

THE FAMILY, COUNSELLING AND VIOLENCE

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Abstract

This paper deals with the family, counseling and violence. It first defines the three terms: the family as "a composition of father, mother and the child or children". By extension, the family includes other extended relations like uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, nieces etc. Counseling is defined as "advice which an expert gives to someone as guide to solving a particular problem or reaching a goal". While violence is "behavior which is intended to hurt, injure kill people or damage properties". In all the family is regarded by many sociologists as the cornerstone of society, the basic unit of social organizational and it is hard to imagine how mankind could function without it. Every human being is born into a family from where development and maturation takes place through the efforts of father and mother and other adult members of the extended family, especially in a typically African home setting. The development and maturation of the child, particularly in character and behavior is principally a function of counseling. And the parents who are the first teachers of the child assume the role of counselors – counseling the child, especially teenager on norms and values of society. A youth who imbibes "value orientation" would view his years as a time of steady growth, free from personal confusion and the demands of others, for instance to engage in violence and organized crimes.

Introduction

The family is a social unit and it is the core foundation of mankind. The child and his parents constitute basically the nuclear family and nuclear families in the typical African setting constitute the extended family. Thus, the community, city and country are made up of people of various family backgrounds.

The task of socializing the child through stages of infancy, childhood, adolescence and adulthood is performed by the family. Thus socialization is a function of the family as well as educational, economic and emotional support to the child. Counseling is a veritable tool in the fostering of child-parents relationship. The knowledge or skills parents are able to transmit to their children depend basically on adequate utilization of their interaction. Where child-parents relationship is lax, the result is in the child becoming vulnerable to anti-social behaviors. Regrettably, some parents mislead their children by transmitting wrong ideas and beliefs to them. It is important to remark here that as much as the home and family may assist in internalizing knowledge and skill in the children, the constellation of ideas, beliefs and practices of parents may militate against such internalization. Thus, many children are unfitted for society by the teaching or lack of it, provided by the parents. (Bateau 1999).

Inadequate parenting, peer pressures and other factors engender criminality in children. Nigeria in contemporary times has witnessed increase in criminal and violent acts. Just as Wada (2012:17) put “it is alarming to discover that crime permeates every aspect of many Nigerian lives. This includes violent crimes such as cultism, aggravated robberies, kidnapping, carjacking and bank heists”.

Do you feel safe in your neighborhood? Have you or your family been affected by crime? Millions of people in Nigeria – even in states once considered relatively safe – admit to having a hunting fear of crime and violence. So endemic are violence and aggression to our society that it is now commonplace to hear in the news and view on the screens of televisions stories and scenes of violent acts involving loss of lives and destruction of property. Oheari (2012:21) says “now we are known for violence and bloodshed. I can’t remember the last time I saw our youths gainfully engaged in plucking groundnuts or picking kola. All they do now is carrying guns and bullets”. Oheari is describing the situation in Kano. It is not peculiar to Kano. They are there in the rest of the North of Nigeria and in fact West, East, and the Niger Delta. The effect is devastating. No solution is in sight, all we do is, with one corner of the mouth we condemn violence and with the order we make inflammatory statements capable of encouraging the dreaded monster – violence.

What is a Family?

The name is derived from the Latin word Familiar. Plant, animals, objects and humans belong to groups or families. In human context, a family is “a group of people affiliated by consanguinity, affinity or co-residencies” Cantor (1998:46). Many sociologists regard it as the cornerstone of society. It constitutes the basic unit of social organization and it is difficult to imagine how human society could function without it. Although a very important social unit, its composition varies from one society to the other. For example, in some societies, including Nigeria, a husband and a wife or two or more wives are regarded as the ideal arrangement. In other, the family unit often consists of a woman and her dependent children.

Generally, the family has its roots in mankind’s biological and physical nature. Thus the term family is universal in sense such that no human society could exist or has ever existed in isolation. Comson and Reeves (1995:64) defines family as “a group defined by a sex relationship sufficiently precise and enduring to provide for the procreation and up-bringing of children”. His view is supported by (Nwachukwu 2000) who says that what gives the family its character are children. And as a family or families exist there is bound to arise intimacy, personal relationships and all other affiliations and affinities that necessitate procreation, protection and educational i.e. transmission of inherited social norms and values to the children.

It is a universal concept that the family is regarded as the principal institution for socialization of children. This primary social unit can only perform this function favorably on children from infancy to the age when they become independent. More on socialization shall be explained under function of the family.

The structure of the family varies from society to society. Thus sociologists classify family as multifocal, conjugal, polygamous, and consanguine.

Classification of Family

1. MA trifocal: Another term for multifocal is matriarchal and it refers to female headed families. According to Murdock in Haralambos and Heald (2002:327). “MA trifocal families

are common in low-income Blacks communities in the New World. In the USA in 1971, 9% of all Black families were headed by women ... 45% of Black Carib families had female heads". This kind of family arrangement is no longer peculiar to the blacks in the Americans as it is assuming wider popularity in many other societies in recent times. In Nigeria for instance, many female – headed families are rapidly emerging, especially amongst the educated and elite ladies and women. Adebayo (2000:26) reveals that "ladies who have lasted too long in their spinsterhood or have suffered failed marriages start their families by making babies outside wedlock. They are females who are usually educated, holding high-profile jobs or doing good business or engaged in a viable means of livelihood". This trend is engendered by civilization which has weakened the traditional norms and values which would inhibit it. Because in the past it was inconceivable for an unmarried female to start a family.

2. **Conjugal:** This is also known as the nuclear family and it typically consists of a husband, a wife and their children to the virtual exclusion of all others. This is the common feature of family in the western societies but not practiced in African societies including Nigeria.
3. **Polygamous:** This is composition of two or more nuclear families by means of plural marriages. Thus, a man and his two or more wives including their children constitution this family.
4. **Extended Family:** Extended family otherwise known as 'kin group' is a unity of nuclear families consisting of uncles, aunts, cousins, nieces and nephews. Ezewu, Fasokun, Akpe and Oluduro (1988:27) explain "the typical extended family includes three generations who live in a single dwelling or closely adjacent households". This explanation may no longer assume wider acceptability because of the influence of civilization, urbanization, economic and other social pressures, for instance, proximity of residence is no longer considered an essential element in the structure of contemporary extended family, nor is high frequency of face – to –face contact a striking feature in recent times. Rogers in Ezewu, Fasokun, Akpe and Oludoro (1988: 27) presents a more realistic definition of the extended family typical to Nigeria, as "any grouping related to descent, marriage or adopted that is broader than the nuclear family". It does not really matter if modernity and other challenges affect their wider extra – familial contacts, but in times of needs or crisis such as marriage and burial ceremonies, celebration or serious disagreement etc., normal social interaction and co-operation apply for meetings and gatherings.

Similar to Rogers' idea of the consanguine (Extended) family is that of Murdock in Haralamos and Heald (2002:326) which states that extended families can be as "extensions of the basic nuclear unit, either vertical extensions – for example the addition of members of a third generation such as the spouses ..." it is significant therefore to say that in Nigeria the extended family system is the most popular and common family structure.

The focus of this study is on the family, counseling and violence: Violence is committed by mostly youths and in most cases sponsored by adults and these youths and adults belong to families. Here we shall consider the roles or functions the family plays in the upbringing of its members, especially counseling.

Functions of the family: Functionalist's theorists' contributions to the study of family have identified some basic and nearly universal family functions as:

- (a) Educational support e.g. primary socialization and support at school
- (b) Economic support e.g. provision of food, clothing shelter etc.
- (c) Emotional support of intimacy, companionship, belonging etc.
- (d) Socialization of child e.g. raising children, parenting critical to this study is the fourth function which is relevant to counseling.

Counseling: counseling according to mac Donald (2001:65) is "conventional processes that can be instrumental in the development of skills that help individuals effectively confront and cope with uncertainties and conflicts". Counseling thus provides the individual an opportunity to learn to make better decisions. Improve one's relationships, and generally increase personal effectiveness. This is a major aspect of parenting in the nuclear family structure in which the child especially the youth, with the help of his parents as counselors can explore feelings and express them better, examine beliefs, and work towards making healthy changes.

Children are born into families with the potential to be raised as humans. They will realize this potential if order family members take the time to protect and nature them into their cultural and social roles. For instance, fathers often serve as role models for their sons and mothers for their daughters in both simple and complicated ways. Today the family is considered universally as the core of primary socialization through which counseling becomes a key process. But many other societal institutions contribute to this process such as the school and counseling centers. In the case of a dysfunctional family, counseling centers offer an individual a chance to understand feelings and change behavior with the support of peers with similar concerns.

The Family as an Agent of Socialization: Sociologists view the family as the window of the child to the society. It provides for the Child's primary socialization and initial education. Idowu (1999:53) defines socialization as the "the process whereby an individual an individual is adapted to his social environment and is eventually recognized as both a co-operating and efficient member of it". Thus, the main duties of the family are the primary socialization of children and the stabilization of the adult personalities of the population of the society. Primary socialization therefore means socialization during the early years of childhood. Parents as the child's first teachers take greater responsibilities in molding the child in line with the norms and values of their immediate society. These cultural values are internalized in the child for desired results. According to Ochekpe (2001:65) "Primary Socialization entails two basic processes which are the internalization of society's culture and the structuring of the personality". In his views, society would cease to exist and social life would not be possible unless culture is internalized since norms and values are shared not inherited.

A child has to learn how to live in his family which is only a unit of the whole society. What a family will teach the child will depend on the cultural background of the family and in fact the society into which the family is subsumed. Aided by this, the child will learn some patterns of behavior, perception of reality and habits of thinking which are characteristic of the wider society and some of which are special of his family

Secondary socialization takes place in the later years of the child's development which is the problematic stage of personality development especially in the teenagers and adult youth. In this stage other agencies such as the peer group and the school exert increasing influence. It is important to remark that many children become social misfits as a result of wrong ideas, beliefs and practices transmitted to them by their parents who they in turn negatively impact to others in their peer group or in school. The concomitant effects manifest in the rising wave of cultism militancy, armed robbery, kidnapping, terrorism and violence.

At this point we may consider personality development as key in both primary and secondary socialization.

Personality Development: This is the most important aspect of socialization in the family which the child derives in achieving credibility in his relationships with other children, maturity in character and attitude, and obedience to laws and orders. Musgrove in Kambili (1997:32) is of the view that "it is the home and not the school that exert the real, prime and lasting influence on the child's character and if there is deprivation at home there will be some form of derivation in the child's personality". This aspect of socialization involves the development of social attitude, promotion of self-awareness as well as other awareness. It is through this socializing and personality process in the home that the child gradually comes to regard himself as one individual among many at the same time as having relationships with other individuals. Lack of this leaves the child empty and vulnerable to anti-social pressures and criminality. This socialization in the family is the beginning of the internalization of the culture of the family's society which will remain indelible throughout the individual's life.

The nuclear and extended families in the universal concept carry out all the function so far considered. The question is, if families discharge these functions why are crimes, violence, terrorism etc sponsored and committed by adults and youths who are products of families?

Violence: What is Violence? Violence is define by the World Health Organization (WHO) in Butlers (2006:36) as "the intentional use of force or power, threatened or actual, against a person or group or community that either results in or has a high like hood of resulting in injury, death, psychological harm, mal-development or deprivation". Terrorism is violence. Stern (2001) says terrorists use violence for dramatic purpose – instilling fears in the target audience. Awake (2006.4), citing the America Heritage Dictionary of the English language defines violence as "the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property, with the intention of intimidating or coercing societies or government, often for ideological or political reasons".

Which family, community, city or country has not been affected by violence? The world today is infatuated with violence. Let us at this point examine the effects of violence in the family, community, city or country.

Effect of violence

Violence within the home: This is otherwise known as domestic violence (DV). It is the most prevalent form of gender – based violence. This results when a man beats his wife. Besides, it typically occurs in psychological and physical assaults such as a battery, sexual abuse, marital rape, incest, dowry-related abuse, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices

Harmful to women and girls, non – spousal violence of son against mother and violence related to exploitation and deprivation of freedom. Situations like this lead to a family becoming dysfunctional.

Violence in the Community: Families make up a community. Therefore a typical community is a composition of adult males and females, the elderly, children, teenagers, and youths. Violence in the community is perpetrated by mostly teenagers and youths of especially loose and depraved families. Salongo (2006:72) writes “parents neglect is responsible for increase in number of youths with anti-social attitudes. Each year tens of thousands of families are torn apart, communities are sacked from their original locations, thousands of lives ruined and properties destroyed as a result of anti-social behaviors of the youths and their sponsors. In Nigerian states like Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Ebonyi, Abia, Bayelsa, Plateau, Benue, have many communities which are yet to recover from spates of violence that have ravaged them. Disagreements over oil and gas proceeds, communal boundaries, areas controlled by cultists, grazing ground for cattle and religious motivations are common triggers of violence in the affected communities.

Violence in the City: Statistics indicate that the poorer neighborhood of cities around the world are often high – crime areas. But are poor people really more violent? Or do they suffer more violence because their communities cannot afford good – quality law enforcement? The answer to both questions is yes. In Nigeria for instance, most cities have the highest population of residents around the slums and designated areas for low-income habitations. As more and more people squeeze into crowded cities, especially at the poorer communities and neighborhoods the levels of anger and frustration are likely to rise which in most cases result in involvement in violent-related crimes. Ekwesi (2003:34) writes, “Most criminals in the cities dwell in slums and densely populated neighborhoods which serve as their hiding places. Perhaps this could justify the action of governor’s Rotimi Amaechi of Rivers State and Babatunde Fashola of Lagos State for demolishing slums and water fronts in their state capitals of Port Harcourt and Lagos.

Cause of Violence: Causes of violence are many. Our environment is filled with potential triggers.

Anger: For someone with anger issues, even seemingly trivial matters can spark a violent outburst that brings consequences. Most domestic violent acts are caused by anger. Our parents have a profound influence on personality development of their children throughout childhood and adolescence: Mills (2010:26) explains “from a very early age, people learn to express anger by coping the angry behavior they see modeled around them, and children who have been exposed to it are more inclined to have anger problems as adults.

People get angry when they face barriers that limit their access to jobs, education, housing and other basic necessities. Also when injustice and comfort are scarce, anger can easily well up in one’s heart which likely burst into violence.

Greed: This means the thoughtless, me-just spirit that is ever present in our day. Greed is a negative trait those who have it can hurt, kill and destroy to achieve selfish ends.

Prejudice: Prejudiced people judge others unfairly and even discriminate against them on the basis of ethnicity, skin color, sex, social status or religion.

Hatred and Jealousy: Like prejudice some individuals with the trait of hatred and jealousy to violence against their enemies or opponents.

Depression and Despair: Some people resort to violence when they are oppressed, discriminated against, socially violated or economically deprived. For instance, the militant in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria gave deprivation as reason for their agitation.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse: Grossman (2004:42) say “substances abuse not only impairs physical and mental health but also inhibits controls centers in the brain”. A result is that a person under the influence may become more prone to violence and respond more aggressively to provocation.

Music: “My son’s music is full of angst and anger”, laments Denise, a mother, in *Awake* (2011:6). Many songs however have innocent lyrics. But Denise’s son, 17 – year –old Jordan complains “my parents’ music is totally boring”. While some songs have innocent lyrics, others either subtly or openly, approve of or even promote behavior that violates wholesome values. Disciplined and morally upright parents know that some musical genres are known for depravity, hatred and violence. Whatever, the case, music influences us, Ashley, 24 in *Awake* (2011:7) confesses “my teenage years were a blur of alcohol, drugs and violence, and the music that fueled it was heavy metal and rap. Since music exerts such a powerful influence parents and children are wise to be selective in the music they choose.

Mob Spirit: People in groups or mob seem to have fewer inhibitions against bad behavior. Why? Callahan (2003:11) answers “they are less aware of their own moral standards and are much more likely to respond to violent or aggressive cues”. Such individuals are mindless puppets, losing all the feeling of social responsibility, (Wohl 2001).

Entertainment Movies: Do television and other media violence impact children negatively? Steyer (2007:56) responds “A generation that been repeatedly exposed to intense, realistic violence grows up with more acceptance of aggression, less resistance to brutality, and, less compassion”. True, because when violence is glamorized on the screens of televisions and other social media most youths who are routinely exposed to them grow up to be vicious criminals.

Political Motivations: Our political atmosphere has been characterized by rancor and acrimony which has engendered political violence like thuggery, arson, kidnapping and murder. Losers of election egg on the youths to stage protests and destroy lives and property in the process. The politicians use the youth as fodder for their canon. In Nigeria many such violent acts occur before, during or after elections such as the post-election mayhem in the North that claimed the lives to many corps members and other citizens, after the presidential election that ushered in Dr. Good luck Jonathan as substantive president in 2011. Even the book *Haram* phenomenon which has now assumed religious coloration was initially reacting to the defeat of some northern politicians.

Relation: Religion is often linked to violence including sectarian violence and terrorism. Most of the violent disturbances, riots, protests and terrorism in the North of Nigeria are traced to religion and ethnicity. The wanton destruction of lives, churches and mosques, police stations, commercial buildings, the UN building, Suleija, Kaduna, Jos, Bauchi, Yobe, Abuja, Sokoto, Maiduguri, Okene etc. are linked to the book Haram Islamic insurgent group that is opposed to Western education. To them western is Christianity and is evil.

Ready Availability of Guns: Some sociologists theorize that ready availability of guns makes a society violent. Certainly, guns make violent people more dangerous. In Nigeria, investigations reveal that there is a proliferation of arms and ammunition due to unmitigated gun running.

Lax Criminal – Justice System: Weak, incompetent, or corrupt system of justice directly or indirectly promote violence. More on this shall be discussed under solutions of violence.

Youths and Violence in Nigeria

In Nigeria, like in many other countries, adolescents are peer group oriented. As they mature, they begin to rely less on their families and other adults. For some, it is time to turn to friends for values, norms and lifestyles. Youths often join cliques, gangs and other kinds of friendship groups. These groups give them a chance to share new experiences, exchange ideas and show loyalty, anger and love (Gomba 2000). In this youth culture, adolescents act their independence from adult authority.

However, while some youths in Nigeria imbibe societal values norms and lifestyle, others engage in activities that break the law. This group includes gangs of young people who most actively reject the values of the larger society. They engage in robbery, cultism, kidnapping, destruction of lives and property, militancy and terrorism. They are mostly addicted to drugs and alcohol under which influence they commit all kinds of atrocities.

Violence is almost a way of life in Nigeria. Religion, politics and ethnicity are major triggers of conflicts and violence in Nigeria, especially in the predominantly Muslim North. Plateau state for over two decades has continued to record more serious flashpoints. Kaduna, Benue, Kano, Bauchi, Yobe and Borno states are the worst hit areas in the North where lives are destroyed in hundreds, building including churches and mosques and police station, and vehicles burnt. In the south of the country the Warri/Ijaw crises in Delta State consumed many lives and many others rendered homeless. Others occurred in Ebonyi, Rivers, Ondo and Akwa Ibom States.

Academic and economic controversies also lead to violence by youths in the society. University students and labour unions equally stage protests that leave in their wake loss of lives and property.

Though some youth are often motivated by secular causes, they frequently engage in violent acts for religious reasons. For example the book haram insurgency in the North which has targeted Christians and churches. This fundamental Islamic extremist has caused the death of more than 1000 lives since 2010. Their activities have forced “some of the crop farmers and pastoralists to abandon their lands and relocate to the neighboring countries of Niger, Chad and Cameroun” Umar (2011:16). Others of course moved to the South of Nigeria as revealed by Onah (2012:36). “In March, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) said about 65 percent of Northern farmers had migrated to the south because of insecurity”. What this

Means is a looming countryside food crisis. Of course the agency had warned that the country faced a famine by the end of 2012 as a result.

The country is still counting its losses from the violence in the south – south where some of the youths took arms against the government towards the end of the last decade. Oil and gas installations were their main targets leading to huge loss in revenue earnings. Insecurity reigned in the land, many lives were lost, villages and communities sacked.

Solution of Violence

Is crime racing out of control? No matter where you live in Nigeria, everyday seems to bring in another crop of lurid crimes. It is therefore pertinent to ask: are present deterrents – stiff penalties, prison terms and so on, actually working? To Braithwaite (2006:64) “prisons are schools for crime”. His view is supported by same now (2006:13) who says “in prison, a person has sample time and opportunity to learn how to be a better criminal. Some in fact do become more successful criminals, immersing themselves heavily in crime...” With these prisons then become finishing schools for criminals, inadvertently helping them to hone their anti-social skills. Same now (2006:35) further states that “criminals chose to commit crimes. Crime ... is caused by the way the person thinks not by his environment. Everything we do is preceded, accompanied who followed by thinking, those who engage in violence are victimizers who have freely chosen their way of life. The views of the above writers are criticized by Callahan (2003:18) who points that “once a criminal does not mean always a criminal. Just as a person may have chosen a life of crime, so he or she can make choice in new direction and learn to lead a responsible life”. This may be credible to the fact that experience has shown that majority of people with all kinds of backgrounds can change.

Law breakers avail themselves of opportunities in the prisons to learn skills which many utilize as they regain freedom. Regular visits of religious people to the prison assist in proselytizing many inmates, making them have a turning point.

In view of the many forces that advocate or glorify violence, it is possible to achieve meaningful solutions to the malaise. Violence, however, is preventable. Scientific research shows that strategies addressing the underlying causes of violence can be effective in preventing it. Examples of scientifically certified strategies to prevent violence include,

- Parenting education to foster parent – child relationships
- Life skills training for children aged 6-20 years
- School – based programmers to address gender norms and attitudes.
- Reducing alcohol availability and abuse though enactment of liquor licensing laws,
- Reducing access to guns and knives
- Supporting the economic empowerment of youths.

The youths constitute majority of the Nigeria populace as shown by statistics and they are the leader of tomorrow. Despite the fact that the Nigerian government has a major role to play, preventing violence in the youths is the responsibility of all, to make Nigeria a violent free society.

Conclusion

Today, we are bombarded by violent imagery from bomb blasts and sporadic shooting resulting in pillage of victims’ bodies for mass burial, destroyed houses of worship, mangled and burnt vehicles. This is the effect of terrorism in Nigeria. Other violent and heinous crimes are

Committed by hired assassins, kidnappers, armed robbers, ritualizes, cultists, ramping campus students and areas boys'. Domestic violence involves results in wife battery, death, or divorce. At the Centre of all this are the youths. Youths who are the breakers of the law, who attach no importance to the norms and values of society? Even though violence may be triggered by a number of elements, its primary roots lie within us. We feed such inclinations when we repeatedly look at, listen to or think about bad things. Counseling is considered veritable for personality development and reform. Quality control measures in the family and other institutions concerned with youth training and empowerment should intensify effort toward curbing youth's involvement in violent crimes.

Suggestions

- Good home training by parents or guardians
- Smooth and better access to quality education for all
- Intensified surveillance and enforcement of laws
- Good example by the nation's leaders.
- Reinforced advocacy on societal norms and values.
- Finding a solution to the nation's economic challenges.
- Empowerment of youths through employment and soft loans for self-reliance.
- Social welfare package for youth awaiting employment.

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