ISSN 12449-1314

OSUN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW

Vol.4, No.1 & 2, June 2017

Published by the
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY
OSUN STATE UNIVERSITY, OSOGBO
(Okuku Campus)

Dr(Mrs) Adelaja D-S 11/8/2017

OSUN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW

ISSN 12449-1314

VOLUME 4 NO. 1, JUNE, 2017
&
VOLUME 4 NO.2, JUNE, 2017

PUBLISHED BY THE
DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY,
OSUN STATE UNIVERSITY, OSOGBO

OSUN SOCIOLOGICAL REVIEW

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THE IMPACT OF MORAL DECADENCE AMONG THE YOUTH IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Morality has been recognized as a way of shaping the youth on what they can become and what they can do with their human capabilities. There are many benefits that individual and society gain where youth are properly thought to be morally upright. Today, Nigeria as a society is faced with a lot of social problems such as drug abuse, arm-robbers, nudity, cultism, violence, sex and pornographies which are the results of moral decadence being experience among the youth. A number of factors have been identified as been responsible for these problems, some of which include technological advancement, economic factors and media exposure. The paper adopted the biological and sociological models by Hofferth and Hayes (1987) for the theoretical explanation. The impact of moral decadence on the youth in our society include low academic standard, lack of morals, health challenge e.t.c. the paper conclude by suggesting some of the way forward in order to re-orientate our youth in order to have a peaceful and orderly society.

Keywords: ICT ; Moral decadence; Social Media; Youth

Introduction

The increasing awareness among Nigerians of the need to instill moral discipline in the youth is a sign in the right direction. Morality has been recognized as a way of shaping the youth on what they can become and what they can do with their human capabilities. According to Thiroux, (1998) morality deals with how humans treat other beings so as to promote mutual welfare, growth, creativity, and meaning, striving for what is good over what is bad and what is right over what is wrong. In this light, morality gives a sense of purpose and a philosophy of life. It gives people values that serves as guiding principles by which they can direct their thoughts, actions, opinions, behaviours and serves as a sort of bedrock or foundation allowing for spiritual, emotional and intellectual growth (Matsumoto, 2002).

The benefits that accrue to the individual and the state through morality are many folds. This is because the type of moral training that is offered to the youth when they come in contact with peers from other culture or ethnic group and also by teachers does not only determine the quality of adults they become to their family, community and the nation, but also maintain sound environmental hygiene, love humanity, appreciate communal life and respect authority and work hard. It is in this regard that instilling good moral conduct among the youth is seen as an investment for any nation. Thus, the education of the child without attention on good moral behaviour is seen as a farce. It is therefore dishearten that good virtues, principles and accepted practices have virtually disappeared from the country considering the list of reported incidents or cases of rape,

drug abuse, teenage pregnancies, vandalism, nudity, stealing, alcoholism and occultism that are reported daily in Nigeria. Duodu, (2006), and Noraini & Suryani (2006), identified the following as some of the main causes of the moral decadence, lack of true religious understanding and practices, attitudes of parents towards their roles, the breakdown of the institution of marriage, rapid economic growth, educational system, attitudes of the teenagers as well as the influence of the peer-group among other factors. It is in the light of the above that the paper examines the impacts of moral decadences on our youth. The rest of the paper is divided into the following segments, conceptual clarifications, Models to explain moral decadence, moral challenges and the way forward

Conceptual Clarifications

Morality is defined as the quality of being right or wrong; behavior in relation to accepted moral standards (Allen, 1994). The question is what is 'right' or 'wrong' is a matter of environment, because what seems to be right in one community may be wrong in another community. Therefore, the definition of morality becomes subjective. This has given rise to many definitions about morality.

According to Ezekwu (2008), morality is used to denote a general accepted code of conduct in a society or within a sub-group of society that comes to be regarded as essential to its survival and welfare. In his own contribution, Harry Schofied describes moral as selected behavioural standard of a society used to measure the different modes of behavior and Geizler, (1989), in his theory of Morals and Mores believe that the ethically right or the morally good is defined and informed by the will of the individual. According to him, an act is deemed right for an individual, even if is cruel, hateful or tyrannical. Although, this ethical theory according to him would render the human community inoperative, if this is put into practice, because if everyone did as he pleased and what pleases individuals is considered ethical, chaos would result. Therefore, Community demands unity and commitment to certain ethical norms.

In support of this, the theory of Morals and Mores hold that what is morally right is determined by the group to which one belongs. Ethics is defined in terms of the ethnic. What is morally right is what the community says is right. Community demands are the ethical commands. Each society creates its own ethics (Geizler, 1989). The theory of Morals and Mores according to Geizler (1989) holds that it is the ethnic context which determines what is to be accepted as morally right or wrong. The position maintains 'ethical relativism'. What is ethically unacceptable in a given social context may be acceptable in another social context. Ethical relativism assumes that ''even two opposite ethical principles are both right''. Yet 'right' and 'wrong' cannot all be right. The first flaw with this ethical theory is what is described by ethicist as the ''is-ought'' fallacy. Just because some people are doing something does not mean that they are doing the right thing. This theory may also be described as the ''band- wagon'' fallacy. Something is good just because many people are doing it. The second flaw as identified by Geizler (1989) is that, if each community's mores are right, then there is no way to adjudicate conflicts between different communities, and there is no moral way to solve conflicts between them.

To sum it up, Atkinson (2000) argues that there can be no intelligence, artificial or organic, that can exist without a set of values. It is essential part of every creature's

mind, as it must be formed before that creature can use reason to understand. And this set of values is the morality of the creature. Hence, Morality is not just a set of values, but a vital and permanent part of ourselves, formed in childhood before the age of reason, which dictates how we understand the world. He continues to say that morality must precede understanding because understanding can only develop after the underlying values have been formed. So the early values are the most important as they become the parent of all subsequent values; later additions though made with a more adult mind, must incorporate previous decisions as those prior decisions are beyond the force of reason. This arbitrary set of beliefs is the morality.

Nigeria as a society has a number of moral codes that are inculcated into their children and which they expect to act as a guiding principle to for the youth in their relationships with individual, family and society at large. Some of the common moral codes of conduct in Nigeria include, respect for elders, sacredness of human life, hard work, avoidance of pre-marital sex and wholesome relationships.

Models to explain causes of immorality

A number of models of immorality have been identified. Most of them suggest two basic components, which are biological and sociological models (Hofferth& Hayes 1987).

Biological factors

The biological models are based on the effects of hormones, especially androgens (Bancroft and Skakkebaek 1978). Psychologists have argued that some types of deviant behaviors in the society such as alcoholism, prostitution, excessive quarreling, stealing, etc. could be inherited from biological parents. Some negative attitudes are regarded as genetic traits of parents who have had similar lifestyles. This argument is valid because if an individual can inherit some good traits from his/her parents, he/she could as well inherit the bad ones. Alcoholism could be inherited. Research by medical experts has shown that the compulsion or strong desire to drink an alcohol can be passed from parents to children. This research holds that certain people or alcoholics are born with a reduced level of a substance in the brain called endorphins. People who lack endorphins feel a sense of well-being only when they are drunk. To such people, the desire to drink is not their doing; it is something inherited.

A number of genetic factors, including the nicotinic acetylcholine receptor, the dopamine transporter gene and cytochrome P450 2A6, appear to be associated with the development of nicotine addiction, (O'Loughin, Kim, et al 2004). Polymorphism in the genes regulating nicotine metabolism is an important factor in the development of addiction (Ling, Feng, et al 2004).

Sociological factors

Sociological models proposed thatvarieties of factors are responsible for immoralities among today's youth, prominent among the factors are; the home, the media, peer pressure, economic factors, culture and religion.

The home factor

Parents or members of a family are primary source of socialization in every community. It is through the home and parents that a child gets to know the language, culture, and the values of a given community. Parents are supposed to transmit the value of the society to the child in order for him or her to fit well into society. The extent to which a child is cultured, therefore, depends on the parents. That is why it is so often said that 'charity begins at home'. Atkinson (2000), states that civilization is a shared understanding, and the only way civilization can maintain this understanding from generation to generation is by that understanding being passed from parent to child, which is how a civilization keeps itself alive. Anigbogu (2005), also argues that, the nature of an understanding depends upon its founding values, which makes morality (the actual values adopted) the vital concern for parents, with the early experiences of infancy the most critical for the formation of understanding in a child. This means that the lessons taught to the infant during the first weeks or months of its existence are the most important, as every subsequent value must reflect those values already adopted by the maturing mind of the person. For once the foundation of values is set, it is for life, and with the values taught during child rearing becoming a permanent part of the adult's understanding.

Peer influence

Peers are powerful agency of socialization. Peers relate to each other in a more informal manner. A powerful peer group can influence and re-socialise a person and thereby make him or her discard the values transmitted by the family. The major reason for drug abuse, among youth, is the influence of peer groups. According to Tamuno (1991), the average age group of youth is between 15-25 years many youths of this age are at their most impressionistic age and they tend to imitate easily. Thus, they are easily manipulated and influenced by their peers, who encourage them to commit delinquent acts on the grounds that it enhances their status and commitment in the society. So most of the times, all teens like to think of themselves as competent to make their own decision. They often see their choice to take drug as a mark of rugged individualism.

Mass media

According to Nche, (2012 : 18), "without doubt, social media currently seem to take the centre stage in the field of information and communication technology" In today's world, the mass media, comprising the television, radio, newspapers, magazines, etc. constitute a strong source of moral development in modern societies. Even under the presence of parents, magazines, television, programmes, pornographic films, nightclubs, cinema, etc. that are foreign or alien to our culture have captured the minds of the youth, making it difficult for parents and teachers to enforce values that have been transmitted to the youth. Pornographic materials have the effects of arousing sexual desire. Undue access to these materials by teenagers could have an influence on them. It could arouse their interest in sex and easily lead into having unprotected sex. Again, through enticing advertisement in the press, most youth have become victims of alcoholism, prostitutions, etc.

Another aspect of media is fashion. Fashion is usually the most often imitated by the general population. Nowadays, children are having difficulty finding clothing that actually covers their bodies. Most of today's youth cloths are too tight, too short or too revealing. The fashion industry, promoted by television and movies, has created this dilemma.

Television

Television has been called the window into our society. It truly shows the "state of affairs." It was the stimulus for change in society. Popular culture once reflected what was seen on television and so did morality. Competition had frayed the moral direction of producers. What "sells" became more important than what effect their programs would have. As noted, television provides adolescents with role models, including movie and television stars and athletes, who portray smoking as a personally and socially rewarding behaviour. Although bans have prevented direct tobacco advertising on television, studies by Ban (2006) on how to curb tobacco addiction have indicated the widespread portrayal of smoking on television in prime-time programming, movies, music videos, and sporting events has increase the rate of youth participating in smoking.

The internet

Modern society has every imaginable convenience. Information is at our fingertips at the click of a button. According to Nche (2012), the Internet has changed communication. It has allowed millions from all around the world to keep in contact and make contacts. But these amazing achievements cast a dark shadow on the moral development of the youth.. This technology has spawned the Information Age, but, not all information is good. Many things can be considered "good," such as families scattered around the world communicating for virtually no cost via e-mail. Researching a subject is made incredibly easy. You can follow news and events from around the world as they happen. This position was supported by Ikpe & Olise,(2010), when they observed that social media are new communication technologies without boundaries and convenient way of sending and receiving information to or from anyone and anytime around the globe.

But all that information has its downside. The instant access to news and communication also allows instant access to negative and immoral forms of information. With little investigation, you can indulge in any perverse desire. There are now websites that focus on even the most extreme of perversions. Often, such websites allow others of similar interest to discuss their lusts. This creates an atmosphere of acceptance and validation for such people and propels them even further down the slippery slope of immorality. According to Net Value (2000), children spent 64.9 percent more time on pornography sites than they did on game sites in September 2000. Over one quarter (27.5%) of children age 17 and under visited an adult web site, which represents 3 million unique underage visitors. Of these minors, 21.2 percent were 14 or younger and 40.2 percent were female.

Economic factor

Poverty in most developing countries has made it mandatory for both parents to work and absent from home due to their work demands. They leave home very early for work, heavy traffic jam does not permit parents to get home early. The result is that parents spend less time with their children. The child therefore falls under the influence of house-helps and crèches rather than parents, this expose them to a lot teaching that influence their value and outlook of live that are not originally intended by the parents. Apart from the above, many youth who are working to support themselves and their family engage in many legitimate and illegitimate means to survive. As a result some find themselves in gangs (Arm-robbery, drugs, Prostitution etc.). Soteriades and Difranza (2003), assert that there is a correlation between poverty, high unemployment, low income and youth high rates of smoking, drugs, prostitution and other vises.

Technologies and Advancement

Scientific and technological advancement also has influence on the moral development of many children nowadays. Technology is increasing at such a break neck speed. It is bringing so many changes that make the youth question the scientific basis of some of the cultural values that parents attempt to impact into them. This situation may lead to non-conformity with norms of the society. Again, as urbanization increases, the social controls that existed in traditional societies begin to diminish. In traditional communities, every person is subjected to the control and scrutiny of other members of the society. Urbanization is however associated with the influx of strangers of different background, development of nightclub's and video centres. These social changes may have negative impact on the individual. Moreover, urbanized communities are associated with unemployment, high cost of living, housing problems, just to mention a few. People who are unable to face these challenges may turn to such deviant means as armed robbery, prostitution, drug trafficking, etc. to make ends meet.

Some Moral Challenges facing the Society today

Gyekye (2003) stated some elements which he believed must be accepted as good moral values in African societies. They include kindness, compassion, generosity, hospitality, faithfulness, truthfulness, concern for others and the actions that bring peace, justice, dignity, respect and happiness. He points out that the following, however, are considered as bad morals, backbiting, selfishness, lying, stealing, adultery, rape, incest, murder and suicide. Many societies today are faced with a lot of moral challenges, some of these include: drug or substance abuse, alcoholism, occultism, sex, violence, nudity and stealing, this position was supported by Ifaturoti (1994) who opined that society decay manifests itself in the form of various social vices and is epitomized by corruption, indiscipline, moral laxity and many other ills in the society

Drug or substance abuse

People abuse substances such as drugs, alcohol, and tobacco for varied and complicated reasons, but it is clear that our society pays a significant cost. Anigbogu (2005) indicated in his write up that when stimulants are taken, it normally upsets the user and push them to engage in immoral behaviour. The damage caused by drug abuse

can be seen in our hospitals and emergency departments through direct damage to health and its link to physical trauma. Anigbogu (2005) list some of the drugs or substances to include marijuana, cocaine and crack, alcoholism e.tc All these substance have a lot of negative impact on the health of the youth, apart from serious health complications like madness, other effects include loss of appetite, low retentive memory and other criminal behavious like stealing, robbery and murder cases.

Occultism

Occultism refers to knowledge and workings of the supernatural as opposed to the visible and measurable knowledge. It is a supernatural manifestation that cannot be understood from reasoning or deduction. Today there are many forms of occultism practiced among the youth; these include juju, magic, spiritualism, invoking the spirit of the dead, divination, sorcery, numerology. Boakye (2006) in his article in the Daily Graphic 'is occultism endemic in our schools traces the cause of excessive drinking among youth to the practice of occultism and peer pressure.

Sex and Phonographs

Indiscriminate sex and excessive pornograph has destroyed the life of many youth in our society and this has led to a number of ripples effect such as increase in rate of rate, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS. This was corroborated by Zillmann (1986) and Yuen (2010), when they submitted that extensive view of pornographic materials produce some negative sociological effects, including rape, a decreased respect for long-term monogamous relationship and an attenuated desire for procreation. Most of what is express in pronograph are contrary to African society values which favour ideal family concept, discrete and limited sexual partner with lot of emotional attachment.

Violence

Surette (1992) argues that the source of this concern is revealed by a brief review of the statistics of youth violence. Youth violence, and particularly violent crime committed by youth, has recently increased dramatically. Surette stated that today about 5 out of every 20 robbery arrests and 3 of every 20 murder, rape, and aggravated assault arrests are of juveniles. In raw numbers, this translates into 3,000 murder, 6,000 forcible rape, 41,000 robbery, and 65,000 aggravated assault arrests of youths annually. The surge in youth criminal violence is concentrated within the past five years.

Stealing

Stealing is defined as taking away (another person's property) without permission or legal right, especially secretly. Stealing in the schools involve pilfering books, pens and pencils. Others break into the trunks and boxes of other students and make away with their personal effects, gang stealing from school farms, stores, teacher's bungalows and so on. Most of these acts are as a result of peer pressure and occultism. Others still attribute it to lack of spirituality. Alison (1997), opined that if youths become spiritually sensitive it lessens the inducement to sin.

Effects of Immorality on the Youth Academic Performance

Schools are places where teens spend some hours, five days each week and engaged in activities meant to ensure their intellectual, physical, mental and emotional growth. Increasing violence in schools diminishes the opportunity for learning and, at times, threatens safety or life. A poll conducted by Harris and Associates (1995), describes the effect of immorality on the behaviour of teachers and students in some school districts. According to them, academic performance has decreased, teachers show less enthusiasm for teaching, and students who are unwilling to risk exposure to violence at school dropout or change school frequently. For instance, the issue of cultism in the country higher institutions has led to a number of problems with consequences on the academic life of the students. Some of the problems include violence on campus, expulsion of students and even death of a number of promising youth through their involvement in cult activities.

Moral effects

Youth engage in other indiscipline acts like smoking, excessive drinking, etc. They normally break school rules especially dress code since they have to sneak out of campus to go to where they meet. They wear 'Multico' (unprescribe attire) so that they will not be recognized. Also, bullying has become the order of the day. It is as if to be a junior or meek is a curse nowadays. Because most students who practice this occult claim to have 'ahoodenduro', they try it on the juniors'. Others too move in gangs, and they try to challenge themselves to see which group, is more powerful. At times, they arrange for a 'street fight' and all tools are used to see if the medicine in their body actually works or not. In one of such occasions a student had his hand cut off.

Again, occultism has also led to more youth in robbery. Some students claim they had medicine to steal. They normally steal provisions, money, books, etc. from other student's trunks and chop box. At times those who do this go to town to steal in the night because they think they have medicine to protect them from knives and gunshots. For instance, some student's travelled from Eastern Region to Ashanti Region to rob a Forex Bureau. Luck run out of their side when they were caught and one was lynched by the angry mob. Furthermore, sexual promiscuity is on the increase nowadays among the youth, despite the various campaigns against HIV/ AIDS. Some students use charms and spells on other innocent people to satisfy their sexual gratification.

Health effects

There are also some health effects of cultism, drug abuse, sex and violence activities. Some students meet at odd times and places. They have little sleep, which leads to a slack in physical and mental alertness. There are also fears about body cuts and blood exchanges, which could spread blood-related infections like AID's and hepatitis. It needs to be stressed that these diseases are incurable; they lead to death. Another important factor is the rate of transmission of the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) in this age group. Available epidemiological data shows that ten per cent of the Ugandan population is infected with HIV with peak prevalence among those aged 15-29 (STD/AIDS Control Programme1990), Bagarukayo, et al (1993). According to Caldwell

and Quiggin (1989), HIV has an average incubation period of five years in sub-Saharan Africa; it is possible to extrapolate the peak age at infection to be 10-24 years.

Apart from the above, too much in –take of alcohol, tobacco and other stimulants can damage the human liver, brain, and the heart. Prolonged or excessive in-take of alcohol could cause cirrhosis; a disease that damages the liver. When this disease attacks a person, the liver may not be able to perform its normal functions of manufacturing proteins and removing harmful substances from the blood which could lead to high blood pressure. In severe cases, cirrhosis can cause death.

The health effects of teen drug use can vary, depending on such factors as frequency of use, the kind of drug taken, how much is taken, how quickly it gets into the brain, what other drugs are taken at the same time, the differences in body size and chemistry, the length of time the drugs are used, and other components. For instance, swallowed or snorted amphetamines, hit users with a fast high, making them feel powerful, alert and energized. Uppers pump up heart rate, breathing, and blood pressure, and they can also cause sweating, shaking, headaches, sleeplessness, and blurred vision. Prolonged use may cause hallucinations and intense paranoia (Budu, 2006). Amphetamines are psychologically addictive. Users who stop using them report that they experience various mood problems such as aggression and anxiety and intense cravings for the drugs.

Again, Cocaine is a stimulant that rocks the central nervous system, giving users a quick, intense feeling of power and energy. Snorting highs last between 15 and 30 minutes; smoking highs last between 5 and 10 minutes. Cocaine also elevates heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, and body temperature. Snorting can put a hole inside the lining of your nose First-time users-even teens-of both cocaine and crack can stop breathing or have fatal heart attacks. Using either of these drugs even one time can kill you. These drugs are highly addictive, and as a result, the drug, not the user, calls the shots. Even after one use, cocaine and crack can create both physical and psychological cravings that make it very difficult for users to stop.

Furthermore, small doses help suppress coughing, but larger doses can cause fever, confusion, impaired judgment, blurred vision, dizziness, paranoia, excessive sweating, slurred speech, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, irregular heartbeat, high blood pressure, headache, lethargy, numbness of fingers and toes, redness of face, dry and itchy skin, loss of consciousness, seizures, brain damage, and even death

Also, marijuana can affect mood and coordination. Users may experience mood swings that range from stimulated or happy to drowsy or depressed. Marijuana also elevates heart rate and blood pressure. Some people get red eyes and feel very sleepy or hungry. The drug can also make some people paranoid or cause them to hallucinate. Marijuana is as tough on the lungs as cigarettes-steady smokers suffer coughs, wheezing, and frequent colds. Teens who use marijuana can become psychologically dependent upon it to feel good, deal with life, or handle stress. In addition, their bodies may demand more and more marijuana to achieve the same kind of high experienced in the beginning.

Lastly, Inhalants make you feel giddy and confused, as if you were drunk. Long time users get headaches, nosebleeds, and may suffer the loss of hearing and sense of smell. Inhalants are the most likely of abused substances to cause severe toxic reaction

and death. Using inhalants, even one time, can kill. Inhalants can be very addictive. Teens who use inhalants can become psychologically dependent upon them to feel good, deal with life or handle stress. Drug abuse does not solve problems; it only masks emotions and problems, often making things worse. Drugs can take over a life to the extent that nothing else matters; food, friends, family, health, etc. Some users go to great lengths to get drugs using, whatever means necessary. The drug becomes the master of the users' life. It will crush an individual's emotional, spiritual, and physical health, ruining every aspect of their lives.

Indecent Dressing

Most youth in higher institution and in the society have been be clouded with indecent dressing. Many expose the body and nakedness in the name of being fashionable. These have led to a number of negative effects on the youth, especially the girls. Many are victims of sexual harassment, rape and ritual purpose.

Conclusion

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that the common moral problems identified among Nigerian youths include; alcoholism, occultism, drug abuse, violence, sex and stealing, and some of the factors that has contributed to these menace are economic factors, peer pressure, mass media and information and communication Technology. The paper noted the fact that the identified causes of moral decadence have contributed significantly to students' poor academic performance and health hazards. In view of these problems the paper suggests a number of ways to curb the menace.

The way forward

In the light of the identified consequences of moral decadence among the youths, the following recommendations are made for good moral behaviour among the youth;

- Guidance and counselling department should be established in all Educational institutions with well-trained coordinators. This department should not only organize orientation programs for fresher to usher them into the new environment but should continue to provide relevant programs to enlighten the youth on good moral behaviour.
- The government as a matter of urgency should provide the necessary resources for the smooth reintroduction of Religious and Moral Education in all schools in the country.
- Parents, Teachers and religious leaders should serve as role models for the youth in our society by laying good examples for the youth to follow.
- Religion studies and moral education should be introduced as general courses in higher institutions. This will help to further teach what can control the moral misconduct among the students.
- Rules and regulations that are drastically required for building the moral and character development and capacity of the students should be enforced in schools.
- Promulgation of relevant laws to sensor programmes on television and the internet.

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