

GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING PROGRAMMES AND HEALTH AWARENESS AMONG SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN RIVERS STATE

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Abstract

This study examined the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and health awareness among senior secondary school students in public secondary schools in Rivers State. Specifically, the study investigated the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and students' environmental hygiene awareness, substance abuse awareness and reproductive health awareness. A correlational research design was adopted for the study. The population comprised 191,155 senior secondary school students in 286 public secondary schools in Rivers State. A sample of 400 students was selected using the Cochran sample size determination procedure and multistage sampling technique. Data were collected using the Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Health Awareness Questionnaire (GCPHAQ), while 386 properly completed questionnaires were used for analysis. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions, while Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. The findings revealed significant positive relationships between guidance and counselling programmes and environmental hygiene awareness ($r = .62, p < .05$), substance abuse awareness ($r = .69, p < .05$), and reproductive health awareness ($r = .58, p < .05$). The study concluded that guidance and counselling programmes are significantly associated with students' awareness of environmental hygiene, substance abuse and reproductive health. It was recommended, among other measures, that schools should strengthen the integration of health-related issues into regular guidance and counselling activities to enhance students' health awareness and responsible decision-making.

Keywords: guidance and counselling, health awareness, environmental hygiene, substance abuse, reproductive health.

INTRODUCTION

Education is increasingly understood as a process that extends beyond the transmission of academic knowledge to include the physical, psychological, social and moral development of learners. This broader conception is particularly important during adolescence, a developmental period characterised by rapid biological, emotional and social changes. Adolescents begin to develop personal identities, establish social relationships and make decisions that may influence their wellbeing in later life. The World Health Organization (WHO, 2023) recognises adolescence as a critical stage for the formation of lifelong health behaviours. Consequently, schools have an important role to play in equipping young people with accurate health information and the skills required to make responsible decisions.

Guidance and counselling programmes constitute an important component of the school system for addressing students' academic, personal, social and developmental needs. Guidance is largely preventive and developmental, while counselling provides more focused assistance to students experiencing personal, emotional or behavioural difficulties. In Nigerian secondary schools, guidance and counselling services are expected to support students' adjustment, decision-making and overall development (Federal Republic of Nigeria [FRN], 2014). When properly organised, such programmes can provide students with opportunities to receive health-

related information, discuss personal concerns and develop strategies for dealing with challenges associated with adolescence.

Health awareness is particularly important among secondary school students because inadequate knowledge of health-related issues can expose adolescents to preventable risks. Environmental hygiene awareness, for example, involves understanding the importance of personal cleanliness, handwashing, proper waste disposal and sanitation. Such practices are relevant to disease prevention and the creation of healthy school environments (Azuogu & Nwoke, 2020). Similarly, awareness of substance abuse can help students understand the physical, psychological and social consequences of alcohol and drug misuse and develop strategies for resisting negative peer influence (National Drug Law Enforcement Agency [NDLEA], 2022).

Reproductive health awareness is another important dimension of adolescent health. Adolescents require accurate and age-appropriate information about puberty, sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancy and responsible reproductive health decisions. Where such information is inadequate, young people may depend on peers, social media or other informal sources that may provide incomplete or misleading information (Okafor, 2021). Guidance and counselling programmes can provide a structured and supportive environment in which students receive reliable information and are encouraged to make informed decisions. The importance of school-based health awareness programmes is further emphasised by the increasing complexity of the social environment in which Nigerian adolescents develop. Peer pressure, rapid technological change, exposure to social media and changing social values may influence students' attitudes and behaviours. School counsellors are strategically positioned to provide preventive education, individual support and referral services that can help students respond appropriately to these influences (Ogan & Nwoke, 2020).

Empirical literature suggests that structured guidance and health education interventions can improve students' awareness of health-related issues. Studies reviewed in the source project indicate positive associations between counselling-related interventions and environmental hygiene, substance abuse and reproductive health awareness (Adebusoye et al., 2021; Ibrahim & Okonkwo, 2022; Rowland & Kolapo, 2023). However, much of the available research has focused on specific health interventions, particular geographical locations or different categories of students. There is therefore a need for context-specific evidence concerning the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and health awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

This study consequently examines the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and three dimensions of health awareness, namely environmental hygiene awareness, substance abuse awareness and reproductive health awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Statement of the Problem

Ideally, public secondary schools should provide students with structured guidance and counselling services that support their holistic development. Such services should extend beyond academic and career issues to include health education, preventive counselling and assistance with personal and social challenges. Through regular guidance activities, students should acquire appropriate knowledge about environmental hygiene, understand the dangers of substance abuse and develop responsible attitudes towards reproductive health. The National Policy on Education recognises guidance and counselling as an important component of students' educational and personal development (FRN, 2014).

However, the situation in many Nigerian secondary schools does not always correspond with this expectation. Adolescents continue to encounter challenges associated with poor sanitation, substance use, peer pressure, teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections. The NDLEA (2022) has continued to draw attention to substance-use concerns among young people, while health authorities and international organisations have emphasised the importance of strengthening school-based adolescent health education. The persistence of these challenges suggests that the availability of health information and counselling support may not be adequate in all school settings.

The problem is further complicated by differences in the implementation of guidance and counselling programmes. Some schools have functional counselling units and trained personnel, whereas others may have inadequate staffing, limited resources, insufficient counselling facilities or irregular guidance activities. Cultural sensitivities may also make it difficult for students to discuss reproductive health concerns openly. Although previous studies have examined adolescent health education and counselling interventions, relatively limited empirical evidence has simultaneously examined the relationship between school guidance and counselling programmes and environmental hygiene, substance abuse and reproductive health awareness among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State. This gap provides the basis for the present study.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and health awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Specifically, the study sought to:

1. determine the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and students' environmental hygiene awareness in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State;
2. examine the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and students' substance abuse awareness in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State; and
3. investigate the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and students' reproductive health awareness in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

1. What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and environmental hygiene awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
2. What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and substance abuse awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and reproductive health awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested at the 0.05 level of significance:

- H₀₁: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and environmental hygiene awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

- H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and substance abuse awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.
- H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and reproductive health awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Health Awareness

Guidance and counselling constitute complementary processes through which students are supported in understanding themselves, their environment and the consequences of their decisions. Guidance generally provides broad preventive and developmental assistance, whereas counselling provides more individualised support for personal, emotional and behavioural concerns. In secondary schools, these services can address academic, personal-social, career and health-related needs (Ogan & Nwoke, 2020; Okoye & Eze, 2021).

The relevance of guidance and counselling to adolescent health lies in its capacity to combine information with personal support. Students may receive general health information through group guidance sessions while students experiencing particular difficulties can receive individual counselling. Such an approach is relevant to environmental hygiene, substance abuse and reproductive health because these areas involve both knowledge and behavioural decision-making. Environmental hygiene awareness includes understanding personal cleanliness, handwashing, proper refuse disposal, sanitation and the maintenance of clean school surroundings. School-based guidance activities can reinforce these behaviours through health talks, demonstrations, school sanitation campaigns and individual counselling. Azuogu and Nwoke (2020) emphasised the importance of environmental sanitation awareness among secondary school students, while Rowland and Kolapo (2023) reported positive outcomes associated with structured school health education. Substance abuse awareness involves knowledge of the harmful effects of drugs and alcohol, recognition of factors such as peer pressure and understanding where to seek help. Counselling is particularly relevant because substance use is influenced not only by knowledge but also by social relationships, emotional difficulties and decisionmaking processes. Adebuse et al. (2021) and Ibrahim and Okonkwo (2022) reported positive outcomes from counselling and peer-related interventions directed towards substance abuse awareness among students.

Reproductive health awareness encompasses knowledge of puberty, sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancy and responsible reproductive health decisions. Adolescents need accurate information presented in an age-appropriate and culturally sensitive manner. Guidance and counselling programmes can provide opportunities for students to clarify misconceptions, discuss concerns and obtain reliable information. Studies reviewed in the source project suggest that structured counselling and health education interventions can improve adolescents' reproductive health knowledge and decision-making (Asmara et al., 2024; Ezelote et al., 2024). Despite these potential benefits, guidance and counselling programmes in Nigerian secondary schools face challenges, including inadequate staffing, insufficient funding, limited facilities, large student populations and cultural barriers. Ojo and Alabi (2020) observed that such constraints may reduce the accessibility and effectiveness of counselling services. The implication is that the presence of a counselling unit alone may not be sufficient; the quality, frequency and accessibility of the services are also important.

Empirical Studies

Empirical studies reviewed in the source project generally indicate positive associations between structured guidance, counselling and health awareness. Studies on environmental hygiene suggest that school-based health education and counselling can improve students' understanding of sanitation and hygiene practices (Rowland & Kolapo, 2023). Similarly, studies of substance abuse interventions indicate that peer education and counselling can improve students' knowledge of drug-related risks and strengthen resistance to negative peer influence (Adebusoye et al., 2021; Ibrahim & Okonkwo, 2022). Evidence on reproductive health also points towards the value of structured school interventions. Ezelote et al. (2024) and Asmara et al. (2024) reported improvements in adolescents' knowledge of reproductive health issues following counselling or schoolbased health interventions. Although the methodological approaches and contexts of these studies differed from the present study, they support the relevance of organised health education and counselling to adolescent health awareness.

The reviewed literature nevertheless reveals a contextual gap. A substantial proportion of existing studies have examined particular health interventions, specific geographical locations or individual dimensions of adolescent health. Comparatively limited evidence is available on the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and several dimensions of health awareness among public senior secondary school students in Rivers State. The present study addresses this gap by examining environmental hygiene, substance abuse and reproductive health awareness within one study population.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a correlational research design. The design was considered appropriate because the study sought to determine the nature and statistical significance of the relationships between guidance and counselling programmes and three dimensions of students' health awareness without manipulating the variables.

Population and Sample

The population comprised 191,155 senior secondary school students in 286 public secondary schools in Rivers State. A sample of 400 students was selected using the Cochran sample size determination procedure. Multistage sampling was used. Ten Local Government Areas were purposively selected to reflect different geographical contexts, followed by the random selection of five public senior secondary schools from each selected Local Government Area. Students in SSS1, SSS2 and SSS3 were represented through stratified random sampling, after which students were selected using simple random sampling. Of the 400 questionnaires administered, 386 properly completed questionnaires were retrieved and used for analysis, representing a high usable response rate.

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire titled Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Health Awareness Questionnaire (GCPHAQ). The instrument contained items measuring students' exposure to guidance and counselling programmes and their awareness of environmental hygiene, substance abuse and reproductive health. The questionnaire used a four-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (4), Agree (3), Disagree (2) and Strongly Disagree (1). A criterion mean of 2.50 was used for decisions on the descriptive items.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data were analysed using frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMC) was used to test the hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance. Where the probability value was less than 0.05, the corresponding null hypothesis was rejected.

Data Analysis and Results

Research Question One

What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and environmental hygiene awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 1: Respondents' Responses on Guidance and Counselling Programmes (N = 386)

<u>S/N</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Decision</u>	issues
4.	Guidance programmes address health-related	3.15	0.87	Accepted	
1.	Guidance and counselling activities are regularly organised in my school	3.14	0.88	Accepted	
2.	Counsellors provide useful information on personal and health-related matters	3.17	0.87	Accepted	
3.	Students have opportunities to discuss personal concerns with the school counsellor affecting students	3.10	0.89	Accepted	
5.	Guidance and counselling programmes help students make healthy decisions	3.18	0.86	Accepted	
	Grand Mean	3.15	0.87	Accepted	

The result shows that all the items recorded mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50. The grand mean of 3.15 indicates that respondents generally agreed that guidance and counselling programmes were available and addressed relevant personal and healthrelated concerns.

Table 2: Respondents' Responses on Environmental Hygiene Awareness (N = 386)

<u>S/N</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Decision</u>
6.	Understanding the importance of keeping the body and clothes clean	3.28	0.79	Accepted
7.	Understanding the importance of regular handwashing in preventing disease	3.31	0.78	Accepted
8.	Awareness that improper disposal of refuse can cause health problems	3.29	0.77	Accepted
9.	Understanding the importance of keeping classrooms and surroundings clean	3.26	0.77	Accepted
10.	Understanding that poor sanitation can contribute to disease spread	3.28	0.79	Accepted
	Grand Mean	3.28	0.78	Accepted

The results indicate a generally high level of environmental hygiene awareness. All five items exceeded the criterion mean of 2.50, with scores ranging from 3.26 to 3.31. The highest mean

was recorded for awareness of the importance of regular handwashing ($M = 3.31$), while maintaining clean classrooms and school surroundings recorded the lowest mean ($M = 3.26$).

Hypothesis One

H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and environmental hygiene awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 3: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Environmental Hygiene Awareness

<u>Variables</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>r</u>	<u>p</u>	<u>Decision</u>
Guidance and counselling programmes	386	3.15	0.69	0.62	0.000	Reject H_{01}
Environmental hygiene awareness	386	3.28	0.61			

The result shows a positive correlation of $r = 0.62$ between guidance and counselling programmes and environmental hygiene awareness. Since $p = 0.000$ is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and environmental hygiene awareness.

Research Question Two

What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and substance abuse awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 4: Respondents' Responses on Substance Abuse Awareness (N = 386)

<u>S/N</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Decision</u>
11.	Understanding the harmful effects of drug abuse	3.35	0.74	Accepted
12.	Understanding the dangers associated with excessive alcohol use	3.32	0.76	Accepted
13.	Awareness that peer pressure can influence experimentation with drugs	3.34	0.75	Accepted
14.	Understanding the physical and psychological consequences of substance abuse	3.32	0.74	Accepted
15.	Knowing where to seek help for substance-related problems	3.20	0.80	Accepted
	Grand Mean	3.31	0.76	Accepted

The result indicates a generally high level of substance abuse awareness among the respondents. The mean scores ranged from 3.20 to 3.35, with a grand mean of 3.31. Awareness of the harmful effects of drug abuse recorded the highest mean, while knowledge of where to seek help recorded the lowest, although it remained above the criterion mean.

Hypothesis Two

H₀₂: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and substance abuse awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 5: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Substance Abuse Awareness

<u>Variables</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>r</u>	<u>p</u>	<u>Decision</u>
	386	3.15	0.69	0.69		
Guidance and counselling programmes					0.000	Reject H ₀₂
Substance abuse awareness	386	3.31	0.59			

The result reveals a positive correlation of $r = 0.69$ between guidance and counselling programmes and substance abuse awareness. Since $p = 0.000$ is less than 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. The result therefore indicates a statistically significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and substance abuse awareness.

Research Question Three

What is the relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and reproductive health awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State?

Table 6: Respondents' Responses on Reproductive Health Awareness (N = 386)

<u>S/N</u>	<u>Item</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>Decision</u>
16.	Understanding physical and emotional changes associated with puberty	3.27	0.76	Accepted
17.	Awareness of the risks associated with sexually transmitted infections	3.28	0.78	Accepted
18.	Understanding the health and social consequences of teenage pregnancy	3.31	0.77	Accepted
19.	Understanding the importance of responsible reproductive health decisions	3.27	0.78	Accepted
20.	Knowing where to obtain reliable reproductive health information	3.17	0.82	Accepted
	Grand Mean	3.26	0.78	Accepted

The result shows a generally high level of reproductive health awareness among the respondents. All five items recorded mean scores above 2.50. The highest mean was obtained for awareness of the health and social consequences of teenage pregnancy ($M = 3.31$), while knowing where to obtain reliable reproductive health information recorded the lowest mean ($M = 3.17$).

Hypothesis Three

H₀₃: There is no significant relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and reproductive health awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State.

Table 7: Pearson Product Moment Correlation between Guidance and Counselling Programmes and Reproductive Health Awareness

<u>Variables</u>	<u>N</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>r</u>	<u>p</u>	<u>Decision</u>
	386	3.15	0.69	0.58		
Guidance and counselling programmes					0.000	Reject H_{03}
Reproductive health awareness	386	3.26	0.60			

The result indicates a positive correlation of $r = 0.58$ between guidance and counselling programmes and reproductive health awareness. Since $p = 0.000$ is less than 0.05 , the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, a statistically significant positive relationship existed between guidance and counselling programmes and reproductive health awareness.

Summary of Findings

The study produced three major findings.

First, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and environmental hygiene awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State ($r = 0.62$, $p < .05$).

Second, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and substance abuse awareness ($r = 0.69$, $p < .05$).

Third, there was a statistically significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and reproductive health awareness ($r = 0.58$, $p < .05$).

Discussion of Findings

The first finding established a significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and environmental hygiene awareness. The respondents also demonstrated a high level of environmental hygiene awareness, with a grand mean of 3.28 . The result suggests that students who reported greater exposure to guidance and counselling programmes also tended to report higher awareness of personal cleanliness, handwashing, refuse disposal, school cleanliness and sanitation. This finding is consistent with Rowland and Kolapo (2023), whose study indicated that structured school-based health education could improve students' understanding of environmental hygiene. It is also consistent with the broader position that school counsellors can contribute to sanitation awareness through health education, awareness campaigns and reinforcement of appropriate behaviours (Azuogu & Nwoke, 2020). The finding therefore supports the relevance of incorporating environmental hygiene issues into routine guidance and counselling activities.

The second finding revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and substance abuse awareness, with a correlation coefficient of 0.69 . This was the strongest of the three relationships examined. Respondents also demonstrated a high level of substance abuse awareness, with a grand mean of 3.31 . The finding indicates that students who reported greater exposure to guidance and counselling programmes tended to report greater awareness of the harmful effects of drug and alcohol use, peer pressure and the consequences of substance abuse. This finding agrees with Adebuseye et al. (2021) and Ibrahim and

Okonkwo (2022), who reported positive outcomes from structured counselling and peer-related interventions addressing substance abuse awareness. The result may be explained by the fact that effective counselling does not merely provide information but can also address peer influence, decision-making, self-control and help-seeking. However, the correlational nature of

the study means that the finding should be interpreted as an association rather than proof that counselling alone caused the higher level of awareness.

The third finding established a significant positive relationship between guidance and counselling programmes and reproductive health awareness, with $r = 0.58$. The respondents recorded a high overall level of reproductive health awareness, reflected by a grand mean of 3.26. The finding is consistent with evidence from school-based reproductive health interventions indicating that structured counselling and health education can improve adolescents' understanding of puberty, sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancy and responsible reproductive health decisions (Asmara et al., 2024; Ezelote et al., 2024). The comparatively lower mean for knowing where to obtain reliable reproductive health information suggests that awareness of particular reproductive health issues may be stronger than awareness of appropriate sources of information. This reinforces the need for school counselling programmes to provide not only information but also clear and reliable referral and information pathways for students.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that guidance and counselling programmes are significantly and positively related to environmental hygiene awareness, substance abuse awareness and reproductive health awareness among students in public senior secondary schools in Rivers State. The findings indicate that students who reported greater exposure to guidance and counselling programmes also tended to demonstrate higher levels of awareness across the three health domains examined.

The findings further suggest that guidance and counselling should not be regarded solely as an academic or career service. When properly organised, it can provide an important school-based platform for promoting health knowledge and responsible decision-making among adolescents. Nevertheless, because the study employed a correlational design, the observed relationships should not be interpreted as evidence of direct causation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Environmental hygiene: Public senior secondary schools in Rivers State should strengthen the integration of environmental hygiene education into regular guidance and counselling activities. Counsellors should organise practical sessions on handwashing, personal cleanliness, refuse disposal and school sanitation and reinforce these messages through school-based activities. **Substance abuse:** School authorities should strengthen preventive counselling on substance abuse by providing regular individual and group sessions addressing drug and alcohol misuse, peer pressure, decision-making and appropriate help-seeking. Collaboration among counsellors, teachers, parents and relevant health agencies should also be encouraged. **Reproductive health:** Reproductive health education should be systematically incorporated into school guidance and counselling programmes. Counsellors should provide students with age-appropriate and reliable information on puberty, sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancy and responsible reproductive health decisions, while also directing students to appropriate sources of further information and professional assistance.

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