

STOP-GAP IN FAMILY CARE AS CONTRIBUTORY NEGLIGENCE TO YOUTHFUL DELINQUENCY IN THE CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT

Early childhood care, education and good - grooming have been identified as proven measures for raising the normal standard of children in the society. Although many scholarly works have explored the issues of parental factors in isolation as contributing to isolated problems of children, there are still relatively scarce studies on the effects of stop-gaps in family care on the rising omnibus problems of the juvenile and youth in the current state of affairs of the Nigerian sociopolitical reality. Based on two principal and significant theories of adolescence and conformity, this write-up explores the links between the presence or absence of the parental care in the upbringing of a child and conforming or defiant codes that the growing youth exudes within the society. Since the electronic and print media are daily inundated with reports of activities of the Nigerian youth, the paper relies on records of the youth segment of the populace for our analysis. Qualitative and sometimes, quantitative analyses form the bases of our conclusion. The findings are that children who lack the full compliments of parental guide, care, love and tutelage grow up into errant and deviant youth contributing social menace and non-conforming social entities. The conclusion is that society should ensure that every culture in Nigeria must provide the basis for children to enjoy the fullness of parental guide, care and education to ensure that they are nurtured into youth with acceptable social norms and desirable behavioural patterns.

Keywords: Family dysfunction, Juvenile delinquency, Parental care, Stop-gap.

INTRODUCTION

The family has been identified as the most basic unit of the society. It is the nucleus of the society as it is responsible for all the important role of raising children for populating the human society. Apart from the function of procreation, the family is also responsible for bringing up children to meet the social and cultural norms of the society. The role of the family in the life of a child could be as simple as in the name given to the child which according to Odinka (2016) could be significant in the way the society regards the child later in life. The basic needs of the child - food, clothing and shelter are first provided by the family in a normal situation.

Gable and Lutz (2000, as cited by Francis *et al*, 2021) refer to the family as the central Nervous System of the child's developmental process. The family set up also has very significant influence on a child's development. This influence may turn out to be positive or negative depending on the nature, type and process of introducing the influence. For instance, the home remains the primary arena where children learn

healthy or unhealthy eating habits. Specifically, parents remain the initial source of modeling the child to eat. In this regard parents are considered the primary agents of socialisation and wellbeing for the children. Among other issues, Gable and Lutz (2000) concludes that the physical being, weight, height and other physiological biometrics may have proportional relationship to the parents' beliefs, attitudes and dispositions to the nutritional needs of the child.

Another basic expectation of the family is to meet the clothing need of the child from the neo-natal stage through infancy to early childhood. Dressing is vital in aiding the development of children. Apart from its advantages in providing safety and warmth for the child, children need and should be made to understand the complexity of clothing and dressing. (Hertfordshire Community, 2011, as cited in BabyCentre, 2021). Only a constant exposure of the child to these by the family can inculcate the grooming habit of dressing. Living together by members of the same family engenders compassion, affection and love for one another within the family. This co-existence also provides the child with the opportunity for enculturation where the family provides training and orientation for the child to allow children behave in acceptable manners when they begin to interact with other people outside their immediate family.

METHODOLOGY

This study employs an exploratory research designs. Precisely, a survey of existing literature on the concept of parental care of children and the stop-gap that has continued to widen in Nigeria was conducted and the discovered trends was duly reported. Some of the social realities of the present day Nigeria as reported on social media, news items and published research works concerning issues of family upbringing and juvenile delinquency form the body of information studied. Apart from library search, recent development in Information and Communications Technology (ICT) have opened up the entire global sphere and reduced it to a global village like people often say nowadays. Required information for drawing conclusion were obtained from the internet, print and electronic media from across the entire Nigerian nation.

Child, Adolescent, Juvenile or Youth

According to Dance-Schissel & Chapel (2015) child development, or child and adolescent development, refer to the process of growth and maturation of the human individual from conception to adulthood. The term adolescence is open to particular cultural connotation or social contexts. In different contexts, certain factors other than age may be important in determining who is a child or an adolescent. Such factors may include social roles, gender, marital status, and the capacity to contribute economically. For the purpose of this study, the terms adolescent and juvenile or youth shall be used interchangeably to denote the period of growth and development from late childhood to early adulthood with particular focus on the similarities in the behaviour of the growing children that fall within the socio-biological and psychological age brackets.

History and Nature of Child Care in Nigeria

According to the National Strategic Framework on the Health and Development of Adolescents and Young People in Nigeria by the Federal Ministry of Health, Abuja (2011), as referenced by UNESCO, (2021), young people form a significant population group in terms of demographic parameter and are a unique population in terms of characteristics as a result of their developmental processes. They face unique challenges, some of which may compromise their health and development potentials if not well addressed. Since young people represent the future of the country, one of the most important commitments a country can make for future economic, social and political progress is to address their health and development needs. Akinbote (2006, as cited in Olowe & Oduolowu, 2017) is also of a similar opinion that Africans generally, and Nigerians in particular, have a warm attitude towards having children which in essence, may explain why Africans take good care of their young ones.

Child care in both the traditional and western spheres began with taking care of the pre-natal, neonate and through the early childhood to the adolescent and young adult stages. Careful efforts were put in place to ensure the cognitive, affective and psychomotor development of the growing child (Adubuola, 2020). Child care in the traditional set up is generally non-formal and through the processes of socialisation and enculturation, Western education and civilization have brought in a more organised and formal process of early childhood care and education into Nigeria.

In most cases, children are taken care of by their parents, legal guardians, or siblings. In some cases, it is also possible that older children take care of their younger children. This informal care includes verbal direction and other explicit training regarding the child's behaviour. The American Academy of Pediatrics (2019) also reports that care giving role may be taken on by the child's extended family. Moreover, another form of childcare which is on the rise and contrary to familial care giving, is that of centre-based childcare. In lieu of familial care giving, the responsibilities may be given to paid caretakers, orphanages or foster homes to provide care, housing and schooling. Professional caregivers work within the context of centre based care (crèches, day care, pre-school and schools) or a home based care (nannies or family day care). It is pertinent to note that the provision of child care, education and the stimulation of children has always been regarded as the responsibility of individual homes as the government has not been directly involved in that process of early child care and development.

In Nigeria, while the Federal Ministry of Health (2011) clearly recognises the influence of religious organisations in the training of children but it requires the efforts of parents, guardians and the family to guide a child to the proper place of worship. The family is also required to assist the child in acknowledging the relationship between beliefs and to handle of forms of diversities. In many cultures, the care of children is shared among a wider group of adults. The terms "care", "care-taker" or "care giver" are often used interchangeably to refer to those people who play significant roles in the care of children.

Notion of Stop-Gap in Family Care

The notion of stop-gap in family care is premised upon the reality that the ideal situation in the family set-up becomes distorted, non-existent or breached to the extent that the family could no longer perform its expected function in grooming the child.

The stop-gap in family care refers to the total care of children which was started by parents or guardians but stopped at a point in the life of children due to one reason or other. The gap may result in a complete severance of the growing child from the family or in the existence of the child in a family set-up that is devoid of the required physical, social or cultural environments for the child to grow and develop. This gap aligns with what is referred to as "family dysfunction". Smith and Stern (1997, as referenced by Cárceles & Fernández, 2015) apply the term "structurally in complete families" to explain the condition that allows for a stop-gap in family care.

Stop-gap in family care can be as a result of many factors. Salami and Olugbamigbe (2020) identify severance of the child from parents and guardians, incapacitation of the parents or outright demise of parents as possible causes of the identified gaps. Mbah and Kanu (2019) are of the opinion that circumstances within and outside the making of the family may interfere with the family set-up thereby breaching the arrangement and harmony within the family. The ideas of separation, annulment of marriages, irreconcilable differences and conflicts between spouses, divorces and the likes are known causes of breaches in family set-ups. In most of these, the upbringing of the child becomes the greatest sufferer of the consequences. Some of the most recent developments leading to stop-gap in family care include the Internally Displaced People (IDP) and the Almajiri religious system which are both responsible for causing a breach in the family arrangements of several hundreds or thousands of Nigerians. In very recent time in Nigeria, several thousands of Nigerian children are thrown into situations that deny them of the ideal conditions of upbringing owing to the traumatic experiences at the IDP and the Almajiri religious system. These children like their counterparts from other breached families still manage to grow through the stages of childhood.

Every human society depends on its young population for regeneration, sustenance and continuity. The mode and transition of the children to the adolescent and adulthood therefore should be of significant note to the society. Every culture and tradition has put in place carefully – thought – out – plans for a smooth transition from one stage of development into the other. Various studies abound that investigated issues relating to the family, children and adolescents in isolation but very little have been done in exploring the nexus between the home environment, the nurture of the children and the process of their transition into a juvenile with a view to explaining why some youth behave in manners inimical to the societal norms.

This study therefore examines the child's growing environment with a particular attention to the absence of the required parental attention in nurturing the child to the adolescent stage. In the event of rising cases of juvenile involvement in crimes such as drug abuse, rape and sexual violence, armed robbery, kidnapping and banditry to mention but a few, this study seeks to contribute to the investigation of likely causes of juvenile delinquency in the current social reality.

The family, though defined to be the smallest social unit, has also been identified as a significant and most basic group owing to its functions which are core and significant for the preservation of social norms, enhancing social cohesion and fostering inter-personal relationship among others (Igbo, 2019). This study focuses on the implications of the family's failure to fulfill some of its obligations to the growing child. The intention is to call the attention of parents, educationists and the general public to the awareness that gaps in meeting the family responsibilities may be portending immediate and remote danger for the society. It also intends to examine the recent trends

of Internally Displaced People, the Almajiri system, baby factory, baby mama or under-aged parenting, children involvement in kidnapping, terrorism, rape, drug addiction and

banditry, which are on the increase in Nigeria today with a view to determining their links to family dysfunction and proffering workable solutions through functional family dynamics.

In line with the age-long notions, “catch them young” and “nipping it in the buds”, it is expected that this study apart from helping to minimize the ugly incidences of juvenile delinquency will also assist in redirecting a vast majority of the Nigerian youth populace from errant, deviant and criminal tendencies to more acceptable behavioural patterns. This, in the long term shall bring about significant reduction in violence and crime in our national lives.

Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks

In the opinion of Cherry (2020), theories of development provide a framework for thinking about human growth and learning. Various theories have been put forth to facilitate the understanding of developments in the youth, adolescent or juvenile. Many of these theories explain various aspects of the adolescent’s life, growth and development. Being a critical stage in the transformation of a child into adulthood, different psychological and sociological theories provide different perspectives to the understanding of the features and processes of development in the adolescent. These theories also reveal certain issues and controversies in the study of the adolescent development, (Janet and Daniel, 2020).

Backes (2019) explained three key domains of adolescent development which include puberty, neurobiological development, and psychosocial development. Puberty, a normative developmental transition that all youth experience, is shaped by both social and biological processes. Biologically, puberty involves a series of complex alterations at both the neural and endocrine levels over an extended period that result in changes in body shape due to growth and development (and) psychosocial developmental tasks (include) developing identity and a capacity for self-direction during their transition to adulthood (such as) understanding one's self, understanding one's place in the world, and understanding one's capacity to affect the world (i.e., agency). (These) are all processes that begin to take shape during adolescence in tandem with the physiological, neurobiological, and cognitive changes.

Chinawa, *et al*, (2014, as cited in Manyike *et al*, 2016) opined that there are several models to explain behavioural attributes among adolescents. Some of these models include the American Psychological Association (APA, 2002, as cited in CiteThisForMe, 2015) which published several theories exploring why adolescents engage in risky behaviours. Leung and Shek (2020) also identifies six notable theoretical perspectives on adolescence which includes (a) the lifespan perspective, (b) the learning perspective, (c) the humanistic perspective, (d) the ecological perspective, (e) the socio-cultural perspective and (f) the positive youth development perspective.

The concept of social conformity is another major concept defining this study. McLeod (2016) describes conformity as a type of social influence involving a change in belief or behaviour in order to fit in with a group. Citing Kelman (1958), McLeod (2016) identifies three types of conformity – compliance, internalization and identification. Erin (2021) commenting on compliance, opines that teenagers and pre-

teenagers are “particularly vulnerable to influence because they long to be accepted by their peers”. Erin (2021) also refers to internalization as “informational conformity” because the teenager privately and publicly changes his or her behaviour in order to fit in to the group after privately agreeing with them. Identification occurs when the teenager accepts an influence because he wants to maintain a “satisfying self-defining relationship to a group.

In order to understand how conformity works, Zaid (2019) agrees with Sunstein (2019) that the concept works in three componential parts.

- a. Informational signals. According to Sunstein, people decide to feel or act according to signals from in-groups-people that they like, trust or admire.
- b. Reputational signals. People tend to belong to a particular group in order to maintain or sustain the good graces, benefits or reputations of the group even if privately, they have problems or issues with the group.
- c. Social cascades. This, according to Sunstein is a product of the combination of informational and reputational signals where people tend to think believe or do things because of the beliefs or actions of “a few early movers”.

From all indications, the implication of the theories of conformity may work on the adolescent from two perspectives. The first being that the growing child who is exposed to good family upbringing may eventually tend to grow into deciding to feel or act according to the signals of the family; belong to the social order of the family and try to maintain the identify, reputation and beliefs of the family. On the contrary, where a child is denied of the benefits of good family grooming, the child is exposed to the dysfunctional impulses of the peers and corrupt external influences. The urge to feel, act, belong; or belief in these negative tendencies, and to conform to the negative groups; ultimately leads to an increase in the number of delinquent adolescents and youth in the society.

Specific Manifestations of Delinquency among Contemporary Nigerian Adolescents

The word delinquency generally falls within the domain of behaviour. It has been used variously to mean “behaviour disappointing beyond reasonable expectation”, “unacceptable social acts”, “a complex of sociocultural pattern of behaviour” or “anti-social acts of children and of young people underage”. Adegoke (2015) categorically states that delinquency and crime are related and they are used in reference to a child, teenager, a juvenile or youth. Anonymous (2021) states that

before a youth in Nigeria is classified a delinquent, he must have been arraigned before a juvenile court and proved to be guilty of some offences. Examples of such offences are habitual truancy, drug addiction, prostitution, stealing, cultism, armed robbery etc.

Though the list is inexhaustive, further examples of delinquent behaviours include:

- damage to private and public property.
- violence created in the society by using any means such as knives and guns.
- sex offences and activity like criminal assault and rape.

- traffic violations which include driving without license, drunk driving and similar offence.
- automobile theft and property thefts.
- bodily hurts and homicide.
- joining bad gangs like banditry and cultism.
- kidnapping.
- drug addiction, drug trafficking and abuse.
- fighting and bullying.

Family Care in Contemporary Nigeria and the Attendant Social Problems

Urbanisation is gradually eroding the care and attention which many Nigerian cultures give to the child. Many of the rural areas where the traditions are still kept are getting deserted daily owing to unconducive circumstances like the absence of social amenities, jobs, and in recent times, banditry attacks as well as the constant practice of rural parents sending their children to cities for begging. Unfortunately, getting to the urban centres does not help the situation. Poverty does not allow them to get access to the child care facilities that exist in the cities. So, the situation only gets worsened as the children become exposed to the criminal vagaries of the urban centres (American Academy of Pediatrics, 2019)

The Population Council an arm of UNFPA (2010, as indicated by United Nations Population Fund, 2021) reports on adolescents in Nigeria assume that adolescents live at least with one, or ideally, both parents. Though the presence of both parents does not ensure that a young person will have all the presumed benefits, the absence of one or both parents may call for concern. Adolescents living apart from one or both parents may be socially isolated, may not have economic capability to go to school. The Council's reports (2008) have it that, only 63.3% girls and 63.9% boys, aged 10-14 live with both parents. 11.4% girls and 11.2% boys live with fathers only and 16.9% girls and 13.6% boys live with neither the father nor mother. In the 2020s, the figures must surely have doubled for adolescents without parents.

As for the evolvement of adolescents in schools, the council (2008) reports that 33.5% female and 27.8% male children in Nigeria within the ages 6-17 are not in school. While 6.2% girls and 9.4% boys attended primary school, 47.1% girls and 58.1% boys had stopped at secondary education and only 1.6% girl and 1.3% boys proceeded to obtain higher education.

The Federal Ministry of Health in Nigeria (2011, as referenced by UNESCO, 2021) concludes that though adolescents are generally considered physically healthy, they are vulnerable to several unique health problems. These problems include early child bearing and unwanted pregnancies with its health consequences; high maternal and child mortalities, unsafe abortions Sexually Transmitted infections including HIV/AIDS, and sexual exploitation and abuse; risk taking activities, parasitic and water borne diseases and the use of alcohol and other harmful substances. For instance, adolescents are said to account for 40% of all maternal mortalities in Africa; between 1 and 1.4 million abortions in the region and in 2005 alone, 57% of HIV cases in the region.

The SOS Children Villages International (2017) reports that several factors make adolescents more vulnerable to the possible of suffering psychological problems, emotional maladjustments and psycho-social adaptation. Family history and complicities are part of the chief causes. Oliveira and Ramacciotti (2016) suggest that abuse of drugs, alcohol violence, loss and separations and socio-cultural factors such as poverty and contexts of violence may also serve as contributory factors.

In a survey conducted by Ajidahun (2011) to investigate the impacts of some psycho-social factors on the lives and behaviours of adolescents, it was discovered that there is significant relationship between poverty and adolescents' behavioural problems. Factors like inadequate feeding, lack of shelter, hunger and poor education encourage adolescents to misbehave. This position agrees with that of Akinbola (2004, as cited in Ajidahun, 2011, cited in Ofodile & Ofole, 2018) that adolescents deprived of basic necessities of life exhibit aggression and poor social dispositions. It was also discovered that there is a significant relationship between single parenting leading to improper child care and the emotionally stability of adolescents. This is in tandem with Furstenberg & Kiernan (2001, as cited in Hu, 2020) position that family needs to be intact for adolescents to experience the warmth and nurture of a loving family and that the family can become a source of stress as a result of divorce. (Mucanj and Xeka, 2015)

The Almajiri is supposed to be a system of Islamic education practiced in Northern Nigeria. The male child in this system is also called an Almajiri while the female child in it is called Almajira. Together, they are referred to as Almajirai. The name derives from the Arabic word "al-muhajirun", meaning someone who migrated from his home in search of Islamic knowledge (Mashema, Abdurrrhman & Yawale, 2018). The system has however been bastardized in Nigeria where it has become a social menace. Children now depart their homes and are put in the care of a Muslim cleric who use them to beg for alms. Hoechner (2014), reports that there are over 300,000 almajirai living in Kano city alone and that approximately 8.5 million children are directly or indirectly involved in the social malaise across the Northern part of Nigeria. Abubakar (2020) corroborated these views noting that though the objective of estabkishing the Almajiri system may be noble but the operation lacked supervision and resources. Consequently, the system produces cohorts of unskilled and vulnerable youth that could be lured to embracing radical Islamism and form easy recruits for violent extremism.

Conflict experts have come to the conclusion that the presence of vulnerable children in their thousands in cities where they are fighting ideological wars is a risk. This has fueled the suspicion that the Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria had been sustained as a result of a robust source of recruitment. The Almajirai system has produced a great number of vulnerable younger children who are susceptible to the antics of conflict promoters by mere promising them material rewards and, or psycho-social brainwashing (Nextier, 2020).

Rape and gender-based violence is another prevalent problem in Nigeria today. A World Bank Group (2019) reports that one in four girls (25%) and one in ten boys (11%) from the Northern part of Nigeria have experienced sexual violence. Akinlusi *et al* (2014, as also cited in Siraneh *et al*, 2021) that about fifty cases of rape and sexual violence are reported in Lagos hospitals on daily basis and in most of these cases, the adolescents are involved. Sexual assault of girls under the age of 13 is said to be of concern in some project areas where people take advantage of these vulnerable girls and violate them through sexual assault.

Baby factory, Baby Mama or juvenile parenting is another trending adolescent problem in Nigeria. Makinde, Olaleye, Makinde & Huntley (2017) remarks that baby factories and baby harvesting are relatively new terms that involve breeding, trafficking and abuse of infants and their biological mothers. Onuoha (2014, as cited by Alichie, 2021) refers to baby factories as all acts involved in the transfer, sale or receipt of babies within national or across international borders. Huntley (2013, as cited in Makinde *et al*, 2017) refers to it as criminal activities involving the restriction of a person's movement against his or her will forced impregnations, sale of babies and illegal adoption. Since this crime was first reported in a United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO, 2006) which was cited by Ifeakandu (2019). Several studies have indicated that the trend continues to grow in Nigeria. Unfortunately, some teenagers willingly participate in order to obtain some financial benefits (Alichie, 2021).

CONCLUSION

The family still remains the mainstay of the society and by extension the greatest agent of stability and sustainability of the societal values. Though other agencies may assist and be of complementary efforts in raising a child, a stable, peaceful and functional family still remains the best option for providing the needed care for the child.

From all available evidence, there now exists a wide gap in the traditional cohesion that used to be in the family structure in Nigeria. Families no longer perform their traditional role of bringing up the child and the contemporary Nigerian society is receiving the backlash of the stop gap in the family's failure to meet up its statutory role of child care.

RECOMMENDATION

Obviously, the rising cases of crimes like kidnapping, banditry, drug problems, prostitution, rape and sexual violence, armed robbery and similar problems confronting the society will be drastically reduced if more attention is paid to the provision of effective child care in the country. The government and all other agencies concerned with the reduction of crime and juvenile delinquency in Nigeria should look at the issues from the family point of view so that the problems may be nipped at the buds.

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