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EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL COUNSELLING: A PANACEA FOR MORAL DECADENCE AMONG ADOLESCENTS IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

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ABSTRACT
The moral decadence exhibited by government officials in Nigeria has gotten to an alarming stage. If this unwholesome attitude of government officials is not checked, it will become trend in the day to day running of government agencies, institutions and parastatals in Nigeria. The public rewards for bad behaviours have put Nigerian adolescents in a state of confusion to join the immoral cliques or not. Without doubts, it takes a solid home foundation and personal strong will to fight against immorality in today's society. And this is where professional counselling must meet adolescents to internalize moral development as part of their life in the larger society. The paper examined the conceptual views on adolescents and moral decadence, contextual mind frame of Nigerian adolescents, and professional counselling and moral decadence – fighting for the souls of Nigerian adolescents. The paper concluded that professional counsellors need to partner with teachers and educational institutions in ensuring that teaching and learning practices as well as educational activities are conducive for the preparation of morally developed adolescents that can contribute to the sustainable development of Nigeria.

Keywords: Effectiveness; Professional Counselling; Moral Decadence; Adolescence; Contemporary Society.

Introduction

Today's society keeps reminding humans on planet earth thatit is the age of rapid scientific innovations and technological transformation at exponential levels. The society as it is known today, is fueled by its own agents, which are, massive urbanization, unhindered globalization and penetration of advanced information communication and technologies. Evidently, urbanization, globalization and advanced information communication and technologies have overwhelming influence on the political, economic, cultural and even religious systems set up by individuals, families andnations. Consciously, the agents of modern societies are also changing traditional cultures, activities, pattern of living and values (Igba, Ofemikpi and Isu, 2016). This reality is a now a fact of life. The waves of urbanization, globalization and information communication and technologies are not in line with the old ways of doing things and traditional value system.

It is therefore, not surprising, that societies have lost control of their highly esteemed traditional compass, leading to the advent of moral

decadence in the land. Moral decadence describes the lousy relegation of morality among members of a society. Njoku and Njoku (2017) submitted that moral decadence is an act or behaviour which violates the norms and codes of a particular society. If moral decadence are accepted among members of a society under the guise of a "new world order" it will damage reputations of society and ruin lives of individuals. The question what is the way forward? Led to the development of this paper. To this end, the paper was designed to explore effective professional counselling, a panacea for moral decadence among adolescents in the contemporary Nigerian society. The paper is divided into five parts: conceptual views on adolescents and moral decadence, contextual mind frame of Nigerian adolescents, professional counselling and moral decadence – fighting for the souls of Nigerian adolescents, conclusion and recommendations.

Conceptual Views on Adolescents and Moral Decadence

The concept of moral decadence is better illustrated from the position of morality. Morality according to Tanaka (2014), refers to principles pertaining to right and wrong or good and bad behaviour. Morality is a system of principles and standards of society measuring what is good or bad based on the condition accepted by the people (Cherkowski, Walker, & Kutsyuruba, 2015). They further emphasized that morals vary from place to place, that is, what could be termed as wrong in one area may be different in another. Muraina and Ugwumba (2014) viewed morality as conforming to a set of conventional rules for determining one's social actions. One can infer that morality is the accepted code of conduct guiding the affairs of members of a particular society. Thus, the non-compliance to the morality of a society leads to moral decadence. Njoku and Njoku (2017) asserted that moral decadence involves any act or behaviour which violates the norms and codes of a society.

Moral decadence is an aggressive behaviour which defiles the established values in a given society (Gogo, 2020). Despite the advancement of societies rape, revenge, pornography, drug abuse, and sexual blackmail (releasing sex tapes), stealing and violence are descriptions of moral decadence. Adebisi (2018) posited that moral decadence is a decline in the moral values of individuals and society at large. It is rejection of laid down ethical values and norms by individuals and societies (Afuge, 2015). When good is no more attractive and bad is highly welcoming paints the picture of moral decadence. The fact that today's societies are moving on a fast pace puts the stage of adolescence in serious damage, if there are absence of adequate protection and guidance for adolescents as they walk into the dynamics of the land.

Adolescence is a developmental stage of human where body features and sexual sensitivity are on the increase. This dramatic observation of body features and sexual sensitivity are floods of hormonal activity and rapid physiological development that constitutes puberty (Susman, Dorn & Schiefelbein, 2003). In the years following puberty, adolescents are faced with the task of establishing their own identity separate from their parents (Kroger, 2007). At the same time, risky sexual and non-sexual behaviours among male and female adolescents are on the increase as they begin to observe the uniqueness of their bodies. The World Health Organization (WHO) (2012) defined an adolescent as a person between the ages of 10 to 19 years. According to *Dorn and Biro (2011)*, an adolescent is a person at the transitional stage of physical and psychological development that generally occurs during the period of puberty to legal adulthood. Adolescent is a young male and female human who does not want to be a child but not yet an adult.

Isangedighi in Ogundipe and Ojo (2015) opined that adolescents are teenagers experiencing a period marked with increased self-awareness,

increased sex drive and a period of development of self-identity. The hallmark of adolescence is that they want to act like adults and urgently demand freedom from their parents. Their early experimentation of adulthood in the contemporary society usually gets them depressed, horny, exhausted and confused. At this junction, without self-discipline and guidance from elderly ones, they fall into the wrong road of life. Idensi (2010) outlined the wrong life of adolescents to include academic underachievement in education, lack of respect for constituted authority such as rebellion, riots and cultism. Anti-social activities such as indecent dressing, bullying, smoking, stealing and immoral acts such as sexual abuse, homosexuality and lesbianism abound. At this point, the rivers of moral decadence are sweet and except a corrective event happens, there is no coming out of it.

Contextual Mind frame of Nigerian Adolescents

Many adolescents in Nigeria know that the country system is not designed to help them succeed. It gets disturbing when they see young Nigerians making waves in other nations because they are in a system that works. Every time, young Nigerians hear the news, there is a constant show of low moral standard and hypocrisy of the older generation. This gives rooms for adolescents to get themselves involved in moral decadence because being a morally bankrupt in Nigeria guarantees fame and success (Saheed, 2013). In fact, being a public nuisance leads to political appointments and public favours in Nigeria. Nigeria is composed of selfish and anti-progressive leaders who do not want development to leave the confines of their families. David Cameron, the former Prime Minister of United Kingdom famously stated that, "Nigeria is fantastically corrupt". Majority of adolescents in Nigeria are currently saying that "Nigeria's education is scam". When one explores their minds, they will quickly point to poor Nigerian graduates roaming the streets looking for jobs and fraudsters driving luxury cars and living the good life. Ironically, this is what Nigeria is today.

No wonder, stealing, prostitution, political thuggery, militancy and kidnapping are major sources of income in Nigeria (Sofadekan, 2016). Comprehensively, Adebisi (2018) submitted that moral decadence among adolescentsis blamed on the parents (for lack of proper up-bringing of their children) and the media (for exposing some critical scenes capable of polluting the innocent minds of the youths). Nigeria leaders as a result of their corrupt practices have contributed to the decay of morality in the society (Idensi, 2010).

Recently, the Director of the Niger Delta Development Commission dramatically slumped during a public legislative hearing due to the questions onthe status of the financial management of the commission. This event took another level when the Minister of Niger Delta was close to blowing whistles on the account status of the commission, Nigerians heard their elected lawmakers shouting, "it is okay" Honorable Minister, it is okay". It is in Nigeria that a government official claimed that snake swallowed millions of Naira. Ironically, these matters and other similar matters are swept under the carpet like it is nothing.

Nigerian adolescents are seeing a lot of these dramas on daily basis on social media and pages of newspapers and it gives them the reality check; "is Nigeria worth fighting for"? Alarmingly, there is already an established notion among Nigerian adolescents that, "since Nigeria is already bad, this corruption is turn by turn" and they just cannot wait to have a piece of the "national cake", that is, stealing Nigeria money into their individual's pockets. On the home front, family dysfunction has affected most Nigerian adolescents in the light of moral decadence (Njoku, 2015). Having a parent who is mentally ill, a substance abuser, or absent due to death or divorce opens them to moral decadence (Ime & Unwanaobong, 2014). Again, because of family hardship some

adolescents leave their homes and engaged in "street hustle," where boys are joining the internet fraud business, known as "Yahoo Yahoo" and the girls are chasing men for money to help themselves and their families.

Nowadays, Nigerian adolescents want to be rich as quick as possible through illegitimate avenues. Mere seeing their peers in schools or society driving cars and hanging out with beautiful girls have crushed their emotional, spiritual, and physical health making them wayward, disobedient and disrespectful to constituted authority. Majority of Nigerian adolescents find it difficult to resist the use of marijuana, cigarette and "Shisha" because of peer pressure. Most adolescents are having difficulty wearing clothes that actually covers their bodies. It is too tight, too short and too revealing because of mass media influence. In addition, even under the roof of their parents, the use of the internet, especially social mediahas exposed adolescents to pornographic films, nudity and morally insane standards that have damaged the morality of adolescents. In schools, cultism, smoking and excessive drinking are normalized. In some cases, some adolescents normally sneak out of campus to hang out with their gang. Furthermore, sexual promiscuity among young girls is on the increase to the point that some of them use charms and spells to succeed. On the contrary, adolescents yet to join them are called "Jews" because of their naivety and innocence.

Professional Counselling and Moral Decadence– Fighting for the souls of Nigerian Adolescents

Majority of Nigerian adolescents are in tertiary institutions where intellectual development is taken seriously than moral and character development. Education is complete when mental, characterand moral development are inculcated among learners. Moral education is fundamentally needed in today's society due to rapid degeneration of moral values (Mariaye, 2006). Thus, the synergy between moral education and professional counseling will inspire, propel, and equip adolescents with adequate skills, awareness, and values with which to create sustainable future. The reality is thatour educational system does not instill core values in students, and teachers do not or spend little time educating adolescents about morals. Outside tertiary institutions, hypocritical adults do not transmit moral qualities and values to adolescents. To this end building up the morality scale of adolescents become the duties of professional counsellors.

Professional counsellors help clients identify goals and potential solutions to problems which cause emotional turmoil (Patricia-Luciana, Adriana, Dorin & Elena-Liliana, 2013). According to Patricia-Luciana, Adriana, Dorin and Elena-Liliana, professional counselling is a psycho-socio-educational activity generally aimed at assisting persons in an appropriate way in solving problems. The humanistic orientation of professional counselling points to peoples natural inclinations toward growth and health (Perepiczka & Scholl, 2012). Inherent in professional counselling is the belief and understanding that people have the capacity to move forward, change, adapt, heal, and attain optimal mental health or wellness (Brady-Amoon, 2012). Here, effective professional counselling provides therapeutic relationship by trying to scale up the resiliency core of adolescents towards not losing their sense of morality in the society. The quest for public validation from strangers prevalent among adolescents in today's society can be reduced when professional counsellors focus on identity development programmes in the society. The essence of identity development is to teach adolescents to know who they are and where they fit in the world.

Professional counselling is defined by its emphasis on relationality, empowerment, social justice and wellness (Linwood, Nicole, Gloria & Victoria, 2014). Here, professional counselling must teach adolescents that personal and economic empowerment comes from within. The realization of the simple truth that adolescents can make

legitimate progress out of any given circumstance is the highlight of professional counselling. Effective counselling takes place when professional counsellors' subject adolescents to service learning packages. Service learning includes a variety of activities ranging from working in a car wash for charity, tutoring peers or nursing home (McLellan & Youniss, 2003). The self-control embedded in service learning will help adolescents learn how to identify problems in their own community and developed various strategies for dealing with these problems at a profit making basis. Service learning breeds local entrepreneurs in local communities thus making adolescents to view professional counselling as a path toward self-empowerment and community building.

Fighting the advent of moral decadence from the angle of family dysfunctionality, effective counselling takes place when professional counsellors' prioritizes providing socially stimulating activities among adolescents' within and outside educational institutions to teach them how to engage in legitimate works. Here professional counsellors provide job orientation in order to properly guide adolescents on the career they suit their interest, ability and capacity. Also, professional counsellors can solicit the assistance of formal and non-formal organizations to absorb adolescents based on their skills and abilities to reduce the negative impacts of family poverty and delinquency on adolescents in the society.

Professional counselling needs to be sensitive to varieties of contextual factors facing adolescents in the larger society. Professional counsellors must never ignore the powers of peer relations and the influential dynamics of social/mass media on the behavioural patterns of adolescents. Here, effective professional counselling must instill critical-thinking skills, problem-solving skills, perspective taking and decision-making skills among adolescents to enable them think for themselves. In addition, adolescents need to develop communication skills such as deliberation skills and listening skills among adolescents to feel not ashamed when morally bankrupt, adolescents are stereotyping them as "Jews". The obsession with materialism, compulsion for a short cut to affluence and quest for ill-gotten wealth by the general public demand that professional counsellors must build the self-esteem of adolescents so that they don't feel intimidated about this dangerous form of social exclusion from their peers.

Fighting the advent of moral decadence from the angle of government effective counselling takes place when professional counsellors build critical citizenship skills to enable adolescents gain insight into the way a democratic society functions. Here, professional counsellors must see to the development of positive attitudes and values, community involvement and open-mindedness among adolescents towards participating in a democratic society. The fact that political leaders are representatives of their people demands that professional counsellors must teach adolescents that their morality does not depend primarily on the maturity and ethical principles of hypocritical elders in their society.Hence, to control moral decay, the government themselves will portray good exemplar to the society because where there are well informed and morally conscious citizens the government will have no reasons to compromise the morality of the society.

Conclusion

Moral decadence is a global phenomena which is negatively affecting many societies including Nigeria. The contemporary Nigerian society is full of ritual killings, kidnapping, armed robbery, prostitution, internet fraud, bribery and corruptionwhich have made morality a thing of the past. Charity begins at home, parents should see themselves as agents of morality by emphasizing on things that are destructive to an adolescent's life. Outside the home, professional counsellors must assist adolescents in the context of legitimate

growth and developmental transitions from one stage of life to another without losing their sense of morality due to exposure to social media or peer groups in their societies. Since, tertiary institutions occupy a larger space of contemporary societies and adolescents seem to use the freedom in these institutions to engage in immoralities, the paper concluded that professional counsellors need to partner with teachers and educational institution maagers in ensuring that teaching and learning practices as well as educational activities are conducive for the preparation of morally developed adolescents that can contribute to the sustainable development of Nigeria.

Suggestions

The following suggestions were made:

1. Professional counsellors should build identity development among adolescents to enable them to understand the characteristics of different social groups in their environment to enable them detect immoral cliques in any society.
2. Professional counsellors, parents and teachers of religious education should work hand-in- hand with religious leaders to ensure that moral education and character development are taught at homes, schools and religious centres so that adolescents will be bold enough to say no to any form of immorality in the society.
3. Pastoral counsellors should build life-long skills among adolescents to help them monitor the increasing immoral materials circulating in the society with a view to saving them from moral decay.

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