

Prevalence of Moral Decay among Nigerian Youths: Implications for Quality Leadership

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Abstract

This study investigated moral decay among Nigerian youths and its implications for quality leadership. Specifically, the study investigated various aspects of moral decay like tendency to sexual perversion, tendency to substance use and indecent dressing. The descriptive survey design was adopted and three research questions were formulated to guide the study. The sampling technique was stratified random sampling. Out of twelve faculties in the University of Calabar, seven were used for the study. The population of the study comprised of 8240 year two undergraduate students. The instrument used for data collection was a fifteen-item questionnaire, which was administered to a sample of 412 undergraduate students in the University of Calabar. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics. The result showed that there was low moral decay in terms of sexual perversion, substance abuse and indecent dressing among students in the university. It was recommended that moral education should be emphasized and fully articulated at all levels of the school system. The moral atmosphere should be created in the home, school and classroom. Moral orientation of teachers and school administrators should be enhanced to ensure that they are morally upright and fit to inculcate moral values on students.

Keywords: Moral, decay, Sexual, perversion, Substance, Indecent, dressing.

Introduction

The issue of moral decay in the society calls for serious concern. The youths of today are the leaders of tomorrow; they are therefore expected to be law abiding, uphold the values and cultural norms of the society, show leadership qualities in the way they dress and conduct themselves. Unfortunately, many youths today do not show respect to elders, and the laws that govern the nation. Youths engage in various forms of antisocial vices, ignoring the religious and cultural values meant to make them morally sound individuals. It is no doubt that vices among youths have taken the place of sound moral values in the society.

Moral decay has become a ravaging phenomenon that is responsible for some of the societal ills. The youths of today have lost the consideration of what the future will look

like and what they could do to contribute their quota to the development of the country. Moral decay in Nigeria has reduced youth to mediocre, and their shameful deeds are rewarded with encomiums and recognition. Nudity is now celebrated and mistaken for fame, while skimpy dresses are now regarded as dress code for events, the musical industry now promotes sex with the dressing and the lyrics of their songs. Many girls are now regarded as fashion icons when they expose their body in events and social media.

The boys now wear their trousers below the buttocks and are termed the “big guys”, while educational institutions that were meant to inculcate moral values have become fertile grounds for cultism. Religious institutions are not left out, as they have been infiltrated by fake and diabolic “prophets” whose pre-occupation is to prophesy doom and dupe vulnerable members. The worrisome situation is that if the educational and religious institutions are not able to eradicate this decay, what then will be the hope.

Many youths in Nigeria engage in different sexual activities. They get involved in kissing, breast and genital fondling, embracing, holding hands and sexual intercourse (Luck, 2003). Barnett, Maticka-Tyndale and Team (2011), Kaufman and Slavou (2004) reported the prevalence of exchanging sex for money or gifts in sub-Saharan Africa. Other studies have revealed a high prevalence of youth involvement in sexual activities (Fehringer, Babalola, Kennedy, Kajula, Mbwambo & Kerrigan, 2013; Maganja, Maman, Groves & Mbwambo, 2007). Oba, Ajake and Obinda (2013) observed that students' unwanted behaviour has outweighed good morals such that their contributions as students have no impact on character formation.

Another case of transactional sex where youths were involved in exchange for gifts and money was reported by Amnesty International (2008). Leach (2006) maintained that most adolescent male partners, despite the physical and emotional harm, still involve in sexual escapades. Olagunju (2013) revealed in a study on social media and adolescent sexuality that over 67% of youths who responded to the questionnaire watched pornographic materials on TV in the last three months, while two third had sexual intercourse outside marriage. Olagunju (2013) stressed that in most parts of Africa, girls are not empowered socially or economically to be able to refuse sex from opposite sex partners. However, youths get a higher percent of misinformation from each other about sexual activities. Most boys try to encourage other boys to be sexually active even when they are not ready or show interest in sexual matters.

Ajaye and Somefun (2019), in a study on transactional sex among Nigerian university students using 630 students as study sample, found out that university students receive money, gifts or favour in exchange for sex. When youths get close to their peers, it creates a force for intimacy and tendency to stick to partners of opposite sex. Youths tell their friends about their sexual escapades and convince them how much fun sex could

be, and therefore encourage those not previously involved, to experiment it. Youth's tendency to sexual perversion is on the increase in the society. Many youths experience sex with people of same sex or with multiple partners. Lau, Markham, Lin, Flores and Chacko (2009) carried out a study on dating behaviours and sexual attitudes of Asian American youths, using 31 adolescents between the ages of 14-18 years old from a Houston community center, and discovered that almost three quarter of adolescents were involved in sexual perversions without the knowledge of parents. Regmi, Teijlingen, Simkhada and Acharya (2010) supports this assertion as the findings of their study on dating and sex among emerging adults in Nepal, using a sample of 74 participants, revealed that youths involve themselves in dating which created environment for pre-marital sex.

Garda, Reiber, Massey and Merriwether (2012) revealed a high prevalence of sexual perversion among youths, ranging from kissing, oral sex and penetrative intercourse. He argued that these encounters always take place without any promise of or desire for a more committed relationship, youths tend to manipulate others' perception of their sexual behaviour, they carry out romantic activities in the open, and have gradually made it a lifestyle. Youths also engage in different illicit relationships using a number of colloquial expressions to describe their uncommitted sexual behaviour, including labels like "no strings attached sex," "casual encounters" and "one-night stand" (Hoff & Beougher, 2010). Zablotska, Frankland, Prestage, Down and Ryan (2008) studied gay man and found out that 30% of men had a regular monogamous relationship partner, 23% had both a regular (open relationship) partners and partners with whom they have casual sex.

Another dimension of moral decay that has been on the increase in recent times is tendency to substance use among Nigerian youths. The record of drinking episodes in Nigeria is alarmingly high, and calls for concern (Dumbili, 2015). Reports from the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC, 2010), revealed that about 5 percent of the world population used an illicit drug in 2010, and 27 million people, or 0.6 percent of the total adults are classified as the problem drug users.

A similar report from United States Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services and Administration showed that in 2012, approximately 173,654 subjects aged above twelve years used tobacco products, 111,239 used marijuana and hashish, and 78,034 used illicit drugs other than marijuana and hashes in their lifetime.

Johnson, O'malley, Miech, Bachman and Schulenberg (2016) reported that most youth engage in drinking alcohol than smoking cigarette or using marijuana. According to them, more than three out of ten youths were reported to engage in alcohol drinking. The extent of moral decay with regard to substance use is becoming overwhelming; most parents have lost control over their children's misbehaviour. From personal

observation, many youths use illicit drugs publicly without any form of fear. National Institute on Drug Abuse (2003) reported that by the 12th grade in high school, about half of the adolescents have used an illicit drug at least once, and the most commonly used drug is marijuana.

On the aspect of indecent dressing, youths appear to have departed from the traditional way of dressing; they dress in clothes that are revealing and not modest. Most female youths are seen dressing half nude, wear tight trousers, skimpy skirts and blouses that reveal their stomach, and part of their chest. They wear body hugs which reveal most of their body contours and frames, they wear “see me through” dresses and trousers that leave their waist and buttocks partly open. The boys wear trousers of different sizes and length that are “jump up”, tight and torn (Olori, 2003). This pattern of dressing is not limited to a particular class of youths; it is typical of many youths not minding the socio-economic class and educational level.

Unfortunately, indecent dressing has become a pattern of dressing for most youths. Omede (2011) reports that many girls dress seductively, leaving much to be desired. Some wear skirts that are no inch longer than their pants, and as a result they find it difficult to cross gutters, pick things on the floor. The boys on the other hand look dirty, and unattractive, with unkempt hair, dirty, with their jean ripped, and pockets hanging around like mad people.

Olori (2003) reported a scenario in the University of Abuja where students neglected rules on dressing to cover all body parts as stipulated by the University. Egwim (2010) define indecent dressing as the style of someone, male or female, that dresses to expose private body parts or underwear. Olori (2003) described indecent dressing as improper, unacceptable and morally offensive. Omede (2011) stressed that most youths found on university campuses engage in prostitution and commercial sex to be able to sponsor and sustain themselves in school. From the literature review, the researcher has found a high prevalence of moral decay among youths with regard to tendency to sexual perversion, tendency to substance use, and indecent dressing. The present study therefore aimed at providing new insights on these adequately studied issues by assessing the implications for quality leadership, bearing in mind that the youths are the future leaders.

Research questions

1. What is the extent of youths display of sexual perversion?
2. What is the extent of substance use among youths?
3. To what extent do youths dress indecently?

Methodology

The descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The researcher used this design because it gathers information about issues that bothers on daily living. The population

of the study is eight thousand two hundred and forty (8240) year 2 undergraduate students from the University of Calabar. The sample consists of 412 students being 5% of the entire population. The instrument used for data collection was a self-designed questionnaire, titled Moral Decay Questionnaire (MDQ). It comprised two sections; Section A consists of three items designed to elicit responses on demographic variables; while Section B was designed with fifteen items, with a four point likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD), to measure the three aspects of moral decay. The questionnaire was administered by the researcher to the students in the University of Calabar. The instrument was scrutinized by experts in Measurement and Evaluation and Educational Psychology, in the University of Calabar. For the reliability of the instrument a pilot study was done with fifteen students who are not part of this study. Using Cronbach alpha approach, the reliability yielded coefficient of 0.76 for tendency to sexual perversion, 0.73 for tendency to substance abuse, and 0.79 for indecent dressing. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics. Based on the responses by the subjects in each of the items, the number of subjects that strongly agreed were multiplied by 4 while those that agreed, disagreed and strongly disagreed were multiplied by 3, 2, and 1 respectively. The mean score was obtained by dividing the total score for each item by the sample size.

Presentation of results

Research question one: To what extent do youths display tendency to sexual perversion?

This research question was answered using descriptive statistics. Responses were grouped into four (Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD)) based on their responses to items 1 – 5 of Section B of the research instrument. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Tendency to sexual perversion

S/n	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
1.	I love hanging out late with the opposite sex	23 (5.6%)	82 (19.9%)	136 (33.0%)	171 (41.5%)	1.90	.91
2.	I have many intimate relationship with the opposite sex	40 (9.7%)	80 (19.4%)	116 (28.2%)	176 (42.7%)	1.96	1.01
3.	Having sex with more than one partner is fun	50 (12.1%)	58 (14.1%)	70 (17.0%)	234 (56.8%)	1.82	1.08

4. Having more than one opposite sex partner is profitable	77 (18.7%)	51 (12.4%)	53 (12.9%)	231 (56.1%)	1.94	1.20
5. There is no harm in kissing/hugging an opposite sex	65 (15.8%)	159 (38.6%)	97 (23.5%)	91 (22.1%)	2.48	1.01

The results as presented in Table 1 showed that the responses ranged from 23 representing 5.6% for those that strongly agreed that they love hanging out late with opposite sex to 234 representing 56.8% for those that strongly disagreed that having sex with more than one partner is fun. The results on the table 1 indicate that tendency to sexual perversion among youths is not high with regard to all the dimensions of tendency to sexual abuse, except for the item “there is no harm in kissing/hugging the opposite sex” which was fairly high.

Research question two: What is the extent of substance abuse among youths?

This research question was answered using descriptive statistics. Responses were grouped into four (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree) based on their responses to items 6-10 of Section B of the research instrument. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Tendency to substance abuse

S/n	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
6.	There is no harm in smoking some sticks of cigarettes	22 (5.3%)	39 (9.5%)	72 (17.5%)	279 (67.7%)	1.52	.87
7.	Drinking of a lcohol with friends is fun	25 (6.1%)	83 (20.1%)	79 (19.2%)	225 (54.6%)	1.78	.97
8.	I love the taste of indian hemp	17 (4.1%)	28 (6.8%)	86 (20.9%)	281 (68.2%)	1.47	.80
9.	Cocaine makes me feel high	13 (3.2%)	29 (7.0%)	51 (12.4%)	319 (77.4%)	1.36	.75
10.	Depressants like volume 5 are good for relaxation	16 (3.9%)	39 (9.5%)	90 (21.8%)	267 (64.8%)	1.52	.82

The results presented in Table 2 showed that the responses ranged from 13 representing 3.2% for those that strongly agreed that cocaine makes them feel high to 319 representing 77.4% for those that strongly disagreed that cocaine makes them feel better. The finding indicates that youth tendency to substance abuse was low with regards to all the dimensions of tendency to substance abuse.

Research question three: To what extent do youths dress indecently?

This research question was answered using descriptive statistics. Responses were grouped into four (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree) based on their responses to items 11 – 15 of Section B of the research instrument. The results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Indecent dressing

S/n	Statement	SA (%)	A (%)	D (%)	SD (%)	Mean	SD
11.	I love wearing trousers below the buttocks	11 (11.2%)	44 (10.7%)	46 (11.2%)	276 (67.0%)	1.66	1.05
12.	Wearing transparent dresses makes me feel good	19 (4.6%)	53 (12.9%)	51 (12.4%)	289 (70.1%)	1.52	.89
13.	Wearing skimpy dresses is in vogue	17 (11.7%)	75 (18.2%)	65 (20.9%)	224 (54.4%)	1.87	1.09
14.	I see nothing wrong with wearing ripped jeans	25 (6.1%)	87 (21.1%)	51 (12.4%)	200 (48.5%)	1.85	.96
15.	Having multi-coloured hair makes me feel special	33 (8.0%)	50 (12.1%)	90 (21.8%)	257 (62.4%)	1.66	.98

The results as presented in Table 3 showed that the responses ranged from 11 representing 11.2% for those that strongly agreed that they love wearing trousers below the buttocks to 289 representing 70.1% for those that strongly disagreed that wearing transparent dresses makes them feel good. This implies that there is a low prevalence of moral decay among youths with regard to indecent dressing.

Discussion of findings

The finding of this study revealed that tendency to sexual perversion among youths is not high with regard to all the dimensions of tendency to sexual abuse, except for the item “there is no harm in kissing/hugging the opposite sex” which was fairly high. This finding was in disagreement with findings of previous studies of Luck (2003), Ajayi et al. (2005), Lau, Markham, Lin, Flores and Chacko (2009), Garda, Reiber, Massey and Merriwether (2012). All these studies revealed that sexual perversion is on the increase among youths ranging from kissing, sexual intercourse and other romantic activities.

The study also showed that youth tendency to substance abuse was low with regards to all the dimensions of tendency to substance abuse. The outcome of this findings imply that moral decay with regard to tendency to substance use is not high, The present study contradicts the findings of Dumbili (2015) and Johnson et al. (2016). They revealed that the extent of moral decay in the area of substance abuse is very alarming.

In the area of indecent dressing, it was also revealed that there is a low prevalence of moral decay among youths with regard to indecent dressing. This contradicted the findings of Olori (2013) and Omede (2011) whose studies indicated that indecent dressing amongst youth was on the increase.

Implication for quality leadership

It is easy for leaders to confront challenges facing them by ensuring that they have no moral deficit. Morally just leadership encapsulates transparency, and induces followership; quality leadership holds the key that unlocks the door of transformation in any society, therefore, leaders must be morally just to be able to make and sustain laws that are representative and promotive of a morally healthy society. By implication, until youths begin to think leadership, become morally transformed, and become trees that can provide shades for the despair, then the quest for quality leadership that could curb moral decay among youths will remain a mirage.

Conclusion

The study revealed a low prevalence of moral decay among youths in Nigeria in all the dimensions except as it concerns tendency to sexual perversion with regard to kissing/hugging an opposite sex partner, with intriguing implications for quality leadership. With youths developing idealism and ability to think in more abstract and hypothetical ways, youths may become immersed in a mental world far removed from reality when they indulge in sexual perversion, substance use and indecent dressing. They may see themselves as omnipotent and indestructible, and believe that bad things cannot or will not happen to them. Indulgence in these negative activities such as sexual perversion, substance use and indecent dressing could lead to negative consequences such as sexual harassment and pregnancy for girls; it can also result to sexually transmitted diseases, youth involvement in crime and high school dropout and even death. A person who is

morally bad will not have a good sense of judgment and therefore cannot be a good leader. The problems created by the various aspect of moral decay discussed above will be serious nightmare to the progress and quality of leadership in a nation.

The combination of sexual perversion, substance abuse and indecent dressing will be serious distractions for the youths who are supposed to be leaders of tomorrow and eventually distort and dislocate their thought process, making the youths ill-equipped for quality leadership.

Recommendations

1. Moral education should be emphasized and fully articulated at all levels of the school system. The moral atmosphere must be created at the home, school and classroom; moral orientation of teachers and school administrators should be encouraged to better prepare them for the task of inculcating moral values to students.

2. Character education should be emphasized at all levels of education in Nigeria.

3. Parents and significant others should help their wards to develop moral character. This they can achieve by helping their wards to develop strong conviction, resisting and overcoming distraction and obstacles. A child without strong moral character can easily yield to negative pressures.

4. There is need for parents and teachers to enhance moral identity of their wards, this will involve three things: (i) develop their will power (self-control), (ii) integrity and (iii) their moral desire.

5. Parents and teachers should be models for good moral character and ethical behaviour.

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