Counselling Services and Social Homes as Remediators to Challenges of Persons with Disabilities in Nigeria

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Abstract: Persons with Disabilities (PWD’s) in Nigeria are faced with tons of daily challenges. These challenges range from stigmatization, discrimination, rejection and ostracization from family and friends; socialization problems, infrastructural deficit issues, exclusion and welfare needs from the society and government and also; dejection, depression, mood swing and pity from self. All these pose demeaning tendencies to their psycho-socio-cultural wellbeing. This paper seeks to advocate the provision of counseling services and also proper and adequate institutional homecare to help remediate their diverse challenges. It also tasks the legislature in Nigeria to implement policies and laws that creates enabling environment for her citizenry living with disabilities.

Keywords: Challenges, Counselling, Counselling Services, Disabilities, Remediating, Social Homes

Introduction
The United Nations (2016) population ranking placed Nigeria as the seventh most populous nation in the world with 186,987,563 people, a figure that makes her the most populous nation in Africa. Even though there are varying and sometimes conflicting statistics available on persons with disabilities in Nigeria. Most other times, there are no available data. World Report on Disability (WHO, 2011) posits that more than one billion persons in the world live with some form of
disability. The report which holds that 15% of the total world population live with some form of disability, permeate that percentage of the population of a country are living with disability. (WHO, 2011) sees disability as part of human condition. Persons with disabilities range from infants, children, adults and the aged. These individuals, according to (Fuandai, 2010) who because of their unique features and endowment, cannot be adequately and satisfactorily catered for, they come from different home background and some may have special needs to be given special attention. Persons with disabilities are either born with one or more form(s) of disability, whereas there are those who by chance have lost an-ability or acquired a form of disability by whatever means or design including accidents or illnesses. There are a number of challenges that hinder persons with disabilities, and these challenges according to Oladejo & Oladejo (2011), hinder their personal, vocational, academic and social adjustment. Disability is defined by the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development as “a physical or mental impairment that limits (or is perceived to limit) one or more major life activities of a person with such an impairment”. Persons with disabilities ought to have the same rights and privileges like any able-bodied person in the society. Hence, if persons with disabilities must fulfil their potential then, it is important that they are cared for in ways and in environments where they can maximize their potentials.

The Concept of Persons with Disabilities

Persons with disabilities are persons who cannot perform certain functions or in some other cases cannot perform those functions effectively as a result of impairment, an illness or an accident which could be classified as acquired disability. Disabilities could also be as a result of a particular trait from birth which makes it congenital. There is the stereotype that PWD’s are invalids and cannot add value to themselves nor the society they find themselves.

Mahar & Fraser (2012) considers, Acquired brain injury (ABI) the primary cause of disability and they opine that people with ABI do face an array of challenges, which include emotional liability, dis-inhibition, irritability, distractibility, executive dysfunction, memory difficulties, inattention and noticeable changes to personality. Suffice it to mean that PWD have had some sort of injury to their brains which necessitate their known disability. This school of thought favors the medical model of disability, where a disability is traceable to the improper functioning of an organ.


“...people with impairment (physical, sensory) and because of impairment/disability cannot cope with regular school/class organization and methods without formal special education training. This category includes; those who are visually impaired, hearing impaired, physically or health impaired, mentally retarded, emotionally disturbed, speech impaired, disabled in learning and those who have multiple handicaps”.
According to Fuandai (2010), he identified twelve categories of disabilities to include:
(i) Mental retardation
(ii) Learning disabilities
(iii) Emotional and behavioural disorder
(iv) Communication disorders
(v) Hearing loss
(vi) Blindness and low vision
(vii) Physical disabilities
(viii) Autism
(ix) Severe disabilities
(x) Multiple disabilities
(xi) Deaf/blindness
(xii) Gifted and talented

There are various other kinds of disabilities that people live with, according to Omede & Momoh (2016), people with autism, Down syndrome, dyslexia, blindness, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and cystic fibrosis. Persons with disabilities will also include persons with cleft lips, cleft palate, cerebral palsy, port-wine stains and missing limbs. The Federal Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development identified Psychiatric Problems and Albinism as other forms of disabilities.

Models of Disabilities
There are diverse theories that have been postulated by scholars and researchers on disabilities. These models of disability include; the medical, the social, the moral, the divinity and the rehabilitation models. The medical and social models shall be reviewed briefly:

The medical model views disability as occasioned by defects in the body or organs of an individual. This view holds that disability is necessitated by the malfunctioning of the internal organs of the PWD otherwise; if the organs are functional then disability would have been solved. The medical model holds that disability is fixed if the condition of the organ(s) or body of the person with disability is corrected with medical treatment or medical allied equipments.

The social model views disability as a function of the problems in the makeup and attitude of the society in which the PWD live in rather than with the disability itself. Which implies that the disability in itself is not the issue, rather the society is to be blamed for the lack of functionality of the disabled person as it is believed that the disabled can still function optimally, if the needed mechanism and infrastructures are put in place such as to enable the disabled. This model is popularized by the disabled themselves. Lang (2007) opines that this model arose in response to critique of the medical model.

Causes of Disabilities
Disabilities have been said to be either congenital, progressive or acquired in nature.

Congenital disability: describes a disability that exists at birth. It could be genetic or environmental. They are present in the developing fetus, examples include; Down syndrome and Sickle cell disease. Some congenital conditions can be detected by pre-natal screening.

Progressive disability: describes a disability that exists after birth, and progresses overtime. Examples includes Muscular Dystrophy, Multiple sclerosis, Alzheimer disease, also vision and hearing loss that get worse over time. It could be as a result
of an illness, or other environmental factor.

Acquired disability: describes a disability that exists after birth. It could be as a result of an accident, environmental factor, lifestyle choices and / or behaviors. Examples may include Blindness, paraplegic, quadriplegic, paralysis, memory loss, seizure disorder etc.,

**Psycho-socio-cultural Challenges of Persons with Disabilities**

Challenges abound with living and existence. Howbeit, for persons with disabilities; the challenges are more, and coping may equally be tougher depending on the individual. Ameliorating the challenges of PWD’s should be handled with a great measure of seriousness.

Psychological Challenges: These refer to thoughts, feelings and other cognitive challenges that affect the attitude and or behaviour of the human mind. PWD’s face dejection, depression, mood swing and self pity.

Social Challenges: These refer to challenges faced by PWD’s in their daily interaction with other able bodied individuals. For the individual living with a disability, they often will face diverse forms of stigmatization, discrimination, rejection and ostracization from peers, colleagues, family and friends. Unfortunately also, there are no available data for PWD’s and it is a serious issue with having to plan for them.

Cultural Challenges: These refer to challenges inherent in the culture of a people. According to Eskay, Onu, Igbo, Obiyo & Ugwuanyi (2012), causes of disability in Nigeria have includes: “a curse from God; ancestral violations of societal norms; offenses against the gods of the land; breaking laws and family sins; misfortune; witches and wizards; and adultery, among others”. For a culture with some of the above belief system, it would be practically tough and possibly unbearable for PWD to mingle and live freely. Some cultures will stop at nothing in eliminating anyone with a form of disability that is strange to them, as they are seen as ‘bad’ omen.

**Equal opportunities for persons with disabilities**

It is morally wrong to discriminate against persons with disabilities. There is the need for educating the population of any country or people group as to their inter-relationship with persons with disabilities. In Nigeria today, not very many people understand how to relate and meet certain basic needs of persons living with disabilities. For the select few with some understanding in dealing with persons living with disabilities are found among their parents, siblings and caregivers.

In educating people about persons living with disabilities, we should come to the point where we do not say; ‘He is Autistic, rather we should say he is a child with autism.’ There is the need to understand that a child’s disability does not define him/her, same way as persons with disabilities are not defined by their disabilities; the disability they possess may form an important part of their identity. They should not be discriminated against. Persons living with disabilities, especially children; with “long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments” should enjoy the same human rights and freedoms as other children (UNICEF, 2015). In the
same vein, persons with disabilities do have equal rights and privileges as their able-bodied counterparts. Persons with disabilities should and must be granted equal opportunities at school, homes, at the mall or everywhere they find themselves. Persons with disabilities are not to be looked down upon. If they are to have access to equal opportunities; it will be evident in the designs of public infrastructures so they can use them. The transportation system, banks, hospitals and all other public places must be adapted to suit their needs.

When a child is born and diagnosed with a form of disability or the other, that revelation changes or alters the entire lifestyle of that home. It is pertinent to note that there has to be ways of helping the family cope with this sudden change in their lifestyle and to also help the child adjust to the reality of this difference. The child soon knows that he or she is different from other children and that on its own can have a way of directing or re-directing his/her life, actions and activities. Stalker, Taylor, Fry and Stewart (2015), posits that studies about protecting people with disabilities have been intensified for over ten to fifteen years in America. Onwe (2015) asserts that, there has been a global renaissance of the disability rights movement which has tremendously impacted on the Nigerian disability community. All forms of advocacy have been geared towards ensuring that persons with disabilities are granted their rightful place and privileges in the society today.

There is the need to ensure that the plights of persons with disabilities are researched often and needed actions taken towards their care. Neglecting Persons with disabilities has grave consequences, because not all disabilities are congenital. Every child or adult that is today able-bodied can in some form of accident or based on a variety of other factors become disabled. There should be a system in place that ensures their continuous wellbeing. Policies to be made should embrace their needs. Activities of governance should mirror their needs. Their needs and not the needs of the able-bodied should always be of top priority.

Article 7 of The UN Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities states that;

1. States Parties shall take all necessary measures to ensure the full enjoyment by children with disabilities of all human rights and fundamental freedoms on an equal basis with other children.

2. In all actions concerning children with disabilities, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.

3. States Parties shall ensure that children with disabilities have the right to express their views freely on all matters affecting them, their views being given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity, on an equal basis with other children, and to be provided with disability and age-appropriate assistance to realize that right.

‘States Parties’ as referred in the UN Convention, will mean UN member nations; hence Nigeria as a member nation is obligated by this convention to ensure that Persons with disabilities are adequately catered for. According to The United Nation, their rights
should never be infringed upon. Their rights include:

- The right to life, security and protection of law and undisturbed access to the court of law.
- Freedom and protection from slavery and forced labour.
- Right to ownership of property and protection from deprivation of property.
- The Right to vote and be voted for in any political election.
- Freedom of forming and joining any political association.
- Freedom of movement without any restraint.
- Right to education.
- Freedom from unlawful detention, arrest and torture.
- Freedom of expression and of the press.
- The right to a fair hearing.
- Freedom of conscience and of religion.

**The Nigerian Disability Bill**

The Nigeria Disability Bill, a Bill that has been canvassed for by many for many years. The Bill that was meant to ameliorate the plight of the physically challenged in the country is yet to see the light of day as it is yet to be passed into law. Ezigbo (2017) reports that the wife of Kogi State governor, Hajia Amina Bello, whose son is affected by cerebral palsy has asked President Muhammadu Buhari to assent to the Nigeria Disability Bill ahead of the 2017 International Day of Cerebral Palsy. The Disability Bill is said to have been waiting for the president’s assent for some time, especially as it has successfully scaled through both chambers of the National Assembly.

According to (Onogu, 2016), “a segment of the Nigerian society still live on the fringes as a result of disability”, he further stressed that; “the plight of PWD’s in Nigeria is further aggravated due to lack of appropriate laws to ensure their full social integration into society through provision for their economic, social, educational, emotional and psychological needs”.

In developed economies, the database of PWD’s are constantly updated. This allows for proper interaction with PWD’s. There are disabilities laws in place and there are funds that allow the government pay out disability allowances to PWD’s through their families or caregivers targeted at their upkeep. Nigeria should follow same, as the need for such incentive for PWD’s, their teachers, counselors, coaches, care-givers and handlers is long overdue. Such provision, will eradicate the dearth of having handlers who care, teach and nurture PWD’s. Their caregivers are very important and they should be adequately motivated.

According to Onogo (2016):

- a Bill to provide for the comprehensive care for disabled persons in the country was passed by the National Assembly during the administration of ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo. However, the bill titled: “A Bill to Ensure Full Integration of Persons with Disabilities into the Society and to Establish a National Commission for Persons with Disabilities and Vest it with the Responsibilities for their Education, Healthcare, Social, Economic and Civil Rights (Establishment, etc)” never
received the assent of the former president required to make it a law.

When passed into law, the disability bill will ensure that the welfare of persons with disability are taken care of, and that the dignity and respect they deserve are accorded them. It will also ensure that individuals or institutions that infringe on their rights and privileges are brought to book.

**Counselling Services for Persons with Disabilities**

Counselling is a helping profession designed to cater for the needs of different categories of individuals (Gesinde, Adekeye & Iruonagbe, 2011; Alao, 2017). Like every other group of individuals, persons living with disabilities stand a chance at benefiting from services of the helping profession, amongst who are counselors. Counselors are trained professionals, with master’s or doctoral degrees as well as specialized training that could span over two years or thousands of hours of counseling experiences.

It is expected that counselors offer comprehensive counseling plan that addresses achievement as well as career, personal, and social developmental needs (Lan 2012), especially with persons with disabilities. The provision of counseling services for PWD’s should be basic and compulsorily implemented, as it helps to solve a range of intra-personal and inter-personal challenges faced on a daily basis.

Holm-Hadulla & Koutsoukou-Argyrakia (2015) advocated the need for the availability of counseling services and of counselors who should be psychologically qualified academics, who would offer qualified assessments, diagnoses, crisis intervention, individual counseling and counseling in groups, and in many centers and to also offer short-term psychotherapy. Persons with disabilities, should have access to counseling as they are known to be in dire need of counseling services, this is so because the very idea of lacking in some functioning and ability and also been stigmatized by able bodied persons may have the potential of triggering psychological and emotional tension among them as to alleviate relationship problems for which the availability of counseling services is highly advocated.

Studies have shown the need to integrate psychological counseling services into various treatment programs for persons with disabilities (Holm-Hadulla et. al., 2015; Lindsay & Langevin, 2017).

**Types of Counselling Services**

Counselling Services that can be of benefit for persons with disabilities includes:

- **Marriage and Family Counselling:** these are counseling services provided for by marriage and family counselors or therapist, who are trained mental health practitioners in psychotherapy and family systems and are licensed to diagnose and treat mental and emotional disorders in marriage and families. There place in the context of this work is germane because they can provide services for families with children with disability and they can also be relevant in counseling persons with disability who intend to get married either to a partner that is able-bodied or to a disabled partner.
Educational and Career Counselling: these are counseling services provided for by guidance or career counseling professionals, they help individuals or group of individuals understand themselves and the world of school and work. These counseling services are aimed at ensuring that right schooling options, career choices and decisions are made to enhance productivity.

Rehabilitation Counselling: these are counseling services provided by mental health professionals with the aim of enabling disabled persons achieve their goals; in personal life, career and in other areas of their being.

Substance Abuse Counselling: these are counseling services provided for by mental health professionals, who are trained to diagnose and treat individuals who have chemical dependency problems with drugs, alcohol or other substances. Sometimes, persons with disabilities indulge in substance abuse as escape route in handling their day-to-day challenges.

The Need of Counselling Services for Persons with Disabilities
The need of counselling services for persons with disabilities can never be over-emphasized. Lan (2012) defined counseling needs, as expressed desires to talk with a professionally trained counselor about particular problems. Need analysis of PWD’s shows the need for counseling services, as PWD’s face all forms of psycho-socio-cultural challenges enough to demotivate them on a daily basis. There are so many complexities around the lives of PWD’s for which a counseling state of emergency should be declared in their favour. The need for counseling PWD’s would include but not limited to; helping them achieve their completeness.

The job of counseling centers should offer diagnostic assessment, individual counseling, crisis intervention, and group counseling with a view to enhancing social competences and to overcome psychic disabilities (Holm-Hadulla et. al., 2015) and all other kind of challenge that the PWD may be experiencing. Free and accessible counseling services among PWD in Nigeria will in no small measure improve on their self worth. The need for counseling services for PWD should be imminent, as revealed in a study by (Kreß, Sperth, Hofmann & Holm-Hadulla, 2015) where, in a counseling service centre of a given university, it was noted that an average of 56% of the clients who seek help at the counseling center are significantly impaired.

Social Homes for Persons with Disabilities
The UN convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is to establish social homes that cater for the need of Persons with disabilities. Therefore, the need to establish and ensure the proper running and administration of the social home care facilities can never be overstated. (Celik & Ayna, 2014) defined social support as connections between people or groups which serve for improving adaptive adequacy to cope with short-term crises or transitions in lives, long-term difficulties, stresses and deprivation.

It is important that social homes get operational at every local government in Nigeria. The special needs of PWD’s call for concerted efforts by professionals who are into their care.
They can be trained and helped to exert their potentials. The image of Persons with disabilities used as means of livelihood dehumanizes them. They are seen at street corners, market places and in sundry places. People make a living by taking advantage of them, hence dehumanizing them. They are pulled in carts, moved around in wheel chairs for every form of solicitations. All of which has led to some form of physical, sexual and psychological abuses.

Article 26 of The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities addresses habilitation and rehabilitation and it states that:

1. States Parties shall take effective and appropriate measures, including through peer support, to enable persons with disabilities to attain and maintain maximum independence, full physical, mental, social and vocational ability and full inclusion and participation in all aspects of life. To that end, States Parties shall organize, strengthen and extend comprehensive habilitation and rehabilitation services and programmes, particularly in the areas of health, employment, education and social services, in such a way that these services and programmes:
   - Begin at the earliest possible stage, and are based on the multidisciplinary assessment of individual needs and strengths;
   - Support participation and inclusion in the community and all aspects of society, are voluntary, and are available to persons with disabilities as close as possible to their own communities, including in rural areas.

2. States Parties shall promote the development of initial and continuing training for professionals and staff working in habilitation and rehabilitation services.

3. States Parties shall promote the availability, knowledge and use of assistive devices and technologies, designed for persons with disabilities, as they relate to habilitation and rehabilitation.

UN member nations are obligated through her leadership to implement to the latter, the details of the convention.

**The Need for Social Homes for Persons with Disabilities**

Akin, Mariscal, Bass, McArthur, Bhattarai and Bruns (2014), in their study on the implementation of evidence-based intervention on long-term foster care; identified process factors, provider factors, innovation factors, client factors, organizational factors and structural factors as key challenges militating against the implementation framework of foster care. Parents and family members do sometimes get frustrated and are often seen to become less involved in the lives of their family members with some form of disabilities, especially if the disabilities are such as is not common, or with some kind of extra demand to cope with. Persons with disabilities need much more attention and love from their parents, caregivers and social groups. There is the strain and stress that a PWD can have on the structure of a family.

One of the factors facilitating adaptation of people with inefficiencies is provision of support.
services that help to meet their needs (Celik & Ayna 2014). With the current realities in Nigeria today, the need for social homes for PWD is necessary. Parents, families and care givers for PWD can have some respite and most stress or pressure taken off them while they can face their live and have a more befitting input to make in the lives of their family member(s) with disability.

Persons with disabilities must be the priority of the government. Unfortunately, there are no demographics on them in Nigeria. Attempts to get some were efforts in futility. No State, not even the Federal Government can tell about the plight of PWD’s as there are no databases for them. Nigeria today ranks low in the scheme of providing proper care for persons with disabilities. There are opportunities for multidisciplinary studies on Persons with disabilities. The government should spearhead this and consider it a priority. They can fund universities and NGO’s in this direction.

The Government should be in the lead, in the provision of counseling services, social homes and other related benefits, formulating of friendly policies that recognizes the uniqueness of PWD. The government should take the needed steps in ensuring that every registered private sector gets fully involved in part financing of the social homes catering for the needs of people with disabilities. The government can achieve this by ensuring that every corporate body is engaged in corporate social responsibility that reflects in the provision of the necessities of persons with disabilities which may include but not limited to food, equipments, apparatus, aids, schools and homes. There can be tax waivers for organizations that comply with policy if passed if passed into law.

**Experience Case: A Dogged Administrative Secretary Living with Disability**

Abike (Not her real name), got paralysed at age five due to Polio. About three years later her mother passed away, she was the one who had cared for, assisted, supported and helped her adjust to her disability. Her father who at the time was a civil servant could not cope with five other children and with Abike who has now been confined to wheel chair. Growing up was tough and rough for Abike, as she constantly queried and questioned her state. Abike was out of school for years as she could not cope with being able to adapt to the school not having the needed infrastructure. After what looked like an age, she was able to get into school with so much of challenge. Several times her wheel chair got bad and she could only manage it. For about three times, NGO’s or well meaning individuals helped her get a replacement. Life was unbearable, life was tough. She was discriminated upon by persons far and near. Some extended family members avoided her and would not support proximity with their children even though they were relatives.

Fortune smiled on her, as she got her sibling who over time had picked up a lucrative job to support her dream. Abike got through her senior school certificate exams, got admission to one of the tertiary institutions in the state. It was rough, tough and rugged. Attending classes was a tug-of-war, as fellow students had to help her through the stairs when lectures are in classes not on the ground floor. Today, Abike
is a graduate and works for a company as an administrative secretary. She earns a regular income and still copes with a Polio experience that struck her some 30+ years ago.

The point to ponder on is, how many Abikes are out there who are not so fortunate? Every person with a disability should be supported and empowered to achieve their dreams.

**Recommendations**

1. Policy makers should make provisions for Persons with disabilities and they should be helped to benefit more from social services.
2. The availability of counseling services for persons with disability should be priority and be made available at every local government.
3. The entire public should be sensitized /educated on how to relate appropriately with Persons with disabilities.
4. The designs for public amenities, infrastructures, and buildings should have provisions for Persons with disabilities.
5. Proper data should be collected and updated periodically. This would help in proper planning, etc.
6. Research on disability should be strengthened and supported.

7. Persons with disabilities who have needed expertise should be involved in policies and decision making programs.
8. Heightened public awareness and information on the needs of PWD’s.
9. The upper and lower houses of legislature in Nigeria should implement policies and laws that create enabling environment for her population with disabilities.
10. The best interests of persons with disabilities should be the primary concern in making decisions that affect them. Preference should be given PWD’s in job applications processes.

**Conclusion**

All hands should be on deck, in pursuit of a haven for PWD among us. No longer should our actions be passive. The government, the organized private sector and the entire citizenry should be about a genuine transformation in their concern for PWD’s. It is high time we stopped passing the bucks. The Government, the organized private sector, faith-based organizations, organizations, schools, individuals and the entire citizenry should stop paying lip service to the need of social homes and every other need(s) of persons with disabilities.

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