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Exploration of the Uptake of Professional Counseling Services among the Residents of Gatina Ward - Dagoreti North Division in Nairobi County, Kenya

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Abstract:
There has been a noted concern in recent years on the low uptake of professional counseling coming from many parts of the world. This explains why several studies have focused on factors that are contributing to this trend. In response, the current study sought to explore the uptake of professional counseling services by the general public in Gatina Ward, Dagoreti North Division- Nairobi Kenya. The study used the qualitative phenomenological research design. It involved 10 participants, chosen through criterion sampling technique. The interview technique was used for data collection. Semi-structured interview guide questions were used to collect data which was audio taped and stored digitally. The gathered data was analyzed using the semantic level of thematic analysis technique, guided by the Braun & Clerk's Six – Step Thematic Frame Work. Five themes emerged namely: ways of dealing with personal psychological, emotional, and social challenges, low uptake of professional counseling services, factors affecting the uptake of professional counseling, new factors from the findings and strategies that can enhance the uptake of professional counseling in the study area. The results revealed a low uptake of professional counseling services in Gatina. People use other forms of help for their challenges more than professional help. Help from friends was the most popular source of help and the cost of counseling emerged as the major barrier to professional counseling. The study recommends addressing of the identified factors affecting the use of professional counseling services and putting in place those strategies revealed by the findings that can enhance the uptake of these services. Future studies should explore the clients' experience in the counseling sessions and the counseling process itself. Future research should also explore the uptake of professional counseling in another general public population using the same research design in a dissimilar location in Nairobi.

Keywords: Explorations, psychological/professional counseling, challenges, professional help seeking, low uptake, underutilization, avoidance, the counseling process

1. Introduction

1.1. Background to the Study

Psychological/Professional Counseling is a relatively young profession whose practice continues to grow and recognized in the society; as the need to deal with mental health issues continue to increase around the world. A study by Mojaverian, Hashimoto, and Kim (2013) found that professional counseling offers help to cope or deal with challenges that individuals find themselves struggling with to enable them cope on their own. Another study by Wilson and Deane (2010) found that getting professional help decreases the chances that the challenges faced by individuals become long-term mental health problems. Marsh and Wilcoxon, (2015) stated that the help of professional counselors is sought by individuals who become aware of challenges in their lives, and appraise them as problems that need external intervention. To that effect, professional counselors are trained and have attained a systematic scientific approach to help those in need of their help.

People can choose to get assistance from either formal or informal help givers. While the formal help comes from those who are trained to be professionals, the informal help givers may depend on their natural wisdom, religion, life experiences and cultural heritage when offering help to those who seek it (Gesinde & Sanu, 2014).

Corey and Gladding, (2008) defined counseling as a profession that promotes the beneficial properties of therapy for those who have mental health issues, as well as for those who are overwhelmed by life's challenges. Another definition by Kaplin, Vilia and Gladding (2014) conceptualized counseling as a "professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health wellness, education and career goals" p.336). Thorpe, 2013

concluded that the professional counselor has a helping role; that of enhancing mental and emotional well-being of the client, as well as that of the development of a healthy person. According to Thorpe (2013), the counselor seeks to alleviate distress, resolve crises and increase the ability to function better emotionally, physically and mentally throughout the life span in individual and group settings. Therefore the profession plays a major role in the mental, emotional and social health in society. Despite the positive role played by this profession, a study by Boyd, Hayes, Nurse, Aisbett, Francis, Newnham, and Sewel (2011) reported that there has been a growing concern throughout the world in recent years on the limited numbers of people who seek professional help for their psychological and emotional challenges. Although seeking psychological counseling services is often said to be helpful, a study by Andrew, Issakidis and Carter (2001) found that only less than one third of those faced with challenges are taking up these services world over. Recent research from many parts of the world reports an upward trend in the low uptake of professional counseling services. In their study, Hinson and Swanson, 1993; Gesinde and Sanu (2014) found out that seeking professional counseling is not what many people will think of as their first choice of help, when faced with a challenge in their lives. Boyd et al. (2011) agrees with this and reports that indeed people are not seeking help from professional counselors when their challenges overwhelm them. Adding their voice to this finding is Plattner and Gulubane (2010) who found that people are more willing to try and handle their problems or seek solution for their challenges from their relatives and close friends, as opposed to seeking professional help from counselors. More over Kessler et al, (2003) reported that this low uptake of professional counseling is being reported at a time when research on the state of mental health in the world indicates that well over 30% of the world's population is suffering from mental illnesses, and that over two-thirds of these people are not getting treatment at all for these illnesses.

As more research on avoidance or low uptake of professional counseling appear from different parts of the world, it is emerging that untreated mental illness is a significant global health issue. According to what the World Mental Health Surveys have gathered from many countries such as Colombia, New Zealand, Netherlands, Germany and Italy, including those from Japan, Lebanon, Mexico, France, Israel, Spain and Belgium, it is evident that delays or failure to seek treatment for mental health issues is a persistent problem (WHO, 2000). This is true also in Japan, Lebanon, Turkey, Israel, China and India among other countries (Wang, Angermeyer, Borges, Bruffaerts, Wai, De Girolamo, & Üstün, 2007). In fact in China, which is the world's most populous nation, it is reported that the society faces enormous social economic, religious and political challenges. Yet a study carried out by Boyd et al. (2011) showed that more than 90% of the 170 million adults with mental disorders in the country did not seek professional help for their mental illnesses. Another study by Masota (2017) in Japanese colleges found that professional counseling facilities in the colleges were underutilized by students despite the numerous difficulties they faced. The author observes that indeed, the low uptake of the counseling services is becoming a major concern for the student affairs departments in Japanese colleges because students are facing many challenges which are affecting their quality of life and studies in these colleges, yet they are not seeking the available professional counseling services in their colleges.

Another study by Masuda, Akihiko, Anderson and Edmonds (2012) state that in the United States of America where Counseling is probably better developed as compared to other parts of the world, studies suggests a growing concern over people avoiding professional help, even though a lot of them are faced with mental health challenges. Despite the documented benefits of counseling in mental health treatment, Marsh and Wilcoxon (2015) reported that only a mere 10% of the psychologically distressed people ever seek professional help. Abiodun and Sanu (2014) stated that the African society has seen its fair share of social upheavals, which have the potential to trigger serious psychological and emotional problems. These include: civil conflicts, wars, economic challenges, marital conflicts, domestic violence and divorce; others include tribal clashes, robbery with violence and murders. There are also challenges from drugs and substance abuse as well as sicknesses such as cancers and diabetes among others, which are causing distress to families (Wango, 2015). Interestingly, studies report that it's only a small number of people that is seeking professional help for these challenges Similarly in Botswana, a study on avoidance of professional help seeking by Wade, Post, Cornish, Vogel, and Tucker (2011) reported that the idea of the western oriented counseling is still a new and a foreign concept that people are still trying to get used to; and this is making them avoid counseling services.

Another study carried out in the University of Botswana found that despite the existence of a counseling facility in the University, only a few students sought professional help when they experienced challenges (Plattner & Gulubane, 2010). As a result, these researchers went ahead to state that a lot of awareness about professional counseling is needed in the general public as well as the universities in order to get people to appreciate professional counseling in Botswana.A similar scenario is reported in Nigeria and studies that have been carried out on the uptake of professional counseling services in the country show that many people will not consider professional counselors as a choice or help when faced with challenges. Instead, they will readily seek help from the family, friends, priests and traditional healers when faced with serious challenges at the work place or in their interpersonal relationships. Going for professional help from a counselor might only be considered when all else has failed (Gesinde & Sanu, 2014).

Looking at situation in Kenya, just like other parts of the world people are faced with many challenges in their day to day lives, and even here the few studies available show that people are not taking up professional counseling as key option for dealing with the challenges. According to Wango (2015), although the many people in Kenyan face physiological, emotional, psychological, social and economic challenges, there does not seem to be much evidence that they are seeking professional counseling services for their challenges. Mutie and Ndambuki, 2012 observed that in the Kenyan schools and universities, researchers report that students are not opting for counseling as the first choice of resolving academic, relationships and personal challenges. According to Achieng (2008), only a small number of students are going for counseling in the school counseling facilities. Students struggle with serious problems such as alcoholism,

drugs, sexual harassment and poor academic performances but only a small number of students are seeking help from the counseling facilities in the institutions where they can get professional help for free. Instead, majority opt to seek help from relatives, friends or anybody who they look up to such as priests, elders and pastors (Mutie & Ndambuki, 2012). In deed Ngumi(2003) explains that in secondary schools, counseling receives a negative attitude from the students whoit is meant to be serving, as well as from head teachers, who are supposed to be the main facilitators of its success in the schools, leading to many students avoiding it.

Among the general public, where little research has been done, available studies show that many married couples in Kenya will not seek professional counseling to resolve their marital challenges (Nzangi & Wangila, 2015). Instead they choose to seek help from their social circles including family and friends, pastors or priests - as their preferred options, and will only go for professional counseling when these options fail (Nzangi & Wangila, 2015 ;Gichinga, 2008). These studies confirm that the trend of underutilization of these services is prevalent in Kenya just like it is in many other parts of the world, despite many people struggling with issues that could be resolved by professional counselors.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The existing research reports a growing number of studies from around the world report an upward trend in avoidance or low uptake of professional counseling. Most people are seeking help for their emotional, psychological and social challenges from family members, friends, colleagues, church leaders or other trusted persons; but not from professional counselors even when these challenges require the help of a professional. Seeking the help of a professional counselor is considered as the last resort when all other options have failed.

Whereas help from these informal sources offer important and valuable support to individuals, there those challenges that overwhelm individuals and cause psychological and emotional disturbances that can lead to serious mental health issues. In such situations, professional counselors offer help that can serve to alleviate distress, improve well- being, and diagnose severe psychological and emotional symptoms which might require specialized mental health treatment before they progress to a more serious mental health disorder. It appears however that most people do not seek this professional help when they are faced with such situations. Why then are people not utilizing the professional counseling services?

Research suggests that social stigma, treatment fears, fear of emotions, and anticipated utility risks, gender are the most common factors that make people avoid counseling. In addition social norms, culture and low self-esteem are other contributors to the prevailing avoidance of professional counseling services (Vogel et al., 2007). Most of the existing research on low uptake of professional counseling services among the general public has been carried out in other parts of the globe but very little research of this nature has been carried in Kenya. Most of the previous researches have mainly addressed low utilization of professional services in institutions such as schools, universities and medical facilities but not among the general public. Seeking to fill this gap, the current study sought to explore the uptake of professional counseling services among the general public in Gatina ward, Dagoreti north Division in Nairobi County, aiming to find out if the noted avoidance of these services in other parts of the world is also a reality in Kenya. The study also purposed to determine if the same identified factors contributing to the low uptake of professional counseling in other parts of the world could also be identified in the area of study.

1.3. Purpose of the Study

This study aimed at exploring the uptake of professional counseling services in Gatina ward, Dagoreti north division in Nairobi county, in order to find out if there was avoidance of these services and if so explore the factors that were contributing to the avoidance and find out how people were dealing with their psychological, emotional and social challenges that overwhelmed them.

1.4 Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following research questions:
How did adult men and women in Gatina deal with their psychological, emotional, economical, and social challenges?
Do adult men and women in Gatina utilize available professional counseling services?
What factors affected the uptake of professional counseling services in Gatina?
What strategies could be employed to enhance the uptake of professional counseling services Gatina?

1.5. Significance of the Study

Professional Counseling is being recognized as one of the key players in tackling mental health issues in Kenya and in other parts of the world. However, recent studies appearing from many parts of the world are reporting an upward trend of low utilization or avoidance of professional counseling services. This study sought to find out if this avoidance/underutilization of the counseling services was also happening in Kenya, in order to provide data that may inform the professional counselors to understand more about the state of professional counseling uptake in Kenya and the factors that may be causing people to shun these services.
The findings of the study will go a long way in helping the counselors address the factors that lead to avoidance of their services. The general public will have a better understanding of the role played by professional counseling thus making them appreciating these services for the improvement of social, psychological and emotional well-being. The study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the topic of avoidance/underutilization of professional counseling; and suggest areas that require further research in relation to the research topic.

1.6. Scope and Delimits of the Study

The current study was conducted in Gatina Ward - Dagoreti north Division in Nairobi County. It explored the uptake of professional counseling services looking at the uptake, understanding, perception, experiences and attitudes of the people towards professional counseling. The study employed a qualitative phenomenological study design in order to understand peoples' personal experience with regard to professional counseling. Adult persons in Gatina Ward of Dagoreti North Division were targeted.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Dealing with Psychological, Emotional, Economical, and Social Challenges

Challenges of any nature, whether they are emotional, psychological, economical, or social; may be a hindrance to the smooth running of an individual's life. When faced with challenges, people will try and find a way of dealing with them in order get on with their lives. If they cannot deal with the challenge on their own, they may seek the help of others in order to overcome them. Literature suggests that most people will seek help from those closer to them when faced with life's challenges, and not from a professional counselor.

In their study, Hinson and Swanson (1993) observed that people have always sought the help of others to resolve challenges in many areas of their lives when their own resources are not adequate. Their study emphasizes the fact that, it is in the human nature to seek help for challenges that individuals cannot handle on their own. Subsequently, Pshenishny (2012) supports this idea by concluding that when individuals face challenges, they will seek help from those close to them, including friends, mothers, fathers, and eventually counselors if the problems are perceived as very severe.

Rajagopal (2013) further reported that indeed when faced with challenges, individuals will consider seeking help from different sources when overwhelmed, but a counselor will not be their first choice. He adds that people will consult with friends, colleagues and family members as opposed to seeking professional help for their challenges. Masuda et al. (2011) also report that professional help is not sought readily by those who need it, while Schonet-Reichk and Muller (1996) adds that many adolescents are willing to seek help for their challenges, but majority will not choose counselors as their number one source of help. Instead they seek help from their mothers and friends as opposed to the professional counselors. Adding a different a voice is Gichinga (2008) who stated that pastors and church officials are also a popular choice for many people including the youth when it comes to seeking help for personal problems. The author further emphasizes that counselors are not the first choice of many people when it comes to help seeking.

Apparently, the idea of seeking help from a counselor is not yet domesticated in the African context. A study by Plater and Gulubane (2010) indicates with regard that in Botswana, the idea of the western counseling is still new and has not been embraced by majority of people. They instead seek help from their church leaders, elder's, families and friends. Abiodun and Sanu (2014) share the same view; and the same is reported by Masambia (2014) who observes that in Kenya, individuals go to trusted relatives, friends, elders or pastors to seek help with their challenges, either because they are not aware of the counseling profession or they do not see it as a means of resolving their challenges. Idemudia (2005) further states that, in serious cases, people will seek the services of traditional healers since they believe that mental and physical illnesses are a punishment for the breach of traditional taboos, or are otherwise sent by hostile ancestral spirits. In such cultures people will not turn to professional help since they believe that it cannot help them.

2.2. Uptake of Professional Counseling among Adult Men and Women

Studies from different parts of the world have reported a growing underutilization or an avoidance of professional counseling, despite the availability of counseling services around them Vogel, Wester, Hacker and Larson, (2007) found that people are avoid seeking help from counselors, and they identified some psychological factors that were keeping people away from counselors.

Boyed et. al, 2011; Wang et al, (2010) observed that there was a growing concern over many people who are suffering from mental health issues not seeking treatment from professionals in many parts of the world. Indeed, a study by Andrew, Issakidis and Carter (2001) found that only less 1/3 of those faced with challenges are taking up professional services world over. Their study also found out that people are either avoiding seeking treatment or delaying their treatment until their symptoms are severe. Other studies show that professional counseling services are not a popular choice for those with challenges- this is reported by research from several parts of world including the United states of America where probably counseling is more developed that most parts of the world, Japan, Europe, Israel, Turkey, Africa etc. (Masuda, Akihiko, Anderson & Edmonds, 2012; Marsh & Wilcoxon, 2015; Wango, 2015). Church leaders and community leaders are considered a better choice for those with challenges, compared to professional counselors (Mutie & Ndambuki, 1999; Nayaka, 2007; Gichinga, 2008; Muola & Migosi, 2012; Nzangi & Wangila, 2015). Gichinga, (2008) observed that people were more willing to share their challenges with church leaders and pastors that seeking professional help from counselors. Another study by Nzangi and Wangila (2015) concluded that among the married couples, counseling was not a preferred means of solving marital conflicts. Instead the couples more readily sought help from elders, family members and pastors or church ministers. These views were also reported by a study carried out by Muola and Migosi (2012). Evidently people are more willing to turn to their friends, family members, colleagues, elders, pastors and other leaders in their communities for help and the services of professional counselors are rarely considered (Hinson & Swanson, 1993; Plattner & Gulubane, 2010; Abiodun, & Sanu, 2014).

According to Bicil (2012) the personality of an individual is reported as another means of dealing with personal challenges when they occur. Those with strong personality will first try to solve their problems and challenges by

themselves or using other personal resources as opposed to seeking help. The study adds that to such individuals, accepting help may be viewed as an admission of weakness especially if they are men. With the majority of people dealing with their mental health challenges through the informal ways sources of help, the consumption of the professional services them is becoming low in many parts of the world as evidenced by research.

2.3. Factors Defining the Low Uptake of Professional Counseling Services

Avoidance is a chosen non –activity in behavior either through actions, thoughts or feelings, whereby the individual chooses not to do something so as not to go through a perceived discomfort or pain associated with the act or event (Nugent & Jones, 2005).   It involves shunning a particular situation, behavior, action, individual objects or settings due to anticipated painful thoughts which an individual may associate with those events. Several studies world over show that there has been an evidence of avoidance of professional counseling services by people who would otherwise benefit from the services. One study by Vogel, Wade, Wester, Larson and Hackler (2007) on avoidance of professional counseling noted that there was a growing concern over the increasing number of people avoiding professional counseling across the life span. Indeed Boyd et al. (2011) observed that in China, over 90% do not seek treatment for their mental illnesses.

Several factors that seem to contribute to this avoidance have been identified by studies that have investigated the behavior. Kusher and Sher (1989) found that counseling itself can be embarrassing; to some people, going for counseling gives them a sense of fear, and so they choose to avoid it. To other people, the thought of going for counseling threatens them more than the problem they are facing and so they avoid it (Vogel et al., 2007). Another factor that is reported by Wade, Post, Cornish and Vogel (2011) suggests that the concept of the western approach to counseling is new in Africa, and many people are yet to embrace it. The same is also reported by another study in Botswana by Plattner and Gulubane (2010).

The issue of trust is another factor that studies highlight as causing underutilization of professional counseling services. It is reported that if clients have mistrust with the counselors they will not take their issues to them due to a belief that problems should only be shared with trusted close friends and family members, and not with strangers (Mashaandja et al, 2013). According to the same study, this affects individuals' willingness to work with counselors, since familial issues are kept as secrets among members and are not to be shared with strangers or outsiders. Oketch and Kimemia (2012) agree that the family structure is seen as the best place to solve problems. Their study further reported that the older members of the family such as grandparents, uncles and aunties provide the younger people with solutions for their problems and hardships which they face.

Social stigma about mental health illnesses is widespread in society; and according to a study by Vogel et al. (2007), it is identified as a challenge to seeking help. The study found that those with certain mental, psychological and emotional problems are viewed negatively and are stigmatized in many societies. This makes people reluctant to seek psychological help for fear of being labeled as crazy, weak, social misfits and discriminated. This study concluded that social stigma runs through all cultures and groups of people and it can be a major deterrent to seeking counseling. It identified other factors as fear of treatment, fear of emotions, social norms, self-disclosure, self-esteem, anticipated utility and risks as the common factors that make people avoid counseling (Vogel et al., 2007).

The Personality of an individual is also presented as a factor that contributes to avoidance of professional counseling. A study by Bicil (2012) reported that the personality of an individual   can determine if they will or will not seek help. He suggested that based on their personality, one can stigmatize, have fear of treatment and have fear of negative judgment from the members of their society and end up avoiding seeking professional help. This study adds that those with strong personality may most likely trust in their own ability to solve their problems as opposed to seeking help. It goes on to state that, such individuals may not be willing to accept help since they view it as an admission of weakness which is frowned as at in society, especially for men.

Cultural beliefs also hinder professional help seeking. Idemudia (2005) reported that culture is an important aspect of society and so cultural norms are respected and adhered to, and anything that seems to go against the cultural norms is not be easily accepted. In many cultures individuals who get physical or psychological problems are considered to have breached taboos or are being punished by hostile ancestral spirits. As such, they are obliged to seek help from traditional healers (Anagbogu et.al 2013). The author further states that many cultures regard men as tough and able to handle one's challenges, hence seeking help from others is seen as being weak. The study concludes that as a result, few men are seeking counseling even when faced with major challenges that threaten their wellbeing.

A study among secondary school students by Ketra, (2011) found that fear of being judged negatively by both teachers and fellow students was a major factor causing avoidance of counseling among secondary school students in Nairobi. In their study, Nyamwange, Nyakan and Ondima (2012) agree that indeed guidance and counseling program was given a lukewarm reception by head teachers, and student held a negative attitude which affects the uptake of the service in schools.

Social norms are another factor that affects professional help seeking as reported by Koydemir, Erel, Yumurtci and Sahin (2010). They found out that a decision to seek or not to seek help can depend on how the society views it. If society has a negative view towards professional counseling, individuals will not be encouraged to seek help. Another noted contributor to avoidance of professional counseling is in lack of confidentiality among counselors towards their clients. It is seen as an important factor that prevents many from seeking help. Indeed Vogel, Wade, Wester, Larson and Hackler (2007) found that having confidence and trust in the Counselors actually created a positive attitude towards seeking psychological help. Another study by Dubow (1990) had found that a person may not seek help if they feel overwhelmed and think that their problem is complex and cannot be solved by just talking. He went on to conclude that the individual

upraises their problem as going beyond help and so there is no use to try. As a result they end up not seeking help from professional counselors since is not going to work anyway.

2.4. Strategies to Increase the Uptake of Professional Counseling Services

Due to an increasing number of researches reporting a continued low uptake of professional counseling services from around the world, several studies have been conducted looking at some strategies that can improve the uptake of professional counseling services. Counselors usually don't discriminate among male or female clients. However a study by Bobga (2016) found that the availability or unavailability of a preferred gender of the counselor can determine who goes for therapy. He argues that female counselors are likely to be less appealing to male clients who would rather deal with a male counselor. Hence, the availability of a preferred gender of the counselor can greatly improve the willingness to seek professional help.

Another study by Woodward and Pachana (2009) identified easy accessibility to counseling services as an encouraging factor to clients seeking help. The study also emphasized that a positive attitude of the counselors towards their clients was another favorable strategy to increase the uptake of their services. Adding their voice to this is Anagbogu, Nokwolo, Anyamene, Anachebelu and Umezulile (2013) who suggested that proper policies that explain what counseling is and making counseling clinics available within communities is a strategy that can increase the uptake of counseling services. They further stated that a rigorous creation of awareness and advocacy for the integration of counseling services in the health care sector would be a major boost in tackling the challenge of low uptake of psychological counseling services.

Competency of the professionals also defines how much people consider seeking professional help. According to Wango (2015) the practice of psychological counseling and the professionals offering these services need to be examined and evaluated to ensure that competent services are offered to clients. He observes that there are many people posing as counselors and yet they are not competent. Hence, when clients go to such "counselors" they are not helped and eventually end up being confused or concluding that psychotherapeutic services do not work. He found that dealing with the challenges within the profession can improve uptake of professional counseling services in the society. Supporting this view is another study by Perloff (2005) that concluded that relevant knowledge on the use of empathy, application of theories and counseling techniques play a key role in the counseling process. Moreover, counseling skills such as active listening and interviewing skills are said to be important aspects in the success and effectiveness of the counseling process. The mastery and competence in these skills is very crucial for the clients to have confidence in the counseling profession (Pienaar & Roodt, 2001). Whiston and Coker (in press) further suggested that being able to think broadly and pick the complexities in clients issues are an important skill to effective counseling.

2.5. Research Gap

The underutilization/ low uptake or avoidance of professional counseling has recently received attention in many countries in the world including Kenya. Several studies from many parts of the world report that professional counseling services are not being widely used by majority of people with psychological, emotional and social challenges. These studies show that only a small number of people with challenges seeking professional help. Several studies have been carried out in Kenya on the utilization, underutilization and avoidance of counseling services in secondary schools, universities and other institutions (Nyakan & Ondima, 2012; Nyarangi, 2011; Muola & Migosi, 2012; Ngumi 2003; Amaya 2011; Biswalo 1996; Ndirangu & Kamunyu, 2000).

There is little research carried out among the general public in Kenya on the use of counseling services. The current study responded to this gap to increase research in this area, and sought to explore the uptake of professional counseling services in Gatina ward, Dagoreti North division in Nairobi County since no such research has been carried out in the area before.

2.6. Theoretical Framework

A theory is an assumption that carries several ideas to explain an event or a phenomenon as defined by Kassim (2010). The present study was guided by the Theories of Planned Behavior and the Social Cognitive Theory.

2.6.1. The Theory of Planned Behavior

This theory was proposed by Icek Ajzen in 1985. The theory emphasizes that the beliefs and attitudes held by individuals towards a behavior, the beliefs held by their significant others such as family, friends and colleagues and the perceived ability, knowledge and skills to perform the behavior can all predict their intentions to perform the behavior. Intentions play a major role in determining behavior. Similarly, perceived barriers directly influence both intentions and behavior (Ajzen, 2012).
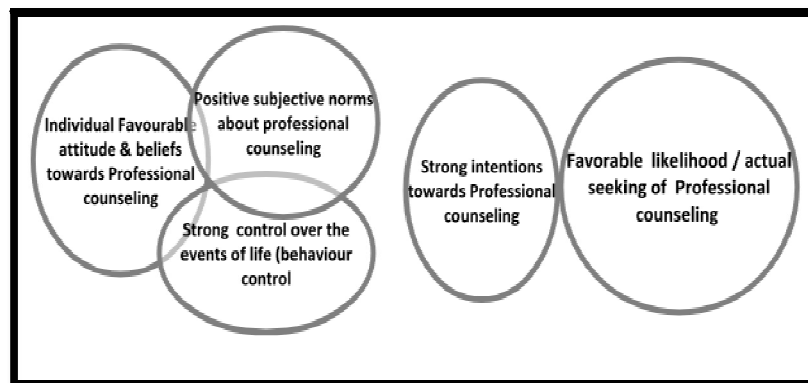
Figure 1: Theory of Planned Behavior (Icek Ajzen, 1985)

Figure 1 shows the conceptualization of the theory of planned behavior. Favorable individual attitude towards a behavior, positive subjective norms and strong control over the events of one's life, together create strong intentions towards behavior performance which leads to favorable likelihood of the actual behavior performance (Corner, 2001). What this means is that an individual is likely to perform a behaviour if:-

- It leads to particular outcome which they value or subscribe to.
- The performance of behaviour is supported by people whose views they value and respect.
- If they appraise themselves as possesing the necessary abilities, resources and oppoturnities to accomplish the behaviour.

This theory suggests that most social behaviors can be predicted from attitudes towards the behavior, subjective norms and perceived behavior control of the people concerned. The theory assumes that individuals' beliefs and attitudes shape their behavior and that rational considerations govern the choices and behaviors of individuals. If attitudes of an individual towards a behavior are favorable, and the subjective norms are positive, then the perceived behavioral control is strengthened and the person's intention to perform the behavior becomes stronger, leading to the performance of actual behavior (Cheon, Lee, Crooks, & Song, 2012). On the other hand, if the attitudes towards a behavior are unfavorable and the subjective norms are negative, behavior control is weakened and the intentions to perform the behavior become less favorable. The theory further suggests that these attitudes reflect on both cognitive beliefs about the act, as well as affective evaluations of the act. In addition, intentions towards the behavior will depend on the degree to which significant individuals such as relatives, friend or colleagues condone this act (Glanz, Rimer, & Viswanath, 2015). The perceived importance or relevance of these relatives, friends or colleagues affects the extent to which their approval will shape intentions.

In respect to this theory, when it comes to help seeking in counseling, an individual will have a cognitive evaluation of the services. If s/he has a favorable attitude towards counseling and believes that it would be beneficial to him, and if there is a positive attitude from society and significant others towards professional counseling, his sense of control over the events of his life will be strengthened, and he would most likely have a favorable intention towards professional counseling, leading to a likelihood of seeking professional counseling.

The major weaknesses presented about this theory are that it is not empirically testable and that it does not account for some variables that may affect motivations towards a behavior as suggested. It is said to ignore the role played by variables such as past experiences, fear, threat, economic and environmental factors, all of which can influence a person's intentions in performing a behavior (Falko, Justin & Vera, 2011; Sniehotta, 2009). Despite these limitations, the strength of this theory lies in its success to predict attitudes so that, for three decades, the theory has been and continues to be used widely in public health research with favorable results. Recent research work continues to shows that with proper application, this theory remains a powerful model for predicting human behavior in health related issues (Glanz, Rimer, & Viswanath, 2015).

2.6.2. The Social Cognitive Theory

This theory was developed by Albert Bandura in 1986, from the initial Social Learning Theory which he had earlier proposed in the 1960s. The theory suggests that individuals are agents who are actively involved in self-development and their actions can make things happen (Bandura, 1997). They possess a self-belief that enables them to exercise control over their thoughts, feelings, and actions. The way people think, believe and feel affects how they behave. Bandura presents the beliefs that people have about themselves as critical in control of their behavior. He views individuals as both products and producers of their own environment and of their social systems. Environments and social systems influence human behavior through psychological mechanisms of the self-system (Bandura, 1986). According to this theory, motivations and behaviors of individuals are determined by environmental, personal and cognitive factors. These factors interrelate and each one has an effect on the outcome of behavior. The chances of following that behavior increases with the level of self-efficacy that an individual possesses, leading to a direct effect on their ability to perform that behavior (Myers, 2010).

In the context of the present study, the theory suggests that the environment within which an individual lives and their perceptions on seeking professional counseling will affect their choice to seek or not seek such services. Additionally, the attitudes held by the society and significant others on professional counseling will also determine their decision to

seek or not to seek help from a professional counselor. A weakness of this theory is that it focuses mainly on the situation and not much on the person's inner traits such as emotions, personality or unconscious motives which can affect choices. Additionally, it pays too much emphasizes on the cognitive abilities, ignoring biological and emotional influences which some experts believe can have an influence on decision making, regardless of past experiences and cognitions (Myers, 2010). Nevertheless, the theory remains useful in understanding the motivations and choices of individuals in performing behavior.

Like the theory of planned behavior, this theory recognizes the influence of the environment, the societal norms and individual ability to make choices on whether to perform or not to perform a behavior. The two theories guided the current study.

2.7. Conceptual Frame work

The conceptual frame work in Figure 2 represents the researcher's conceptualization of the uptake of professional counseling services, factors that affect the uptake of professional counseling, how people deal with their challenges and strategies that can improve the uptake of professional counseling in society as presented by available research. The figure represents the researcher's conceptualization of how these factors interact with each other to determine people's decision to seek or not seek professional Counseling services, even as guided by the reviewed literature.
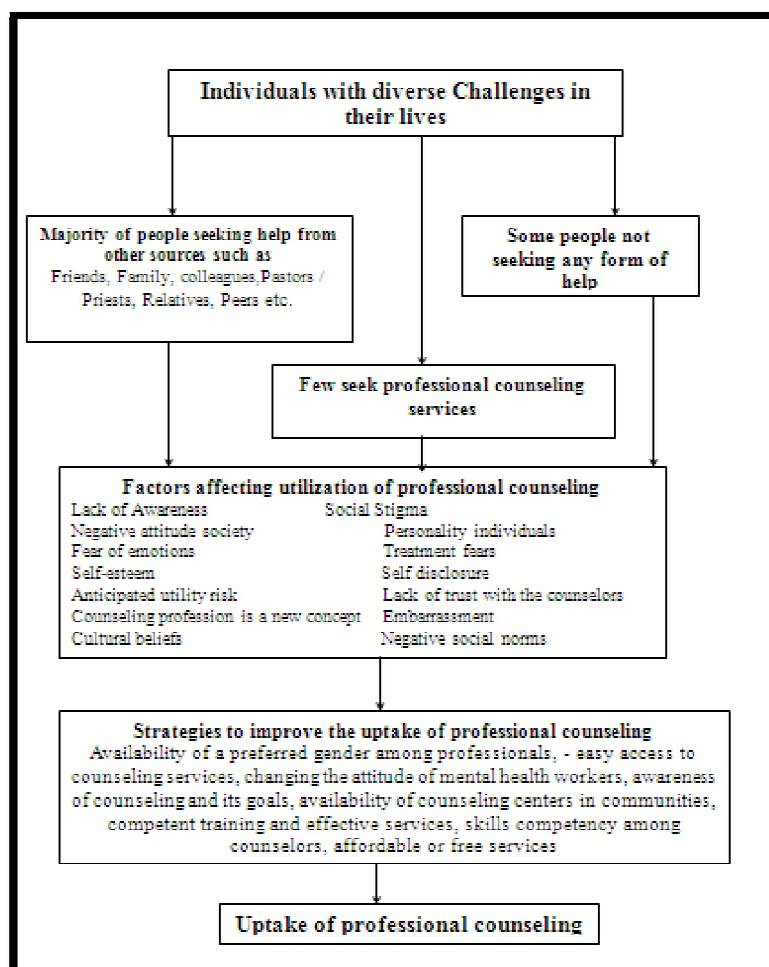

Figure 2: Conceptual Frame Work

As depicted in the diagram, the prevailing situation is that the number of those seeking professional Counselling services remains low, with only a few individuals utilizing them. The majority are said to be seeking help from other sources, while others are not seeking any form of help at all. As research continues to emerge about the underutilization of professional counseling services in various places, there are a number of factors that have been identified as the major contributors to the low consumption of professional counseling services by people with needs in the society, and who would otherwise benefit from them. Consequently, these studies have recommended a number of strategies that needs to be considered and put in place to help in attempting to improve the uptake of professional counseling services in the society. These studies would serve to create the expected situation.

3. Methodology

The current study employed a qualitative phenomenological study design. This type of research design seeks an understanding of the lived experiences of people in their own natural settings (Creswell, 2013). The researcher identified this design as the most suitable for this research since it was concerned with the experiences of the people of Gatina

regarding professional counseling services. Creswell (2013) explains that phenomenological research explores the meaning, values, and beliefs of participants in relation to a phenomenon in order to develop new understandings in a less researched area. The design enabled the exploration of the current study topic from the participants' perspectives and allowed their voices to be heard. It helped to capture their feelings, thoughts and perceptions which are helpful in understanding the unknown factors on the uptake of professional counseling in the area.

3.1. Location of the Study

The current study was carried out in a general public area in Gatina informal urban settlement, next to Kawangware, bordering Lavington and Msongari estates about 15km west of Nairobi's city center. Gatina is a ward in the Dagoreti North Division, in Nairobi County. It involved both men and women who were residents of the area and interviews were conducted in a community project facility provided by the Lavington United Church Gatina. This is a slum area affected by many social and economic issues. The majority of the residents are hardworking low income earners; and so there is a high level of poverty, poor shelter, congestion, alcoholism, unemployment, a high school dropout rate and illnesses that may cause social, emotional and psychological and economic challenges. This was of interest to the topic of the study. No previous studies on the uptake of professional counseling have been carried here before.

3.2. Sampling Technique

The participants in the current study were chosen using purposeful sampling technique which involved selecting participants who met some pre-determined criterion considered important to the study. It enables researchers to select only those participants with rich information, knowledge or have the experience about a phenomenon (Patton, 2002; Creswell & Clark, 2011). In addition, a study by Bernard (2002) states that articulate self-expression; willingness and availability to participate are important aspects when it comes to purposively choosing participants for a study.

The researcher explained the research and its purpose as well as the required characteristics of age, education level, willingness, availability and the free choice to participate in the research to those who responded positively and shown interest to participate. They were also made aware that they can withdraw their participation at any stage of the process without giving any reasons for doing so. Fluency in English was important to the study since it involved some technical terms that would not be effectively interpreted in Kiswahili and also to avoid the time consuming exercise of translations and interpretations during interviews. Adult participants who were between 25 and 52 years of age, with high school education and above who were willing and available for the study. This was to ensure that the participants were mature adults who had the necessary experience and knowledge to be able to understand and respond well to the interview questions. The participants were given time to think and decide about taking part in the study and then confirm their participation to the researcher through a text message. This is in line with Elmusharaf (2012) suggestions that only those participants who are good presenters of information to answer the research questions should be recruited to participate in a study. Some 15 people confirmed their willingness and availability for the interviews.

3.3. Sample Size

Out of the 15 who confirmed their interest to participate, five men and five women, who met the criterion for study, were selected for the interviews, making a total of 10 study participants. This number of participants was considered because qualitative phenomenological study, being explanatory by nature generates a large volume of textual data and its analysis can be quite involving and time consuming. A number of methodologist recommend between 5- 25 participants for some qualitative study designs (Adler, 2011). Specifically, a phenomenological study is allowed between 6 – 10 participants Creswell, 1998; Morse, 1994). The study therefore worked with 10 participants who were within the recommended numbers of participants for this type of study in order to allow good data management and analysis (Creswell, 1998; Morse, 1994).

3.4. Data Collection Technique

The Current study made use of face-to-face interviews to collect data. Open – ended Semi - structured questions were used for the interviews. These questions allowed flexibility in the way they were answered without limiting the way the responses were given, and the interviewer was able to follow up with a necessary probe to pursue a line of thought, as presented by the respondent in order to obtain a clear answer. Edwards and Holland, (2013) states that this technique gives the respondents freedom to talk from their own frame of reference and share their perceptions, opinions, the meanings they attached to professional counseling and their experiences with it. The technique was most suitable to gather in- depth information about the uptake of psychological counseling services in the current study.

3. 5. Data Collection Procedure

The interviews were conducted in Pentecostal Cathedral Church's office taking into consideration the convenience and ease of accessibility by the participants. Prior arrangement for the premises was made and availability confirmed. The participants were notified of the venue, day and time of the interviews before the actual interview day. The room was prepared in advance and all the equipment put in place the evening before the interviews. Two audio recording devices (in case one failed) were available and tested before the day of the interviews to ensure proper functioning during the interviewing process. For the purposes of proper data capturing and storage, the interview sessions were audio recorded with the participants' permission and notes were taken during the interviews. Additionally, the researcher worked with a research assistant to help with the data collection and transcription process. The participants were given ample time to respond to the questions and if need be, necessary probes were made in order to get the meaning behind their answers.

For this reason the researcher concentrated in directing the interviews and capturing everything that was said (verbally and non- verbally) and noting it down to ensure nothing was missed, while the research assistant made notes. Only one question at a time was posed and a transition period allowed between the questions. Clarifications were offered in case the interviewer sensed that the participant did not get the question correctly. These questions addressed the participant's experiences, beliefs, feelings, thoughts and perceptions about professional counseling. The interviewer followed the responses with necessary probes where more clarification was needed to help follow a line of thought fully.

Each interview took approximately thirty minutes. An interlude of 20 minutes was allowed for note taking, labeling and assigning an interview code for each interview. The interviews were listened to and notes taken. Key words, phrases and statements were transcribed verbatim and coded. Field notes were taken after each interview as comprehensively as possible, without any evaluation or judgment, detailing what was observed, what could be derived from the whole process and any critique to self, regarding how the process of that interview went. This time was also used to ensure that the information of the interview was clear and well captured in the recording and in the notes before ushering in the next participant to be interviewed. End of day summary notes were taken to capture what transpired during the whole interview process. The gathered data was stored digitally as well as in the note books.

3.6. Data Analysis: Thematic Analysis

Thematic data analysis technique was used to analyze the generated data from the interviews. This technique was chosen for the study because it is a useful method for analyzing qualitative phenomenological research data as suggested by Braun and Clark (2006). Further Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) noted that it allows for the subjective recognition of the participant's experiences, feelings and perceptions as the most important objects of study. The method therefore catered for aims of the current study.

According to Maguire and Delahunt (2017), thematic analysis can be conducted at two levels; latent and semantic analyses whereby the latent analysis level examines the underlying ideas, assumptions, ideologies and conceptualizations that are thought to inform the semantic content. At the semantic level analysis, researchers examine only the explicit or surface meaning of the data and not trying to interpret things beyond what was presented or said by the participant (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). This study employed the semantic level of thematic data analysis, guided by the Six – Step Thematic Frame Work which involves-familiarization with the collected data, generating initial codes within the data, identifying similar patterns found in the data; then reviewing the identified similar patterns and extracting emerging themes in the data, refining of the themes that are extracted, interpretations of the extracted themes in relations to previous literature and reporting them (Braun and Clark 2006, PP 16-21). The collected data was transcribed verbatim. The organized data was then read and re- read for familiarization in order to ensure that nothing of importance to the research was left out. Initial patterns within the data were generated and coded. The patterns in the semantic content were identified and categorized into emerging themes. The emerging themes were then reviewed and extracted, these themes were refined and interpreted in relation to previous literature and reported.

3.7. Ethical Considerations

According to May (2011), ethics are described as the standards of conduct that define what is wrong and what is right and they help in   determining what is acceptable or unacceptable behavior in society. In the present study, the necessary steps for ethical adherence during and after the research process were taken. Approval of the research was obtained from the Tangaza University College Ethics Committee and the County Director of Education Nairobi. Further approval from the research permit from the National Commission for Science, Technology & Innovation (NACOSTI) was obtained. The participants were given all the relevant information about the nature of the current research and its purpose. They were given the freedom to participate in the study without any coercion whatsoever. Moreover they were informed of the freedom to opt out of the research at any point without giving any reasons for their withdrawal, and they were fully informed about the procedures of the research. Confidentiality of the participants was protected and their anonymity was assured throughout the research process and after, the researcher ensured that no identifiable participants' data was available to third partiesas suggested by Grady (2010). Specific information relating to the use of a tape recorder in the interviews was given and participants assured that it was purely to help store the information they were giving for the study, after which the tapes were to be destroyed. Their autonomy was assured and they were accorded the necessary privacy and treated with respect. The participants were then allowed time to decide whether to take part in the study or not. They confirmed their willingness to participate in the study by signing a research consent form which was also signed by the researcher. Counseling services were available at no cost to the participants to deal with any psychological or emotional needs during and after the interviews. The data collected was securely stored and was used purely for the purposes of the present study.

4. Results

The results are presented in four main themes that emerged in relation to the research questions which were: ways of dealing with personal psychological, emotional, and social challenges, low uptake/avoidance professional counseling services, factors affecting the uptake of professional counseling and strategies that can improve the uptake of professional counseling.

4.1. Demographic Details of the Participants

Participants' Code No.	Age and Gender	Marital status	Education level	Occupation
PI	Male : 30 yrs	Married	B.Ed.	Teacher
P2	Male: 27yrs	Married	BA Sociology	Social Worker
P3	Male: 52 yrs	Married	BA Divinity	Theologian
P4	Female:35yrs	Single	Dip. Comm. Dev.	Project assistant
P5	Female: 28	Married	B.Ed.	Teacher
P6	Male 27	Married	O Level	Mason
P7	Female 26	Married	Certificate	ECD-Teacher
P8	Female 33	Single	BA. Nutrition	Nutritionist
P9	Female 25	Single	Dip. Hospitality	Student
P10	Male : 39	Married	B.Ed.	Teacher

Table I: Participants' Demographics

Table 1 above shows the demographics of the participants. The study involved 10 participants both men and women aged between 25 and 52 years of age. All the five men were married, had O level education while four had university degrees. Among the five women, two had university degrees; and three had diplomas and one held a certificate. Three of them were single while two were married. The participants comprised of four Teachers, a Nutritionist, one Theologian and Mason. Others included one Social worker, a Student and a Community developer. To preserve participants' anonymity, their names were concealed and instead labels P1, P, up to P10 were given.

4.2. Results

Results were presented in line with the research questions which were: - The ways in which people in Gatina dealt with their psychological, emotional, economic and social challenges, low uptake/avoidance professional counseling services in Gatina ward, factors that are affecting the uptake of professional counseling in Gatina Ward, Suggested strategies that can improve the uptake of professional counseling in Gatina ward. Emerging issues which came out of the study but not covered by the research questions were also presented.
The following sections present the four themes in relation to the research questions and the emerging factors from the participants' answers to the questions are presented as sub themes.

4.3. Ways of Dealing with Personal Psychological, Emotional, and Social Challenges

The first question in the current study was how adult men and women in Gatina deal with their psychological, emotional, and social challenges. From the gathered data, it emerged that participants acknowledged that they had faced challenges in their lives at one time or another and they tried to deal with them. Under this theme, the following sub themes emerged.

4.3.1. Personal Resources

Under this subtheme participants responded that when challenges occurred they tried to deal with them by themselves without involving other people because they were their own problems. They believed that it was only them who could find ways of dealing with what they were facing since they understood the weight of what they were going through. Five participants gave their views on this. Some of their responses are presented in the following excerptions.

"When I get a challenge that is disturbing me, I first deal with it by crying it out. It makes me feel better, and get a way of handling the problem". (Smiling and shaking her head) P5

(Smiling) "Me when I get a problem, I first try to write it in my diary and think about it. Then I can find a way of calming myself by either reading or by playing games and I also watch movies and keep busy so as to forget the problem" (P2).

"I try to help myself by reading a good book or a magazine to forget or distract myself. I take a walk or just sit quietly to think about the problem". I also pray about it and think of a way to tackle it. (P3).

"I try to think about it and find a way of handling it by myself first because I really don't like talking about my problems with people. I like dealing with my own problems alone. I also pray and ask God to help me" (P8).

"I try to help myself because we have the strength to solve our own problems; I think of ways to handle it and try to come up with a solution. Praying also helps to give me hope." (P6)

4.3.2. Friends

This was the most commonly used source of help among the participants. Majority of participants (eight out ten) said that when faced with problems or challenges they could not handle on their own, they turned to their close friends for help. They were categorized as trusted friends and best friends. These participants stated that they were comfortable sharing their challenges with their friends and the friends were willing to help. Some excerpts from eight participants' responses are presented below:

"If I can't sort my problems alone, I call or go to my trusted friends for help... and if it's somewhat private, I will share it with my best friends to try and get a solution"(P1)

"With problems that I can't solve alone I will go to my trusted friends because they understand me and we are always together and as women, we talk and help each other…" (P7)

"I share my problems with my best friends because they cannot share my secretes with other people … and we look after each other and share our burdens" (P10)

"Those problems or challenges that require sharing, I share with my wife, who is my best friend and I trust her to give good advice and keep them to herself" Since we are both Christians, she helps me to pray and together we seek for a solution." (P2)

" ..I seek solutions from my trusted friends because I trust them and they know me well, so they will give me the best advice to help me…and… they will not betray me." P9)

4.3.3. Family Members

Consulting family members was named by Participants as another means of dealing with their challenges. Six participants stated that they shared their challenges with family member when they felt they cannot share them with their friends because they were private. They said that family members were there for them no matter what and so they felt comfortable to share their problems because they will not be judged and abandoned. They expressed their opinions as follows:

"I share my private and important challenges with my father because he will not judge me and will be there to help since he has more experience in life than Me.; other people even professionals will judge you and may start to share your private matters with other people who know you… (Smiling) you know it's better to keep some of these within the family" (P6)

"I share my heavy things with my husband and may be my mother because these are my close people and whatever affects me will affect them so they try to help me a much as they can, and they will not discuss me with other people, they will protect my secrets" (P7)

"You see my family members would want me to be happy and they will try to help you even with a big problem and they can take care of you even when you don't have money, you don't need to worry about paying anybody back for some help they give you, they do it from the heart. That's why I go to my family to discuss my problems" (P9).

"I tell those family members I trust because they will not go to share what I tell them with outsiders and they will try to help me genuinely without complaining" (P 10)

4.3.4. Faith and Religion

Another source of help to the participants was their faith and believes in God. Participants said they prayed and had faith that God was going to help them when faced with challenges that exceeded their coping abilities. If they felt that things were not working for them, they went to their church and sought the help of their pastors, priest or church leader such as elders or fellow church members. They said that they were comfortable sharing their problems with their pastors who would pray with them. Some participants said they go to their pastors because they trusted pastors were spiritual, will not mislead them and will give Godly advice. Six participants gave their views on this and some of their expressions are presented below:

"I always go to my pastor because he is more spiritual and understands, and he gives me Godly advice for those problems that I cannot deal with alone" (P3).

"You see, Pastors are always available and always have time for people, and they understand temptations and they try to help us with our problems" (P10)

"The pastors do not judge you and again you don't need to pay them like the professional counselors, all you need is an appointment and you are helped" (P6)

Two participants said they sought help from God through prayer because he has the power to help them and one said that she sought help from God because he will not share her secrets with anybody.

"For me I will only tell God my problems because he power to help me and He will not share my issues with other people… (Smiling) that way I am sure that no one will gossip about me" (P7)

"When the problem is hard for me to handle it, I seek God's help in prayer be its only God who can give you the real help" (P2)

4.3.5. Professional Counseling

Two out of ten participants said they had sought help of a professional counselor for their challenges when things got out of control and they did not trust their family or friends to deal with them. One of the participant said that he sought help form a professional counselor for his challenges which he did not want his family members to know. He consulted with his friends and through referral he got a professional counselor who helped him. The other one said that he was using counseling services in the university for his educational challenge which nearly saw him expelled. He still consulted with a professional counselor for his work related challenges from time to time when he feels overwhelmed.

"Sure I see a counselor from time to time for work related challenges, just like I used to consult with the university counselor when I was there for educational and other challenges. In fact I must say that I started to appreciate counseling when I joined university, a thing I did not do in high school. (P1)

"Yes, I use professional services, I started when… I mean I had this problem with some drugs which I could not stop using, and my life was not going well, so I was referred to go and see a counselor who worked with me and I must say

that this was very helpful. I was grateful because I was getting very disturbed about my social life, and I did not want my family knowing what was happening to me". (P6)

4.4. How Adult Men and Women in Gatina Are Utilizing Available Professional Counseling Services

The results from analyzed data show that the uptake of professional counseling services was low in Gatina. Two out of ten participants had sought counseling from a professional counselor while eight sought help from other sources and they said they would go to the same sources in case of other challenges in future. They would not consider professional counseling.

Interestingly, when asked about how they viewed professional counseling, it was evident from the data that the general perception of professional counseling was positive and that people viewed it as helpful. Even when they did not seek the services, they said that it was a "good and helpful" profession, but they did not use it for one reason or another. Below are the expressed opinions:

"Professional counseling is very important and it is good in the society because it helps people with their problems and it is good for people to go and see counselors when they have problems… yes, (nodding) it's good."(P7).

"I feel that if there were counselors around here, then we will know them and start going to them when we have challenges, if they can train people from here who are familiar with guys here, I mean small people like us and not big people handling small people because some of those counseling places are for big people" (PI)

"According to how I look at it, Professional counseling is really a good thing because it can help people to tackle their problems with the help of an expert. These experts should be available in these villages" (P5).

4.5. Factors Affecting the Uptake of Professional Counseling Services in Gatina

The data revealed that there were certain factors that were affecting the uptake of professional counseling services in this area. The identified factors that prevented the uptake of profession counseling are presented in the following sub themes starting with the most common to the least common. A total of nine factors emerged from the data:

- The cost of professional counseling
- The unwillingness to share personal matters with strangers
- Lack of trust with the counselors
- Confidentiality
- Believe in personal ability to solve their own problems
- Social stigma
- Religious beliefs
- Unavailability of counseling services
- The counseling process

4.5.1. The Cost of Professional Counseling

 It was interesting to find out that the professional fee was a major factor that determined the use of counseling services in this area. Participants mentioned the cost of counseling services as the biggest barrier that kept them from seeking help from professional counselors. The fact that the professional counselors are paid a fee, and the assumption that it was high or expensive, had a negative effect to the consumption of their services among the participants. Nine participants gave their opinions on this sub-theme as follows:

"Mostly it's the payment required to be paid for the services offered that makes me not want to go for counseling" (P3)

"It is the high charges for counseling that has kept me from going to professional counselors" (P2)

"It is finances (laughing) you know, this professional counselors are doing it for money, it's their job, you know, you have to pay for their services and it's pathetic, I mean it's pathetic" P4

"Seeking professional counseling is a bit expensive and this keeps me from using it more" P1

"Because these professional counselors are not free and they are found in expensive places" P6

"Their professional fee prevents me to go for counseling P7

"What prevent me are financial issues, I hear it's expensive" P8

"The cost of counseling is not cheap and so I just go to church because help is free from pastor or elders" P9

"Not having enough money to pay for the services because I hear their professional fee is quite high". (P 10)

4.5.2. The Unwillingness to Share Personal Matters with Strangers

The issue of sharing personal information with a stranger was mentioned as another barrier to seeking professional counseling. Participants said that they were not comfortable going to a counselor who they viewed as a stranger to share their challenges with him/her, and so they chose to go to those they felt comfortable with, or they just tried to deal with problems on their own. Six of the participants shared their perceptions, which are presented below:

"I don't really feel free to share my problems with a person I don't know…I mean, to go to a stranger and talk to them about my problems with my spouse or something else for a certain fee Umm…I don't think I will do that…" (P3).

"Well, I don't like to share my issues with strangers, I mean, whatever they are, it's better to keep them to myself" (P2)

"Ok, you see there are things I don't share with people I don't know. Even if I went to a counselor, I mean, I may share some challenges, I will not share everything especially the more private ones." (P6).

"There are some limits…..I mean not all personal problems can be shared to people you may not know well." (P8)

"As a woman, I hesitate to share my personal things with someone I don't know. In fact I don't know whether I can trust that person, I don't think it's easy to talk to a stranger, personally. May be if the counselor is a woman like me, then I can try.....but it's difficult" (P7)

4.5.3. Lack of Trust with the Counselors

Participants mentioned the issues of trusting the counselor as another determinant of seeking professional help. They felt that they needed to trust a person well enough before sharing their personal information. Four participants shared their opinions on this sub theme and some of their responses are presented in the following excerptions.

"Well, I don't think that it's easy to trust a counselor about my personal matters" (P10)

"You know personal things are not shared with just people you don't trust, I need to trust the counselor first" (P4).

"You see... I don't trust the counselors that they will not tell other people about my secrets". (PI)

"Well, it will depend because first I don't know if this counselor can be trusted with those personal issues". (P2)

4.5.4. Confidentiality

Another factor that the participants stated as having a negative impact on their willingness to seek professional help was confidentiality. They said that personal issues are sensitive and should not be discussed anyhow and with anybody. Participants shared that they will not be willing to disclose their private matters to counselors because they were not sure that they will not share their information with others. The idea of seeing a counselor was therefore not favorable. Five participants mentioned this sub theme and their responses are presented in the following excerptions:

"I do not like my personal matters shared among many people and the counselor may not keep them to her/himself". (P1)

"Me I tell my problems to God because he will not share them with anybody" (P6)

"Well, it is because I am not sure that the counselor will keep my personal matters confidential, I mean... some things are very personal and I can't disclose them to another person" (P8)

"It's about private matters here; you just can't spill your problems about your personal life and your challenges to a stranger who may share them out with other people ..." (P9)

"It's not easy to trust that the counselor will not tell others about what I shared with them. You know people can say that they keep secrets but in the real sense they can start telling others what they heard you say even without knowing" (P5)

4.5.5. A Believe In Personal Ability to Solve Own Problems

Some people may have the tendency to use personal resources to solve and deal with the challenges that face them in life without seeking for external help. This was another factor that was reported as determining if people seek professional help. Under this sub theme opinions of three participants who mentioned it are presented below:

"I think I can handle it myself because I understand myself better" (P6)

" Well you see, Unajikaza, sio kulilia watu saa yote (you brave it, not to go crying to people always); I try to deal with my challenges because other people cannot solve your problems" (P4)

"I solve my psychological problems by keeping myself in control and ignoring them. I keep moving on and brave them like a man. We men face many things and we don't run to people to ask them to help us". (P2)

4.5.6. Social Stigma

This sub theme was referred to by five participants who felt that it was baring people from seeking professional help from counselors. Participants said that the fact that people who are suffering from psychological and mental problems are treated by counseling psychologist and psychiatrists makes them avoid them. They felt that society judged those with mental or psychological problems negative and so those being treated by mental health workers face stigma from the community. Participants felt these people are viewed with skepticism and are treated like outcasts who can cause harm to people, and so people keep away from them. The opinions on this subtheme were expressed by four participants and they are presented below:

"People around here will think that if you go to see a counselor, then you have very serious problem, in fact they will think you are going mad" (P1)

"It's because I don't know what I will do if people start thinking I am going crazy, (smiling) in fact a lot of people will avoid your company. That's why I don't like going for counseling" (P4)

"In fact if people think you have a psychological problem, they will act in a discriminatory manner towards you, and you will just see it, they don't hide it, so people don't like visiting counselors" (P10)

"Well, because people usually look at you like you have mental disorder and they don't take you seriously; I mean going to a counselor, no..., people will label me as mentally ill" (P7)

4.5. 7. Religious Beliefs

The participants expressed their deep believe in God and trust in their religious leaders. As such people felt comfortable sharing their challenges with church leaders such as pastors and the church elders. Four participants mentioned that they are comfortable sharing their private matters with their pastors and praying about them. Their expressed opinions are presented as follows:

"I pray to God because he has the power to solve our problems". (P8)

"I first pray, then if need be I will share with a pastor for spiritual guidance". (P3)

"God can help us in all situations and I trust him to intervene whenever I have something that overwhelms me, and I will seek help from the church because the church where you go they will help". (P6)

" I am a Christian and I trust that God helps us when we pray about our problems and so I pray about over my challenges and I go to get help from the church people if I cannot deal with it alone" (P9)

4.5.8. Unavailability of Counseling Services

Participants said that there were no known counseling facilities in the area and majority did not have easy access to counseling centers. They also stated that the professional counselors are not well known and so they could not go to them in the first place.

"It is not easy to find the professional counselors. They don't have any places here" (P6)

"I have never seen a professional counselor, where are they found? May be if they are available here we can start getting used to them" (P7)

4.5.9. The Counseling Process

The counseling process was named as another factor that keeps people from counseling.

Participants described their experiences of the counseling as uncomfortable. They stated that the counselors ask too many deep questions. They said that the fact that you have to book an appointment and sit with a stranger alone for long asking questions was not attractive to people. Two participants expressed their opinion on this subtheme as follows:

"The counseling can be uncomfortable, the counselor asks too many questions; I mean they interrogate a lot" (P1)

"The counselor could not stop producing eye contact, this made me very uncomfortable to the situation, I mean I am there talking with someone who is just looking at me straight and saying nothing! I did not like that". (P5)

4.6. Strategies to Enhance the Uptake of Professional Counseling

Participants gave their suggestions and opinions on what they thought could make them and other people in their community to start appreciating the services of professional counselors. Participants mentioned that the professional counselors need to be available and make their presence known so that people can be more willing to go to them for help. They said that if professional counseling fee could be made affordable to all (the general opinion among the participants was that it was high) then more people would be willing to use the services.

Participants felt that the counseling services should be sponsored financially by the government so that the people can go to see counselors without paying them. Another suggestion that was shared was that the counselors should offer voluntary services as a means of creating awareness of their work so that many people can get used. It was further suggested that the number of counselors should be increased in their neighborhood so that anyone can reach then with ease; moreover they should create awareness by holding public meetings, workshops and conferences to create awareness their services in the society because there is still a lot people don't know about what counselors do. Organizing seminars in public places to tell people about counseling so that people can understand it was seen as another helpful way of improving the uptake of counseling services. Participants said that free services and availing counseling centers within the community can create familiarity with the counselors and the people will begin to understand the benefits of professional counseling and utilize it. It was further suggested that those people who have the talent to help others with their problems in the community can be taken to counseling training so that they can help people in their community since the people will be more comfortable with them because they know and are familiar them.

Another opinion that came up during the interviews was that counselors should stop "interrogating people and making eye contact" it made people uncomfortable and so people didn't want to go to them. Participants said that counselors need to change the way they conducted counseling. Some of their expressed opinions and suggestions from six participants are presented below:

"I think they should stop the way they keep asking too many questions; they should stop interrogating people and be polite" (P5)

"The counselor should stop that continuous eye contact, it's very uncomfortable. I mean it's very uncomfortable when someone is just looking at me straight and saying nothing! I don't like that, it's uncomfortable". (P9)

"The counselors should offer volunteer services as a means of creating awareness of their work so that many people can get used to them after which they can feel free to contact them." "And also they should stop the interrogation, they interrogate too much" (P7).

"The number of counselors should be increased in their neighborhood so that anyone can reach then with ease". (P1)

"These professional counselors should not be doing it for money. This people are very hard to get, it should not be done in those big offices, and again it not big people handling small people because they will not open up, the local people here who have talent to help others should be taken to training so that they can help people here since they will identify with them and they can connect well with the people here since they interact with them on a daily basis" (P4)

"The counselors can be making public meetings like in schools and organize seminars in public places to tell people about themselves so that people can know about them". (P3)

"The counselors should be supported financially so that the people can go to see them without paying." (P6)

4.7. Emerging Issues from the Interviews

This theme addresses some emergent issues that did not necessarily address the research questions, but were elicited by some interview guide questions. Two notable issues emerged.

Positive attitude on professional counseling
Discomfort within the counseling process

4.7.1. Positive Attitude on the Professional Counseling

Participants expressed a general positive attitude towards counseling and counselors, and it emerged that the low uptake of the services was caused by other factors. All the participants except one believed that professional counseling was good and helpful because counselors had the expertise to help people with their challenges. They said that if the professional counselors were available and affordable, they would seek help from them. Two of the participants who held positive view on professional counseling said that if counselors were readily accessible and affordable, people will not judge them negatively, they would be willing to seek help for their challenges from professional counselors.

The following excerpts show their responses when they were asked how they felt about professional counseling:

"I think professional counselors are very helpful for example to the youth, when they are counseled by a counselor, they can change because they know they are receiving this help from a professional who is an expert. They just need to be assured that others will not see them as crazy or start laughing at them" (P2)

"For me the professional counseling is good and I would like it to be made affordable or free to us here in these villages; if these professional counselors are available here, and are free we will go to them for help.., but now you see if you want to see one you will have to look for them in other areas". (P5)

4.7.2. Discomfort within the Counseling Process

Two participants who had sought professional help from a counselor expressed some discomforts with the way the counseling process was conducted. They had issues with the questioning that was done by the counselor and said they didn't like it. They said that they felt it was too much and they actually called it a "the interrogation". The expressed:

"These counselors should stop asking too many questions, I mean they interrogate a lot, (they shaking his head and smiling) they should stop these interrogations." (P1)

Another concern was on the "eye contact". The participant who mentioned this said that the eye contact made by the counselor made her uncomfortable. She said she did not like the way the counselor kept staring at her as she spoke. Her expressions are presented below:

"The counselor could not stop producing eye contact, this made me very uncomfortable to the situation, I mean I am there talking with someone who is just looking at me straight and saying nothing! I did not like that. I mean...like I felt like I needed to tell him to stop staring at me; year you know you don't know what he is thinking about and just staring at you with a blank face...like its eh.. It's very uncomfortable". (P6)

An issue was raised by a participant who had a bitter expression about counseling and said that if professional counselors wanted to help people they should look for a better way of helping People. He expressed himself as follows:

"Mmh...I mean, if these professional counselors are to help people as they claim, them they should look for other better ways to help people; and not those centers where they abuse people!" (P7)

Further prompts to clarify this statement about abuse yielded nothing and the participant appeared bitter and said he will look for the researcher to explain things later!

4.8. Summary of findings

This chapter presents the results of data analysis. Four themes and nine sub-themes emerged from the responses of 10 male and female participants from Gatina ward. The themes and sub-themes reflect the participants' attitudes, understanding and perception of professional counseling, and also the factors affecting their decision to seek or not to seek professional counseling. Strategies that can improve the decision to seek professional counseling services are also highlighted.

The findings revealed that there was avoidance/underutilization of professional counseling services in Gatina Ward, Dagoreti – North in Nairobi County. Participants reported to have faced various challenges in one time or the other in their lives, some of which they dealt with on their own and others they could not handle on their own. When they were faced with those kinds of challenges, participants reported that they sought the help of others for their support and help to deal with the challenges. The results from the data showed that majority of the people did not use counseling services to resolve their challenges, instead they turned to other sources of help, and thus there was a low uptake of professional counseling services in the area. The use of friends was identified as the most commonly source of help for many, followed by family, church leaders and elders in the community. Professional counselors were reported as the least used form of help.

Participants reported some of the factors that they thought were causing the low uptake of professional counseling in the area. The identified factors included the cost of professional counseling, the unwillingness to share personal matters with strangers, lack of trust with counselors, confidentiality issues, believing in personal abilities, social stigma, religious beliefs, unavailability of the counseling services and the counseling process.

Some strategies that could improve the uptake of professional counseling services were suggested by the participants. They include changing the way the counseling process was contacted, offering volunteer services to create awareness, holding awareness meetings in public places and schools, availability of counselors and counseling centers within communities, affordable or free services, financial support from the government and integrating counseling into main stream health care so people can access the services from the health centers and hospitals where people will not know they were seeking counseling.

The general perception about professional counseling was positive and participants said it is a good profession that can help people and that more counselors should be available and accessible. This shows that the low uptake was not caused by a negative attitude towards the professional, but by other factors that are contributing to the avoidance.

Some issues of concern to the counseling profession about the counseling process emerged about the experiences of clients and the conduct of some counselors in the counseling session. Participants expressed some concerns that need to be addressed; especially in the counseling sessions and the counseling process.

5. Discussions, Conclusions and Recommendations

This study set out to explore the uptake of professional counseling in Gatina ward, Dagoreti North in Nairobi County. A qualitative phenomenological research design was used to carry out the study which aimed at answering four research questions; how did adult men and women in Gatina deal with their psychological, emotional, economical, education and social challenges?, how were adult men and women in Gatina utilizing available Professional counseling services?, what factors affected the uptake of professional counseling services in Gatina? And what strategies could be employed to enhance the uptake of professional counseling services Gatina? 10 participants both males and females aged between 25-52 years were identified and chosen through a criterion purposeful sampling technique. To collect data, semi-structured interview questions were used to conduct one on one individual interview which lasted a total of 150 minutes.

As result a thematic analysis of the collected data from the interviews, four themes emerged related to the objectives: ways of dealing with psychological, emotional, economic and social challenges, the uptake of professional counseling, factors affecting the uptake of professional counseling and strategies to enhance the uptake of professional counseling. The themes highlighted a range of feelings, perceptions, attitudes, opinions and expectations of the people of Gatina on professional counseling services, as well as their experiences of both the counselor and the counseling process. The findings of the study are discussed in the following sections in relation to literature review.

5.1. Ways of Dealing with Psychological, Emotional, Economic and Social Challenges

From the participant's responses to the interview questions, there was acknowledgment that facing various challenges was part of everyday life. It emerged that people used various ways to deal with such challenges. Participants stated that when challenges occurred, they tried to handle them using various personal resources such as crying, praying, distractions such as reading books, magazines, watching movies, sitting quietly to think about it, taking a walk and toughing it up. Ifthe problems persisted and they realized that they could not deal with them on their own, then they sought external help from other informal sources of help. This finding corroborates with a study by Hinson & Swanson (1993) who observed that people have always sought the help of others to resolve challenges in many areas of their lives when their own resources were not adequate. Participants said that they sought help from their close and trusted friends or from their family members those challenges they could not deal with on their own. This finding is in agreement with what was noted by Pshenishny (2012) who observed that when individuals face challenges, they will seek help from those close to them including both male and female friends, mothers, and fathers and eventually will going to counselors, only if the problems are perceived as very severe. They added that they readily sought help from religious leaders and elders whom they trusted with their problems. In the process of help seeking counselors were the least used source of help. This agrees with a study by Rajagopal (2013) which reported that indeed when faced with challenges, individuals will consider seeking help from different sources when overwhelmed, and a counselor will not be their first choice. They will consult with friends, colleagues and family members as opposed to seeking professional help for their challenges. In other studies by Masuda et al. (2011); Reichk and Muller; (1996); Gichinga (2008); Plater and Gulubane (2010); Abiodun and Oluwafunto (2014), and Masambia (2014), it is observed that professional help is not sought readily by those who need it, instead they opt for other sources of help such as their mothers and friends, pastors and church officials, as well as elder's, families members and colleagues. The findings in this study confirm these earlier reports.

A possible explanation to these findings can be found in the responses of the participants. From what was shared it is evident that the people go to those they are familiar with and there is a level of trust, and so they feel free to share their challenges with them. For instance, one participant said that he shared his challenges with his father because he was free with him, trusted him and was assured that the father will not gossip or discuss what he shared with him with other people. The professional counselors are not readily available and they are not well known by the majority of the people talk less of trusting them. Many said they didn't know any professional counselor and this can explain why they view them as strangers. This fact discouraged many from seeking professional help. The people considered those other sources of help as more favorable to them.

It is evident from the findings of this study that despite the fact that the counseling professions has been around for some time now in Kenya and a lot of training is going on to produce qualified counselors, its understanding and recognition is yet to reach majority of the people in society; and so many people do not yet understand the difference between the professional counselors and the benefits or advantages they hold over the other informal sources of help. More awareness in needed to promote counseling its benefits in addressing mental health in society in order to encourage people to seek professional help for the challenges that cause psychological and emotional disturbances in order to promote better mental health.

5.2. The Uptake of Professional Counseling Services

The findings of the current study revealed that there a low uptake of professional counseling in Gatina and majority of the people were using more of the other sources of help as opposed to professional help leading to

underutilization of the services. These findings are consistent with previous reviewed literature from many parts of the world which reported a growing underutilization/avoidance of professional counseling (Boyd et. el, 2011; Wang et al, 2010; Vogel, Wester, Hacker & Larson, 2007). There were only two participants out of the ten in this study who reported having sought professional counseling. This finding relates to a study by Andrew, Issakidis and Carter (2001) which found that only less than one third of those faced with challenges are taking up professional counseling services world over.

Based on the findings of this study, it emerged that friends are a very important source of support to individuals when they faced challenges. Compared with other sources of help in this community, friends were the most utilized source of help by the majority, as well as being the first choice of help for many. When asked where they sought help from for those challenges they could not handle on their own, all the participants responded that they first went to their best or trusted friends to share their issues. Religious leaders, family members and elders followed in that order and counselors were only considered if things were to get serious and nothing else was working. These findings are consistent with these other studies several other studies which observed that many people are not choosing to seek help from professional counselors for their challenges (Masuda, Akihiko, Anderson & Edmonds, 2012; Marsh & Wilcoxon, 2015; Wango (2015); Mutie & Ndambuki, 1999; Muola & Migosi, 2012; Nayaka, 2007; Gichinga, 2008; Nzangi & Wangila, 2015). Instead many are turning to their friends, family members, colleagues, elders, pastors and other to religious leaders for help (Hinson & Swanson, 1993; Abiodun, Oluwafunto & Sanu, 2014; Plattner & Gulubane, 2010).

The results of the current study suggested that only few individuals were utilizing professional counseling in Gatina just like it is being reported from other parts of the world by research. These findings can be explained by the fact that many here did not understand the part played by professional counselors; and where they come in regard to mental health, they tend to think that the advice they get from friends and others is enough and they do not need the professional help.

Promotion of mental health awareness and the role of professional counseling in it are needed in order to help the community understand that the challenges that cause mental health problems cannot be dealt with by the advice of friends and other leaders in society. Special professional help is needed when people are facing emotional and psychological challenges in order to prevent them from progressing to serious mental health problems that lead to incapacitation of the individual and may require long and expensive psychiatric care. This can help in making the people in this society to start appreciating professional counseling as an important player in prevention and treatment of emotional and psychological disturbances that can lead to serious mental health problems.

5.3. Factors Affecting the Uptake of Professional Counseling Services

The present study identified several factors that were contributing to avoidance or underutilize professional counseling services. The findings revealed that the professional fees were the major barrier to individuals seeking help from professional counselors corroborating another study in the reviewed literature which reported that expert fees were a contributor low to uptake of psychological counseling services (Pfohl, 2010). The cost of professional counseling was the most mentioned factor by majority of the participants as the reason why they avoided going for professional counseling. Seven out of ten participants said that they didn't go to seek help from the professional counselor because they had to pay for their services which they said were high; and even the two who had sought the professional counseling services were in agreement that they didn't like the idea that they had to pay for the counseling sessions. This was an interesting finding since no previous reviewed study had shown the cost of counseling as a leading barrier to seeking professional counseling services.

Possible explanations could be the economic status of the participants. The area of study being an informal urban settlement, the residents here although educated may be experiencing financial constraints and find it difficult to pay for counseling, while they can get help from other sources which are free of charge. It could also be as result of not recognizing the need for the services and so they don't think it's worth paying for. Psycho education about what psychological counseling is and the costs involved could be helpful; majority said they assumed it was high because they heard it was. Another factor identified by the findings as a barrier to seeking professional help is the unwillingness to share personal matters with strangers. Under this barrier participants reported that they did not like sharing their challenges and personal matters with other people they did not know. Some said that they preferred keeping personal matters to themselves and so if they got a challenge, they dealt with it by toughing it up and trying to distract their attention from the problem. They felt that the counselors were strangers who they cannot talk to them about their personal life. This finding corroborates reports in previous literature that found out that individuals avoid going to counseling because they are unwilling to share their issues with people they did not trust, who are strangers to them and that includes professional counselors (Mashaandja et al, 2013 & Anagbogu, 2013).

This finding can be associated with the conflict between the western cultures on which mainstream counseling is based on, and most African cultures. The western cultures promote openness and sharing of problems while African cultures discourage people from talking about their problems and being able to keep them private is regarded as respectable and tough. Those who keep seeking for help (especially men) are regarded as weak and unable to be in control of their lives. The findings corroborates another study which observed that many people especially men are not willing to "expose" their problems to professional counselors who they consider as strangers (Anagbogu, 2013). Majority of the people in this study who said that they deal with their own problems using personal resources were men. This was reported in another study by Koydemir, Erel, Yumurtci and Sahin (2010) who found that men are thought of as tough and able to handle their own challenges; hence seeking help from others is seen as being weak and degrading.

There is a need to educate men on the consequences of this toughing up to their overall health and mental health; a lot of men are suffering with mental, emotional and physiological problems as a result of bottling their emotions in the name of being "tough". Many turn to antisocial behavior such as alcoholism, drugs, violent behavior to escape. They need to know that it's okay to seek help and that not doing so can be detrimental to their mental health. Psycho education about the normality of seeking help is needed coupled with devising ways of integrating the western model of counseling into the African cultural ways of interactions in order to make professional counseling more appealing to more people and take accommodate of those upholding their cultural believes. Confidentiality was another factor that was affecting the uptake of professional counseling services in this area. Evidently individuals were concerned about confidentiality issues when it comes to sharing their challenges with counselors. This finding agrees with another study by Vogel, Wade, Wester, Larson and Hackler (2007) which found out that those people who had confidence and trust with counselors were more likely to share their issues with counselors in confidence. This finding also confirms another one by Mashaandja et al, 2013 which stated that people will not share their issues with counselors if they cannot trust and have confidence with them. Participants said that they go to pastors and church leaders because they felt that they could keep their discussions between them and they will not be discussed with other people. They indicated that they were not sure if the counselors will keep their information secret and will not share them with other people. One participant said that she shared her problems with God through prayer because she was sure that God cannot share her secrets with anybody; this shows that she would only go for ultimate confidentiality.

Another factor that was found to be hindering the uptake of professional counseling in this study was a personal believe that individuals possess an ability to solve their personal problems. The findings revealed that people tried to deal with their problems on their own whenever they faced challenges in their daily lives. They felt that it was better to face their challenges and overcome them, other than going to share them with outsiders including counselors. A study by Bicil (2012) corroborates this finding. It reports that individuals with strong personality trust in their ability to solve their own problems and so they may not seek counseling services.

Social stigma is one of the most reported factors by research that has a negative influence on seeking professional counseling services and it was reported as one of the factors hindering professional help seeking in the present study. This finding is consistent with another study carried among secondary school students by Amaya (2011) which concluded that fear of being judged negatively is a major cause of voidance of counseling among students in Nairobi secondary schools. Studies on barriers to psychological counseling by Bicil, (2012); Topkaya, (2011); Calloway, (2008); Komiti, Judd, and Jackson, (2006); and Vogel, Wade, and Hackler,(2007) state that people avoid counseling for fear of the stigma that goes with mental illnesses, and so they fear being stigmatized.

In another study by Topkaya (2011), seeking help from counselors is always viewed with suspicion of having serious mental problem, which is highly stigmatized and those thought to have mental sickness are avoided and discriminated. This corroborated in the current research. Participants feared that they will either be labeled as 'crazy'; having a serious mental problem or being mad if they are seen visiting a professional counselor. This finding further confirms what was found out by another study which observed that stigma was the biggest barrier to the improvement of the quality of life for most people with mental illness (Sartorius, 1998).

This finding can be associated with the attitudes held in society that when individuals are seen going for Professional counseling, then they are thought as weak and not able to handle their own lives. They are also more likely to be associated with a mental illness and thus be subjected to social discrimination. Participants were particularly concerned about being seen as insufficient, being isolated, losing respect in their community, being subjected to the feelings shame about having a mental condition and being discriminated in their social circles.

There is a need to address the mental illness stigma in society if people are to come out and utilize professional counseling services. The fact that people look at those seeing counselors with suspicion of having a serious mental sickness which is frowned at in society is an issue that needs to be dealt with. Society should start to view and address mental illness as any other illness of the body that people suffer from. Seeking treatment for mental illnesses should not be seen as being different from going to see a doctor for any other illness. The promotion of counseling in the communities and its importance in preventing and alleviating mental health challenges is greatly needed.

 Participants mentioned faith in God as another identified factor that kept them from seeking professional counseling as reported by in the present study. It was evident that people who believed in God as having the power to help them felt calm and peaceful inside despite the challenges they were facing. They trusted and believed that God had the power to handle their challenges and so they prayed. Participants reported having confidence that God will solve their problems, indeed one participant said that God was there for her and she shared her problems with Him. This is consistent with a study by Culbertson (2007) which found out that a dialogue in prayer is a first point of call for individuals who are in need and looking for help. Others said that they sought help from pastors and elders of their church because they would give them godly advice and helped them seek divine intervention. These findings agree with previous studies which show that individuals readily seek help from their pastors and other church leader (Gichinga, 2008; Nzangi & Wangila, 20150). One reason for this scenario could be the fact that most Africans are strong believers in God and they hold their religious leader in high esteem as it is reflected in the findings of this study.

The counseling process was identified as another factor that made people refrain from seeking professional help. This was an interesting finding in this study. This is not a common finding in most previous studies which have looked into avoidance and barriers to professional counseling. The only two Participants in this study who had sought help from a professional counselor expressed some concerns with the counseling process. They indicated that eye contact and the questioning made by the counselor made them feel uncomfortable in the counseling session. One of the participants said

that the counselor "could not stop making eye contact" that made her feel uncomfortable in the session. One wonders how this eye contact was being made that made her feel this way! The other participant called the questioning an interrogation. Questions in counseling are used to help the counseling process in clarifying issues and moving the session forward and not to interrogate clients. The participant said the following about the counselor in a counseling session: "they should stop the interrogation, they interrogate too much", raising a concern about how the questioning was being done. Eye contact and questioning are two counseling techniques commonly used by counselors and they require expertise and experience in the way they are used. If used wrongly or inappropriately, they can negatively affect the counseling session and derail the whole process.

These findings reflects Wango's (2015) observations that an evaluation of the professionals offering psychological counseling in general is needed because there are many people offering these services without the necessary competence. He stated that clients who go to such counselors do not receive any substantial help and they end up thinking that counseling does not work; while the truth is that they never received help in the first place. Adding to the importance of a proper counseling process, Perloff (2005); Pienaar and Roodt (2001) stated that the properuse of empathy, application of theories, skills and techniques play a key role in the counseling process. More over Whiston and Coker (in Press) emphasizes that counselors' expertise and appropriate application of listening and interviewing skills are essential skills that are important to an effective counseling process.

A negative perception of the therapist by the client can ruin the session thereby affecting the entire process. In the Rogerian client centered approach, the role of the therapist in given as that of a provider of an enabling environment on which the clients grow towards change (McLeod, 2015). The therapist communicates empathy and unconditional positive regard to the client through their words and behavior from which the client perceives the therapists empathy and the unconditional positive regard; these motivates the client towards change. If the client has a negative perception of the therapist, the counseling process will be affected negatively and may end up unsuccessful.

These findings in the current study therefore poses a concern on the counseling process, and further emphasize the observations by Wango (2015) that the counseling profession needs an evaluation because some factors contributing to the low uptake of counseling could be emanating from within. In another earlier study, it was found that counseling itself can be potentially embarrassing and fear invoking to some individuals (Kusher & Sher, 1989). The study further stated that those who felt embarrassed and a sense of fear ended up avoiding going for counseling. The counseling profession therefore may want to have a closer look at the polices that govern training and practice of counselors and make sure those counselors who are licensed to practice have the competency and knowledge on proper use of counseling techniques and skills needed in client handling in a counseling session. This may address the issues raised in both the current and previous studies in order to make professional counseling a respectable profession which attracts client and handles them with dignity. The finding of this study adds a voice in the call for an evaluation of the counseling process and the expertise of the counselors in handling clients.

The gender issue in counseling also came up in the current study. One participant mentioned that she will be comfortable seeing a female counselor since as a woman she will be free with her and also the female counselor will understand her better. This corroborates what was reported by Bobga (2016) who observed that the gender of the counselor can determine who goes for counseling. It is therefore important to have the preferred gender available in order to help those clients who may want to have a particular gender handling them in counseling sessions.

The last factor that participants identified as a barrier to seeking help in this study was the lack of availability and accessibility of the counseling services within the community. Participants mentioned that the professional counselors are not available in their neighborhood and so going to them was not easy since they don't know where to find them. They said that having the services in their neighborhood would make it easier to use them. This result match another study that concluded that making counseling centers available within communities can go a long way in increasing the uptake of counseling services (Anagbogu, Nokwolo, Anyamene, Anachebelu & Umezulile (2013). This study further agrees with another study by Woodward and Pachana (2009), which identified easy access to counseling services and changing the attitude of the mental health workers towards their clients as two favorable strategies to increase the uptake of the services. If counseling services are fully recognized and advocacy for their integration in the health care sector is realized, it would be a major boost in tackling the challenge of low uptake of professional counseling in society.

5.4. Strategies to Improve the Uptake of Professional Counseling

The results of present study showed that there was a low utilization of professional counseling services which participants attributed to a number of factors that they felt was hindering them from utilizing these services. They gave their opinions and suggestions on some strategies that can be put in place to enhance the uptake of professional counseling service in this area.

5.4.1. Availability and Accessibility

Availability of counselors and counseling facilities within the community was said to be a major boost to increase the peoples' willingness to use professional counseling services. Having these facilities where people can access them easily and increasing the number of counselors in the neighborhood can facilitate the uptake of the services in Gatina. This suggestion is in agreement with a study by Woodward and Pachana (2009) which indicated that easy access to counseling services was a favorable factor that could increase the uptake of the counseling services.

5.4.2. Making Counseling Fee Affordable

According to the opinions expressed in the current study, there was a need to make the counseling fee affordable by everyone. It was felt that this would go a long way in encouraging more people to use the services. This is in agreement with a study by Pfohl, (2010) which stated that the cost of counseling was contributing factor to low uptake of professional counseling. It was suggested that the counseling services should be sponsored financially by the government so that the people can go to see counselors without paying them. This was a new finding which was not highlighted as a major barrier to professional help seeking in the reviewed literature; nevertheless it emerged as the major barrier to professional help seeking in this area. Perhaps this can be attributed to the fact that the study was conducted in a low income area.

5.4.3. Creation of Awareness

Participants further suggested that counselors need to be holding public meetings and conferences to create awareness of their services in the society because there were still a lot of people who didn't know about what counselors do. Counselors should offer volunteer services as a means of creating awareness of their work so that many people can get used to them after which they can feel free to contact them. These findings can be related to a study by Anagbogu, Nokwolo, and Anyamene, Anachebelu & Umezulile (2013) which indicated that proper policies that explain what counseling is and making counseling services available can promote the uptake of counseling services.

5.4.4. Integration of Counseling Services into the Mainstream Health Care

Promotion and presenting counseling as a part of health care system was seen as booster to encourage the uptake of professional counseling. Participants reported that they would be more willing to go for counseling if they would find the counselors within hospitals and health centers where they seek other medical services. This will enable them to visit counselors just like they visit other doctors in these facilities. They felt that this will protect them from the stigma that they will get if seen visit places which are known to be exclusively for counseling.

Recognizing the importance of professional counseling integrating them in the main stream health care sector would be a major boost in tackling the challenge of low uptake of these services. This finding addresses most of the issues raised about stigma associated with mental health issues in society. If counseling facilities and counselors could be promoted as an important player in health matters and are availed within hospitals and health centers; people will visit them without feeling that they are seeking a discriminated and a stigmatized serving, thus improving the uptake of professional counseling services among the people.

5.4.5. Training Leaders in the Community with Counseling Skills

It was further suggested that those people who have the talent to help others with their problems in the community and were consulted by those with problems for help can be taken to counseling training so that they can get the skills to help people in their community. Although not reported in the reviewed literature, this finding shows that the people are willing to seek and use the help of professionals so long as they can trust them. Participants felt that the people will be more comfortable seeking help from familiar counselors from their community.

This finding conflicts with the mainstream counseling that discourages a counseling relationship between close friends, spouses, acquaintances, colleagues as well as blood relations. This calls for an examination of some of the aspects in mainstream counseling with a goal of finding how it can be integrated into different situations and cultures.

5.4.6. Evaluating the Counseling Process

Another opinion that came up during the interviews was the change in the way the counseling process was conducted. Two Participants reported feeling uncomfortable in a counseling session because of the questions that were posed by the counselor; they felt like they were being "interrogated". They also mentioned an "eye contact" that made them feel that the counselor was staring at them constantly making them uncomfortable. Participants were of the opinion that counselors should stop "interrogating people and making constant eye contact" which made them uncomfortable. If people felt comfortable in the counseling session, then they will be more willing to seek professional counseling services. This finding is corroborated by an observation reported by Wango 2015, that asserted that counseling profession needs an evaluation of who is offering services to clients because when clients go to incompetent counselors they are not helped. This may lead to clients leaving the counseling session confused and having a negative attitude towards the profession, and the may conclude that counseling does not work.

5.5. Emerging Issues from the Interviews

5.5.1. Positive Attitude on the Professional Counseling

The findings of the study revealed a general positive attitude towards the profession of counseling and the professional counselors, which helped to show that the prevailing avoidance/ low uptake of the services was not cause by other factors that have been identified; and had nothing to do with the attitude of the people towards the services.

5.5.2. Discomfort within the Counseling Process

Some interesting discoveries were made during the interviews about the counseling process concerning the clients and the counselors in a counseling session. Participants expressed some experiences in the counseling sessions which made them uncomfortable. Some aspects of the counseling process and the techniques used by the counselor came

into question. Participants said as clients they had issues with the questioning technique and the attending skills which involves the counselor maintaining eye contact with the client. The concerned participants said these made them uncomfortable in the session. Two participants who had sought professional help from a counselor expressed their some discomforts with the way the counseling process was conducted. They had issues with the questioning that was done by the counselor and said they didn't like it. They said that they felt it was too much and they actually called it a "the interrogation". The expressed as follows below:

Another issue of concern was the statement from one of the participant who expressed bitterness about counseling and said that if professional counselors wanted to help people they should look for a better way of helping them. This statement "and not those centers where they abuse people!" needs to be further explored and investigated to find out what really he means and find out what really happened for him to make such a statement.

The questioning technique and the eye contact are important aspects in the counseling process; however their use and improper use can jeopardize the entire process. They require expertise, experience and tact in the way they are used so that the client does not feel stared at and being interrogated. In the cases expressed in the findings of this study, one wonders how the eye contact and the questioning were done to make the clients feel the way they felt.

5.6. Theoretical Implications

The findings of the present study have reflected the tenets of the theories that informed the current study. The theory of planned behavior states that if people hold a negative attitude towards a behavior, and the same attitudes are held by significant others in society, the individuals' senses of control towards the behavior are weakened. This leads to unlikelihood of performing the behavior. On the other hand, if the individuals' attitude and those of significant others are positive, their senses of control are greatly increasing and this leads to increased likelihood of behavior performance.

As regards this theory, the findings of the current study reveal that the people have a positive attitude of the professional counseling in itself but other factors such as the stigma that is directed to those who go for counseling, the cost of counseling fees, lack of awareness, lack of trust, and confidentiality issues and the fear of the counseling process are the ones making people not to seek professional counseling. This means that even though the attitude of the individual is positive towards the professional counseling, the negative view held by the majority in the society that cost of the counseling serve to deter them from seeking the service. Hence, an individual's attitude is not enough to determine their involvement in a behavior but greater power can lie in external factors.

The findings of the study are upholding and agreeing with the Theory of planned behavior that the attitudes and views of the society and significant others influences the decision to perform or not to perform behavior. The findings of this study reveal that an interplay between a positive attitude and societal norms determine the decision to perform or not to perform a behavior. It emerged that although the participants had a positive attitude towards professional counseling, they did not use it due to the stigma and the assumed high cost of professional counseling; which were the main identified barriers to professional counseling services. The Social Cognitive Theory states that the interactions between a person, the environment and the beliefs held by the individual influence behavior. The findings agree with the assumptions of this theory.

Conclusively, the theory of planned behavior should be more precise in underlining that behavior is the result of interplay between individual and contextual factors.

5.7. Conclusions

The aim of this exploratory study was to gain an in-depth understanding of the uptake of the counseling profession and find out the opinions, experiences, perception and attitudes of the Gatina residents about the profession. The present study concluded that there was a low uptake of professional counseling and a lack of clear understanding about what professional/psychological counseling is, how it works, its role and benefits in society. This exploration of the uptake of professional counseling provides new insight on the state of the counseling profession in the Kenyan society. The findings of the study highlights some factors that are affecting the utilization of these services, as well as some strategies that can be employed to offer solutions to some of the issues affecting the utilization of the professional counseling services.

There is a need to take the necessary steps to address the identified factors in order to overcome the barriers that are causing the low uptake of professional counseling services in the society and bring about a better understands and appreciation of its role in the society. There seems to be a lack of awareness about the difference between psychological counseling and psychiatry, and the work that these two professionals do. Providing this information to the general public by creating the necessary awareness will reduce the stigma associated with seeing a counselor because most of it seems to emanate from the fact that those who see a counselor have a serious mental disorder. This stigma keeps people away from seeking counseling lest they be labeled crazy or mad.

There is a need to normalize professional counseling help seeking, make it easily accessible, and increase the number of counselors in the communities together with the promotion of its benefits and the expected outcomes. These strategies can greatly enhance the uptake of professional counseling. Efforts should therefore be directed towards a campaign to increase public awareness on the benefits of seeking professional help and explaining the role of professional counselors in dealing with psychological, emotional and other social challenges. Availability of competent counselors and their easy accessibility to clients should also be emphasized. Issues that were identified in the counseling process need to be investigated to find out what is really going on in there in order to address those issues that were pointed out in an effort to make the process more clients friendly.

5.8. Recommendations

The study present study recommends that policy makers need to explore ways of addressing the cost of counseling fees which was the major hindrance to help seeking according to the findings, and ensuring a form of facilitation such as having counseling fee included in medical insurance policies in a bid to encourage individuals' access to services. Experts offering psychological services should come up with Psycho social education programs to inform the public about what psychological counseling is and explain its benefits; as well as informing individuals about therapy and how it works. The psycho social education should also be aimed at dispelling the major identified barriers of professional help seeking which include the cost of therapy, cultural barriers, social stigma, confidentiality, self-disclosure, lack of trust with counselors and the believe in own ability to solve own issues. Adequate information about the counseling process should be clearly given to ensure that clients understand what goes on in therapy and quell fears and discomforts such as the "eye contact and interrogation" expressed in this study. Normalizing professional/psychological help seeking and mental health illnesses, explaining therapy experience and increasing competency of service providers in psychological counseling can go a long way in enhancing the uptake of these services in the Kenyan society.

5.9. Suggestions for Further Research

A similar study in a dissimilar location needs to be carried out using a qualitative phenomenological design for further understanding of the state of professional counseling in the Country. Future studies should also explore the counseling process and the clients' experience in the counseling session in order to address the identified issues within the counseling process that are hindering the uptake of professional counseling.

5.10 Limitations of the Study

The study had some limitations due to the fact that it was carried out in an informal urban settlement and so the outcome may differ from other dissimilar locations. Although all efforts were made to be objective, there is a possibility that the researcher's attitudes and perceptions may have an influence on the data collection process.

5.11. Reflexivity

According to Strauss and Corbin, (1998), the researcher is an important tool in a qualitative research, and their relationship with the participants directs the outcome (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and as such, there is a constant interaction between the researcher and the research. In the present study the researcher was aware of this fact and kept a record of personal experiences, expectations, interests and perceptions on the topic of study before going to the field for data collection. She understood the need to be sensitive and objective to the research process and the participants; and was able to be sensitive to the responses, subtle messages, signals and meanings in the participant's verbal and nonverbal communications. She maintained a good environment for easy interactions between her and the participants which ensured the success of the interviewing process.

Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher tried to respond to the interview questions in the way she anticipated the participants would respond in an attempt to examine her expectations. There was little expectation on the perceptions about professional counseling because she was not sure how much the participants knew about it. The researcher expected the participants to say that professional counseling helps people with serious mental health issues, that they did not use it because they did not have serious mental issues; they used friends and family to solve their problems and also solved their own issues. The researcher remained objective and open minded throughout the research process. The participants were given a chance to listen to the recorded interview at the end of their interview in order to verify their responses and confirm if what was caught on tape was what they wanted to remain as their final answers to the interview questions. They all confirmed their responses.

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Appendix

Semi Structured Interview Guide Questions Used in the Interviews

- Could you please tell me a little about yourself, - name, occupation, marital status age and level of education
- What do you understand by theterm 'Professional counseling'? (Probe on "what do you mean? Can you please say more about that or could you please clarify that" followed depending on the response of the participant)
- Could you please tell me what you think/ or feel about professional counseling?
- How do you feel/think about someone who is seeing or has been referred to see a Professional Counselor?
- Is there any one you know here in your neighborhood who has been to a Professional Counselor? - (if yes) what do you feel or think about them?
- According to you, has any one you know been helped through professional counseling?
- How do you try to solve your emotional, Social or psychological challenges?(terms were simplified to the level of understanding of the respondent there was need)
- In case you encounter a family, relationship or marital challenge/ problem in future, where would you think of seeking help from first?
- Could you please tell me why you would seek help from the sources you have just named?
- Have you ever had a challenge in your life and sought help from a Professional Counselor? (If yes), could you please describe to me your experience with the counselor?
- Was there anything that you disliked or made you uncomfortable during the counseling process?
- What did you like about the counselor and the counseling process?
- In your own opinion what could have made you experience much better in the counseling process?
- What are some of the factors that you think would prevent, or have prevented you from seeking help from a professional Counselor?
- What do you think can make people seek more of professional counseling services?