COUNSELING IN ISLAM: THE QUR'ANIC APPROACH AND ITS INTERPRETATION

Salisu Ahmad Sidi Ali
Centre for Early Childhood Care and Education,
Sa'adatu Rimi College of Education Kumbotso,
P.M.B. 3218 Kano, Kano State
sdali379@gmail.com

Abstract

The paper looks at the nature and goals of non-Islamic counseling. It defines counseling from the view point of Islam as contain in the Qur'an and sunnah of His Prophet (peace be upon him), the main pillars of Islamic counseling, the goals of counseling in Islam and some Qur'anic approaches to counseling. The paper concluded with a recommendation that continuous research and scholarly writing on Islamic counseling will move the field from the periphery to the centre-stage of schools' curriculum.

Key words: counselling, Islamic counselling, Qur'anic approach.

Introduction

The word 'Qur'an', a verbal noun, is equivalent in meaning to '*qira'ah*' – both come from the verb '*qara'a*' which means 'to read'. Thus, Qur'an literally means "reading or reciting". However, the term Qur'an has been historically used specifically to refer to the Book revealed to Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). The word 'Qur'an' is mentioned in a number of places throughout the Book in reference to itself (Qur'an 17:9). Maher (2008) has succinctly described the Qur'anic counseling direction:

> The Qur'an tells us that man's life in this world is but the first stage - a very short stage - of a life that continues beyond the hiatus called "death"; and the same Qur'an stresses again and again the principle of man's moral responsibility for all his conscious actions and his behaviour, and of the continuation of this responsibility, in the shape of inescapable consequences, good or bad, in a person life in the hereafter. But how could man be made to understand the nature of these consequences and, thus, of the quality of the life that awaits him? - for, obviously, inasmuch as man's resurrection will be the result of what the Qur'an describes as "a new act of creation", the life that will follow upon it must be entirely different from anything that man can and does experience in this world.

The Almighty Allah, according to Maher (2008), revealed in the following verses, which formed part of counselling foundation in the Qur'an. It runs:

> "….now has come unto you the Light from God and a manifest Scripture. Whereby, it He (God) guides him who seeks His good pleasure unto paths of peace. He brings out of darkness unto light by His decree, guides them unto – a straight path" (5: 15 - 16).

The whole Qur'anic themes are about guidance and counseling, as the Qur'an attests to itself that it is "…guidance and a mercy to mankind". It is upon these that this paper looks at the nature and goals of non-Islamic counseling, defined counseling from the view point of Islam as contained in the *Qur'an* and *sunnah* of His Prophet (peace be upon him), the main pillars of Islamic counseling goals of counseling in Islam and some Qur'anic approaches to counseling. The paper concluded with recommendations that continuous research and scholarly writing on Islamic counseling will move the field from the periphery to the centre-stage of schools' curriculum.

The Nature and Goals of Non-Islamic Counselling

Counselling, according to Gladding (2004), is the skilled and principled use of relationships to facilitate self-knowledge, emotional acceptance and growth and the optimal development of personal resources. The overall aim is to provide an opportunity to work towards living a more satisfying and resourceful life (Okon, 1984). Counselling relationships may vary according to individual need but may be concerned with developmental issues, addressing and resolving specific problems, making decisions, coping with crisis, developing personal insights and knowledge, working through feelings of inner conflict or improving relationships with others. Some of the non-Islamic counseling goals, according to Gibson & Marianne (2007), are:

1. To bring about the desired changes in the individual for self realization.
2. To provide assistance to solve problems through an intimate personal relationship.
3. To achieve positive mental health.
4. To help students to make proper and satisfactory adjustments for improved academic pursuits and useful life.

Though these goals have all the positive indicators of being incorporated into Islam, they lack the clamour of being considered Islamic due to the source of their intentionality. And again one has to notice that the sources of inspirational guidance in Islam is the Qur'an, Ahadiths and the expansion and clarification of higher level Islamic scholars, which non-Islamic counselling lack.

Some Major Weaknesses of Non-Islamic Counselling

A major goal in non-Islamic counselling is preparing an individual to fit positively into this world, so as to achieve the full potentialities for material satisfaction devoid of any spiritual inclinations. This direction has been pointed out in Sidi's proposed *Islamic vs. non Islamic counselling model*. The direction of Islamic counselling is vividly pronounced by the f Qur'an:

"My worship and my sacrifice and my living and my dying are all for Allah, Lord of Worlds" (Qur'an 6: 163).

The following are a summary of the major weaknesses of non-Islamic counselling as seen by this paper. These are:

1. **Secularism**
   Secularism stands as a solid wall between religion and the state, between man and his deeds. Anything related to religion was seen as rigid, backward and illogical in thinking. Counselling was viewed as an alternative emanating from the church-related doctrines of pity and help (Barzua, 1959) and their manifestation in the therapeutic models of persuasion and healing (Frank, 1973). It is difficult to maintain, as secularism does, that God exists but is not concerned with material existence. Islam, as a way of life, regulated an individual's spiritual, psychological and physical needs and those of society as a whole. Allah reminds us that: "and be not like those who forgot God and He cursed them to be oblivious of their own selves or souls" (Qur'an 49:19).

2. **Dualism**
   The difference of the Islamic approach is strikingly evident when compared to the non-Islamic counselling perspective. The former is based on the conviction of the integrity of the spiritual and the physical life emanating from the absolute truth of monotheism (*tawhid*), while the latter is based on the duality of the faith and material life.

3. **Empiricism**
   The superimposition of empirical methodology on the study of social and human phenomena has done more to create numerous fallacies than it has to develop viable and tenable propositions about human intellect, consciousness, behaviour and interpersonal influences. Islamic counselling study of any phenomena is limited to physical observations under human-controlled situations. Human limits are acknowledged before proceeding with inquiry rooted in the Islamic viewpoint. The divine knowledge – revelation, is interpreted with adequate judgment and the human ability to reason. From these divine sources, the concepts of *ruh* (soul), *qalb* (heart), *nafs* (self) and *aql* (intellect) have emanated.

4. Parochialism

Non-Islamic counselling has evolved from the peculiarities of the American profile in the social, political and economic domain (Parson, 1909; Shertzer & Stone, 1980). The industrial revolution, urbanization, the need to rehabilitate skills to deal with changing occupational technologies, demographic dynamics, social problems engendered by an aging society, *womenism* and other concomitant movements and the disintegration of the family and other social institutions are among the primary factors that have provided the impetus for counseling, theorization and research. Unlike non-Islamic counselling, Islamic counselling is based upon commonly held ideological beliefs and values systems (Islam) and is, therefore, universal.

The Meaninig of Counselling in Islam

Islamic counselling (*tawjih*) is a process of building, reforming, guiding and practically demonstratind people's spiritual perfection (Shalaby, 1987). As knowledge and information play an important role of an engineering design, so also a knowlegde of people's personalities, which are based and conctructed by specialists in counselling psychology, according to Brammer (1996), has been proved to be amazing. Hence, so is true that culture and information at the counsellor's hands are playing a similar role to a design at an engineer's disposal,who is engaged in constructing a house or a project. The building takes shape according to the drawing which has been carefully prepared. The processes of Islamic counseling started by making an individual identify his/her moral status as extracted from the Qur'an. The Qur'an identified seven stages of *moral status* as follow:

1. *Nafs-sul Ammara* (the soul that command evil) – Qur'an 12:53;
2. *Nafs-sul Mulhimma* (the inspired soul) – Qur'an 91:8 ;
3. *Nafs-Lawwama* (the upgrading soul) – Qur'an 75:02;
4. *Nafs-sul Mutma'inna* (the tranquil soul) – Qur'an 89:27;
5. *Nafs-sul Radiya* (the satisfied soul) – Qur'an 89:28;
6. *Nafs-sul Mardiyya* (the contended soul) – Qur'an 89:28; and
7. *Nafs-sul Kamilah* (the complete soul) – Qur'an 89:30.

To attain these levels of perfection, Islam laid down some fundamental rules as a whole, some of which, according to Mawdudi (1986), are doing good and avoiding wrong-*amru bil ma'arufin wal nahawu ail munkarul*, should be observed and respected under all possible circumstances. To achieve these fundamental rules of perfection, Islam provides a legal safe guard and an effective moral system as well, which, we need to stick to. These according to the Qur'an are:

> It is not righteousness that you turn your faces towards East or West; but it is righteousness to believe in Allah and the Last Day and the Angels, and the Books, and the Messengers; to spend of

your substance, out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy; for the wayfarer, for those who ask; and for the freeing of captives; to be steadfast in prayers, and practice regular charity; to fulfill the contracts which you made; and to be firm and patient in pain (or suffering) and adversity and throughout all periods of panic; such are the people of truth, the God-conscious (Qur'an 2:177).

"Uprightness from Islamic view point according to Ajmal (1968) does start and ends in observing the five daily prayers (which are considered the sign posts of the *Dinul - Lahi*). It surpasses this – for the totality of one's ways of life must be govern by the religious tenets as well". In a very best way which summarizes the moral behaviour expected of a Muslim, the prophet (peace and blessings of Allah be upon him) said:

My sustainer has given me nine commands: to remain conscious of Allah, whether private or public; to speak justly, whether angry or pleased; to show moderation both when poor or when rich, to reunite friendship with those who have broken off with me; to give to him who refuses me; that my silence should be occupied with thought; that my looking should be an admonition; and that I should command what is right.

A learned counsellor moulds people and society in accordance with the design of his education code. In other words, counselling education is considered the first step in building a society and civilization. For this very reason, heavenly laws have placed a great emphasis on the bringing up of man according to

their respecctive educational codes, so that people would be prepared in all aspects to live in harmony under the peaceful shades of a perfect social code.

The ideals of Islamic counselling can best be understood by fully grasping the contents of Sidi's Differential Model of Islamic Counselling.

The Differential Model of Islamic Counselling
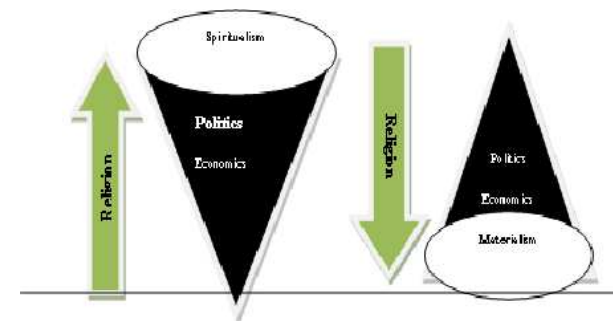
Sidi's proposed Differential Model of Islamic Counseling with non-Islamic Counseling (2015).

A cursory look at this model will tell one that the Islamic religion has an overwhelming power of influence upon the individual. Looking at the left hand side of conical diagram, an individual might decipher that the ultimate end of Islam counselling is spiritual perfection. But a look at the right side of the conical representation will show that non-Islamic counselling's ultimate goals is human perfection for tangible or intangible worldly gain.

Hence, it is necessary to be fully concious when studying and using non-Islamic counselling theories and principles, so as to limit the extent of its influence on one. Cleverly disguised theories may influence our thinking and infect us with deadly poisons and moral diseases, which, in turn, may inflict serious spiritual destruction to our sanctity.

Islamic counseling, therefore, is not a matter of one-to-one interaction (as in non-Islamic counselling) between a specialist and a person in need or between a helper and helpee. Counselling in Islam is more of a personal effort that might be nourished and supplemented as well by outside influences (i.e. one's parents, teachers, peers, etc). The following are some of the proposed definitions of Islamic counseling. These are:

> It is a process of self preparedness (through knowledge, devotion, supplication and mediation) so as to achieve the necessary moral acceleration towards being God- consciousness and following in footsteps of His Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).

One of the major premises is 'Allah does not create human beings and Jinns except for the purpose of worshipping Him' (Rizvi, 1989). So, all theirs (activities and deeds) in relation to the self, others, things and in short *all* must be for the *sake of Allah*. Therefore, for one to fully grasp the main gist of counselling in Islam, he must be able to root his or her thinking to the three core sources of Islamic counseling, i.e. the Qur'an, the Sunnah and the most revered scholars.

The Tenents of Islamic Counselling

1. Islamic counselling recognizes the fact that people posses pure natural instincts, and have equal response to good and evil. This reality is revealed in the following verse of the Holy Qur'an:

   "By the soul, and that which shaped it and inspired it to understand sin and   piety,(Indeed) successful is he who keeps it pure and ruined is he who corrupts it"- Sura Shams (91:7-10).

   "So set thy face to the true religion, the nature made by Allah in which He has made mankind; there is no altering of Allah's creations; that is the right religion; but most people know it not" -Sura Rum (30:30).

2. Enviroment and genes factors have positive and negative effects on people's personalities and life. Allah the highest says:

   "And Even so We did not send any Warner into a township but those who led easy lives in it said: Indeed we found our fathers upon a course, and we are following upon their footprints"-Sura Zuhkruf (43:23).

The Prophet (peace be upon him), pointing out the role of genes in the formation of human characteristics, said:

"*Be careful when choosing a wife, for (maternal) uncles have a bearing on babies' characteristics*" (Muhammad, 1972).

3. Basic motives and instincts exist within all people, but have different magnitudes with respect to strength or weakness. Hence, it is acknowledged that people possess various potentialities, such as intelligence, noble characters, etc….

4. Since every human being possesses the will and choice of selection, he or she would be held responsible for his/her actions. They would be accounted for their deeds and would receive relevant reward or punshment in the Hereafter. Any person is able to correct his/her stands, triumph over canal desires and overcome adverse conditions, although he/she would be free to indulge in evil doings and go astray.

   "*and pointed out to him the two conspicious ways*"- *Sura Belad (90:10).*

   "*Nay, man is evidence against himself, even though he puts forth his excuses*"-*Sura*

   Qyimah (75: 14-15).

5. Counselling is a process of refining human character and building a pleasing personality that would help to

enhance good motives and uproot or curb negative manifestations. Knowledge is a guiding light in life to do constructive work and in turn counsel others, while seeking knowledge solely for the purpose of its possession is not encouraged by Islam.

6. Furnishing a model practical code of Islamic values and ethics is an important part of constructive Islamic counselling, which every schooled individual on Islamic basic sources of guidance (the Qur'an and Sunna of the Prophet Muhammad [PBUH]) will show. It can be demonstrated through day-to-day interactions between the counsellor and the counsellees. Such an example would provide the society with a visual portrait, add dynamism to thoughts and concepts, induce people to keen adherents and encourage the mixing of principles with concepts.

7. Learning lesson from others' mistakes: Allah, the Highest says:

   "*Have they not journeyed in the land? And even seen how the end of those before them?*" – *Sura Yusuf (12:109).*

8. Counselling in Islam is generally a personal and social responsibility:

"O you who believe guard yourselves and your families against a fire whose fuel is people and stones". – *Sura Tahrim (66:6)*.

"And from among you there should be a party who invite to good and enjoin what is right and forbid the wrong and these it is that shall be successful". – *Sura Ale-Imran (3:104)*.

These are some of the most important pillars of Islamic counselling structure from which planning and codes are indeed inspired.

The Goals of Islamic Counselling

Islamic counselling, according to Amini (2009), aims at developing people's talents and inspiring lofty ethical values in them. These goals are:

1. Making people discover their innate talents;

2. Making people concious of their creator on a basis of rationnal understanding;

3. Implanting in people harmonious relationships with their universe and strengthen human ties by developing aesthetic tastes;

4. Creating systematic Islamic thinking, which leads people to conform in every thought and deed;

5. Building a balanced personality possessing within its domain materials, spiritual and conceptual elements on a harmonial basis;

6. Developing all human resources in order to be employed for the betterment of mankind;

7. Guiding people to the scientific methods of thinking, learning and knowledge acquisition; and

8. Developing fraternity and brotherhood among Muslims and stressing on sincerety and beliefs.

These are some of the most oustanding goals of Islamic counselling in a more scientific ways.

The Islamic Approaches to Counseling

The spiritual faculty in human beings is, according to Masudul (2001), variously described as - the *ruh* (soul), 'aql (mind or intellect), *qalb* (emotion) or *nafs* (self) according to the function ascribed to it. An Islamic counselor should target the purification and adjustment of these faculties, so that the individual will be able to reach the final stage of perfection, i.e. *al-insanul kamil*. Therefore, Qur'an uses the following approaches, according to Shahzad (2012), to provide direction to humans - *tarbiyah, ta'līm* and *ta'dīb*.

a) The Concept of Tarbiyyah

Tarbiyyah is an Arabic word that linguistically denotes the meaning of increase, growth and loftiness. Generally, it is used to denote the development and training of people in various aspects and to describe the process of upbringing children by parents to provide them with the physical, educational, moral and spiritual needs to help them to grow and become useful parties in the society. The word *tarbiyyah* again connotes the following terms:

Al-Tanshi'ah (upbringing), *al-Ilāh* (reform), *al-Ta'dīb or adab* (inculcation of good ethical and moral conducts), *al-Tahdhīb* (discipline), *al-Tahīr* (purification), *al-Tazkiyah* (purification of the soul), *al-Ta'līm* (pedagogics), *al-Siyāsah* (leadership and good management), *alnui wal-irshād* (advice and guidance) and *al-Akhlāq* (morality).

Most of the writings in Islamic education by the classical scholars were associated with the inculcation of ethical and moral conduct from childhood. In the Qur'an, "*Tarbiyyah*" is defined as to "take care of that which is necessary for the development of the one being raised". The root word of *tarbiyyah* is *al-Rabb,* which means "the Lord", and indicates the meaning of "to nurture" (An-Nahlawi, 1979). This implies Allah who nurtures all of the creation with His favours. He supports them with all of their needs.

b) The Concept of Ta'līm

The root word of *ta'līm* is *'ilm,* which means knowledge. It is widely used by classical and modern scholars to denote the process of teaching or learning, but most scholars, according to Hussaini (1984), limited it to the process of the development of the cognitive aspect of man through the inculcation of knowledge. In other words, *ta'līm* means the inculcation and dissemination of knowledge through the process of teaching and learning (instruction). *Ta'līm* is repeatedly mentioned in the Qur'an to indicate such a process. As an example, Allah says that He sent the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to teach the people by instructing them to refer to the Qur'an as their guidance,

> *It is He who has sent among the unlettered a Messenger from themselves reciting to them His verses and purifying them and teaching them the Book and wisdom - although they were before in clear error.*

The term *ta'līm* is, according to Ahmad (1989), also mentioned in the *hadīth* of the Prophet (PBUH) that praised those who involve in the process of teaching and learning, and that the best knowledge is those related to the Qur'an,

"*The best is those who learn the Qur'an and teach it*"

In modern times, the term *ta'līm* implies the above meaning, as well as the knowledge delivery system, its methodology,

evaluation and assessment. Thus, it must be noted that the development of whole man (i.e. Qur'an) is the target of Islamic counseling. Some distinctions have been propounded by some scholars about both *tarbiyyah* and *ta'līm*. Scholars, such as Abdullah (2007), preferred to use *tarbiyyah* as more of a physical, emotional and rational aspect of human growth while Al-Asfahani (1998) insisted in using the word *ta'līm* as more of a cognitive intuition of facilitative counseling – a spiritual balance of one's thoughts. Therefore, the term *ta'dīb* has later been proposed by modern scholars to reflect the holistic philosophy of counselling in Islam.

c) The Concept of Ta'dīb

Ta'dīb - from the root '*aduba*' (to be cultured, refined, well-mannered); a man of *adab* is the one who is sincerely conscious of his responsibilities towards the true God; who understands and fulfills his obligations to himself and others in his society with justice and who constantly strives to improve every aspect of him towards perfection. A man who has *adab* is called a perfect man and is "the one who is sincerely conscious of his responsibilities towards the true God; who understands and fulfills his obligations to himself and others in his society with justice and who constantly strives to improve every aspect of his own being towards perfection" (Mawdudi, 1986). Prophetic tradition offers a more enlighten elaboration:

"*My Lord educated (addaba) me (Prophet Muhammad PBUH) and made my education (ta'dīb) the most excellent*".

The concept of *ta'dīb*, if competently explicated, is believed to be the accomplishment of concept for counselling in Islam, not just the concept of *ta'līm* and *tarbiyyah,* which are currently in vogue among Muslims all over the world. According to Shari 'at (1987), *ta'dīb* includes within its conceptual structure the elements of knowledge ('*ilm*), instruction (*ta'līm*) and good breeding (*tarbiyyah*).

The above approaches can be termed as the *general counseling approaches* that are extractable from the Holy Qur'an. Others which can be termed as *microskills* (i.e. containable under each of the lists above) are – *nazr* (observation) and *tazkir* (remembrance), *tafkir* (intelligent reasoning) are mentioned in the Qur'an as additional strategies for counseling human beings.

Conclusion

The Qur'an is the embodiment of all that humans are seeking – the material, the spiritual, the education, the political, etc. They (humans) get to learn and imbibe some wisdom associated with life for them to prepare themselves well in the service of Almighty Allah, as contained in the Qur'an and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad (peace of Allah be on him). It is essential for counselors to gain knowledge, understanding and competence of the various religious beliefs, values and traditions

as well as the cultural worldviews when counseling a diverse group, such as the Muslim community globally. It is, therefore, essential for any future scholarly work on Islamic counseling to view its counseling approach entirely from the *din* of Islam.

Recommendations

This paper, as it does not intend to be the ultimate ground work of an Islamic counseling, but only intends to stimulate interest in the field, none the less has laid down something. The following are some its recommendations:

1) Continuous research on the field of Islamic guidance and counselling by interested scholars;

2) There should be a national and international platform on which to promote the causes of Islamic scholarship;

3) A journal should be dedicated to develop and promote research and scholarship in Islamic counselling; and

4) Scholars of Islamic counselling should understand the importance of viewing anything Islamic from its perspectives and not otherwise.

References

Abdullah Nasih Ulwan (2007). *Tarbiyyah al-Awlad fi al-Islam*. Qaherah: Dar al-Salam li al- Tiba῾῾ah wa al-Nashr wa al-Tawzi῾῾.

Ahmad, M. (1989). *Ta'alim al-Muta'allim* (*The Instruction of the Learner: Method of Learning*), Cairo: Maktabat an-Nahda.

Ajmal, M .(1968). *An Introduction to Muslim Traditions in Psychotherapy*. **Psychology** Quarterly, **no. 4** (1968).

Al-Asfahani, Raghib. (1998). *Al-Mufradat fi Gharib al-Qu„ran*. Beirut: Dar al- Ma„rifah.

Amini, M.T. (2009). *Fundamental of Ijtehad*. Delhi: Idarah Adabiyat-1

An-Nahlawi, A.R. (1979). *Usool At-Tarbiya al-Islamiyya Wa Asalibuha* (*The Principles of Islamic Education and its Methods*). Damascus: Dar Al-Fikr.

Barzua, J. (1959). *The house of intellect*. New York: Harper.

Brammer, L.M. (1996). *The Helping Relationships: Process and Skills 6th Ed*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.

Frank, J.D. (1973). Persuasion and helping: A comparative study of psychotherapy. Baltimore: John Hopkins.

Gladding, S.T. (2004). *Counseling: A Comprehensive Profession (5th edition)*. Upper Saddle River: Merrill/Prentice Hall. P 6-7.

Gibson, R.L. and Marianne, M. (2007). *Introduction to counselling and guidance (7th Ed)*. New York: Pearson.

Hussain, S. (1984). *Islamization of psychology*. Third international seminar on Islamic Thought, Malaysia: Kuala Lumpur.

Maher, A. (2008). *Educational philosophy of The Holy Qur'an*. New Delhi: Adam Publishers & Distributors.

Masudul, H. (2001). *The digest of the Holy Qur'an*. New Delhi: Kitab Bharan.

Mawdudi, A. A. (1986). *The Islamic way of life*. Leicester: Leicester Islamic Foundation.

Muhammad, A. (1972). *Sahih muslim*. Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture

Okon, S. E. (1984). *Guidance for the 6-3-3-4 systems of education*: Zaria; Ahmadu Bello University Press.

Parson, F. (1909). *Choosing a vocation*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.

Rizvi, A. A. (1989). *Muslim traditions in psychotherapy*. Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture.

Shahzad, A.A. (2012 Ed.). *Encyclopedic of educational instructions in the Holy Qur'an*. Birmingham: Karos Press Limited.

Shalaby, A. (1987). *At-Tarbiya wat-Ta'lim fi al-Fikr al-Islami* (*Teaching and Education in the Islamic Thought*), Vol. 5. Cairo: An-Nahda al-Masriyya.

Shari'ati, A. (1987). *Al-insaan wa al-islaam*. Translated by Abas Al-Turjmaan. Beirut, Lebanon: *daar alrawdah*.

Shertzer, B. and Stone, S.C. (1980). *Fundamentals of counselling*. Boston: Houghton-Mifflin.