

## ***Curtailing Behavioural Disorders of Nigerian Youths through Counselling***

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### **Abstract**

*Nigeria is presently passing through difficult times. There seems to be chaos almost everywhere in the country as a result of the numerous problems facing her. Among these problems is the issue of behavioural disorders of the youths who are supposed to be leaders of tomorrow. However, these behavioural disorders of the Nigerian youths appear to be increasing by the day, especially in the last two decades, either due to globalization or civilization. This paper, therefore, examined the problem of behavioural disorders among Nigerian youths. Based on related studies reviewed, behavioural disorders are categorized as educational, social and economic dimensions; possible causes of behavioural disorders as well as some proven counselling approaches to curtail them are discussed. Some recommendations were also made for other members of the society to assist in swaying youths away from behavioural disorders.*

**Keywords:** Curtail, behaviour, disorder, youth, counselling

### **Introduction**

Youth and behavioural disorders are common concepts to counsellors. This group of individuals (youths) is regarded as the seeds for the later generations, universally referred to as the leaders of tomorrow. They represent the bliss and sorrow, strength and weakness, hope and despair of any developing society. Their loyalties and aspirations are also founded on the social order (Denga, 1997 as cited in Kemebiye, 2021). The primary preoccupation of youths in this modern world is transition into responsible adulthood. However, for many youths, this transition is not an easy or a smooth affair. A lot of them fall by the way side because their unique characteristics and environmental circumstances make it difficult for them to ascend the slippery ladder of life to a considerably high level.

In a country like Nigeria where the social system seems comatose, with myriads of problems such as massive unemployment, insecurity, religious intolerance, high-level inflation and so on, many youths who face adult experiences for the first time without any guidance are often misled. Besides, youths are inexperienced, energetic, curious, exploratory and full of expectations; so many of them lead lives of fantasy and become vulnerable to behaviours that offend the society's moral code. Moreover, many youths have been so much exposed rather too dangerously to obscene print, electronic, and in recent times, social media that have subjected them to antisocial tendencies that are ubiquitous in the society.

These environmental influences have not only provoked a feeling of futility of life in them but also behavioural disorders. This may be why there is increase in the number of youths experiencing serious behavioural problems. This is not good for the country; hence this paper attempts to draw attention to the need to look critically at this vital aspect of the national existence in order to alleviate the problem. However, to properly guide this

discussion, it is imperative to first outline the sub-areas of this paper which are: clarification of major concepts, behavioural disorders of Nigerian youths: educational, social and economic behavioural disorders, consequences of behavioural disorders, counselling intervention and conclusion.

### **Clarification of concepts**

**Curtail:** In this discourse, curtail means to stop something from existing and/or continuing to subsist. Curtail therefore is about stopping behavioural disorders of Nigerian youths.

**Youth:** This refers to the time of life when a person is young, especially the time before a child becomes an adult; a person in this stage of life.

**Behavioural disorder:** A behavioural disorder is a negative behavioural deviation from the social norms. It is a behaviour that defies known rules and regulations, or a condition whereby one infringes upon accepted norms and standards of a society. It involves a retraction from the rules that govern behaviour.

**Counselling:** Counselling is an activity in which a trained individual (a counsellor) engages another individual (a client or counsellee) in a person-to-person relationship with the aim of helping the client to clarify their understanding of life and their potentials in order for them to make proper adjustments in every spheres of their life (Ossai, 2022). The essence of counselling is to enable the individual make desirable adjustment so as to experience some relief that will make them to live as a healthy member of the larger society, being at peace with self and the society.

### **Behavioural disorders of Nigerian youths**

In recent times, a lot of behavioural disorders which were hitherto not present have been found among Nigerian youths. However, in this paper, it is only those ones which bother on the educational, social and economic aspects of individual lives and the society that are considered. They are therefore termed educational, social and economic behavioural disorders respectively.

a) **Educational behavioural disorders** are behaviours that are detrimental to students' learning and constitute a hindrance to their academic success. Some of these behaviours include truancy, poor study habits, examination malpractice and indiscipline. Many youths in educational institutions are truants. Truancy (also called wagging school) is the practice whereby students stay away from school (or classes) without permission from either parents or school authorities (Centre for Adolescent Health, 2021). Other educational behavioural disorders include:

2. **Poor study habits:** Study habits refer to students' ways of studying their school subjects, whether systematic, efficient or inefficient (Loveless, 2023). Efficient study habits produce positive academic performance while inefficient or poor study habits lead to academic failure. In other words, poor study habits are what some psychologists call "learning pathologies". They are non-strategic behaviours that hinder rather than help in learning, often because they are antithesis of those behaviours that have been shown to assist in learning. Inefficient study habits not only retard school progress, they also breed frustration, destroy initiative and confidence and make prominent the feeling of worthlessness among students. Some study habits that are considered poor include cramming, multitasking, missing classes, inefficient note-taking and improper time management. Walck-Shannon et al. (2021) revealed that causes of poor study habits consisted of poor monitoring by parents, parental educational status and laziness.

3. Examination malpractice is a serious problem in Nigeria. It may be defined as any dishonest means a student employs to pass an examination. Chukwuemeka (2021) sees it simply as an improper or illegal conduct by a candidate of an examination with the intention of passing the examination. Forms of examination malpractice indulged by Nigerian youths include impersonation, smuggling of extraneous materials, external assistance, copying during examination and collusion. According to Chukwuemeka (2021), causes of examination malpractice are failure of the Nigerian educational system, poor parental upbringing, undue emphasis on certificates, environmental factors, failure to prepare for examinations and over-population of schools.

4. Indiscipline involves behaviours that diverge from the acceptable societal norms and values. It is a violation of community rules and regulations which is capable of obstructing the smooth and orderly functioning of the system (Adeleke & Odeyemi, 2022). Chukwuemeka (2022) opines that an indiscipline youth is uncontrollable and is capable of causing damage to others in order to achieve self-satisfaction. A major cause of indiscipline is poor home background or faulty parental upbringing.

b) **Social behavioural disorders:** These are patterns of behaviours that offend the moral code of the society by upsetting not only intrapersonal welfare and integrity but also interpersonal relations in the community. Social behavioural disorders tend to portray the individual as undesirable, a nuisance or an abominable character. The following constitute some social behavioural disorders of Nigerian youths:

1. Substance use/abuse: Substance use or abuse in this paper include illicit drug use, cigarette smoking as well as alcoholism among the youths. Using the aforementioned substances, especially in excess, is a social behavioural disorder. It is considered a disorder because substance use/abuse adversely affects the physical, psychological and social integrity of the user. The youth who abuses these substances constitutes a danger to themselves and the society. Among the many consequences of substance abuse are mental deterioration, low academic achievement, negative social functioning, indiscipline, moral decadence, a breakdown of the central nervous system and ultimately, death (Petters, 2022). According to Poon et al. (2022), substance abuse among youths has been associated with misery, peer pressure, unemployment, mass poverty, crumbling family support system, among others. When any or a combination of these occur, many youths resort to substance use as an escape route as it tends to offer momentary relief from their problems; but in the long run, much damage is caused.

2. Cultism: This is another social behavioural disorder among the youths in Nigeria. It is a ritual practice of a group of youths whose membership and mode of operations are shrouded in secrecy. Their language is that of violence, which makes their activities to have negative effects on both members and non-members (Ogunbiyi, 2022). Walubengo and Simwa (2022) describe cultism as a system of beliefs binding together people of the same interest for the purpose of promoting and defending the common pursuit. Nwobodo (2022) added that cultism has become so bad that aside from the universities where it has become an institution of sort, cultism is already gaining inroad into primary and secondary schools. It has also become deeply rooted among artisans, transporters and office workers. They are brutally violent; maiming, killing, destroying and raping women, among other dastardly acts. Oftentimes, their activities have resulted in the closure of schools, leading to the disruption of academic calendars (Bakare, 2021; Nnam et al., 2022). Onoja (2022a) suggests causes of cultism in Nigeria to include financial reasons, peer group influence, lack of recreational facilities, parental background/upbringing as well as quest for power and protection.

3. **Obscene dressing and sexual perversion:** Youths have thrown overboard the culture of decent dressing and adopted to wear all manner of obscene dresses that tend to expose the vital parts of their bodies to the general public (Okafor & Uwalaka, 2021; Olusegun, 2023). Apart from indecent dressing, youths no longer respect sex and sexuality as they indulge in sexual acts freely anywhere and at any time. According to Ugwoezuonu et al. (2022), besides sexual promiscuity, a more dangerous trend that is fast emerging the world over is same-sex sexual relationships commonly known as gay and lesbianism. This is worrisome because in a recent study on peer and home factors as predictors of tendency to same-sex sexual behaviour among adolescents in eastern Nigeria, it was discovered that there were common or prevailing same-sex behaviours among Nigerian in-school adolescents attributable to peer pressure and dysfunctional home environments (Ugwoezuonu et al., 2022). For reasons behind this disorder, Agbeusi (2021) and Lawal et al. (2021) opine that the causes of sexual perversion among Nigerian youths are exposure to pornographic films and literatures, peer group influence, parental neglect of their duties, uncensored videos and television materials, permissiveness of modern society, unemployment, lack of sound moral conduct among many adults in the society, poverty, as well as non-availability of counselling services.

4. **Premarital sex and teenage pregnancies:** As stated earlier, premarital sex among youths in many Nigerian societies is no longer a taboo because of Nigeria's warped values. Youths engage in illegitimate relationships and give birth to children in the process when they are not ready for parenthood (Nwankwo, 2021). These children are sometimes sold out while others grow up to constitute societal nuisance due to lack of proper parental upbringing (Taylor, 2022). Most teenage mothers also consequently drop out of school either out of shame or for lack of the wherewithal to continue their education. Such unprepared parenthood by youths comes with some psychological burden as more often than not, the mothers bear the burden of raising the child alone (Okoli et al., 2022; Akanbi et al., 2021). Bolarinwa et al. (2022) believe that teenage pregnancies in Nigeria are caused by lack of parental care, lack of sexuality and reproductive health education, poverty, peer pressure, curiosity and experimentation and negative influence of mass/social media.

c) **Economic behavioural disorders:** These refer to activities that constitute dishonest means of acquiring economic benefits or dishonest sources of livelihood. Some of such activities are stealing, armed robbery, kidnapping and internet crime.

1. Stealing is the illegal taking of another person's property with the intention to keep it and deprive the owner of it unlawfully.

2. Armed robbery is the application of force or threat of violence often with a weapon (or weapons) such as guns, axes, knives, sticks and so on, to deprive a person or persons of their right to private, public or corporate belongings. Egharevba et al. (2022) state that armed robbery is a serious offence in Nigeria. They further summarized the effects of armed robbery in Nigeria thus:

A successful robbery entails the direct loss of property on an individual. Such property is transferred from the rightful owner to another person. Most armed robberies also lead to death of victims or their loss of productivity through incapacitation, thereby denying the society of their contributions to its development. P.4.

Armed robbery in Nigeria is caused by lack of employment, laziness, desire to get rich quick and peer pressure (Onoja, 2022b).

3. Internet fraud is another thorn in the flesh of the Nigerian nation. It is any intentionally deceptive activity that involves the use of a combination of internet components such as email, chat rooms and websites to offer goods or services that are non-existent to unsuspecting members of the virtual community, transmission of victims' funds to, accessing devices or taking possession of other items of value without informed consent by the victim (US Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2003 as cited by Ayodele et al., 2022; Idem et al., 2023). Its prevalence in the Nigerian society can be attributed to the fact that many youths take internet fraud as an assured path to financial freedom (Ayodele et al., 2022). Eze-Michael (2022) revealed that unemployment and poverty are the major causes of internet fraud in Nigeria. He concluded in his study that internet use by Nigerians has come with fraudulent acts, and this has put the country under scrutiny and brought negative image in international relations.

4. Kidnapping is the forcible seizure, taking away and unlawful detention of a person or persons against their will, for financial gains, religious or political reasons. It often involves a demand for ransom (Isa, 2022). Causes of kidnapping include poverty, political rivalries, government insensitivity and the get-rich-quick mentality of the youths (Peter & Osaat, 2021). According to Isa (2022), unemployment is a major cause of kidnapping among youths in Nigeria. It leads to psychological trauma and death of victims sometimes, as well as breed an atmosphere of fear, social tension, insecurity and general distrust.

### **Consequences of behavioural disorders**

Although, consequences of some particular behavioural disorders have been identified earlier, generally, youth behavioural disorders adversely affect the Nigerian nation in many ways including the following:

1. Tarnishing the country's image and reputation.
2. Breeds lack of trust and confidence that hinders profitable business transactions and interpersonal relationships.
3. Denied opportunities for Nigerian citizens abroad.
4. Inimical to the progress and development of the country.
5. Insecurity of lives and property.
6. Loss of human and financial resources.
7. Unemployment.
8. Wastage of state resources on security.

### **Counselling intervention**

The various behavioural disorders of youths tend to give Nigeria the impression of a country in disarray; a nation that seems to have lost control of her human resources, especially her future leaders. Several governmental intervention measures have yielded little or no meaningful results. However, it is believed that with the application of well-coordinated counselling services, it is possible to eliminate the behavioural disorders of youths and make the country to regain its pride of place in the committee of nations (Ossai, 2022). Counselling intervention is the psychological treatments offered to youths with behavioural disorders to enable them overcome their problems. The best form of counselling intervention, according to Petters (2022), is curative rather than reductive; that is to say it should not aim to reduce the problem but to provide a cure for it. She further suggests that the counsellor should emphasize self-help and self-management as counselling therapies to clients. Such counselling measures include:

1. Value re-orientation counselling: Ekpang and Abuo (2021) are of the opinion that all behavioural disorders of Nigerian youths revolve around the issue of individual values. They believe that the youths and by implication, the entire Nigerian nation have derailed from the age-long values of honesty, humility, hard work, respect and others. For this reason, Shittu and Gamde (2021) suggest that there must be a conscious effort on the part of counsellors to bring back the society on the path of honour through value re-orientation counselling. They further stated that, in this method, the counsellor has to make a deliberate effort to guide the individual to understand the kind of values that they hold and how such values could be beneficial or harmful to their well-being and the general society. It also involves the counsellor going on a voyage of how their negative beliefs/values were developed and then inculcate socially acceptable values of life in them. This form of counselling could be offered either individually or in groups with parents, guardians and other significant persons present (Ossai, 2022).

2. Cognitive restructuring counselling: Cognitive restructuring is a group of therapeutic techniques that help people to notice and change their negative thinking patterns (Quinn, 2022). These are techniques that deconstruct unhelpful thoughts and rebuild them in a more balanced and accurate way. People oftentimes experience cognitive distortions – thought patterns that create a distorted, unhealthy view of reality. Cognitive restructuring therefore helps people with distorted cognitions to change the way they think. It helps them to feel differently about things that worry or frustrate them, and in turn can affect their behaviour (Villines, 2022). In this form of counselling, emphasis is placed on the thinking, feeling and behavioural aspects of personality and it is socially oriented in the direction of promoting awareness so that youths would be able to take new decisions that can afford them positive living and happiness. Cognitive psychologists hold that behavioural disorders are the consequences of distortions caused by erroneous convictions and suppositions. In situations such as these, counsellors should assist individuals to discard their distorted thoughts and adopt alternative, more socially acceptable means to formulate their experiences. This method has proven effective in the correction of several behavioural disorders (Villines, 2022). According to Akinade (2016) as cited by Petters (2022), reality therapy could be useful in this regard. It involves bringing clients to focus on what they are doing and to learn to be in effective control of their lives. For them to meet their needs, they have to learn what is right, how to behave responsibly and how to face reality.

3. Periodic sensitization: In form of a constant reminder, the counsellor should endeavour to organize periodic awareness campaigns in order to sensitize the citizenry about the negative effects of behavioural disorders. This could be done by way of community counselling whereby a large proportion of the population would be in attendance. To achieve success of this laudable exercise, the counsellor should collaborate with the leaders of the community. By carrying out such sensitization programmes continually, there is the likelihood of the people starting to confront behavioural disorders whenever they tend to occur.

## **Conclusion**

In this paper, the researcher tried to highlight some behavioural disorders among youths in Nigeria. The prevalence of behavioural disorders cuts across educational, social and economic aspects of the society. Based on the findings of other scholars, the researcher identified forms and causes of the problem, and as well proffers that behavioural disorders could be addressed with some counselling approaches. In addition, Nigerian counsellors are urged to adopt those methods to tackle the ever-increasing problem of behavioural

disorders among the youths of the country. With such counselling approaches, it is believed that the problem will drastically reduce.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations were made:

1. Parents and school authorities should collaborate to ensure that youths in schools are discouraged from educational behavioural disorders.
2. Parents and other significant persons should be good role-models to youths in order to curb social behavioural disorders in the society.
3. To stop and/or reduce economic behavioural disorders, governments should promulgate and enforce stringent laws to deter errant youths.

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