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## GROUP-ORIENTED NATURE OF TRADITIONAL IGBO COUNSELLING SYSTEMS

**ABSTRACT:** The authors identify and discuss the major beliefs and practices underlying Igbo traditional counselling systems. They point out the absence of professional counsellors, but emphasize Igbo concern for human life in relationship with others. The group-oriented nature of Igbo traditional counselling practices are described by examining counselling processes within four cultural sub-systems: the family, intimacy groups, the age-group, and the delegated group.

In the organizational diversity and complexity of Igbo village groups, certain types of social forms and processes occur frequently and are features which provide cohesion and order to Igbo society. Much of these center around unique group counselling practices that occur at many different levels in the society.

This paper outlines the major beliefs and practices underlying Igbo traditional counselling systems.

Counselling and psychotherapy have been used to apply to interactions where one person, referred to as the counsellor or the therapist, has taken the responsibility for making his role in the interaction process contribute positively to the other person's personality development. For purposes of simplicity in this paper, "Counselling" will refer to the helping and therapeutic practices within the group systems described below. These will include interactive influences at work, skills and knowledge employed, and personality reorganizations and experiencing that result — in short, how problems of living are minimized.

### THE IGBO OR IBO

Since an ethnography of the Igbo has been written by an Igbo Anthropologist, Uchendu (1965), only a brief background comment will be made here.

The village Igbo are an agricultural people, their planting activities supplemented in some areas by hunting and gathering. They inhabit the largest portion of Eastern Nigeria and although census figures at present are controversial in Nigeria, they number perhaps between seven and ten million people. The Igbo have never had a centralized state. Rather, they have been organized into some two hundred separate village-groups, each one having a name, an internal organization, and a central market. Each group also has its own characteristic rituals and some cultural features that distinguish it from its neighbours. In some cases, dialectical differences of the Igbo language are found. The village-groups range in size from several thousand to over seventy-five thousand persons.

Each village group has considerable local autonomy. Its organization has been based on patrilineal descent groupings, and on association groupings, particularly age sets, grades, secret societies, and title groupings. The structure of these organizations and the manner in which they are inter-related vary from village-group to village-group. Some villages have been relatively centralized, such as Onitsha, although in most others authority has been more diffuse. Everywhere respect for seniority of age has been important and decisions have tended to be made by elders and prominent persons acting as a group, rather than by single persons. This pattern of leadership has been a distinctive feature of Igbo society. Another feature is a strong emphasis on an open status system, with few ascribed positions and considerable status mobility, whereby individuals acquire wealth and status through personal activities, but often with the support from the groups to which they are associated.

Igbo social life emphasizes two broad areas of values: 1. ability, for example prowess in farming, practical skills, and the ability to discuss intelligently and convincingly in council; 2. prudence in various social and interpersonal relationships, especially in the maintenance of personal reputation and the protection by the spirits, who include the high god (chukwu), the village tutelary spirits (alusi), and the ancestors (ndichie).

Stress situations for an entire population include such broad calamities as drought and flood (both rare), epidemics, and threats to the village land by neighbours or by government.

Individual potential stress-situations are numerous; the most important concern economics (procuring of farm land, of a wife, or wives, of titles), fertility — especially the fathering or bearing of sons — loss of face, and antagonism of the spirits. Individual stress-situations, however, are usually controlled or coped with through the maintenance of proper relationships with the spirits and with the ancestors, by appropriate sacrifices to them; and through a number of cultural systems which serve (among other social functions) very useful counselling and psychotherapeutic functions.

Here we shall examine four of these cultural systems: the family, intimacy groups, age groups, and delegated groups. The main questions to be addressed will be: What are these group counselling systems? How do they operate? Who is the client and who is the therapist? What methods are used, and with what effectiveness? These and similar questions we will try to answer, with specific reference to the Igbo traditional way of life which has been considerably altered in some places by the interjection of foreign values.

### HUMANISTIC VALUES

To prepare the reader for a fuller comprehension of the cultural group processes referred to here as "group counselling," a brief sketch of the basic Igbo philosophy of humanistic living is in order. As in other African societies human need is the supreme criterion of behaviour, and social harmony is a vital necessity (Kaunda, n.d.).

The Igbos believe that social calamities and human relations which disturb their world are controllable and should be manipulated by them for their own good (Uchendu, 1965, p. 13). Hence the maintenance of social balance becomes a dominant and persuasive theme in Igbo life. They achieve this social balance through constant interaction in their various cultural groupings.

Since the need to get along well with one another is such a major concern in interpersonal relations, a properly socialized Igbo is one who is able to interact with others and speak his mind freely, even if it hurts himself or others to do so.

The Igbo group-oriented value system does not imply a "let-alone" policy. Each cultural group accepts and believes in its reconciliatory functions among its members. There are conflicts, and to resolve them adjustment through compromise is the accepted way. To achieve this compromise, the cause of the conflict must be known to the people involved.

Another feature of the Igbo society is the belief that every member is one of "us." The "us" is an accepting community of Igbos who share mutual responsibility for one another. The new look at psychotherapy by Jourard (1971, p. 156) expresses this basic Igbo belief system. There is no "them" — only us, seekers after meaning and life under conditions of extreme hardship and disease. The mission of a group is to discover ways to relate to others and to the social order that keeps one fit, loving, growing, and inventive in the society. The group needs new possibilities for achievement, contributions, and enjoyment. The criterion for individual success involves the quality of experiencing that squarely confronts the struggle for existence within the society.

Each group operates under the most humanistic and facilitative conditions possible. For example, an Igbo can claim justice, privilege, or opportunity simply because "he is born." (Even a slave, who is not a son of the land, *nwa di ala*, may claim at least basic human rights.) He often questions, *a mughim amu?* — wasn't I born? Being born represents existence. He deserves because he exists. He is as valuable as everyone else. With such respect for being born, each group exists with a full understanding that everyone owes a responsibility for the welfare of the society and its members. The Igbo motto (*Igwebuike*) illustrates this view: *Otu aka anaghieke ngwugwu* — One hand does not tie a parcel. It is true to say that the Igbo community group is characterized by a high value and respect for the birth of the individual, contrary to the implications of the statement (Shelton, 1968) "for mere existence does not make a human being important among Igbos."

Ideally, these groups are highly influenced by the following major humanistic values:

1. Belonging is a basic human need.
2. Each person is of supreme and equal value.
3. Living is not easy, therefore problems of living are of serious universal concern, as important as survival itself.

4. Counselling is not a client/therapist affair, but part of living for the group to share. People can learn from people.
5. Each individual has the creative power to make biased interpretations of social reality.
6. Motivation is understood in terms of the striving for significance — the movement to enhance the self esteem.
7. Behaviour is goal directed and purposive.
8. Empathy: the belief that knowledge of other social beings can only be acquired when dispassionate objective analysis is supplemented with empathic understanding.
9. Social interest is a key concept in the understanding of behaviour.

In short, humanism as a major Igbo referent means the concern for human life in relationships between the self and other. Humanism may be destroyed unless the individual gives of himself to another. Service to family, clan, community becomes more than "the burden of being my brother's keeper." Serving others is motivated not by some abstract code of behaviour; rather, one serves others to serve oneself. Necessity, instead of philanthropy, marks the encounter between self and others.

As each group is described, we shall illustrate how its activities reflect these humanistic values and then heuristically suggest some of their counselling and psychotherapeutic functions. It is our thesis that, beyond the organizational diversity and complexity of Igbo village-groups, certain types of social forms and processes occur frequently and are features that provide cohesion and order to Igbo society. Many of these center around basic group processes (referred to here as "group counselling") that occur at many different levels of the society.

### *Vocational Guidance*

The basic general occupation in Igbo country is agriculture. Individuals or families have several small land holdings on which they practise a multiple crop rotation cultivation. In addition, there are localized occupations or trades such as crafts, pottery, carpentry, music, carving, smithing, etc. Without the complexity of vocational choice common in highly technological societies, vocational guidance presents little or no problem to the Igbo. Young people subsequently become the farmers their parents were. Any person desiring a profession other than that typical of his locality follows a process of on-the-job apprenticeship. It is not uncommon for the experts of a locality to refuse apprentices from "out of state," thus maintaining a profitable monopoly of their trade or art. Vocational guidance does not therefore merit special discussion. There is no special provision for or recognition of its needs among the Igbos except as part of general group counselling.

### *Absence of Professional Counsellors*

Igbo herbalists, diviners, fortune tellers, and the like have suc-

cessfully incorporated the role of counsellor with their various orientations. Some people consult them and are satisfied with the experience. Other than these types of people, it can be said that there are no professional counsellors among the Igbos. This is consistent with the fact that the Igbo does not regard counselling as the specific art of a professional practitioner. (Berenson and Carkhuff (1967, p. 14) have observed that the overwhelming preponderance of systematic evidence available today indicates that the primary conditions of effective treatment (therapy) are conditions which minimally trained non-professional persons can provide.) Counselling or therapy is either a way of life or nothing. If counselling were a profession it would contradict the belief of the Igbos that problems of living are such that any member of the community can be subject to them, rather than problems against which certain professionals may graduate and be exempt.

### GROUP-ORIENTED NATURE OF IGBO COUNSELLING

The entire Igbo counselling system is group-oriented in nature, as a consequence of communal living. Most activities are organized through community groups, counselling being one of its major services. Each one of these social groups is not only concerned with counselling responsibilities among its members, but could undertake this role on behalf of other individuals or some other group.

This counselling duty can be voluntarily offered or can be delegated as a duty by a larger social group or authority (*ndiiche, ofo* holders). In either case the mission is to counsel, described with words such as (*odu*) advice, (*ileba anya*) look-into, or (*ido aka nanti*) ear pulling, i.e. warning.

But the actual group counselling situations, however, are not described with the above words which, in the case of the last two, have implications of legality and warning respectively. An Igbo seeking counselling or being invited to participate is more likely to use words such as: (*noria*) sit with, (*ikwa uwa*) to rap, (*ikpa nkata*) general discussion, or (*ntugha*) reflections. In fact the number of words or Igbo expressions used in this connection is surprisingly large.

One can observe certain unique facilitative conditions operative in these counselling groups, for example:

1. freedom of expression among group members.
2. flexibility and informality in terms of counselling time, location, procedures, or even problems.
3. humour and jokes (*njakiri*) some of which are loaded with meaning.
4. sincerity, trust and openness of discussion (telling it like it is, calling it as one sees it).
5. unrestrained emotional expressions — fights, dance, drama, and musical demonstrations.
6. high level confidentiality (*izu*) employing body language if necessary.
7. direct mutual assistance — labour, finances, and business with no strings attached.

Examples will be given to illustrate how these processes operate in each group counselling system.

### COUNSELLING GROUP I: THE FAMILY

The extended family of the Igbos includes not only mother, father, and their children, but grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and sometimes others who have lived in the family for a long time and have secured their acceptance by creditable conduct rather than by blood relationship. That the Igbo is one of his community, there is no question. The positive regard, congruence, and empathic understanding which he enjoys in this group is considerable. But as we come closer to his family, we approach his home, his abode, the root of his being.

The family naturally guarantees social and personal security for its members. It also provides richness of experience and knowledge to those who are part of it; thus it strives to build a good family name which its sons will be proud to identify with. The children of the family in turn will struggle to maintain and enhance this good name by reputable conduct, and by refraining from any behaviour that could put the family into shame and disgrace.

However, should any problems arise, as in the case below, the family counselling process is immediately invoked. A typical family counselling case is described below for illustration.

A young Igbo was involved in a case of misappropriation of lottery (*Oha, Ogbo*) funds which threatened his honour, means of livelihood, and disturbed his family and social relationships.

As a result, he became confused, worried, depressed, and withdrawn. A member of the family became aware of this apparent change in the young person, and quickly reported to the others. A few people met him and he was summoned home. His immediate problems, food, lodging, pocket money, and the like were provided. While his domestic needs were being satisfied, the family decided to get the case over with. This was done with the least possible harm to the individual and the family name.

Because of pressing needs of the lottery group whose money was involved, the financial part of the case was resolved by a private family delegation that negotiated a method of repayment agreeable to the lottery group. Hand-in-hand with deliberations about meeting family obligations in connection with repayment arrangements, members had gradually been exposed to other details in this case. In the days following a complete settlement of this problem, the young man was involved in (*obu*) discussions in which effective counselling usually took place. "*Obu* or *Obi*" is a separate building usually located in the centre of an Igbo Compound. It serves an Igbo family as a "common room." Activities that take place in an "*Obu*" vary from children's play activities and serious adult affairs to individual or group counselling. In the "*Obu*" all matters relating to this case and/or any others were discussed in greater detail and in a relaxed atmosphere. In Ngwa, Oboro, and Nsukka localities, the evening "*tombo*," palm wine, is usually served to moisten the lips — to lubricate inhibitions.

Here, counselling relating to the general life of the young man was touched. Further sources of conflict were looked into, and ways of resolving them suggested. The number of these family counselling meetings were determined by the needs of this young man, and the magnitude of the different aspects of the problems involved. As the general conditions improved, this young person became less depressed, and much happier. He was able to go about his business with due respect from his social world and with the encouraging support of his family.

## COUNSELLING GROUP II: INTIMACY GROUPS

In some cultures, friendship or intimacy often refers to boy/girl relationships, and may have homosexual or lesbian implications in cases of intimacy between people of the same sex. The Igbo concept of intimacy (*enyi omam, onye ya na madu na-ato*) within his community is a very close relationship and usually develops between same sexes. It is considered a primary relationship by nature of what goes on in it. An intimacy group hardly involves more than two or three people who could share mutual help and support in all spheres of life including private personality problems. The military concept of "comradeship" illustrates an aspect of this type of friendship. "Brother" (*nwanne*) is a blood relationship which is very important to the Igbo. But there is (*Enyi ka nwanne*), an intimate friend more important than a brother.

Because of the great importance attached to this intimacy group which may develop usually between people of approximately the same age, members in this relationship are in a position to participate in a counselling involvement, and the roles they undertake depend on the nature of their problems and the circumstances. Other counselling groups, for example the family, which has been discussed, recognize this intimacy group and employ the services of its members for referral or counselling effectiveness. A simple statement such as "ask your friend, consult your friend," (*jua enyi gi*) or "take a look at your friend" (*lee ibe gi anya*), may be just what a person requires for a re-evaluation of his living style. It has been known that under extreme anxiety or agitation when all efforts seem to fail in controlling the behaviour of a person, this intimate friend is invited, because he could effect a restraining influence that may calmly restore the normal situation.

An intimate friend plays a key role in the informal modification of behaviour. The Igbo does not always confront the source of behaviour directly for fear of invading individual privacy or its relationship. One way of reaching an individual is through his intimate friend who reports a feed-back in a way his friend will understand. Intimate friends act as checks and balances for each other, so that it cannot be said of both that one is picking stones for the schizoid other to throw with. There is true unconditional regard for persons in this intimacy group since the role of client or therapist is not reserved for any particular member. The problem of living is one for both to share with respect and confidence.

Intimacy group counselling seems to be effective in cases where a member is sexually inhibited or extroverted. Intimate friends act as chaperones who gradually and constantly introduce and encourage this member in appropriate heterosexual behaviour.

Addiction or excessive drinking is also controllable through intimacy group counselling. An Igbo is more likely to attend a social function in which heavy drinking will take place in the company of his "friend." Either "friend" can order "no more drinks" for the other. Society respects and abides by such an order, because the intimate friend is expected to take responsibility for the proper conduct of a drunken intimate friend. The daily disputes common between young married couples are within the counselling jurisdiction of the intimate friend, in whose presence problems are usually discussed and forgotten.

### COUNSELLING GROUP III: THE AGE GROUP

A significant feature of Igbo social structure is the "age grades." These are hierarchical groupings of several persons of approximate age range who show at least minimal organization, who carry out some activities jointly, and pass through the grade in time, leaving behind its name and its associated activities for others who join it as they reach the appropriate age.

In contrast, "age sets" (*uke*) which grow out of the many years of intimate association of age mates, are named organizations to which the members belong for life, and which cease to exist after their deaths. There are usually between fifteen to twenty age sets in a community, each covering a span of approximately three years.

A set (*uke*) of males is fully formed by the time its members are about thirty years of age. (Female age sets do exist, e.g. *elia* in Afikpo, but their unique features are not included here.) It keeps its name and organization throughout the life of its members, though their position and duties in the village change as they grow older and the set joins with other sets to form village age grades.

Members in an age set establish very strong identity with their peers. There is much conforming behaviour on matters where general consensus has been reached. During the discussion phase, freedom of expression is encouraged. All views on a matter are explored, and every detail thoroughly discussed. The age set is of all things, an equal expression platform where all members seek to exercise equal talking privileges. In this group one can afford to be flippant, impetuous, make spontaneous remarks, or do anything short of violent disruption of the meeting. Fights for example are punishable by only a small fine in many Igbo age sets. Still, there is often minor bickering over whether a set member has fulfilled his obligations properly, and there may be much debate and talk over the matter, as is typical of many arguments among age set members.

It should be noted, however, that this permissive atmosphere in an age set is not allowed in a mixed group where different age groups are represented. In a mixed group, the Igbos are very skeptical of a



man misunderstanding a topic (*ida elu uka*), thereby revealing his ignorance, or, worse still, betraying his age-set decision relevant to the topic. In a mixed social setting, mistakes not punishable at the age-set level could be very expensive for the individual, as well as his group. As a result, reservation and caution are the strategy in mixed group encounters.

The age-group setting encourages a member to "talk out," because he is within "the us" (*anyi anyi*), his own group. When serious emotionally charged expressions begin to flow, Igbo humour and proverbs are called into play. Funny proverbs can drive home a point for future serious reflection or amusing remarks (*njakiri*) can be addressed to an individual to draw him into uninhibited participation. In discussion, a hard blow can thus be softened (*iju uka nmanu*), while a poorly receptive individual can be handed a life riddle to think about at home, (*itu uka n'anti*). All these could be done without hurting the feelings of any member, and in full respect of him as a person. There was a case in which an inquisitive member, sensing the indirect bearing of several subtle proverbs to his own problems of living, directly demanded an explanation. Another member rose to remind the former that an Igbo who hears a proverb and fails to see the implications represents the stupid one whose mother's wedding was a wasted effort. (*Nwata aturu ilulu kowakwara ya, ego ejiri luo nne ya furu efu.*) (Research on African psychiatric practice has emphasized the role that suggestion plays in treatment. Prince (1964), Collis (1966), and Turner (1964) have attributed whatever success the African therapies may have entirely to suggestion, noting that Africans are highly suggestible. There can be no doubt that suggestion plays an important part in these Igbo counselling groups. For example, proverbs are used by Igbos to heighten suggestibility or to implant specific ideas for an individual's reflection and action.)

A member's difficulty is felt to be the set's concern as well, and the set may intercede in the matter. Here it acts as a moral force, invoking traditional Igbo rules and beliefs. For instance, a man wanted to swear his innocence at an Igbo shrine, a serious business, over a trivial case that he had lost in a decision of the village elders; his age set tried to dissuade him, offering to pay his court fine in order to prevent him from what they believed was possible death at the hands of the shrine spirit if he were in fact guilty. Such a case indicates how a set may press its members to remain within normal social bounds.

If a man is in constant disagreement with his set and refuses to take part in its activities or to pay fines against him, his membership can be suspended, following a general meeting of the set, until he terminates the disputes and fulfills his obligations. He cannot join another set; no other would take him in, but rather he would be told to make peace with his own group. Such a man almost invariably returns, because the membership is advantageous to him.

An age set aids its members in many ways and is interested in their achievements, which bring prestige to the group. When a man

takes a "title," the group often gives him money or goods, and its members may dance and support him in carrying out the proper rituals. In return he feasts them, and their presence is one way of insuring that news of the title will spread through the village. On rare occasions they may supply the whole cost of a title if it is a necessary one for a member to take and he is poor and lacks relatives to help him. The group may aid a man who wishes to marry but does not have the means or a member who loses his trade goods in the river or by theft, by making him a gift or a special loan of money.

If a member is ill, he may ask his set to help with his farm. Although there is a normal procedure for housebuilding involving set segments within the major patrilineage, a man building a large dwelling may have his set assist him in return for wine and food. The widow of a member may receive assistance in repairing her house, in farming, or in other ways, if she asks for it.

Other dimensions of age group counselling which members undertake and find quite satisfying and rewarding include:

1. *Bereavement.* When a member dies, the group gives whoever performs the funeral a small sum to help defray funeral costs, and sometimes palm wine for the mourners as well. The man who directs the burial may in turn give the set members yam and chicken to sacrifice to the spirit of the dead at crossing of paths.

In cases where the loss of a member of the family, an intimate friend, or a loved one is very upsetting to an individual, counselling practices of the age group are extremely sustaining. The musical compositions of the Igbos permit the age group to share sadness or joy with music. A member can start a sad song with the entire group joining in a sorrowful chorus that unburdens the emotions and releases tears of other members. When happiness is communicated, rhythms of joy and gratitude spontaneously conclude the discussion or may even announce the event to the larger community

<i>Ayamba</i> —	<i>Kanyi nuriba</i> <i>Kanyi nuriba</i> <i>Kanuriba</i>	Let us rejoice Let us rejoice Madam Enyidi
<i>Enyidi</i> —	<i>Kuru ekwe n'ama</i> <i>anyi ejela ubi</i> <i>Kanyi kuruba egwu.</i>	Summoned us Not to work But to rejoice.
<i>Ayamba</i> —	.....	

2. *Failure in Productivity.* Where a member considers he is not being productive in his life, age group counselling could revive his spirits, could give him practical help or set a model through some members, so that his readjustment could be cooperatively set up. Funding, lending, and communal labour are common.

3. *Self-Concept.* A deformed person, for example, could enjoy as high a self-concept as any other member of his age group. In their counselling practices, and in practical living, members make sure the interest of their members are protected and their weakness not taken advantage of.

4. *Early and Late-Maturing Individuals.* The specific date of birth of an individual is not as important as his level of all-round maturity. While the late maturer is not set back in age grouping, the exceptionally early all-round maturer is sometimes advanced into an older age group. The practical problems of self-concept minimized by this practice are obvious. Self worth is achieved within a group whose abilities and achievements are about equal.

In all these activities there is a strong sense of reciprocity and comradeship among equals. A set is obviously concerned with the major prestige activities of a member, his titles, and ceremonies for his children, which mark his growing maturity and rising prestige. It is also of interest to note the manner in which it is involved with the domestic kin of a member, how a father or brother may pay a man's dues if he is absent and represent him at set meetings, how the set may help a member's widow or try to settle a member's dispute with a wife. In short, while the set is nominally an association grouping, it is closely linked with the personal and domestic life of its members.

#### COUNSELLING GROUP IV: DELEGATED GROUPS

By a delegated group in the Igbo sociocultural system, we mean a group capable of bringing some influence to bear on the conduct of a person or group of persons.

There are quite a variety of delegated groups within the entire cultural mechanism. There are long-standing delegated groups as well as groups that are spontaneously set up just as the western society strikes a task force or an *ad hoc* committee. Such a group may often be comprised of self-appointed or volunteer enthusiasts, but more often one will find people whose ascribed roles are traditionally determined by custom, or people whose assignment is a result of the demands of a temporary situation.

In the affairs of the community, groups play the greatest part in social control. Sometimes a delegated group could be charged with responsibilities that one can describe as persuasive (protesting), legal, regulatory, military, counselling, etc.

##### *Formal Delegated Groups*

1. Persuasive (protest) — as in the 1929 women's riot, when Chief Ogbonnas' (*ama*) compound or home surroundings were actually littered with human excreta from women protesting the Chief's unpopular support for the taxation of women. The "*Umuada*" influence explained by Olisa in his *Political Culture and Stability* (1971) is another example.

2. Legal — Where there is an undisputed offence for which the culprit refuses to pay the customary fine and instead shows evidence of resistance to legal action, a "strong" delegation sometimes made up of his age-group is delegated to collect the fine or confiscate property (*iri iwu*) in lieu of it.

3. Regulatory — When human evidence is doubtful and inade-

quate, cultural regulatory groups such as "ofo, ekpe, okonko," as final arbiters on judicial matters, and for commitment to agreements, pledges, and alliances, use their symbols to remind everyone of the consequences of disrespect for truth, uprightness, and fair play.

4. Military — As when a delegation goes to scout an invading army, to man an outpost, or to intercede between two forces.

### INFORMAL COUNSELLING GROUPS

A delegated counselling group is a group of people chosen to investigate, "look into," problems of an individual or group. The problem conditions determine the group composition of the delegation. In setting up a delegated counselling group, the following factors are likely to be considered:

1. Person affected, his age, experience, temperament, social status, etc.
2. The seriousness of the problem — its implications to personal and social welfare.
3. People of similar experience, especially those who can understand and communicate effectively.

A delegated counselling group is not a permanent rigid structure, rather it is determined by the problem situation and its development.

In one marriage conflict for example, Ugoala, aged 35, was married but had no child from his first wife. So he decided to marry a second wife against the wishes of the first wife, Ugo. A stress situation naturally developed for the couple. Ugoala, or his wife, each alone, could undertake to report the conflict to two or more persons, in which case family counselling will result. Unfortunately, the problem was so serious for Ugo that she collected her things and deserted Ugoala for her parents' home.

Ugoala waited for a few days and then sent a delegation of two reliable and mature friends of the family, who were well known for their fairness and sincerity. The delegation was received by Ugo's parents as they would receive ordinary visiting in-laws. But everyone concerned recognized that a counselling situation was in progress. Cola nuts and wine were served, and while food was being prepared, discussions were slowly started. If communication breaks down at this informal counselling stage, subsequent delegations might take a legal turn. But Ugo comes from a very good family, and was able to return to her husband a few days later to help her husband in decisions about his new proposal.

Such a delegated counselling group in operation draws from experience. In respect for tradition delegates are very courteous as they cautiously point out the consequences of proposed actions without making decisions for anybody. They ask the necessary questions often conveyed through any of the numerous Igbo proverbs which constitute a mark for wisdom, prudence and diplomacy. *Ya buru uka, buru ilu.*

## CONCLUSION

Whereas the most recent developments in western counselling and psychotherapy appear to be in the area of "group work" (psycho-drama, group-centered therapy, analytical group therapy, family therapy are among the most common designations), an Igbo will not find these developments new. Traditional Igbo counselling systems are naturally occurring group processes rooted in the very structure of Igbo society. What is new, if one considers the composition, nature, and functions of the western "groups," is the involvement of a professionally trained counsellor.

RESUME: Les auteurs identifient et discutent des principales croyances et pratiques sous-jacentes aux systèmes traditionnels du groupe Igbo. Ils font état de l'absence de conseillers professionnels. Par contre, ils soulignent les préoccupations pour la vie humaine dans les relations chez ce groupe. L'orientation sociale des pratiques de counseling du groupe Igbo sont décrites par voie d'examen des processus de counseling dans quatre sous-systèmes culturels: la famille, les groupes intimes, les groupes d'âge et le groupe délégué.

Parmi la diversité et la complexité organisationnelle des villages Igbo, on observe que certains types de structures et de processus sociaux se produisent souvent et constituent des particularités qui assurent la cohésion et l'ordre. Beaucoup de ces processus sont centrés sur des pratiques de counseling de groupe qu'on peut retrouver aux divers niveaux de la société.

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