

## Anti Social Behaviours Among Nigerian Adolescents

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**Abstract:** This paper critically examines the behaviors regarded as antisocial. The causes of antisocial behaviors with reference to factors such as: the nature of the home environment, gender, socio economic status of parents, peer group influence, residential location. The paper further poses the effects of antisocial behavior. The implications of adolescents' antisocial behaviors on national development such as unattractive destination for tourists, low foreign investment, unemployment, poverty and hunger, insecurity of life and property. Finally, the paper recommends among others, parents and guardians should show love and care to their children and wards. They should endeavor to monitor the type of image their children watch on television or video machines and effort should be made to advise them against watching violent images, keep away from friends or peers whose behaviors do not conform to the norms and values of the society.

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### I. Introduction

In modern times, there are varieties of behaviour exhibited by adolescent in Nigeria which make right thinking citizens wonder if our national values have been eroded, it is common to see youths bath one another with acid while quarreling over trivial matters. Nigerians cannot forget in a hurry the activities of the Niger Delta militants in the Niger Delta region that held sway between 2007-2011 in which a lot of pipelines carrying oil were blown up and expatriate oil company workers and Nigerians alike were kidnapped. This period also witnessed unparalleled arson and vandalism of private and public property and a lot of lives were lost. These atrocities were perpetrated by adolescents as well as children.

Currently, just as the militancy in the Niger Delta region is dying down, the Boko Haram sect started unleashing mayhem in the Northern region of the country. The senseless killing going on there makes one wonder if there is a calculated attempt by the sect members to wipe out an entire generation of Nigerians. All these despicable behaviours which are contrary to the norms and values of the society as perpetrated by the adolescents as well as adult cohorts qualify as antisocial behaviour.

Antisocial behaviour, personality disorder or conduct disorder, a term synonymous with delinquency was defined by Wachikwu and Ibegbunam (2012) as crimes committed by young people below the age of eighteen years usually characterized by violation of existing social norms and values. It was defined by Mayer (2001) as a recurrent violation of socially prescribed patterns of behaviour usually involving aggression, vandalism, rule infractions, defiance of authority and violation of social norms. Similarly, antisocial behaviour was defined by Hanrahan (2006) as a disruptive act characterized by covert or overt hostility and intentional aggression towards others. It refers to an overall lack of adherence to the social norms and standards that allow members of a society to coexist peacefully. Observation by Lahey (2003, p. 562) made the writer to describe people with conduct disorder in the following words.

People with antisocial personalities have a low tolerance for frustration. They act on impulse, lose their temper quickly, and lie easily and skillfully, in childhood, they are often bullies who fight, lie, cheat, steal, and are truant from school. They blame others for their misdeeds, feel Picked out by their parents and teachers, and never seem to learn from their mistakes.

In this paper, antisocial behaviour, personality disorder, conduct disorder and delinquency are regarded as synonymous and are used interchangeably.

### Behaviours regarded as antisocial

There are no universally accepted behaviours that are regarded as antisocial as there are world-wide variations in norms and values upon which antisocial behaviour definitions are based. For example, homosexuality is an acceptable way of life in some countries such as England, USA, Canada and some other western countries. In Nigeria, on the contrary, homosexuality is frowned at to such an extent that over 90% of Nigerians regard it as a taboo (Ogala, 2011). It is hated by Christians, Muslims and traditional African religion practitioners forbid it. In fact, a bill was recently passed by Nigerian parliament banning the same-sex marriage and at the same time spelling out heavy penalties of 14 years imprisonment for defaulters and their collaborators or death penalty in accordance with Sharia penal code in some northern states. However, based on the acceptable societal norms and values in Nigeria as apply to adolescents, antisocial behaviours as listed by Wachikwu and Ibegbunam (2012) include but not limited to lying, deceit, stealing, callousness, love for fighting and violence,

cruelty, promiscuity, aggression, bullying, confrontation and lack of respect for elders. Others are vindictiveness, intractability, arson, counterfeiting, hostility, greed, forgery, thuggery, alcoholism, frequent running away from home.

### **Causes of Antisocial Behaviour**

There are some factors that have been thought to be responsible for the development of antisocial behaviour in children. Some of these factors include:

#### **(i) The Nature of the Home Environment**

The nature of the home environment here refers to the affective aspect of the home environment in which children are raised. Some children are nurtured in aversive, punitive, or violent environments while others are nurtured in blissful environment with love, care, compassion and understanding. Children raised in aversive and punitive environments are usually verbally abused, spanked and sometimes injuries are inflicted on them for any perceived misconduct (real or imagined) by their primary caretakers. Again, the elderly siblings also mete out raw treatment to the younger ones. Children raised in such home environments are physically and psychologically traumatized. In such homes, all the children can see is hatred, quarrel, bitterness, hostility, violence, competition and pains. They accept misdeemeanor as a way of life and may have no qualms meting out this same treatment to the weaker ones.

However, children nurtured in home environments where parents show love, care and tenderness to the children are likely to develop pre-social personality traits and may hardly engage in risky behaviours. Inconsistent parenting style swinging from excessive punishment to excessive leniency is capable of precipitating antisocial behaviour in adolescents. At home or elsewhere, heavy exposure to uncensored media violence through television, video, internet sites or even cartoons has long been associated with an increase in the likelihood that a child becomes violent and behaves in an aggressive and antisocial manner (Hanrahan, 2006). In studies conducted by Mayer (2001) and Wachikwu and Ibegbunam (2012), it was found that aversive and punitive home environments promoted antisocial behaviours such as violence, vandalism and escape from home while majority of children raised in loving and caring environments developed pre-social behaviours.

#### **(ii) Gender**

Gender has been implicated as a factor that has influence on the development of pre-social or antisocial behaviour in adolescents. Sex stereo-type manifestation of antisocial behaviour traits is common in our society. Boys by their very nature exhibit [More physical, verbal aggression and thuggery while antisocial behaviour in girls is more subtle, indirect and relational involving harmful manipulation of others. Besides, there is more involvement of boys than girls in such antisocial behaviours as stealing, kidnapping, rape, fighting and violence. More girls than boys participate in such antisocial behaviours like prostitution, lesbianism, frequent running away from home, hedonism, child theft and child trafficking. Antisocial personality disorder was diagnosed in approximately 3% of male and 1% of female adolescent in the United State of America (American Psychiatric Associate, 1998). American Psychiatric Association (1998) also asserted that the incident of conduct disorder appeared to have increased in USA over the preceding decade and might be as high as 6 to 16% in males under 18 years and 2 to 9% in females under 18 years. Manie (1998) also reported that the likelihood of boys to develop conduct disorder was four to eight times greater than for girls. However, Kazdin (1987) reported that conduct disorder was more common among boys than girls and that sex differences further affected the age of onset of conduct disorder. Girls tended to engage in conduct disorder starting between ages 14 and 16, whereas, many boys engaged in conduct disorder at the age of 11 years.

#### **(iii) Socio-Economic Status of Parents**

Discussion on factors that contribute to the development of antisocial behaviour traits in adolescents cannot be complete without mention of socio-economic status of parents. Some adolescents are nurtured in a state of abject poverty while some others are brought up in affluent conditions. For those brought up in later condition, life is good and there is no need to do anything that can endanger their lives. For those brought up in the former condition, the reverse is the case as they have to struggle for survival. Chauhan (1990) observed that poverty of parents make it impossible to fulfill the legitimate basic physiological needs could give rise to frustration which could ultimately trigger off anger and general antisocial behaviour in adolescents. Nwankwo (2003) also noted that children born into impoverished environments might take to socially unacceptable behaviours as a survival strategy. Elliot and Ageton (1980) reported that antisocial behaviour was acute among adolescents with low socio-economic background. Bacchini, Concetta and Afusso (2011) and Nwankwo, Nwoke, Chukwuocha, Obbany, Nwoga, Iwuagwu and Okereke (2010) found that gender, parenting style, exposure to community violence and parents socio-economic status were significantly associated with antisocial behaviours among the students.

**(iv) Peer Group Influence**

Peer group association appears to exert influence on the behaviour of adolescents,. An adolescent who belongs to a peer group whose members engage in antisocial activities such as under-age smoking, alcoholism, pilfering, cultism, rape, prostitution and violence is most likely to imbibe these attitudes. Developmental theories according to Monahan, Steinberg and Cauffman (2009), suggest that affiliation with deviant peers and susceptibility to peer influence are important contributors to adolescent delinquency. Monahan et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal study of 1354 antisocial youths to investigate how individual variation in exposure to deviant peers and resistance to peer influence affected antisocial behaviour manifestation from middle adolescence into young adulthood (ages 14 to 22 years). They obtained evidence that antisocial individuals chose to affiliate with deviant peers, and affiliating with deviant peers was associated with an individual's own delinquency. Duarte, Escario and Molina (2011) found that there was existence of significant peer group influences on the deviant behaviours of alcohol abuse and truancy.

**(v) Residential Location**

The impact of location or place of residence as one of the contributory factors in the development of antisocial behaviour traits in adolescents cannot be over-emphasized Urban dwellers have diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Hence they tend to be more individualistic and often show less concern for the plight of others (Berger, 2003). Cost of living in urban centers is comparatively higher than that of the rural areas and there is more pressure on social amenities in urban centers compared to rural areas. The quest for money and material things is more pronounced in urban centers than in rural areas. All these circumstances conspire to make crimes and delinquent acts equally more pronounced in urban centers (Berger, 2003). Crime-ridden societies typified by some Nigerian urban centers breed adolescents who engage in various forms of delinquency while notorious criminal adults serve as models. In contrast, in rural areas, there are usually strong cultural and ethnic bonds among the dwellers. In such places, adolescents are less emboldened to be violent. Berger (2003) reported that adolescents resident in urban centers exhibit more anger-driven behaviours than those residents in rural areas, adding that residential location significantly influenced such behaviours in adolescents.

**Effects of Antisocial Behaviour**

Though antisocial behaviour refers to conduct disorder perpetrated by young people below 18 years of age (Wachikwu and Ibegbunam 2012). It has far-reaching consequences in Nigerian society at large. We must not forget a line in the Poem (My Heart Leaps up) credited to Word worth William which says that the "child is father to the man "or a line in Jim Thompson's novel (The filler inside me) which says that the "boy is father to the man" (Language Forum), in either case, it meant that the personality, emotions, beliefs and attitudes of a person as an adult are derived from those he had in childhood.

Alternatively, the quality of a person as an adult is determined from his quality as a child. For this reason, signs of antisocial behaviour should be looked into with a view to recognizing their onset in children and taking remedial action to rectify the maladies before they get out hand. It is believed that the consequences of conduct disorder in adolescents are grave especially if no remedy is sought and found at the early stage of the manifestation of the traits. There is a high rate of transition from antisocial behaviour in adolescents to adult criminal activities (Hanrahan, 2006). Opinions are rife that successful adults who once exhibited adolescent antisocial behaviour indulge in white collar crimes.

Longitudinal studies reported in Hanrahan (2006) revealed that as many as 71% of chronic juvenile offenders had progressed from childhood antisocial behaviour through a history of early arrests to a pattern of chronic law breaking in the United State of America.

Nigeria is one of the nations where crimes tend to pay. It is worthy of note that Niger Delta militants who once terrorized people in the region, kidnapped, maimed and killed people, blow up oil wells and vandalized pipelines carrying oil around 2007-2011 are being provided cash rewards after an amnesty has been granted to them. Some of these ex-militants are in the pay role of politicians for doing their dirty jobs while some obtain lucrative contracts to provide security services to oil companies operating in the region. One wonders if this is not a motivating factor that gave rise to Boko Haram sect and terrorism in the Northern part of Nigeria. Some Nigerians are accused of on All Qaeda membership and are facing trials in various courts around the world. The business of kidnapping has assumed an alarming proportion in recent times in Nigeria, it has permeated every nook and cranny of our society. Even people in the South East of Nigeria have not been spared of the activities of the kidnappers. Notable Igbo Sons and daughters (from whom they extorted appreciable some of money as ransom) have fallen victims to them.

The digits 419 strikes fear in the mind of every enlightened Nigerian. This is the number of the decree prohibiting obtaining money or material things by false pretense or what is popularly referred to as advance fee fraud. Those who engaged in this fraud dupe people of their hard-earned money and created a terrible image for the country. Just as the activities of this group of people are dying down, cyber crimes are succeeding in taking a

hold in our national lives.

The inference that can be drawn from the foregoing is that most of the ex-militants from Niger Delta region or elsewhere, most members of the Boko Haram sect, most of the political office holders who came to power by foul means and most of the wealthy citizens who corruptly enriched themselves must have engaged in one form of antisocial behaviour or the other in their adolescent years as the ultimate offshoot of antisocial behaviour of adolescence is criminal activities in adulthood.

### **The Implications of Antisocial Behaviour among Adolescents on National Development**

Antisocial behaviour in adolescents usually persist to a large extent and manifests in adult criminal activities (Hanrahan, 2006). Hence, a high rate of antisocial behaviour among the adolescents gives rise to a corresponding high rate of criminal activities. This probably explains the high crime wave prevalent in our society in recent times as both adult and adolescent criminals through their nefarious activities create the following unpalatable conditions in the country.

#### **Unattractive destination for tourists:**

Nigeria is hardly remembered in terms of tourist attraction despite her huge potentials in that regard. There are tourist sites in many states of the federation including beaches, rocks and caves. These sites have failed to attract tourists especially foreigners for fear of the menace of the criminals who must have passed through a history of antisocial behaviours in their lives. Nigeria occupied unenviable positions in the Transparency International Perception index which placed Nigeria as the 32nd most corruption country out of the 147 that were assessed in 2007. This was an improvement over the 2005 and 2006 ratings which placed Nigeria as 3rd and 17th most corrupt out of the 147 countries respectively (Olaguju, 2012). Nigeria rated 143 in 2011 and 139 in 2012 out of 1176 countries surveyed by the Transparency International (Amy, 2012). With the activities of advanced fee fraud operators or in Local parlance 419 fraudsters who have gone electronic in modern times, sending internet mails to their would-be victims coupled with kidnapping of Nigerian and foreign nationals for ransom and reports of corruption at high places, Nigeria's image has been battered. Consequently, periodic warnings are sent by high commissions of American and European countries against traveling to Nigeria. These warnings are heeded to as foreigners exclude Nigeria as their tourist destination. In one instance, a pilot recently flew into Abuja from US, discharged his passengers and insisted on flying to Ghana to pass the night on interrogation, he confided in one of the passengers that he would not like to pass the night in Nigeria for security reasons. This short story helps to bring to fore the dilemma Nigerian tourism industry faces. Therefore, no tourists who value peace and wish to enjoy peaceful and convivial holiday would like to visit Nigeria for that purpose. In this way, Nigerian tourism industry remains largely under-developed and foreign exchange needed for development is hardly realized from this sector.

#### **Low foreign investment**

Money has been likened to a coward who does not go where it is not safe (Merszie, 1998). Nigerian nation in recent past witnessed a large scale vandalization of property of oil companies by the Niger Delta militants most of them owned by foreigners. The vandalization is still going on today though at a limited scale. The vandalization is usually perpetrated by adolescents with conduct disorder or adults who once engaged in antisocial behaviour. In the present height of technology, the world is a global village where what happens in one part of it is received in other parts within minutes. Investors are aware; of the spate of vandalism going on in the country and so are afraid to invest their money. Even some established companies are beginning to scale down their operations because of the activities of vandals.

#### **Unemployment**

Activities of criminals who once engaged in antisocial behaviours have contributed to reduction in employment opportunities in the country. The corrupt individuals run around companies and embezzled money meant to start up new business outfits or expand the existing ones and by so doing, they deny Nigerians employment opportunities. Some private companies have folded over the years due to unhealthy business climate occasioned by corrupt practices of those who exhibited antisocial behaviour in their adolescent years. Similarly, vandalization of the property of some companies have resulted in scaling down their operations rather expansion, thus, discouraging the establishment of new companies with attendant loss of jobs.

#### **Infrastructural Decay**

One of the greatest problems faced by a society ridden with uncontrolled adolescents' antisocial behaviours is "white collar crimes" such as falsification of figures in offices and during elections, inflation of contract figures, bribery and kickbacks. Government officials at federal, state and local government levels across the nation indulge in these acts. Huge sums of money are usually voted and paid out for projects that are either not

executed or shoddily executed. The attendant consequences of this are that good roads are not constructed and the existing ones are in a terrible state of disrepair constituting death traps. The hospitals and the equipment thereof are in a deplorable state owing to neglect and diversion of money meant for developing health sector of our economy. Hence, wealthy Nigerians have resorted to traveling abroad for treatment. Furthermore, most of our higher institutions can best be described as glorified secondary schools. Every year, there is a huge budgetary allocation to education sector. In practical terms, there is nothing on ground to justify these allocations. Again, ghost workers syndrome has taken root in our national life, in all these, the money voted for infrastructural development ends up in the pockets of government officials and their collaborators leaving the infrastructures in ruin.

### **Poverty and Hunger**

Despite the huge oil revenue of Nigeria, the country is rated among the poorest countries of the world. The 2006 United Nations Human Development Index indicated that 70.8% of Nigerian citizens resident in the country lived on less than one dollar and (UNICEF Nigeria). With a very large proportion of unemployed youths and high dependence ratio, undeveloped manufacturing sector of the economy, greed and embezzlement of funds meant for developmental programmes that could impact positively on the lives of people there is massive poverty and hunger in the land.

### **Insecurity of life and property**

Nigeria has been witnessing unprecedeted and deliberate spate of killings in recent times. On daily basis, breaking news about the killings perpetrated by members of Boko Haram sect in the North. The intractable killings in Jos, abduction and killing of innocent people everywhere, ritual killings and communal clashes among differed communities have left destruction of lives and property as the aftermath.

## **II. Conclusion**

Antisocial behaviour among the adolescents in Nigeria is a source of concern to right-thinking citizens. The tendency for antisocial behaviour develop in children at tender age. If they are not checked at the onset, they usually persist and manifest at adulthood as criminal tendencies. From the factors identified in this paper as causes of anti- social behaviours, it is pertinent that some practical measures be taken to change the trend. Therefore, necessary measures must be put in place to forestall the development of antisocial behaviour traits in adolescents. Failure to do this can give rise to a large population of adolescents with this malady. If this happens the society will be worse off as this group of adolescents transform to adults some day to unleash crimes and corruption to the society. Then the unpleasant condition can trigger off chain reactions of low investment, infrastructural decay, unemployment, insecurity of life and property, poverty and hunger.

## **III. Recommendations**

The following recommendations are hereby made to forestall the development of anti-social behaviour among Nigerian adolescents;

1. parents and guardians should show love and care to their children and wards. When there is a need to punish a child for wrongdoing, the punishment must be mild and corrective rather than harsh and punitive. Excessive punishment incommensurable with the offence committed should be avoided.
2. Parents must monitor the type of images their children watch on television or video machines and efforts should be made to advice the children against watching violent images as these are capable of precipitating violent behaviour in them.
3. Parents should also monitor the type of friends and peer groups of their children. The children should be advised to keep away from friends or peers whose behaviours do not conform with the norms and values of the society. When the behaviours of children conform to the acceptable code of conduct in a society, they will develop into law-abiding adults who will contribute meaningfully for prosperous and blissful society where peace will religion supreme.
4. Parents and guardians should provide their children with good example of acceptable behaviours in the society by exhibiting and maintaining acceptable societal values and norms.
5. Recreation facilities should be adequately provided in schools to keep the adolescents productively engaged.
6. Effective and functional guidance and counselling services should be provided in all secondary schools to prevent anti-social behaviours and also modify such behaviours where it exists.

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