

# The place of theory in traditional guidance and counselling in modern Ghanaian cultures

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Accepted 20 September, 2016

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## ABSTRACT

The study examined what constitutes traditional guidance and counselling among the Akan ethnic group in Ghana and also explored the theoretical basis for the practice. The study followed a qualitative case study design utilizing interviews to collect data. Using purposive sampling, data was collected from chiefs and queen mothers among the Akan people selected through key informants. Inductive thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. The study revealed that advice giving, prophecies, prescriptions and re-enforcements are the practices that constitute traditional guidance and counselling in the observed community. The study also discovered that there is a theoretical underpinning to the practice of traditional guidance and counselling; however, though very functional, its major weakness is that it barely relies on empirical procedures. Based on the latter weakness, the study recommends that seminars and workshops should be organized for practitioners of traditional guidance and counselling to train some of them meeting the level of education but not conversant with how to use some psychometric tools to reliably predict and interpret clients' aptitudes, personalities and interests when need be. Furthermore, the study recommends that to maintain the African philosophy, the people need to go back to their roots to reclaim from their past practices what is wholesome and best, merge it with best western practices and use it to rebuild African guidance and counselling with modernity. This would enable them to render a more satisfying and effective assistance to their clients.

**Keywords:** Traditional guidance and counseling, Akans, confidentiality, working model and theories.

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## INTRODUCTION

Traditional guidance and counselling is the aboriginal ways (putting into consideration the beliefs and customs) in which a person or persons of authority in the society consciously and/or unconsciously steer individuals towards a path for developing potentials, fulfilling societal demands and modifying undesirable behaviours. The words "conscious" and "unconscious" come into play here because, these practices occur sometimes without any special intent. In the like manner, most of the guidance offered to individuals is unnoticed because they are deeply embedded in daily activities.

Like most other African countries, guidance began in Ghana as advice giving (Taylor and Buku, 2006). Guidance and counselling are ideas that have existed for a very long time in the Ghanaian society. From time

immemorial, people have sought self-understanding and the understanding of other people in many ways and especially in the Ghanaian society where people, mostly the younger generation, have always had other people (usually elderly people) direct them in all of their endeavours. In other words, the elderly people in one way or another steer or counsel the younger people so that they continue to live useful and fulfilling lives.

Guidance in itself has always been deeply rooted in the Ghanaian culture in such a way that it is a part of people's life style. Most things a typical Ghanaian child does either advertently or inadvertently is as a result of some form of received Guidance and counselling through his or her nuclear and extended family, and the society at large. From cradle to grave, everyone needs guidance

(Bedu-Addo, 2014) and counselling on one's life. In most Ghanaian societies, there is, and has always been, a deeply embedded fervor that under appropriate conditions, people could help others with their problems. Some people help others find ways of dealing with, solving, or transcending problems and the people who often offer this sort of guidance and counselling were authorities in the traditional societies. For instance, in the Asante society, there are authorities like "*Otwedianpon Onyankopon*" (Supreme God) and other minor gods who offered guidance through "*akomfo*" (traditional priests and priestesses/prophets and prophetesses), chiefs, elders of the society, "*ebusuapanyin*" (head of the clan), grandparents, parents, uncles and aunties, elder siblings and cousins and the elderly members of the society.

The Akan people occupy the greater part of the southern sector of Ghana. Akan is spoken as a native language in five of the ten regions in Ghana namely: Ashanti, Eastern, Western, Central, and Brong Ahafo Regions. According to the year 2000 National Population Census, 49.1% of the Ghanaian population belongs to the Akan ethnic group. The Akan people have contributed largely to the world and for that matter Africa in art, literature and culture such as Kente, Gold-weights, Kweku Ananse folklore and the Adinkra symbols. Opoku (2005) explains that even though the Akan people are immensely influenced by Christianity, Islam and other foreign cultures, they have not departed from their ancestral culture which distinguishes them as Akans. That is why traditional guidance and counselling is one of the practices of the Akan Culture that is not easily affected by the realities of foreign cultures that came into the country.

The rationale for the study was to explore some theoretical underpinnings of the practice of traditional guidance and counselling in the traditional context with the view to merge these practices with what is wholesome from the western culture since societies are becoming global villages. Specifically, the study sought to: a) identify the components of traditional guidance and counselling; b) ascertain how confidentiality is ensured in traditional guidance and counselling; and c) discover a theoretical model for the practice of traditional guidance and counselling, which embeds Western theories.

## METHODOLOGY

The research employed the qualitative case study design, a naturalistic inquiry procedure, to help define the experiences of the Akan people using the traditional theories in guidance and counselling vis-à-vis strategies meeting global modern practices. Qualitative research helps in a descriptive and exploratory analysis of people, actions, beliefs, perceptions and events

### Sampling

Five traditional leaders were sampled for this study as key informants. These traditional leaders were chosen from the regions

that the Akan people occupy namely the Western, Eastern, Central, Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions. The sampled participants were selected because they were regarded as "the wise" and information rich in their respective societies. The other used selection criterion was their offering of traditional guidance and counselling to subjects.

Purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants for this study. Purposive sampling technique was used because the participants had rich information due to their accumulated experience in practicing guidance and counselling in their respective traditional societies. Standard data collection procedures were followed such as: confidentiality, consent seeking where-need-be and explaining focus of the study and many other relevant issues for many other relevant ethical considerations.

### Instrument

Semi-structured interview guide was relied on to elicit information from the purposively sampled participants. Semi-structured interview schedule offered participants the opportunity to construct their own world through relating their guidance and counselling experiences. It also allowed the participants to express themselves at length and that offered enough shape to prevent aimless rambling.

Since the interviewers were working in the interpretive-qualitative framework, they were present with all their convictions and understandings interacting with participants in their socio-cultural context. For this reason, the interviewers personally conducted the one-on-one interviews; and that provided them with the opportunity to clarify issues that the participants raised about some questions in the instrument. The collected data were tape recorded after seeking audio taping consent from the participants and noted and observed field notes were also taken in case of recorder malfunction. The notes were written against the corresponding data as it was collected to minimise a laboured data analysis.

### Data analysis

All data collected through the interview schedules were analysed qualitatively through the inductive thematic data analysis approach. The generated data was revised several times and the recorded audio-tapes were replayed to organise and establish the meaningfulness of the collected data to the study. This equally helped to identify the consistencies and differences in the collected data. Data was then transcribed, analysed and interpreted.

Emerging patterns and themes from the collected data and supporting verbatim collections were presented under each section. Coding assisted in placing the collected data accordingly and this made data organisation a much easier task. Furthermore, coding was successfully done identifying text segments and circling them, and assigning a code that precisely described the meaning of the text segment after which related codes were aggregated under each of the dominant themes identified as already pointed out. These were:

- (a) The components of traditional guidance and counselling in the Ghanaian context.
- (b) Confidentiality in the practice of traditional guidance and counselling.
- (c) Theoretical underpinnings of traditional guidance and counselling.

In attributing quotations to the interviewees, the participants were anonymously identified as Obaapanyin 1, Obaapanyin 2, Obaapanyin 3, Nana 1, and Nana 2 for their protection and ethical reasons. The organized data was continually revised to analyse

and establish linkages and relationships with the rest of the collected data and a position was set taking all this into cognizance. The findings were then interpreted and discussed pointing out the extent to which the data addressed the research questions. Where possible, this was also supported with related literature.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Components of traditional guidance and counselling in the Ghanaian context

The components of traditional guidance and counselling implies what constitutes traditional practice of guidance and counselling or what makes up guidance and counselling in the Ghanaian traditional setting and how it is practised. Analyzed and discussed below are the components of traditional guidance and counselling that emerged from the interviews:

#### *Advice giving*

Advice giving has been and still is the commonest way of providing help to people among the Akan people. The advice given is considered helpful for people to consider their future. Among the Akans, the extended family is the main source of advice for girls and boys. There is usually no lack of people willing to share their wisdom. For example, among the Akans when the elderly observe that a child is developing recalcitrant attitude, they call him/her and advise him/her against that attitude; the advice usually takes the form of proverbs. Usually, after giving advice, the elderly/advisor encourages the individual to depend on the advice given. An example of an advice from typical Akan (Fante) society is as follows:

*'Abɔfraba a wɔ ka asɛm Kyerɛ no, a ɔntse no  
ɔko antse antse kromu'*

The above statement literally translates, "a child who is disobedient will find himself/herself in a land of regret". Asked about the constituents of traditional guidance and counselling, Obaapanyin 1 and Obaapanyin 2 explained that advice giving is the most dominant and effective constituent. Obaapanyin 1 further explained that though re-enforcements, prophecies and prescriptions constituted traditional guidance and counselling, advice giving was most effective because it facilitated genuine change in the behaviour of people. Below is what she said:

*'Everything sums up to advice giving because every other thing you do to the individual will not cause intrinsic change as much as advice giving would. When an individual is advised, he/she gains a better understanding of him/herself and the consequences of his/her actions'*

Obaapanyin 2 confirmed this when she explained that advice is embedded in our everyday interaction especially through proverbs and because they are repeatedly ushered out the message is actively assimilated. She said:

*'Advice giving is not merely calling the person with the problem and talking to him/her once and that is all. We consistently emphasise what we have already told them in proverbs and sometimes songs whenever we meet them be it in the market, by the road side or in the house so that the message "sinks in" well.'*

Nana 1 also admitted that advice giving was the major constituent of traditional guidance and counselling. For him, traditional leaders resolve conflicts and misunderstandings through advice giving. He further explained that because tradition did not permit traditional leaders to be always seen outside and as such they take advantage of occasions such as festivals and funerals to advise the general public about issues. Below is what he affirmed:

*'Because of certain chieftaincy customs, we are not allowed to reveal ourselves to the public often so we take advantage of special occasions such as festivals and funerals to advise people. Apart from this, when there is a misunderstanding between two people, we publicly call them and resolve the problem after which we privately call them one after the other to advise them.'*

Nana 2 also explained that advice giving was the crux of traditional guidance and counselling and that irrespective of what issue is presented before the elders/chiefs investigation is done to identify the offender and the victim after which advice is given. He said:

*'When you bring your problem to the elders be it land problems or marriage problems, we investigate and offer contributions and suggestions to help resolve the problem. We sometimes invite special people who are knowledgeable about specific problems, because of their rich experience, to offer their contributions and advise to individuals who are facing the problems.'*

#### *Prophecies*

Prophecies have always been the most effective form of Guidance among the Akan people. People dared not disobey the "akomfo" (prophets or prophetesses) because the Akans believed they were the messengers

of the “*abosom*” (gods). The term “*abosom*” which is used by the Akans suggests that the gods which they worshipped were formerly only stones (Sarpong, 1974). The name ‘*Akom*’, which refers to hunger, is viewed in the context of making reference to fasting. Fasting, the seeking of visions (sometimes in dreams), prayer, drumming and dancing are some of the aspects of the Akan Traditional initiation. The Akans believe that “*Akom*” enables the Okomfo to interact with the “*abosom*” (gods/goddesses). Interactions with the “*abosom*” lead to gaining knowledge about their songs and other incantations, as well as their taboos and specific rituals (Opoku, 2005). The “*abosom*” through the “*akomfo*” inform the people of what they should do and how they should do it in order to live good lives. For instance, when an Akan society is facing some misfortunes, they (usually led by the chief and his elders) call on the “*akomfo*” to intercede on their behalf and often after going through fasting, singing, dancing and incantations the “*akomfo*” return with some sort of information and interpretation from the gods regarding the situation. Obaapanyin 2 confirmed this observation when she stated:

‘Previously, there were no churches and other modern religious entities so people relied on Traditional prophets for interpretations about misfortunes in their lives and how they could deal with it. People still rely on traditional prophets but not as much as they used to in the past.’

Nana 2 also confirmed this when he explained that prophets interceded for people with misfortunes in their lives so that the gods could help them to recover from their adversities and live good and happy lives. He explained that there was a very powerful prophet in his locality who attracted people with all sorts of problems from all over the country. As he asserted:

‘We have always had prophets here in the Brong Ahafo Region. This hub (Odomase) used to be the regional capital during the British colonial era mainly because of the popular prophets in this town. Barren women and people with all sorts of problems visited the prophets for revelations about their problems and how to solve them. There was one prophet who is still remembered because of his guidance to the entire community. He was well known for interceding for barren women so people from as far as central region came to him for revelation. He also protected the community during the colonial era especially during the 1900’s. The British were lodging here because it was the capital town but the prophet interceded for the town’s people and the gods struck diseases on the British; the British were forced to vacate our hub because they could not

bear to endure the sicknesses any longer and with them went the capital.’

### **Prescriptions**

Prescription is when someone gives an instruction of what someone else must do. Prescriptions are given by professionals. For example, in most contemporary societies, doctors give prescriptions. Among the people of Akan, prescriptions are given as a form of direction to help individuals to understand themselves better and to follow a procedure or live in a certain way that will yield healthy or good life. The authority that usually directs the people of Akan through prescription is the herbalist or a priest or priestess of a particular shrine. Individuals visit herbalists or shrines when they are encountering problematic situations with the hope that they would get a better interpretation of what they are facing or going through and a solution to their problems. Many people among the Akans often start seeking advice from the elderly in the society when they are facing certain difficult situations. However, if the elderly realise that they would not be to prescribe any solution to them, they refer them to people who have the professional training and skill to deal with such situations. This often happens when the problem requires a medicinal approach or magic to solve it. Herbalists are Traditional healers who use herbs to treat the sick. There is the belief among the Akans that the knowledge herbalists acquire is as a result of the weeks of training and education that is given to them by “*amotia*” (dwarfs) after they have been chosen. Priests and priestesses, for example, are people who use magic to heal the sick. They often relay prescriptions from the “*abosom*” (gods) of what people should do and how they should do it in order to come out of their undesirable situations. Nana 2 confirmed;

‘People sought directions from herbalists when they needed healing and herbalists relayed prescriptions from the gods to people. Things have changed now but during the pre-colonial era, herbalists gave directions to people as to how to live good lives usually by giving them instructions about how to treat themselves with herbs which entire households followed.’

He also elucidated that the herbalists worked hand in hand with prophets and other priests. Obaapanyin 3 explained that the gods choose herbalists and afterwards tasks dwarfs to snatch them away from their families and give them intensive training. She further explained that fathers could teach their sons; however, if one is not chosen by the gods, the dwarfs would never reveal themselves. According to her:

The herbalists are chosen by the gods. After

choosing them, the gods will then task dwarfs to steal 'the chosen' from their family and take them into the deep forest to give them intensive training which sometimes lasts for weeks or months. Fathers can teach their sons but if they are not 'chosen', the dwarfs will never reveal themselves to the newly trained.'

According to Sarpong (1974), people go to their gods to ascertain the underlying causes of disasters in which they may have been involved and there are others who seek guidance from their gods about certain enterprises they want to undertake. He further explained that on higher national or clan levels, in time of war, the gods forecast the outcome of the encounter with the enemy and should they foresee defeat, it becomes incumbent on them to "prescribe" the necessary "medicines" for victory; this is done through the priests or priestesses of the shrine. Priests and priestesses also deal with situations of intense problems; herbalists sometimes refer people to shrine priests and priestesses depending on the problems that are brought before them.

### **Re-enforcements**

Re-enforcement is probably the commonest constituent of traditional guidance and counselling that passes unnoticed. Re-enforcements have been used from time immemorial by most traditional societies in Ghana to encourage desired behaviours and discourage undesired behaviours in the society. Re-enforcement as properly explained in operant conditioning theory which was opined by B.F Skinner vividly explains human behaviour in relation to anticipation of a stimulus (Ntim, 2010). Operant conditioning occurs because of what happens after a certain quality of behaviour has been exhibited (Hanson et al., 1986 cited in Kankam and Onivehu, 2000). The operant conditioning theory has it that the behaviour of an individual is shaped by the consequences of the environmental activities that follow it. In the Akan traditional society, positive re-enforcements are used to encourage a desired behaviour and increase its occurrences. Obaapanyin 2 gave a vivid example of positive re-enforcement after revealing a scenario; when a child obediently fetches water for an elderly person, a simple praise or reward may encourage that behaviour. An example of such praise as given by Obaapanyin 2 is:

*'Akwesi aye adee. Monpre no e!!! yee ye!!!'*

he above re-enforcement literally translates "Akwesi has done well, let's all give him big-ups" and usually the people around will all respond "big-ups, Akwesi". Negative re-enforcement, on the other hand, is used to discourage undesirable behaviours. Asked about negative re-enforcement, Obaapanyin 2 explained that

when used, it reduces the frequency of occurrence of the behaviour. She further explained that negative re-enforcement often takes the form of threats and sometimes punishments. She elucidated that the threats were not "empty" at all and that children whose behaviours were not modified by continuous threats were consequently punished severely. She gave an example of pulling one's ears when one was disobedient. Nana 2 established this when he asserted that responsible people who exhibited good and honourable behaviour were motivated by praising them and sometimes naming towns after them. He however explained that there were negative consequences for those who exhibited bad traits such as stealing. Obaapanyin 3 revealed that negative re-enforcement should not be used all the time as it may turn the child into a rebellious individual. Below was what she said:

*'Too much negative-re-enforcement such as beating is not good; when the individual does something wrong and you use a negative reinforcement as a corrective measure, he/she is aware of what ordeal he/she will be passing through since he/she is used to it so he/she doesn't care. However once in a while, it is good to threaten the child and add some beating to it to shape his or her behaviour.'*

### **Confidentiality issues in traditional guidance and counselling**

Confidentiality which forms one of the dominant bases of adopted/modern guidance and counselling is a complex matter in virtually every traditional society. Asked about it, practitioners of traditional guidance and counselling will argue that it is ensured in their practice and just as it was predicted based on the researchers' observations, all the subjects insisted that confidentiality is ensured in traditional guidance and counselling. However, further probes revealed that the principle of confidentiality in traditional guidance and counselling is still not given as much reverence as it should be. With regard to what can be done to ensure confidentiality, Obaapanyin 1 suggested:

*'You will have to tell the persons involved to be secretive. The third person is only there to either witness or share his/her knowledge in the matter and once it is over he/she must keep quiet about it. To ensure that the problem does not become public, you will have to be certain of the credibility of the people you are inviting to witness or share knowledge in the matter; whether they are gossips or loquacious.'*

Obaapanyin 2 also argued that it was uncommon for a discussed problem to become the talk of the community

because of measures put in place to ensure privacy. She said:

'When someone is facing a problem and seeks some sort of guidance from you, you would not have to call anyone else if you can handle it all by yourself; however, depending on the intensity of the problem, one or two more people may be called to also listen to the problem. In ensuring privacy, however, you will have to tell them to be secretive about the person's problem and helping process since your integrity is at stake. You will also have to be conscious about the trustworthiness of the people you are inviting into the helping process.'

Nana 1 confirmed the assertions of Obaapanyin 1 and Obaapanyin 2 when he explained that after the matter has been resolved by the council of elders, all persons involved in the discussion are told to be secretive about it. He further explained that there were several identifiers used to tell where the leak emanated and that there were consequences for leaking such information especially after all involved had sworn an oath of secrecy. He elaborated:

'We have "ngobɛsonfo" (council of elders) who help resolve people's issues and such people swear a spiritual oath of silence which takes the form of pouring libation when dealing with a person's issue. Our people are of the belief that there are consequences on the individual who breaks the oath.'

Nana 1 emphasized that "the spiritual oath of silence" was a very effective mechanism of ensuring privacy in their practice of traditional guidance and counselling. He, however, explained that mostly, the leaks, if there were any at all, came from the people whom they were helping (clients). Nana 2 confirmed Nana 1's assertion when he said:

'People in our traditional setting fear the gods more than anything you can think of and so in situations like keeping someone's issue safe we call on the gods to render punishments to those who commit a breach by pouring libation. After pouring the libation, everyone takes a sip of the alcohol to show their commitment to the cause. We depend on people's fear of the gods to ensure confidentiality. We are very certain as traditionalists that the gods unlike the Supreme Being who takes a relatively long period of time to take action, spend less than a week after the breach to take action.'

Obaapanyin 3 strongly argued that practitioners of

traditional guidance and counselling were very secretive and because of that whatever issue was discussed remained in their midst. She maintained:

'Whatever is discussed remains in the midst of those who discussed the issue. We ensure confidentiality by asking participants to swear to the gods that they will keep the issue private.'

Unlike the Western practice of guidance and counselling, traditional guidance and counselling is practised as an informal service in traditional societies and for that matter, there is no strong code of ethics or rudiments guiding the rendering of the service. In traditional communities, the problems of one man are the problems of the entire community because the elderly have indeed watched the individual grow and feel some sort of responsibility towards him/her; it therefore comes as no surprise when a problem of an individual which is intended to be kept confidential becomes the talk of town. Usually in traditional societies, after one person has finished helping another with a problem, the client is referred to other elderly people/professionals for further help. A continuance of this cycle will limit the privacy of the issue; in that case, the issue of confidentiality becomes even more questionable when the elderly use the problem situation of the client as a point of reference when guiding and counselling the younger generation. Schank (1998) asserts that the primary objective for rural and other small community practitioners is to keep the needs of clients foremost and to be vigilant in situations that could impair the practitioner's objectivity.

### **Theoretical underpinnings of traditional guidance and counselling in the Ghanaian context**

A theory is a set of related assumptions from which a biological deductive reasoning and testable hypothesis can be drawn (Fiest and Fiest, 1998 cited in Taylor and Buku, 2006). This definition insinuates that a theory is a set of deductive assumptions that explains a phenomenon. Here, assumptions underlying the basis of traditional guidance and counselling are drawn to establish a theoretical underpinning of the practice. The writers are sure that there have been many arguments among scholars regarding the issue of the theoretical basis of traditional guidance and counselling in the Ghanaian context although they are yet to come across such literature. However, for an empiricist, it is an underlying fact that for every thing that exists, there is proof or evidence of its existence. For instance, if there is claim of the existence of a tree, the questions that come to mind are: what is the colour of the tree? Can it be touched? Where is it located? and how tall is it? From the researchers' observation and the literature reviewed, it is quite clear that indeed there is such a thing as traditional



Figure 1. Affum's model of traditional guidance and counselling.

guidance and counselling. Below is a *working model* that gives a pictorial representation of the underpinnings of traditional guidance and counselling.

In addition, there is the fact that every society thrives on certain philosophical assumptions and Figure 1 indicates that traditional societies among the Akan people in Ghana thrive on the philosophy that “*Obiara ye onipa*”; which literally means “every person is a human being. Awoonor (1990) explains that the African world begins with the individual; each individual has value and it is important. This means that the individual who is in the traditional society is capable of strengths and potentials and it is for this reason that the society inculcates into him/her, acceptable standards that will help him/her to chalk down achievements and successes since they are highly dependent on his values.

The traditional society also recognises that “*Nkrabea*” determines the destiny of every individual. “*Nkrabea*” literally means fate and this philosophy of the Akans and many other traditional societies in Ghana have it that man has no control over what happens to him and that it is the gods of the land that control his life affairs. This assumption plays a great role in traditional guidance and counselling; this is so because when an individual and sometimes the society at large go through misfortunes, practitioners attribute it to “*nkrabea*”. For instance, when several people die continuously in a particular family, practitioners of traditional guidance and counselling console mourners by telling them that it is fate and sometimes there is the need to perform certain rituals in order to change the fate.

Awoonor (1990) asserts that “*ebusua*” defines those who are linked by blood ties beyond the immediate parentage of father and mother and that it is only within the community of people, dead or alive that the individual's personality and individuality receives fulfillment. Even if the individual loses both parents, he still belongs. Mwaniki (1973) asserts that in traditional African society, an individual exists in relation to and for the group and this is true of groups such as family, clan or tribe. It is because of this philosophy that among the

The working model above paints a vivid picture of the procedural phases of traditional guidance and counselling

Akans, members of the society have in-depth knowledge about the individual; they often know the individual from childhood and this makes it easier for practitioners of traditional guidance and counselling to help the individual.

Traditional guidance and counselling also has roots from the belief, “*Ntease ma asomdwee*” which means understanding restores peace. This assumption embeds that when there is misunderstanding, there is chaos, conflict, distress, anxiety and restlessness. However, when there is understanding, there is peace. Based on this belief, traditional guidance and counselling seeks to help clarify issues and concerns at the appropriate time to avoid conflict and distress. For instance, the male child is directed to embrace the roles of manhood to avoid misunderstanding between him and his wife in future.

The beliefs elucidated above and others such as magic and sorcery, divination, gods, witchcraft and ancestors sum up the philosophy that most traditional societies thrive on and inculcate into its socialization process through guidance and counselling to shape the individual “holistically”. After going through the socialization process, the individual becomes a responsible and productive member of the society. The individual understands himself/herself better, utilizes his/her potentials better and generally becomes capable of making intelligent choices. The beliefs which form the basis of traditional guidance and counselling are passed on from ancestors to younger generations as it is in traditional societies.

The traditional society is characterised by a post-figurative lifestyle, that is, one in which children learn primarily from their forebears; the past of adults is the future of each new generation and the blue print of culture is essentially complete and therefore unchallenged by foreign models (Nukunya, 2003). These beliefs are very rigid and do not allow the infiltration of other beliefs thereby making the traditional society static. This is elucidated in Figure 1. It is for this reason that Affum's model is linear; in other words, it does not give room for evaluation.

in an individual's life. As expatiated in the paragraphs above, people living in traditional settings are governed



by beliefs which inform their behaviour towards events and basically their daily activities. The arrow points the belief towards the philosophies that make up the beliefs. *Every person is a human being* simply implies that people who live in traditional settings have profound respect for each other. Seeing people as human beings indicate that they are full of potentials to love and to despise, to care and to be indifferent, to respect and to disrespect, to invent and to destroy, and to solve problems and to create problems. With the belief that every individual is capable of the aforementioned potentials and more, when counselling in the traditional setting, individuals are regarded as being capable of evolving out of their problems when they are pushed towards the right direction. Although practitioners of traditional guidance and counselling believe that human beings can do both good and bad, in traditional societies people are pushed to the right direction which makes it very likely for the individual to do good and not evil.

One other belief that is predominant in traditional settings is that *understanding restores peace*. This implies that when there is a misinterpretation of an idea, statement or event, conflicts may arise. It is for this reason that traditional counsellors seek to always create understanding between two or more individuals or groups of individuals who are facing a problem. Usually, they attempt to restore peace by finding out why one individual or group is upset with the other by asking directly or indirectly in order to get to the root cause of the problem after which the practitioners share with them, some wisdom and insight as regard the problem. Usually, this is the fastest way of restoring peace in traditional setting but most importantly what informs their practice is the belief that *understanding restores peace*.

The actions of practitioners of traditional guidance and counselling are undoubtedly informed by the belief of *fate* or *destiny*. Fate refers to a hypothetical force, power or energy that predetermines events or occurrences. In traditional settings majority, if not all events, are inevitably predetermined by this force usually the gods of the land or Supreme Being. Among the Akans, for instance, there is a universal God (Onyame)/ Supreme Being who is not isolated from gods associated with a particular region or spirits (obosom) by whom a fetish priest may be possessed. They are also of the belief that gods and the spirits of the ancestors are always present. The belief is that these gods and spirits are responsible for the events or happenings of the land. It is for this reason that in counselling an individual in traditional setting, depending on the problem presented, practitioners consult the gods and spirits of the land for direction and sometimes invite them to be in their midst while they try to resolve a problem. This philosophy explains why they pour libations before they deal with an issue or even why they do incantations and prophesy.

*Family* is a belief that binds members of a traditional society. Family defines those who are linked by blood ties

beyond the immediate parentage of father and mother. Among the Akan people for example there are seven established Family groups namely: Agona, Oyoko, Bretuo, Asona, Aduana, Ekuona and Asakyire. Every member of the Akan tribe is a member of one of the above family groups and can trace their descent only through matrilineal ancestress who would customarily be the founder of the family. Without doubt, one of the traditional counselling implications of this connection is clearly that members of one family are considered to have the same blood, and marriage between them is therefore forbidden. Again the average Akan is polygamous. Many men strive to marry more than one woman to show their readiness to support a large family and their generosity. Akan communities are basically communal and the wealth of one should benefit all and so in counselling an individual or individuals in Akan settings, the practitioner links the problem to this background information before offering advice, suggestions and directions especially when the problem is related to marriage.

A critical look at the working model indicates that the philosophy which makes up the belief system of people in traditional system is linked by an arrow to the society implying that the philosophy of the people is what makes up the society or shapes the society. The society, which has the aforementioned philosophies embedded in it in an attempt to reinforce the philosophies and beliefs employs or adapts certain tools which are used to shape the behaviour of its members (refer to: 'traditional guidance and counselling as practiced in the Ghanaian context'). These tools are instruments used in the socialization process of the society; from childhood through to adulthood the upbringing/rearing process comprise the use of proverbs, taboos, norms, folklores and legends and folksongs. The education of the youth therefore is the responsibility of the entire society (Castle, 1966). Most often than not individuals who are bred in typical African traditional settings grow up to become *Holistic* individuals. A major weakness of the theoretical underpinnings of traditional guidance and counselling, however, is that its underlying assumptions lack empirical basis.

## CONCLUSION

The study found out that traditional guidance and counselling as practised among the Akan people of Ghana constituted advice giving, prophesies, prescriptions and reinforcements. It emerged from the interviews that advice giving was the most commonly used practice since it was a conscious effort of practitioners to effect behavioural change. The study found out that advice was given by any elderly persons in the community since they lived together as one family. It also emerged from the study that reinforcement was one



of the commonest forms of traditional guidance and counselling that were done most often than not, unconsciously but was very effective practice that shaped behaviours. The study revealed that positive reinforcements regarded to strengthen good behavior and increase the likelihood of repeating such behavior while negative reinforcement/punishment decreased the likelihood of repeating an undesirable behavior.

The study also found out that practitioners of traditional guidance and counselling ensured confidentiality by swearing an oath to the gods. They also ensured confidentiality by telling third persons to be secretive about what has been discussed.

From relevant literature and some of the assertions the participants made about their practice of traditional guidance and counselling, the researchers found out that there is a theoretical framework of traditional guidance and counselling. A working model was suggested to paint a clearer picture of the theoretical underpinning of traditional guidance and counselling.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Like Western guidance and counselling, traditional guidance and counselling in Ghana seeks to help man to become useful to himself and his fellows though their approach to achieving that aim is quite different. It is for this reason that the researchers believe that traditional practitioners can adopt skills and techniques from the western approach to make the helping process more efficient. For instance, instead of giving advice, traditional practitioners can suggest alternatives that may be relevant solutions to the client's problem situation. Through listening skills and occasionally questioning skills, the traditional practitioner can guide the client toward a path of self-discovery and realization so that he or she can make a productive decision.

Inasmuch as traditionalists believe in prophecies, there is no empirical basis for the assertions made by prophets and for that matter, such practices must be discouraged. Seminars and workshops should be organized for practitioners of traditional guidance and counselling to train some of them meeting the level of education but not conversant with how to use some psychometric tools to reliably predict and interpret clients' aptitudes, personalities and interests. This would help them to be able to render a more satisfying and effective assistance to their clients. This notwithstanding, the study further recommends that to maintain the African philosophy, the people need to go back to their roots to reclaim from their past practices what is wholesome and best, merge it with best western practices and use it to rebuild African guidance and counselling with modernity.

The findings of this study seemed to indicate that the traditional practitioners lack strong control measures to ensure confidentiality. It is for this reason that the

researchers recommend that institutions should be formed to: a) license appropriate individuals with relevant training and appropriate qualities to render the guidance services; b) design codes of ethics for practitioners to abide by and periodically update practitioners on new developments; c) monitor and ensure that practitioners are doing the right things periodically; and d) render appropriate sanctions to practitioners who violate and breach confidentiality and other codes of ethics.

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