

Effective Guidance and Counselling Program: A Panacea for Prevention of Insecurity in Zamfara State, Nigeria

ATTAHIRU, Yahaya¹
Sarkiyahaya530@gmail.com
08069665676

MUSA, Maryam Shehu¹
musamaryam2000@gmail.com
08036272971

SANI, Maryam Mannir²
maryammannirsani@gmail.com
08036071162

ATTAHIRU, Bilyaminu³
Bilyagwandu@gmail.com
08144113285

ABBA, Hafiz⁴
08063409362
hafizabbaisah@gmail.com

¹Department of Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Federal College of Education (Technical) Gusau

²Department of Primary Education Studies, Federal College of Education (Technical) Gusau

³Department of Psychology, Federal College of Education Gidan Madi, Sokoto

⁴Department of Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Federal College of Education (Technical) Gusau

Abstract

Insecurity—whether emotional, social, or psychological—is a critical issue that undermines individual well-being and societal progress. Guidance programs, when effectively implemented, serve as a proactive measure to prevent insecurity by fostering self-awareness, resilience, and healthy relationships among individuals and community at large. This paper highlights the importance of guidance programs in schools, workplaces, and communities, presents evidence of their effectiveness in preventing insecurity, and provides actionable recommendations for stakeholders to strengthen these programs.

Keywords: Insecurity, Guidance Programs, Prevention

Introduction

One of the basic needs of human life according to Maslow is security. This includes the need to feel secured within and outside, and to be protected against all external danger. It is met largely through the security offered at home, and in the community. But unfortunately, it is a common knowledge today that Zamfara State is under the atrocities of criminal element known as Bandits. This made Zamfara State to be regarded as one of the if not the most insecure State in Nigeria. Insecurity in Zamfara has become a monster that frustrates individual, community and government efforts at realizing meaningful goals as hardly a single pass without cases of acts of insecurity. If reports in the media concerning the daily act of criminal activities in some parts of the State are anything to go by, the situation obviously poses more danger and challenges beyond the capacity of the community and government to effectively contain it single-handedly. It is indeed worrisome going by the alarming number of people killed as a result of insecurity since previous government led by Muhammadu Buhari's administration. The increasingly messy and nasty way in which the bandits, kidnappers, unknown gunmen, and other criminal elements are making life unbearable for people in the region is unthinkable. The boldness and audacity with which they carry out their atrocities is

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64348/zije.202527>

Effective Guidance and Counselling Program: A Panacea for ... Attahiru, Y., Et. al., (2025) worrisome (Editorial report of the Guardian April 12, 2022). According to the National Security Adviser, Monguno (2022), “we are in a very difficult situation. And council understands people’s concerns about the growing insecurity. But I can assure you that there is no straight-cut-and-dried method of dealing with this thing unless all of us embrace each other”. This statement is undisputable in the sense that when people live in fear and anxiety, there will be no constructive thought to plan for future development. In trying to bring an end to insecurity issues, the Government both at the State and the Federal level has strengthened law enforcement agencies, implement strict policies, enhance border security, and use modern technology for surveillance and intelligent gathering. Moreover, Government also has come up with programs such as poverty alleviation program, economic reform and even sought for international support to tackle insecurity threats. However, one can hardly believe that the security challenges has been addressed. This pave way for the government and the communities to seek for more measures that can effectively address insecurity challenges and ensure peace and sustainable development in the region. Therefore, it is higher time that, the Government start to counter insecurity beyond using of force and begin to address the issue from the root, and this can be achieved through Guidance programs. Guidance programs when effectively implemented, has the potentials to preventing insecurity by providing individuals with the tools, support, and resources needed to build resilience, self-awareness, and coping mechanisms. This paper argues that guidance programs are essential in fostering emotional well-being, promoting healthy relationships, and creating a supportive environment that mitigates the root causes of insecurity. The paper therefore seeks to address the issues of insecurity in Zamfara State in an effort to bring about peace and development using guidance program which has been known overtime as a potent tool in controlling and managing human behaviors.

Conceptual Clarifications

The terms that need clarifying are, Insecurity, Nature and Causes of Insecurity, Guidance Programs, Role of Guidance programs in Addressing Insecurity, Literature review.

Insecurity

Insecurity is simply the opposite of security and it is an issue that people are concerned with in Nigeria. Beland (2005) defined insecurity as the state of fear or anxiety stemming from concrete or alleged lack of protection. It refers to a lack of inadequate freedom from danger. This implies that insecurity is an absence of peace, order and security. Ezemenaka (2020) viewed insecurity as the state of being unsafe or insecure or a state of mind characterized by self-doubt and vulnerability. Udoh (2017) defined insecurity as the state of being subjected to danger or injury.

The Nature of Insecurity in Zamfara State

Over the time, the issue of insecurity in Zamfara State is on the increase, daily, people wake up and live in fear and trepidation, the state has become a trap to passengers. Before now, it was just an issue of armed robbery attacks at homes and on the highways but it has gone beyond that, the nature of insecurity has various forms in different parts of the Zamfara among which includes:

Kidnapping

Kidnapping is a known major security challenge in Zamfara. The perpetrators of this crime do not spare anyone, the aged, youth, male, female. It ranges from individuals, families, school children and the clergy. Beside the kidnapping of Government Girls Science Secondary School Students in Jangebe in the year 2021, several others have been kidnapped or abducted in different parts of the State. Kidnapping which seems to have replaced armed robbery, and since its inception, citizens and non-citizens alike live in fear of falling victim to these criminals because they waste lives and collect ransom. The ransoms collected through mass abductions have become a means of business for these criminal perpetrators.

Terrorism

There is a high threat of terrorists in Zamfara which threatens its peace, progress and development. Zamfara continues to face multiple challenges posed by various terrorist groups called Bandits under different kingpins such as Buharin Daji, Bello Turji, Dogo Gide, Baleri. Etc. Their barbaric acts have devastated human costs, in terms of lives lost or permanently altered, internally displaced persons and negative consequences on social and economic development in the region.

Banditry

The word “banditry” is construed from the term “bandits” which implies unlawful armed group who attack and terrorize members of the public, confiscate and disposes them of their money/properties. Banditry refers to criminal activities, such as robbery, theft, and violence often carried out by groups or individuals in areas with weak law enforcement. These groups of outlaws known as bandits, typically targets travelers, merchants, or local communities. Banditry is often fuels by poverty and illiteracy or lack of government presence. Historically Zamfara has witness series of Banditry activities in many of its rural areas including some local government areas in the state. A committee set up to investigate the menace of armed banditry,

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Effective Guidance and Counselling Program: A Panacea for ... Attahiru, Y., Et. al., (2025) headed by Mohammed Abubakar, a former inspector general of police, reported that in Zamfara state between June 2011 and May 2019, 4,983 women were widowed, 25,050 children were orphaned and more than 190,000 people were displaced as a result of armed banditry. The Nigerian security forces initially responded to this issue by increasing the deployment of the military and police to the troubled zones. These deployments were under several code names such as "Operation Puff Adder," "Diran Mikiya," "Sharan Daji," "Hadarin Daji," "Thunder Strike," and "Exercise Harbin Kunama III." But these operations have produced mixed results. Till date, the effects of these criminal acts are still felt in the State.

Assassinations

Another security challenge facing Zamfara State is the frequent cases of assassinations. Many residences of the State have become victims of this nefarious act, law-abiding citizens at times acct down via stray bullets. Although this barbaric crime carries capital punishment in the nation's various laws and statutes, the situation continues to deteriorate.

Organized Violent Groups

Organized violent groups take different forms, such as unknown gunmen, vigilantes, ethnic militia, and political thugs. There are various reasons and circumstances for the emergency of these groups which include agitations, poverty, illiteracy, social insecurity, lack of information and poor government policies. This is also viewed to have contributed to the escalating condition of insecurity in the State.

Causes of Insecurity in Zamfara State

There are several reports base on public opinion and expert analysis on the causes of insecurity in Zamfara State, which include the following:

Increased in the Number of out-of-school Children/ Illiteracy

According to a study by UNESCO in 2022, Zamfara State had 883,953 out-of-school children, which is 61.4% of the State's children. This makes Zamfara one of the states in Nigeria with the highest number of out-of-school children. The National Commission for National Nomadic Education (NCNE) disclosed that the increased figure of out-of-school children is a result of banditry, kidnapping and terrorist attacks. This was also contributed by the recorded attacks and kidnaping of Jangebe Secondary School and Federal University Gusau Students in the state. Some of the boarding schools in some parts of State were turned to day school while some schools in remote areas were closed indefinitely due to the security situation of the areas. Children in the areas that are prone to attacks are scared and refused going to school for fear of being kidnapped or abducted.

Unemployment/Poverty

Ezemenaka (2022) opined that the high level of unemployment and poverty among Nigerians, particularly the youths, makes them vulnerable to all sorts of crimes and undesirable behaviors. According to recent data by Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) (2024), the unemployment in Zamfara is around 3.1%. this makes it one of the lowest unemployment rates among Nigeria States. The rate at which unemployed youths are roaming the streets is alarming. Every year, tertiary institutions graduate many students who are thrown into the labour market with no hope of job opportunities. Many become frustrated and vulnerable to social vices, like the common saying, an idle mind is the devil's workshop. In an effort to keep the mind and body together, they are lured into undesirable behaviors.

Corruption

Nonetheless, corruption was largely responsible for government failure and systemic infrastructure collapse, resulting in large-scale insecurity in Nigeria. The state of insecurity in Nigeria is unquestionably a result of government failure, traceable to widespread corruption.

The Unchecked Flow of Lethal Weapons

The proliferation of both small arms and light weapons has been responsible for violence, crime, and terrorism in Zamfara State. Illegal arms transfers are mostly and easily done in States that has boarder to link to other neighboring countries. Another way is purchase of small arms and light weapons to thugs who assist politicians to rig and win elections at all costs and after the election, they forget to retrieve the arms already circulated. Thereafter, the thugs and miscreants use the weapons in their possession to unleash terror within and outside their territory. Zamfara, has, in recent times increased the rate of violent crimes, communal conflicts, micro-nationalism, social upheavals, political violence, social agitations, electoral violence, and economic crisis among others. The proliferation and use of small arms and light weapons in various clashes have claimed so many lives and created a culture of violence. However, this trend has witness massive decrease as a result of new policy introduced by the Zamfara State Government under the leadership of His Excellency Dauda Lawan Dare, who banned all political gathering and thuggery activities in the State.

Weak Security System

Some are of the view that Zamfara State's security system seems to be weak and poor in both personnel and equipment. Security officers are inadequately trained and mobilized, also complain of poor meagre welfare and lack of sophisticated weapons. As a result, the required expertise is not available to meet the security challenges in the State. In addition, there are reports of unethical criminal activities that are threatening the peace, security, and sustainable development in the region. Behaviors and practices where security personnel deployed for some operations are said to have been comprised. In some cases, security personnel assigned to carry out their operational functions lack the skill and weaponry to handle the situations. And even where these exist, some security personnel get influenced by ethnic, religious or communal sentiment and also allow personal aggrandizement to cloud their sense of civic responsibility. Instead of serving and protecting lives and properties, being the watchdogs defending national interests and values, they become traitors, and saboteurs of government efforts by supporting and fueling insecurity through either divulging vital security information or aiding criminals to acquire arms to perpetrate their crimes.

Bad Governance and Poor Leadership

It is a known fact that one of the major causes of insecurity in Nigeria is bad governance and poor leadership and Zamfara as a Nigerian State is not exempted. Any responsible government has the primary aim of securing and providing basic amenities such as potable water, electricity, quality education, a good road network and general infrastructure. Transparency International (TI). A German-based non-governmental organization, opined that insecurity in Nigeria can be tied to bad leadership, and corruption, which is one major reason why it is still difficult to defeat banditry, herdsmen, and terrorism. It has been alleged in Zamfara State that, some military officers, politicians, traditional rulers and other elites have either enriched themselves by diverting money that meant to fight insecurity or are said to have hands in fueling insecurity in the region. Reports also showed that the growing insecurity in Zamfara is not because the enemy is formidable and stronger than the government; it may rather be because of a lack of focused leadership, ineffective security, governance structure and poor coordination from the center (Musekura, 2018).

Consequences of Insecurity in Zamfara State

Presence of security is paramount to the wellbeing of the people and supporting the people's physical security is vital part of reducing poverty and stable development. Moreover, one can agree that insecurity have negatively affected the lives of people, the economy and the development of Zamfara State. Among such effects are decreased participation in productive economic activities; destruction of human and material resources; reduction in investment and economics opportunities. According to Yusuf (2021), the consequence of insecurity includes the following:

1. School Closure/School Drop-Out: School closure refers to shutting down of schools due to threats such as insecurity and school drop-out refers to students who are unable to complete their school programme. Both have serious consequences as students/pupils are denied their right to education. Premium time 29/6/2021 reports that Nigeria has the highest number of Out-of-School Children in sub-Sahara Africa. Therefore, the higher the number of school drop-out children, the higher the illiteracy level in society and the higher the level of insecurity in that society. Considering the length of insecurity in Zamfara State, it is evident that, the state has recorded series of Schools closure during the administration led by Bello Matawalle, the then governor of Zamfara State due to cases of schools been attacked, or occupied by armed groups which led to students/pupils drop-out from schools. E.g., 'a school building in Fakai Village was reportedly used as a food storage facility by the notorious bandit leader Bello Turji.

2. Loss of Learning: it is clear that one of the effect of school closure due to threats posed by insecurity is that learning will be lost. Prolong school closure can lead to significant gaps in foundational subjects like literacy and numeracy. Due to the fear and uncertainty of security in the school environment, teachers cannot impart knowledge to the learners and learners do not acquire what needs to be acquired with full concentration. Also there is no effective teaching and learning in unconducive environment. Students from rural areas suffer the most due to limited access to alternative learning resources (e.g., online education, radio or televised impactful programs). As such, the literacy and potential man-power in the state will hugely be affected.

3. Loss/Reduce of Work Force and Resources: Both human and materials resources are lost due to security challenges in Zamfara State. Many workers were reportedly killed or kidnapped, School Buildings and other facilities in the state were destroyed. This has led to many workers especially non indigene to flee the state in fear of either been kidnapped or killed to a safer environment. There has been reportedly cases of construction workers and minerals resources miners been kidnap and some end of been killed and this can be viewed as a serious consequence to the state.

4. Increased in poverty and illiteracy

Another devastating effect of insecurity is that, school closure, loss of learning and reduce or loss of workforce, have a direct impact on poverty and illiteracy. When children lose access to education, foundational skills leading to long-term employability, and people facing economic disadvantages or suffer from decreased human capital and productivity, the future is uncertain. Zamfara is considered among the leading states in Nigeria with both poverty and illiteracy level with a record of 78% been considered poor and illiteracy rate of 19.16% as of 2022 report by National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

5. Lack of Socio-Economic Growth and Development

This refers to a situation in which the society is lacking progress in terms of social advancement, economic growth and development. When a region experience high levels of insecurity such as banditry and terrorism, it affects investment opportunities, disrupt economics activities, and undermines social progress and this can lead to decline in agriculture and food security, brain drain and population displacement and reduced in external business collaborations. It is evident that Zamfara State government on multiple occasions has order the closure of some popular markets within the state due to threat posed by armed bandits. There are also reports concerning the increasing number of internally displaced person camp within the state due to banditry activities.

Understanding Guidance and Counselling Programs

Guidance is a systematic process that involves assisting individuals in understanding themselves, their environment, and their options to make informed choices. It is not about directing or controlling individuals but rather about equipping them with the tools, knowledge, and confidence to navigate life's challenges and opportunities. Guidance is rooted in the principles of empathy, respect, and empowerment. The primary objectives of guidance programs include promoting self-awareness, developing life skills, providing emotional support and setting a clear path for individual personal as well national development. Below are the key objectives of guidance programs

- 1. Building Self-Esteem and Self-Awareness:** Guidance programs help individuals develop a positive self-concept by encouraging self-reflection and self-acceptance. Through activities such as counselling sessions, workshops, and group discussions, participants learn to identify their strengths, values, and areas for growth. By fostering a sense of self-worth, these programs reduce feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, which are core components of insecurity.
- 2. Providing Emotional Support:** One of the primary functions of guidance programs is to offer a safe space for individuals to express their emotions and concerns. Trained counselors provide empathetic listening and validation, helping individuals process their feelings and experiences. This emotional support is crucial in preventing insecurity, as it reassures individuals that they are not alone and that their feelings are valid.
- 3. Promoting Healthy Relationships:** Insecurity often stems from negative interpersonal experiences, such as bullying, rejection, or toxic relationships. Guidance programs emphasize the importance of healthy communication, empathy, and mutual respect in relationships. By teaching individuals how to build and maintain positive connections, these programs reduce the likelihood of social isolation and relational insecurity.
- 4. Addressing Root Causes:** Guidance programs often involve identifying and addressing the underlying causes of insecurity, such as academic struggles, family issues, or past trauma. Through individualized counseling and targeted interventions, guidance professionals help individuals work through these challenges and develop strategies for overcoming them.
- 5. Creating a Supportive Environment:** Guidance programs contribute to the creation of a supportive and inclusive environment where individuals feel valued and understood. In schools, for example, guidance counselors work with teachers and administrators to promote a culture of respect and empathy. This collective effort helps prevent insecurity by reducing instances of bullying, discrimination, and other harmful behaviors.

Strategies of Guidance and Counseling program in preventing Insecurity in Zamfara State

Guidance programs are structured interventions designed to support individuals in navigating personal, academic, and social challenges. These programs are typically implemented in schools, workplaces, and community settings and are led by trained professionals such as guidance teachers, counselors, psychologists, and social workers. According to American School Counselor Association (ASCA). (2019), below are some of the key components of guidance programs which if effective implemented can contribute to preventing insecurity:

1. Awareness Education

Awareness education is one of the programs use in guidance to help people understand the various psychological, social and economic issues one may face which can lead to positive change. Awareness Education helps individual to make informed decisions and take action base on guidance offered. Education awareness are of different types, among them includes security campaigns to make people aware and understand the root causes of insecurity, the negative effects it can have on individual

Effective Guidance and Counselling Program: A Panacea for ... Attahiru, Y., Et. al., (2025) and the society in general. This can be done/achieved through collaborations with religious leaders, community leaders, parents, government and non-governmental organizations, and other stake holders in the community.

2. Community Participation/Involvement

Community involvement refers to involving communities and local residents in the process of developing and implementing security measures within. This involves allowing them to contribute their any meaningful information, ideas, concerns and views to create a safer environment. This can be done through initiatives such as neighborhood watch programs, reporting suspicious activities, coordinating security measures and planning meetings with security and law enforcement agencies. This can empower communities to take active role in their own safety, fostering sense of responsibility.

3. Environmental design for safety

This is another guidance program that if effectives implemented can have a positive impact in prevention of insecurity issues in communities. Environmental design for safety is a process of identifying and reducing safety and health risk through good design at the conceptual and planning phases of a project. The aim is to create spaces that are both functional and good in prompting sustainable relationship between people and the environment. This include using physical features, lighting, and landscaping to make environment safer. These strategies are proven to help in preventing crime and creates a sense of security among public.

4. Strong laws and policies measure

Establishing an effective legal and policy framework is paramount to holding security threats. policy making process can identify laws that are needed to accomplish the policy's goals. Laws are set of rules that are created and are enforceable by social or governmental institutions to regulate human behaviors. Promoting laws are key to enabling the development of peaceful society, protection of human right and means of conflict resolution.

5. Social and Economic Support

Social and economic support in guidance programs refers to advice and strategies aimed at providing assistance to individuals or communities to address and manage potential challenges related to their social well-being. This involves designing programs that address specific needs of targeted groups, considering cultural context and local challenges. Example of such programs include; food security program, subsidies programs, education scholarships, good health care access program and microfinance loans to SMEs among others. This can promote both economic and social development in the communities.

6. Evidence of Effectiveness

Research consistently demonstrates the positive impact of guidance programs on emotional well-being and insecurity prevention. Studies have shown that students who participate in school-based guidance programs report higher levels of self-esteem, improved academic performance, and better social skills. Similarly, workplace guidance programs have been linked to reduced stress, increased job satisfaction, and enhanced interpersonal relationships. According to a study by Okenyi (2019), the study has examined the role of counseling services in primary schools as a coping strategy for inculcating security consciousness in pupils in Nsukka Local Education Authority, Enugu state. Generally, indications from the discussions in the study revealed that counseling services when effectively utilized could be used to inculcate in the pupils such consciousness that may enhance peace and security. However, the relevance/importance of counselling services in both the education sector and country is essential as highlighted in the study, in the sense that, it will bring about security awareness and strategies for prevention. Therefore, the need arises for effective management of primary education in Nsukka Local Education Authority, Enugu state and to ensure that counseling units are established in all the primary schools in the area. Another research conducted by Yakubu (2021) on the importance of guidance and counselling services in forestalling insecurity. The study concludes that for the government to minimize insecurity in Nigeria, there is urgent need for government to ensure that guidance and counselling programme are emphasize in school to inculcate in the youth the right values that can guarantee peace, stability and harmony in Nigeria. Guidance services can be used sequentially within school and outside school system to minimize behavioral problems such as indiscipline and moral bankrupt that could lead to insecurity problems in the country. The services have the capacity for preventing people from involving in acts of insecurity. These findings underscore the importance of investing in guidance programs as a proactive measure to prevent insecurity.

Conclusion

Based on the findings and literature reviews in this study, it is evident that guidance programs are a vital tool in preventing insecurity and promoting emotional well-being. Hence, the current study stands on the conclusion that; guidance programs if implemented effectively has the potent to addressing the root causes of insecurity, equipping individuals with the skills to navigate life's challenges, these programs create a foundation for resilience, confidence, and healthy relationships. The Stakeholders should therefore, as a matter of urgent prioritize the implementation and expansion of guidance programs in all

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Effective Guidance and Counselling Program: A Panacea for ... Attahiru, Y., Et. al., (2025) part of Zamfara State to ensure that individuals have access to the support they need to thrive. Investing in guidance programs is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic investment in the well-being and productivity of Zamfara as a State.

Recommendations

To maximize the impact of guidance programs in prevention of insecurity, the following actions are recommended by the researcher:

1. Launch public awareness campaigns to reduce act of indiscipline and highlight the importance of guidance programs.
2. Collaborate with parents and community organizations to create a holistic support network.
3. Offer workplace guidance programs to support employees' mental health and well-being.
4. Provide access to guidance services and resources for conflict resolution.
5. Advocate for the expansion of guidance programs and increased access to mental health resources.

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