THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF TRADITIONAL COUNSELLING

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This article was developed based on the literature search with the intention of exploring the theoretical framework of traditional counselling from an African perspective. 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 dichotomous dimension: traditional counselling practised from an Afrocentric orientation and modern counselling practised from a Eurocentric orientation. 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. The research question was: What is the theoretical framework of traditional counselling? The literature search shows that the key elements that inform the theoretical framework of traditional counselling from an African perspective are: cultural context, collective belief system, and initiation rituals.

Key words: traditional counselling, theoretical framework, social psychology

INTRODUCTION

Traditional counselling has variable aspects and many people hold different views on what it is and its context of application. Traditional counselling is oftentimes regarded as part of informal interpersonal interaction and communication that is integral to community life. 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. Traditional counselling is a process that 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 counsellors during the process of their interaction with people in a culturally acceptable environment, using appropriate interventions that are tailored to meet the client's needs, expectations and aspirations .Based on the literature search(Ampim, 2003; Colson, 2006; Giddens, 2009; Janssen, 2007; Jigau, 2007; McLeod, 2003; 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). These are elaborated hereunder.
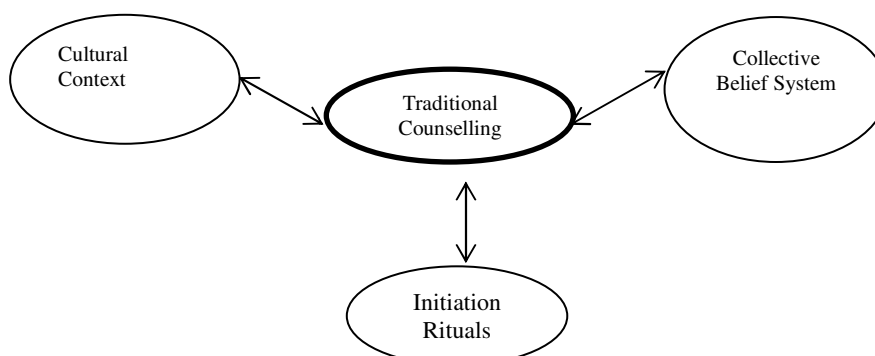

Figure 1: Theoretical framework of traditional counselling

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 a people, a period or a 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 values and beliefs such as individualism, collectivism, equality, 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, 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 behaviour and belief system is an essential psychological ingredient to the accurate assessment, treatment and management of client concerns.

The African way of 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, traditional ceremonies, religious cults, and witchcraft (Labouchere, 1993; Matthews, 1974; Taylor, 2006). In rural communities for instance, large land areas are divided into chiefdoms under command of chiefs. The chiefdom comprises between 100 and 150 villages that are superintended over by village headmen. For administrative purposes, between 15 and 20 villages are demarcated to constitute a zone whose committee is chaired by an elected headman. The zone is the second tier in the administration hierarchy just below the chief's council. At village level, the village committee constitutes the third tier in the hierarchy. This administrative structure underscores the importance of not only the management functions of villages and zones in a chiefdom, but also the levels at which traditional counselling is offered.

In rural communities of most African countries for instance, people live in relatively small villages in which they know each other very well, they share many things in common, and the behaviour 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 counsellor involves the family or community during the traditional counselling 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 behaviour and collective responsibility in conformity with community life.

Most concerns or problem situations affecting an individual are dealt with at 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. The chief is the final authority whose counsel is binding and 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 (Deloria, 1993). 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 plays a significant role in the sphere of social life as it iscentral to the development of any human society (Giddens, 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 (Strong, de Vault & Cohen, 2005). Marriage is a very important institution in almost all human societies worldwide (Animasahun & Femi Fatile, 2011); it has survived human existence as an instrument for social interaction, procreation and protection from extinction (Buss, 2004); and it can be a critical factor in achieving happiness throughout the family life (van Pelt, 2008). 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 (Mawere & Mawere, 2010; Wanjohi, 2013). The institution of marriage represents the behaviours, 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 the fundamental aspects of stability, longevity and prosperity, but also on the number of children borne. 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 practised at community level in most African countries (Mawere and Mawere, 2010). Although most people wish to maintain nuclear family status, the exigencies of human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immune deficiency syndrome, 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/and grandparents. Developmentally, orphan child-headed families are an emerging phenomenon and progressively moving toward institutionalization.

Religion is another important institution in the cultural life of not only the African people, but also most 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 (Pretorius, 2011). 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 (Bering, 2006). 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; and religious gathering constitute a formidable social network that is perceived desirable and relevant to the peoples' social life.

Traditional herbal remedies constitute yet another symbol of cultural heritage in the African society. Traditional medicine plays an important role in the provision of primary health care (Seshamani, Mwikisa and Odegaard, 2002); and traditional healers provide affordable and accessible primary health care that is culturally appropriate and traditionally convenient (Naur, 2001). For instance, most Zambians 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 (Novella, 2010). This situation is similar to that obtaining in Cameroon where Agbor and Naidoo (2011) indicate that most Cameroonians depend on traditional medicines for their health care needs; or as obtaining in South Africa where Pretorius (1994) indicates that a large proportion of the population use the traditional medical sector as their first contact for advice or for treatment of physical illnesses. From an African perspective, the traditional healer is a psychiatrist, medical doctor, fortune-teller, diviner, social worker and counsellor, all rolled into one (Larson, 1997). Traditional healers are a valued category of people in the community as they possess the cultural knowledge and skills to make an impact on health promotion (King and Homsy, 1997).

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 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 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 inform, guide and advise their patients or 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 belief and value systems which influence the pattern of their social behaviours and actions. Values and beliefs are an important component of people's lives as they are used to interpret, judge and evaluate external situations or events (Milkman and Wanberg, 2007); and beliefs in luck, fate or chance are generally associated with failure to engage in constructive behaviours and depression in the face of chronic illness (Walker, 2001). The behaviour of people varies from one culture to another. Expressive behaviour drives the actions of people through their lifespan (Argyle, 1994); and behaviour is one of the primary currencies used by natural selection (Bering, 2006). The evolutionary history of natural selection is anchored on lifespan developmental issues such as transition changes and adaptation (Buss, 2004). When behaviour changes are disconcerting especially during pubescence and senescence for instance, they affect attitudes toward the changes unfavourably (Hurlock, 2011). The reverse is true when the changes are deemed beneficial or gainful to the individual. This is the locus of the

collective belief system: people believe in both the seemingly good and bad things that affect their behaviour, communication patterns, or interactions and interpersonal relationships with others and their environment.

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, 2003).The values of people are a representation and reflection of their prior experiences during the lifespan development journey. They are derived from socialization and culture, environmental influences, and education among many other factors (Hurlock, 2011). All these factors contribute to the determination of how a person ought to act or react when confronted with problem situations (Egan, 1994). In the context of this understanding, it can be inferred 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 foundation for the collective belief system.

The belief and value system may be influenced by four factors: syncretism, totemism, universalism and culturalism. 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 society that defines its beliefs and practices (Harris, 1979; Nasry, 2013). 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, rock, cave, mountain, tree or any such other emblem (Colson, 1997). These yield the notion of totems and rituals as well as special shrines that serve as places of intimate personal memory and repository of traditional knowledge (Breen, 2005) as well as ancestral religion and custom, although ritual practices are much more diverse and fluid (Fournier, 2010). 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 behaviours (Nasry, 2013).

The totemic character is inherent and a symbolic figure to all the individuals of a given clan (Strachey, 2001). Totemic ritualism is influenced by a collective belief system that has evolved through a blend 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 behaviour 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 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 (Udelhoven, 2008); and it forms part of the African culture. 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 the witch and it involves covert actions by people to cause misfortune (Colson, 2000). 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 energy; 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 empowering medicines which can be used for personal protection such as from bewitchment, for public common good such as divination and traditional herbal treatment, and for evil such as placating bad luck, inducing physical illness or death.

When magic is applied for offensive purposes it assumes the label of witchcraft. Traditional healers use magic in a broad context. For instance, diviners apply divination to discover the cause of sudden illness or death, or perceived bad luck; herbalists apply herbal medicines to treat the illness or placate the spirit of the deceased, or induce good luck; spiritualists claim a special link to the underworld or dead ancestors as a source of their magical power to help people experiencing extrasensory phenomenal problems; and faith healers apply biblical inscription and prayer to wade off demon possession or enduring physical illness. Some traditional healers apply exorcism to cleanse evil spirits or

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demons at individual or family level. Most people are motivated to contact traditional healers because of their perceived magical power and influence.

The social paradigm of this collective belief in witchcraft is centred on the assumption that magic is both good, for instance the traditional healer who cures physical illnesses or induces good luck as well as bad, for instance a wizard or witch who causes physical illnesses or bad luck. It is from this context that the belief in magic and fear of witchcraft has actually evolved and it is a potent force pervading and influencing all spheres of human endeavour in African society. Witchcraft is an enduring belief and occurrence throughout central and southern Africa, among rural and urban populations alike (Austen, 1993).Most people, both the educated and uneducated, believe in magic and witchcraft; and witch hunts have proliferated despite the increasing importance of Christian churches and the people's association through various religious denominations (Gifford, 1998).

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 (Colson, 2000). For individual problems, many people either find an acceptable answer in witchcraft (Crehan, 1997) or supernatural influence (Bering, 2006), 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; and 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 (Colson, 1997). 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 spirits of the dead are known as ancestral spirits. The interpretation and experience of these extrasensory phenomena is common among many cultural and tribal groupings at community level. They constitute a prevalent belief that finds solace in traditional healers who divine not only their occurrence, but also their effect on the causation of physical illness among members of the community and their ritualistic treatment. The occurrence or experience of ancestral spirits results in spiritual trance and demon possession. The affected person becomes a spiritualist after undergoing ritualistic treatment at the hands of another experienced traditional healer initially.

Land shrines become associated with invisible entities or spirits and are thus objects of veneration by the people in a particular community (van Binsbergen, 1978). The implication of this indigenous knowledge is that although the linkage and interconnectedness between cause and effect may not be apparent from a modernistic perspective, many people believe in spirits, that is, natural spirits and ancestral spirits. This belief seems much the samein most countries throughout Africa and beyond (Colson, 1997). It can be postulated that both natural spirits and ancestral spirits are important factors in the aetiology of human disease causation and the practice of traditional medicine and adherence counselling.

Another aspect to the collective belief system is spirituality. The word spirituality is sometimes used interchangeably with faith or religion. Spirituality is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things that unite people into one single moral community called a church (Pretorius, 2011). Whereas spirituality appears to be a simple phenomenon on the surface, in reality it entails a very complex system of symbolisms, ideas, beliefs and practices that comprise the fundamental principles on which many people base their lives. With particular reference to the Tonga people in Zambia for instance, Colson (2006) notes that aspects or factors regulating the daily life were the same for religion, they provided the occasion and setting for awareness of spirit or divinity and the symbolic forms through which religion was conceptualized. This is an essential element of African religions; and it is on this basis that religious and shrine cults have flourished (van Binsbergen, 1978). In advertently, spirituality differs from private belief in that it has a public aspect that unifies people into a religious brotherhood and sisterhood, a religious family, and a religious community ultimately.

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 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

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at individual, family and community levels; and state funerals are a common feature at national level, including memorial service in remembrance of a deceased relative at family level. Ritual ceremonies are an embodiment of the cultural life and a symbol of traditional values, beliefs, customs and practices from an African perspective.

Ritualism is a common feature in contemporary society and many people practice rituals as part of cultural norm, religious service, or sheer traditional requirement. Aritual 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 it 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 can be inferred that rituals are part of the cultural life of people and ritual performance is a normal traditional custom and practice in most 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 (Rasing, 1995). Rituals have important cultural, social, psychological and symbolic dimensions to people who take part in ritual practice (Helman, 2000). 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 community 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 birth to early teenage or the pubescence stage. 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 (Ampim, 2003). 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 the child may take place at household level, family level, or/and church level; and through consultation with a traditional healer. The latter is a pre-requisite in situations where the traditional healer previously prescribed herbal remedies for infertility or any sexual dysfunction to a couple prior to conception of the infant. At church level, a child is 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 arm, neck or waist. This is intended to protect the child from bewitchment, physical illness, evil spirits or bad luck. Traditional healers are instrumental in these arrangements; and they act as a cherished fountain of traditional knowledge and cultural practices at community level. In contrast, every child has a 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 (Turner & Helms, 1995). 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 annunciating 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 (both girls and boys being initiated) at puberty is unique; and it is practised 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. Equally important is the marriage initiation ritual. In the African context for instance, initiation rituals are performed at premarital stage and during the wedding ceremony. At 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, religious and cultural aspects whose focus is on emphasizing the oneness of the 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 knowledgeable, competent and skillful. Young people in adolescence are regarded as adults, capable of marrying or being married and bearing children. They can work to earn income and live independently, although it is not uncommon for the new couple to stay with parents in arranged marriages, especially in rural communities.

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.

From a modernistic perspective, the informal education and traditional counselling processes related to initiation rituals at puberty place emphasis on the development of moral values and social responsibilities, and the exposition of sex role dilemmas from a sociocultural context. This view is in sharp contrast to the traditional view that holds that the young woman at initiation is predominantly taught how to lie in bed with her future husband in order to give him the greatest satisfaction; how to behave as a proper woman, as a married woman, as a mother of the family; and how to perform a woman's roles and responsibilities (Rasing, 2010; Simonsen, 2000; White, 1948). The traditional view is not only narrow in focus, but also contrary to modern perception and understanding. It greatly contributes to the stereotypical orientation that promotes the hegemony of man against the submissiveness of woman. Stereotypical orientations are instrumental for the perpetuation of gender based violence and other forms of abuse between men and women, including abuse and violence against children.

Multiculturalism Theory

The theoretical framework of traditional counselling is supported by the multiculturalism 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 & Pedersen, 1996). The multiculturalism 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). People of different ethnic groups are products of their distinct sociocultural and historical experience as exemplified in both developed and developing countries – because they are essentially multiethnic, multiracial, multicultural, multilingual, and multireligious by inclination and representation.

Ethnic affiliations are perceived as an important aspect in individual and group identity whereby minority groups are deemed disempowered politically, rendered poor economically and disenfranchised socially (Lum, 2000). In contemporary society increasing importance is being placed on how culture, ethnicity, and gender affect communication styles. The multiculturalism theory is integrative in orientation and it recognizes the existence of various worldviews. Each worldview is influenced by uniquely constructed sociocultural beliefs and norms; and no particular worldview is right or wrong, good or bad, or superior to the other (Sue, Ivey & Pedersen, 1996).

Multiculturalism is a broad theory that is conceptualized based on multiple levels of human experience and sociocultural affiliations; it involves the social construction of reality and the meaning of human experience, culture and life from a constructivist perspective (Reppeto, 2002); 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 (Laungani, 2005). 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 (Szapocznik and Kurtines, 1993).

The multiculturalism theory recognizes that within each culture there are subcultures which differentiate, for instance, one tribal grouping or clan from another and one society from another. Some of the issues multiculturalism set out to address, although primarily referenced the Euro-American context, have some relevance to the African context as well. In most African countries for instance, the sociocultural divide is prominent in rural villages, rural and urban townships, and various community settings. Each community comprises people of different ethnic backgrounds, languages, religions, customs and traditions. The needs and aspirations of these people are different from one province or region to

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another and so is their demand for traditional counselling. Equally, there are variations in traditional, social and ritual ceremonies, as well as on how these ceremonies are organized, managed and conducted in each region essentially because of the diversity in cultural orientations.

Multiculturalism is an essential theory in counselling and working with people from different cultural backgrounds irrespective of continental affiliation. It recognizes that all helping relationships ultimately exist within a cultural context and counselling is multicultural in nature (Speight, Myers, Cox and Highlen, 1991). The traditional counselling theory is collectivist in orientation. It emphasizes stronger social bonds, promotes group cohesiveness and belongingness, and enhances desirable social behaviour for a common good of the society (Jigau, 2007), which blends well with the meta theoretical approach of multiculturalism theory. 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 & Ennis, 2006). Meta theories clarify the context in which theoretical concepts are constructed, grounded, constrained and sustained.

CONCLUSION

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 belief and value systems which, in turn, influence the pattern of their social behaviours and actions. The collective belief system is part of a people's culture; and beliefs are ideas that constitute an essential element in predicting behavioural patterns of people. Ritualism is a common feature in contemporary society and many people practice rituals as part of sociocultural norm or religious service .Initiation rituals are an embodiment of the cultural life and a symbol of traditional heritage. All these contextual factors are cardinal elements in understanding the theory and practice of traditional counselling from an African perspective and orientation. Traditional counselling is dynamic and unique in the sense that its theory and practice is based on traditional systems of knowledge and cultural heritage. The theoretical framework of traditional counselling represents a different worldview that may influence counselling styles, strategies and interventions applied by counsellors of divergent training and educational backgrounds. Traditional counselling is a sociocultural invention in almost all African societies; and it ought to be promoted and strengthened from this perspective. All counselling is multicultural in nature and orientation. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the multiculturalism theory can adequately inform the theoretical framework of traditional counselling when the African perspective is integrated.

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