

competence.

- c. Promote school-wide awareness programs on emotional intelligence and conflict resolution.
- d. Encourage participatory leadership and youth-led initiatives like "Right Here".
- e. Design counselling curricula that balance cognitive strategies with emotional literacy.

References

- Ayodele, O. S., & Ekwoaba, J. O. (2025). Emotional intelligence and classroom management among private secondary school teachers in Isolo LCDA in Lagos State, Nigeria. *Lagos Journal of Banking, Finance & Economic Issues*, 6(1).
- Alferaih, A. (2021). Emotional Intelligence and Job Satisfaction in the Educational Sector. and general psychology. *Monographs*, 125(2), 209.
- Chebykin, O. (2020). Emotional Intelligence in the Workplace.
- Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Goleman, D. (1998). *Working with Emotional Intelligence*. Bantam Books.
- Holian, R. (2006). Management decision making, ethical issues and “emotional” intelligence. *Management Decision*, 44(8), 1122-1138.
- Holian, R. (2006). Management decision making, ethical issues and “emotional” intelligence. *Management Decision*, 44(8), 1122-1138.
- Mayer, J. D., Caruso, D. R., & Salovey, P. (2004). Emotional Intelligence: Theory, Findings, and Implications. *Psychological Inquiry*, 15(3), 197–215.
- Petrides, K. V., Sangareau, Y., Furnham, A., & Frederickson, N. (2016). Trait Emotional Intelligence and Children’s Peer Relations at School. *Social Development*, 15(3), 537–547.
- Singh, K. (2011). Enhancing ethics at workplace through emotional intelligence: An exploratory study on business organizations in India. *International Journal of Business and Management Science*, 4(1), 51-73.
- Zaki, J. (2018). *The War for Kindness: Building Empathy in a Fractured World*.

RELIGIOUS COUNSELLING: A TOOL FOR PROMOTING NATIONAL SECURITY IN NIGERIA

Amina U. ZARMA

Department of Sociology, Gombe State University.

Tel.: 08032447934

Email: aminazarma@gmail.com

&

Abdullahi M. SAGIR

Faculty of Educational Foundation, Gombe State University.

Tel.: 08063122131

Email: Sagirsagacious@gmail.com

Abstract

Religious counseling has emerged as a vital, though often overlooked, tool in addressing the complex security challenges facing Nigeria. This paper examines the role of religious counseling in promoting national security by exploring its theoretical foundations, practical applications, and policy relevance. Using frameworks such as Social Learning Theory, Human Needs Theory, and Conflict Transformation Theory. The study illustrates how spiritual guidance, moral reorientation, and interfaith dialogue can reduce radicalization, foster social cohesion, and support post-conflict reconciliation. Key concepts including national security, radicalization, peacebuilding, and religious extremism are clarified within the Nigerian context to highlight their interconnections. Drawing from recent empirical studies and real-life case examples, the paper demonstrates how religious counselors—particularly pastors, imams, and faith-based therapists serve as agents of peace, healing, and moral reform. Challenges such as religious manipulation, inadequate training, and institutional resistance are also discussed. The paper concludes with practical recommendations for policy integration, community engagement, and institutional support for faith-based counseling interventions. Ultimately, it argues that sustainable national security in Nigeria must go beyond military responses to include culturally rooted, spiritually driven solutions like religious counseling. Such an approach not only addresses the symptoms of insecurity but also tackles its moral and psychological roots, paving the way for a more peaceful and united nation.

Keywords: Religious counseling, national security, radicalization, peace building, Nigeria, social cohesion.

Introduction

Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, continues to face persistent threats to its national security which ranges from the insurgency of Boko Haram in the Northeast to farmer-herder clashes in the Middle Belt and rising incidents of banditry and kidnapping across various regions,

the nation's security landscape remains complex and fragile (Adesoji, 2017; Ogundiya, 2020). Despite the deployment of military force, intelligence operations, and political dialogue, these measures alone have proven insufficient in tackling the root causes of insecurity. This reality has spurred renewed interest in exploring alternative and complementary strategies one of which is

religious counselling.

Religious counseling is a counselling approach grounded in spiritual guidance, moral instruction, and emotional healing through religious frameworks, has the power to shape attitudes, influences behaviour, and rebuild fractured communities. In a nation where religion penetrates every aspect of life with over 90% of Nigerians identifying as either Christian or Muslim (Pew Research Center, 2017). Faith-based leaders and institutions command deep trust and wield significant social influence. These leaders often serve as counsellors, community gatekeepers, and moral compasses. As such, their role in promoting peace, discouraging extremism, and offering hope to the disenfranchised is both strategic and necessary (Ibrahim & Ahmad, 2018).

Evidence suggests that religious counselling has been effective in rehabilitating former insurgents, promoting interfaith dialogue, and reducing youth involvement in violent activities (Salihu & Madaki, 2019). More than just sermons, religious counselling involves structured interventions, conflict mediation, trauma recovery, and reintegration programs that address both spiritual and psychological needs. When religious leaders speak out against violence and champion forgiveness, tolerance, and reconciliation, they help to create a culture of peace that goes beyond the reach of political decrees or military campaigns (Adebayo, 2021).

This paper investigates religious counselling as a tool for promoting national security in Nigeria, focusing on how religious actors and institutions can contribute meaningfully to peacebuilding and counter-violence initiatives. It contends that integrating religious counselling into national security efforts is not only culturally appropriate but also a potentially transformative strategy for long-term stability. The paper examined successful models, current gaps, and practical recommendations for policymakers, religious leaders and institutions, and civil societies. In a time when national unity feels increasingly strained, and citizens sought for answers beyond government pronouncements, the pulpit may yet prove to be one of the strongest platforms for peace.

Conceptual Literature Review

Religious Counselling

Religious counseling is a process that blends psychological support with spiritual guidance, often grounded in the values and doctrines of a religious tradition. It involves using religious principles, scriptures, and moral teachings to guide individuals in coping with personal, social, or existential problems. In the Nigerian context, religious counseling is typically delivered by pastors, imams, chaplains, or trained faith-based counselors, often in places of worship, schools, or correctional facilities.

For instance, Uwe (2018) clarifies that, religious counseling in Africa is not only therapeutic but also a form of moral instruction and social control, aimed at shaping behavior, restoring relationships, and promoting peaceful co-existence. The counsellor uses tools such as prayer,

scripture, confession, and religious dialogue to guide counselees toward peace, repentance, and ethical living.

The most important is that, religious counseling does not replace professional psychological therapy, but it complements it, particularly in culturally and spiritually grounded societies like Nigeria where religion plays a central role in identity and morality (Ogunleye & Oladipo, 2020). Through religious counseling, individuals are taught to resolve conflicts peacefully, forgive offenses, obey laws, and reject violence all of which contribute significantly to national peace and stability.

National Security

National security refers to the protection of a nation from internal and external threats that could undermine its sovereignty, safety, economic well-being, or social stability. Traditionally, national security was viewed narrowly as a military concern, but contemporary definitions include economic resilience, social justice, political inclusion, and community peace (Bassey & Okon, 2016).

In Nigeria, national security challenges include terrorism which includes the activities of terrorist groups like (e.g., Boko Haram, ISWAP), banditry, farmer-herder conflicts, ethnic agitation, kidnapping, cybercrime, and political violence. These threats often have religious or ideological undertones, making religious counseling a potentially transformative tool in mitigating them.

Religious counselling contributes to national security by promoting moral reorientation, reducing violent extremism, and supporting trauma healing in conflict-affected communities. For instance, Odukoya and Agbaje (2021) argued that, security should not be defined only by weapons and policing, but by the level of peace, trust, and ethical behavior in society.

Radicalization

Radicalization is the process by which individuals adopt extreme beliefs or ideologies that may lead to the justification of violence to achieve certain goals. In Nigeria, radicalization has been particularly associated with religious extremism, where young people are recruited into terrorist groups under the guise of religious jihad or defense of faith.

Religious counseling counters radicalization by offering alternative narratives rooted in compassion, moderation, and peace. Through dialogue, theological correction, and emotional support, counselors can deconstruct extremist ideologies and redirect individuals toward socially acceptable behaviors (Suleiman & Bello, 2019). In areas like Borno and Yobe, where radicalization has been severe, religious counseling has helped ex-combatants reintegrate into society and abandon violence.

Peace building

Peace building refers to the processes that create conditions for lasting peace in societies

affected by conflict. This includes reconciliation, justice, trauma healing, education, and the reformation of institutions that perpetuate violence or inequality. Religious counseling plays a key role in peace building, especially in post-conflict societies like Nigeria. Faith-based counselors promote forgiveness, healing, and dialogue. For example, Christian and Muslim leaders have facilitated counseling sessions that brought victims and perpetrators of communal violence together for mutual understanding and reconciliation (Adegbite, 2022). Through such efforts, the emotional wounds of war and conflict are addressed, and the cycle of retaliation is broken.

Religious Extremism

Religious extremism is the distortion of religious beliefs to justify violence, hatred, or exclusion of others. It often emerges in societies with high levels of poverty, illiteracy, political corruption, and religious manipulation. In Nigeria, both Christian and Muslim extremists have used scripture out of context to provoke violence and division (Ahmed, 2017).

Religious counseling combats extremism by teaching correct interpretations of sacred texts, emphasizing love, tolerance, and peaceful coexistence. When religious counselors are trained to recognize early signs of extremism, they can intervene through pastoral care, theological dialogue, and community mobilization.

Social Cohesion

Social cohesion refers to the strength of relationships and the sense of solidarity among members of a society. A cohesive society is one where citizens cooperate across ethnic, religious, and class lines to achieve common goals and maintain peace. In a pluralistic nation like Nigeria, promoting social cohesion is vital for national security. As Ibrahim (2023) notes, religious counseling has succeeded in building trust between rival communities in several parts of Northern Nigeria, fostering a sense of shared humanity and reducing fear. The following are some of the contributions of religious counselling to social cohesion.

1. It encourages interfaith dialogue among different religious followers.
2. It teaches empathy and forgiveness among members of a given community.
3. It promotes ethical leadership and responsible citizenship.

Theoretical Review

The application of religious counseling as a strategic intervention for national security can be situated within several relevant psychological, sociological, and counseling theories. These theories provide an academic foundation to understand how values, beliefs, and interpersonal guidance influence human behavior, particularly in the context of violent extremism, deviance, and moral decline. This section highlights key theories that underpin the study and their relevance and providing.

Social Control Theory

Originally proposed by Hirschi (1969), Social Control Theory posits that strong social bonds,

particularly to institutions like family, school, and religion, prevent individuals from engaging in deviant or criminal behavior. According to this theory, individuals are less likely to commit acts that threaten societal order when they are integrated into moral frameworks that emphasize conformity, responsibility, and discipline.

Religious counseling, by reinforcing these social bonds especially moral commitment to divine authority reduce anti-social behaviors that threaten national peace (Ibrahim & Musa, 2019). The religious counselor, in this sense, becomes a medium through which pro-social norms are internalized, and national loyalty is enhanced. As such, the theory supports the argument that religion-based guidance contributes to internal security by promoting behavioral self-regulation.

Cognitive-Behavioral Theory (CBT)

Cognitive Behavioral Theory which is mostly abbreviated as (CBT) was developed by Aaron Beck, emphasizes the role of thought patterns in shaping behavior. Individuals engage in destructive or anti-social behaviors when they possess irrational, distorted, or radical beliefs. CBT aims to correct these faulty cognitions and replace them with rational, value-based alternatives (Beck, 2011).

Religious counseling integrates the cognitive restructuring goals of CBT with scriptural teachings, offering individuals both emotional healing and value reorientation (Afolabi & Olanrewaju, 2020). For individuals involved in violence, religious counseling offers a platform to challenge extremist ideologies and adopt peaceful, community-friendly beliefs thus contributing to national security.

Moral Development Theory

Lawrence Kohlberg's Moral Development Theory suggests that moral reasoning develops through stages, from obedience to law-and-order reasoning, and finally to universal ethical principles. Religious counseling often promotes such progression by offering ethical teachings and accountability rooted in spiritual values (Odeh & Ahmed, 2018).

In the Nigerian context, many youths at risk of being recruited into violent activities often act at a lower level of moral reasoning—driven by impulse, peer influence, or religious misinterpretation. Religious counseling interventions encourage reflection on justice, peace, and responsibility, thereby elevating the moral consciousness necessary for national peace building (Okoye, 2021).

Peace building Theory

Peace building Theory, particularly as developed by Johan Galtung and furthered by Lederach (1995), emphasizes the importance of addressing root causes of conflict, building

relationships, and reconstructing societies after violence. It promotes non-violent approaches like dialogue, reconciliation, and community education.

Religious counseling aligns with this theory because it promotes inner peace, forgiveness, and interpersonal understanding, which are essential tools in post-conflict environments and in preventing future violence (Nwachukwu & Idris, 2022). By equipping individuals with spiritual tools to cope with trauma, resolve conflict, and promote tolerance, religious counseling becomes not just a therapeutic activity, but a nation-building strategy.

Social Learning Theory

This theory posits that people learn behaviors, attitudes and norms through imitation and observation of role models, in religious context, clergy and spiritual leaders serve as powerful role models who shape moral behaviors through sermons, counseling and live examples. So in Nigeria, where religious leaders are deeply respected, their guidance especially when delivered through counseling can deter young people from engaging in extremist or criminal behavior by promoting peaceful and pro-social alternatives grounded in religious values.

It finally shows that, these theories Social Control Theory, Cognitive-Behavioral Theory, Moral Development Theory, Peace building Theory and Social learning theory collectively support the rationale that religious counseling can influence behavior, reduce deviance, and promote social harmony. They provide an academic basis for analyzing how religion-based interventions contribute to national security not only by deterring violence but by instilling peace-oriented values in individuals and communities.

Integration into Education Curriculum

1. Integration into Educational Curriculum: Religious counseling should be incorporated into secondary and tertiary institutions to build moral values and conflict resolution skills early.
2. Capacity Building for Faith Leaders: Training programs should be organized for pastors, imams, and faith-based counselors on psychological first aid, trauma healing, and de-radicalization strategies.
3. Government Collaboration with Religious Bodies: The Ministry of Interior and the National Orientation Agency (NOA) should collaborate with churches, mosques, and faith-based NGOs in peace promotion programs.
4. Counseling Centers in Conflict Zones: Establish interfaith counseling centers in volatile areas such as Plateau, Borno, and Benue states to help victims of trauma and reintegrate former extremists.
5. Use of Media and Technology: Promote religious peace messages through radio, TV, and social media to counter online radical propaganda.

Challenges and Limitations

Religious Manipulation: Some religious leaders may misuse their platform to incite violence

or spread hate, defeating the purpose of counseling.

- i. **Lack of Professional Training:** Not all religious counselors are trained in psychology or conflict resolution, which limits their effectiveness.
- ii. **Distrust Between Faith Groups:** Mistrust among Christian and Muslim communities may hinder interfaith counseling initiatives.
- iii. **Insufficient Government Support:** Religious counseling is often underfunded or ignored in official peace and security policies.

Case Studies / Real-Life Examples

1. **Borno State Interfaith Dialogue Program:** After years of Boko Haram insurgency, a joint Christian-Muslim counseling initiative helped reintegrate over 200 ex-combatants into society (Yusuf & Ibrahim, 2019).
2. **Kaduna Peace Counseling Project (2021):** Following recurring ethnoreligious clashes, counselors trained by a religious NGO offered trauma therapy and conflict resolution sessions to over 500 victims and youth leaders.
3. **Jos City Church and Mosque Collaboration:** In 2022, leaders of major churches and mosques in Jos co-organized counseling forums addressing tribal hate speech and promoting forgiveness.

Conclusion

Religious counseling has increasingly been recognized as a preventive and rehabilitative strategy in addressing issues of insecurity, radicalization, and social unrest. Studies by Adebayo (2017) and Ojo and Adekunle (2019) show that religious institutions in Nigeria have historically played a key role in promoting peace through sermons, dialogue, and rehabilitation programs. Umar and Abdulazeez (2020) found that interfaith counseling initiatives helped to reduce youth radicalization in Northern Nigeria by promoting empathy and mutual respect. Similarly, Olanrewaju (2021) documented the role of Christian and Islamic counseling services in fostering post-conflict reconciliation in Kaduna State. These efforts helped restore inter-group trust and reduce the likelihood of reprisal attacks. Research by Dogo (2018) highlights that religious leaders trained in counseling were more effective in deradicalizing youth than conventional security measures. Such findings affirm that religious counseling is not only spiritually important but also a valuable social intervention tool.

Religious counseling remains a potent and often underutilized tool in promoting national security in Nigeria. Unlike conventional security measures that respond to violence, religious

counseling offers preventive, moral, and emotional healing interventions rooted in cultural and spiritual values. By shaping conscience, promoting forgiveness, and guiding youth away from violence, religious counseling contributes directly to building a peaceful and united Nigeria.

References

- Adegbite, T. A. (2022). Faith-based reconciliation and peacebuilding in Northern Nigeria: A counseling perspective. *Journal of Religious and Social Studies*, 10(2), 75–89.
- Adebayo, A. M. (2017). The role of religious leaders in peacebuilding: A Nigerian case study. *African Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 17(3), 113–129.
- Ahmed, L. Y. (2017). Religious extremism and the politics of hate in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Peace and Development*, 12(1), 51–63.
- Bassey, C., & Okon, E. (2016). Rethinking national security in Nigeria: Beyond the military approach. *Journal of Security Studies*, 4(2), 88–104.
- Dogo, R. S. (2018). Faith-based rehabilitation programs and deradicalization in Northern Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 5(3), 41–55.
- Ibrahim, H. A. (2023). Religious dialogue and social cohesion in divided communities: Evidence from Northern Nigeria. *Interfaith Studies Review*, 7(1), 34–47.
- Odukoya, J. A., & Agbaje, O. O. (2021). Spiritual strategies for addressing insecurity in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Religious Counseling*, 8(1), 67–83.
- Ogunleye, K. O., & Oladipo, A. A. (2020). Integrating spiritual counseling into youth development programs in Nigeria. *Journal of African Psychological Practice*, 6(2), 102–118.
- Ojo, M. A., & Adekunle, T. A. (2019). Peace through the pulpit: Religious counseling and social stability in Southwest Nigeria. *Journal of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, 11(2), 91–108.
- Suleiman, M., & Bello, F. J. (2019). Countering violent extremism through interfaith dialogue in Nigeria. *Journal of Conflict Prevention and Religious Studies*, 9(1), 19–33.
- Umar, B., & Abdulazeez, I. (2020). Religious counseling and youth deradicalization: A case study of Borno State. *Journal of Religion and Conflict Transformation*, 3(1), 45–59.
- Uwe, I. N. (2018). Faith, culture, and moral reformation: Religious counseling in African societies. *African Journal of Pastoral Studies*, 6(1), 58–74.
- Yusuf, L., & Ibrahim, R. (2019). Post-conflict reconciliation and counseling in Northeast Nigeria: The role of religious leaders. *Journal of African Peacebuilding Research*, 4(3), 120–137.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION STRATEGIES AMONG COUNSELLORS AND PUBLIC OFFICIALS IN OWERRI MUNICIPAL COUNCIL, IMO STATE