

Counselling for Harmonious Living Among Different Christian Denominations in Rivers State

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Abstract: *This study was an empirical survey to find out the perceived counseling services/strategies for improved harmonious living among different Christian denominations in Rivers State. A sample of-100 counsellors drawn from Rivers State Schools, comprising 40 counsellors from tertiary level and 60 counsellors from secondary level. A self-constructed questionnaire titled Counselling Strategies for Harmonious Living Scale (CSHS) was the instrument used for the study. The instrument was validated and a reliability coefficient of 0,67 was calculated using Cronbach's alpha. Three research questions and one hypothesis guided the study. The data collected was analyzed using mean scores for the research questions, while t-test statistics was used to test the hypothesis. Results showed that factors like poverty, strict opposition by Pentecostal churches to the orthodox Churches, lack of tolerance among others are responsible for disharmonious living among Christian denominations. Also, the effects that are capable of tearing the state apart were also revealed. Above all, the findings showed that group counseling, social and community counseling, and Rational Emotive Therapy are the counselling strategies that could be used to promote harmonious living among Christian denominations. Some recommendations for promoting harmonious living among Christian denominations were highlighted.*

Keywords: counselling, harmonious living, Christian denominations, Rivers state

INTRODUCTION

Man's worship of God is dependent upon their effort to love their neighbors and live in peace and

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harmony with one another. Where love, peace and unity exist among friends, families, and neighbors, there exists harmonious living among the people. In Nigeria and Rivers state in particular, people are ready to fight to protect their faith in God. No one believes the other's religion or denomination could lead him/her to heaven. That explains why some religious groups are even ready to kill to inherit the kingdom of God. This assertion is supported by Macaulay in Asahi (2024) posited that "as Africans we have been split almost in smithereens by what we call religion in West Africa, where men wrangle for religion, and fight for it..." "Also, Udoidem (2021) submits that Christian fundamentalists and Pentecostals see Islam as a satanic kingdom and Muslims as Satans. For them, those members of the satanic kingdom are not to be converted but condemned. In a situation like this, one begins to wonder whether God is split into many parts or just one, as religion made us believe. The disharmony is not only noticed between Christians and Muslim alone but also among Christian denominations and Muslim denominations themselves.' Obiagwu (2022) in looking at the issue of disharmony among Christians themselves, observed that Pentecostals and New Religious movements claim to be better than the other and attack each other, only to be united in attacking the Catholic Church. He went further to say that they attack basic doctrines of the church while trying to infiltrate their teachings and doctrines into some of the Catholic Christians. The Catholic Christians, on the other hand, look with pity on this attitude of their "separated brethren" and continue to pray that the church become one someday by the power of God.

In Rivers State, particularly, the disharmony that exists among Christian brethren grows daily, almost in geometrical progression as new churches spring up. This is noticeable in the way each of the denominations scrambles for political posts to let their member occupy the" seat. Some of the leaders are ready to do anything in order to occupy positions like the governorship position, the position of the vice chancellor or provost in the university and colleges of education in Rivers State. The credibility of the candidate may not matter so long as he/she is a member of one's denomination. Asalu (2024) posits that the protestant Christians are struggling to unseat the Roman Catholic Christians who won a position hitherto occupied by a protestant.

Counselling is a helping relationship between a professionally trained person called a counsellor and a client or clients in which the counsellor helps to resolve the problem of the client/clients (Echebe, 2024). The roles that guidance and counselling techniques play in the school setting could also be applicable in the churches (Onyinloye, 2024). This paper intends to investigate the place of counselling in promoting harmonious living among different Christian denominations in Rivers State. One of the goals of counselling is to enhance coping skills and improve human relationships, which implies that most people have difficulties coping with problems or unusual situations, especially in interpersonal relationships (Echebe, 2025). Therefore, counselling at this juncture tries to assist the client to develop skills and maintain healthy relationships. Because of a lack of harmonious relationships among our Christian brethren, the researcher intends to find out the causes and effects of this disharmony among different Christian denominations, and then highlight counselling strategies that will be used to improve harmonious living among different Christian denominations.

Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of the study generally is based on investigating counselling for harmonious living among different Christian denominations in Rivers state. Specifically, the study has the following objectives;

1. To find out the causes of disharmony among Christian denominations in Rivers State, Nigeria.
2. To investigate the effects of living in disharmony among different Christian denominations in Rivers State, Nigeria.
3. To find out the counselling services/strategies can be used to improve harmonious living among Christian denominations in Rivers State, Nigeria.

Research Questions

Three research questions guided the conduct of the study:

1. What are the causes of disharmony among Christian denominations in Rivers State, Nigeria?
2. What are the effects of living in disharmony among different Christian denominations in Rivers State, Nigeria?
3. What counselling services/strategies can be used to improve harmonious living among Christian denominations in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Hypotheses:

One research hypothesis guided the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the perception of secondary and tertiary school counselors on the causes of disharmony among Christian denomination in Rivers State.
2. There is no significant difference in the perception of secondary and tertiary school counselors on the effect of disharmony on among Christian denomination in Rivers State.
3. There is no significant difference in the perception of secondary and tertiary school counselors on the counselling services and strategies to be used in improving harmonious living among Christian denominations in Rives State.

METHODS

The researcher adopted the descriptive survey research design in the study. The design is ideal for use in this study because the study involved collecting and describing data obtained from a sample of a population in order to determine the counselling strategies for improving harmonious living among Christian denominations. The population of the study consisted ofpracticing counsellors in Rivers State. The sample of the study consisted of 100 counsellors from secondary and tertiary institution drawn using the multi-stage sampling procedure. The instrument used to obtain data was titled "Counseling Services/Strategies for Harmonious Living Questionnaire" (CSHQ). It was developed by the researcher and contained 15 items designed to elicit information on the causes and effects of disharmonious living and counselling strategies for improving

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 harmonious living among Christian denominations, as reported by trained counselors. Section A contains items on personal data like age, gender, religion, status, and qualification. Section B deals with causes and effects of disharmony among Christian denominations, while Section C deals with counselling strategies for promoting harmonious living among Christian denominations using strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), and strongly Disagree (SD).

The validity of the instrument was ensured by giving the draft copy to two experts, one in guidance and counselling and the other in measurement and evaluation, all from the department of Educational Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, University of Port Harcourt. They offered useful suggestions and modified the instrument. The test-retest method was adopted to ensure the reliability of the instrument. The researcher administered the same instruments to twenty counselors who were not part of the target population at an interval of four weeks. The set of scores was computed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficient obtained was 0.82. It is considered high enough for the study. The researcher administered the questionnaire for the study personally with two research assistants. It was given to Rivers State counselors at their meeting in preparation for the 2026 CASSON conference. On the spot administration and collection were used. The data collected were analyzed using item by item analysis while independent t-test for the item by item analysis, any score below 2.5 was regarded as low and therefore rejected, but items with a mean score of 2.5 and above were accepted as applicable.

RESULTS

The results of this were presented in the table below based on the research questions raised for the study.

Research Question One: What are the causes of disharmony among Christian denominations in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 1: Mean responses of counselors on the causes of disharmony among Christian denominations.

S/N	Item Description	Mean	SD	Criterion Mean	Remarks
1	Poverty makes one aggressive and intolerant of other denominations	3.20	1.01	2.5	Agreed
2	Lack of tolerance because of differences in doctrines.	2.67.	0.97	2.5	Agreed
3	Strict opposition by the Pentecostal church to the orthodox church's doctrines	3.66	0.69	2.5	Agreed
4	Lack of Christ-like love among Christians of today causes disharmony among denominations	3.10	0.78	2.5	Agreed
5	Some Christians see Christians from other denominations as unbelievers, and so they should have nothing to do with them	3.27	0.77	2.5	Agreed
	Grand Mean				

Data presented on table 1 shows that item 1-5 with mean values of 3.20, 2.67, 3.66, 3.10 and 3.27 respectively were agreed on because they were above the criterion mean of 2.50. Specifically, item 5 is rated highest among the items, which shows that some Christians regard those from other denominations as unbelievers and therefore have nothing to do with them. Additionally both category of counsellors agreed that lack of tolerance, lack of Christ-like love, and strict opposition by Pentecostal churches to the orthodox church's doctrines among others are some of the causes of disharmony among Christian denominations.

Research Question Two: What are the effects of living in disharmony among different Christian denominations in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 2: Mean responses of counselors on the effect of living in disharmony among Christian denominations

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Criterion Mean	Remarks
6.	Development is hampered in society as a result of Christian disharmony.	2.96	0.77	2.50	Agreed
7.	Christians may not speak with one voice in matters concerning them.	3.21	0.83	2.50	Agreed
8.	There could be discrimination in political appointments due to disharmony among denominations.	3.55	0.92	2.50	Agreed
9.	Christians who belong to different denominations may engage in blackmail of the other to outmaneuver them in political positions.	2.94	0.59	2.50	Agreed
10.	The youth are affected as their parents oppose their marriage with members of other denominations	3.16	0.92	2.50	Agreed
11.	Family conflicts occur when parents force their children to marry a member of their denomination against their will.	2.88	0.67	2.50	Agreed

Data from table 2 reveals that items 6 to 11 with mean value of 2.96, 3.2, 3.55, 2.94, 3.16 and 2.88 respectively were all agreed on because they were up to the criterion score of 2.50. These data reveal that development is hampered in the society as a result of disharmony among Christian denominations, Christians may not speak with one voice in matters concerning them, discrimination in political appointments, Christians who belong to different denominations may

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engage in blackmail of the others, youth are affected as their parents oppose their marriage with members of other denominations and finally, Family conflicts occur when parents force their children to marry a member of their denomination against their will etc.

Research Question Three: What counselling services/strategies can be used to improve harmonious living among Christian denominations in Rivers State, Nigeria?

Table 3: Mean responses of counselors on counseling services that could promote harmonious living among Christian denominations.

S/N	Items	Mean	SD	Criterion Mean	Remarks
12.	Group counseling could be used to change the Christian attitude towards each other	3.44	0.77	2.50	Agreed
13.	Social and community counseling could be applied	3.28	0.83	2.50	Agreed
14.	Rational emotive therapy could be used to make Christians be more rational in their thinking about others.	3.38	0.92	2.50	Agreed
15.	Leaders of different denominations should be giving workshop counselling to promote harmony with other denominations.	3.55	0.59	2.50	Agreed

Table 3 revealed that items 12, 13, 14 and 15 with mean value of 3.44, 3.28, 3.38 and 3.55 respectively were agreed upon because they were up to the criterion mean score of 2.50. this means that it was agreed that counselling services and strategies that could be used in improving harmonious relationship include Group counseling, Social and community counseling, Rational emotive therapy as well as giving leaders of different denominations workshop counselling.

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: There is no significant difference in the perception of secondary and tertiary school counselors on the causes of disharmony among Christian denomination in Rivers State.

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Table 4: t-test analysis of the significant difference in the perception of secondary and tertiary school counselors on the causes of disharmony among Christian denomination in Rivers State.

Institution	N	Mean	SD	df	Sig	Alpha	Result
Secondary	60	22.46	3.42	98	0.12	0.05	Retain H0
Tertiary	40	21.98	2.83				

From table 4, mean and standard deviation value were 22.46 and 3.42 for those in secondary school while those in the tertiary institution were 21.8 and 2.83 respectively. Calculated p-value is 0.12 while the alpha value is 0.05. Hence, since the sig value ($p=0.12 > 0.05$) is greater than the alpha value of 0.05, the hypothesis is retained meaning that there is no significant difference in the perception of secondary and tertiary school counselors on the causes of disharmony among Christian denomination in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant difference in the perception of secondary and tertiary school counselors on the effect of disharmony on among Christian denomination in Rivers State.

Table 5: t-test analysis of the significant difference in the perception of secondary and tertiary school counselors on the effect of disharmony on among Christian denomination in Rivers State.

Institution	N	Mean	SD	df	Sig	Alpha	Result
Secondary	60	20.28	2.02	98	0.02	0.05	Retain H0
Tertiary	40	18.88	3.13				

From table 5, mean and standard deviation value were 20.28 and 2.02 for those in secondary school while those in the tertiary institution were 18.88 and 3.13 respectively. Calculated p-value is 0.02 while the alpha value is 0.05. Hence, since the sig value ($p=0.02 < 0.05$) is less than the alpha value of 0.05, the hypothesis is rejected meaning that there is a significant difference in the perception of secondary and tertiary school counselors on the effect of disharmony on among Christian denomination in Rivers State.

Hypothesis Three: There is no significant difference in the perception of secondary and tertiary school counselors on the counselling services and strategies to be used in improving harmonious living among Christian denominations in Rives State.

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Table 6: t-test analysis of the significant difference in the perception of secondary and tertiary school counselors on the counselling services and strategies to be used in improving harmonious living among Christian denominations in Rives State.

Institution	N	Mean	SD	df	Sig	Alpha	Result
Secondary	60	20.45	3.22	98	0.031	0.05	Retain H0
Tertiary	40	22.58	2.13				

From table 5, mean and standard deviation value were 20.45 and 3.22 for those in secondary school while those in the tertiary institution were 22.58 and 2.13 respectively. Calculated p-value is 0.031 while the alpha value is 0.05. Hence, since the sig value ($p=0.031 < 0.05$) is less than the alpha value of 0.05, the hypothesis is rejected meaning that there is a significant difference in the perception of secondary and tertiary school counselors on the counselling services and strategies to be used in improving harmonious living among Christian denominations in Rives State.

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

From table 1, the study found that certain factors are responsible for the lack of harmonious living among Christian brethren. Some of these causes include poverty, which is capable of making one to be aggressive and refuse- to tolerate anybody, other causes include: strict opposition by Pentecostal churches to the Orthodox churches' doctrines, lack of Christ-like love among Christians of today and finally some Christians seeing others as unbelievers, and therefore refuse to have anything to do with them just because they: are from other denominations. This finding is in agreement with the submission of Agbakwuru (2021) that poverty and its attendant deprivations imprison people in a near state of torture and mental backwardness. He went further to say that individuals under these states lack basic understanding, tolerance, and respect for individual cultural and religious differences. He ended by saying that a state of affairs like this could create a basis for intolerance, conflicts, and crisis in the country. Asalu (2024) also agreed with the findings of the study about religious intolerance. He contended that religious bigotry (intolerance of other faiths) has remained a canker worm eating deep into the fabric of the life of our nation. Again, the findings in table 2 reveal the effect of living in disharmony among Christian denominations. The effects include: lack of development, Christians not speaking with one voice in matters of common interest, discrimination may be noticed in political appointments just because of denominational affinity, Christians even engage in blackmailing other Christians who win political power against them, family conflicts arise as parent force their children to marry from parental denominations to avoid the unbelievers.

The submission of Obilor (2024) agrees with this finding, where he made it clear that internal rivalry makes the religions incapable of achieving their set goals. He went further to say that the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) is trying to bridge the gap of suspicion and jealousy

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amongst the various Christian denominations because they do not speak with one voice. Whereby, because of the denominational affinity, a political position is given to an incompetent aspirant or personnel, the resultant effect is that the development of such a state or local government area will be hampered, and there will be no progress.

Again, the findings of the study revealed the counseling services that could be used for promoting harmonious living among Christian denominations. The agreed services by counselor respondents include Group counseling, Rational Emotional Therapy, workshop counseling, and social and community counseling offered to denominational leaders to assist them in living in harmony with other denominations. In using Rational Emotive therapy, they will be made to see the irrationality of their action of seeing another Christian as an unbeliever, while all of them believe in Christ and should work as a team to solve their problems as Christians. The finding that counseling services should be used to promote harmonious living among Christian denominations is supported by Oyinlioye (2023) when he contended that the roles that guidance and counseling techniques play in the school could also be applicable in the churches. Again, Jegede (2024) had earlier remarked that religious differences of various kinds could be a source of stress for the family. In a family where different denominations exist, there is always a conflict when it comes to beliefs and doctrines. For instance, there is the case of an Etche woman who refused to wear mourning clothes for her late husband, not to mention barbing her hair just because her faith forbids them, according to her. In such situations, if the brothers-in-law insist that she go on mourning clothes, which is the Etche tradition, family stress becomes the order of the day. Finally, the findings also indicated that there is no significant difference in the perception of the two categories of counsellors on the causes of disharmony. On the contrary, it also revealed significant difference on the effect and techniques of improving harmony among churches.

CONCLUSION

The results of the findings show that harmonious living among Christian denominations could therefore be promoted using counseling services and strategies. No doubt, denominational bigotry and conflict are an evil wind that blows no one any good. It is a recipe for disaster and a prelude to the division of Nigeria and Rivers State in particular. This question is always put across “in what church does he/she belong” whenever a governor comes to power, no one asks whether the individual is capable enough to steer the wheel of the state forward or not, provided he/she belongs to their denomination. The researcher has thus found out that there are things that cause Christian denominational disharmony, like poverty, intolerance due to differences in doctrines, and some Christians seeing other Christians as unbelievers. The study has also revealed the effects that could tear a whole state apart if care is not taken, like denying one’s right because he is not in the denomination of the officer in charge.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are made:

1. The Federal and State Governments should liaise with church leaders to ensure that their

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pastors and Priests are trained in counseling psychology before they begin to practice to be enriched with the counseling theories that will assist them to reason better about other denominations and encourage their faithfuls to do so.

2. Counseling psychologists should be part of the administration of churches so that collaborating With the church; effective counselling practice will be achieved in our churches.
3. Counseling psychologists who are trained to offer educational, vocational, and persona-social counseling could help to offer career information and. education to church members so that people will be employed and poverty reduced with its attendant aggression.
4. Group counselling and community counseling should be offered to Christians in the community. This could be done by counselors assisted by the government to establish private counseling centers; emphasis here should be on love of neighbour and the hazards of not doing so to oneself and the community.
5. Seminars and workshops should be organized by CASSON for not only religious/ church leaders but also civil servants to enlighten them on the need for harmonious living across other religions and denominations.
6. Above all, church leaders should desist from telling their members that they should try to vote for their members during elections, they should be told to vote for individuals who are capable and conscientious in character. It is the hope of the researcher that if the above recommendations are put in place, harmonious living will be improved among Christian denominations.

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