
THE CAUSES AND IMPLICATIONS OF YOUTH GANGSTERISM IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Gangsterism is a scourge that negatively affects the social development of the Nigerian society. It encourages the exhibition of undesirable behaviour which are against the socially approved standards. This study investigated the causes and implications of youth gangsterism in Nigeria. Both the cultural transmission and differential association theory were employed (used) in analyzing the study. The study identified poverty, lack of comprehensive policy on the youths, peer group influence, weakness of the home in terms of sound parental control and high rate of illiteracy among the youths as the major causes that account for youth gangsterism in Nigeria. The study concludes that government and policy makers should enunciate well articulated (comprehensive) policies and programmes that can tackle the scourge of youth gangsterism in Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

When an Arab sociologist, Abdel Rahman Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406) argued that a single human being cannot live by himself, his existence can only materialize only in association with his follow men, little did he know he was laying opportunistic foundation for gangsterism that has wrought tremendous damage to the development of the society. Surprisingly in Nigeria today, many of the youths have shunned the path to social order by forming themselves into violent and criminal gangs. Group fight and clashes are common place with each struggling for supremacy. The implication of their actions is always maiming, killing, looting, thuggery, snatching of people's valuables, stealing, raping and other activities relating to the total break down of law and order. The exhibition of these undesirable behaviour by the youths gives impetus to the development of social disorganization of the society. This, in no doubt put the future of the entire society in great jeopardy. The Holy scripture (Bible) teaches clearly that "the glory of the young is their strength". Again in Nigeria, youths are oftenly regarded as leaders of tomorrows but recent activities of our youths show that the future of the society is moving from bad to worse. This study is aimed at examining the causes and implications of youth gangsterism in Nigeria.

Framework Analysis

Theoretically, cultural transmission and differential association theory will be used in analyzing this study.

Cultural Transmission Theory

Cultural transmission theory was propounded by Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904) assumes that the environment has great impact on our behaviour. Cultural transmission theorists argued that gangsterism and criminal behaviour are culturally transmitted from one generation to

another. From this point of view, it is "natural" that youth living in high crime areas should acquire indecent life styles. Proponents of this perspective argued that as new ethnic groups enter a neighbourhood, their children learn the delinquent patterns from the youth already there. Therefore, youths became members of street gangs because they associate and make friends with other deviants who are already members of street gangs. Though this theory is criticized for its failure to explain (show) how culture is transmitted from one generation to generation.

Differential Association Theory

Differential association theory propounded by Edwin Sutherland (1939) insists that interaction plays a prominent role in behaviour and character building. Proponents of this perspective acknowledge that when we associate and interact with people with unwholesome stubborn and unquestionable character, we tend to copy almost everything they do. This then become our character which we carry often time till death. Differential association theorists maintained that individual became members of street gangs to the extent to which they associate with people with deviant behaviours. People can learn techniques of gangsterism by interacting with gangsters just the way other forms of social behaviours are learned. The theory is criticized on the ground that disapproved behaviour can arise through the same processes of socially approved ones. This study adopted cultural transmission theory because it vividly explained the persistent nature of gangsterism which is transmitted from generation to generation.

Causes and Implications of Youth Gangsterism in Nigeria

Several factors account for youth engagement in gangsterism in Nigeria. These factors include:

Poverty: Poverty is one of the major factors that drive youths into gangsterism in Nigeria. Majority of youths are poor and cannot provide the basic necessities of life such as food, clothing and shelter. This hampered their ability to meet social and economic obligations. In most cases, most of them have limited access to social and economic infrastructure such as education, health, and safe environment. Some of the youths that managed to graduate from institutions of learning have no jobs to do. Most of them live on the streets due to inability to get comfortable accommodation. This has a serious implication on the society. Ogunbiyi (1978) observed that our cities are littered with unemployed youths whose stock in trade is to maime, loots and rape innocent girls. Thus gangsterism has come to stay in Nigeria, due to the fact that many youths have no means of livelihood. Many of them roam about on the streets and engaged in acts that are criminal in nature. Poverty eludes our youth's ability to exhibit their potentials. This enables them to form gang, which can guarantee their sustenance. Assessing the devastating effects of poverty in Nigeria, Manbe (2006:78) revealed that:

In Nigerian context, poverty is clearly one of the most profound problems being grappled with, and it has contributed substantially

to the erosion and undermining of the foundations of peaceful co-existence and stable natural development.

In order to resolve the problems of gangsterism, aggressive youth economic empowerment and development strategies need to be put into practice.

Lack of Comprehensive Policy on the Youths: The proliferation of gangsterism among the youths in Nigeria shows that government at all levels lacks effective and aggressive youth policy. According to Anger (2006:10) "the reality is that in Nigeria today there is an absence of good governance and it is as a result of this that all sectors of the economy are fast collapsing". Under such an unfriendly environment, the future of our youth looks gloomy and uncertain. Government at all levels needs to set up a youth empowerment agency.

Peer Group Influence: A peer group is composed of members of roughly equal age sharing equal status and pursuing some interest in common. Peer groups have a significant influence on an individual's behaviour; members of a peer group are exposed to knowledge, which they have no access to within their individual families, and peer groups have their norms and values, which members strive to adhere to. Peer groups often pressure youths to do evil. Mintain (1978:20) pointed out that the most strong influence of peer groups in Nigeria are sources of disciplinary problems. Gangsterism and modern-day cultism in higher institutions in Nigeria may be an extreme of peer group influence. Some of these peer group members are groomed in violent and hostile families where there is a transfer of such behaviours to the group, which they belong to, hence they compelled their members to adopt them. When the youth abandoned their parents, they find solace in gang groups. The implication here is that youths often times copy what their friends do for reasons of group acceptance, trust and assistance. Gangsterism is a new life style which our promising youths have adopted. Today, Nigerian youths smoke marijuana and other dangerous substances, they maim, loot, rape, shoplift, hire as thugs, steal and hawk drugs. These activities compelled them to be engaged in crime which impacts on the society is too grievous. Parents must be conscious of such group influence on their children. Children who are given too much freedom tend to join bad companies.

Weakness of Home in terms of Sound Parental Control: Most Nigerian parents are not capable of enforcing strict social order in their homes. In such homes, parents are inadequately equipped to answer questions on moral issues usefully. Basically, the task of educating children, especially the youths, about the norms and value of the society is seen as the responsibility of parents but most parents are weak in terms of enforcing disciplinary measures in their homes. The implication is that most of the youth have no option than to seek information from their peers, most of which are glorification of historical banditry and gangsterism. The serious implication here is the miseducation of the youths by the peer group as a result of weakness of the home. The Greek famous philosopher, Plato warns that man's innate tendencies are tremendously influenced by education. His personality is moulded and formed by the kind of education he receives and his conduct in social situations is fashioned accordingly. It is in the light of this that Ayu (1986:14-15) in Peter Tosh argued:

You teach the youth to learn in school that cow jump over moon. You teach the youth to learn in school that the dish run away with the spoon. So you can't blame the youth. You can't fool the youth. You teach the youth about Christopher Columbus and you said he was a very great man. You teach the youth about macro polo and you said he was a very great man. You teach the youth about the pirate Hawkins and you said he was a very great man. Therefore, you cannot blame the youth for "robbing, raping, kidnapping and killing. For, all these great men were doing robbing, raping, kidnapping and killing.

It became obvious that one cannot, and should not turn around to blame the youths when they resort to gangsterism and violence. The family lays psychosocial, moral and spiritual foundations for the overall development of the youth but leaving a situation where they have to seek for the care outside could be disastrous to their family and the society. Discipline at home should be seen as responsibility requiring the full cooperation of both parents who must ensure the total development of their offspring(s).

High Rate of Illiteracy among the Youths: There is generally high rate of illiteracy among the Nigerian youths. As a result of this illiteracy, most of the youths lack basic skills to acquire the few available job opportunities thus ending up to be idle. In order to survive, these idle youths resort to violence and gangsterism. The implications of this on the society include entrenchment of unacceptable moral values, militancy and crime. A comprehensive policy on the youth should be put in place to empower the youths.

CONCLUSION

It is obvious that the scourge of gangsterism is a pervasive phenomenon that has a serious implication on the social functioning of the Nigerian society. This study identified factors such as poverty, lack of comprehensive policy on the youths, peer group influence, weakness of the home in terms of sound parental control and high rate of illiteracy among the youth as the fundamental causes of gangsterism in Nigeria. There is therefore an urgent need for government, parents, mass media, religious leaders, policy makers, national orientation agency to enunciate well articulated policy on the youth in order to tackle some of the factors that breeds the root causes of gangsterism in Nigeria.

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