

## COUNSELLING APPROACH TO POVERTY ALLEVIATION IN NIGERIA

BY

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### Abstract

This paper explores the crucial yet often overlooked role of counselling in poverty alleviation, particularly within the context of Nigeria. Poverty is a multifaceted issue that extends beyond mere financial deprivation, affecting millions of individuals through educational disparities, limited access to healthcare, social isolation, and psychological distress. While traditional poverty alleviation strategies have focused on economic interventions, this paper argues that addressing the psychological and emotional barriers to poverty is equally vital. Counselling offers a pathway to empowerment by enhancing self-efficacy, resilience, and social support networks, thereby enabling individuals and communities to break the cycle of poverty. This paper discusses various counselling strategies for poverty alleviation, including holistic needs assessment, skill development, and community-based interventions. It concludes with recommendations for integrating counselling services into existing poverty reduction programs, advocating for increased investment in mental health services, and promoting culturally relevant counselling approaches. By incorporating counselling into a comprehensive approach to poverty alleviation, the paper suggests that more sustainable and holistic solutions to poverty can be achieved.

**Key words:** Counselling, Poverty alleviation

### Introduction

Poverty is a complex social issue that affects millions of people globally. According to the World Bank (2022), approximately 8.4% of the world's population or around 670 million people lived in extreme poverty. It encompasses more than just a lack of financial resources; it also involves the

deprivation of basic human needs, including education, healthcare, and social services. While economic strategies such as job creation, microfinance, and social welfare programs are essential in tackling poverty, the role of counselling in poverty alleviation is often overlooked. Counselling can play a significant role in addressing the psychological and emotional aspects of poverty, empowering individuals and communities to overcome the challenges they faced. Poverty remains one of the most pressing issues in Nigeria, affecting a significant portion of the population. The World Bank estimated that over 40% of Nigerians live below the poverty line, making it crucial to explore various methods for its alleviation. Among the myriad strategies for poverty reduction, counselling has emerged as a vital tool, particularly in addressing the psychosocial dimensions of poverty. This article explores the role of counselling approach to poverty alleviation in Nigeria, considering its potential to empower individuals and communities to break the cycle of poverty.

## **COUNSELLING**

Counselling, as defined by Corey (2015), is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals. In the context of poverty alleviation, counselling can provide individuals with the necessary tools to manage stress, improve decision-making, and enhance their overall well-being (Egan, 2014). Studies have shown that counselling can play a crucial role in enhancing self-efficacy, which is critical in helping individuals take proactive steps toward improving their socio-economic status (Bandura, 1997).

Counselling has been identified as a valuable tool in addressing the multifaceted nature of poverty (Audu & Ekoja, 2019). Studies have shown that poverty can have significant psychological and emotional consequences, including feelings of hopelessness, low self-esteem, and lack of motivation (Ugwu & Ugwu, 2020). Counselling interventions can help individuals and communities develop coping strategies, improve their problem-solving skills, and foster a sense of empowerment and self-efficacy (Okoro et al., 2018).

## **POVERTY**

Poverty is a complex societal challenge that extends beyond mere economic deficiency. It encompasses a multitude of issues, including educational disparities, health care access, social isolation, and psychological stress. As we strive to find effective ways to alleviate poverty, innovative strategies must be considered—one of which is the incorporation of counselling approaches. Poverty in Nigeria has been extensively studied, with numerous factors identified as contributing to its persistence, including unemployment, low educational attainment, and poor access to healthcare (Ajakaiye & Adeyeye, 2016). Traditional poverty alleviation strategies have often focused on economic interventions such as microfinance, skill acquisition programs, and social welfare schemes. However, these approaches often overlook the psychological and emotional barriers that keep individuals trapped in poverty.

### **Understanding the Psychological Impact of Poverty**

Poverty is not only a material deprivation but also a psychological experience. People living in poverty often face chronic stress, anxiety, depression, and feelings of hopelessness (Santiago et

al., 2011). These psychological challenges can hinder individuals from taking advantage of opportunities that could improve their circumstances. For example, the stress associated with financial insecurity can impair cognitive functioning and decision-making, making it difficult for individuals to plan for the future or invest in long-term goals (Haushofer & Fehr, 2014).

The psychological impact of poverty often goes unnoticed. Individuals living in impoverished conditions may experience anxiety, low self-esteem, and a sense of hopelessness. This emotional burden can create a cycle that hinders their ability to seek opportunities for improvement—educational, social, or economic.

Counselling can address these psychological barriers by helping individuals process their feelings, develop coping strategies, and build resilience. Through this emotional support, individuals can gain a clearer perspective about their situations, allowing them to take actionable steps toward overcoming their circumstances. By addressing the psychological and emotional dimensions of poverty, counselling interventions can empower individuals to take a more active role in improving their circumstances and breaking the cycle of poverty (Audu & Ekoja, 2019). Furthermore, the integration of counselling services with other poverty alleviation programs, such as skills training and income-generating activities, can create a more holistic and effective approach to addressing this complex issue.

## COUNSELLING STRATEGIES FOR POVERTY ALLEVIATION

### 1. **Holistic Assessment of Needs**

A critical component of poverty alleviation is understanding the individual's unique context. Counselling provides a framework for a holistic assessment of needs. Professional counsellors can employ various techniques, such as active listening and motivational interviewing, to understand the root causes of distress and identify specific barriers to improvement.

For example, a client might be struggling not only with financial instability but also with mental health issues or family dynamics that exacerbate their situation. By recognizing these interconnected aspects, counsellors can design tailored interventions that consider all facets of an individual's life, leading to more sustainable solutions.

### 2. **Empowerment through Skill Development**

Counselling can also play a crucial role in skill development—an essential factor for economic mobility. Many individuals in poverty lack access to educational resources or vocational training. Through supportive counselling, clients can engage in skill-building exercises that foster self-efficacy.

Counsellors can facilitate access to local job training programs, adult education classes, or workshops focused on life skills such as budgeting and time management. By empowering individuals with the knowledge and skills necessary for employment, counselling can directly impact their economic situation, providing paths out of poverty that may not have been previously visible.

### 3. **Building Social Support Networks**

Isolation is a common experience among individuals in poverty. Social networks often diminish due to lack of resources or awareness of available community services. Counsellors can assist clients in building and leveraging social support systems. Group counselling sessions or community-focused programs can provide a platform for individuals to connect, share experiences, and foster relationships that mitigate isolation. These connections are vital, as social support can alleviate stress, provide practical assistance, and offer encouragement in the face of adversity.

### 4. **Advocacy and Resource Connection**

Counsellors often serve as advocates for their clients, helping them navigate complex socio-economic systems. An essential aspect of poverty alleviation is ensuring access to necessary resources—healthcare, housing assistance, legal aid, etc. Counsellors can provide clients with information about available services and support them through the application processes.

Moreover, counselling approaches can help clients recognize and articulate their needs more effectively, empowering them to advocate for themselves and access resources that might otherwise remain out of reach. This advocacy can lead to improved mental well-being and increased stability in various aspects of life.

### 5. **Counselling for Empowerment**

Empowerment counselling is a critical approach in poverty alleviation. This approach involves helping individuals recognize their strengths, build self-efficacy, and develop a sense of control over their lives. By focusing on empowerment, counselors can help clients overcome the feelings of helplessness and dependency that often accompany poverty (Lee, 2001). Empowerment counselling can include goal setting, skill development, and advocacy, all aimed at enabling individuals to take action towards improving their socio-economic status.

### 6. **Resilience-Building Through Counselling**

Resilience refers to the ability to adapt and thrive despite adversity. Building resilience is particularly important for individuals living in poverty, as they often face multiple stressors and challenges. Counselling can play a vital role in resilience-building by helping individuals develop coping strategies, foster positive relationships, and find meaning in their experiences (Walsh, 2006). Techniques such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) can be used to help clients reframe negative thoughts and develop a more positive outlook, which can be crucial in navigating the hardships associated with poverty (Beck, 2011).

### 7. **Community-Based Counselling Interventions**

Community-based interventions are an effective way to address poverty on a larger scale. These interventions involve providing counselling services within the community, often through partnerships with local organizations, schools, and social service agencies. Community-based

counselling can be particularly effective because it is accessible and culturally relevant, and it can reach individuals who may not seek out traditional counselling services (Goodman et al., 2014). Furthermore, community-based interventions can address the systemic issues that contribute to poverty, such as discrimination, lack of access to education, and inadequate healthcare.

While individual counselling is crucial, addressing poverty requires systemic change. Counsellors can play a role in advocating for policies that promote socioeconomic equity, highlighting the need for accessible education, fair wages, and comprehensive health care.

Collaboration with community organizations and local governments can help create initiatives that address the larger systemic issues contributing to poverty. By engaging in community-based participatory research, counsellors can ensure that the voices of those affected by poverty are heard in the development of programs and policies process.

## **Conclusion**

The complexity of poverty necessitates a multi-faceted approach to alleviation efforts. Integrating counselling into poverty alleviation strategies offers a pathway for individuals to confront the emotional, social, and economic barriers they face. By facilitating personal empowerment, building social networks, and advocating for systemic change, counselling can transform lives and contribute to the broader goal of eradicating poverty.

As we continue to explore solutions for poverty alleviation, it is crucial to recognize the vital role that mental health and emotional support play in this ongoing struggle. Through counselling, we can not only provide immediate relief to individuals but also foster the resilience necessary for sustainable change.

Counselling has a vital role to play in poverty alleviation. By addressing the psychological and emotional aspects of poverty, counselling can empower individuals, build resilience, and foster community solidarity. While counselling alone cannot solve the problem of poverty, it is an essential component of a comprehensive approach to poverty alleviation that includes economic, social, and psychological interventions. Integrating counselling services into poverty alleviation programs can help individuals and communities overcome the barriers that keep them trapped in poverty, leading to more sustainable and holistic solutions.

## **Recommendations**

1. **Increase Investment in Counselling Services:** The government and non-governmental organizations should invest in training more counselors and providing them with the necessary resources to effectively serve low-income communities.
2. **Public Awareness Campaigns:** To reduce the stigma associated with seeking counselling, public awareness campaigns should be launched to educate people on the benefits of counselling and mental health care.

3. Culturally Relevant Counselling Approaches: Counselors should incorporate the use of culturally relevant counselling techniques that consider the unique socio-cultural context of Nigerian communities.

4. Integration with Economic Programs: Counselling services should be integrated into the existing poverty alleviation programs, such as microfinance initiatives and skill acquisition programs, to provide a holistic approach to poverty reduction.

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