

Counselling Across the Gender Divide: Male Teachers' Attitudes towards Counselling Secondary School Female Learners in Zimbabwe

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Abstract

the attitudes of male secondary school teachers towards counselling female adolescent school learners were examined in Zimbabwe in the current study. The study was grounded in the field of Educational Psychology specifically focusing on Freud's classical psychoanalytic theory, Erikson's psychosocial theory and Horney's feminine psychology together with Rogers' person-centred theory. The qualitative research approach was employed with the descriptive survey as the research design. Data collection was done using open-ended questionnaires and telephone interviews. The researcher used the stratified random sampling method to generate a sample of 20 male secondary school teachers based in Masvingo. The stratification was done relative to teaching experience, age and highest professional qualifications. The study established that seven out of the 20 respondents expressed positive attitudes towards counselling female secondary school learners while eight of the respondents expressed serious misgivings regarding the exercise. The remaining respondents were half-hearted and pointed out that they were willing to assist female secondary school learners on a limited number of issues. Variables such as culture, technological advancement, ignorance of the counselling techniques and dynamics, the developmental stage of the target counselees and the issue of qualifications to conduct counselling were cited by the research participants as they substantiated their opinions. The researcher recommended that counselling workshops to sharpen classroom practitioners' counselling acumen be undertaken on a regular basis so that counselling could be undertaken across the gender divide

Key words: *Counselling, adolescence, period of storm and stress, crushes, midlife crisis, gender divide, emotionality*

Introduction and background to the study

It has been claimed and verified by numerous researchers that a multiplicity of inimical variables are at play in modern society and counselling has been mentioned as a credible survival strategy (Nayak, 2004; Musiiwa, 2014). People at different developmental stages seemed to be struggling physically, emotionally, morally, personality-wise, intellectually, socially and even spiritually (Kufakunesu, 2011). Challenges such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic, poverty, the fragmentation of the extended family network and crunching industrial and commercial downsizing have altered the life trajectories of many people (Van Niekerk & Prins, 2001). The sporadic cases of suicide which are reported in electronic and print media can be attributed to the overwhelming developmental challenges which characterise modern society. Kufakunesu (2011) noted that the cited social, economic and allied challenges do not respect age or gender. As already indicated, counselling has been identified as a basic human need and secondary school learners are not an exception. It has to be acknowledged that the challenges which male and female individuals deal with in life are sometimes different principally because of culture. While adolescents generally face similar developmental challenges, one can safely claim that male adolescents are more inclined to battle with issues such as bullying, alcohol abuse and violent behaviour in general than their female counterparts. On the other hand, female adolescents may find themselves grappling with challenges such as sexual abuse, teenage pregnancies and stigmatisation. Secondary school teachers remain the main adults who spent more time with school going adolescents than any other adults. In the current study, the attitudes of male secondary school learners towards counselling female adolescent learners in Zimbabwe were under scrutiny.

The Nziramasanga Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training is a task force which was assigned by the government of Zimbabwe in 1998 to examine the state of education and training in the country (Nziramasanga, 1999:1). An elaborate and comprehensive report encompassing a number of recommendations on many educational aspects one of which is Guidance and Counselling were generated

(Nziramasa, 1999). Among many other things, the commission recommended that Guidance and Counselling be made a compulsory subject in Zimbabwe from preschool to university. According to Musiiwa (2014), the Zimbabwean Ministry of Education, Sport, Art and Culture's in Zimbabwe issued the Education Director's circular number 23 of 2005 specifying that Guidance and Counselling be part of the Zimbabwean school curriculum at both primary and secondary school levels. The implementation of the greater part of the recommendations by the Nziramasa Commission started in Zimbabwe in all earnest in 2013 through what has come to be called the Updated New Curriculum culminating in Guidance and Counselling being made compulsory at all educational levels in the country. The fact that Guidance and Counselling is not examinable at primary and secondary school levels in Zimbabwe to some extent compromises its status and credibility relative to other subjects.

As already alluded to, classroom practitioners are the main adults who spent more time with learners than any other adults. Kufakunesu and Chinyoka (2017) maintain that in educational settings, teachers are a crucial component for numerous reasons. According to Herrero, Estevez, and Musitu (2006:674) educators as professional adults are very important in helping adolescents to deal with a wide range of challenges they meet at school in particular and in society in general. Kufakunesu and Chinyoka (2017) insisted that teachers can plug the limitations of substandard parenting styles which can prevail in some cases. This was insinuated to by Zarrett and Eccles (2006:20) who intimated that some adolescents come from families where parents are unavailable, unable, or, in some cases, reluctant to give support to their adolescent children as an outcome of variables such as parental divorce, poverty, unemployment, hectic lifestyles, death, or psychological estrangement of parents and their children. Just like in the family set-up, male and female teachers sometimes influence learners differently. Among other reasons, this can be accounted for by the fact that female teachers act as mother figures for the learners while male teachers can be modelled as fathers in the school context. The current study explored the attitudes of male secondary school teachers towards counselling female adolescent learners.

Since attitudes were under the spotlight in the current study, the researcher deemed it suitable to take time to define and explain the nature of attitudes. An attitude is defined by Verešová and Malá (2016:870) as a relatively permanent organisation of beliefs, feelings, and behavioural tendencies towards socially significant objects, groups, events or symbols. Kufakunesu (2011:15) posits that attitudes are relatively enduring general judgemental sentiments regarding something which are closely associated with the bearer's cognitive beliefs and behaviour towards an object or a person. This implies that attitudes can influence an individual's reactions towards an item, person or phenomenon under consideration. Moreover, an attitude is laden with the bearer's biases, beliefs, prejudices and appreciations which will impinge upon the manner in which one handles a given situation (Kufakunesu, 2015). According to Mensah, Okyere and Kuranchie (2013) attitudes are psychological inclinations which people develop due to experiences and subsequently influence their views of situations, objects, and people and how they respond to them either positively or negatively or favourably or unfavourably. Nayak (2004) claims that attitudes can strongly determine how an individual behaves across situations and over time. Kufakunesu (2011:24) maintains that the attitudes of teachers are very important in all programmes which are delivered through the education system. It was remarked by Hogg and Vaughan (2005) that attitudes have affective, conative and cognitive components. This means attitudes involve feelings and emotions, behaviour and knowledge based beliefs respectively. Attitudes have affective, conative and cognitive components, that is, they involve feelings and emotions, behaviour and knowledge based beliefs respectively (Hogg & Vaughan, 2005). Fazio and Olson (2003) maintain that the affective component of an attitude designates emotional reactions, either likes or dislikes, towards a given object, event or situation. The cognitive component of an attitude constitutes a person's beliefs that the attitude object or event in question would generate desirable or undesirable outcomes (Linerós & Hinojosa 2012; Mensah, et al, 2013). On the other hand, the behaviour component of an attitude entails the noticeable and observable overt actions or responses, either verbal or non-verbal, towards the attitude objects that are exhibited by an individual (Ayob & Yasin, 2017; Fazio & Olson, 2003). It was against this background that the researcher decided to explore the attitudes of male secondary school teachers towards counselling female secondary school learners in Zimbabwe.

One determinant of people's attitudes towards counselling is their conceptualisation of what counselling actually entails. For example, Cooper (2005) remarks that some secondary teachers in Scotland viewed counselling as mere advice giving. In an attempt to be explicit and elaborate, the researcher decided to define guidance and counselling since the two terms are sometimes mixed up. Guidance is the process of providing a person or a group of people with crucial information which is to be subsequently used to set realistic goals, undertake strategic planning and to make informed choices when confronted by a number of options (Kufakunesu, 2011:16; Musiiwa, 2014). It can be deduced from this definition that guidance is not undertaken as a direct reaction to an immediate challenge, but as a way of empowering people to navigate challenge, opportunities and threats at a later date. For instance, female secondary school learners have so many decisions to make with regard to issues such as career trajectories, abstinence and whether to enter into amorous relationships or not. Formal counselling, which is normally reactionary in nature, has been defined as "an interpersonal relationship between someone actively seeking help and someone willing to give help, who is capable of or trained to help in a setting that permits help to be given and received" (Cormier & Hackney, 1993:2; Kufakunesu, 2011:16). This implies that professional counselling is the interaction between someone who is provisionally unable to handle a particular social, emotional, physical, academic, moral or even spiritual problem and another person who knowledgeable and skilfully encourages the troubled individual to mobilise his or her internal potentialities to ultimately solve the problem (Mpfungu, 2006; Kufakunesu, 2011:16). It can be deciphered from this definition that a counsellor is ideally expected to be committed and knowledgeable to undertake viable counselling particularly when dealing with adolescents who are characteristically known to be volatile in many ways. The given definition of counselling was adopted in the current study in which the attitudes of secondary school teachers towards counselling female adolescent learners were under scrutiny.

There are many reasons why counselling remains crucial, one of which is that the well-knit original African society in which people more than zealous to assist any person needing help has to some extent undergone metamorphosis in the negative direction. According to Kufakunesu and Dekeza (2017) most people in Zimbabwe have to some extent adopted lifestyles characterised by independence and individualism. Such a trend has altered and debilitated the symbiotic communal way of life and people now strongly lean towards solving problems which directly affect members of their immediate families (Kufakunesu & Chinyoka, 2017). According to Kufakunesu and Chinyoka (2017) the traditional roles of the aunts, uncles and grandparents as well as parents themselves in helping adolescents as they walk along the road to adulthood has been distorted by numerous variables. With regard to gender, the traditional Zimbabwean setup was characterised by limited counselling between fathers and their daughters since daughters were counselled by their aunts and grandmothers. It was kind of taboo and sacrilegiously wrong for men to meddle into the emotional and social affairs of their daughters. One is left wondering how knowledgeable male secondary school teachers are with regard to feminine issues such as period pains, the menstrual cycle, relationships, sexual abuse and pregnancy. The current study was an attempt to establish the attitudes of male secondary school teachers towards counselling female secondary school learners.

Characteristically, female secondary school learners who were considered in the current study were developmentally adolescents. A 19th century psychologist called Stanley G. Hall described adolescence as a period of storm and stress (Kufakunesu, Ganga, Chinyoka, Hlupo, & Denhere, 2013: 827; Swartz, de la Rey, Duncan, Townsend & O'Neill, 2011:87). In essence, adolescence is a developmental stage in which an individual changes from being a child to become an adult (Santrock, 2004:36; Snowman, McCown & Biehler, 2009: 56-57). It is a stage of development which is physically and psychologically found between childhood and adulthood. Erikson (1968) labelled this stage identity versus role confusion. During adolescence, there are dramatic physical changes which are called the growth spurt in which the muscles, body mass and height increase significantly. Adolescent girls witness the onset of their menstrual cycle while simultaneously undergoing hip and breast enlargement as well as developing pubic hair. Adolescents normally experience emotional tension and mood swings due to changes in hormonal composition, the reproductive system and social roles. Adolescents typically spend more time with their peers and significantly less time with their parents (Kufakunesu, et al, 2013). Moreover, adolescents tend to be rebellious both at home and at school. In the western world, adolescents actually gain independence from

parents. It was after considering the quagmire which can emanate from counselling processes between counsellors battling with adult male educators and counselees negotiating their way through adolescence that the current study was undertaken.

Apart from the already outlined challenges associated with adolescence, romantic crushes are another attendant emotional inconvenience which adolescents need to manage. By definition, a crush is an overwhelming and almost universal sense of sexual attraction which engulfs adolescents and they experience a strong acclivity to interact with their imaginary suitor (Huang & Dong, 2019). According to Oettingen and Mayer (2002) an individual experiencing a crush would not have communicated their feelings to their target. Beadle (2016) claims that female adolescents tend to experience crushes on males who are normally inappropriately older than them because they normally reach puberty earlier than boys. It has also been established that female adolescents commonly have crushes on their male teachers thereby creating an embarrassing and potentially dangerous phenomenon for both parties (Beadle, 2016).

The current study involved individuals at two development stages, that is, adolescent female secondary school learners and adult male classroom practitioners. The male teachers whose attitudes were explored were in young and middle adulthood as postulated by Erikson's sixth and seventh stages respectively. During middle adulthood, both men and women grapple with midlife crisis although it is more pronounced in males (Freund & Ritter, 2009: 582; Tamir, 1989). For the purpose of the current study, midlife crisis was discussed in the context of males since males were the only research participants. According to Freund and Ritter (2009) midlife crisis as a concept was pioneered by Jacques (1965) although many people attribute it to Levinson (1978). By definition, midlife crisis is an experience in middle adulthood in which for the first time a man reflects on himself and evaluates his achievements according to the standards that he crafted when he was younger (Brim, 1976; Freund & Ritter, 2009). Levinson (1978:198) remarks that midlife crisis is a painful and sometimes a frustrating experience characterised by the re-appraisal of one's past and fine-tuning of one's life structure relative to marital relations and occupational aspects. Relative to relationships, midlife crisis is a hypothetical crisis in which middle age men grapple with the temptation to make amorous advances on young women who are young enough to qualify as these men's daughters. Psychologically midlife crisis stems from feelings of emotional desperation on the part of males as they realise that they may no longer be sexually appealing to younger women. Whether midlife crisis is real or imaginary has remained a debateable poser in the psychological field.

One variable which can have a serious bearing on the way classroom practitioners at all educational tiers perform their duties is time at their disposal. At secondary school level, one teacher can teach more than one class at different grade levels. The situation is aggravated by the fact that currently in Zimbabwe teachers who go on different forms of leave such as sick leave or maternity leave are not substituted for the entire duration of their leave. The teachers remaining at work are expected to reshuffle their timetables to absorb the extra teaching responsibilities emanating from the absence of a colleague who would have gone on leave. Mwamwenda (2004) posits that sometimes teachers do not have adequate time to meaningfully attend to learners' personal needs. Gysber and Handerson (2000) reiterate that teachers normally encounter difficulties in finding sufficient time to offer direct counselling to learners. The same sentiments were echoed by Barker (2000) who asserts that teachers' non-counselling duties usually interfere with the entire counselling programme and with learner counselling. It has to be admitted that classroom practitioners would have to tactfully balance their time between the real counselling of learners and the various non-counselling professional duties like administering achievement tests, updating professional documents, extra-curricular activities, supervising learners and covering for fellow teachers who would be on leave (Barker, 2000; Gysber & Handerson, 2000). One wonders how teachers operating under such tight conditions would have time to undertake learner counselling over and above their non-counselling professional duties. It is with such considerations that the researcher investigated the attitudes of secondary school male teachers towards counselling female learners.

Technology, just like culture, is dynamic across generations in virtually all parts of the world. Various forms of technological innovations tend to alter the lifestyles virtually everyone including adolescents who are likely to capitalise on it more than people in any other age (Kufakunesu, Chinyoka & Ganga, 2011). One

challenge which is associated with technological advancement is the viral dissemination and dispersal of information literally every aspect of life. This makes relatively younger children vulnerable to indecent materials pertaining to sexuality and violence (Black, 2009:688). According to Black (2009:696) adolescents' online technological ventures are mostly leisure-time pursuits which contribute minimally to their scholastic endeavours. Innovations in technology have been hailed for bring about great convenience in literally all areas of human functioning despite exposing the minds of adolescent learners to emotionally absorbing stuff thereby negatively impinging upon their smooth transition from childhood to adulthood (Subong, 2008). As a result of innovations in technology, teachers and parents no longer have the right and means to regulate the volume and composition of the information which is at the disposal of children and adolescents. Given such a scenario, the researcher considered it expedient to take a closer look at the attitudes of secondary school teachers towards counselling female adolescent learners in Zimbabwe.

In 2005 a two-pronged study was carried out in Scotland to explore the attitudes of secondary school educators towards learner counselling and also to scrutinise their conceptualisation of school counselling (Cooper, 2005). One hundred and four classroom practitioners took part in the study. Cooper (2005) found out that classroom practitioners generally had positive attitudes towards counselling learners at secondary school level. Regarding conceptualisation of counselling, Cooper (2005) gathered that the generality of the respondents viewed counselling as mere advice giving, a perspective which does not sufficiently tally with the definitions of counselling given above. It was also found out by Cooper (2005) that a small fraction of the respondents harboured significantly negative attitudes towards learner counselling. The teachers in this category backed their dissonance and ambivalence towards learner counselling by indicating that there were situations where learners abused the available counselling services, thereby making the coordination of the counselling efforts needlessly untenable.

In Zimbabwe, Kufakunesu (2011) undertook a study to scrutinise the attitudes of secondary teachers practitioners towards secondary school learner counselling. The study anchored on several psychological theories and was methodically qualitative in nature. Kufakunesu (2011) employed the descriptive survey research design with questionnaires, interviews and observations as data collection tools. Sixty respondents constituting 52 secondary school teachers and eight school administrators took part in the study. It was revealed that secondary school teachers largely harboured favourable attitudes towards learner counselling. The study by Kufakunesu (2011) was not dominantly focusing on learner counselling done across the gender divide, hence the need for the current study.

Studies by Kufakunesu (2011:24-25) and McGuiness (1998) revealed that sometimes teachers' attitudes towards the counselling of adolescent learners at secondary school level are influenced by the emotionality which accompanies handling adolescents. Such conflicts usually stem from value dissonance on critical matters such as love, sexuality, security, careers and authority (McGuiness, 1998; Ingersoll, 1989). The studies established that sometimes teachers encounter difficulties in according adolescents learners the leeway to make their own choices out of a variety of alternatives as required in professional counselling. According to McGuiness (1998) tension is likely to ensue when classroom practitioners impose their views and sentiments during counselling instead of adopting a non-directive approach as postulated by Carl Rogers in his person-centred counselling approach (McGuiness, 1998). The study by Kufakunesu (2011) gathered that most educators in the sample disputed the hypothetical statement that classroom practitioners who undertake learner counselling run the risk of confronting their own unresolved challenges which they encountered during adolescence and young adulthood. Such findings were in direct contradiction to the claim by Ingersoll (1989) that the counselling of adolescent learners is usually emotion-laden and are avoided by teachers as they are afraid of confronting their own unfinished personal emotional issues. Such conflicting research findings primed the researcher to carry out the current study.

A related study focusing on the effectiveness of Guidance and Counselling programmes in Harare urban primary schools in Zimbabwe was carried by Musiiwa (2014). The study was qualitative in nature and the descriptive survey research design with questionnaires, interviews and observations as data collection tools. Forty people participated in the study. Musiiwa (2014) established that Guidance and Counselling programmes in Zimbabwe were not sufficiently effective as confirmed by the fact that very few learners had

access to specialist counselling. It was also noted by Musiiwa (2014) that numerous factors such as dearth of vital human and material resources needed for guidance and counselling were at play. However, the study by Musiiwa (2014) did not focus on the secondary school settings and more specifically; it did not explore the dynamics of counselling done across the gender divide. The current study is an endeavour to plug the gaps left by the above-stated studies.

Theoretical framework

The study was theoretically grounded in the field of Psychology of Education focusing on Freud's classical psychoanalysis, Erikson's psychosocial theory and Rogers' person-centred theory. Sigmund Freud is the founder and father of the psychodynamic paradigm who advanced the classical psychoanalytic theory (Larsen & Buss, 2008). Among the various principles of Freud's psychoanalytic theory is the idea that people go through a series of five psychosexual stages with the genital stage as the fifth and final stage commencing at approximately at the age of 12 years (Huffman, Vernoy & Vernoy, 2006). This implies that adolescents fall in the genital stage which is characterised by the search for sexual gratification from non-relatives (Mwamwenda, 2004). It is during the genital stage that adolescents instinctively find themselves cuddling, hugging, kissing and engaging in related activities in an attempt to achieve sexual gratification (Lahey, 2009; Mwamwenda, 2004). Erik Erikson is a Neo-Freudian who crafted the psychosocial theory. According to Kufakunesu and Chinyoka (2017) Erikson's psychosocial theory has been rated by numerous scholars as more comprehensive and more convincing than Freud's psychosexual theory because Erikson's theory has eight stages which cover the entire human lifespan. Of relevance to the current study is Erikson's the fifth stage named identity versus role confusion. It is at this stage that adolescents seek an identity with more intensity than in all other stages (Meggett, 2006:163). According to Erikson (1968), adolescents normally struggle with developmental challenges revolving around the development of a sense of mastery, identity, and intimacy (Kufakunesu & Chinyoka, 2017). This implies that adolescents attempt to establish autonomy, management of sexuality and intimacy, and making the right career choices as a way of preparing for adulthood. As already alluded to, it can be safely argued that both male and female adolescents secondary learners need specialist assistance to navigate the diverse challenges associated with the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Karen Horney is a Neo-Freudian whose feminine psychology is one of the early theories which brought about a gender favour to the field of psychology and beyond (Feldman, 2009). Among other things, Horney theorised that the patriarchal nature of society perpetrated a culture in which females were treated as inferior to their male counterparts and the preferential treatment propagated basic hostility and basic anxiety among the female folk (Larsen & Buss, 2008; Huffman, et al, 2006). Horney postulated that females were not necessarily inferior to males but the males were enjoying the cultural privileges which females were deprived of in the name of culture (Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2006; Hayes, 2008; Feldman, 2009). The theory was deemed suitable for the current study because the study focused on counselling contexts involving males who are the apparent beneficiaries of any patriarchal society and female learners who are hypothetically claimed to be at the receiving end of a patriarchal society. On the other hand, Rogers is a humanistic psychologist who developed the person-centred self-theory (Feldman, 2009). Rogers' person-centred theory revolves around giving the counsellee unconditional positive regard, empathy and genuineness (Lahey, 2009). The person-centred theory was considered in the current study mainly because of its direct applicability during formal non-directive counselling (Austad, 2009).

Leading research questions

The study was a scholarly endeavour to generate solutions to the following research questions:

- To what extent do male secondary school teachers have favourable attitudes towards counselling female learners?
- Which factors determine the nature of the attitudes of male secondary school teachers towards counselling female learners?

Research methodology

The research adopted the interpretive research paradigm paired with the qualitative research approach accompanied by the descriptive survey as the research design. According to Braun and Clarke (2013) and Kufakunesu (2011) a descriptive survey research design is an investigation technique in which the researcher targets to describe and interpret the existing phenomenon with reference to issues like effects, attitudes, processes and beliefs. Chinyoka and Kufakunesu (2017) reiterate that a descriptive survey is a qualitative research design in which a researcher attempts to describe and interpret the situations which is obtaining in the form of processes, effects, attitudes and beliefs. The descriptive survey was chosen in the current study because it created a propitious platform for male secondary school educators to openly express their attitudes towards counselling female adolescent learners.

Data was gathered using open-ended questionnaires and telephone interviews. A questionnaire is defined by Kufakunesu and Chinyoka (2017) and Kufakunesu (2011:34) as a document containing relevant items that the researcher intends to give to the respondents. According to Chiromo (2006) a questionnaire is a document containing pertinent questions which the targeted respondents have to respond to as a way of providing information to a researcher in a given inquiry. Therefore, it is safe to define a questionnaire as a list of methodically and carefully structured items prepared by the researcher to trigger responses from respondents during the empirical investigation (Chiromo, 2006; Swartz, et al, 2011:29). The researcher considered it appropriate to use questionnaires because the target respondents who happened to be secondary school teachers were literate professionals who were not expected to have any challenges in interpreting and answering the questionnaire items. Telephone interviews were used as a means of addresses challenges regarding inaccessibility of some target respondents and minimising transport costs. The researcher used the stratified random sampling method to generate a sample of 20 male secondary school teachers based at rural and urban stations in Masvingo. The stratification was done relative teaching experience, age and highest professional qualifications. Braun and Clarke (2013) view stratified random sampling as a sampling method in which a given population is partitioned into non-overlapping subgroups before members of each stratum are selected in proportion of the size of the layer relative to the whole population.

Research findings

The following are the major findings which emerged from the data which was gathered during the empirical investigation:

- Thirty-five percent of the 20 male secondary classroom practitioners who participated in the study expressed positive attitudes towards undertaking learner counselling across the gender divide. They gave a number of reasons to support their self-belief in this regard.
- Five out of the 20 research participants were caution in their approach. They pointed out that they had favourable attitudes towards carrying out counselling involving female secondary school learners who had certain challenges. They remarked that there were certain learner challenges which they were reluctant to handle during counselling sessions involving female learners.
- Forty percent of the research informants were diametrically against conducting learner counselling in which the counselees were female. A long list of reasons was given to substantiate their standpoint.

Discussion of findings

The current study found out that seven out of the 20 male secondary school classroom practitioners who constituted the sample expressed positive attitudes towards counselling female secondary school learners. They argued that they were professionally trained teachers who have been exposed to ways of handling secondary school learners regardless of gender. They attributed their willingness to counsel learners across the gender divide to the fact they were prepared to entertainment people at virtually all developmental stages. These sentiments concurred with the findings of a study by Kufakunesu (2011) which revealed that a properly trained secondary school teacher can counsel both male and female secondary school counselees. They argued that they were keen to undertake counselling across the gender divide because there is legislative evidence suggesting that Counselling is important to all learners in Zimbabwe (Musiiwa, 2014). Three respondents claimed that apart from being professionals, they were family men with daughters whom

they assisted to negotiate the meanders and undulations of adolescents in particular and life in general. Consequently, they viewed helping female secondary school learners just as an extension of the very counselling services which they rendered to their daughters and female adolescent relatives. Four out of the seven informants who expressed positive attitudes towards counselling female secondary school learners indicated that they were quite familiar with the common challenges which females at various developmental stages grapple with. They reported that they came to know much about such challenges through their interactions with their respective spouses. They also reiterated that a counsellor is inspired by the desire to see positive transformation in the life of anyone and everyone regardless of gender. One respondent who appeared to be imbued with enthusiasm to counsel anyone stressed that counselling is a basic human need which must not be determined by variables such as gender since challenges inundate everyone in society regardless of tribe, age, socioeconomic status, religious orientation and even gender (Mpofu, 2006).

One quarter of the 20 secondary school teachers who comprised the sample expressed lukewarm attitudes towards counselling female secondary school learners. More precisely, they indicated that they had favourable attitudes towards counselling female secondary school learners with certain types of challenges. These results contradicted part of the findings by Kufakunesu (2011) and Cooper (2005) in which teachers utterly expressed negative attitudes towards learner counselling. These secondary school teachers specified that they were not hesitant to counsel female secondary learners battling challenges such as bereavement, suicidal tendencies, career indecision, poverty, depression, anger management and inferiority complex. The justification for singling out these challenges was that they were common and even male learners also battled with them. The respondents felt that they were unlikely to get emotionally ambushed when dealing with the above-stated challenges. However, they remarked that there were certain learner challenges which they were reluctant to handle during counselling sessions where female learners are involved. The challenges which the respondents declined to deal with included sticky love relationships, female health issues, sexual abuse cases, religious challenges and conflict resolution. In defence of their opinions, the respondents pointed out that the chief reason for their negative attitudes towards counselling female secondary school learners beleaguered by the stated challenges was lack of counselling expertise. They admitted that attempting to handle such cases with insufficient connoisseurship could cause more harm than good, hence the negative attitudes. These findings were partially agreeable with the remarks by Ingersoll (1989) and McGuinness (1998) who established that classroom practitioners generally avoid counselling adolescents to insulate themselves from getting emotionally entangled in some of the sticky issues brought for counselling. They mentioned that since counselling involved real life issues, it was unethical and immoral to experiment with human beings.

The remaining 40% of the research participants unequivocally pointed out that they harboured negative attitudes towards counselling female secondary school learners. Numerous reasons were advanced for holding such a stance. The issue of the traditional cultural relationships between fathers and their daughters during adolescence and young adulthood was cited as a credible reason for their reluctance to carry out learner counselling involving female secondary school learners. These male secondary school teachers indicated that in the traditional African society, fathers stayed away from the emotional and social dealings of their daughters till after the daughters were married. The fact that aunts, who happened to be female, did the general counselling signals the clumsy situation which can ensue when male teachers attempt to counsel female adolescent learners. The respondents emphasised that the female learners stood to benefit more from counselling services if the counsellors were female. This line of thinking is consistent with what Horney challenged regarding the way females play second fiddle to their male counterparts principally because of the established cultural practices (Kosslyn & Rosenberg, 2006; Huffman, et al, 2003; Hayes, 2008).

Part of the eight respondents who expressed apathy towards counselling female students remarked that their negative attitudes were not limited to counselling female learners but were generic with regard to undertaking learner counselling. They intimated that they believed that they were better positioned to cater for the intellectual needs of all learners in their respective subject specialisations and not to labour with learners' counselling needs. They hastened to remark that schools must employ at least one qualified school counsellor with non-teaching duties. This group of informants reiterated that their negative attitudes towards

counselling were an outcome of the fact they felt that they were not sufficiently qualified to carry out formal counselling. Reference was made to their apparent lack of knowledge of the counselling ethical principles and psychological theories to employ during counselling. These secondary school teachers confessed ignorance of the proper formal counselling techniques which they felt was a necessary pre-requisite for one to attempt to embark on counselling. These sentiments were consistent with Mwamwenda (2004) who regretted that numerous classroom practitioners were not adequately qualified to undertake learner counselling. Moreover, some of the respondents in studies by Kufakunesu (2011) and Cooper (2005) expressed the same sentiments as the basis for their negative attitudes towards carrying out learner counselling.

The eight secondary school teachers who expressed unfavourable attitudes towards counselling female secondary school learners mentioned the high levels of emotional energy which is at play in counselling relationships as the basis for their negative attitudes. They pointed out that they were aware of the fact there is a lot of attachment and bonding between counsellors and counselees and there remained the danger that the counselling relationship could degenerate into something unexpected and worse than the original problem which the counsellor and the counsellee wanted to solve. Human nature is such that whenever people attempt to solve a common problem, they get emotionally attached (Huffman, et al, 2003). So these respondents' negative attitudes emanated from the view that they believed that counselling female learners was likely to interfere with their emotional and moral boundaries. Such a trend, according to the research informants, would cause unnecessary strife between them and their spouses. One of the respondents went further to remark that counselling female learners was actually dangerous to their careers still such an exercise would make them more vulnerable to violating their professional ethics as teachers which stipulate that they should not engage in improper association with school learners. The characteristics of learners at the genital stage as postulated by Freud persuaded the teachers to shun counselling learners of the opposite sex. These respondents actually alluded to the issue of crushes directed on male teachers by female secondary school learners as hinted by Huang and Dong (2019) as well as Oettingen and Mayer (2002). Moreover, the respondents seemed to be aware of the aspect of midlife crisis on their part which could compromise their moral and professional boundaries when they attempt to befriend female learners during counselling sessions (Freund & Ritter, 2009: 582; Tamir, 1989; Levinson, 1978:198).

It also came to the attention of the researcher that the personality attributes and characteristics of the current cohort of adolescents fostered negative attitudes towards female learner counselling on the part of male secondary school classroom practitioners. Six out of the eight respondents who expressed untoward attitudes regarding counselling female secondary school learners regretted that modern adolescents have been exposed to violence, corruption and sexually explicit forms of entertainment due to technological innovations thereby rendering them tricky and unpredictable schemers who are slippery to deal with (Goldin, 2008; Black, 2009; Kufakunesu & Chinyoka, 2017). The respondents remarked that they feared being entangled and trapped by the female learner counselees who may come to them pretending to be in need of counselling yet they may be deliberately trying to toy with the male educators' emotions. The same sentiments agreed with the findings of a study by Cooper (2005) in which some Irish teachers strongly expressed negative attitudes towards counselling learner because they accused the learners of sometimes abusing counselling facilities provided by classroom practitioners in schools.

Conclusions

In the current study, the researcher engaged male secondary school classroom practitioners to gather their attitudes pertaining to the carrying out of counselling involving female adolescent learners. This was done against a background of some cultural limitations in which males do not take a direct and active role to deliberate on the deep personal issues in their daughters' lives since aunts and grandmothers used to play that role. The study revealed that the attitudes of male secondary school teachers towards offering counselling services to female learner were assorted, that is, favourable, lukewarm and unfavourable. Various variables such as adolescents as a volatile developmental stage characterised by female crushes on male adults among other things, impact of technological innovations, midlife crisis, cultural issues, the emotionality associated with counselling adolescents were mentioned as determinants of the attitudes of

male secondary school teachers towards counselling female adolescent learners. The research findings were significantly consistent with the findings of earlier researchers such as Kufakunesu (2011) and Cooper (2005). The findings of the current study were not exhaustive and consequently the researcher made some recommendations to create room for further exploration.

Recommendations

The researcher made the following recommendations as an upshot of the data collected during the researcher's interaction with the research participants:

- Schools should intermittently have cluster workshops and seminars to sharpen, widen and deepen the counselling acumen of classroom practitioners. This would empower the educator to be in a position to carry out fruitful learner counselling regardless of gender and cultural background.
- One recommendation made by the respondents themselves is that schools should have at least one qualified educational counsellor at each station who will be responsible for spearheading guidance and counselling activities in schools.
- Educational institutes need to have both male and female counsellors who can offer specialist counselling services to learners including cases where counselling across the gender divide is not the best option.
- Researchers who are interested in the area of counselling are hereby tasked to undertake a similar study examining the attitudes of female secondary school teachers towards counselling male adolescent learners.
- The need to avail resources for counselling in schools should also be taken seriously by school administrators so that counselling will be taken seriously by all stakeholders.

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