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Juliet C. Alex-Nmecha, and Abdurrahman Onifade

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## **Bibliotherapy in the Wilderness: NLA and Information Services for Mental Health since 1962**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated how LIS professionals and health practitioners have adopted bibliotherapy and relevant information services to enhance mental health issues in Nigeria since 1962 to date. The study adopted a narrative research design of qualitative methodology. Semi-structured interviews using audio recordings and personal observations/interactions by the researchers were the instruments for data collection. The researchers collected data from three purposively selected academics whose areas of expertise cut across library and information science and psychiatry. The data collected were presented in a narrative form, with insertion of verbatim transcriptions where nuanced expressions were identified. The findings from the study revealed that bibliotherapy is used by clinical psychologists in neuropsychiatric hospitals in Nigeria; however, LIS professionals do not have the knowledge and adequate skills to practise bibliotherapy. The study recommends that the time is ripe for NLA to pragmatically implement recommendations that the LIS curricula in Nigerian library schools be diversified and expanded to incorporate valuable realms like bibliotherapy.

**Keywords:** Bibliotherapy, Depression, Suicide, Mental Health, NLA, NLA@60

### **INTRODUCTION**

Bibliotherapy as a therapeutic measure and its adoption by librarian and information professionals in neuropsychiatric hospitals is the focus of the study. Although there are various definitions of the bibliotherapy, this study conceives bibliotherapy as the careful selection and proficient application of books and print information resources for the treatment of mental health problems. The study is specifically focused on how the collaboration between LIS professionals and health practitioners or the lack of it has between promoted and/or hindered the development and adoption of bibliotherapy since the establishment of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) in 1962.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Despite the rising challenges of mental health in Nigeria, adequate attention has not been given to the application of bibliotherapy in Nigeria. Although there are libraries in most of the nation's

neuropsychiatric hospitals, little is known about their use of bibliotherapeutic services and programmes to tackle mental health problems. More so, there appears to be lack of skilled personnel within the field of library and information science to engage in bibliotherapy; hence, there are no clearly defined programmes or services dedicated to it in mental health facilities in Nigeria. Additionally, there is a deep concern about the overall low ratio of mental health practitioners and specialists to the increasing population in the country, which according to Wada et al. (2021) is put at 700,000 per psychiatrist. Therefore, this study set to investigate whether bibliotherapy is used as a therapy in neuropsychiatric hospitals, and what has been the impact of LIS professionals and mental health practitioners in its adoption in these mental health facilities.

### Research Questions

1. What is the extent of bibliotherapeutic services in neuropsychiatric hospitals in Nigeria since 1962?
2. What's the impact of bibliotherapeutic services on mental health in Nigeria?
3. What are the challenges faced in the provision of bibliotherapeutic services in Nigeria?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview of Bibliotherapy

The term bibliotherapy is derived from two Greek words: *biblio* meaning book and *therapy* meaning healing, remedy, treatment or cure. Aiex (1996) cited in Adebayo (2017) defined bibliotherapy as a method deployed to help individuals surmount negative emotions associated with a real-life problem, through directed reading about the woes of a third person, followed by individual or group discussion in a non-threatening environment. Sometimes referred to as *biblioguidance*, *bibliocounseling*, *literotherapy*, *bookmatching* or *reading therapy*, bibliotherapy involves the use of books and other media to facilitate both normal development and treating clinically significant problems.

Bibliotherapy as a practice in the field of psychology and medicine first made its literature appearance in an article published by Samuel Carother in the *Atlantic Monthly* of 1916. Carother described bibliotherapy as the process by which those receiving medical care are taught about their challenges through the use of books. Bibliotherapy was further recognized as a form of therapy for the treatment of mental health issues as contained in Dorland's illustrated medical dictionary (1941). The use of this term was further amplified in the 1950s when Carolyn Shrodes developed a theoretical model based on the preface that people are greatly influenced by the characters they identify with in stories. In 1966, the American Library Association (ALA) recognized bibliotherapy as a practice in librarianship when they issued an official definition of bibliotherapy. In 1978, Rhea Rubin, a US based librarian, building on the existing expositions on bibliotherapy in her work, *Using Bibliotherapy: A Guide to Theory and Practice*, classified bibliotherapy into two categories: developmental (for educational settings) and therapeutic (for mental health settings). As a result of various study on bibliotherapy since the first appearance in 1916, bibliotherapy is employed today by medical practitioners, educators, helping professionals, librarians and parents in treating mental health issues. The versatility and adaptability of bibliotherapy makes it an excellent supplement to self-improvement of all kinds.

The World Health Organization (WHO) (2017) and other international health organizations have made great efforts to curtail the global spread of physical and mental health diseases. Huge investments (human and financial) have been spent on research, treatment, awareness campaigns and education of the public to prevent, reduce, manage and eventually eliminate some of the diseases. Ilogho et al. (2020) opined that efforts have been expended to manage physical health diseases such as polio, measles, meningitis, chicken pox, malaria, HIV/AIDS, Ebola and very recently, monkey pox. This is also true for mental health diseases like depression and several others which have equally received huge investments and the attention of the international health organizations and agencies. However, the level of awareness and education of the populace on the issue of mental health seems to be low, compared with physical diseases.

### **Bibliotherapy and Depression**

According to Abilash and Jothimani (2019), emotional health problems are not character deficiencies, neither do they mean that an individual is a bad or weak person. Rather, they are caused by alteration in brain chemicals and can be triggered by physical stress (such as an illness or injury) or by emotional stress (such as the loss of a loved one). They can also occur due to the presence of a long term (chronic) health problem, such as diabetes, cancer, or chronic pain. For instance, some people feel too anxious only at certain times, while other people feel anxious most of the time. Either kind of anxiety can make an individual feel helpless, confused, or worried. Sometimes anxiety is a sign of another problem, such as depression or too much stress.

Furthermore, Almanzar et al. (2014) posited that a lot of individuals experience signs and symptoms of depression for the first time unaware of what is happening, while others were aware because they had earlier come across informative and educative literature on depression. Thus, lack of awareness about depression could have contributed to the untold hardship and pain of countless individuals, families, societies and countries around the world. Consequently, Miller, Cuthbertson, Skidmore and Loveridge (2015) submitted that enhanced public awareness and education through provision of health information about depression is a vital strategy for checkmating depression and the associated challenges of depression. Ilogho et al. (2020) also opined that people can become more aware and enlightened about their mental health if they are armed with adequate knowledge about depression symptoms, causes and experiences of depressed people through health information materials such as fliers, pamphlets, magazines, newspapers, journals, books, social media, blogs, and websites. Furthermore, awareness about depression information could prevent the possibility of becoming depressed, especially if it is not genetically inherited. It is on this premise that the WHO and other health-concerned organizations encourage education campaigns that target the general public to increase awareness of depression, combat stigmatization, discrimination, suicide cases and improve access to health care (Dumesnil and Verger, 2009).

Bibliotherapy, which is the use of books within curative context has been used as a treatment method by professionals to address various emotional and mental health challenges such as depression, behavioural issues, chemical dependency, chronic illness, homelessness, self-destructive behaviours, etc. (Pehrsson and McMillen, 2005). Rubin (1978) classified bibliotherapy into two types, which are: clinical bibliotherapy (utilized by mental health practitioners to address emotional-behavioural problems and meet therapeutic goals) and developmental bibliotherapy (employed by educators, librarians and healthcare workers to facilitate transitions with basically healthy individuals). This means that bibliotherapy does not only serve as a corrective measure, it

also serves as a preventive measure to curb the proliferation of emotional and mental instability in the society. Pehrsson and McMillen (2007) submitted that the advantages of bibliotherapy include reduction of negative emotions and symptoms with their replacement by more positive behaviours and feelings, promoting problem solving, increasing compassion, developing empathetic understanding and enhancing self-awareness.

Meanwhile, librarians and information science (LIS) professionals are in a unique position to magnify the effects of bibliotherapy due to the valuable resources they possess, manage, and their relationship with the community. Hence, by sourcing, organising and recommending appropriate information sources required for effective bibliotherapy sessions, LIS professionals have key roles to play in mental health issues especially through reading services. Abilash and Jothimani (2019) opined that reading has been found to help people understand the issues they are experiencing, amplify the effects of other treatment, normalize experiences with mental health concerns and care, and offer hope for positive change. This means that librarians as professionals must be conversant with the type of information services and materials needed for therapeutic purpose. Aramide (2020) submitted that bibliotherapy for an individual battling with major life tasks may be within the scope of librarians to perform skillfully. The author further noted that in serving the emotionally ill or deviant, it is very essential that the team approach include physician, psychiatrist, and counselor with the school or hospital librarian. As a result of this, bibliotherapy has been applied successfully in a variety of settings to many kinds of psychological problems. For example, practitioners have reported successful use of bibliotherapy in treating eating disorders, anxiety and mood disorders, agoraphobia, alcohol and substance abuse, and stress-related physical disorders (Fitzgerald, 2017).

Furthermore, Kar (2012) opined that there is ample evidence that implies that bibliotherapy is instrumental in the management of many psychiatric upsets, even though there is need for further validation. Most professionals agreed that reading is a productive activity that can promote good mental health, as reading has been shown to increase empathy, sharpen the mind, and impact behaviour (GoodTherapy.org, 2017). For instance, libraries in the United States have a programme known as books on prescription, where reading materials targeting specific mental health needs prescribed by mental health professionals are acquired by the libraries and displayed on their websites as reading lists. The Carnegie Library of Pittsburg is well known for this service, for example. They also have books for children, which cover topics like adoption, self-esteem, grief, divorce, etc. listed on their website (Abilash and Jothilani, 2019). Countries like England, Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Croatia have also reportedly embraced the use of bibliotherapy, along with other forms of therapies in the practice of clinical psychiatry (Blechinger and Klosinski, 2011). Kar (2012) also noted that the practice of bibliotherapy has been found to be widespread in child and adolescent psychiatry in German and Austrian hospitals. However, the study reported that bibliotherapy was used interchangeably with expressive writing, which is another form of therapy.

### **Bibliotherapy in Nigeria**

Nigeria, being classified among developing countries is not left out in the practice of bibliotherapy. Studies have established the use of bibliotherapy for the treatment of emotional and mental health concerns, especially among children and adolescents (Oyewusi, Nicolau, Aramide and Messakh, 2019). While the developmental bibliotherapy is used by school librarians to help their students maintain a good state of mental health, the clinical bibliotherapy is being used by healthcare

personnel and medical librarians to correct or optimize a poor or damaged mental health status. This is evident in the submission of Adeyeye and Oyewusi (2017) who found clinical bibliotherapy to be useful in the rehabilitation process of children and adolescents in correctional homes in Lagos, Nigeria.

Agbetuyi, Adeleye and Omolade (2022) also carried out a study on the use of bibliotherapy for rehabilitation of drug addicts in neuropsychiatric hospitals in Southwest Nigeria. The study found that the hospitals had different methods of bibliotherapy used for the rehabilitation of drug addicts, depending on the severity or uniqueness of the case. These methods were: creative bibliotherapy, self-help bibliotherapy and books on prescription method. This establishes the presence of bibliotherapy as a form of treatment in Nigerian neuropsychiatric hospitals, although the extent of its use is yet to be ascertained.

Okeke, Eze, Eze and Asogwa (2017) also carried out a study on the status of medical library resources and services in teaching hospitals in Enugu state, Nigeria. The study found that even though bibliotherapy services were available at the hospitals, the standard at which it was being provided was very low, thus reducing the willingness and enthusiasm of patients to accept the use of bibliotherapy for treatment. This indicates that even though bibliotherapy is not a strange phenomenon in Nigerian neuropsychiatric hospitals, the extent to which it is practised is not as high as expected.

### **Impact of Bibliotherapy on Mental Health**

The inclusion of bibliotherapy among various methods of enhancing mental health among citizens suggests that it has a significant level of impact on mental health. Scholars have found bibliotherapy to influence mental health positively in various ways. Brenes, McGall, Williamson and Stanley (2010) noted that bibliotherapy has been used for the treatment of mental issues like late-life depression, phobia and other anxiety disorders. This has helped the patients to become more optimistic and positively disposed towards life, thus increasing their productivity. Also, bibliotherapy has proven to be more effective for clinically significant emotional disorders than waiting list or no treatment conditions (den Boer, Wiersma and Van den Bosch, 2004). McPherson-Leitz (2018) opined that the impact of bibliotherapy on mental health can be considered beneficial in that: it gives the patients hope by revealing how people with similar problem have been able to manage it successfully; helps the patients vocalize their feelings to people who can be of help to them; helps them become more aware of the problem-solving process; makes them connect with others and helps them to develop interests outside of themselves.

In Nigeria, for instance, Aramide (2020) posited that the impact of bibliotherapy on mental health of children and adolescents is worthy of note. The author found that bibliotherapy influences cognitive and affective changes which occur in the reader that enables him or her to fully or partially satisfy an unfulfilled need. It was also found that bibliotherapy helps young people to cope with a multitude of problems and helps in the process of rebuilding thought structure. This can be achieved by memorizing and meditating upon important passages in the books read. Goleman (2006) cited in Adegun and Fasina (2018) also submitted that the practice of bibliotherapy results in improved mental state of individuals by increasing their level of emotional intelligence, which increases their ability to persist in frustrating situations, enables them to manage impulses, helps them to control their mood, and increases their self-motivation, optimism and empathy level. These submissions agree with the findings of Songprakun and McCann (2012)

that bibliotherapy can be used by community and mental health nurses and other clinicians to reduce psychological distress and promote recovery in people with moderate depression. Handarini et al. (2015) also argued that bibliotherapy is useful for identifying character figures, recognizing various self-related emotions, providing experience through the richness of life experiences, characters, situations, and problems that are present in reading materials.

Oyewusi, Nicolau, Aramide and Messakh (2019) also submitted that bibliotherapy serves as an alternative treatment or auxiliary therapy that helps to control the stress and anger levels caused by the family and immediate environment. Thus, bibliotherapy is used by librarians in Nigeria and Indonesia to promote mental and physical health which could repress disruptive behaviours among young people, enabling them to live a focused life, not hurting themselves or other people. This submission lends credence to the findings of Apodaca and Miller (2003) who found that there were some levels of reduction in drinking with participants using bibliotherapy and in cases where drinking was not reduced, other problems were alleviated. This means that bibliotherapy has a soothing effect on the human mind, which helps to douse rising tension and prevent or reduce the demonstration of physical aggression.

According to the study of Agbetuyi, Adeleye and Omolade (2022), bibliotherapy was found to be useful for the rehabilitation of drug addicts in neuropsychiatric hospitals. The respondents of the study indicated that bibliotherapy increased their motivation to behave in a more acceptable manner, encouraged them to abstain from addictive substances, altered their orientation about illicit use of drugs, helped them to regulate their emotion and reduced depression. This finding is in tandem with the assertion of Okwilagwe and Mumboyin (2011) that adolescent behaviours are modified after exposure to reading materials. The finding also corroborates the submission of Carrasco (2008) that because bibliotherapy is a non-invasive method of treatment, it reduces resistance, accelerates changes (direction identified through an image that remains in the individual), while contributing to the identification of new responses to similar situations, and promoting patients' independence. The implication of these findings is that the impact of bibliotherapy on mental health, especially for clinically diagnosed issues cannot be underestimated.

### **Librarians and Information Professionals and the Challenges of Bibliotherapy**

Even though it has been observed that bibliotherapy is not alien to the librarianship profession and that librarians have a major role to play in the design and implementation of bibliotherapy policies, the existence of certain challenges that militate against the effective delivery of bibliotherapy services by librarians globally cannot be denied or ignored. As a matter of fact, Heath et al. (2005) affirmed that even with the multitude of benefits accrued to bibliotherapy, it is not a cure-all and should be used concurrently with other therapy techniques rather than as the sole intervention for people with mental disorders.

Skinner (2016) noted that bibliotherapy, as useful as it has been found, can be ineffective for people with severe mental health issues, poor reading habit and lack of motivation to follow-through a designed reading programmes. The study found that most patients, especially adolescents lacked the patience to sit down and read the prescribed materials and discuss with the therapists. This can be a challenge to the librarians and even therapists as they have to spend more time than originally planned on one patient, which can affect the attention given to other patients. Lewis et al. (2015) also found illiteracy/inability to read to be challenge of bibliotherapy services.

The authors explained that people who are not literate find it difficult to read or even comprehend the prescribed materials, hence they require that the materials be read to them by librarians, therapists, or family members. However, family members were found to be often unwilling to assist in this process, thereby dumping the whole load on medical personnel and librarians. This makes the task arduous as they have to attend to many patients.

Jack-Ide and Ulys (2012) carried out a study on challenges of mental health care services in the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria from the users' perspective. The study found that most users were not aware of the advantages of such a method called bibliotherapy, hence, they preferred to treat their mentally ill loved ones using other methods which they find expensive or physically stressful. The study also found that most of the patients were unemployed as a result of their medical condition, which makes them depend on family members. The family members, however, affirmed that having to accompany their loved ones for therapy at intervals cost them income and revenue they could have generated from their business. This mindset will definitely result in deliberate skipping of therapy schedules, which elongates the time of treatment. The study also found that cultural values were a barrier to bibliotherapy services. Most of the people in the region believe in the traditional method of treating such conditions and do not even wholly trust the medical methods. Hence, it did not even make sense to them that a mentally ill individual can be treated using bibliotherapy.

Similarly, Onwubiko (2021) conducted a study on the challenges facing special libraries in Nigeria, among which are libraries in neuropsychiatric hospitals. Findings of the study revealed that these special libraries faced a lot of challenges that hindered the provision of services to their users. The challenges include: inadequate personnel, inadequate ICT facilities, inadequate funding, neglect by management and government, outdated collections and poor maintenance culture. These factors are capable of limiting any organization or department from functioning optimally. Since libraries in neuropsychiatric hospitals are classified as special libraries, these factors are most likely to affect the provision of bibliotherapy services to mentally challenged patients.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopted the narrative research design of qualitative methodology. Semi-structured interview using audio recordings and personal observations/interactions by the researchers within the hospital environments were the instruments for data collection. The researchers developed an interview guide that was divided into three sections and comprised ten questions in total. The first section of the guide was used to elicit data about 'Bibliotherapeutic Services in Neuropsychiatric Hospitals;' the second was to get insights about the 'Impact of Bibliotherapeutic Services on Mental Health;' and the third focused on the 'Challenges of Providing Bibliotherapeutic Services for Mental Health.' Table 1 shows the three sections of the interview guide and the research questions under each section. The data were collected from three academics who were purposively selected and whose areas of expertise are mental health, neuropsychiatry and bibliotherapy in Nigeria. The researchers interviewed the respondents separately, one in Ibadan and the other two in Port Harcourt, and physically interacted with the neuropsychiatric hospitals at Yaba, Lagos State; Rumuigbo, Port Harcourt, River State; and Aro, Abeokuta, Ogun State. However, the researchers' efforts to interview the provosts and/or librarians of the neuropsychiatric hospitals were futile due to bureaucratic red-tapism that approval from the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja, was required before consent can be given for the interviews. Meanwhile, two of the interviewees are professors

with more than three decades of professional experience in their respective fields of professional practice while the third holds a doctorate degree in psychiatry, as shown in Table 2. The data were collected through audio-recordings that lasted for about 30 to 40 minutes.

**Table 1**

*Interview Guide – Bibliotherapy in the Wilderness: NLA and Information Services for Mental Health since 1962*

### **Bibliotherapeutic Services in Neuropsychiatric Hospital**

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1. What are the various types of therapy adopted in treatment of patients in neuropsychiatric hospital?
2. What is the extent of using bibliotherapy for the treatment of mental health issues since establishment of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) in 1962?
3. Have you used bibliotherapy for the mental health treatment of patients?
4. Does the hospital (library) have bibliotherapeutic resources in its collection?
5. a. Are there skilled personnel among the staff in the hospital, specifically commissioned to provide bibliotherapeutic services to patients?  
b. Are librarians and information professionals skilled to provide bibliotherapeutic services to patients in mental health facilities?
6. What are the techniques for using bibliotherapy for treatment of patients?

### **Impact of Bibliotherapeutic Services on Mental Health**

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7. What have been the dispositions of patients to the bibliotherapeutic services?
8. What are the impacts of bibliotherapeutic services on mental health of patients?

### **Challenges of Providing Bibliotherapeutic Services for Mental Health**

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9. What are the challenges faced in the provision of bibliotherapeutic services to patients?
10. What are your recommendations to make the provision of bibliotherapeutic services to patients more viable in Nigeria?

The narrative research design has been chosen for this study because bibliotherapy relates to story-telling from texts as a treatment mechanism; and as a qualitative methodology, narrative research helps to elicit and analyze stories in order to understand people, societies, and cultures. Also, narrative research design has been used in counseling and psychology with the assumption that mental health healing as a personal matter revolves around unique meanings constructed by people's everyday lives and can be utilized by other patients to compose and order their life experiences (Ntinda, 2018; Andrews, Squire & Tamboukou, 2013; McMullen and Braithwaite, 2013; Wolgemuth & Agosto, 2019). Findings from the data collected were categorized based on

thematic issues relating to the study and presented in a narrative form, with insertion of verbatim transcriptions in quotes where nuanced expressions have been identified by the researchers.

**Table 2**

*Interviewees' Profiles*

Interviewee	Cadre	Areas of Expertise	Location
Oshiotse Andrew Okwilagwe	Professor	Publishing, Psycholinguistics, Writing, etc.	Ibadan, Oyo State, Nigeria
Princewill Stanley	Professor	Mental Health, Depression, etc.	Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria
Michael Osika	Doctor	Consultancy in Psychiatry	Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings from the study have been presented based on themes recognized from the research questions and responses to the interview. The key themes developed from the transcription of the interviews include: *bibliotherapeutic services in Nigeria*; *techniques and impacts of bibliotherapeutic services in Nigeria*, and *challenges of bibliotherapeutic services in Nigeria*. Each of these themes is analysed below based on the data transcription of the interviews and the respondents will be referred to by their academic cadre and foremost area of expertise.

### **Bibliotherapeutic Services in Nigeria**

Bibliotherapy has not been extensively explored by LIS professionals and mental health practitioners for treating mental health problems in Nigeria. LIS professionals have lagged behind in providing bibliotherapy for mental health because of what the Professor of Publishing termed "impatience to understand the phenomenon within the context of information services". This is evident in the lack of a formal discipline in library schools in Nigeria that specializes in bibliotherapy. For instance, since the establishment of a library school at the University of Ibadan in 1959, the first library school in West Africa, and the establishment of the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) in 1962, it took more than five decades before a qualified bibliotherapist was

produced in Library and Information Science at the same department. According to the Professor, this was a problem that persisted because of an attitudinal approach that was characterized by 'uncertainty' among LIS professionals until he had the courage of 'bull-dozing' his way to have a PhD candidate whose study was completed on bibliotherapy in 2010. The researchers agree that the scarcity of bibliotherapy as a programme or area of specialization in Nigeria's library schools has contributed to the dearth of skilled personnel to provide bibliotherapy for mental health in the country. More so, the phenomenon is seldom considered as a realm that LIS professionals should be more involved, especially as an academic discipline that can prepare them for more social responsibilities.

Meanwhile, there are different types of therapy used for treating mental health, such as surgical therapy, drug therapy, psychotherapy and cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). In clinical psychology, the Professor of Mental Health stated that bibliotherapy is considered as part of CBT, which to a large extent is used to treat 'psychoactive patients with challenges like anxiety, restiveness, phobia, etc.' Specialists in clinical psychology, according to the Professor, consider bibliotherapy as a 'non-biological treatment' approach that helps in managing behavioural adjustments in patients with mental health challenges. Therefore, mental health practitioners use bibliotherapeutic method as part of psychotherapy, using various approaches like 'psychoanalysis, psycho-education, book counselling' to model positive behavioural adjustments, especially among patients that have not lost touch with reality. Meanwhile, it was revealed that bibliotherapy is practised in neuropsychiatric hospitals selectively and mainly by clinical psychologists.

### **Techniques and Impacts of Bibliotherapeutic Services in Nigeria**

The techniques used for bibliotherapeutic services in neuropsychiatric hospitals, according to the Professor of Mental Health and Psychiatry Consultant, include psycho-education, storytelling, counselling, reading and recommending reading materials such as newspapers, picture books, etc. to the patients. The three respondents agreed that 'reading' is central to the effective application of bibliotherapeutic services, and that the administration of bibliotherapeutic services may, however, be more effective among patients that can read, if they are not psychotic, and the bibliotherapy sessions are facilitated by professionals skilled in reading. Emphasizing this view with comparison based on the literacy levels of Nigeria and other developed countries, the Professor of Publishing disclosed that in advanced countries like the United Kingdom and the United States, there are book trolleys moved around in patients' wards to share books to those interested. Whereas in developing countries, the bibliotherapist may need to hold series of sessions with the patients, give them reading materials and discuss the contents read with them to ascertain their level of understanding, feedback mechanisms and recovery stage. However, the situation of the patients determines if the person administering the bibliotherapy session could go close or not; hence, patients that are hyperactive or under severe psychological disorders are usually exempt from bibliotherapy.

Regardless of the techniques, findings from the study revealed that the impacts of bibliotherapeutic services have been felt by patients, particularly by non-psychotic patients and even psychotic patients that have gradually recovered as a result of medications. The Professor of Mental health disclosed that based on practical experience, bibliotherapy has helped to calm patients' nerves as some have overcome anxiety, insomnia and smiled as a result of what they have read in books. Also, the patients that have undergone bibliotherapy are in full acceptance of the therapy and some have given 'motivational interviews' to help others understand the value of

bibliotherapy in mental health treatment. This finding is in tandem with the view of Agbetuyi, Adeleye and Omolade (2022) who found that bibliotherapy was useful for the rehabilitation of drug addicts in neuropsychiatric hospitals.

Additionally, the Professor of Publishing also noted that reading or listening to the stories of other people's experiences through bibliotherapy has helped patients to 'develop hope, regain memory and confidence in themselves, and become more aware about their society'. Citing an example, the Professor added that a patient while awaiting treatment after being diagnosed at the University College Hospital, Ibadan, once contested his diagnosis result because of what he read about his ailment while on the hospital bed. The patient currently works as a banker in Abuja, the respondent added. According to the Professor, to understand the bibliotherapeutic techniques, professionals need to understand that:

a bibliotherapist can be likened to a medical doctor and bibliotherapy is just like drugs. Bibliotherapists prescribe books (or reading materials) like the medical doctors prescribe drugs because the use of a book can turn a human being into an angel or saint and also turn a person into a beast. It can also turn a human being into a peak achiever and could also demean or reduce the level of achievement. Just like a nurse cannot carry out an operation like a medical doctor, librarians are not equipped enough to conduct bibliotherapeutic services in Nigeria.

These researchers agree with the respondents that bibliotherapy can have significant impacts on the mental health of Nigerians; especially in managing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) of victims of armed robbery, kidnapping, banditry and other insecurity challenges that affect the psyche of the citizens. The finding also aligns with the view of Songprakun and McCann (2012) that bibliotherapy is effective for the reduction of psychological distress and can serve as recovery techniques for people with depression. Therefore, the impacts of bibliotherapy will be accentuated when more skilled personnel – LIS professionals and mental health practitioners are open to the application of bibliotherapy for mental health challenges.

### **Challenges of Bibliotherapeutic Services in Nigeria**

Despite the invaluable impacts bibliotherapy is expected to bring to mental health practices, lack of awareness and lack of skilled personnel have hindered its use as a popular method of treating and managing mental health challenges in Nigeria. The major challenges of bibliotherapeutic services in Nigeria identified by the respondents are illiteracy, superstitions and lack of skilled personnel to provide bibliotherapy especially in the field of library and information science. The inability of patients to read has been noted to be a major challenge that hinders the delivery of bibliotherapeutic services, and this confirms the view of Lewis et al. (2015) that established that illiteracy is a setback to bibliotherapy. Also, the Professor of Mental Health stated that the prevalence of 'superstitious beliefs' and the 'preference for surgical therapy, injections or drugs' by patients or their relatives has made bibliotherapy not to be recognized as a viable therapeutic method.

Furthermore, the dearth of skilled clinical psychologists that are versatile in bibliotherapy in the academia is due to the high cost of training, including cost of bibliotherapeutic resources. Also, the processes of progression or promotion have dissuaded the few skilled personnel in the system. Meanwhile, the consultant noted the lack of partnership between LIS professionals and neuropsychiatrists in the application of bibliotherapeutic services as another challenge. LIS

professionals need to complement mental health professionals especially in the selection of reading materials for different patients, also regarded as biblioanalysis. These findings are further supported by the study of Senevirathna and Lansakara (2022) in Sri Lanka where they identified lack of awareness on bibliotherapy, its positive outcomes, scarcity of well-trained bibliotherapists, and high cost of training and organizing sessions as major problems to having a better foundation for bibliotherapy system in the country.

Significantly, the Professor of Publishing pointed out without being 'contemptuous' that trained librarians and information professionals in Nigeria do not have the 'knowledge and skills' of a bibliotherapist because they are not trained enough to provide bibliotherapeutic services. Bibliotherapy involves a 'gamut of activities' that require cognitive, technical, social accessibility, book selection/collection development, and communication and reading skills. LIS professionals, for example, need to be skilled in understanding biblio-analysis, i.e., how reading materials are good fit to meet the needs of patients and patrons, considering the setting, culture, reasons for publication and publishing processes like the development of manuscript. Like a drug that cannot be prescribed to patients anyhow, bibliotherapy also requires the expertise of personnel who can ensure there is no mismatch in the prescription of reading materials and the target audience. The lack of trained bibliotherapist is espoused by McPherson-Leitz (2018) who argued that the effects of bibliotherapy may be hampered by too much focus on superficial issues during discussions, inadequate bibliotherapy sessions, lack of long-term follow-ups, and the limited knowledge in human developmental problems and/or appropriate literature by the facilitator. The researchers believe that having LIS professionals that are skilled in bibliotherapy will enhance the efforts to curtail mental health problems in Nigeria, and facilitate the fulfilment of the second law of library science as propounded by S. R. Ranganathan that: *Every reader, his or her book*.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has established that bibliotherapy is a wild area that has yet to be fully explored by LIS professionals due to the lack of formal training in the realm. Although librarianship has been a field of study in the country for more than six decades, there are no extant courses in bibliotherapy in Nigerian library schools and the researches about the phenomenon are still at a low stage. While the impacts have been felt as a complementary treatment method for managing mental health problems like phobia, anxiety, depression, etc. bibliotherapy has not gained the required adoption for treatment due to superstitious beliefs and lack of skilled personnel.

Based on findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- Library schools in Nigeria should have bibliotherapy as an area of specialization at graduate level, awarding masters and doctorate degrees in the realm.
- There is need for more advocacy programmes and awareness about the impacts of bibliotherapy for mental health and other medical challenges.
- Libraries, whether public, academic, school or special, should incorporate human library. That is, clienteles should be able to borrow human (i.e. librarians) due to their specialized expertise in bibliotherapy and be able to getting recommendations through counselling and/or reading materials to overcome their mental and other health challenges.

- As the Nigerian Library Association (NLA) commemorates its 60-year anniversary, there is no better time for the association and its special interest groups to implement all the viable recommendations being made over the years about the diversification of library and information science as a discipline. Particularly, the time is ripe for recommendations about having new areas of specializations in line with global realities to be incorporated into the LIS curricula. Should the association fail to pragmatically pursue this, the library schools may become obsolete in the nearest future, save a few.
- This study could not capture some neuropsychiatric hospitals it planned to gather data from due to time constraint and the bureaucratic red-tapism that characterizes many of Nigeria's formal institutions. Therefore, it is recommended that further studies be conducted about the practical outcomes and other dimensions of bibliotherapy in Nigeria.

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