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Violence among Nigerian Adolescents: A Threat to National Security

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ABSTRACT

Violence among adolescents or youths is a universal problem, and it is so serious that it can have negative effects on victims and their families, friends and communities.. It is a phenomenon which in practice has led to a near breakdown of law and order, low productivity due to disruption of production activities, increasing crime rate, intra-ethnic hostilities, and harassment of prospective developers and other criminal tendencies. These alarming incidences of youth violence provoke this paper to identify types of youth violence, causes, effects, counselling strategies and recommendations. In conclusion, effective counselling to youths could go a long way in curbing violence. The role of counselling in the management of behaviour cannot be neglected; this is because a counsellor is the only professionally trained person who possesses the personal and professional skills required in managing such behavioural problem.

Key words: adolescents; youths; violence; types; causes; effects; counselling strategies.

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Introduction

Adolescence is generally viewed as a stage where young people experience rapid growth of their body and mentality to fall maturity during 12-25 years of age. (Liu, 2001), while The United Nations General Assembly and World Bank cited in Adewuyi (2008) defined the youth as people between ages 15 to 24 years. Adolescents/youth, since time immemorial play different vital roles in communal life, they have served as helpers to their parents on the farm, assistant to their parents and families in the family vocation; such as farming, blacksmithing, weaving and so on. They have also served as communal watch-dog that has protected their immediate environment from external attack. Youth have been great source of human power for developmental process and also constitute man-power for production in cottage industries, Sdrilling, farming and agriculture which many accents in Africa towns have benefited in raw-material production. Since 1950's especially in the colonial era, youth have played vibrant role in agitating for independence from the colonial masters through the writing skills of the then youth like Nnambdi- Azikwe, Anthony Enahoro, late Odemo of Isara; Oba Adesanya, Wole Soyinka, Bola Ige, Tafawa Balewa and many notable others who led many demonstration against the colonial masters and their allies in order to press home their demand for: salary increase, equity in government (between black and whites); agitation for social and economic welfare; strive for independent of the country from colonial government.

The current youth violence is caused by youthful exuberance, imitation of activities in video film, vicious poverty circle, unemployment, underemployment, incapability of parents and families and the school to organize counselling sessions and education that will be functional and tap the potentials and power in the talent of the youth for productive services. Youths in developed country and productive society have been used as resource of energy and dynamism for national growth and development; however in Nigeria where government have politicize youth development programmes, has led youths to find themselves in the devil's workshop controlled by secret cult, money-bags, do-or-die politicians in a bid to win elections and in kidnappers den who kidnap for ransom and in turn constitute into kidnappers after and during campaign campaigns. In the modern times, due to vicious poverty circle, problems, unemployment and lack of productive skills among the youth, have made them to be mirrored negatively. Federal Bureau of Investigation (2011) asserted that between 2005 to 2010, police recorded some 1.4 million violent crimes in Nigeria that actually took place. The predisposing factors included politics, religion, secret cult, land disputes, Boko Haram, among others.

There has been an increase in the occurrence of acts of violence and lawlessness, in Nigeria in recent times including things like hostage taking, kidnapping, oil bunkering, arms insurgence, robbery, pipeline vandalism, hijacking, cultism, and all forms of evil devices especially in the Niger Delta and North East regions. Various forms of violence that are economically, politically, or religiously motivated have existed for a long time. This negative development is rather unfortunate and has become one of the many security challenges facing man in the contemporary society. In many occasions, lives and properties worth millions of naira have been lost or vandalized and some razed down by violent youths (Mercy (2009) in Bukoye, Adeoye, Usman,& Oyinloye, 2012; Igbo & Ikpa, 2013).

Most people agreed that youth violence is a serious social problem especially in Nigerian society due to their notion, to harm and kill others. Such actions brake social norms (by violating the law) and causing insecurity. They threatened the country's social order, and they attack government security agents especially the police. As such, well meaning Nigerians, should see youth violence in this nation, as the biggest part of the general problem facing this country. Youth crime, according to Rogers (2001) does not only harm the victims but also harm the family, friends and disrupts the peace in the local community. COECD (2011) opined that youth violence does not only contribute greatly to the global burden of premature death, imprisonments, injury and disability, it also has a serious lifelong impact on behaviour, psychological and social functioning of victims, families, friends and communities. In view of this, various governments and organizations in many countries including Nigeria have made many reasonable efforts to curb the menace of violence but have not yielded permanent solution to the cankerworms of these vices. For example, the federal government of Nigeria called Boko Haram for reconciliation but of no avail. The government also gave general amnesty to ex-militants in the Niger Delta areas, gave stipend wages, scholarships within and outside the country, skills acquisition, general infrastructural development, yet the spat of violence is increasing (Iwuama and Ekwe 2012).

Types of Violence

There are six distinct forms of violence according to Obi and Ozumba (2007) and Aihie (2009).They are as follows: Physical violence; Sexual violence; Emotional violence; Psychological violence; Spiritual violence; and Cultural violence.

1. Physical Violence : It occurs when someone uses a part of their body or an object to control a person's actions. Physical violence includes : Using physical force which results in pain, discomfort or injury; Hitting, pinching, hair-pulling, arm-twisting, strangling, burning, stabbing, punching, pushing, slapping, beating, shoving, kicking, choking, biting, force-feeding, or any other rough treatment; Threats with a weapon or object; Deliberate exposure to severe weather or inappropriate room temperatures; and, Murder.

2. Sexual Violence: It occurs when a person is forced to unwillingly take part in sexual activity.

 Sexual violence includes : Touching in a sexual manner without consent (i.e., kissing, grabbing, fondling); Forcing a person to perform sexual acts that may be degrading or painful; Beating sexual parts of the body; Exhibitionism; Making unwelcome sexual comments or jokes; Denial of a person's sexuality or privacy (watching); Forced prostitution; Unfounded allegations of promiscuity and/or infidelity; and, Purposefully exposing the person to HIV-AIDS or other sexually transmitted infections.

3. Emotional Violence: Furthermore, It occurs when someone says or does something to make a person feel stupid or worthless. Emotional violence includes : Name calling; Blaming all relationship problems on the person; Not allowing the person to have contact with family and friends; Destroying possessions; Jealousy; Humiliating or making fun of the person; Intimidating the person; causing fear to gain control; Threatening to hurt oneself if the person does not cooperate; Threatening to abandon the person; and, Threatening to have the person deported (if they are an immigrant).

4. Psychological Violence: It occurs when someone uses threats and causes fear in a person to gain control. Psychological violence includes : Threatening to harm oneself, or his/her family if she or he leaves; Threats of abandonment; Destruction of personal property; Verbal aggression; Socially isolating the person; Not allowing a competent person to make decisions; Inappropriately controlling the person's activities; Treating a person like a child or a servant; and Withholding companionship or affection;

5. Spiritual Violence: Spiritual (or religious) violence occurs when someone uses a person's spiritual beliefs to manipulate, dominate or control the person. Spiritual violence includes : Not allowing the person to follow her or his preferred spiritual or religious tradition; Forcing a spiritual or religious path or practice on another person; Belittling or making fun of a person's spiritual or religious tradition, beliefs or practices; and, Using one's spiritual or religious position, rituals or practices to manipulate, dominate or control a person.

6 . Cultural Violence: It occurs when a person is harmed as a result of practices that are part of her or his culture, religion or tradition. Cultural violence includes : Committing "honour" or other crimes against women in some parts of the world, where women especially may be physically harmed, shunned, maimed or killed for: Falling in love with the "wrong" person; Seeking divorce; Infidelity; committing adultery; Being raped; and Practicing witchcraft;

Causes of Youth Violence

Elliot, D. C (1999) categorized the major youth violence into the following categories:

The Family Context

The initial causes of violence are found in the early learning experiences in the family. They involve 1) weak family bonding, ineffective monitoring and supervision; 2) exposure to and reinforcement for violence in the home, and 3) the acquisition of expectations, attitudes, beliefs and emotional responses which support or tolerate the use of violence. Early exposure to violence in the family may involve either witnessing violence or physical abuse. Research suggests that these forms of exposure to violence during childhood increase the risk of violent behavior during adolescence by as much as 40 percent. Still, most youth who are victims of physical abuse do not go on to become serious violent offenders. While exposure to real violence and physical abuse on the part of family members have stronger modeling effects, heavy exposure to violence on television is also causally linked to later violence. Even if violence is not modeled in the home, research suggests that the absence of effective social bonds and controls, together with a failure of parents to teach (and children to internalize) conventional norms and values, puts children at risk of later violence. There is also evidence that certain individual temperaments and acquired biological deficits may complicate or interfere with parents' efforts to develop good internal

controls in their children.

The Neighbourhood Context

Some neighbourhoods also provide opportunities for learning and engaging in violence. The presence of gangs and illegal markets, particularly drug distribution networks, not only provide high levels of exposure to violence, but violent role models, and positive rewards for serious violent activity. Single parent families, ineffective parenting, violent schools, high dropout rates, high adolescent pregnancy rates, substance abuse and high unemployment rates are all concentrated in such neighborhoods. While these neighborhoods are areas with high rates of concentrated poverty, the critical feature of such neighborhoods that is most directly related to the high rates of violence, crime and substance use, is the absence of any effective social or cultural organization in these neighborhoods. High levels of transiency make it difficult to establish common values and norms, informal support networks and effective social controls.   Illegitimate enterprises and gangs emerge in these neighborhoods, in part because the neighborhood has no effective means of resisting such activity, and in part as a means of providing some stable social organization for youth and some economy for the neighborhood. The School and Peer Context

Furthermore, Elliot (1999) asserts patterns of behavior learned in early childhood (e.g., aggressiveness) carry over into the school context, the school has its own potential for generating conflict and frustration and violent responses to these situations. A successful non-violent social adjustment at home increases the likelihood but does not *guarantee* a successful non-violent adjustment to school and peers. Failure to meet these school and peer performance expectations (e.g., academic success, peer approval, personal competence and independence, self-efficacy, and a capacity for developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships and intimacy) creates stress and conflict. The combination of new conflicts and reduced levels of monitoring and supervision in these contexts, increases the likelihood that violence will emerge in response to these problems. During junior and senior high school, a clear adolescent status hierarchy emerges, and much of the violence at school is related to competition for status and status-related confrontations. Ability tracking also contributes to a collective adaptation to school failure and peer rejection by grouping academically poor students and those who are aggressive troublemakers together in

the same classes. Delinquent peer groups tend to emerge out of these classes and individual feelings of anger, rejection and alienation are mutually reinforced in these groups. The strongest and most immediate cause of the actual onset of serious violent behavior is involvement with a delinquent peer group. It is here that violence is modeled, encouraged, and rewarded; and justifications for disengaging one's moral obligation to others are taught and reinforced.

Alcohol, Illicit Drugs and Firearms

The relationship between substance use and violence is complicated. Alcohol is implicated in over half of all homicides and of assaults in the home. Parents who abuse alcohol (and illicit drugs) are more prone to be physically abusive and neglectful of their children, while problem drinkers are more likely to have a history of violent behaviour. They are not disproportionately represented among violent offenders as compared to non-violent offenders. In general, the use of psychoactive drugs has not been linked pharmacologically to violent behavior. The effect of marijuana and opiate drugs actually appears to inhibit violence, although withdrawal may precipitate an increased risk of violence. The clearest drug-violence connection is for selling drugs; the drug distribution network is extremely violent. Not much is known about why today's youth, in increasing numbers, are carrying guns. Anecdotal evidence suggests it is to "show off", to insure "respect" and acquiescence from others, or for self-defense. In part, it appears to be a response to the perception that public authorities cannot protect youth or maintain order in their neighborhoods or at school. There is evidence that dropouts, drug dealers and those with a prior record of violent behavior are more likely to own a gun than are other adolescents. And the vast majority (80 percent) of firearms used in crimes are obtained by theft or some other illegal means.

The Adolescence-Adulthood Transition

The successful transition into adult roles (work, marriage, parenting) appears to reduce involvement in violent behavior. It appears that growing up in poor, minority families and disorganized neighborhoods has two major effects directly related to violent behavior. First, when it comes time to make the transition into adulthood, there are limited opportunities for employment which, in turn, reduces the chances of marriage. These are two primary definers of adult status. Second, there is evidence that growing up in poor, disorganized neighborhoods

inhibits a normal course of adolescent development. Youth from these neighborhoods have lower levels of personal competence, self-efficacy, social skills, and self-discipline. Many are not adequately prepared to enter the labor market even if jobs were available. They are, in some ways, trapped in an extended adolescence and continue to engage in adolescent behavior.

Adolescents Violence: A Threat to National Security

The youth in Niger delta region spreading through Niger, Bayelsa, Ondo, Warri and Urhobo region mount deadly attack against oil companies and their bombing installations; killing and kidnapping oil workers and demanding ransom before their release and killing or drowning them in deep water where the ransom are not paid. In other areas such as in the western region, unemployed or underemployed youths who have no job have allowed themselves to be recruited by politicians or some money bags as their touts or tugs serving as their body guards or used to terrorize their rivalry. In the north, politicians or some fanatics or extremist mallams have conscripted many youth in *Almagirinchi* as jihadist and have been trained as warriors to lynch terror on communities or tribes and individual that defies their religious and political ideology. Such situation have been witnessed in Zango Kataf in Borno State by *Bokoaharam* whose leaders were killed and are still bombing many part of the north including Abuja, Yobe, Adamawa, Kaduna and Niger States (Oromareghake,Arisi and Igho , 2013).

According to Danesy (2011), and Iwuama and Ekwe (2012), adolescents violence produces industrial destruction when many youth like Movement and Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) attack industrial installations, oil pipelines, and infrastructure and so on. This produce ugly effect such as oil spillage and eventual lock up of many oil industries and privately owned industry. It has produced indiscriminate bombing and blasting of targeted areas for example, during the October 1st 2010 independent celebration a lot of people were wounded, killed and deformed and the bombing of police head quarters on Tuesday on Tuesday, 14th June 2011.

Youth violence produces self-destruction of youth because when they are apprehended by law enforcement agencies, it may lead to their imprisonment, killing and many youth may become disabled when any of their sensitive organs are hit by gun or cutlass when attack by rival cult or gang. It leads to societal unrest when innocent people, garages, market centres and immediate communities are destroyed. Youth violence have produced threat and fear in people during important functions such as election campaign and voting. This has make people run for their lives for fear of being lynched, robbed, or harmed in the market places. Many youth due to their attitudes of getting rich quick have kidnapped children and families of industrial worker in a bid to collect huge ransom. For youth to be able carry out the above nefarious assignment they have resorted to the use of narcotics such as heroin, cocaine, ephedrine, Indian hemp and others to develop magical thinking and to stimulate their psyche to become energetic to be able carry out this task. This has hitherto produced a lot of youth having psychotic, neurotic and schizophrenic behaviour.

Implication for Counselling

- The counsellors should be capacitated through undergoing training on various youth counselling approaches in order to ensure that guidance and counseling is effective in helping the youth to address their issues

- Promotion of peer guidance and counselling programs which have potentials of building a strong youth counselling foundation upon which many other well grounded benefits can be realized.

- Counselling both in school and non-school setting is capable of doing this, hence ; guidance counsellors at all levels of education can no longer afford to remain indifferent and complacent. They should take interest in counselling youths who are regarded as the hope of tomorrow's adults.

- The guidance counsellors may help the youths to acquire knowledge which they are ignorant of. Such information could liberate them from falsehood and misconceptions being provided by peers and adults who utilize them to fulfill personal wishes and later dumb them to their faith. Youths also need information that will get them economically empowered. Hence, guidance counsellor gives them entrepreneurial information that will help them develop skills that can sustain them economically. Such information liberates them from psychological and mental torture they pass through in acts of restiveness.

- Guidance counsellors could organize

workshops, talk shows, and seminars for youths in schools, youth organizations and youths in religious settings. Youths need to be told that the future belongs to them and they should not be used to destroy it. Topics on citizenship education, patriotism, rule of law could be incorporated in such sessions. Such may help them understand their roles in the society better. Such counselling sessions could also be extended to the political elites, leaders at various levels of government and political thugs. Seminars and workshops could be organized for them on good governance.

- Assertive training could also be given to the youths at such forum. Since it has been observed that most youths are recruited by politicians and highly placed individuals to act restively in the society, the youths should be equipped with assertive skills in order to be able to say NO to such elders and peers without hurting them. Until youths are able to refuse such enticements of horror, the problem of youth restiveness in this nation may continue.

- Cognitive restructuring and behavior modification skills could also be useful in curbing youth violence. As professionals, guidance counsellors should work towards restructuring negative views held by youths. The insinuation that restiveness is the only way of expressing their views and demands could be modified to more rational ways if appropriate information is given to them.

- The government should establish and fund counselling centres at the community, and local government levels and employ professional counsellors to help victims and perpetrators of violence.

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