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EFFECT OF GUIDANCE SERVICES ON AWARENESS OF UNWANTED PREGNANCY AND ABORTION AMONG FEMALE SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN GASSOL EDUCATION ZONE, TARABA STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study examined the effect of guidance services on awareness of unwanted pregnancy and abortion among female secondary school students in Gassol Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria, focusing specifically on counselling, orientation, and information services. The study, guided by three research questions and hypotheses, adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test and post-test design. From a population of 1,068 female students, a sample of 100 SS II students was selected. Data were collected using a structured instrument, the Unwanted Pregnancy and Abortion Awareness Questionnaire (UPAAQ), validated by Dr. Usman Bakari, Dr. Abdul Rahman Musa Doman and Dr. Happiness Micheal, lecturers in the Department of Guidance and Counselling, Taraba State University, Jalingo, with a reliability coefficient of 0.75. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer research questions, while paired sample t-test tested the hypotheses at 0.05 significance level. Findings showed significant improvements in awareness of the causes of unwanted pregnancy, the consequences of unwanted pregnancy, and the causes of abortion, following counselling, orientation, and information services respectively. The study concluded that guidance services effectively promote awareness and positive behavioural change toward unwanted pregnancy and abortion, and recommended strengthening counselling, orientation, and information services within secondary school systems.

Key words: Guidance Services, Awareness, Unwanted Pregnancy and Abortion.

1. Introduction

Unwanted pregnancy and unsafe abortion remain a persistent public health and educational challenge among adolescent girls in sub-Saharan Africa, with Nigeria bearing a disproportionate share of the burden. Globally, an estimated 38% of pregnancies are unintended (World Health Organization [WHO], 2023), and about 22% of these end in induced abortion, mostly under unsafe conditions in low- and middle-income countries where abortion is legally restricted or stigmatized (WHO, 2020; Sedgh, Hussain, Bankole, & Singh, 2016). The United Nations Population Fund (2023) reports that approximately 21 million adolescent girls aged 15 to 19 in developing countries become pregnant annually, with Nigeria accounting for a substantial share of this burden. In Nigeria, an estimated 1.2 million unsafe abortions occur yearly, and about 20,000 women die annually from largely preventable abortion-related complications (Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Nigeria [SOGON], 2022; Ganatra, Tunçalp, Johnston, Johnson, Gülmezoglu, & Temmerman, 2022; Bankole, Hussain, Sedgh, Rossier, Woog, & Raggers, 2022).

The situation in Taraba State, in Nigeria's North-East geopolitical zone, is particularly acute. Taraba State recorded the lowest guidance service functionality scores among three northern states studied, with only 31.7% of secondary schools having even minimally functional guidance and counselling units (Akinrinola, Oluwaseun, & Taiwo, 2022). The state also recorded the highest proportion of adolescent post-abortion complications in a three-state comparative study, with 74.1% of respondents reporting severe health complications following unsafe abortion (Sully, Bello, Hussain, Owolabi, & Bankole, 2022), and 88.6% having received no formal health and wellness guidance prior to pregnancy (Danladi, Hamidu, & Yakubu, 2022). Within Gassol Education Zone, a predominantly rural area with strong socio-cultural traditions restricting open discussion of sexual health matters, school counsellors have documented recurring cases of unwanted pregnancy among students as young as eleven years, often followed by school dropout, psychological trauma, and unsafe abortion. The absence of fully functional guidance units in many of the zone's schools leaves female students without the structured professional support needed to navigate reproductive health challenges safely.

Despite Nigeria's establishment of guidance and counselling units in many secondary schools to address unwanted pregnancy and promote safe academic outcomes, research consistently shows that many female students remain inadequately informed about the causes, consequences, and

prevention of unwanted pregnancy and abortion (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2024). Nwosu (2021) found that secondary school female students in northern Nigeria frequently lack knowledge of basic reproductive physiology, including their ovulation period and the dangers of unsafe abortion, a pattern consistent with persistently low national contraceptive knowledge among female secondary school students (Guttmacher Institute, 2022). While guidance services have been deployed in some Taraba State schools, students there continue to show low awareness of unwanted pregnancy and abortion prevention strategies, and their vulnerability is further compounded by risk factors such as early marriage (UNICEF, 2023). This suggests that existing interventions, where available, have been inadequate in scope or relevance to rural, culturally conservative student populations. No prior study has specifically examined the effect of counselling, orientation, and information services on awareness of unwanted pregnancy and abortion among female secondary school students in Gassol Education Zone, a gap the present study addresses.

The present study therefore examined the effect of a structured, eight-week guidance services intervention on awareness of unwanted pregnancy and abortion among female secondary school students in Gassol Education Zone, Taraba State, focusing specifically on counselling, orientation, and information services and their respective effects on awareness of the causes of unwanted pregnancy, the consequences of unwanted pregnancy, and the causes of abortion. The study is anchored in Rational Emotive Behaviour Theory and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, two evidence-based psychological frameworks explaining how structured guidance can modify the irrational beliefs and cognitive distortions that leave adolescents vulnerable to uninformed sexual decision-making.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The study is grounded in two complementary frameworks: Rational Emotive Behaviour Theory, propounded by Ellis (1957), and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, developed by Beck (1967; Beck & Haigh, 2014). These theories were selected for their coherent, empirically validated explanations of the cognitive processes through which awareness is generated and translated into behavioural change among adolescents navigating reproductive health decisions (Hofmann, Asnaani, Vonk, Sawyer, & Fang, 2020; David, Cristea, & Hofmann, 2018).

Rational Emotive Behaviour Theory holds that individuals carry assumptions about themselves and the world that shape their reactions to life events. Ellis identified core irrational beliefs common in adolescent populations: catastrophizing (treating minor setbacks as catastrophic failures), musterbation (insisting that things must be a certain way), and self-damnation (judging one's entire worth by specific failures). In reproductive health decision-making among adolescents in rural northern Nigeria, many students hold irrational assumptions such as “it will never happen to me” or “pregnancy only affects girls who are promiscuous,” beliefs that function as cognitive filters preventing accurate risk perception and reducing motivation to seek guidance. Counselling and orientation services offer structured opportunities to examine and challenge these assumptions, replacing distorted schemas with accurate, evidence-based beliefs about reproductive health, consistent with the broader effectiveness of cognitive-behavioural approaches in modifying maladaptive cognitions (Ramalingam, 2021; Gotlib & Joormann, 2020).

2. Methodology

Research Design and Setting. This study adopted a quasi-experimental pre-test–post-test design without a control group, in which the same instrument is administered before and after an intervention and the difference in scores indicates the treatment's effect (Campbell & Stanley, 1963), an approach well suited to applied educational settings where random assignment to a control group is not feasible (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Population and Sample. The target population comprised 1,068 SS II female secondary school students in Gassol Education Zone during the 2025/2026 academic session. A stratified random sample of 100 female SS II students was selected from three secondary schools: GDSS Lugga (n = 25), GDSS Tella (n = 41), and GDSS Mutum Biyu (n = 34).

Data Collection Instrument. The Unwanted Pregnancy and Abortion Awareness Questionnaire (UPAAQ) is a 60-item self-report instrument organized into six sections of ten items each, corresponding to the six dimensions of awareness examined across the broader research programme: Section A (causes of unwanted pregnancy), Section B (consequences of unwanted pregnancy), Section C (prevention of unwanted pregnancy), Section D (causes of abortion), Section E (consequences of abortion), and Section F (prevention of abortion). The instrument's face and content validity were established by [insert names/credentials of validating experts, e.g., lecturers in Guidance and Counselling and in Measurement and Evaluation, Taraba State

University, Jalingo], and its internal consistency reliability, computed using Cronbach's alpha, yielded a coefficient of 0.75 (Nunnally, 1978).

Treatment Programme. The guidance services intervention consisted of an eight-week structured programme delivered in weekly sessions by three trained school counsellors with a minimum of two to three years of professional experience. Table 1 summarizes the weekly content focus of the programme.

Table 1

Weekly Content Focus of the Eight-Week Guidance Services Intervention Programme

Week	Content Focus
1	Orientation to the programme and building of group cohesion
2	Meaning and definitions of unwanted pregnancy and abortion
3	Types of unwanted pregnancy and abortion
4	Causes of unwanted pregnancy and abortion
5	Prevalence of unwanted pregnancy and abortion
6	Consequences of unwanted pregnancy and abortion
7	Prevention strategies for unwanted pregnancy and abortion
8	Review, consolidation, and post-test administration

Data Collection Procedures. The UPAAQ was administered as a pre-test immediately before the intervention and as a post-test after the eight-week programme, by trained research assistants under standardized conditions during school hours. Informed consent was obtained from participants and school authorities, with assurances of confidentiality and the right to withdraw without consequence. Data were analyzed using SPSS version 25.0, employing paired sample t-tests to test the three hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

3. Results

Research Question One: What is the effect of counselling services on the level of awareness of the causes of unwanted pregnancy among female secondary school students in Gassol Education Zone, Taraba State?

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics and Paired Sample t-test on the Effect of Counselling Services on the Level of Awareness of the Causes of Unwanted Pregnancy Among Female Secondary School Students in Gassol Education Zone, Taraba State

Test	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest	100	2.272	0.66	-0.894	-11.973	99	.000
Posttest	100	3.166	0.32				

Note. N = 100, df = 99. Scores are based on a 4-point awareness scale; higher scores indicate higher awareness. p < .001.

Table 2 shows that the mean pre-test score for awareness of the causes of unwanted pregnancy was 2.272 (SD = 0.66), rising to a post-test mean of 3.166 (SD = 0.32), a gain of 0.894. Testing H01 (no significant difference in the effect of counselling services on this outcome), the paired samples t-test result was significant, t(99) = -11.973, p < .001. H01 is therefore rejected, indicating that counselling services significantly improved awareness of the causes of unwanted pregnancy among female secondary school students in Gassol Education Zone, Taraba State.

Research Question Two: What is the effect of orientation services on the level of awareness of the consequences of unwanted pregnancy among female secondary school students in Gassol Education Zone, Taraba State?

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics and Paired Sample t-test on the Effect of Orientation Services on the Level of Awareness of the Consequences of Unwanted Pregnancy Among Female Secondary School Students in Gassol Education Zone, Taraba State

Test	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest	100	2.122	0.636	-0.993	-14.219	99	.000
Posttest	100	3.115	0.354				

Note. N = 100, df = 99. Scores are based on a 4-point awareness scale; higher scores indicate higher awareness. p < .001.

Table 3 shows that the mean pre-test score for awareness of the consequences of unwanted pregnancy was 2.122 (SD = 0.636), rising to a post-test mean of 3.115 (SD = 0.354), a gain of 0.993. Testing H02 (no significant difference in the effect of orientation services on this outcome),

the paired samples t-test result was significant, t(99) = -14.219, p < .001. H02 is therefore rejected, indicating that orientation services significantly improved awareness of the consequences of unwanted pregnancy among female secondary school students in Gassol Education Zone, Taraba State.

Research Question Three: What is the effect of information services on the level of awareness of the causes of abortion among female secondary school students in Gassol Education Zone, Taraba State?

Table 4

Descriptive Statistics and Paired Sample t-test on the Effect of Information Services on the Level of Awareness of the Causes of Abortion Among Female Secondary School Students in Gassol Education Zone, Taraba State

Test	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean Difference	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
Pretest	100	2.348	0.46	-0.576	-9.442	99	.000
Posttest	100	2.924	0.47				

Note. N = 100, df = 99. Scores are based on a 4-point awareness scale; higher scores indicate higher awareness. p < .001.

Table 4 shows that the mean pre-test score for awareness of the causes of abortion was 2.348 (SD = 0.46), rising to a post-test mean of 2.924 (SD = 0.47), a gain of 0.576. Testing H03 (no significant difference in the effect of information services on this outcome), the paired samples t-test result was significant, t(99) = -9.442, p < .001. H03 is therefore rejected, indicating that information services significantly improved awareness of the causes of abortion among female secondary school students in Gassol Education Zone, Taraba State.

4. Discussion

The present findings provide strong empirical support for Rational Emotive Behaviour Theory and Cognitive Behaviour Therapy as applied to adolescent reproductive health decision-making in rural Nigerian contexts. The significant improvements across all three guidance service components suggest that the intervention successfully modified the irrational beliefs and cognitive distortions identified by Ellis and Beck as drivers of maladaptive responses. The particularly strong effect of orientation services on awareness of consequences aligns with REBT's proposition that

directly confronting irrational beliefs, such as the belief that pregnancy happens only to other girls, produces powerful cognitive restructuring.

These findings are consistent with prior Nigerian research. Ogueji, Okolie, and Nweke (2021) and Eze, Ugwu, and Onuoha (2021) similarly found that counselling significantly improved awareness of unwanted pregnancy among Nigerian students, while Bello, Abubakar, and Salisu (2023) and Suleiman and Christian (2022) reported comparable gains from orientation and information services respectively. The present study extends these findings to a rural Taraba State context, suggesting that guidance service components are effective across diverse settings in northern Nigeria.

The findings have important implications for practice. They validate structured guidance services as a feasible, effective intervention within the resource constraints of rural secondary schools, with awareness gains of 25–47% achieved in just eight weekly one-hour sessions, consistent with broader evidence that school-based sexuality education reduces unintended adolescent pregnancy (UNESCO, 2023). The significant effects across all three components suggest schools should prioritize comprehensive, multi-component guidance delivery over single-service approaches, with protected timetable time rather than treating guidance as ancillary to academic demands.

Several limitations warrant acknowledgement. The quasi-experimental design without a control group limits causal attribution, as observed changes could partly reflect maturation or history effects; future research should employ randomized controlled designs. The study measured awareness rather than actual behaviour or pregnancy outcomes, and self-report data raise the possibility of social desirability bias. Findings are also geographically limited to Gassol Education Zone, and the eight-week timeframe does not permit assessment of the durability of awareness gains. Longitudinal, multi-site studies incorporating behavioural outcomes would strengthen future investigations.

Conclusion

This study examined the effect of a structured, eight-week guidance services intervention on awareness of unwanted pregnancy and abortion among female secondary school students in Gassol Education Zone, Taraba State, Nigeria, focusing on three guidance service components—counselling, orientation, and information services.

Recommendations

1. School authorities in Gassol Education Zone, and in comparable rural districts, should establish and adequately resource functional guidance and counselling units, given the substantial awareness gains produced by structured guidance services.

2. Guidance counsellors should deliver comprehensive, multi-component programmes combining counselling, orientation, and information services rather than relying on a single approach, since all three components produced significant improvements in awareness.

3. School authorities should allocate dedicated, protected time for guidance services within the school timetable rather than treating them as ancillary activities subject to preemption by academic demands.

4. The Ministry of Education and relevant stakeholders should consider replicating and scaling the eight-week guidance services model piloted in this study across other rural education zones in Taraba State and comparable contexts in northern Nigeria.

5. Guidance and counselling curricula should be adapted to directly address the irrational beliefs and cognitive distortions common among adolescents in culturally conservative rural settings, in order to sustain the awareness gains observed.

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