PSYCHOLOGICAL SPACE AS A PROVISION FOR COUNSELLORS’ SAFETY IN COUNSELLING RELATIONSHIP

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Abstract
This paper examined the concept of psychological space as a safety valve for counsellors in a counselling relationship in the digital age. It is the ability of the counsellor to restrain the client from verbalizing that which will create more burn out for the counsellor. As such the writer asked for respondent’s perception of the importance of this concept. A total of 109 level 4 and 5 part time students were used. Three hypotheses were tested and the difference between the mean score was not significant. It implies that all respondents see psychological space as important for the safety of the counsellor. The researchers recommends that the concept be given more sensitization among counsellors.

Keywords: Psychological space, Provision, Counsellors safety, Counselling relationship

Introduction
Professional counselling is an intense and personal relationship between a counselor and a client. While one is a helper, the other is a helpee. An interactive relationship that will help the client become him or herself in order to be a better chooser in the critical life events. In the process of this helping, the process may become risky for the counsellor either due to burn out being experienced or a sign of threat from the client based on the nature of the issue of concern or on the nature by which the client enters counselling.

At this digital age, risk may be created for the counselor by the instrument of digital communication brought into counselling such as voice recording gadgets. Though it is viewed by Nisenholz (1991) that part of the characteristics of an effective counsellor is the ability to take risk. The risk which can endanger the security of a counsellor according to Kolo and Adamu (2001) can emanate from the client through:

a. Rejecting the counsellor and his services due to the point at which a client enters counselling.
b. Taking a direct confrontation with the counsellor on issue of discussion.
c. When the counsellor directly confronts the clients’ irrational thinking and wants to change that thinking.
d. When the counsellor is having a client who comes with wrong understanding of what the process involves, such first timers may have emotional and even personality dispositions that the counselor may not know about.
With these risk factors, the counsellor’s risk-taking may at times lead him or her to safety when he or she is expected to enter into a productive counseling relationship with any client that comes? This is because one of the principles of guidance services is that it is for the benefit all. The response to this question is for the counsellor to develop a psychological space especially with the clients who is being suspected of safety risks until such a time when doubts or focus about such clients can be put in proper perspectives.

Psychological space can be created in many types of relationship. Griffin (2013) talked cost time in psychological space and the language of psychological space and time. Shaw and Gaines (1992) talked about Geometry of psychological space in George Kellys personal construct psychology. All these used the concept of psychological space in various settings. Nelson-Jones (2003:37) also discussed about psychological space in counselling which is the focus of this paper. Using this concept to help counsellors provide internal safety in this digital age since times and seasons are becoming more sophisticated. Among the psychological features of cyberspace are:

a. Temporal flexibility in communication allows two persons in communication time to think about what they want to say and compose their responses exactly the way they want. “this distant in communication enables some people to be more expressive, organized and creative in….. messages”. This is also needed in counseling when the client and the counselor give each other time to respond.

b. Creation of physical distance but not communication distance.

c. No discrimination psychologically. This gives people the opportunity to present their ideas if they choose to do. Though there may be psychological space there is no discrimination to airing their views and opinions.

Psychological space to Shaw and Gaines (1992:3) is a term for a region in which we may place and classify elements of our experience. Elements of experience that could make a counsellor create region from unsafe experiences with previous clients. In counselling psychological space to Nelson-Jones (2003:37) is that ability of the counselor to restrain the client from verbalizing those messages that will make the counselor more intense and less safe in the relationship. To Nelson-Jones that restraining ability can come through the skills of communication which can discourage the client from communicating verbally or non-verbally destructive statements that could make the counsellor unsafe. It is for the safety of both the client and the counselor that demands them to be in psychological contact. Where this safety cannot be ascertained due to behavioral exhibition of the client which the counselor has observed; a need for psychological space becomes imperative.

In this paper, the writers ventured into investigating counsellor especially those in training whether this concept of psychological space as a means of providing safety for them from risky clients is important or otherwise. Pursuance to this, the following objectives are presented.

1. To investigate whether gender has influence on the importance of psychological space when counseling.
2. To find out the level in which counsellor-in-training has any influence on the importance of psychological space.
3. To find out the influence of age on the psychological space in the counselling.
The above objectives are then translated into research hypotheses of which the following emerge.

1. There will be no significant difference between the male and female respondents on the importance of psychological space in counselling relationship.
2. There will be no significant difference in the level in which counsellor-in-training has influence on the importance of psychological space.
3. There is no significant difference in the influence of age on the psychological space in counselling.

**Methodology**

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design. An instrument termed Psychological Space Assessment Scale (PSAS) developed by the writers in 2015 was used. The instrument has two main sections. The Biodata and the main scale: the main scale has two sections, the qualitative and quantitative. Each has 15 items and to be responded to using a five-point scale. The items were mainly generated using Nelson- Jones (2000) description of psychological space in counselling. With this, the construct and content validities are high. A preliminary reliability using split-half method gave a Cronbach estimate of 0.85 for the entire scale. This estimate is high enough to be accepted as reliability evidence for any measurement scale in behavioural sciences.

Two statistical analysis were used to analyze the responses. The t-test statistics was used for hypotheses 1 and 2 for there were two variables in comparison while Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to analyzed hypothesis three.

**Results**

**Hypothesis One**: There will be no significant difference between the male and female respondents on the importance of psychological space in counselling relationship.

t-test was conducted and the result is hereby presented in table one below.

**Table 1: Difference between Male and Female Respondents on Psychological Space**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>11.42</td>
<td>31.33</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>107.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is indicated in table 1 that no significant difference exists between males and females in the importance attached to psychological space security during counseling relationship. This implies that both males and females viewed this psychological space as of equal importance.

**Hypothesis Two**: There will be no significant difference in the level in which counsellor-in-training has influence on the importance of psychological space.

The result of the analysis is as presented in table 2 below.
Table 2: Analysis of Responses on Psychological Space

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>t-value</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>109.84</td>
<td>33.44</td>
<td>107</td>
<td>3.28</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>112.03</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From table 2, it is clear that there is no statistical difference between the two levels. The level 5 students only had a higher mean score than level 4 students.

**Hypothesis Three:** There is no significant difference in the influence of age on the psychological space in counselling.

The responses were analyzed and the result is presented in table 3 below.

Table 3: Result of responses from various age groups of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sum of Square</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>Mean Square</th>
<th>F-value</th>
<th>Decision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between Groups</td>
<td>2924.949</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>974.983</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within Groups</td>
<td>127109.252</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>1210.564</td>
<td>.805</td>
<td>Not significant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>130034.202</td>
<td>108</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hypothesis three is also retained for there is no significant difference among the various age groups of respondents on the importance of psychological space for security in the counselling process. This means that all the age groups see the importance of psychological space as a means of security in their relationship with clients.

**Discussion of Findings**

All the hypotheses on gender, level of studies and age were retained due to the result indicating no significant difference either, among or between the variables tested. A possible explanation to this finding maybe what Kelly (1995) in his theory of psychology of personal construct postulated that a person’s processes are psychologically characterized by the way in which he anticipates events. In this case the respondents all being counselors-in-training might have anticipated that a scale of this nature is trying to ensure one’s credibility to certain concepts in order to understand one’s behavior hence they responded in a similar direction. This is why Shaw and Gaines (1992) also emphasized that when people are seen as “personal scientist” in anticipating the world, they develop techniques where this anticipatory modelling becomes reflexively applied to the self. This is to say in Kelly’s (1995) statement “a person anticipates events by constructing their replications. As people are driven by the need to cope with coming events in the environment their behaviors begin to emerge from that event they are anticipating.

All the respondents irrespective gender, level of studies and age differentials responded to the measuring statement not that they had a fore knowledge of the items but rather the responses came into being through a process of construction which they create a space in which they place the elements called items as they come to interpret them. The concept of psychological space through the items generate a way of providing a coordinated system for the experience of the respondents.
There is no difference between the different levels of the respondent’s educational pursuit. This can be possibly explained that because both levels (i.e. level 4 and 5) might have gone through substantial learning experience in counselling program and that learning has exposed the two levels to different aspects of counselling. This understanding and level of awareness about the counselling relationship might have caused them not to be significantly different in matters that demand their responses to counselling relationship. Learning to Lauver and Harvey (1997) could make one consciously competent hence making one build confidence in their role as counsellors at both levels hence their responses makes no difference in how much importance they attach to psychological space as a means of providing security. This learning experience to Kolo (2013) could make the counsellor more patient with the client because he or she has learnt in the course of being taught that the client can come into the relationship with different understanding but the counsellor’s patience and ability to adjust to the client’s expectation. This can bring about reciprocal relationship which counselling is all about. In essence, the lack of significant difference can be attributed to the level of learning that has taken place in the two levels used in the study.

Conclusion
As observed by Doyle (1998) every counsellor that wants to be effective with clients must be ready to demonstrate willingness to be involved in the issue that has brought the client to the counselling relationship. This involvement to him must include the effort to bring as much of oneself as necessary into the helping relationship and to communicate to the client that nothing is more important at that moment as the client. This can be risky to the counsellor’s safety with the client especially when the client knows that the counsellor has thrown all he or she is into the relationship. It is every human need to feel safe and secured and live in a non-threatening environment and relationship. As much as there could be external safety or security measures provided to make one feel comfortable to do his or her job, there should be internal safety valve developed by counsellors and clients to safeguard themselves both psychologically and physically. Individuals have a right to protect themselves and this is what a counsellor can do through psychological space.

Recommendations
On the basis of this complete involvement and based on the findings from the responses of these would-be-counsellors on psychological space, it is recommended that:

1. A more deliberate effort be made by counselor educators to train the counselors more on their own safety or security during counseling interactions.
2. The concept of psychological space as a security tip for counsellors should be made more on issues of teaching in the program.
3. Workshops on skills training for even the counselling practitioners and educators on the concept of psychological space be mounted both at the national and state levels so that it becomes an intentional concept known and understood among counselors.
References


