

ADOLESCENCE IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM, A GENERATION AT RISK

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Abstract

Nigeria's population reads 160million and the country's population is predominantly youths. Six out of every ten Nigerian are under 25 years, over 70 percent are under ages 15-35, 61 percent lives in rural area, While 39 percent live in urban cities. Being a vulnerable group with peculiar but unmet needs and aspiration, face problems such as political manipulations, cult manipulations, moral decadence, war violence, to mention but a few. This paper focus on the risk the adolescents face having been involved in criminal activities, and its possible negative effect on the society. Suggesting possible ways of saving this population, emotionally, to bring about viable development economically, socially and politically.

Youths are the foundation of societies whose energy, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development, and the security of the nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic and socio-political attainment. In their dreams and hopes, a nation finds her motivation, on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose, and on their dreams and aspirations the future of a nation is assured. The Federal Republic of

Nigeria (2007), defined youths, as all young persons of ages 18-35, who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

They represent the most active, volatile, and yet the most vulnerable segment of the population socio economically and emotionally. Youths are also a segment of the national population that are sensitive, energetic, active, and are in their most productive phase of their lives as citizens. A majority of the youths face problems, because of unmet needs and

aspirations, which includes inadequate parental care, moral decadence, and lack of appropriate role models, religious fanaticism, drug addiction, unemployment, and underemployment, poor education, sexual assault, health and social welfare problems to mention but a few. They are also affected by different kinds of disabilities including, poliomyelitis, blindness, lameness, and so on (National Population Commission 1991).

In terms of acquisition of formal education approximately 33% of all youths have no formal education and are vulnerable to unemployment and underemployment, and even socio-economic exploitation and deprivation. Some of the youths, with the resemblance of gainful employment are in the informal sectors (that is private companies). Low level economic activities like, street hawking of wares and food items, are consequently the pool from which youths are exploited, and this make the susceptible to crime, delinquency and other vices. The problem of the Nigerian youths, require a committed and determined effort on the part of all stakeholders, to help them achieve their potentials, and make them appropriate partners in the task of national development.

Categories of Youths

There are three categories of youths which include, ages 1-15, 18-30, and 31-45.

Ages 1-15:- they are the category in nursery, primary and secondary school,

who know little or nothing about neither their society nor that of the environment that surrounds them. Their ideology depends on the teaching of their peer group and teachers. They view the universe through their family, peer group and the school. Those in their early adolescence of 10-15years, exhibit what the psychologist Piaget termed 'formal operational thinking', that is the ability to think logically. This ability according to Rogoff and Chavajay (1995), is only restricted to topics or types of problems with which they have had direct experience. Within this stage of their cognitive development they develop what is known as realist approach to knowledge, where they believe that knowledge is a property of the real word, and that there are definite facts and truths that can be acquired.

Ages 18-30:- This includes the youths in the tertiary institutions, and hold about 50% of the population of the country. Their ideologies are widened, and based on universal, abstract, ethnical principles. This category, believe that there is no secure basis for knowledge or for making decisions, but they adopt an approach described as dogmatism-skepticism- in which they alternate between blind faith in some authority, and doubling everything around them (Robert, 2008). This group have ability for speech and action, and are in the position to criticize and evaluate the lechers. They are usually valnerable to violence, and are being used for political and religious violence.

Ages 31 – 45:- This group are the leaders of youth organizations, the foremen of various nations, the dictators or custodians of what they need, and also determine the direction of any nation. They effect meaningful changes in the nation, and are always in a dilemma of identifying with the elders of the nation and the real youths. They shift between power and ideology, are self-centered, and believe that they know much on the sensitive issues in the nation.

A Generation at Risk

Robert, (2000) recalled a book, he read when he was an adolescent, describing the Japanese invasion of China during the 1930s, which focused on how this invasion brought death and suffering to a particular family in China. It described how the youngest son of that family, aged fifteen, was brutally raped by Japanese soldiers when they could not find any woman in the family house (because the women had already fled to the relative safety of a nearby Christian mission). After this horrendous experience, the boy left home to join rebels in the nearby hills.

This story emphasizes the fact that there are often many periods in the world history, when adolescents have been placed at great risk by war, revolution, plagues, and other tragic and frightening event. Some African countries like Cote’D Voire, Gabon, Burundi, Sudan, Somalia, Liberia and Nigeria in recent past, have been ravaged by war violence and commotions involving the youths, Nigeria, in the past 22 months, has been

experiencing political and religious wars, bombing, maiming involving youths, examples are, the recent post election violence involving youths in Kano, Bauchi, Katsina, Gombe, Kaduna, and the Boko Haram insurgence in the northern region of Nigeria. These related issues above, suggest that today’s adolescents face a new set of danger different from those faced by previous generation and perhaps, more difficult to defend against.

Some factors contribute to the manifestation of these behaviors which includes, poor parental care that are experienced in divorced homes, absent-parent families and blended homes (remarried parents), and adolescents personality.

Poor Parental Care

At present, more than half of marriages in Nigeria and other countries end in divorce. This means that a large proportion of children and adolescents, are spending a part of their lives in one-parent families, specifically with their mother, who is basically a career woman (Norton and Moorman, 1987). Adolescents react to divorce with fear, anxiety, and guilt. The effect on their emotional well being, depend on the care they receive from their divorced parents, (Raphael Cubis, Dunne, Lewin & Kelly, 1990).

Absent-Parent Families

Sommers, Whitman, Borkowski, Schellenbach, Maxwell and Keogh, (1993) noted that adolescents growing in families where parents are always absent, as a result of their nature of work, face another set of

problems. They also reiterated, that those youths, born to unman mothers may never know their fathers, and stand the risk of delinquent behaviors, depression, anxiety, impaired cognitive and poor performance in school, and difficulties in forming meaningful relationship including stable romantic ones.

Adolescents Personality

Their personality also poses a threat on their relationship. There are growing evidences according to French, Conrad, and Turner (1995), that certain adolescents are at high risk of being rejected by their peers for engaging in various kinds of antisocial behavior. These adolescent are those they identified as showing high level of aggression, disruptive or hyperactive irritable or in attentive behaviors

Youths and Crime

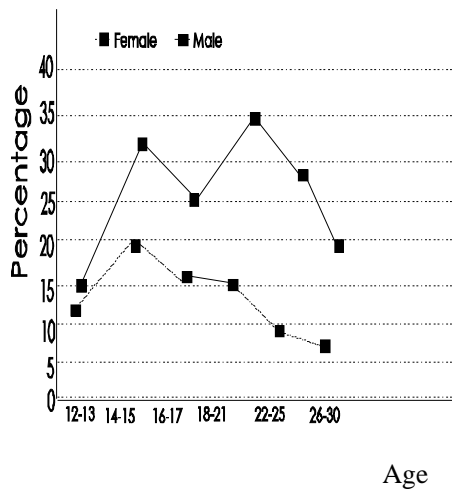


Figure 1.1 Prevalence of offending by ages and sex (%)

Source: Home office (2004)

The graph above represents the official statistics of crime rates among young people. The Home office (2004) report, shows that fewer girls than boys are involved in criminal offences. The graph shows the peak age of offending in boys to be 18 years and that of girls to be around 15 years. Muncie (1999), warned that caution ought to be taken in the approach about youths and crime. His argument being that ‘Moral Panics’ about youth criminality, may not accurately reflect social reality, and that isolated events involving young people and crime can be transformed into a full blown crisis of childhood’ demanding law and order responses.

Muncie (1999), further observed that trends in drug use have shifted away from hard drugs’ such as heroin towards combination of substances like amphetamine, alcohol and ecstasy (a synthetic Amphetamine analog used illicitly for its mood-enhancing and hallucinogenic properties). Popular fear about crime, centre on offences such as theft, burglary, assault and rape-street crime’ that are largely seen as the domain of young working class males. Media coverage of crime often focuses on moral break down among young people, and highlights such issues as vandalism, school truancy, and drug use to illustrate the increasing permissiveness in society.

Awoyinfa (2011) in a newspaper report, noted a specific picture of Oshodi in Lagos Nigeria, where certain homeless youths under the age of 20 turned the area to a den of hemp smoking. He noted that though the Lagos State environmental agency cleared the area of hoodlum on 4th January 2009, a new set of tenants are regrouping on the rail line. While some were sighted busy smoking Indian hemp openly in the hot afternoon, others were also busy taking a nap in the open space, all under the vagaries of the weather, some of them he further stressed, work as bus conductors and take their Indian hemp before going to work, returning in the evening to reconvened again. Unfortunately, this is the general scenario in most major cities of Nigeria.

Government Effort on Youth Development

The government of Nigeria recognizes the youths of the nation as constituting the most vital resources for national development. That if correctly guided, adequately mobilized, and fully integrated into the fabrics of the society, will bring great reservoir of energy, resourcefulness, creativity and dynamism in national development. On the other hand, they can also constitute threat to the national stability and survival if left to drift, remain unemployed and misguided, (Federal Government of Nigeria 2001). On the basis of the above facts, has the federal Government of Nigeria in 2001 programmed a national youth policy with vision as follows:

1. A positive future role of the youths in National socio-economic development;
2. Empowering Nigerian youths to fully realize their potentialities and positively contribute to the overall development of Nigeria.
3. And with missions as follows;
4. Building a youth with a sense of hope, self confidence, imagination, creativity and pride in the nation heritage;
5. Youths who represent hope in the future of Nigeria;
6. Youths who are disciplined, well focused, law abiding and good citizens;
7. Youths full of the spirit of entrepreneurship, self reliance, mutual cooperation, understanding and respect;
8. Youths who are not corrupt and self serving;
9. Youths with equality of opportunity;
10. Youths free from gender and other forms of discrimination, exploitation and abuse;
11. Youth who imbibe the culture of democracy and good governance;
12. Youths who take pride in our divers cultural heritage and geographic condition; and
13. Youths committed to the ideal of national unity and development as enshrined in the 1999 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Federal Government of Nigeria, 2001).

The Federal government of Nigeria, therefore formulated key areas of development of the youths as follows.

Pathways:- Which focused on the educational and vocational training of the youths. This involve providing educational opportunities for youths of Nigeria, as a prerequisite for building a strong, just, equitable state, viable and vibrant nation. This includes also making available, facilities that will ensure provision of both formal, non formal, basic, as well as technical and vocational education in all the states of the Federation. This will go a long a way in taking care of the significant percentage of Nigeria youths, who are illiterates, roaming the streets of Nigeria engaging in violence, instead of participating in viable development of the nation.

Gainful Employment and Entrepreneurial Development

This programme in the national policy of the youth, anchors on the efficacy of preparing the youths, for accessibility to gainful and sustainable self employment and other employment opportunities in the country. It also intends to strive to create conditions and opportunities for creativity, addressing the problems of under employment and unemployment.

Personal Development

The policy makers did not forget the fact that healthy minds and body, are the basic necessity for the survival of the youths, and their positive contribution to national endeavors. Therefore, the health

care programme intends to enhance youth's accessibility to basic hygiene and health education. Providing information, education and safeguard against preventable and communicable diseases such as sexually transmitted disease (STD), HIV and AIDS to which youths are most vulnerable.

Sports and Recreation

providing sporting and recreational centers, will greatly facilitate and enhance both physical, mental growth, and development of the youths. Therefore the policy desire to develop and promote a mentally fit, alert, physically strong, and agile Nigerian youths, that can favorably compare and compete with any group of youths in the world. It is also aimed at promoting competitive spirit and the value of team work, through sporting competitions.

Arts and Culture

The continuity of any culture lies in the ability of the exciting generation to preserve and pass on same to the next generation. No society could afford to discard its cherished past and traditional values, for they represent the sense of identity, self respect and path, through which generations learn the skill and techniques of social relations, survival and societal regeneration. The policy intends to introduce programmes aimed at inculcating in the young ones the need of appreciating and respecting the goods aspect of our cultural heritage, such as respect for elders, one another, being our brothers keeper and so on.

Conclusion

The increasing involvement of the youths in drug abuse, violent crimes, cultism and armed robbery is a disturbing phenomenon. These social vices are to a considerable extent, products of the depressed economy, political repression, instability under military rule, and the systematic abandonment of the positive aspect of our cherished cultural value and tradition. With the democratically elected civilian government, and a liberalized political context, the necessity for designing concrete policies and implementing them, has become a matter of urgency. It has particularly become necessary, to consciously and systematically address the serious problems that have bedeviled, disorientated and dis-powered the youths.

Recommendation

The youths contributing to national development depends essentially, on the political will of the government, the legitimacy and credibility of its national youth development policy. This require appropriate institutional arrangement to put things in place, such as;

1. An enlightenment programme on the dangers of the intake of hard drugs, cultism and other forms of crime and delinquency.
2. Establishing a rehabilitation centre in order to rehabilitate drug addict and juvenile offenders, who have been helped out of drug to enable them pick up their lives again.
3. Establishing guidance and counseling centres for the youths,

using youth development centres, to address the needs of out-of-school youths.

4. Development of effective process of identifying talented youths.
5. Encouragement of all talented youths through providing adequate incentives and facilities (either by the government or the non-governmental organizations) to assist the youths actualized their potentials.
6. Provision of recreation centers, like sports centers, meaningful educational and vocational centres to engage the youths so as to occupy them and dissuade their mind from idleness that opens them up to crime.
7. Government being fully involved in empowering the youths and making available employment opportunities that will discourage the youth from being militants and nuisance in the society.

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