

The Roles of Counseling towards Promoting Women's Mental Health

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Abstract:-This paper highlights generally on the gigantic roles that counseling can play toward the promotion of good mental health of women. The paper specifically pointed out the common mental health issues experiencing by nowadays women as well as the factors affecting women's mental health which are the causative elements of mental illness. The paper also examined the important of effective counseling as decisive intervention for the treatment of mental illness as well as the techniques for preventive measures on women's mental health. The authors finally recommends the intervention of government, non-governmental organizations and other donor agencies to actively play a gigantic role in the creation, co-ordination, organizing, supervision and funding of strong organization that will render a comprehensive and intensive services particularly for women's mental health.

Keywords: Roles, Counseling, Women's Mental, and Health.

I. INTRODUCTION

Human being is combination of physical and mental states under which one is ultimately inter-dependent with one another. In this paper our main concern is how the counseling can be a helping hand in the promotion of good mental health of women. It is pertinent to know that maintaining good mental health is crucial to living a long and healthy life. Good mental health can enhance one's life, while poor mental health can prevent someone from living an enriching life.

The World Health Organization cites that women are two times more likely than men to develop certain mental health conditions like depression, eating disorders, and panic disorders. Women are often most likely to suffer from certain mental illnesses due to some factors like biological, social and socio-economic factors that contribute to jeopardizing of their mental health.

Counseling in this context is a vital means of helping individual to understand and use wisely the different therapeutic techniques to cope with difficult life events and help them to adjust and manage mental health problems. According to Smith and weikel (1996) mental health Counseling is a process of working with individual, couples, families and groups to address and treat emotional and mental disorders and to promote mental health.

It is apparent that there are numerous mental health issues that require no medical treatment by a psychiatrist doctor or nurse, rather they mere requires a counseling intervention in finding

out the effective way of coping with them. Such aforementioned mental issues or illness includes stress, anxiety, depression, post traumatic disorder, eating disorder, excessive compulsive disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) etc.

It is against this introductory background that this paper will generally examine the roles of Counseling towards promoting a good mental health of women. The paper will specifically shed more light on common mental health issues in women, factors affecting women's mental health, Counseling of women with mental health illness and preventive services for women's mental health. The authors also will conclude by recommending the paramount way of promoting women's mental health in General.

II. COUNSELING AND MENTAL HEALTH

Counseling can be defined by Akinade, (2012) as a number of procedures used in assisting an individual in solving problems which arise in various aspect of his life or in assisting him/her to maximize his/her overall personal development so that he could be more effective, satisfied and more useful to the society in which he/she lives. In collorary, counseling is a one to one relationship between an individual beset by problems with which he cannot cope alone and professionally trained counselor whose training and experiences have qualified him to make others reach solutions to various types of personal difficulties.

Mental health on the other hand, is a state of mind in which an individual can effectively utilize his or her capacities by displaying psychological resilience in making personal and social adjustments to fit the dynamic environment within which he or she co-exists with other persons (Mullen, 2010). It also represents one's ability to adapt to internal and external environmental stressors. Successful adaptation to a range of demands is manifested in thoughts, emotions and behaviors that are in congruence with age, local and cultural norms or expectations (United Nations Children's Fund and World Health Organization, 2009). To be mentally unhealthy signifies a psychological state that results in behavioural anomalies that affect daily functioning. Mental health problems may be associated with genetics, environ-mental stressors, psychological factors, brain defects, substance abuse, amongst other factors (Schmidt, 2007).

The World Health Organization (2001) famously defines mental health as ‘a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make meaningful contribution to his or her community’.

Mental health counselors help people who have normal cognitive processes cope with difficult life events, for example, physical illness, death of loved ones, and relationship problems or divorce. Others help people manage serious mental illnesses like bipolar disorder. Some clinical counselors specialize and work with a particular population, for example, the elderly. Mental health counselors may work for a variety of agencies: individual and family services, hospitals, and inpatient and outpatient mental health facilities. Some are in private practice. A qualified mental health counselor serves as mental health practitioners, providing services without referral. Clinical counselors often work as part of a health care team; the team could include doctors, nurse specialists, psychologists, and even social workers.

III. FACTORS AFFECTING THE WOMEN’S MENTAL HEALTH

There are number of factors that are said to be causative elements for jeopardizing the women’s mental health. Such factors are as follows:-

- Biological factor
- Socio-economic factor
- Socio-cultural influence and belief

Biological factor

Studies have shown that biological factors do play an important role in mental illness. It’s in fact a critical element in one’s mental health and possible development of mental health disorders. Women have lower serotonin levels than men and also process the chemical at slower rates, which can contribute to fluctuations in mood. Females are generally more predisposed to hormonal fluctuations or changes as well. Such Biological differences alone are likely to jeopardize the women’s mental health.

Socio-economic factors

Sociologists defined socio-economic status as the hierarchical arrangement of an individual’s strata within the society in terms of individual’s income, occupation, education and prestige in society. Women are over represented in low income; low status jobs and are more likely to live in poverty than men. Poverty, working mainly in the home on housework and concerns about personal safety can make women particularly isolated and at risk.

Socio-cultural influences and belief

Culturally speaking, women have historically been the subordinate gender, putting them in roles as primary

caregivers to children and the elderly. Even though gender roles have seen a shift in our culture, with women taking on more powerful careers and men staying at home to take care of children and other household activities, there is still a big amount of stress placed on women. This stress can lead to different mental illness like anxiety, depression, panic attacks etc. It is quit disgusting that, women have unfortunately been the sex machines, whether it is through magazines, movies, television shows, or peer relationships. This frequently negative sexualisation can cause problems with the healthy development of self-esteem and self-image among females, as reported by the American Psychological Association. Both of these factors can not only lead to unhealthy self-image but also to shame, depression, anxiety, and stress.

IV. COMMON MENTAL HEALTH ISSUES IN WOMEN

It is pertinent to know that both women and men can experience mental health problems equally, but some are more common among women, because of various factors attached specifically to women. According to Drapalski, Youman, Stuewig and Tangney (2009), in a study to discern the gender differences in the symptoms of mental illness, prior treatment history and treatment seeking behaviour, women reported far more clinically significant symptoms mental illness than their counterpart.

The World Health Organization cites that women are two times more likely than men to develop certain mental health conditions like depression, eating disorders, and panic disorders. Symptoms can also differ between men and women, so it’s important to understand the different factors that can contribute to each illness. The common mental health issues that became a challenge to our women nowadays are as follows:-

- Depression
- Panic disorders
- Agoraphobia
- Eating disorders
- Anxiety
- Stress
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
- Obsessive-compulsive disorder

Depression

Depression is a mood of feeling sad, anxious, empty, hopeless, helpless, worthless, guilty, irritable, angry or restless. According to Unison (2015) more women than men experience depression, partly because of social factors such as poverty and isolation and biological factors such as the hormonal changes experienced by women.

Panic disorders

Panic disorder is an anxiety disorder that characterized by recurring panic attacks, causing a series of intense episode. It has been said that due to.

Agoraphobia

Agoraphobia is a mental disorder characterized by reaction the situation where the person perceives the environment to be dangerous, uncomfortable or unsafe.

Eating disorders

Eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa are more common in women than men, particularly for young women. People with anorexia nervosa don't eat enough, usually because they feel that their problems are caused by what they look like. People with bulimia nervosa can't stick to a healthy eating pattern. They tend to binge, that is, eat a lot at once. This makes them feel guilty and out of control so they then panic and punish themselves by starving, making themselves sick, taking laxatives or over-exercising. As well as the mental distress, eating disorders can lead to a number of serious physical problems.

Anxiety

Anxiety is a mental disorder characterized by feelings of extreme fear. Women are twice as likely as men to experience anxiety disorders such as panic attacks.

Stress

Work-related stress is not an illness itself but can cause serious illnesses such as depression, high blood pressure, aches and pains. Stressful and unsupportive work experiences can also contribute to existing mental health problems.

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a mental disorder that can develop after a person is exposed to traumatic or horrific events, such as sexual assault, warfare, or other threats on a person's life. Worldwide, more women are affected by PTSD than men, largely because women are exposed to more sexual violence. The risk of developing PTSD after any traumatic event is 20.4% for women and 8.1% for men.

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD)

Obsessive compulsive disorder (OCD) is a mental disorder where people feel the need to check things repeatedly, perform certain routines repeatedly, or have certain thoughts repeatedly. Common activities include frequent hand washing, counting of things, and checking to see if door is locked. These activities occur to such a degree that the person's daily life is negatively affected. According to Wikipedia (2016) About 60% of the people with phobias or obsessive compulsive disorder are women.

All the above mentioned disorders are common issues in women's mental health which in one way or the other affect the women's mental health condition.

V. COUNSELING OF WOMEN WITH MENTAL HEALTH ILLNESS

The major role of Counseling Women is to enhance a women development that encompasses an understanding of the gender, social/economic, and cultural impact of being a woman today. Mental health counseling can be used to pull some people out of their mental din. Professionals in this field offer counseling, support, and guidance to individuals that are having trouble coping mentally or emotionally. There are a number of mental problems that mental health counselors might encounter during their careers, from people dealing with everyday stress to those with diagnosable mental illnesses and disorders.

A number of Counseling approaches have been found to be effective with providing a remedy in common women's mental health. Some are more research based than others, as rigorous research studies are still lacking on many women-specific treatment approaches. In order to fully address the needs of women, therapeutic programs need to use a variety of interventions with behavioural, cognitive, affective/dynamic, and systems perspectives. The following Counseling and psychotherapy approaches and techniques are fished out to help the counsellor in prognosing the treatment of common mental illness victimized by women in our society:

Counseling treatment of depression

In treatment of depression in women through counseling approach the Mark, and Elliot (2016) averred that rational emotive behavioral therapy (REBT) is found to be effective because a person suffering from depression usually feel the mood of sad, anxious, empty, hopeless, helpless, worthless, guilty, irritable, angry or restless. According to Albert Ellis the proponent of REBT, the large part of what we call emotion is nothing more than biased, prejudiced, or strongly evaluative kind of thinking. Thus, the counsellor or psychotherapist has the task of helping their clients to live the most self-fulfilling, creative, and emotionally satisfying lives by teaching clients how to organise and discipline their thinking.

Other approaches found to be effective in the treatment of depression includes cognitive therapy for depression, spiritual therapy, hypnosis, inter-personal therapy for depression, solution focused therapy etc.

Counseling treatment of Panic disorders

According to NHS (2016) The main aim in treating panic disorder is to reduce the number of panic attacks and ease the severity of symptoms. Depending on client's circumstances, the psychological therapy of cognitive behavioural therapy is found to be effective in this context. According to NHS (2016) CBT is thought to be one of the most effective Counseling treatment for panic disorders.

Counseling treatment of Agoraphobia

Cognitive behavioural therapy is also suitable for the treatment of Agoraphobia because CBT is based on the idea that unhelpful and unrealistic thinking leads to negative behaviour. CBT aims to break this cycle and find new ways of thinking that can help the clients to behave more positively,

Counseling treatment of Eating disorders

Eating disorders if not treated in order can cause severe physical and mental health problems and it can have a negative impact on someone's job, school or house work and can disrupt relationship between woman and her husband, family and friends. Moreover, the physical effect of eating disorders can sometimes be fatal.

The dietary counseling is found to be effective in the treatment of eating disorders which is geared toward helping the clients how to maintain a healthy diet. Other approaches that may be effective depending on the client's situation includes interpersonal therapy, family therapy, dialectical therapy etc.

Counseling treatment of Anxiety

Exposure therapy, systematic desensitization and CBT are the most effective approach for the treatment of anxiety. Exposure therapy as the name implies, exposes you to the situations or objects you fear. The idea is that through repeated exposures, you will feel an increasing sense of control over the situation and your anxiety will diminish. Systematic desensitization on the other hand is the step-by-step approach encounter with the object of fear which allow you to gradually challenge your fears, building confidence and master skills for controlling panic.

Counseling treatment of Stress

CBT is often an effective form of therapy for stress as the technique can help change negative thought patterns that develop as a result of stress, find new ways of thinking about stressful events that may not have such a negative issues.

Counseling treatment of Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)

In the treatment of PTSD, CBT, systematic desensitization and eye movement desensitization are found to be effective in this context. Eye movement desensitization and reprocessing (EMDR) is new invented therapy for PTSD that can help to change how you react to memories of your trauma. While thinking or talking about your memories you will focus on other stimuli like eye movements, hand taps and sounds.

Counseling treatment of Obsessive-compulsive disorder

CBT, cognitive therapy, exposure and response prevention (ERP) are considered to be effective in the treatment of obsessive compulsive disorder. Exposure and response prevention is a way of to stop anxieties and behaviours from getting stronger. The longer you are exposed to your fear or

stressful situation, over time you become used to the setting and the need to perform compulsive action is neutralized.

However there may be other forms of therapies effective for the treatment of common mental illness in women but above mentioned are thought to be more current, suitable and more effective for women's treatment through Counseling intervention.

VI. PREVENTIVE SERVICES FOR WOMEN'S MENTAL HEALTH

According to a popular English adage, "prevention is better than cure" and in another words "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure". Women's mental health solely depends on three components. These components are: emotional well-being, social well-being, and psychological well-being. As regard to this paper, the focus is being made on the provision of preventive ways on how to avoid victimization of mental illness by women.

The followings have been recommended by the authors to be the preventive measure in the victimization of women in mental illness:

1. Government should establish a strong organization that will help to provide the effective programs, intensive public education and sensitization activities that would promote mental wellness of the women.
2. Employ the services of health and community based providers i.e counsellors. Psychiatrists, psychotherapies etc who are well conversant about the sign and symptoms of mental illness and can render necessary counseling assistance to the patient.
3. Government and other donor agencies should provide adequate fund for comprehensive and co-ordinated services particularly for women's mental health.
4. Enhance social support for women particularly during known period of risk throughout the life course (ie adolescence, pre-natal, post-natal).
5. Improve awareness of effective treatment.
6. Create, co-ordinate and implement policies to support comprehensive mental health services for women.
7. Enhance the capacity of state and local partnership and collaborations to strengthen mental health services for women so that those in villages and local area should not be lagged behind.
8. Improve access to appropriate and effective maternal and infant mental health services in both state and local hospitals specifically for vulnerable population (ie immigrants, homeless, incarcerated women).
9. Support the development and implementation of interventions designed specifically to prevent recurrence of major mental illness in women.

10. Women should avoid any things that can cause or aggravate the mental illness such as drugs abuse, excessive taking alcohol, too much consumption of caffeine etc.

VII. CONCLUSION

The paper concluded by affirming that women are generally perceived as weaker, subjugated, and suppressed side in most of our society and this perception led them to socially, biologically and socio-economically fall a victims of one mental illness or the other. There is apparent indication that mental illness is a chronic condition that nowadays uniquely affect our women at all stages throughout their life course. Moreover, the Counseling as a profession has a gigantic role to play in bringing about the remedy as well as relapse or preventive measure that will help the women at all ages to be far away from mental health problems.

Finally, the government, donor agencies and non-governmental organizations has a special and paramount role to play in prevention and provision of mental wellness of women in the society.

VIII. RECOMMENDATIONS

A comprehensive plan to improve women's mental health requires action at a number of levels, including the development of policies and implementations, the provision of interventions through population-based settings, ensuring that community services and supports are adequate and accessible, supporting and promoting grassroots activities, and utilizing media-based strategies to influence awareness of issues of women's mental health in the general community. The authors recommends that all levels of government, federal, State and Local government, Non-governmental organizations as well as other Donor agencies must develop and fund realistic community mental health services which are alternatives to traditional medical programs, and are promotional and

preventative in nature and include those focused specifically on the needs of women.

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