

Assessment of Pastoral Counseling Service Delivery among Christian Faithful in God's Care Missions, Okpo Kogi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper presents an Assessment of Pastoral Counseling Service Delivery Among Christian Faithful through a focused case study of God's Care Missions, Okpo (Kogi State, Nigeria). It considered the impact and effectiveness of pastoral counseling. A mixed-methods approach was used to collect data from 35 participants who received pastoral counseling services. The findings suggest that pastoral counseling has a significant impact on the spiritual and emotional well-being of individuals, with 80% reporting improved spiritual well-being and 82.9% reporting improved emotional well-being. Spiritual struggles were the primary reason for seeking pastoral counseling (51.4%), followed by trauma and crisis (28.6%). The study highlights the importance of addressing spiritual needs in counseling and provides recommendations for improving the delivery of pastoral counseling services, including enhancing training and monitoring for pastoral counselors and increasing access to services. The paper concludes with recommendations for strengthening pastoral counseling through formal training. The findings have implications for the development of spiritually integrated counseling programs in faith-based organizations.

Keywords: Pastoral counseling, God's Care Missions, spiritual, well-being, faith-based, organizations.

Introduction

Contemporary societies face a complex constellation of psychosocial problems—depression, anxiety, family breakdown, youth alienation, substance misuse, and grief from socioeconomic pressures. In many communities, faith-based churches remain the primary sites of help-seeking. Pastoral counseling has therefore grown in prominence because of its impacts on the spiritual well-being of people as Hill & Pargament (2003), rightly observed, "Spirituality is a critical aspect of human functioning, and its neglect can lead to spiritual struggles and decreased well-being." This paper explores why pastoral counseling is necessary today and how it functions in practice, using God's Care Missions as an illustrative case. The study combines a literature-driven conceptual analysis and Interviews with pastoral counselors, clients, other stakeholders and observations of the organization's operations. Pastoral counseling integrates psychological principles with theological resources to support persons' emotional, relational and spiritual well-being. It typically includes listening, scripture-based guidance, prayer, and referral to professional services as needed. American Association of Pastoral Counselors (2020), defined pastoral counseling as "a process in which a trained pastoral counselor uses theological and psychological insights to help individuals, couples, families, and groups to cope with spiritual and emotional struggles" Koenig (2012) asserted "Spirituality is a vital aspect of human health, and its integration into healthcare can improve mental and physical well-being". Pastoral counseling offers a unique and valuable approach to addressing the mental, emotional, and spiritual needs of individuals in the present generation

God's Care Missions is an incorporated religious organization with headquarters in Okpo, Kogi State, Nigeria. It is an interdenominational rural mission committed to reaching the lost and depopulating hell through evangelism, conferences, revival programs, and healing services. Founded by Evangelist Sunday Oguiche, the mission has been active since 1997, focusing on various initiatives such as: Evangelism, Discipleship, Education, Training, Support for Vulnerable Groups etc. The Mission take her caring inspiration from the scripture, (Psalm 34:18-19 New International Version) "The Lord is close to the brokenhearted, and saves those who are crush in spirit. The righteous person may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers him from them all" to carry out her mission. Her public programs indicate both evangelistic and



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pastoral/discipleship emphases within the ministry. The role of pastor as a shepherd is critical in the church and the society. Pastors act as spiritual leaders, gatekeepers, informal therapists, community connectors and sometimes crisis responders. In contexts with limited formal mental-health infrastructure, pastoral counselors serve as frontline responders. Steven S. Ivy (2017) assert, "The various disciplines of practical theology encounter individuals, families, groups, and communities at their point of need with good news. Pastoral care, worship, and religious education are examples of practical theology. The primary means of delivering that good news is the person of the "pastor" who brings to "God's people" care and comfort, challenge and transformation, reconciliation and justice".

The pastoral counselor that would make meaningful impact is required to be equipped with resources for investigating the complexity of providing care and fostering communities of belonging across cultural differences. Aten & Leach (2009), insist, "Counselors must be aware of the spiritual and cultural contexts of their clients to provide effective care". Miller-McLemore, B. J. (2011). *Christian theology in practice: Discovering a discipline.* discusses the practical applications of Christian theology, including pastoral care and counseling. In her work she views pastoral care as a form of practical theology that requires a deep understanding of the complexities of human experience and the role of faith in shaping that experience. Louw, D. J. (2008). *Caring for the soul: A contemporary model for pastoral care,* presents a model of pastoral care that emphasizes the importance of spiritual care and healing. D.J. Louw's work on pastoral care emphasizes the importance of a holistic approach, considering the spiritual, emotional, and social components of individuals' lives. According to Louw, pastoral care should extend beyond individual counseling or spiritual advice within religious organizations and into the public sphere, addressing societal challenges and promoting overall well-being. While the above authors' work has contributed diversely to pastoral counseling and stand out as references for pastoral counselors; "assessment of pastoral counseling service delivery among Christian faithful through a focused case study of God's Care Missions" remain a unique work based on its setting, practical expression of God's Care Missions approach to pastoral Care.

Despite the growing prevalence of psychosocial problems such as depression, anxiety, family breakdown, and substance misuse in contemporary society, access to formal mental health services remains limited particularly in rural and underserved communities like Okpo, Kogi State. Meanwhile, faith communities and churches often serve as primary sites for help-seeking, highlighting the potential role of pastoral counseling. However, pastoral counseling often lacks formal recognition, standardized training, and integration with professional mental health systems potentially limiting its effectiveness and reach, yet every human need mental and physical well-being. Koenig (2012) assert, "Spirituality is a vital aspect of human health, and its integration into healthcare can improve mental and physical well-being."

Statement of the Problem

Despite the growing recognition of the importance of spirituality in mental health and well-being, many individuals in Okpo, Kogi State, Nigeria, and other parts of the world, continue to face spiritual struggles, trauma, and crisis, which can negatively impact their emotional and mental well-being. While pastoral counseling is a vital resource for addressing these needs, there is a lack of formal recognition, standardized training, and integration with professional mental health systems, potentially limiting its effectiveness and reach. Research Gaps includes, limited Research on Pastoral Counseling: There is a lack of research on pastoral counseling, particularly in the context of Nigeria and other developing countries. Lack of Evaluation of Pastoral Counseling Services: There is a lack of evaluation of pastoral counseling services, which can make it difficult to determine their effectiveness and identify areas for improvement. The purpose of this study is to assess pastoral counseling service delivery among Christian faithful through a focused case study of God's Care Missions and to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of pastoral counseling on the spiritual and emotional well-being of individuals.

Objectives of the study

1. To investigate the role of pastoral counseling in addressing spiritual struggles, trauma, and crisis among individuals in Okpo, Kogi State, Nigeria.
2. To assess the effectiveness of pastoral counseling in improving the spiritual and emotional well-being of individuals who have received counseling services from God's Care Missions.
3. To identify the challenges and limitations of pastoral counseling in the context of God's Care Missions and to provide recommendations for improving the delivery of pastoral counseling services.

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Research Questions

1. What is the impact of pastoral counseling on the spiritual and emotional well-being of individuals who have received counseling services from God's Care Missions?
2. How effective is pastoral counseling in addressing spiritual struggles, trauma, and crisis among individuals in Okpo, Kogi State, Nigeria?
3. What are the challenges and limitations of pastoral counseling in the context of God's Care Missions, and how can they be addressed?

Hypotheses

- H₀₁: Pastoral counseling has a significant positive impact on the spiritual well-being of individuals who have received counseling services from God's Care Missions.
- H₀₂: Pastoral counseling is effective in addressing spiritual struggles, trauma, and crisis among individuals in Okpo, Kogi State, Nigeria.
- H₀₃: The challenges and limitations of pastoral counseling in the context of God's Care Missions include inadequate training and equipping of pastoral counselors, stigma and misconceptions about pastoral counseling, and lack of integration with professional mental health systems.

Methodology

The study employed a Quantitative Research Approach, utilizing a Descriptive Survey Design to examine the impact and effectiveness of pastoral counseling at God's Care Mission, Okpo. This design enabled the researchers to systematically describe the demographics, experiences, and perceptions of participants regarding pastoral counseling services. Data were collected through a Questionnaire Survey administered to 35 participants who had received pastoral counseling services from God's Care Mission, Okpo. The survey instrument was designed to gather information on participants' demographics, their experiences with pastoral counseling, the impact of counseling on their spiritual and emotional well-being, and their perceptions of the counseling services. The collected data were analyzed using Descriptive Statistics, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. This analytical approach allowed the researchers to summarize and describe the characteristics of the sample, providing insights into the effectiveness and impact of pastoral counseling services.

Presentation of Results

Research Question 1:

What is the impact of pastoral counseling on the spiritual and emotional well-being of individuals?

Table 1: Impact of Pastoral Counseling on Spiritual and Emotional Well-being

N/S	Variable Name	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
1	Spiritual Well-being	4.25	0.75	Positive Impact
2	Emotional Well-being	4.10	0.85	Positive Impact

Filed survey, 2025

This table presents the results of the impact of pastoral counseling on the spiritual and emotional well-being of individuals. The table shows the mean and standard deviation of the participants' responses to two variables: spiritual well-being and emotional well-being. The results indicate that pastoral counseling had a positive impact on both spiritual well-being (mean = 4.25) and emotional well-being (mean = 4.10).

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Research Question 2:

Effectiveness of Pastoral Counseling in Addressing Spiritual Struggles, Trauma, and Crisis

Table 2: Effectiveness of Pastoral Counseling in Addressing Spiritual Struggles, Trauma, and Crisis

N/S	Variable Name	Mean	Std. Deviation	Decision
3	Effectiveness in addressing spiritual struggles	4.40	0.70	Effective
4	Effectiveness in addressing trauma	4.20	0.80	Effective
5	Effectiveness in addressing crisis	4.10	0.90	Effective

Filed survey, 2025

This table presents the results of the effectiveness of pastoral counseling in addressing spiritual struggles, trauma, and crisis. The table shows the mean and standard deviation of the participants' responses to three variables: effectiveness in addressing spiritual struggles, trauma, and crisis. The results indicate that pastoral counseling was effective in addressing spiritual struggles (mean = 4.40), trauma (mean = 4.20), and crisis (mean = 4.10).

Research Question 3: What are the challenges and limitations of pastoral counseling in the context of God's Care Missions, and how can they be addressed?

Table 3: Challenges and Limitations of Pastoral Counseling

N/S	Variable Name	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Inadequate training and equipping	4.20	0.80	Challenge
2	Stigma and misconceptions	4.00	1.00	Challenge
6	Lack of integration with professional mental health systems	4.10	0.90	Challenge

Filed survey, 2025

This table presents the results of the challenges and limitations of pastoral counseling. The table shows the mean and standard deviation of the participants' responses to three variables: inadequate training and equipping, stigma and misconceptions, and lack of integration with professional mental health systems. The results indicate that all three variables were identified as challenges and limitations of pastoral counseling, with mean scores ranging from 4.00 to 4.20

Hypothesis Testing

Table 5

N/S	Hypothesis	t-value	p-value	Decision
1	H1: Pastoral counseling has a significant positive impact on spiritual well-being	6.50	0.000	Supported
2	H2: Pastoral counseling is effective in addressing spiritual struggles, trauma, and crisis	12.50	0.006	Supported

3	H3: Challenges and limitations of pastoral counseling include inadequate training and equipping, stigma and misconceptions, and lack of integration with professional mental health systems	-	-	Supported
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Filed survey, 2025

Based on the analysis in the hypotheses testing table, the decision is to NOT REJECT the hypotheses. In other words, the hypotheses are SUPPORTED.

Here's the explanation:

H1: Pastoral counseling has a significant positive impact on spiritual well-being

The p-value is 0.000, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is supported. This means that pastoral counseling has a significant positive impact on spiritual well-being.

H2: Pastoral counseling is effective in addressing spiritual struggles, trauma, and crisis

The p-value is 0.006, which is less than the significance level of 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is supported. This means that pastoral counseling is effective in addressing spiritual struggles, trauma, and crisis.

H3: Challenges and limitations of pastoral counseling include inadequate training and equipping, stigma and misconceptions, and lack of integration with professional mental health systems

Although there is no p-value provided for this hypothesis, the results indicate that the participants identified all three variables as challenges and limitations of pastoral counseling, with mean scores ranging from 4.00 to 4.20. Therefore, the hypothesis is supported.

Discussion of Findings

The study aimed to assess the effectiveness of pastoral counseling in improving the spiritual and emotional well-being of individuals who have received counseling services from God's Care Missions and to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of pastoral counseling on the spiritual and emotional well-being of individuals. The findings of the study suggest that pastoral counseling has a significant positive impact on the spiritual well-being of individuals, with a mean score of 4.25 and a standard deviation of 0.75. This is consistent with previous research that has shown the importance of spirituality in mental health and well-being (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Koenig, 2012). The study also found that pastoral counseling is effective in addressing spiritual struggles, trauma, and crisis, with mean scores ranging from 4.10 to 4.40. This is consistent with previous research that has shown the effectiveness of pastoral counseling in addressing spiritual struggles and trauma (Aten & Leach, 2009; Miller-McLemore, 2011). However, the study also identified several challenges and limitations of pastoral counseling, including inadequate training and equipping, stigma and misconceptions, and lack of integration with professional mental health systems. These challenges and limitations are consistent with previous research that has highlighted the need for adequate training and equipping of pastoral counselors (Louw, 2008).

The findings of the study suggest that pastoral counseling is a vital resource for addressing the spiritual and emotional needs of individuals, particularly in rural and underserved communities like Okpo, Kogi State, Nigeria. However, the study also highlights the need for addressing the challenges and limitations of pastoral counseling, including inadequate training and equipping, stigma and misconceptions, and lack of integration with professional mental health systems. The findings of the study have several implications for the development of pastoral counseling services in faith-based organizations. Firstly, the study highlights the importance of adequate training and equipping of pastoral counselors to address the spiritual

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and emotional needs of individuals. Secondly, the study suggests that pastoral counseling should be integrated with professional mental health systems to ensure that individuals receive comprehensive care. Finally, the study highlights the need for addressing stigma and misconceptions about pastoral counseling to increase its accessibility and effectiveness.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Pastoral counselors should receive adequate training and equipping to address the spiritual and emotional needs of individuals.
2. Pastoral counseling services should be integrated with professional mental health systems to ensure that individuals receive comprehensive care.
3. Efforts should be made to address stigma and misconceptions about pastoral counseling to increase its accessibility and effectiveness.
4. Further research should be conducted to explore the effectiveness of pastoral counseling in addressing spiritual struggles, trauma, and crisis in different contexts.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the study found that pastoral counseling has a significant positive impact on the spiritual well-being of individuals and is effective in addressing spiritual struggles, trauma, and crisis. However, the study also identified several challenges and limitations of pastoral counseling, including inadequate training and equipping, stigma and misconceptions, and lack of integration with professional mental health systems. The findings of the study have several implications for the development of pastoral counseling services in faith-based organizations and highlight the need for addressing the challenges and limitations of pastoral counseling.

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