of a transition phase with its own ambiguities that begins when childhood ends at puberty. The initiation rituals of adolescence are essentially twofold: at puberty and at marriage. The initiation rituals at puberty are more pronounced for girls than boys, primarily because of the physiological implications and sex role responsibilities that segment girls from boys. For the girls, initiation is puberty-occasioned, ceremonial, celebratory, and announcing of a girl having become the nature's vehicle of life; whereas for the boys, initiation is an intervention enacted if not against then in juxtaposition to originating associations with the natural sphere (Janssen, 2007). Most young girls as they advance towards pubescence, the pubertal initiation ceremony is something they eagerly look forward to, prepare for, and freely participate in. It is perceived a symbol of their maturation to womanhood, motherhood and adulthood.

Pubertal initiation rituals are very important and significant to the African cultures and societies. The isolation whether for a few hours, days, weeks, or months of the initiands (girls and boys being initiated) at puberty is unique; and it is practiced in both rural and urban communities alike. The current practice focuses on seclusion for shorter periods as opposed to the olden practice that favoured longer periods. This development is necessitated by the demands of schooling, innovations to traditional practices, and commercialization among many factors at play. During the period of seclusion, the initiands are taught the ways of adulthood and their role in the family, including the rules, taboos, and sanctions of the society; moral instruction and social responsibility; gender and sex role challenges; and their life goals and expectations. This is the penultimate of initiation ceremonies at puberty, the onset of adolescence.

The African interpretation of adolescence is that these are young people whose age band spans from sixteen to twenty-four years. Young people in adolescence are regarded as adults, capable of marrying or being married and bearing children. In the African context, marriage initiation rituals are performed at premarital stage and during the wedding ceremony. At the premarital stage, the focus is on the dos and don'ts of marriage life,

family responsibility, and parenting – more of an induction process to enhance social competences and skills in readiness for marriage. During the wedding ceremony the ritual performances integrate traditional, cultural and religious aspects whose focus is on emphasizing the oneness of a couple as a unitary entity and vehicle for bearing children. Just like at puberty, the marriage initiation rituals are performed by elderly people deemed to be socially knowledgeable, competent and skillful. These are known as traditional marriage counselors.

The symbolic logic regarding the primary function of rituals is that it applies to both girls and boys; and the socialization process starts during childhood and reaches its climax in the initiation rituals at puberty and marriage. The informal education and initiation counselling related to performance of rituals at the pubertal stage place emphasis on learning for transformation and at the marital stage on social integration. This process not only empowers the young people with relevant attitudes and knowledge, but also enhances their social competences and skills to handle similar issues when they grow into adulthood as valuable members of the community. It also enhances their ability to perpetuate traditional systems of knowledge and sociocultural values, customs and practices over successive generations for a common good of the society.

MULTICULTURAL THEORY

Multiculturalism can be viewed as an umbrella term which incorporates within it a variety of shades of meanings, attitudes, beliefs, norms and values; and it is subject to different interpretations and applications (Laungani, 2005). It is anchored on some fundamental assumptions which are core to its theory, practice and research. The central theme of multiculturalism is the assumption that the other mainstream modern counselling theories (psychodynamic counseling, cognitive-behavioral counseling and person-centred counselling) inadequately describe, explain, predict and deal with cultural diversity and dynamism of the clientele (Sue, Ivey and Pedersen, 1996). Most counselling theories have tended to focus on the individual, giving minimal attention to contextual issues and sociocultural values, customs and practices. Multiculturalism is a concept that broadly acknowledges the importance of demographic variables (gender, age, and place of residence), ethnographical status (nationality, ethnicity and language), social status (occupation, education and economic), and sociocultural affiliations (religion,

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political and institutional) of the people in any human society.

The proponents of multicultural theory have advanced varying assumptions to complement the identified gaps, two of which are illustrated herein as advanced by Laungani and Repetto. According to Laungani (2005), the fundamental assumptions of multiculturalism are that: all human beings are products of their own culture; each culture has a uniquely acquired way of construing its own worldview that give meaning to life and living; within each culture there exist a plurality of beliefs, values, norms and traditional practices; each culture has something to offer and learn from another culture and assumes comparative meaning only in relation to other cultures; and a mixture of cultures is more likely to lead to an enrichment of an individual's intellectual, emotional, spiritual, humanitarian, moral, and altruistic visions. According to Repetto (2002), the fundamental assumptions of multiculturalism are that: it recognizes the existence of many points of view none of which are considered good or bad, correct or incorrect; and it involves social constructivism in that people construct their worldviews through social processes (historical, cultural and experiential) which contain cultural symbols and metaphors. It is contextualistic in orientation because personal conduct can only be understood within the context it takes place; it offers different approaches to the world because each perspective captures a differently valid approach; and it defends a rational sense for languages rather than just a representational one, because language has a high correlation with culture and the perception of reality.

A general understanding to be drawn from the foregoing instanced assumptions is that multiculturalism integrates a conception of the uniqueness of each culture and its own constructed worldview based on a plurality of traditional values, customs and practices. The universal experience suggests that all human beings are products of their own culture, hence the unique cultural identities in each human society worldwide. Each culture has something of value to offer or learn from another culture in contemporary society. The effects of globalization, acculturation and social integration all bear testimony to this observation. People have the ability to adapt and incorporate changes within their cultural identities. Multiculturalism recognizes the interplay of the cultural influence between the counselor and client and how those influences determine or affect the counselling

process outcome. Multiculturalism is a broad theory that is conceptualized based on multiple levels of human experiences and sociocultural affiliations. It involves the social interpretation of reality and the meaning of culture and life from a constructivist perspective; and it recognizes the importance of cultural identity and its centrality in defining associations and relationships within the individual, and between the individual, his family and environment. This theoretical paradigm proposes that in working with the individual client in any setting, it is necessary to understand how that person is embedded in his family and how the family is affected by being embedded in a pluralistic culture.

The theoretical framework of traditional counselling is supported by the multicultural theory which promotes a systematic integration of numerous theoretical concepts based on the complexity of human experience and sociocultural, situational and environmental factors (Sue, Ivey and Pedersen, 1996). The theory is premised on the understanding that awareness of the sociocultural differences among clients and the way people view the world are paramount in counselling psychology (Minami, 2009). The traditional counselling theory is collectivist in orientation. It emphasizes stronger social bonds, promotes group cohesiveness and belongingness, and enhances desirable social behavior for a common good of the society, which blends well with the meta theoretical approach of multiculturalism. A meta theory is prescriptive and defines what is meaningful and meaningless, what is acceptable and unacceptable, what is good and bad, and what is central and peripheral to inquiry (Overton and Ennis, 2006). Meta theories clarify the context in which theoretical concepts are constructed, grounded, constrained and sustained. All people are products of their distinct sociocultural and historical experience as exemplified in both developed and developing countries. This is so because most people are essentially multiethnic, multiracial, multicultural, multilingual, or multi religious by inclination. Ethnic affiliations are perceived as an important aspect in individual and group identity formulations whereby disadvantaged or underprivileged groups are deemed disempowered politically, rendered poor economically and disenfranchised socially.

CONCLUSION

This article has shown that the conceptualization of traditional counselling is dynamic, complex and multifaceted. When viewed from the perspective that indigenous knowledge has

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cultural implications and that all counselling is influenced by the cultural context, it is safe to conclude that traditional counselling is rooted in traditional systems of knowledge and sociocultural values, customs and practices. It is essentially community-based, multicultural in nature, and offered within a culturally acceptable environment, using appropriate strategies and interventions that are tailored to meet the people's needs and aspirations. The broad and inclusive understanding of culture is that there are various factors that define a people's culture. The culture of people in any society is partly determined by their value and belief systems which, in turn, influence the pattern of their social behaviors and actions. The collective belief system is part of a people's culture; and beliefs are ideas that constitute an essential element in predicting behavioral patterns of people. Ritualism is a common feature in contemporary society and many people practice rituals as part of their sociocultural norm or religious service. Initiation rituals are an embodiment of the cultural life and a symbol of traditional heritage in Africa. The theoretical framework of traditional counselling represents a different worldview that may influence counselling styles, strategies and interventions applied by counseling psychologists and counselors of divergent training and educational backgrounds. Therefore, all these contextual factors are cardinal elements in understanding the theory and practice of traditional counselling from an African perspective.

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