

Effect of Assertive Counselling Programme on Children's Vulnerability to Trafficking in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria

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Abstract: *Due to the high tendency of students falling victims of children's trafficking, this study was designed to determine the effect of assertive counselling programme (ACP) on children's vulnerability to trafficking in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The study used a pretest-posttest randomized control group design. The sample of the study comprised of 156 junior secondary school two (JSSII) students from 6 secondary schools in Uyo Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Instrument used for data collection was Children's Vulnerability to Trafficking Questionnaire (CVTQ) developed by the researchers. The participants in the treatment group were subjected to ACP for seven weeks while those in the control group only received a seven-week conventional counselling. After the intervention programme, both the treatment and control groups were subjected to posttest evaluation. The hypothesis postulated in study was tested at 0.05 level of significance using repeated measure ANOVA. The results show that ACP has strong effect on children's vulnerability to trafficking in the treatment group when compared to those in control group. Based on the results, it was concluded that ACP can be used to help students overcome personality and environmental threats that makes them vulnerable to trafficking.*

Keywords: *Assertive counselling programme, children, vulnerability to trafficking.*

I. Introduction

Human trafficking has been a form of modern slavery and one of the most damaging forms of social injustice that exists today and most children are vulnerable to this act. Vulnerability means a person's state of being liable to submit to manipulations, persuasions and temptations. Someone who is vulnerable can be easily debilitated or affected by something evil. The person is weak and is easily hurt physically and emotionally. Trafficking is the subjection of a person to the real and illegal influence of other persons by using violence or intrigue with a view to all forms of sexual exploitation and assault of minor or trade in abandoned children (Gbadomosi, 2006). It may consist of domestic servitude, illegal and bonded labour, false adoption, sex tourism and entertainment, pornography, organized begging, organ harvesting and other criminal activities. According to United States Agency for International Development [USAID] (1999), trafficking is the procurement or offering of a child for prostitution, production or pornography or pornographic performances are all forms of child trafficking. USAID further explained that child trafficking is a complex developmental issue because it is an economic problem as the vast majority of children seeking to escape poverty are lured into trafficking by the false promise of economic gains. Thus, trafficked persons are victims of violence, threat, ill treatment, incarceration and extortion and they have to pay off considerable debts to meet the cost of their transportation or document.

United Nations (2006) observed that the victims of trafficking are often exploited for commercial sex, including prostitution, pornography and sex tourism. Estes and Weiner (2001) noted that child trafficking involves a pattern of power and control used to extract labour and services for financial or material gain. Children's trafficking is a dangerous business of buying and selling of children, most commonly for the purpose of sexual slavery, forced labour or commercial sexual exploitation for the trafficker or others. This kind of business can occur within a country or trans-nationally and it is a crime against the person because of the violation of the victim's rights of movement through coercion and because of their commercial exploitation (United Nations, 2006).

In Nigeria, child trafficking is a demand-driven phenomenon because of the existence of an international market for children in the labour and sex trade, coupled with an abundant supply of children from poor families with limited or no means for education in a cultural context that favours child fostering (International Labour Organization [ILO], 2002). According to the ILO, parents' unemployment, broken homes, displacement, peer influence and poor living standards could drive children to trafficking and make some youths to choose trafficking business. Further, children who lack access to quality education, good health and other basic needs which make their parents to entrust them into the hands of other family members who are more financially stable are often vulnerable to trafficking.

Akwa Ibom State is a destination for various economic activities. Thus, the exploitation of children in restaurants, bars, domestic servitude, agricultural exploitation, street begging and illegal adoption appears to be

emerging issues in the state. Issues such as disempowerment, social exclusion and economic vulnerability are the result of policies and practices that marginalize entire groups of people and make them particularly vulnerable to being trafficked. And it is terrible when parents may not report to law enforcement agents when their children voluntarily leave their homes without their consent (UNICEF, 2003), especially in cases like illicit international adoption, trafficking for early marriage, recruitment as child soldiers, for begging or as sports such as football or for recruitment for cults. This situation is worrisome not only to the researchers but to parents, teachers, counsellors and government. Moreover, it seems no practical programme has been developed to help Nigerian children resist the trafficking. Efforts so far made by government have been to arrest the traffickers whenever there is a reported case of trafficking and this effort has been abortive several times. Since many incidences of the trafficking has not been reported (UNICEF, 2003) and government has not been able to rescue many victims of this crime, one of the most effective methods of controlling the rate of trafficking might be to instill assertive ability on the children through assertive counselling programme to make them bold enough to refuse any offer, appointment or promise that may make them victims of trafficking given that human traffickers prey on people who are poor, isolated and weak.

Children's trafficking, as well as other social justice issues has become increasingly important to the counselling profession as counsellors realizes that oppression and other forms of injustice have a tremendous impact on the well-being of their clients (Tovar-Gamero, 2005). Children's trafficking is one form of social injustice that barriers many people from becoming actualized in life. Therefore, issues of social justice should be particularly relevant to humanistic counselors because humanism is an ideology that has consistently emphasized the importance of human actualization (Maslow, 1968). According to Bales, 2005, an estimated 27 million victims of human trafficking, which may not be self-actualized exist throughout the world today. Counselling programmes that are geared towards addressing human trafficking are not common all over the world. This lack of specific counselling programme for human trafficking is worrisome because the menace is likely to continue if nothing is done. Therefore, it is the goal of this article to determine how effective assertive counselling programme would be in decreasing the rate of vulnerability to children's trafficking among Nigerian secondary school students.

Assertive counselling programme (ACP) was developed by Otusum Consult, Training and Services (2015) based on the principles of classical conditioning techniques of Pavlov. It is used to help individuals openly express their thoughts and feelings and be bold to 'say what they mean and mean what they say'. The programme is designed to assist individuals to be assertive and stand their ground so as to initiate actions and confront objects they dread. The programme is related to assertive training techniques that many researchers have used successfully. For instance, Topuku (2003) determined that assertive training was effective in boosting adjustment and self-esteem of students in Turkey; Hennessy (2004) found that assertiveness training was effective in increasing assertiveness and self-esteem among adolescent students in Gombe State, Nigeria; Onwuka (2008) established that assertive training was effective in reducing phobia among polytechnic students. It is against this backdrop that this study aimed at determining the effect of assertive counselling programme on children's vulnerability to trafficking in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. Based on this objective, the hypothesis is that: there will be a significant effect of assertive counselling programme on children's vulnerability to trafficking.

II. Methods

Ethical Clearance: The permission to conduct this study was obtained from the Department of Educational Foundations, University of Uyo, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State.

Design: The design of this study is a pretest-posttest randomized control group design.

Participants: The participants in the study comprised of 156 junior secondary school two (JSSII) from 6 secondary schools in Uyo Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria (26 students per school). The students were selected through purposive sampling method. The students were selected by the school counsellors and class teachers based on their observable signs of unassertiveness among the selected students.

Procedure: First, the researchers visited the six selected schools to make arrangement with the principals, counsellors and teachers concerning the study. Each student was assigned a number which was between 1 to 156 and by using a lottery method; the participants were randomly assigned to either treatment or control groups. Both the participants in the treatment and control groups were exposed to pretest (Time 1) at the beginning of the programme. The participants in the treatment group were exposed to assertive counselling programme (ACP) for seven weeks, while those in the control group were not, (n = 78 for each group). At the end of the intervention programme, posttest was administered (Time 2) to participants in the two groups. Four weeks follow up was done and then the test was administered again (Time 3) to confirm the impact of the programme on the participants.

Assertive Counselling Programme (ACP): Subjects who were randomized to this group were taught what assertiveness means, benefits of being assertive, how to be assertive. This programme was developed by Otusum Consult Training & Services (2015) to help people who cannot stand their grounds to defend their rights even when they are wronged or those who cannot speak up in groups or class discussion due to shyness or problem of anticipatory anxiety. The programme helps people to directly and honestly express feelings, emotions and desires. In the present study, the ACP was used to overcome being vulnerable to trafficking.

Measure

Children's Vulnerability to Trafficking Questionnaire (CVTQ): The CVTQ is a 20 item instrument developed by the researchers and used to determine the children's vulnerability to trafficking. The instrument had two sections: A and B. Section A sought for the students' personal information such as age, class, religion, gender while section B focused on measuring the students' vulnerability to trafficking designed on a rating scale of Strongly agree (4), Agree (3), Undecided (2), Disagree (1) and Strongly disagree (0).

The instrument was given to two experts in counselling psychology and one in measurement and evaluation for construct and face validation. The modifications made by these validates were effected before the final draft was made. The instrument has a reliability coefficient of 0.81.

Statistical Analysis: Repeated measures ANOVA statistics was used for data analysis. The decision rule for testing the hypotheses was to reject null hypothesis if the exact probability value (p-value) is less than the 'a priori' probability value (that is, 0.05); otherwise do not reject. The researchers further reported partial eta squared (η_p^2) for this design.

III. Results

Figure 1: Estimated Marginal Means of MEASURE_1

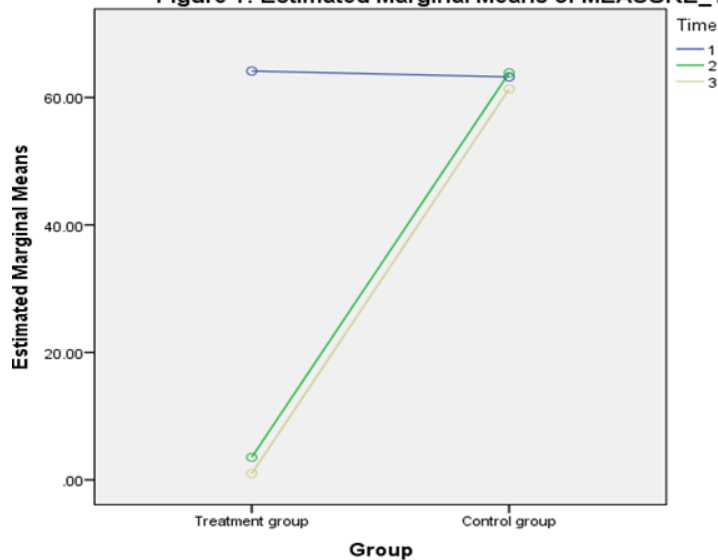


Figure 1 shows the decrease that took place in vulnerability to trafficking among students who participated in the assertive counselling programme. The line graph shows that vulnerability to trafficking was high before the beginning of the intervention (Time 1 measure) as participants in the treatment group had mean score of 64.15±2.13 and those in the control group had mean score of 63.23±1.90. The line graph shows that vulnerability to trafficking remains high at the end of the intervention for the control group (Time 2 measure) (63.85±3.21) but has become reduced for participants in the treatment group (3.53±0.20). During follow-up (Time 3), there was further decrease for participants in the treatment group (0.98±0.23), but the mean score was still high for those in the control group (61.34±1.69).

Table 1: Repeated measure ANOVA showing effect of assertive counselling programme on children's vulnerability to Trafficking in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria in the treatment and control group

Outcome	Control Group, n=78			Treatment Group n=78			df	F	Sig	η_p^2
	Time 1 M(SD)	Time 2 M(SD)	Time 3 M(SD)	Time 1 M(SD)	Time 2 M(SD)	Time 3 M(SD)				
ACP	63.23(1.90)	63.85(3.21)	61.34(1.69)	64.15(2.13)	3.53(0.20)	0.90(0.23)	(1,154)	308.848	.000	.989

As shown in table 1, the repeated measures ANOVA test conducted, the within subject test indicates that there was a significant time effect, F (1, 154) = 308.848, p = 0.000. $\eta_p^2 = 0.99$. The results from the table 1

further demonstrates how individual participant in each groups decrease vulnerability to trafficking over time. Whereas the control group's vulnerability to trafficking remained substantively high over time, the treatment group's vulnerability to trafficking is seen reducing due to exposure to assertive counselling programme (ACP). Based on decision rule, the hypothesis that states: "there will be significant effect of assertive counselling programme on Nigerian children's vulnerability to trafficking", was accepted since the exact probability value of 0.000 is less than the 'a priori' probability value of 0.05.

IV. Discussion

The study determined the effect of assertive counselling programme (ACP) on children's vulnerability to trafficking in Akwa Ibom State, Nigeria. The results of the study show that at Time 1 the participants in both treatment and control groups were vulnerable to trafficking. As the counselling programme began, there were noticeable changes in the degree of children's vulnerability to trafficking in the treatment group. Thus, results show that ACP was effective for enabling the students to overcome being vulnerable to trafficking. The ACP was able to educate and condition the minds of the participants, making them realize how they can be bold and stand for their rights, and defend themselves at all times. Their mindsets were also conditioned to say no to what is not pleasing to them and to report or stand against any threat attempt they may face in life.

The finding of the study support previous studies such as Topuku (2003), Hennessy (2004), Onwuka (2008) that found that assertive training programme was effective in helping individuals overcome personality and emotional problems. It is obvious that ACP can help students, irrespective of their background, to overcome their personal and environmental challenges that make them vulnerable to trafficking.

Limitation of the Study

The researchers observed that it was challenging to make the students to understand their vulnerability to trafficking. Thus, the vulnerability questionnaire was developed using simple grammar to facilitate their understanding. Another limitation observed was on the aspect of the programme implementation because of the tight schedule of the participants; but due to the relevance of the study, the school management had to arrange for the researchers to use the free periods in the school timetables.

V. Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers concluded that Assertive Counselling Programme (ACP) is efficacious in helping to minimize children's vulnerability to trafficking.

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