

## ***The Menace of Cultism and Moral Development of Students in the University of Benin: Implications for Behavioural Counselling***

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### **Abstract**

*This study sought to unravel the nexus between the menace of cultism and moral development of students in the University of Benin, with its corresponding implications for behavioural counselling. A sample of two hundred and fifty two (252) undergraduates was selected from the six faculties in the University of Benin through stratified random sampling techniques. The data collected through the questionnaire were subjected to analysis using the chi-square statistical technique. Analysis revealed that secret cult activities affect the moral development of male and female undergraduate students, that perception of 100 level students is not different from that of 400 level students on the relationship between secret cult activities and moral development, among others. Based on these findings, the researcher draws a caveat and recommends that there should be extensive functional counselling units in all the faculties and hostels of students in the University of Benin.*

**Keywords:** Secret Cult, Moral Development, Undergraduates, Counselling, University, Benin

### **Introduction**

Nigerian tertiary institutions have been facing embarrassing problem of cult related activities, hitherto, unknown in the country's history. From the intermittent killing of students to destruction of lives and properties in the campuses. Alutu and Ojiyi (2017, p. 223) attested to the above fact when they stated that

One of the most embarrassing problem facing tertiary institutions in Nigeria today is the menace and aggressiveness of cult groups and cult activities... the emergence of the destructive secret cult activities on the campuses of our higher institutions has been described as mind boggling, irritating, distasteful and disgusting. Being one of the greatest anti-social crimes committed in the institutions of higher learning in the country, it is sometimes labelled as an epitome of moral

decadence thus affecting academic and moral development which in turn presents a bad impression or perceptions about the credibility and integrity of our noble universities.

Similarly, Inyang (2017, p.2) corroborated the above view when he stated that “cultism is one of the major vices confronting the Nigeria educational sector today. The activities of these groups have caused the deaths of many (members and non-members inclusive). Secret cult groups are rampant in higher institutions in the country and have become a smear on the proper development of the Nigerian Youths”. In the same vein, Onwuemeodo and Nwosu (2015, p.1) noted that “Nigerian higher institutions are the havens for secret cult (cultism) activities. Hitherto very secret, the membership and activities of the cults are known and pervasive and contumacious. The devilish activities of the cults in higher institutions are one of the greatest evils of campus life. There is no existing institution of higher learning that has not experienced the menace of cultism for one time or another.”

The characteristics of these groups include but not limited to torture, advanced fee fraud, making painful inscriptions on the bodies of new members, voodoo ritual practice, drinking of human blood and urine, taking of hard drugs, holding meetings in unconventional places such as cemeteries, forests, river side, indecent dressings, intimidation of others, sexual assault, illegal possession of firearms, violent crime like armed robbery, illicit sexual escapades, killing of innocent students, academic and non-academic staff, Arson, rape, extortion, threats, physical attacks, blackmail, factional struggle and war of supremacy and so on. Activities of cults are a sort of derailment from what started as a forum to awaken socio-cultural consciousness of our elite to fight oppression, racism and colour discrimination; has been painfully bastardized, due to various factors (Inyang, 2017,p.4; Jekayinfa, 2010). The menace of cultism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria has elicited explanations from scholars. For instance, Ajayi, Ekundayo and Osalusi (2010) examined the Menace of Cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions. They observed that cultism is a ritual practice by a group of people whose membership, admission, policy and initiation formalities as well as their mode of operations are done in secret and kept secret with their activities having negative effects on both members and non-members alike.

Similarly, Onwuemeodo and Nwosu (2015) investigated cultism in Nigeria tertiary institutions and its effects on National Development. They insisted that cultism has been a menace in our society especially in the Nigerian higher institutions. In pursuance of the objectives, they identified the cause, effect and way out of cultism in our tertiary institutions, related literature was reviewed which revealed that some of the causes and effect include to gain respect and recognition, societal frustration, admission of ill qualified students, deprivation, hopelessness, and others. In view of

the above findings, Onwuemeodo and Nwosu (2015) recommended that (i) the government should equip the tertiary institutions with crime detectors instruments in strategic places and emotional stability of students tested before admission. (ii) Religious bodies and government and nongovernmental organization should organize seminars, conferences, youth camps to teach them the ills of cultism. All these would reduce the practice of cultism in our tertiary institutions.

Also, Nebo (2004) in a presentation titled “cultism in Nigerian Higher education institutions” submitted that in spite of all the frequent and shameful deaths of students cultist, many students still join the cults and that perhaps the main reason these cults still get new members is that they hold mouth-watering attractions to the unsuspecting students most of whom are usually new on the campus, whereas the danger and actual implications of memberships is, however, never mentioned. He opined that some students may be told that it is an opportunity to belong to a higher status and then to gain recognition. The cults promised to offer power, security and protection. Moreover, the activities of the secret cult’s smell of danger can be summed up using the acronym HARRM, which depicts Hit, Association, Robbery, Rape and Meetings.

Furthermore, Falaye (2008) in his paper titled “the role of students and staff in eradicating cultism in tertiary institutions”, presented during the national stakeholders’ workshop on the eradication of campus cultism held at the Trenchard hall, University of Ibadan, also expressed shock on the activities of secret societies in our institutions of learning which have far reaching implications on denting the image of our tertiary institutions before the international community. He observed that the waves of cultism in our tertiary institutions have often resulted in their long closure thereby truncating academic activities and calendars. He further stressed that the problem is further aggravated by attendant loss of lives and property and other heinous and criminal activities.

Amadi (2008) on his own part, discusses the factors sustaining cultism in Higher Institution in Edo State. He stressed that there are so many effects which include disruption of school calendar, restriction of movement for fear of death, robbery in the campuses, rape etc. He further noted that secret cult can be described as a set of persons or group with an identical purpose or aims which are usually in conflict with the accepted norms of the society and whose procedure of entry into the groups, meetings and overall agenda are not revealed to the public but only to the members and sometime sensitive issues involving special operations or activities are revealed only to the need to know members and not to all members.

Efinzuagha and Evboboru (2005) described cult as a group which is organized around a set of belief and rituals. Cult exhibits excessive dedications to some persons (capons), idea or things that employs or use dishonest manipulative techniques of persuasion and control designed to advance the goals of the group leaders and ideology. This is done to the detriment of members, families and the community at large. Maliki (2011) as well investigated Family size and undergraduates' attitude towards cultism and the implication for counselling. She observed that the activities of secret cult on Nigerian University Campuses has taken a horrendous and worrisome dimension with many criminal activities including murder, arson, armed robbery and rape frequently linked to their members. To that extent therefore, many of the purported cultists are actually gangsters or members of crime syndicates hiding under the umbrella of certain secret cult or societies, she added.

More so, Oluwatobi and Babatunde (2010) examined the issue of cultism and gansterism in Nigerian tertiary institution, with focus on Adeniran Ogunsanya College of Education, Oto-Ijanikin and Lagos State University, Ojo as case study. The study observed that the current aggressive tendencies and violent behaviours of Nigerian students were investigated; the genesis, causes and their effect on moral development of the learners were equally considered. One hundred students (100), 50 from each institution, were selected for the study. The findings reveal that those cults and gangsters' activities in the two campuses and other tertiary institutions in Nigeria is an epitome of moral decadence thus, affecting their academic and moral development. Therefore, the study draws a caveat that if hands are not on deck to wage war against these two virulent school diseases, Nigerian institutions will constantly nurture and breed indiscipline people. The study recommends that parents should be made to sign a deed of undertaking before their children could be admitted in school, the school security department should be equipped with modern and sophisticated security gadgets, universities and colleges should established a well equipped guidance and counselling unit and that Religious Education as a core subject should be made compulsory.

Ogunbameru (2004) explored how socio-biology can be used to explain personality vis-à-vis cult membership. The paper addressed such questions as: Does nature alone account for personality? or is it nurture alone?; or a combination of the two? The paper reviewed relevant theories of personality, and examined the influence of nature and nurture on personality development and secret cult membership in Nigerian tertiary institutions. He concludes that an individual's personality is the product both of inherited traits and tendencies. Inherited genes influence behaviour, however, the environment (i.e the culture in which we are raised, our early

conditioning, the norms among our family, friends, social groups, and other influences that we experience) is a factor that exerts pressures on our personality formation that may influence participation in cultic activities.

Alanamu, Olanrewaju and Muhammed (2018), on their own part, looked at the impact of religion in combating the demented acts of cultism in Nigerian schools, using Islam and Christianity as the basis. They observed that religion dictates to its followers basic values intended to guide people towards living an ideal life-style. In Nigeria, there are two dominant religions. These are Islam and Christianity. To these writers' minds, the two religions do not condone cultism. They further noted that the menace of cultism in Nigerian schools has certainly emerged as one of the main social problems in contemporary Nigeria, with obvious psychological consequences. Finally, they insisted that the core values of these religions which include purity, chastity, honesty, integrity, quality of moderation and humility are not taken into consideration. After the analysis of the causes and psychological impact of cultism, it then concludes with the submission that the menace of cultism in Nigerian schools can be drastically reduced or eliminated through the internalization and inculcation of the fear of God in the minds of students.

However, this study tries to examine the menace of cultism on moral development with particular reference to University of Benin and the implication for behavioural counselling. Then, what is Behavioural counselling? According to Weiten (2007), behavioural counselling is focused on human behaviour and looks to eradicate unwanted or maladaptive behaviour. Typically, this type of therapy is used for those with behavioural problems or mental health conditions that involve unwanted behaviour. However, the techniques do not focus on the clients achieving insights into their behaviour (cultism), rather the focus is just on changing the maladaptive behaviours. In this light, this study sought to contribute to the literature on cultism and moral development in relation to counselling.

### **Research Questions**

The following four (4) research questions guided the study:

1. Do secret cult activities affect the moral development of male and female undergraduates in University of Benin?
2. Are there different perceptions of influence of secret cult activities on moral development for 100 and 400 level students?
3. Does age influence the relationship between secret cult practices and moral development of the students?
4. Does awareness/orientation put in place by the school through their counsellors on the dangers of joining secret cult discourage newly admitted students from joining cult and impact positively on their moral development?

### **Research Hypotheses**

Four null hypotheses were formulated.

**Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between secret cult activities and the moral development of male and female undergraduate students.

**Ho2:** There is no significant difference between 100 and 400 level students on their perceptions of the relationship between secret cult activities and moral development.

**Ho3:** There is no significant influence of age on the perception of the relationship between secret cult practices and moral development of the students.

**Ho4:** There is no significant relationship between awareness/orientation put in place by the school through their counsellors on the dangers of joining secret cult and the moral development of the newly admitted students.

### **Methodology**

The study was conducted from January to August 2018 in the six Faculties of the University of Benin. The study adopted survey design where questionnaire was administered to selected male and female undergraduates in the six faculties of the University of Benin namely: Social sciences, Education, Law, Engineering, Agriculture and Physical science. The six faculties have a population of 10,346 students (source: Department of Academic Planning of University of Benin, 2017/2018). A sample of two hundred and fifty two (252) respondents (42 each from the six faculties) was randomly selected through stratified sampling techniques. At the end, only two hundred and forty (240) copies of the questionnaire representing 95.3% of the self-administered questionnaire was successfully filled and retrieved for analysis. This method involves the division of the sampling frame into homogeneous group in order to ensure that the sample is truly representative. The division was done in such a manner that the units in each stratum are homogeneous with the main characteristics. The instrument was given to some experts in the Department of Counselling Psychology in the Faculty of Education of the National Open University of Nigeria for scrutiny and vetting. Thereafter, their observations were corrected. The reliability coefficient value of 0.76 was obtained which means that the instrument was reliable. The data analysis was carried out using the simple percentage and chi-square which independence and homogeneity were used to test the hypothesis of the study.

The chi-square test statistics is:

$$X^2 = \frac{\sum(o_i - E_i)^2}{E_i} \text{ where.}$$

K= Number of cells in the contingency table.

O<sub>i</sub> = Observed frequency of value.

E<sub>i</sub> = Expected frequency of Value of and is calculated as follows:

(Column i total)(Row i total)

*Sample size*

At .01 significance level, where  $(r-1)(c-1) = (4-1)(3-1) = (3)(2) = 6$  is the degree of freedom.

### **Presentation of findings**

This section presents the result of analysis of data generated through the questionnaire administered on the respondents on the menace of cultism and moral development of students in the University of Benin. Normally, the hypothesis is accepted when the calculated  $\chi^2$  is less than the value of the critical Chi-square ( $\chi^2$ ). The reverse is the case when the calculated  $\chi^2$  is greater than the critical  $\chi^2$  from the same degree of freedom.

**Table 1:** Distribution of Respondents by Age

<b>Age of respondents</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Percentages (%)</b>
16-21yrs	100	41.6
22-27yrs	140	58.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>100</b>

**Ho1:** There is no significant relationship between secret cult activities and the moral development of male and female undergraduate students.

**Table 2:** Secret cult activities affect the moral development of male and female undergraduate students

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Percentages (%)</b>
Strongly Agreed	110	45.5
Agreed	94	39.2
Undecided	10	4.2
Disagreed	14	5.8
Strongly disagreed	12	5.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>100</b>

In table 2, it is observed that 110 (45.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed that Secret cult activities affect the moral development of male and female undergraduate students. 94 (39.2%) of the respondents agreed, 10 (4.2%) of the respondent were undecided, 14 (5.8%) of the respondents disagreed and 12 (5.0%) of the respondents strongly disagreed. From this data, the calculated  $\chi^2$  (31.0686) is greater than critical  $\chi^2$  (22.46) at alpha level of 0.01. Therefore, the relationship is statistically significant at 0.01 level of significance. This led to the rejection of the null hypothesis. This implies that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that Secret cult activities

have affected the moral development of some male and female undergraduate students.

**Ho2:** There is no significant difference between 100 and 400 level students on their perceptions of the relationship between secret cult activities and moral development.

**Table 3:** Perception of 100 and 400 level students on the relationship between secret cult activities and moral development

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Percentages (%)</b>
Strongly Agreed	8	3.3
Agreed	9	3.7
Undecided	13	5.4
Disagreed	95	39.6
Strongly disagreed	115	48
<b>Total</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 3, shows that 115 (48%) of the respondents strongly disagreed that perception of secret cult activities in relation to moral development for 100 level students is not different from that of 400 level students. 95 (39.6%) of the respondents disagreed, 13 (5.4%) of the respondent were undecided, 9 (3.7%) of the respondents agreed and 8 (3.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed. Statistically, the calculated  $\chi^2 = 15.5264$  is less than critical  $\chi^2 = 22.46$ , at alpha level of 0.01. Therefore, data are not statistically significant at 0.01 level of significance. This means that we should accept the null hypothesis. This implies that there is no significant difference between 100 level and 400 level students on their perceptions of the relationship between secret cult activities and moral development.

**Ho3:** There is no significant influence of age on the perception of the relationship between secret cult practices and moral development of the students.

**Table 4:** The influence of age on the perception of the relationship between secret cult practices and moral development of the students

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Percentages (%)</b>
Strongly Agreed	10	4.2
Agreed	11	4.6
Undecided	15	6.3
Disagreed	84	35
Strongly disagreed	120	50
<b>Total</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 4 as well shows that 120 (50%) respondents strongly disagreed that there is no significant influence of age on the perception of the relationship between secret cult practices and moral development of the students. 84 (35%) of the respondents disagreed, 15 (6.3%) of the respondent were undecided, 11 (4.6%) of the respondents agreed and 10 (4.2%) of the respondents strongly agreed. Statistically, the calculated  $\chi^2 = 18.2818$  is less than critical  $\chi^2 = 22.46$ ,  $\alpha = 0.01$ . Therefore, data are not statistically significant at 0.01 level of significance. This means that we should accept the null hypothesis that there is no significant influence of age on the perception of the relationship between secret cult practices and moral development of the students.

**Ho4:** There is no significant relationship between awareness/orientation put in place by the school through their counsellors on the dangers of joining secret cult and the moral development of the newly admitted students.

**Table 5:** Relationship between awareness/orientation put in place by the school through their counsellors on the dangers of joining secret cult and the moral development of the newly admitted students

<b>Responses</b>	<b>Frequencies</b>	<b>Percentages (%)</b>
Strongly Agreed	115	47.9
Agreed	90	37.5
Undecided	7	2.9
Disagreed	13	5.4
Strongly disagreed	15	6.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>100</b>

Table 5 also shows that 115 (47.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed that orientation carried out by the school counsellors on the newly admitted students on the danger of joining secret cult has discouraged them from joining cult and impacted positively on their moral development. 90 (37.5%) of the respondents agreed, 7 (2.9%) of the respondent were undecided, 13 (5.4%) of the respondents disagreed and 15 (6.3%) of the respondents strongly disagreed. Statistically, the calculated  $\chi^2 = 30.1813$  is greater than critical  $\chi^2 = 22.46$ ,  $\alpha = 0.01$ . Therefore, data are statistically significant at 0.01 level of significance. This means that we should reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative. This implies that majority of the respondents strongly agreed that orientation carried out by the school counsellors on the newly admitted students on the danger of joining secret cult has discouraged some from joining secret cult and has impacted positively on their moral development.

## **Discussion**

Hypothesis 1 states that there is no significant relationship between secret cult activities and the moral development of male and female undergraduate students. The result indicated that there is significant relationship between secret cult activities and the moral development of male and female undergraduate students. This implies that undergraduate students have favourable dispositions towards the activities of secret cults which invariably affect the moral development of undergraduate students. The finding is consistent with the findings of Ogunbameru (2004) who observed that the Nigerian society has willingly or unwillingly created an enabling and conducive environment for all kinds of crisis and criminal acts among which is the positive disposition towards secret cult practices.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant difference between 100 and 400 level students on their perceptions of the relationship between secret cult activities and moral development. This null hypothesis is accepted, which indicates that there is no difference in perception of secret cult activities between 100 level and 400 level students in tertiary institutions. Hypothesis 3: There is no significant influence of age on the relationship between secret cult practices and moral development. The null hypothesis is accepted, which implies that age does not necessarily discourage students toward secret cult activities.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant relationship between awareness/orientation put in place by the school through their counsellors on the dangers of joining secret cult and the moral development of the newly admitted students. This null hypothesis is rejected. This implies that most of the undergraduate students are discouraged after awareness/orientation programmes put in place by the school through their counsellors on the dangers of joining secret cult. In other words, awareness/orientation programmes play a very big role in tertiary institutions in discouraging students from joining secret cult.

## **Implications for Behavioural Counselling**

This study has revealed that there is need to extensively employ the services of counsellors in our various universities, especially University of Benin, to limit the dangerous activities of secret cult in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. The study as a matter of caveat admonishes the State and Federal Governments to start from primary and secondary schools to expose pupils and students to the negative impacts of secret cult activities with the consequent effect on moral development before they enter the university. Counsellors should also collaborate with student affairs units and security department to organize specific orientation/awareness programmes for both fresh and old students either in the auditorium, faculties and hostels every

semester. These should include showcasing films and documentaries on the evils and repercussions of being members of secret cult groups. This will act as antidote to students, who are already in cults, to change their way of lives, and deter those who are not members, especially newly admitted students.

### **Conclusion**

The study examined the menace of cultism and moral development of students in the University of Benin, with implication for behavioural counselling. Different means and ways of stopping these ugly developments of secret cult activities in Nigerian Universities, with particular reference to University of Benin, have been highlighted. Nevertheless, the sum of all the analyses and findings revealed that secret cult activities affect the moral development of male and female undergraduate students.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, these recommendations are made:

1. The universities should extensively employ the services of counsellors who will constantly organise orientation programmes on the evils/repercussions of secret cult to discourage students from enrolling into secret cults.
2. There should be sensitization and orientation programme (every semester) to assist students to provide appropriate ways of behaviour modification to enhance their means of coping with emergent personal and academic challenges.
3. The University should enforce the law on the prohibition of secret cults in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions especially University of Benin to serve as a deterrent to other students in order to create a conducive environment for academic learning.
4. The State and Federal Ministry of Education should ensure that secondary school students are constantly exposed to intervention programmes that will give them negative disposition towards joining secret cults before they enter the University.

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