THE EFFICACY OF COMMUNITY BASED COUNSELLING AS AN INTERVENTION STRATEGY IN CONFLICT MANAGEMENT: A CASE OF KUWADZANA HIGH DENSITY SUBURB, HARARE.

Webster Chihambakwe[*]

ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the effectiveness of community counselling as an intervention strategy in conflict management: It was a case study of Kuwadzana high density suburb of Harare Metropolitan Province. The study focused on the community counselling concept as an intervention strategy in conflict management. The study was conducted in Kuwadzana high density suburb which is located at the western side of Harare. The research methodology that was used to conduct the study was qualitative methodology in nature. The research method used was a case study within the interpretive paradigm. The purposive and convenience sample used in this study consisted of thirty (35) participants who were selected from police officers, local business people, nurses, ward councillors and teachers. Data generation was done using the in-depth face to face interview. The research findings from this study were presented in the form of themes that emerged. Themes that emerged were: community perception of community counselling; challenges with traditional methods of conflict management; and inadequate knowledge and skills of handling conflict issues. Recommendations from this research were that there is need to promote both traditional and modern methods of conflict management in Kuwadzana high density suburb by conducting awareness campaigns and establishment of

[*] **Lecturer, Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, Department of Counselling, Zimbabwe Open University**

community counselling clinics in every community so that they can be used as community centers for counselling whenever there are either conflicts or no conflicts.

Key words: Community Counselling, Conflict Management, Conflict Intervention and Conflict.

Background to the study

Many questions have been raised by members of the public and non-governmental organisations working in the communities on the effectiveness of community counselling as an intervention strategy in conflict management. Of notable concern is the number of stakeholders in the conflict management sector who operate differently, yet insisting that they are doing awareness campaigns on peace and conflict resolution. Conflict is inevitable that is neither good nor bad. It invades individuals or communities at one time or another. It occurs in all kinds of human relationships and in all social settings. Conflict also has the potential for either a great deal of destruction or much creativity (Chung and Megginson, 1999). It is an integral part of our lives. Normally we work in groups and while working, we relate with our superiors, peers and juniors. While relating, more often than not, conflicting situations arise which take toll on our precious time and energy. Therefore, understanding and management of conflict become very important. The most popular and effective style of resolving conflict is through dialogue, which is popularly known as negotiation. Through negotiation people deal with differences, which they do, consciously or unconsciously, throughout their lives.

Conflict can be defined in many ways and can be considered as an expression of hostility, negative attitudes, antagonism, aggression, rivalry and misunderstanding. It is also associated with situations that involve contradictory or irreconcilable interests between two opposing groups. In simple terms, a conflict can be defined as a situation in which two people cannot agree on the actions that one person takes or that he or she doesn't want the other to take. According to Follet (2001), conflict refers to the appearance of difference- difference of opinions, of interests. Chung and Megginson (1999) define conflict as the struggle between incompatible or struggling needs, wishes, ideas, interests or people. Conflict arises when individuals or groups encounter goals that both parties cannot obtain satisfactorily. Thus, we can

say that fighting, hostility and controversy, all of which can be called conflict, are nearly every day fare for individuals and groups, although they are not always evident. It is an absolutely predictable social phenomenon and it should be channelled to useful purpose. Therefore, conflict management does consist of diagnostic processes, interpersonal styles, negotiation of strategies and other intervention that are designed to avoid unnecessary conflict and reduce excessive conflict. The ability to understand and correctly diagnose conflict is essential to managing it.

Statement of the problem

The economic downturn in Zimbabwe in the last decade has led to poor salaries and wages for workers. The disparity in incomes and inflation has produced great dissatisfaction and agitations amongst workers, which has often resulted in industrial disputes and conflicts in almost every work place. This has become a major concern for families in different communities in both high and low density suburbs as they fail to have food on the table. Local authorities, such as the Harare City Council have failed to provide clean water, sanitation and health services to the satisfaction of community residents in the greater parts of Harare. However, such failure to deliver on services due to the communities has given rise to conflicts in the communities, especially in the high density suburbs where a lot of people reside. What would have started as an economic turndown in the whole country has now caused several conflicts amongst community members based on political affiliations. Specifically, stressed community members have resorted to seeking professional counselling services in their communities from elder members of their community and those known professional counsellors. This situation prompted the researcher to embark on a research targeting Kuwadzana high density suburb. Thus, the question "How effective is community counselling as an intervention strategy to conflict management?"

Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to carry out an evaluation on the effectiveness of community counselling as an intervention strategy in conflict management in Kuwadzana high density suburb of Harare Metropolitan Province.

Research Questions

- What are the various roles of counsellors in conflict management?

- To what extent do people in Kuwadzana high density community conceptualise counselling as an effective conflict intervention strategy?

- How is community counselling carried out as a conflict management strategy?

- How can counselling as an intervention strategy be strengthened as a conflict management in Kuwadzana high density community?

Theoretical Framework

The broad range of emotions that are experienced as a result of conflicts and trauma are central to healing individuals and communities and defending against the perpetuation of aggression, fear and mistrust (Hutchison & Bleiker, 2008). Although cognitive-behavioural approaches have proven to be useful from various cultural perspectives (McDonald & Gonzalez, 2006), many counselling interventions implemented on a community level are contested by some authors and deemed to be inappropriate as they require expertise and expectations of resources (Duran et al., 2008; Phipps & Byrne, 2003). Culture and context are significant factors in determining whether a counselling approach would actually be successful. As with all counselling techniques, when training community members, no counselling strategies should be applied in a perfunctory way without adapting it to the cultural context in which it is being used. Systemic interventions require a reconceptualisation of psychosocial issues and integrate the knowledge of community members in defining and resolving these issues. This would involve a multi-systemic engagement with the issues as they relate to the person-in-context. Therefore, community counselling activities would require changing relationships intra- and interpersonally (Lazarus, Baptiste and Seedat, 2009; Breckenridge and James, 2010). In doing so community counsellors would have the opportunity to intervene at an early stage and reduce the impact of the broad community conflicts and traumatic stress responses that would have emerged within the said communities (Phipps, Byrne and Deane, 2007). Thus, this study is guided by the cognitive-behavioural and systemic theories.

Methodology

Research methodology is a strategy to philosophically interrogate the research problem, while research methods may be understood as all methods or techniques that are used for the conduct of research (Kothari, 2004:7-8). Kothari (2004:8) goes on to clarify the distinction between research methods and methodology by proffering that: "when we talk of research methodology we do not talk only of the research methods but also consider the logic behind the methods we use in the context of our research and explain why we are using a particular method or technique and why we are not using others so that research results are capable of being evaluated either by the researcher himself/herself or by others". The term "research methodology" appears to mean a number of things in educational research. At times, methodology has been misconstrued to mean method. From the proceeding scholarly views, it may be deduced that a number of features stand out in one's bid to conceptualise the term 'methodology'. To begin with, research methodology is indicative of how a research study is going to be carried out. It guides the assumption of the research process. It also provides us with the general approach on how to study a topic. It spells out the direction to be followed when generating new knowledge. However, this study adopted the qualitative research methodology.

Population

The population for the research study consisted of three hundred and fifty (350) participants who consisted of residents both (males and females) from Kuwadzana high density suburb. The study population consisted of those who were formally and informally employed and those who were not employed from the community. Participants comprised of a ward councillor, teachers, nurses, police officers and local business people from Kuwadzana high density suburb.

Sample and sampling procedure

Purposive and convenience sampling techniques were used to select the research participants who are residents of Kuwadzana high density suburb of Harare Metropolitan Province. Purposive and convenience sampling was used in the study because of it being a type of non-probability sampling technique which focuses on the participants that are being investigated based on the judgment of the researcher. Purposive and convenience sampling also enabled the researcher to focus specifically on those characteristics of the population that are of interest,

which would best enable the researcher to answer the stated research questions in chapter one. The sample being studied might not be representative of the whole population, but for researchers pursuing qualitative methodology, this was not considered to be a weakness. Table 3.2 below shows the sample of the research participants that took part in the study that the researcher conducted in Kuwadzana high density suburb of Harare Metropolitan Province.

Table 3.2:   Sample of research participants interviewed used

Participants	Category	Qualification	Date of interview was conducted	Type of interview	Age	Gender
Rumbidzai	Unemployed	Grade 7	09/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	42	F
Themba	Informally employed	O-Level	09/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	33	M
Tindo	Informally employed	O-Level	09/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	29	M
Tanaka	Informally employed	O-Level	10/03/14	Open ended interview questions (individual)	31	M
Vivienne	Informally employed	Certificate	10/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	38	F

Thomas	Informally employed	Grade 7	10/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	49	M
Maggie	Unemployed	Grade 7	11/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	45	F
Tungamirai	Unemployed	Grade 7	11/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	55	M
Peter	Unemployed	Grade 7	11/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	50	M
Memory	Unemployed	Grade 7	12/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	33	F
Martie	Informally employed	O-Level	12/03/15	Open ended interview questions(individual)	35	F
Dzimba	Informally employed	Grade 7	13/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	44	M
Pomunoda	Informally employed	Grade 7	13/03/15	Open ended interview questions	54	M

				(individual)		
Zaranyika	Unemployed	Grade 7	13/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	60	M
Takaendesa	Unemployed	Grade 7	14/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	58	M
Nyika	Informally employed	Grade 7	14/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	42	M
Shingirayi	Formally employed	O-Level	14/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	29	F
Matilda	Formally employed	Degree	14/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	37	F
Florence	Formally employed	Diploma	15/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	38	F
Shupikai	Formally employed	Degree	15/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	45	F
Chipo	Informally employed	O-Level	15/03/15	Open ended interview	27	F

				questions (individual)		
Paradzai	Informally employed	O-Level	15/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	25	M
Marufu	Unemployed	ZJC	16/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	39	M
Tirivanhu	Informally employed	ZJC	16/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	40	M
Tinashe	Informally employed	ZJC	16/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	30	M
Farai	Informally employed	ZJC	16/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	38	F
Agnes	Unemployed	ZJC	17/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	48	F
Shephard	Pursuing further studies	O-Level	17/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	24	M

Samora	Pursuing further studies	O-Level	17/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	35	M
Mercy	Unemployed	O-Level	18/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	33	F
Tariro	Pursuing further studies	A-Level	18/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	36	F
Tatenda	Pursuing further studies	O-Level	18/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	28	F
Wilbert	Pursuing further studies	O-Level	18/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	28	M
Mharidzo	Pursuing further studies	A-Level	19/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	33	M
Wellington	Formally employed	Degree	19/03/15	Open ended interview questions (individual)	34	M

Data Presentation and Analysis

The present study targeted individuals who were residents of Kuwadzana high density suburb. The research participants were formally and informally employed, whilst some were also not employed but were pursuing their studies academically. The researcher sought for informed consent from the research participants to interview them. The rationale behind the researcher to seek for informed consent from the research participants before interviewing them was to authenticate the study to the recipients who were the residents of that community. Clarification was done to the research participants on issues that they were not clear about before the interview.

Table 4.1   Distribution of participants by gender (N=35)

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	15	43
Female	20	57
Total	**35**	**100**

Table 4.1 above shows the distribution of participants by gender. In terms of the gender, females constituted 57% of the participants who took part in the study whilst 43% were males. The high number of females who took part in the study was due to the fact that some males whom the researcher approached to participate in this study were not willing to be involved in the study citing various tight work and social programmes. Females were more receptive when the researcher approached them seeking their consent to take part in the study. However, the researcher was more interested in a 50-50 representation, though it failed to materialise like that.

Table 4.2   Participants rating of counselling as an effective intervention strategy (N=35)

Rating Scale	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	6	17
Good	10	28.5
Very Good	10	28.5
Excellent	9	26
Total	**35**	**100**

Table 4.2 above shows the rating of the effectiveness of counselling as intervention strategy in conflict management ranged from poor to excellent. 17% of the participants to the study rated the counselling strategy as poor, whilst 26% rated the counselling strategy as excellent. Another 28.5% rated the counselling strategy as good and the other 28.5% rated it very good. The various rating scales of counselling as an effective intervention strategy differed from the categories of participants who took part in the study due to their age groups, experience and educational qualifications.

Results

- The effectiveness of community counselling as an intervention strategy in conflict management could not be generalised across Kuwadzana high density suburb.

- Community counselling as intervention strategy applicability in conflict management within the African context is difficult to attain the needed peace due to its Eurocentric ideology.

- Community counselling using traditional methods of conflict management lacked transparency and it suppresses women rights.

- Wisdom is a vital component in conflict management in resolving both the community and family conflicts.

Discussion

Below is a discussion of themes that emerged from the study:

Challenges with traditional methods of conflict management.

Research participants to the study alluded to the fact that there were challenges with traditional methods of conflict management. One male police officer who was a participant in this study said: *The use of community courts as a traditional method of conflict management was no longer working due to the different cultural norms and values that people in the urban communities now abide to. Urban dwellers are no longer interested in complying with old traditional ways of resolving conflicts be it in the family or neighbours. Traditional methods of conflict management such as the use of community courts were very protective of the aggressor, whereas the modern methods are very transparent. This situation has resulted in total disrespect of traditional methods of conflict management.*

Another female participant said: *traditional methods of conflict management especially on family disputes have always looked down upon women who do not have rights like those of males. For example, in the community/village courts, women were not recognised when it comes to the distribution of their husband's estate whereas nowadays, in the modern way of conflict management over your husband's estate dispute, priority is now being given to women and children in a transparent manner.*

Another traditional method of conflict management was that of conducting family rituals to appease the avenging spirit of the dead relative. This method of conflict management method in a family was now facing resistance from other family members who were now turning to different churches. A female nurse participant to this study said: *I am no longer interested in hearing about this thing of conducting traditional rituals of beer brewing to appease the avenging spirits of the dead as a way of resolving family disputes. My brother, I am now a Christian and will never resort to this traditional way of resolving disputes in my family, but rather, I will stick to God to resolve all my conflicts.*

The researcher observed that research participants agreed that to a lesser extent, traditional methods to conflict management do complement each other in the different communities. However to a larger extent, the research participants disagreed to the assertion that traditional and modern methods of conflict management do complement each other. They argued that, modern methods of conflict management in urban communities such as Kuwadzana high density suburb could work effectively whereas in rural areas, traditional methods could also effectively work in conflict management.

Inadequate knowledge and skills of handling conflict issues

There was a general consensus amongst the research participants that effective conflict management is not a preserve for those who are only educated at all. They went on to say that in the yester years back, conflicts were settled with community elders who at all were not even educated. One participant said: *Wisdom entails the ability to give wise guidance on others on different issues of life such as social, economic and political development of a person in the community at no cost. Those people whom we regard as having wisdom from my community are*

people who have white hair and are now too old, that is, in the age range from seventy (70) years and above. These people can impart on you knowledge and skills about what life entails based on their personal experiences. These people who are considered to have wisdom can easily address any conflict in a family or between friends in a community without any difficulties. Another male participant who was a businessman said: *wisdom is a natural talent that a person is born with. In other words, wisdom is the ability to assist others in their times of life challenges be it in a family or between friends. I will give you an example that I once had when I was running my business two years. I used to have my young brother whom I was running with my business and suddenly a misunderstanding arose between us to such an extent that no family member managed to assist. One day an old man just visited our home at the invitation of a family friend and he managed to address our differences amicably in a peaceful environment. This old man had wisdom which I still admire for this community of Kuwadzana to benefit from him. This community lacks people with the requisite knowledge and skills to handle different conflicts that might arise just like mine which were handled by this old man who had natural wisdom to give guidance that was helpful to my family dispute.* What I noted from the research participants that I interacted with during the study was that wisdom is the key to effective conflict management within communities, whereby traditional values are respected by all.

Conclusions

From the research findings of this study, the researcher concluded that the effectiveness of community counselling as an intervention strategy in conflict management could not be generalised to Kuwadzana high density suburb due to several factors. These factors included age, gender, experience and educational qualifications of the participants in the study. Research participants who had attained a professional qualifications such as a certificate, a diploma and a degree perceived community counselling as an effective intervention strategy in conflict management whereas as those with Grade 7, ZJC, O-Level and A-Level perceived community counselling as not an effective intervention strategy in conflict management.

Recommendations

• Promotion of both traditional and modern methods of conflict management through awareness campaigns.

- Establishment of community counselling clinics in every community so that they can be used as community centers for counselling whenever there are either conflicts or no conflicts.

References

- Adamu, H. (2003). Conflict Resolution and Communication Problem in Marriage. In A.A. Adegoke (Ed). *Conference Proceedings*, 150-155.

- Albert, I. O. (2002). *Sharing the Vision of Mediation Processes and Activities*. Paper presented at the National Workshop of Stakeholders of Peace Research and Conflict Resolution, Nicon Noga, Abuja, 14–15 May, 2002.

- Amoo, Sam G. (1997). *The challenge of ethnicity and conflicts in Africa: the need for a new paradigm.* New York: UNDP.

- Brown, L. D. (1995). Managing conflict among groups. In D. A. Kolb, J. S. Osland and I. M. Rubin (Eds.), *The organizational behaviour reader* (6th ed., pp. 317-328). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.

- Clodius, J. (1997, January). *Creating a community of interest: "Self" and "other" on DragonMud*. Paper presented at the combined winter conference on educational uses of MUDs, Teton Village, Jackson, WY. Available http://dragonmud.org/people/jen/mudshopiii.html.

- Coser, L. (1956). *The Function of Social Conflict.* New York: Free Press.

- Deutsch, M. (1973). *The resolution of conflict: Constructive and destructive processes*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

- Jehn, K. A. 1997. *Qualitative Analysis of Conflict: Types and Dimensions in Organisational Groups*. Administratively Quarterly No. 42, Vol. 3, pp. 421–618.

- Montville, J. V. (1991). *Conflict and peacemaking in multiethnic societies.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Moore, C. W. (1996). *The mediation process: practical strategies for resolving conflict.* Second edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

- Mustapha, I.A. (2003). The Role of the Counsellor in Conflict Resolution in Nigeria's Young Democracy. *The Counsellor* 19(2)150-155.

- Shertzer, B. & Stone, S.C. (1980). *Fundamental of Counselling* (2nd Ed), Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company.