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Role of Teachers in Controlling Drug Abuse and Cultism among Nigeria School Youths

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Abstract

Drug abuse has been defined as the excessive and indiscriminate use of drugs without the doctor's recommendation. Cult is also defined as a set, a body of people who broke away from the community, sharing a common belief and opinion about the world. Drug abusers and cultists are mainly young people in the youthful stage of life. These youths have physical, social and intellectual changes which give rise to craving for independence from their parents and to rely on their peers. They believe that their problems which relate to sex, moral life, social life and legal implications of their actions cannot be solved by their parents. Both male and female pupils resort to drug to overcome these problems. The problems include excessive body weight, unwanted pregnancy, sexual excitement, make up for social acceptability and poor academic performances. Drug abuse can lead to drug addiction, drug tolerance and withdrawal syndrome. Cultist on the other hand, drop out from their school programme, commit murder and seek employment as thugs with unpopular politicians who aim to win election by intimidating, maiming and killing their opponents using the thugs. Teachers' role using education as instrument, include warning, using physical, sex and moral education, guidance and counselling to stop these bad practices. In conclusion, all Nigerians should see the politicians as master minders of drug abuse and cultism and plead with them to adopt a new orientation.

Drug is a chemical substance used to alter the state of the body or the mind. Cult is a secret society or a group of people associated for a common interest. It is a sect of people sharing common opinions. They are known for having broken away from a larger body or society. The use of drugs without doctor's recommendation is

Journal of Resourcefulness and Distinction, Volume 7 No. 1, April, 2014

drug abuse. Cultism and drug are two faces of one coin. It is the youths that abuse drugs and are mostly found to be members of secret cults. The adult users of drug and cultists started such life when they were youths.

The youths stage of life is the period between childhood and adulthood that falls between the ages of eleven (11) and twenty-one (21) years. The physical development in youths makes them face challenges personally, socially, educationally, vocationally, legally and morally. The youths have attained puberty through growth support. They attained full height with well developed muscles and sexual maturity. The females are two years ahead of males in terms of maturity.

Their physiological changes lead to self consciousness in physical appearance, the need to be independent from parents and relying on their peers. Their worry is about finances, sexual excitement and the need to be treated like adults. The males may find female friends who could be snobbish and demanding so much. The girls may find men that can outmatch her adolescent friend in meeting their demand. The males find solace in drugs and cult membership in order to win back their friends.

Socially, boys who are physically more developed are accorded leadership roles by peers and school authorities. Their energy may give them physical strength which can be used negatively (in fighting) or positively (in manual work). For social acceptance, the weaker ones can indulge in drugs in order to make up. Educationally and vocationally, the youths face the problem of adjusting to school work. They are worried about examinations which they have little time to prepare for. They fear “difficult” subjects as mathematics, primary science and yet want to become doctors and engineers, etc. They fear the teachers of these subjects. They contemplate examination malpractice, and resort to use of drugs and cultism for solution of these problems.

Legally, they know that they are children and not adults. Their sexual urge and financial needs could lure them into raping, stealing and robbing. They could face trials in juvenile courts for such offences and could be sent to remand homes or to face firing squad. Drugs can repress their anxiety to fall victim or victims of these offences. They also battle with morality because of the confusion created by adults who preach good behaviour and do the opposite. The adults, for example preach against stealing, dishonesty, exam malpractice, sexuality and yet the adults embezzle public fund, take bribe, commit election malpractice and pose as “sugar daddies”. No wonder the youths drift away from parents to assert independence with their peers while the use of drugs and membership of secret cult are accepted norm.

The Concept of Cultism and Drug Abuse

Drug abuse is the excessive and indiscriminate use of drugs without doctor's prescription. "People step into dangerous territory of drug abuse, when they take medication for the wrong reason, take liberties with the dosage, use products meant for someone else, or take the drugs in the wrong way. For example "some pills are meant to be swallowed whole so that the ingredients in them are released into the system slowly, but abusers crush or chew or grind and sniff the pills" (Ani 2004:14). The use of drugs is considered abusive when drug consumption has severe consequences psychologically, socially and mentally.

Cult on the other hand is a sect, a body of people sharing a common opinion about the world, who have broken away from the community. The use of them "cult" in this respect means disapproval. Cult is a secret society of a group of people associated together for some common interest, under the condition of secrecy. Their identity is not usually clear but the members unleash anxieties on their members and those of opposing cults they fight, maim and kill in their operations. Politicians hire them to intimidate their political opponents and to assist them commit election malpractices. In higher institutions, they attack lecturers and themselves.

Classification of Drugs

They are many different classifications of drugs. They range from depressants, stimulants to psychedelic drugs, Adimola in Ani (2004:22) classifies drugs, of abuse under hypnotics, sedative, barbiturates, amphetamines, antibiotics and steroids.

Johnson in Ani (2004:22) also listed most commonly abused drugs as alcohol, valium, activan, Librium, madras, cocaine, amphetamines, cafferine, lyserenic Acid Diethylamide (LSD) and marijuana (India hemp). Others are depressants and pain killers like opium, heroine and morphine. Also, glue, shifted by youths, though not popular in Nigeria, has joined the list of abused drugs.

The most commonly abused drugs in Nigeria are:

- i. Alcohol: This is one of the most widely abused drugs by youths. People who take alcohol claim that it reduces their personal inhibition and alleviates mild anxiety. "Alcohol depresses the higher center of the brain which controls inhibition" (Okafor, 2001:181). Alcohol results in marked impairment and gross disorientation of thought. Heavy and excessive drinking can result in brain and liver damage.
- ii. Marijuana (Indian hemp): This is another most widely abused drug. It is the first drug on the ladder of drug addiction among Nigerian youths. It is a dangerous drug and can cause a permanent damage to the mental health of some people and by no means, every smoker. Addiction to marijuana involves

psychological dependence in which the addict does not feel alright until he takes the drug. “Marijuana affects the basic personality of the individual and had been known to have inhibiting effect on the brain (Okafor, 2001:181).

- iii. Cocaine: This is mostly widely addictive drugs known to mankind. It is a pleasant drug and its effect wears off after taking it, such that progressively large dosages are needed to sustain the same earlier feelings. “It is exciting drug which create a state of euphoria usually followed by a physical dependence” (Okafor, 2001:181). Withdrawal symptoms such as fear, vomiting and irritability occur when the individual fails to get his regular supply.
- iv. Amphetamines: These are mostly abused by students who want to stay awake and study. Sports men also take amphetamine pills. Victims of amphetamine may remain ill even long after they have stopped taking the drug.
- v. Caffeine: This is also abused by students who want to stay awake and study. “Prolonged use of caffeine can be dangerous resulting in paranoid psychosis (Okafor, 2001:183).

Cultism in Nigeria

The genesis of cultism in Nigeria cannot accurately be traced historically due to its secret nature. However, there are evidences of existence of secret societies in the old Oyo Empire and in Niger Delta States of southern Nigeria. In Oyo Empire, for example, there existed the Ogboni secret society which was recognized in the administration of the Alafin and in Niger Delta states Ekpe and Nkonkwo secret societies existed (Onwubiko, 1972:121). The Ekpe and Nkonko infiltrated into southern Igbo communities of Arochukwu, Ohafia, Afikpo, Ikem etc through cultural affiliation. Christianity has intervened in these secret societies: Ogboni secret society is now reformed to fraternize Ogboni society which Christians are members (Babalola, 1978:148).

The present secret societies or cults showed their existence in the last two decades of twentieth century in universities and other institutions their atrocities were so high that they were feared and dreaded. Yet, those who wanted to become members joined voluntarily. Others were trickishly lured into the cults by peers. Today, cultists are found in secondary schools, primary schools and urban and rural communities. Most of these cultists are youths, and the adult members joined when they were youths. They do not seem to resign their membership for fear of violating their vow.

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The initiation of new members is an elaborate and involving ceremony. In higher institutions, members from other institutions converge at an appointed venue in a nocturnal conference. The new members are tortured, followed by oath of membership and secrecy administered by the officiating officer, then finally the testing of everybody's blood by every member.

The cultists operate in a "world" where Nigerian legal system has no strength. An offender is tried within the court of cult, if found guilty, is punishable by torture or by execution. The corpse of the victim is disposed in the way chosen by the members. "Each cult is an antagonizing group of other cults. It seems that there is no co-operation among them" (Oladipo, 2006:10).

The functions of the secret cult include protecting their oath of secrecy and the interest of their members in keeping boy and girl friends. Others include arrogance and embarrassment of members by member(s) of opposing cult and warning to lecturers who teach difficult courses. They also find job as political thugs where they maim, intimidate and kill their employers opponents with joy and satisfaction.

The use of drug such as marijuana, cocaine, glue, madras etc is fundamental. Members are forced to become drug addicts. These drugs are part of their entertainment during their meetings. To conclude, all cultists are drug abusers. All cultists started their life as drug abusers when they were in youth stage of life.

Reasons why Youths Abuse Drugs

There are several reasons why youths take drug in Nigeria. They abuse drugs and leave immoral and debased life that go with it, most of them are members of secret cult. The reasons are as follows:

1. Young people especially the females, abuse drugs when they are obese. Their intentions are to reduce weight, slim down and become attractive to the young men. Closely related to this is the avoidance of unwanted pregnancies. Resentment, fear, shame and conflicts that may arise as a result of unwanted pregnancy may make the youths take drugs either to avoid or terminate the pregnancy.
2. Youth also indulge in drugs as a means of facilitating their sexual excitement.
3. Most young people take drugs as defensive mechanism. They want to escape from realities of life. They react to failure and disappointment with marked feeling of hurt and inferiority complex because they have low frustration, tolerance, feeling of inadequacy and insecurity. They find comfort in the abuse of drugs.
4. Youths abuse drugs because of peer pressure. They want to gain social acceptability among their peer. They want to boost their ego, for example,

youths want to assert their manhood or womanhood, look tough and gay. Their drug habit appears to reflect their efforts to relate well to adult world. Irabor (1985) in Nwachukwu, (2000:106) attributed drug addict of the youths to personality problems resulting from development process, for example, regression, fixation etc.

5. Some parents are too busy to explain common daily phenomena to their children or guide them properly, with the result that children get wrong and false information and cut upon it; for example, some youths who do not attain development task role such as choice of career or vocation may become frustrated. They resort to taking drugs as a means of forgetting their problems.

Consequences of Drug Abuse

All well meaning citizens of Nigeria are no doubt frightened by the ever increasing trends and intensity of youth drug abuse. This is perhaps evidenced in the newspapers, radios, televisions report and through daily occurrences in our society. It is generally believed that drug abuse has significant impact on human behaviour and those who consistently and are heavily addicted to it.

All abused drugs have negative consequences on the abuser. Their consequences are highlighted below:

- a. Drug Addiction: A drug addict has the emotional and psychological dependence on drugs without it, he cannot function effectively. The addict generally gets some feelings of relief, and emotional satisfaction after taking the desired drug.
- b. Withdrawal syndrome: It is also referred to as abstinence syndrome. It is a set of symptoms that usually appear whenever the intake of certain drugs is suddenly stopped. The syndromes are mere signs on the body craving for the drug. These vary from watery eyes, running nose, to nausea, when the individual needs the drug. Some may develop cramps, feeling of jittery and sometimes terrifying effects. Where proper management of the addict is not well undertaken, the physical symptoms may be so tense and acute that the victim becomes mad or dies. The syndrome varies depending on the drug under consideration.
- c. Most drug abusers eventually become school drop-outs some end up in prison, madness or untimely death. Females among them become custodian of criminals, prostitutes and victims of HIV.

Role of Teachers in Controlling Drug Abuse and Cultism

Teachers' roles in controlling drug abuse and cultism cannot be overemphasized. They can help to alleviate problems of drug abuse and cultism among the youths while in school through the following ways:

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In the first place, teachers should educate the youths by warning them that using drugs without the doctor's prescription is dangerous. A well known adage is that "an idle mind is the devil's workshop". The teacher should therefore suggest indoor games such as lido, scrabbles, whot etc which the youth engage in whenever they are idle, bored or lonely.

Secondly, teachers through the help of ministering of social development, churches, voluntary agencies such as Boy' Scout, Girl's Guide, the Police, National Orientation Agency, etc should assist in the campaign against drug abuse, drug addiction and cultism. This can be carried out through the use of posters, TV and radio at home and in the school.

Thirdly, proper moral education of the youth should be included in the school curriculum. Armed with adequate information, the immoral uprising and resultant social ills being experienced by the youth will be reduced to the barest minimum. Youth should be encouraged to take part in skill acquisition programme during holidays. This will channel their energy towards constructive ideas.

Fourthly, proper sex education of the youth will help reduce unwanted pregnancy. Lack of sex education in schools, home and churches exposes the youth to conflicting and confusing ideas and information about sex.

Finally, teachers, school authorities and parents should watch out for bad companies and symptoms of drug abuse and cultism, among youths. According to Jason in Okoye (2008:115) "the symptoms include changes in school attendance, discipline and grade, change in character of assignment turned in, unusual flare-ups, outbreak of temper, poor appearance, furtive behaviour regarding drug and their possessions, wearing of sunglasses at inappropriate time to hide dilated pupils, long sleeves shirts worn constantly to hid needle marks".

Guidance counsellors in the school system should be more serious with their work especially those referred to them by teachers as having the symptoms mentioned above. Those addicted should be given orientation on vocational, educational and personal adjustment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is well known everywhere that drug abuse and cultism are not the best for our youths. The only group of people who do not condemn drug abuse and cultism is the unpopular politicians, who employ the youth to assist them in their political campaigns.

When these youths are ready for action, their “masters” buy the drugs for them. Some politicians consume the drugs as a demonstration that drug abuse is necessary. As these youths fight, maim, kill their opponents and destroy their property, the politicians nod their heads in approval. And when these cultists and drug abusers are apprehended by the police, they pay their ransom. These youths, the adolescent school drop-outs are only dancing to the music of their employers – the politicians.

The reason is that politicians see the winning of an election as a do or die affair. They apply all sorts of fowl means through the drug abusers and cultists in order to win.

Recommendations

It is hereby recommended that since teachers, clergymen, voluntary agencies have done sufficient work on these youths without success, it is high time they direct their efforts on the politicians, the judiciary and the government itself. The politicians should stop the use of thugs. The judicial system should declare judgment in favour of rightful winners of elections without fear or favour. The government should reduce the salaries and allowances of politicians and political office holders thereby making politics less lucrative and attractive. The money saved from the reduction should be used in establishing industries that can give employment to the youths and would be political thugs.

Teachers should:

- a) Warning the youth on use of drugs without doctor’s prescription.
- b) Encourage indoor games such as lido, scrabbles, whot to wade off idleness and boredomness.
- c) Teach moral and sex education as part of school curriculum. Encouraging sports and other strenuous physical exercises to improve the rate of body metabolism and reduce weight. These can make the use of drug impossible.

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