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PERCEPTION OF COUNSELLORS' BEHAVIOUR ON THE TREATMENT OF DRUG-ADDICTED CLIENTS IN MINNA REHABILITATION CENTER, NIGER STATE

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the perception of counsellors' behaviour on the treatment of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center, Niger State. Guided by two objectives, and two null hypotheses, the study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which enabled the collection of information from both counsellors and clients without manipulating variables. The population comprised 261 respondents, consisting of 106 counsellors and 155 registered drug-addicted clients. From this, a sample size of 155 was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's sampling table and selected through simple random sampling technique to ensure representation. Two researcher-developed instruments were used for data collection: the Perceived Influence of Counsellors' Behaviour Questionnaire (PICBQ) and the Treatment of Drug-Addicted Clients Questionnaire (TDACQ). These measured counsellors' behavioural attributes such as empathy, and non-judgmental attitude, along with treatment outcomes including adherence, coping ability, craving reduction, readiness to change, and relapse control. The instruments were validated by experts, yielding a strong Content Validity Index of 0.89, and reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.82 from a pilot study. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse demographic data and research questions, while Chi-square tested the hypotheses at 0.05 significance level. Findings revealed that counsellors' interpersonal qualities greatly shaped recovery outcomes. Empathy enhanced adherence, and non-judgmental attitudes promoted openness to change. The study concluded that effective rehabilitation outcomes depend largely on counsellors' professional conduct and interpersonal skills. It recommended regular training to enhance counsellors' behavioural attributes, consistent ethical practice, avoidance of stigmatization, and prioritizing counsellor-client relationship quality in evaluating treatment effectiveness. It further emphasized integrating counsellors' behavioural qualities into drug rehabilitation programmes as essential components for improving recovery outcomes.

Keywords: Counsellors' behaviour; Drug addiction; Rehabilitation; Empathy; Treatment outcomes; Nigeria.

Introduction

Substance abuse continues to be one of the most serious public health challenges across the world, especially in developing nations like Nigeria. Drug addiction not only endangers the physical and mental well-being of affected individuals but also disrupts family structures and threatens community stability (UNODC, 2023). In response to this growing problem, rehabilitation centers have become essential for supporting individuals battling addiction. Among the most critical aspects of treatment in these facilities is counselling particularly the way counsellors interact with clients. The behavioural approach counsellors adopt can significantly influence treatment outcomes.

The behaviour of counsellors plays a central role in the success or failure of rehabilitation efforts. Their approach characterized by empathy, effective communication, a non-judgmental attitude, and professional competence has a direct impact on clients' motivation to participate in therapy and remain committed to their recovery (Morrison et al., 2022). When counsellors show genuine empathy and compassion, they foster a safe and trusting environment. This trust encourages clients to open up and feel understood an essential foundation for initiating meaningful change (Rogers, 2021; Okafor & Balogun, 2023).

Clear and effective communication is another critical component. It allows counsellors to explain treatment goals, give feedback, and help clients gain insights into their behaviour. In contrast, poor communication can lead to confusion, resistance, and even cause clients to abandon their treatment (Eze & Ojo, 2022). A non-judgmental approach is equally important it helps reduce the stigma and shame many clients carry, promoting emotional safety and encouraging psychological healing (Ibrahim & Musa, 2023). When clients trust their counsellors and believe that their confidentiality is respected, they are more likely to disclose sensitive personal information (American Counselling Association, 2022).

Professional competence both in theory and practice is another vital element. Counsellors must be equipped to customize treatment to fit each client’s unique situation. Their availability and responsiveness to clients' emotional and therapeutic needs can also strengthen clients’ motivation and support their long-term recovery (Nwachukwu & Adeyemo, 2023). Treatment outcomes for drug-addicted clients, which serve as the dependent variable in this study, can be measured in several ways. Active client participation in therapy is often one of the earliest signs of effective counselling. When counsellors demonstrate positive behavioral traits, clients are more likely to engage meaningfully in the treatment process (Chima & Ekanem, 2021). Successful counselling is also reflected in reduced substance use and fewer relapses, indicating that clients are learning healthier coping strategies and adjusting their behaviours. Improvements in mental health such as reduced anxiety and depression, and improved self-esteem are further signs of successful treatment (Ogunleye et al., 2023). Behavioural changes, including better interpersonal skills and more

constructive life choices, are often linked to the quality of counselling received. Ultimately, successful rehabilitation is marked by a client's ability to reintegrate into society through employment, restored relationships, and avoidance of criminal relapse.

Counsellors are trained professionals who assist individuals in understanding and resolving personal, social, emotional, and psychological challenges. Their role is centered on helping clients explore concerns, develop coping strategies, make informed decisions, and improve their overall well-being. Counsellors operate in various settings such as schools, rehabilitation centers, hospitals, correctional facilities, and private practices. According to Okobiah and Okorodudu (2021), counsellors are instrumental in promoting mental health and personal development by facilitating self-understanding and growth in clients through a supportive and structured relationship.

The behaviour of counsellors refers to the consistent patterns of action, communication, attitude, and emotional expression they exhibit during counselling interactions. This includes their levels of empathy, warmth, genuineness, respect, patience, non-judgmental attitude, and ethical conduct. These behaviours play a essential role in shaping the therapeutic alliance between the counsellor and the client, which is considered a cornerstone of effective counselling outcomes (Alao & Adebowale, 2022). A counsellor's behaviour can either facilitate or hinder the counselling process depending on how professionally and ethically they manage client interactions. Research emphasizes that counsellors' behaviour, particularly empathy, active listening, and unconditional positive regard, significantly influences the success of therapeutic interventions. Igbokwe et al. (2023) highlight those counsellors who exhibit supportive and ethical behaviour contribute greatly to client trust, engagement, and willingness to disclose sensitive issues. Furthermore, the behavioural attributes of counsellors such as punctuality, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity also affect clients' perceptions of the counselling process and their commitment to change (Nwankwo & Ogidi, 2022). In addiction treatment and rehabilitation settings, for instance, counsellors' behaviour is crucial in motivating clients towards recovery. Consistent demonstration of compassion, respect, and professional guidance fosters an environment of safety and support, which is essential for individuals dealing with substance use disorders (Ogunyemi & Bamigboye, 2021).

Drug-addicted clients refer to individuals with a compulsive and destructive dependence on psychoactive agents like alcohol, cannabis, cocaine, opioids, or prescription medicines. Addiction is defined by the failure to abstain from a substance even with adverse effects on a person's physical health, mental condition, social interactions, and everyday functionality (WHO, 2025). Drug addiction is today understood to be a chronic relapsing brain disorder with an impact on brain activity particularly in areas concerning decision-making, self-regulation, and behavioural control (NIDA, 2022). Drug-addicted clients frequently present with a diverse set of complex psychological and social problems such as anxiety states, depression, unemployment, family

disintegration, and crime. These clients usually need specialized intervention for a successful recovery. Drug-addicted clients presenting in rehabilitative contexts according to Culbreth (2023) refer to clients who are in formal treatment for their problems of substance use and who frequently receive multidisciplinary support involving counsellors, psychologists, medical professionals, and social workers.

Drug addiction therapy is a systematized and combined endeavor which aims at empowering an individual to refrain from drug use, weather withdrawal symptoms, address existing mental health issues, and lead a salutary drug-free life. Treatment may be of a pharmaceutical kind, a psychotherapeutic type, or a combination of these. Typical interventions include detoxification, individual counseling, group therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT), motivational interviewing, and relapse prevention planning (UNODC, 2023). Although effective treatment is client-centered, holistic, and individual-specific, counsellors play a significant role in this context through providing therapeutic assistance, promoting behavioural alteration, and enabling the client with coping skills. Rowe and Grills (2023) argue, the effectiveness of treating addiction mainly focuses on the client's motivation along with a high-quality therapeutic relationship between the client and counsellor. Treatment isn't concluded once drug use stops but involves continuation with long-term follow-up as well as support systems for sustaining recovery and discouraging relapse. According to Luthar and Walsh (2025), continuous counselling, peer support groups, vocational skills training and family therapy constitute the major elements of a sustainable recovery program for clients with drug addiction.

Empathy plays a powerful role in behaviour modification because it allows the counsellor to truly step into the client's world and understand what drives their actions, struggles, and choices. When a counsellor approaches behaviour change with empathy, the client feels seen, heard, and respected rather than judged or criticised. This emotional safety is often the first step toward genuine change, especially for individuals who may already feel misunderstood or rejected (Okobiah & Okorodudu, 2021). In behaviour modification, empathy helps the counsellor identify the underlying needs or emotions behind unwanted behaviours. For instance, a client's aggression might stem from fear, insecurity, or past trauma. Instead of focusing solely on "stopping" the aggression, an empathetic counsellor works with the client to address these root causes, making change more sustainable. By validating the client's feelings and showing understanding, the counsellor encourages openness, which allows for honest conversations about triggers, challenges, and possible solutions (Rogers, 2021).

Empathy greatly shapes a counsellor's behaviour because it enables them to genuinely understand and connect with clients' feelings, thoughts, and perspectives. When counsellors show empathy, they actively listen without judgment, reflect the client's emotions accurately, and respond in ways that make the client feel understood and valued. This not only fosters trust and openness but also encourages deeper self-disclosure, which is essential for effective therapy (Clark, 2019). Empathy

also makes the change process more collaborative. Clients are more likely to accept guidance and practice new behaviours when they feel the counsellor is an ally rather than an authority figure imposing rules. In fact, research shows that empathetic engagement increases motivation, builds trust, and enhances the likelihood of long-term behavioural change (Elliott et al., 2021). Ultimately, empathy doesn't just soften the approach to behaviour modification it makes it more effective. It transforms the process from simply "correcting" behaviour to helping a person grow, heal, and replace harmful patterns with healthier ones in a supportive and respectful environment.

Moreover, empathetic behaviour enhances client engagement in the treatment process. When clients perceive their counsellors as understanding and compassionate, they are more motivated to participate actively in their recovery journey. Empathy can also reduce resistance to treatment; clients are less likely to push back against interventions when they feel that their experiences are acknowledged and validated. This collaborative approach fosters a sense of partnership in the recovery process, encouraging clients to commit to their treatment plans (Ogbu & Eze, 2023). In addition to promoting engagement, empathy facilitates emotional processing, which is vital in addressing the complexities of addiction. Counsellors who empathize can help clients explore and articulate the emotions tied to their substance use, such as guilt, shame, and fear. By normalizing these feelings, counsellors can reduce the sense of isolation that often accompanies addiction, creating space for healing. This emotional exploration is essential for clients to understand their behaviors and motivations, paving the way for meaningful change (Sharf, 2020).

A counsellor's non-judgmental attitude can make a profound difference in the treatment of drug-addicted clients because it creates a safe, shame-free space where individuals feel accepted despite their struggles. Many people battling addiction have already faced harsh criticism, rejection, and stigma from society, which often leads to guilt, isolation, and reluctance to seek help (Okon & Nwachukwu (2023). When a counsellor approaches them without moral condemnation focusing on understanding rather than blaming, it sends a powerful message: "You are more than your addiction, and change is possible." This attitude encourages openness. Clients are more likely to share the truth about their substance use, relapses, or risky behaviours when they know they won't be met with scorn. Such honesty allows the counsellor to address root causes, triggers, and patterns more effectively, leading to better-tailored treatment strategies (Hser et al., 2022). A non-judgmental stance also builds trust, which is essential for maintaining long-term engagement in therapy a critical factor in recovery from substance use disorders (Kelly et al., 2023). Substance use disorders often carry a heavy burden of societal stigma, which can intensify feelings of shame among those seeking help. Counsellors who adopt a non-judgmental approach help to alleviate this shame, creating a space where challenges can be discussed freely. By reducing stigma, they empower clients to confront their issues without the additional weight of self-blame. This acceptance also encourages self exploration, allowing clients to reflect on their behaviours and motivations without fear of criticism. Through this process, they can develop greater self-

awareness and insight, both of which are essential for personal growth and long-term recovery (Okon & Nwachukwu, 2023).

Rehabilitation is defined as "a set of interventions designed to optimize functioning and reduce disability in individuals with health conditions in interaction with their environment". Put simply, rehabilitation helps a child, adult or older person to be as independent as possible in everyday activities and enables participation in education, work, recreation and meaningful life roles such as taking care of family. It does so by working with the person and their family to address underlying health conditions and their symptoms, modifying their environment to better suit their needs, using assistive products, educating to strengthen self-management, and adapting tasks so that they can be performed more safely and independently. Together, these strategies can help an individual; overcome difficulties with thinking, seeing, hearing, communicating, eating or moving around (W H O, 2025).

Rehabilitation centres are structured facilities created to support individuals in overcoming various physical, psychological, or behavioural challenges that disrupt their health, relationships, and overall well-being. In the specific case of drug addiction, these centres serve as safe, therapeutic environments where people can break free from substance dependence, address the root causes of their addiction, and develop the skills needed to live a drug-free and productive life. They are designed with the understanding that recovery is a gradual, multi-dimensional process one that goes beyond simply stopping drug use to restoring mental, emotional, social, and sometimes spiritual balance (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime [UNODC], 2023).

Rehabilitation centre is often a place of hope and second chances. Many clients who enter have experienced years of hardship broken family ties, job loss, financial struggles, health problems, legal issues, and deep emotional pain (Eze & Adeyemo, 2023). Outside society may have labelled them as failures or outcasts, but within the rehabilitation setting, they are seen as individuals with potential for healing and transformation (Nwachukwu & Okolie, 2021). This non-judgmental atmosphere plays a critical role in motivating change and reducing the feelings of shame and isolation that often keep people trapped in addiction. Core strength of rehabilitation centres is their structured, supportive environment. Here, daily life is carefully organised to promote stability and healthy habits regular sleeping hours, nutritious meals, physical activity, and therapeutic activities. Triggers for drug use are minimised, while positive social interactions are encouraged (Akinwale, 2023). Trained professionals, including counsellors, medical staff, psychologists, and social workers, work together to address the client's needs holistically. This often includes medical detoxification to manage withdrawal symptoms, individual counselling to explore personal struggles, group therapy to foster peer support, vocational training to prepare for reintegration into the workforce, and sometimes spiritual or cultural programmes to strengthen identity and purpose (Koob & Colrain, 2022).

Statement of the Problem

Drug addiction is a major public health issue in Nigeria with a destructive impact on individuals, families, and society in general. At Minna Rehabilitation Center in Niger State, an increasing number of clients are admitted for treatment for substance abuse disorder every year. Although medicines and psychological therapy are routinely provided, the contribution of counsellors especially their behaviour has yet to be adequately examined in the context of treatment efficacy. Behaviour of counsellors like empathy, non-judgmental attitude, vocational and life skills training, supportive behaviour approach, and encouragement provides an important contribution towards establishing trust, alliance for therapy, and motivational enhancement for the recovery of clients. However, initial observations and unreliable reports suggest counsellors' behaviour heterogeneity for variable treatment outcome with a few clients' relapse shortly after discharge or being poorly engaged throughout the rehabilitation period. In spite of the centrality of counsellor-client relationships in therapy contexts, very little empirical work within the Nigerian context or more specifically within Minna Rehabilitation Center examines the influence of counsellors' behaviour on the recovery and reintegration of drug-addicted clients. This omission prevents the formulation of evidence-based interventions aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of counselling and overall rehabilitation outputs. Thus, this survey aims to explore the perception of counsellors' behaviour on the treatment of drug-addicted patients at Minna Rehabilitation Center, Niger State. Through knowledge of counsellor behaviour's effect on client motivation, engagement, and progress in recovery, the study hopes to contribute findings which shall be used in informing effective counselling practices and boosting the efficacy of addiction treatment services in the state.

Objectives of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate perception of counsellors' behaviour on the treatment of drug addicted clients in minna rehabilitation center, Niger state. Specifically, the objectives of the study include:

1. To examine the perception of counsellors' empathy on the treatment of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center of Niger State.

2. To investigate the perception of counsellors' non-judgmental attitude on the treatment of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center of Niger State.

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses were tested at a 0.05 level of significance.

H_{01}: There is no significant perception of counsellors' empathy on the treatment of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center of Niger State.

H_{02}: There is no significant perception of counsellors' non-judgmental attitude on the treatment of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center of Niger State.

Methods

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, which enabled the collection of information from both counsellors and clients without manipulating variables. The population comprised 261 respondents, consisting of 106 counsellors and 155 registered drug-addicted clients. From this, a sample size of 155 was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's sampling table and selected through simple random sampling technique to ensure representation. Two researcher-developed instruments were used for data collection: the Perceived Influence of Counsellors' Behaviour Questionnaire (PICBQ) and the Treatment of Drug-Addicted Clients Questionnaire (TDACQ). These measured counsellors' behavioural attributes such as empathy, trustworthiness, non-judgmental attitude, rapport maintenance, and active listening, along with treatment outcomes including adherence, coping ability, craving reduction, readiness to change, and relapse control. The instruments were validated by experts, yielding a strong Content Validity Index of 0.89, and reliability was confirmed with a Cronbach Alpha coefficient of 0.82 from a pilot study. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse demographic data and research questions, while Chi-square tested the hypotheses at 0.05 significance level.

Results

Test of the Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses formulated were tested at 0.05 level of significance:

Ho_1: There is no significant perception of counsellors' empathy on treatment of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center of Niger State.

Table 1: Chi-square Test for Empathy and Treatment Outcomes of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center of Niger State.

Variable	χ^2	Df	p-value	Decision
Empathy	28.62	3	0.004	Reject H_{O1}

Interpretation: The Chi-square test result on counsellors' empathy and the treatment outcomes of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center shows a Chi-square value of 28.62 with 3 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.004. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis (which stated that there is no significant influence of empathy on treatment outcomes) was rejected.

H_{02}: There is no significant perception of counsellors' non-judgmental attitude on treatment of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center of Niger State.

Table 2: Chi-square Test for Non-judgmental Attitude and Treatment Outcomes of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center of Niger State

Variable	χ^2	Df	p-value	Decision
Non-judgmental Att.	18.22	3	0.032	Reject H_{O2}

Interpretation: The Chi-square test result for the relationship between counsellors' non-judgmental attitude and the treatment outcomes of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center shows a Chi-square value of 18.22 with 3 degrees of freedom and a p-value of 0.032. Since the p-value is less than the 0.05 level of significance, the null hypothesis (which stated that there is no significant influence of non-judgmental attitude on treatment outcomes) was rejected.

Discussion of Findings

This study has established that all two counsellor behaviours, empathy, and non-judgmental attitude, exercise significant influence on the treatment of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center of Niger State. This underscores the important role of counsellors' interpersonal qualities in fostering positive treatment outcomes and aligns with global best practices in addiction counselling, which highlight the therapeutic relationship as a basis of successful recovery. Empathy was found to be a fundamental factor influencing rehabilitation outcomes. Clients who perceive their counsellors as empathetic are more motivated to adhere to treatment, as empathy allows them to feel understood, valued, and less stigmatized. This result is consistent with Okafor and Balogun (2023), who argued that empathy builds trust and openness in counselling. International literature also supports this finding. For instance, the American Psychological Association (APA, 2021) stresses that empathy is a critical component of effective psychotherapy, as it enhances client disclosure and deepens therapeutic alliance. Similarly, the World Health Organization (WHO, 2025) has emphasized that empathetic counselling reduces stigma and encourages individuals with substance use disorders to seek and remain in treatment. Within the Nigerian rehabilitation context, this implies that counsellors must deliberately cultivate empathy as a professional skill to bridge the gap between clients' vulnerabilities and their willingness to recover.

The study further revealed that a non-judgmental attitude significantly enhances recovery outcomes. Clients who feel accepted without criticism are more open to behavioural change and more motivated to embrace healthier coping strategies. This finding supports Akinwale (2023), who argued that unconditional acceptance reduces stigma and facilitates progress in counselling. Addiction is often associated with social stigma, which can lead to shame, guilt, and resistance to treatment. A non-judgmental approach therefore creates a safe space where clients feel respected and empowered to share their struggles without fear of condemnation. International evidence also reinforces this position. WHO (2025) emphasizes that non-judgmental care is essential to

addressing the stigma associated with substance use disorders and to promoting recovery-oriented systems of care. Studies in the United States and Europe (Ogbu & Eze, 2023) have equally shown that clients who experience non-judgmental support are more likely to sustain recovery and avoid relapse. This indicates that Nigerian counsellors must consciously avoid stigmatizing attitudes in their practice if rehabilitation efforts are to succeed.

The findings of the study showed that:

1. The study revealed that counsellors' empathy has a significant influence on the treatment of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center. Clients who perceive their counsellors as empathetic are more likely to adhere to treatment and experience positive recovery outcomes.

2. The result revealed that counsellors' non-judgmental attitude significantly affects the recovery process of drug-addicted clients. Clients who feel accepted without criticism are more open to change, which facilitates recovery and reduces resistance to treatment.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that:

This study set out to investigate the influence of counsellors' behaviour on the treatment of drug-addicted clients in Minna Rehabilitation Center of Niger State. From the findings, it can be concluded that counsellors' interpersonal qualities and professional conduct play a central role in shaping the recovery outcomes of clients. Specifically, counsellors' empathy was found to promote adherence to treatment, as clients who feel understood and cared for are more willing to participate fully in the rehabilitation process. Similarly, the study confirmed that a non-judgmental attitude on the part of counsellors significantly influences recovery, as clients who are accepted without criticism become more open to change.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Rehabilitation centers should organize regular training and professional development workshops aimed at strengthening counsellors' skills in empathy, rapport building, and active listening.

2. Counsellors should avoid stigmatizing or criticizing clients. Instead, they should provide unconditional positive regard and acceptance, which helps clients feel safe and valued.

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