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Impact of Outcome Expectations on Junior Secondary Students' Willingness to Self-Disclose During Counseling in Anaocha LGA, Anambra State

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Abstract:
The willingness of junior secondary students to self-disclose during counseling sessions has been a growing concern, despite the increasing presence of guidance and counseling departments in Nigerian schools. This study used a descriptive survey design to examine the impact of outcome expectations on junior secondary school students' willingness to self-disclose during counseling in Anaocha LGA, Anambra State. The target population included all JSS1–JSS3 students in government-approved secondary schools, with a total sample of 398 students selected through multistage and stratified sampling. Data was collected using the Outcome Expectations and Self-Disclosure Scale (OESDS), which was validated by academic experts and found to have high reliability. Descriptive statistics and multiple regression analysis (SPSS version 25) were used for data analysis. The findings revealed that that outcome expectation variables during counseling sessions in Anaocha Local Government Area exhibited moderate levels for emotional openness (29.91), stigma tolerance (11.12), anticipated risk (13.51), and anticipated utility (13.47). Social support (59.38) and attitude toward self-disclosure (78.58) were higher. Girls had slightly higher emotional openness (30.02) and stigma tolerance (11.59), while boys had higher anticipated risk (13.65) and anticipated utility (13.84). The correlation analysis revealed significant relationships, with emotional openness showing moderate positive correlations with social support (0.33) and attitude toward self-disclosure (0.32). Stigma had a strong positive correlation with anticipated risk (0.90). Finally, the regression analysis indicated that social support, anticipated utility, and anticipated risk were significant predictors of attitudes toward self-disclosure, with R-values of 0.375 (F = 80.59), 0.443 (F = 34.35), 0.499 (F = 34.01), and 0.526 (F = 19.16), respectively. The study concludes that addressing these factors, along with improving counselors' multicultural competencies, is essential to fostering a more open counseling environment in schools. Based on these findings, it is recommended that school counselors undergo regular professional development, focusing on cultural competence, and that counseling programs incorporate strategies to reduce stigma and enhance social support for students.

Keywords: *self-disclosure, outcome expectations, counseling, stigma tolerance, social support, multicultural competencies*

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the growing emphasis on guidance and counseling services in Nigerian educational institutions, there remains a persistent issue of low levels of self-disclosure among junior secondary school students during counseling sessions. Research has shown that students' willingness to self-disclose — a key component for effective therapeutic relationships — is often hindered by various psychological, social, and contextual factors (Baysden, 2018; Davis, 2019). Even with the establishment of counseling units across schools and the provision of enabling environments, students remain reluctant to open up during sessions, thereby limiting the effectiveness of counseling interventions (Masaviru, Mwangi, & Masindano, 2018). The consequence of this trend is dire, with rising incidents of untreated psychological trauma, poor academic performance, and behavioral issues among students. A growing body of literature points to "outcome expectations" — students' anticipatory beliefs about the results of their self-disclosure — as a critical factor influencing their openness (Obibuba, 2022; Wang et al, 2025). Understanding the relationship between these expectations and students' self-disclosure attitudes is thus essential for designing effective interventions.

Self-disclosure is rooted in existential and phenomenological thought. It occurs when individuals share personal, private, and significant information about themselves, often verbally, in hopes of building trust or gaining relief (Cozby et al., 2018). Hungerford et al, (2025) emphasize that true self-disclosure must be intentional and involve information not commonly known. Self-disclosure in counseling takes two major forms: immediate and non-immediate. Immediate disclosures focus on real-time interactions during sessions, such as a counselor expressing feelings about a student's lateness. Non-immediate disclosures shift the focus from the session to the counselor's personal experiences (McCarthy & Betz, 2019). Although both forms serve different purposes, studies show that immediate, self-involving disclosures are often more effective in therapeutic settings (Watkins & Wagner, 2015; Knox & Hill, 2018).

Counseling boundaries also shape disclosure norms. Generally, clients are expected to disclose more, while counselors maintain a professional distance (Farber & Joseph, 2017). However, counselors' selective and strategic use of self-disclosure can model vulnerability, encourage openness, and make therapy more relatable, especially for adolescents (Wachtel et al., 2017). Outcome expectations refer to individuals' beliefs about the potential results of a behavior—in this case, disclosing personal information. When students believe that self-disclosure will lead to judgment, punishment, or ridicule, they are less likely to be open during counseling sessions (Park et al, 2025). On the contrary, if they anticipate acceptance, empathy, or

problem resolution, they are more likely to self-disclose. The influence of outcome expectations on disclosure is evident in empirical studies. For instance, Levitt et al. (2019) found that when therapists disclosed information that humanized them or reflected shared experiences, clients responded more positively. Similarly, Knox et al. (2018) discovered that self-disclosure encouraged by therapist empathy and reassurance made clients more comfortable discussing sensitive issues.

Carter & Moran (2025) also found that while self-disclosure can blur boundaries, when used appropriately, it facilitates emotional connection and trust. However, not all disclosures are effective; inappropriate or ill-timed self-disclosures by therapists can discourage openness and raise concerns about boundary violations (Mroz et al, 2025). In the Nigerian context, Ojumu et al, (2025) noted that students often expect negative outcomes—such as stigmatization or breach of confidentiality—from disclosing issues like family problems, abuse, or academic failure. These expectations significantly reduce the likelihood of meaningful counselor-student interactions. Therapists' use of self-disclosure is influenced by their experience and skill. Andersen and Anderson (2018) found that more experienced therapists were more likely to use self-disclosure effectively. They also discovered that disclosures expressing therapists' emotional reactions to clients' behaviors—when framed positively—had the highest impact on client self-disclosure. This reinforces the idea that perceived therapist authenticity and emotional resonance can reshape outcome expectations, making students feel safer and more willing to engage.

Likewise, Bottrill et al. (2019) revealed that therapists in training struggled with how and when to disclose effectively, indicating the importance of professional development and support. Counselor training should therefore include modules on strategic self-disclosure to enhance therapeutic outcomes, especially for young clients. This study is therefore grounded in the Social Penetration Theory by Irwin Altman and Dallas Taylor (1973), which conceptualizes individuals as onions with layered personalities that are progressively revealed. The theory explains how people decide whether or not to open up, especially during counseling, based on outcome expectations such as anticipated risk, anticipated utility, social stigma, and perceived social support. The conceptual framework outlines the relationship between independent variables (like cultural norms), intervening variables (outcome expectations), and the dependent variable (emotional openness). In Anaocha Local Government Area of Anambra State, cultural norms heavily discourage emotional expression, especially among junior secondary school girls. These cultural values emphasize emotional restraint, self-reliance, prayer, and resilience over

vulnerability, which clashes with the counseling process that requires openness and emotional expression.

Girls often suppress thoughts and emotions due to societal expectations, leading to self-devaluation and depression. Furthermore, revealing personal or family matters to outsiders, such as counselors, is culturally frowned upon. As a result, counseling uptake and effectiveness are hindered. This study operationalizes key outcome expectations influencing self-disclosure, including anticipated risk, anticipated utility, social stigma, perceived social support, and emotional openness, to understand how these factors impact students' willingness to engage in counseling. There is a growing concern over the mental health of adolescents in Nigeria, yet many junior secondary school students remain unwilling to engage in counseling, particularly in culturally conservative areas like Anaocha LGA, Anambra State. Despite the availability of school counselors, students often withhold personal issues due to cultural, psychological, and social factors. Studies such as Vogel and Wester (2015) have shown that anticipated risks and social stigma significantly reduce students' willingness to self-disclose during counseling. However, most existing research has been conducted in Western contexts, with limited application to African or Nigerian socio-cultural environments.

Furthermore, the strong cultural emphasis on emotional restraint and self-reliance in African settings is under-researched in relation to students' counseling behaviors. Junior girls, in particular, may internalize problems such as rape and other social vices due to societal expectations, leading to depressive symptoms (Obibuba, I. M. (2020). There is a need to understand how outcome expectations—such as anticipated utility, social support, and emotional openness—influence self-disclosure within this specific context. This study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring these variables among junior secondary school students in Anaocha LGA, thereby providing culturally relevant data to inform effective, context-sensitive school counseling practices in Nigeria.

METHOD

This study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the impact of outcome expectations on junior secondary school students' willingness to self-disclose during counseling in Anaocha Local Government Area (LGA) of Anambra State. The study was carried out in Anaocha LGA, a culturally vibrant area in Anambra State. The choice of this location was informed by its cultural emphasis on emotional control and self-restraint, values that could

significantly influence how students approach counseling and whether they feel safe disclosing personal issues. The target population consisted of all junior secondary school students (JSS1–JSS3) in government-approved secondary schools within the LGA. To select participants, the study employed a multistage sampling technique. First, two schools were purposively selected based on accessibility and student population. Then, a stratified sampling method was used to ensure that all three class levels (JSS1, JSS2, and JSS3) were represented. Finally, students were randomly selected from each stratum: 162 from JSS1, 134 from JSS2, and 102 from JSS3, resulting in a total sample size of 398 students. The sample size was determined using Yamane's (1967) simplified formula, applying a 5% margin of error.

To collect data, the researcher developed a structured questionnaire titled Outcome Expectations and Self-Disclosure Scale (OESDS). The questionnaire had two sections. Section A gathered demographic information, while Section B contained items designed to measure the key variables—anticipated risk, anticipated utility, social stigma, perceived social support, emotional openness, and willingness to self-disclose. For validation, the questionnaire was reviewed by three academic experts—one each from Guidance and Counseling, Educational Psychology, and Measurement and Evaluation—at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Their feedback was used to refine the instrument for clarity and content relevance. To ensure reliability, a pilot test was conducted in a nearby local government area not included in the main study. Using Cronbach's Alpha, the internal consistency of the instrument was established.

Data collection was carried out during school hours with the support of school counselors and classroom teachers. The researcher explained the purpose of the study to the students, ensured confidentiality, and encouraged honest responses. The questionnaires were completed on the spot and collected immediately to avoid loss or influence from others. For data analysis, descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to address the research questions. To test the hypotheses, the study employed multiple regression analysis at a 0.05 level of significance, using SPSS version 25.

RESULT

Table 1: Outcome Expectation Variables During Counseling Sessions Among Boys and Girls of the Selected Schools in Anaocha Local Government

Variables	Emotional Openness	Stigma Tolerance	Anticipated Risk	Anticipated Utility	Social Support	ATSD (Attitude Toward Self-

						Disclosure)
Mean	29.91	11.12	13.51	13.47	59.38	78.58
Girls	30.02	11.59	13.36	13.10	59.41	77.00
Boys	29.80	10.75	13.65	13.84	59.36	80.20
Standard Deviation (SD)	6.94	2.72	3.53	3.06	16.62	10.19

Table 1 presents the outcome expectation variables during counseling sessions among boys and girls of the selected schools in Anaocha Local Government Area. The mean scores indicate that, overall, students have moderate levels of emotional openness (29.91), stigma tolerance (11.12), anticipated risk (13.51), and anticipated utility (13.47), with a higher level of social support (59.38) and a positive attitude toward self-disclosure (78.58). When broken down by gender, girls reported slightly higher emotional openness (30.02) and stigma tolerance (11.59) compared to boys, who had lower mean scores for these variables (29.80 for emotional openness and 10.75 for stigma tolerance). However, boys scored higher in anticipated risk (13.65) and anticipated utility (13.84) than girls (13.36 and 13.10, respectively). Both genders had similar social support scores (59.41 for girls and 59.36 for boys), though girls had a slightly lower attitude toward self-disclosure (77.00) compared to boys (80.20). The standard deviations suggest a moderate level of variability in responses, with emotional openness and social support having the highest variability (6.94 and 16.62, respectively).

Table 2: Summary of Correlation Relationships Among Variables of Outcome Expectations

Variable Pair	Correlation Coefficient (r)	Significance Level	Relationship Direction
EO (Emotional Openness) & Stigma (Social Stigma)	-0.12	* ($p < .05$)	Weak Negative
EO (Emotional Openness) & AR (Anticipated Risk)	-0.24	* ($p < .05$)	Moderate Negative
EO (Emotional Openness) & AU (Anticipated Utility)	0.07	Not Significant	Very Weak Positive
EO (Emotional Openness) & SS (Social Support)	0.33	** ($p < .01$)	Moderate Positive

EO (Emotional Openness) & ATSD (Attitude Toward Self-Disclosure)	0.32	** (p < .01)	Moderate Positive
Stigma (Social Stigma) & AR (Anticipated Risk)	0.90	* (p < .05)	Strong Positive
Stigma (Social Stigma) & AU (Anticipated Utility)	-0.01	Not Significant	Negligible
Stigma (Social Stigma) & SS (Social Support)	-0.21	** (p < .01)	Weak Negative
Stigma (Social Stigma) & ATSD (Attitude Toward Self-Disclosure)	0.38	** (p < .01)	Moderate Positive
AR (Anticipated Risk) & AU (Anticipated Utility)	0.22	** (p < .01)	Weak Positive
AR (Anticipated Risk) & SS (Social Support)	-0.03	Not Significant	Negligible
AR (Anticipated Risk) & ATSD (Attitude Toward Self-Disclosure)	0.20	** (p < .01)	Weak Positive
AU (Anticipated Utility) & SS (Social Support)	0.08	Not Significant	Very Weak Positive
AU (Anticipated Utility) & ATSD (Attitude Toward Self-Disclosure)	0.24	** (p < .01)	Weak Positive
SS (Social Support) & ATSD (Attitude Toward Self-Disclosure)	0.27	** (p < .01)	Weak to Moderate Positive

Table 2 presents the correlation relationships among various outcome expectation variables, highlighting both positive and negative associations. Emotional openness (EO) had a weak negative correlation with stigma (social stigma) (-0.12, $p < .05$) and a moderate negative correlation with anticipated risk (AR) (-0.24, $p < .05$). Additionally, EO exhibited moderate positive correlations with social support (SS) (0.33, $p < .01$) and attitude toward self-disclosure (ATSD) (0.32, $p < .01$). Stigma showed a very strong positive correlation with anticipated risk (0.90, $p < .05$), and a moderate positive correlation with ATSD (0.38, $p < .01$), while having a weak negative correlation with social support (-0.21, $p < .01$). Anticipated risk (AR) had a weak positive correlation with anticipated utility (AU) (0.22, $p < .01$) and ATSD (0.20, $p < .01$), and a negligible negative correlation with social support (-0.03). Anticipated utility (AU) was weakly

positively correlated with ATSD (0.24, $p < .01$), but exhibited no significant relationships with other variables, such as social support (0.08).

Table 3: Relationship between Outcome Expectations and Attitudes Towards Self-Disclosure

Model	Predictors	R	F	df1	df2	Sig.
1	(Constant), Total SS Score	0.375	80.59	1	493	0.000
2	(Constant), Total Anticipated Utility Score	0.443	34.35	1	492	0.000
3	(Constant), Total Anticipated Utility Score, Total Anticipated Risk Score	0.499	34.01	1	491	0.000
4	(Constant), Total Anticipated Utility Score, Total Anticipated Risk Score	0.526	19.16	1	490	0.000

- **Dependent Variable**: Attitude towards self-disclosure
- **Significance**: *$p < .01$

Table 3 shows the relationship between outcome expectations and attitudes towards self-disclosure, with each model indicating significant predictors for self-disclosure. In Model 1, the total social support (SS) score was a significant predictor, with an R-value of 0.375 and an F-value of 80.59 ($df1 = 1$, $df2 = 493$, $p < .01$), suggesting that social support strongly influences attitudes towards self-disclosure. In Model 2, when the total anticipated utility (AU) score was added as a predictor, the model's R-value increased to 0.443, with an F-value of 34.35 ($df1 = 1$, $df2 = 492$, $p < .01$), indicating that anticipated utility also positively impacts attitudes towards self-disclosure. Model 3, which included both anticipated utility and anticipated risk (AR) scores, yielded an R-value of 0.499 and an F-value of 34.01 ($df1 = 1$, $df2 = 491$, $p < .01$). This indicates that both anticipated utility and risk are significant predictors of attitudes toward self-disclosure. Finally, Model 4 showed a further increase in the R-value to 0.526 ($F = 19.16$, $df1 = 1$, $df2 = 490$, $p < .01$), reinforcing the combined predictive power of anticipated utility and risk.

DISCUSSION

The study explored the impact of outcome expectations on junior secondary students' willingness to self-disclose during counseling in Anaocha Local Government Area (LGA), Anambra State. Table 1 highlights the different levels of outcome expectation variables among boys and girls, revealing that girls reported slightly higher emotional openness and stigma tolerance, while boys scored higher in anticipated risk and anticipated utility. This finding aligns with research by Asad and Dawood (2025), which found gender differences in emotional

openness and risk perception during counseling, with boys displaying more reluctance in self-disclosure. Table 2 further reveals that emotional openness had moderate positive correlations with social support and attitude toward self-disclosure, in line with findings by Singh and Ishrat (2025), which highlighted the importance of social support in enhancing students' willingness to share personal issues. The negative correlations between emotional openness and anticipated risk suggest that students who are more emotionally open tend to perceive less risk in self-disclosure, a pattern similar to that observed by Obibuba (2021) in her study on Nigerian students.

Stigma, on the other hand, demonstrated a strong positive correlation with anticipated risk, supporting the work of Tegan (2024), who argued that social stigma often heightens perceived risks, which in turn discourages self-disclosure. In contrast, anticipated utility showed weaker associations with other variables, reflecting findings from a related study by Chorney (2023), where utility expectations were not strongly linked to students' willingness to self-disclose. In terms of predictors of self-disclosure, Table 3 reveals that both social support and anticipated utility are significant predictors. This concurs with the findings of Wu et al, (2024), who reported that social support strongly influenced self-disclosure among students in school counseling contexts. Furthermore, anticipated risk was identified as another key predictor of self-disclosure, in line with the results of Zhu et al, (2024), where students with higher perceived risks showed lower willingness to disclose personal information.

CONCLUSION

This study explored how different factors—such as outcome expectations, emotional openness, anticipated utility, social support, stigma tolerance, and anticipated risk—affect junior secondary students' willingness to self-disclose during counseling sessions in Anaocha LGA, Anambra State. The results revealed that stigma tolerance, anticipated utility, and anticipated risk are key influences on students' willingness to open up during counseling. It was found that, in the first selected school, girls showed higher anticipated risk and anticipated utility, while in the second school, girls displayed greater emotional openness, stigma tolerance, and social support. These findings suggest that girls tend to face more stigma around self-disclosure but are also more emotionally open than boys.

The study emphasizes the importance of considering gender and various emotional and social factors when promoting self-disclosure during counseling. The results highlight how a supportive and understanding environment, where these factors are taken into account, can encourage students, particularly girls, to feel comfortable sharing personal issues with counselors. Based on the empirical findings, this study recommends that highly qualified and well-trained

staff are essential for the success of college counseling centers. Ensuring continuous professional development for counselors is crucial to maintaining competence, especially in addressing the diverse needs of students from different cultural backgrounds. To enhance cultural competence, government, stakeholders, and NGOs should enroll guidance and counseling teachers at all levels in the Association for Multicultural Counseling Development (AMCD). Additionally, they should implement essential multicultural competencies to equip counselors with the skills needed to effectively support students from various cultural contexts.

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