

THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE ON GROUP COUNSELLING AND DYNAMICS: THE SUREST WAY OF HELPING ADOLESCENTS IN S.H.S

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ABSTRACT: *Establishing effective group counselling programs in Senior High Schools (SHS) require comprehensive knowledge of theories in group counselling to be able to better understand the behaviour of adolescents and help them to deal with their problems. The dynamics of groups are essential to achieving success at conducting group counselling sessions in educational settings such as the Senior High School. Engaging teenagers who are facing challenges in their lives for group sessions also require sufficient relevant knowledge necessary for understanding, interpreting and predicting behaviours by professional Senior High School counsellors as they work together to achieve common goals with these students. The thrust of this paper was to qualitatively study the subject of the essential theoretical knowledge in group counselling and group dynamics in helping adolescents deal with a plethora of problems that they face in Senior High Schools of the Ghanaian educational system. For this reason, four counsellors from two (2) Senior High Schools in Efutu Municipality were purposively sampled and interviewed to find out whether indeed having theoretical knowledge in group counselling and group dynamics is the surest way for counsellors to help adolescents deal with a plethora of problems they face using a semi-structured interview guide. The findings revealed that indeed counsellors' success at organising group sessions for adolescents in SHS was based on their theoretical knowledge of group counselling and group dynamics.*

KEYWORDS: senior high school, adolescents, group counselling,

INTRODUCTION

Dealing with adolescents is one of the most complex tasks one can engage in, in today's Ghanaian contemporary society. This, over the years, has been attributed to urbanisation and westernisation- a changing social environment. There is no denying the fact that the latter statement is true; however, the effect of internal conflicts and processes is most often than not underestimated. Authoritarian behaviours which were previously used to shape the behaviour of adolescents are no longer effective. The psychological conflicts within adolescents and the social environment of this social milieu, in general, have become more dangerous than it was over 50 years ago. The rich Ghanaian culture which prepared early adolescents for intelligence, maturity and growth has become corrupt. Decades ago, there were no drugs easily available for troubled adolescents and even if there were, adolescents would not have abused it because of the nurturing they had; it was almost unheard of that an adolescent exhibited violence and disobedience that extended to authority figures such as teachers, parents and the elderly; adolescents lived with extended families so they were monitored and

properly nurtured. Garbarino (1995) explains that the mere act of living in society today is dangerous to the health and well-being of children and adolescents. This is especially so in the Senior High Schools (SHS) where adolescents who are from different family/social backgrounds come together and develop sub-cultures that are marring their lives. The world and Ghana for that matter couldn't have asked for a better intervention than Guidance and Counselling in Senior High Schools. Adolescents in SHS encounter a wide plethora of problems in their respective homes and in the school. Because of the bias ratio of one counsellor to a large number of adolescents, counsellors cannot deal with all of them at a time hence the need to establish group counselling within institutions. This is done by grouping the adolescents according to the commonality of their problems. Dealing with complex adolescent emotions and problems require the use of relevant theories to acquire a more vivid understanding of their personality and behavioural traits so that counsellors will be able to assist them with their educational, vocational, and inter and intrapersonal (personal-social) problems. Counselling theories contribute tremendously to the understanding of human behaviour (Osipow, Walsh and Tosi, 1994; Taylor and Buku, 2006). Taylor and Buku (2006) further explain that theories provide counsellors with a framework that assists in organising and understanding clients' behaviour in a meaningful way and that they also assist counsellors in devising a strategy or plan of treatment. Kankam and Onivehu (2000) assert that theories serve as guidelines to indicate possible causes of clients' difficulties, alternative courses of actions and the desired counsellor behaviour in the counselling process.

These inferences simply imply that theories are indispensable tools in the counselling process of groups of adolescents. Undeniably, having adequate theoretical knowledge in group counselling as well as group dynamics is the surest way for a counsellor to assist adolescents to deal with a plethora of problems they encounter at the SHS level of the Ghanaian educational system. It is for this reason that the researcher has decided to examine relevant literature and empirical data about how theories of group counselling and dynamics are used to help adolescents in SHS in the central region hence the question, *'How do counsellors in Senior High Schools apply their theoretical knowledge on Group Counselling and group dynamics to group Sessions organised for the adolescent students in their attempt to help them (adolescents) deal with a plethora of problems they encounter'*. Two Senior High School counsellors were interviewed one-on-one for the purpose of this study and for the essence of ensuring anonymity, they will only be known as 'Counsellor A' and 'Counsellor B'. All the interviews were recorded and the data were transcribed from audio to text data. For a reduction of redundancies, a clear sequence of events and better understanding, the text data were coded and grouped into themes and sub-themes. A semi-structured interview guide was used to gather data from the two counsellors who were purposively sampled for the exclusive knowledge and experience they have acquired because of the positions they occupy in their respective institutions as counsellors. The researcher selected the Efutu Municipality as a focal point of this study because using the entire country as a focal point will make the scope of study very broad; however, findings from this study can be applied to other Ghanaian communities since the problems that adolescents face are nationwide besides adolescents in Senior High Schools are from the various communities in Ghana and not just the Efutu Municipality.

LITERATURE/THEORETICAL BASIS OF GROUP COUNSELLING AND GROUP DYNAMICS

Viewing the Group as a System and its Associated Dynamics

Systems Theory is one way of viewing how the group works to achieve a common goal. A system is a set of elements standing in interaction with one another (Agazarian, 1997). He further explains that such elements in the system are affected by whatever happens to any other element hence the system is only as strong as its weakest part. Donigian and Malnati (1997) explain that a group is made up of three vital parts namely: a) the leader, b) the members, and c) the group as a whole. For a system to be effective and productive, each of its parts must function in an interactive and harmonious way as a unit. This implies that the group is a system the members form the parts of the system; they must work harmoniously for the survival of the group otherwise, that is to say, if there is always conflict among the members, the group work well as a whole irrespective of how skilful and knowledgeable the leader might be. In system's perspective, the group members decide between their needs for differentiating themselves (doing things on their own) and integrating with others (doing things with people other than themselves) (Matthews, 1992). This means that group leaders must direct their efforts at helping members in the group and the group as a whole to strike a balance between each member's need and the entire group's need as the group develops. From a systems perspective, very small or insignificant events may make a difference in the group. For instance, when a group member does not contribute to a discussion or show up for a group meeting, the group's regular form of doing things may be altered; this is because the group as a system with many parts is constantly in a state of change.

In relating Systems theory to group dynamics, one may say that if every member and his/her activity affect the efficiency and effectiveness of the group, then it is very important for the group leaders and facilitators to take advantage of such knowledge. They can do so by setting up structures and events that will provide a conducive environment for the smooth running of events in the group. Some of these structures and events may include the preplanning (informally planning what type of group to conduct, what setting it should be held, how long it will last, who should be included and how it will be evaluated), group structure (the arrangement of group members during sessions- the circle format/ the chain/the Y/the wheel or the theatre-style format), group exercises (may include games and exercises to get members acquainted with each other), group interaction (consist of verbal and non-verbal behaviours and the attitudes that go with them in members' relation to one another), and members' roles. It must be noted here that the type of group influences all other planned activities for the group; for instance, the physical structure or seating arrangement for a guidance group may be the theatre-style where members of the group sit in rows because the emphasis in guidance group is mostly in obtaining cognitive information. However, for psycho educational group, a group of female adolescents who are dealing with the problem of 'boyfriend dilemma' may be arranged in such a way that they will be able to interact with each other verbally and physically hence the need for a circle format where members can express themselves democratically. Gladding (2003) however argues that because of the emphasis in psycho educational groups on obtaining cognitive information, a theatre-style structure may be useful. For organisational groups such as

task groups, the chain format will be more suitable because of the hierarchical nature of the command. Walton (1991) explains that this trend is prevalent in organisations and associations that operate according to a quality management style.

Viewing the Group as a Learning Process and its Associated Dynamics

Learning theories over the years have been very influential to group effectiveness and efficiency. In his social learning theory, Albert Bandura explained that behaviour of group members can be explained by one of the three methods of learning namely; i) the classical conditioning, ii) the operant conditioning and iii) the social learning (Kankam and Onivehu, 2000). With the classical conditioning theory, Ivan Pavlov, the profounder explains that desired behaviour is elicited when a response is made to a stimulus (Ntim, 2010). This implies that behaviour is associated with the stimulus. In the case of an adolescent group for instance, if Aba Sam, a member of the group is fond of giving negative comments whenever someone shares an opinion, the group leader may respond by making a negative verbal comment. After making several negative comments for some time each time Aba Sam behaves in that manner, even when the leader is not commenting, she will begin to behave in a desired manner.

The second, the operant conditioning theory propounded by Frederic Buhrrus Skinner has it that the desired behaviour is exhibited in anticipation of a stimulus (Ntim, 2010). This implies that the members of a group exhibit certain behaviours because they expect to gain something out of behaving in that manner. The behaviour of the group members in this paradigm is governed by the consequences of their actions (Toseland and Rivas, 1984; Kankam and Onivehu, 2000). Here, if the behaviour of one member is positively enforced by another/others in the group, there is the likelihood of frequently repeating that behaviour that was remarked or acknowledged in the future. Likewise, if a member exhibits a behaviour that is negatively enforced by another/others in the group, there is the likelihood of not repeating that behaviour that was rebuked or disapproved of in the future.

Social learning theorists are of the view that behaviours are acquired through observational learning. Social learning theory accounts for both the uniqueness and consistency of human personality (Bower, Bootzin and Zajonc, 1987). Bandura proposed that majority of learning takes place through observation and vicarious reinforcement or punishment (Kankam and Onivehu,2000). Gazzaniga (1973) refers to vicarious learning as modelling, a situation in which another individual observes and imitate the actions of another that yields a positive consequence. Bandura's basic idea was that learning could occur through direct observation or example rather than by direct reinforcement though he does not deny the importance of direct reinforcement as a way of influencing behaviour (Shultz and Shultz, 2005). For instance, if Ama Pomaa exhibits a behaviour and is praised for that behaviour, there is the likelihood that other members of the group will imitate that behaviour that Ama exhibited. Learning theories are widely used by practitioners group counselling because it provides a wide range of techniques one may use to yield behavioural modifications and changes. Such techniques may include modelling, shaping, behavioural rehearsal, coaching, cognitive restructuring and assertive training.

The knowledge of group dynamics here that is experiential and cognitive can help counsellors facilitate effective groups. According to Gladding (2003), such learning can take place in multiple ways. For instance, within a group, members reinforce one another verbally and non-verbally for changing specified behaviours. A contingency contract is another way of modifying behaviour by spelling out the behaviours to be performed, changed discontinued. Modelling is another dynamic that facilitates learning through observation; counsellors often model the desired behaviours for their members. Behavioural rehearsal is the process of practising desired behaviour until it is performed as one wishes it. Counsellors may use coaching to provide group members with general principles for performing desired behaviours.

Field Theory and its Associated Dynamics

Kurt Lewin, a major proponent of this theory explains that a group has a life space, it occupies a position relative to other objects in this life space, it is oriented towards goals, it locomotes in pursuit of these goals, and it may encounter barriers in the process of locomotion (Shepard; Kankam and Onivehu, 2000). Field theorist believe that groups are influenced by internal and external events and that they are shaped and directed by goals; all activities are directed towards the achievement of these goals. They are also of the belief that in their quest for achieving goals, groups may encounter certain problems that can hinder their development.

Lewin introduces a number of dynamics that could be used by counsellors and these are as follows;

- i. Roles, which refer to the status, rights and duties of the group members.
- ii. Norms, which are rules governing the behaviour of group members
- iii. Power, which is the ability of members to control
- iv. Cohesion, which is the amount of attraction the members of the group feel for one another and for the group
- v. Consensus, which is defined as the degree of disagreement regarding goals and other group phenomena and
- vi. Valence, which is the potency of goals and objects in the life space of the group.

When counsellors consider the distribution of roles and duties among group members, it can lead to a sense of responsibility and commitment among the members of a group. Norms shape the behaviour of individuals in a society so when there are norms within groups, individuals within the group behave in accordance with the norms. It is also good to give room for members of a group to feel that they are in control; this can be done by creating a non-authoritarian environment for members to be able to freely express themselves and better open up and share their experiences. Counsellors must create an atmosphere of trust and acceptance among members of a group by explaining the uniqueness of individuals to them and engaging them in exercises that will help them understand and accept each other as explained above by Akumme (2003).

Lewin's last point, valence literary means "a measurement which shows the number of hydrogen atoms that can combine with one atom of a particular chemical element to form a compound; also used to describe how easily an element can connect in a chemical way with other" (Walter, 2008). This, from a group counselling perspective implies that when members are able to connect with each other by developing healthy interactive relationships, there is a high likelihood of achieving both individual and group goals. Lewin, in his quest to generate more interest in his theoretical model of group dynamics, developed the T-group as a way to observe the effects of group processes on group members and as a means to help individual members change their own behaviour (Kankam and Onivehu). T- group was established in the USA in 1947 by the National Training Laboratory to members to help train administrators and managers in communication and human relation skills. Members of this group basically learn through shared experiences. T-group experience attempts to provide participants with extensive feedback about their own behaviour. The success of T-group led to the establishment of encounter groups in the 1960s which was used to help individuals who were facing personal and social alienation. Encounter group encourages its members to encounter their problems by sharing experiences and interacting with others in the group. This group can be used to help adolescents who have low self-esteem or those who feel inferior to others in high schools because of a delay in physical and biological developments. For instance, adolescents who delay experiencing nocturnal emissions are often excluded from group interactions among adolescents who have had such experiences; this isolation may cause such individuals to feel inferior and alienated leading to shyness, low esteem and antisocial behaviours. Such adolescents may be assisted to evolve from their problems through encounter groups.

Viewing the Group as a Social Exchange and its Associated Dynamics

The **social exchange theory** emphasises the behaviour of individual group members. Thibant, Kelley, Blau and Homans, the originators of this theory, deriving their inspiration from the psychology of animal behaviour, economic studies and game theory are of the view that when people interact in groups, each group member will make an attempt to behave in a way that will minimise punishment (Kankam and Onivehu, 2000). Social Exchange theory is based on the philosophy that in all human relationship, something is not ordinarily gained without giving something. This implies that human relationship is one that is a give and take. This theory is also based on the assumption that members within a group influence each other through interaction. Social Exchange is therefore based on the degree of social influence and the degree of social dependence in a group.

Having relevant knowledge about the essence of offering support to each other among group members and knowledge about how interdependence can go a long way to make the group effective will be an exclusive addition to the dynamics of group counselling that will facilitate trust, honesty and openness in groups. Social Exchange Theory has however been criticised for being too mechanistic because it assumes that people are always rational beings who act according to their analysis of rewards and punishment.

Psychoanalytic Perspective and its Associated Dynamics

This theory assumes that in-depth change takes years to produce and so it is often directed towards individuals with deep-seated debilitating issues. Gladding (2003) explains that this theory has changed from its original individual orientation to include groups. He further explains that Freud, although never interested in conducting groups, applied his psychoanalytic theory to groups in 1922 in his book 'Group and the analysis of the Ego'. Freud in the book examined the nature of groups and how they influence individuals' lives. He likens a group to a 'Primal Horde' and that the leaders of both function as 'substitute parental figures (Slavson, 1964; Gladding, 2003). Freud also stresses the importance of ego development within a group context the reconstruction of the family unit among group members. Physicians such as E. W. Lazwell (1921), Trigant Burrow (1927), Paul Schilder and Louis Wender in the 1930's found psychoanalysis useful in their respective practice of group psychotherapy. Paul Schilder and Louis Wender in the 1930's, for instance, worked with psychotic, and hospitalized adults. Alexander Wolf, a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst is generally credited with being the first to apply psychoanalytic principles and techniques to systematically to groups (Corey, 2000; Gladding, 2003). Wolf created a model for psychoanalysis and in his model; the major tools he used were transference, dream interpretation, historical development analysis, interpretation of resistance and free association. George Bach (1954) and Bion (1959) developed models totally different from Wolf's, referred to as group psychoanalysis and these models viewed the group as the client and that group dynamics are an essential feature to analyse (Gladding, 2003). Bach and Bion explained that groups may manifest healthy or unhealthy on those within them. Psychoanalytic group stresses the importance of freeing the unconscious thoughts, making them more conscious and using specific techniques to do so (free association, interpretation, slips of tongue and transference) is universally emphasised. Individuals who undergo Psychoanalytic group therapy usually function better because such groups deal with resolving 'intrapsychic conflicts' (Psychological conflicts within individual group members). The psychoanalytic group is mainly based on the premise that human instincts reside in the interaction between the id, ego and super ego. Kankam and Onivehu (2000) explain that a lot of Freud's concepts such as ego strength, insight, defence mechanisms and many others have had an important influence on group work practice. This theory explains that group members act out unresolved conflicts from early life experiences in the group. The group members identify with the group leader as the 'ego ideal' and in the process, they form transference reactions to the group leader and to each other on the basis of their early life experiences (Wyss, 1973; Kankam and Onivehu, 2000).

The researcher, however, does not think the methods and techniques of this theory may be useful in the case of adolescents who are going through a normal phase of development. This is because this theory can only be used to help individuals in groups who are going through emotional states of disequilibrium and sometimes behavioural impairment. The dynamics, however, may be useful in the group process.

METHODOLOGY

Design

The research employed the qualitative case study design, a naturalistic inquiry procedure, to help define the experiences of the Akan people using the traditional theories in guidance and counselling vis-à-vis strategies meeting global modern practices. Qualitative research helps in a descriptive and exploratory analysis of people, actions, beliefs, perceptions and events

Sampling

Four coordinating counsellors from two Senior High Schools in Efutu Municipal Assembly were sampled for this study as key informants. These coordinating counsellors were chosen from two Senior High Schools in the Efutu Municipal Assembly.

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants for this study. Purposive sampling technique was used because the participants had rich information due to their accumulated experience in coordinating guidance and counselling affairs in their respective schools of practice. Standard data collection procedures were followed such as confidentiality, consent seeking where-need-be and explaining the focus of the study and many other relevant issues for many other relevant ethical considerations.

Instrument

The researcher relied on a semi-structured interview guide to elicit information from the purposively sampled participants. Semi-structured interview schedule offered participants the opportunity to construct their own world through relating their guidance and counselling experiences. It also allowed the participants to express themselves at length and that offered enough shape to prevent aimless rambling. Since the interviewer was working in the interpretive-qualitative framework, he was present with all his convictions and understandings interacting with participants in their socio-cultural context. For this reason, the interviewer personally conducted the one-on-one interviews; and that provided him with the opportunity to clarify issues that the participants raised about some questions in the instrument. The collected data was tape recorded after seeking audio taping consent from the participants and noted and observed field notes were also taken in case the recorder malfunctioned. The notes were written against the corresponding data as it was collected to minimise a laboured data analysis.

Data Analysis

All data collected through the interview schedules were analysed qualitatively through the inductive thematic data analysis approach. The generated data was revised several times and the recorded audio-tapes were replayed to organise and establish the meaningfulness of the collected data to the study. This equally helped to identify the consistencies and differences in the collected data. Data was then transcribed, analysed and interpreted. The researcher presented emerging patterns and themes from the collected data and supporting verbatim collections under each section. Coding assisted in placing the collected data accordingly and this made data organisation a much easier task. Coding was successfully done by identifying text segments and circling them and

assigning a code that precisely described the meaning of the text segment after which related codes were aggregated under each of the dominant themes identified as already pointed out.

These were:

- i. Problems of adolescents in Senior High Schools
- ii. Students' participation in group counselling sessions
- iii. How learning takes place in group sessions
- iv. Effects of group counselling on SHS students and
- v. The physical structure of group counselling

In attributing quotations to the interviewees, the participants were anonymously identified as Counsellor A, Counsellor B, Counsellor C, and Counsellor D for their protection and ethical reasons. The organized data was continually revised to analyse and establish linkages and relationships with the rest of the collected data and a position was set taking all this into consideration. The findings were then interpreted and discussed pointing out the extent to which the data addressed the research questions. Where possible, this was also supported with related literature.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the research data that have been gathered for the purpose of the study. The analysis of the data is based on the perceptions and information given by the respondents.

Problems of Adolescents in Senior High Schools

Asked about some of the problems adolescents encounter in Senior High Schools, the counsellors revealed that adolescents in their schools often encounter drug abuse, sexual activities, examination anxieties, overemphasis on particular subjects and lack of concentration. They explained that groups are formed based on the issues above and that students who found themselves encountering any of the problems could join a particular group so that eventually students with common problems will find themselves in a particular group. Counsellor 'A' said:

“They concentrate on their elective subjects neglecting the core thinking the electives are the subjects they need in order to enter the universities but Universities go with the EMS system that is English, Mathematics and Integrated Science before they consider two of the elective courses”

“Again because of the advancement in technology, students don't concentrate on their studies because they are always communicating on the phone. Those who use mobile electronic devices often fail in exams based on my personal observation. They are also always mingling with people of the opposite sex although they don't really engage in sexual activities. There is no way they can because after 6:00 pm security is very tight so they can't sneak

out to meet each other besides the headmistress does not tolerate such acts at all” (Source: Counsellor ‘A’)

The response of counsellor ‘B’ to the question of the problems that adolescents in her Senior High School were facing was not much different from that of counsellor ‘A’. She said:

“Their problems are basically low self-esteem, how to manage their time, examination fright, on rare occasions drug abuse and mostly sexual issues. They are often confused about certain emotions they feel and they tend to sometimes engage in activities that don’t necessarily involve sex itself but they regret it immediately afterwards”. (Source: Counsellor ‘B’)

Counsellor ‘D’ explained that group counselling sessions are organised for students in SHS to deal with problems like examination anxieties, self-esteem, sexual reproductive health, STD’s and learning habits as indicated in the following comment.

“The problems that students in SHS face range from learning habits to sexual issues. I usually organise guidance programs for students around themes such as dealing with examination anxieties, self-esteem, sexual reproductive health, learning habits and Sexually transmitted diseases”. (Source: Counsellor ‘D’)

Nielson (1987) and Owens (2002) agree with the revelations made by the subjects about adolescents’ sexual issues when they explain that adolescents are filled with questions ranging from whether their sexual urges are normal to how to receive pleasure from sex or how to achieve orgasm. They further explained that many adolescents engage in a variety of mutually sexually stimulating acts lumped together as petting activities which may include kissing and perhaps genital stimulation but does not involve sexual intercourse. Nielson (1987) further explains that because they are rebuked for engaging in such activities, adolescents often feel embarrassed and guilty after engaging in them. This may lead to emotional stress and anxiety if their situation is not properly addressed.

The researcher inquired about the duration of group counselling sessions and the number of days they met in a week. Counsellor ‘C’ explained that their group counselling sessions took place once a week from 6:30 to 7:50 pm. He said:

“Every Thursday, students and I and sometimes a resource person meet between 6:30 and 7:50 pm”. (Source: Counsellor ‘C’)

Counsellor ‘B’ also said:

“They only meet for about 2 hours twice or thrice in the term. The group sessions we hold here are mostly preventive and we address issues as and when necessary”. (Source: Counsellor ‘B’)

Counsellor ‘D’ revealed that their group sessions always lasted for an hour:

“We meet on Fridays only and our sessions are always 1 hour. Within that hour we have intensive interaction with each other without a break”. (Counsellor ‘D’)

The researcher observed after attending a couple of sessions with the two different institutions that the kind of group that they were referring to was mostly ‘guidance group’ and ‘Psycho educational group’. This is because they often brought in resource persons, people who are knowledgeable about the information that they want to transmit to discuss a theme with the group members and sometimes they discussed the issue among themselves (group members), brainstorming ideas. They do not have group counselling sessions in the Senior High Schools that I used as a case for this study however since their practices are based on their theoretical knowledge of group counselling, the researcher is of the view that indeed, having adequate theoretical knowledge in group counselling as well as group dynamics is the surest way for a counsellor to assist adolescents to deal with the plethora of problems that they encounter at the SHS of the Ghanaian Educational System.

Students’ Participation in Group Sessions

Asked about students’ participation in group sessions, Counsellor ‘D’ revealed that students were very much involved in the group sessions because they had interests in the issues that evolved during such meetings. He said:

“Students contribute very well because they are allowed to bring out issues they are encountering and would want to get more information and clarification on”. (Source: Counsellor ‘D’)

Counsellor ‘B’ explained that members of the group were active participants during group sessions. She explained:

“The interaction among group members is very good. They have a healthy relationship among themselves and because of that they are supportive of each other not only during group sessions but also outside the group”. (Source: Counsellor ‘B’)

Counsellor ‘A’ also said:

“Honestly, in my school, usually when we begin the session, students are reluctant to open up unless they see others contributing”. (Source: Counsellor ‘A’)

The above assertions are very good for group survival. It is in line the assumptions of the system’s theory. Agazarian (1997) explains that a system is a set of elements standing in interaction with one another. He further explains that such elements in the system are affected by whatever happens to any other element hence the system is only as strong as its weakest part. The system here is referring to the group in its totality and that for the group to thrive and develop for all members to work together in a healthy relationship. The assertions above are also in line with the field theory. Lewin’s

comparison of a group to “a measurement which shows the number of hydrogen atoms that can combine with one atom of a particular chemical element to form a compound; also used to describe how easily an element can connect in a chemical way with other” implies that when members are able to connect with each other by developing healthy interactive relationships, there is a high likelihood of achieving both individual and group goals. The researcher also observed during his visits to their group sessions that they operated on certain principles and by certain rules that they had formulated. For instance, the researcher observed that their operations employed rules as a dynamic: (a) when one person was talking, the other members did not interrupt; (b) members respected each other’s view because even when they had contradictory/opposing issues to discuss, they did not dispute each other’s points; (c) they didn’t have personal interactions among each other during group sessions; and (d) they were very prompt for group sessions. The latter is in line with the dynamics suggested by Ackummey (2003) and Kurt Lewin.

How Learning Takes Place During Group Sessions

In an attempt to find out how learning took place among members of the group, the researcher asked the participants how they thought learning occurred among the group members. Counsellor ‘A’ said:

“The leaders of the groups are very knowledgeable about the issue that is being discussed and so the members learn through the information that is provided and the meaning that they derive from it. Mostly the leader has some experiences as regards the issue under discussion and since the other members are also experiencing it, they are able to assimilate the information properly”. (Counsellor ‘A’)

Counsellor ‘C’ also said:

“Most of the time, they learn from each other’s experiences. Sometimes the members share their experiences and their emotions with the group members and the group members learn from those experiences. These are adolescents and for them learning from each other is the basic order of the day so we encourage it in the group but we do it in such a way that it has a positive influence on the members”. (Counsellor ‘C’)

Counsellor ‘D’ however explained that learning occurred through re-enforcement:

“Usually, during my group sessions, learning occurs through motivation, especially when a group member exhibits good behaviour. Every member of the group claps to encourage the person and then we award the person with a gold star. Occasionally I use negative re enforcement to discourage undesirable behaviours. Usually, I give them the ‘look’-that which shows I disapprove”. (Counsellor ‘D’)

Counsellor A's assertion can be likened to Freud's portrayal of a group as a 'primal horde' where the group leader plays the role of a father. Freud likens a group to a 'Primal Horde' and that leaders of both function as 'substitute parental figures (Slavson, 1964; Gladding, 2003). A good father plays the role of a guardian, a disciplinarian, an instructor/a teacher and a friend. This implies that the group leader who is assumed to possess all the qualities of a good father must be knowledgeable about certain developmental issues to be able to instruct/teach the other members of the group; he should be skilful enough to draw out the desired behaviour from the group members and democratic enough to draw the group members close to him and avoid unnecessary conflicts within the group. In the case of SHS situations, the leaders are often the counsellors or resource persons who have background knowledge, skills and rudiments about the problems of the group members. There are however rare situations where a member of the group is appointed as a group leader after going through training with the counsellor. Counsellor B's revelation is an adaptation of the Social Learning Theory of Group counselling. Social learning theorists are of the view that behaviours are acquired through observational learning. Social learning theory accounts for both the uniqueness and consistency of human personality (Bower, Bootzin and Zajonc, 1987). Counsellor 'D' seemed to have adopted B. F Skinner's principles. Bandura proposed that majority of learning takes place through observation and vicarious reinforcement or punishment (Kankam and Onivehu, 2000). So in this particular situation, if a person shares an experience which yielded a bad outcome, the likelihood that the other members will imitate that behaviour is low; however, if a person shares an experience which yields a good or successful outcome, the likelihood that the members will learn from it is very high. Counsellor 'D' seemed to have adopted B. F Skinner's principles. For Skinner, the behaviour of the group members is governed by the consequences of their actions (Ntim, 2010; Kankam and Onivehu, 2000). Here, if the behaviour of one member is positively enforced by another/others in the group, there is the likelihood of frequently repeating that behaviour that was remarked or acknowledged in the future. Likewise, if a member exhibits a behaviour that is negatively enforced by another/others in the group, there is the likelihood of not repeating that behaviour that was rebuked or disapproved of in the future.

Effects of Group Counselling on SHS Students

The counsellors were asked if group counselling had had any positive effects on the students and they admitted that indeed such sessions had had a positive influence on student. Counsellor 'D' revealed the following:

“From the children's response, one can see that they are learning from group counselling sessions. Sometimes they bring pens and papers to jot down points so it is obvious group counselling have a positive influence on them”. (Source: Counsellor 'D')

Counsellor 'B' unveiled this:

“The members of the group have really benefited from the group sessions we hold. Students who were having problems with exams are improving and those who have concerns about sexual issues are in healthy relationships with people of the opposite sex and

they are also cautious about certain decisions they make about sexual issues". (Source: Counsellor 'B')

Counsellor 'C' also said:

Group sessions in my school have bridged the gap between my students and I. They are able to freely approach me with any issue at all. (Source: Counsellor 'C')

Generally, group sessions such as those organised in Senior High Schools concentrate on equipping students/adolescents with relevant information that may help them gain clarity on certain developmental changes that they are encountering or may encounter in the near future and also to provide them with problem-solving skills to help them deal with the plethora of problems that they are encountering or may encounter during this face of development.

Physical Structure of Group Counselling

The subjects were further asked about the physical structure of their group counselling sessions and their response implied that sitting format was that of the 'theatre format'. Counsellor 'A' said:

"They sit as they do in the classroom and the person who is sharing information with them stands or sits in front of them and talks to them". (Source: Counsellor 'A')

Counsellor 'B' responded similarly when she said:

"The facilitator stands in front of them and gives them the relevant information; however, as the session proceeds, the facilitator may call some of the members to brainstorm on specific issues or contribute to the group session with information that they have. (Source: Counsellor 'B')

The type of group influences all planned activities for the group; for instance, the physical structure or seating arrangement for a guidance group may be the theatre-style where members of the group sit in rows because the emphasis in guidance group is mostly in obtaining cognitive information. Gladding (2003) also argues that because of the emphasis in psycho educational groups on obtaining cognitive information, a theatre-style structure may be useful.

SUMMARY

The researcher's main reason for conducting this study was to seek an invaluable answer to the question 'How do counsellors in Senior High Schools apply their theoretical knowledge on Group Counselling to group Sessions organised for the adolescent students in their attempt to help them (adolescents) deal with a plethora of problems they encounter'? It is for this reason that all the researcher's activities were centred on eliciting response and observing facts that will yield relevant information for this study. From the findings above, there is no denying the fact that indeed having

adequate theoretical knowledge in group counselling as well as group dynamics is the surest way for a counsellor to assist adolescents to deal with a plethora of problems they encounter at the SHS level of the Ghanaian educational system. This is so because the empirical evidence above indicates that

- (a) Truly adolescents face a plethora of problems in Senior High Schools namely, drug abuse, sexual anxieties, examination anxieties, time mismanagement and lack of concentration and for this reason, group sessions of about 2 hours were organised for them on regular basis, based on the commonality of their problems.
- (b) Systems Theory was adopted in the running of activities in the group to ensure its survival. This was done by employing group dynamics such as the seating structure and exercises to help members understand the uniqueness of each other and interact in a healthy manner so as to avoid conflicts. For instance, it is evident that most of the group sessions held for adolescents in SHS are cognitively based hence the 'Theatre-Style' format of seating arrangement.
- (c) Counsellors also employed the field theory and its dynamics in their group sessions. they employ the use of norms, power, cohesion, consensus and valence in their quest to shape behaviour members in the group, encourage democracy, prevent conflicts and encourage sharing of experiences so that not only are group goals achieved but also, individual goals.
- (d) Counsellors also use classical conditioning approach to shape the behaviour of members within a group. They also create an atmosphere where vicarious learning takes place and this is basically done through the sharing of experiences.
- (e) Finally, although the methods of psychoanalytic groups do not inform group sessions organised in SHS, Freud's simile of the group leader as a father is highly used in group sessions organised for adolescents in Senior High Schools.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Generally, the researcher observed that the group sessions that were being organised for adolescents in Senior High Schools in Ghana were preventive and developmental in nature. Though obviously, most of the problems that adolescents face is normal and part of the developmental process of individuals, some of them make wrong decisions and go through some form alienation and stigmatisation; others abuse drugs as a way of coping with anxiety; while many others develop all sorts of personality disorders in their attempt to cope with the changes that come with that phase of development and also to fit into the demands of adolescent sub-culture and be socially accepted. It is for this reason that the researcher strongly suggests that remedial groups such as encounter groups and counselling groups be provided for them to help them deal with some of these problems. Undoubtedly, Ghana, a developing country needs knowledgeable, skilful and responsible men and women to help develop it and children and for that matter, adolescents are the very people who will be able to effect a change. It is for this reason that the researcher appeals to educational leaders, policymakers and government

officials to invest into counselling programs especially group sessions so that the future generation of this country will evolve as fully functional beings who will massively contribute both to self and to the larger Ghanaian community.

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