ASSERTIVENESS TRAINING AND VALUE RE-ORIENTATION AS PREVENTIVE COUNSELLING STRATEGIES FOR YOUTH RESTIVENESS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract
Youth restiveness is a recurring decimal in the face of socio-cultural, economic or political upheavals in Nigeria. Many Nigerian youths have taken to restiveness due to obvious problems such as lack of functional education, unemployment, poverty, insecurity, bad governance, and corruption, deceit by greedy politicians, low self-esteem etc. It is desirable for the youths who are the leaders of tomorrow to be well-endowed with the where-with-all to take Nigeria to the next level. This Paper examined the use of assertiveness training and value re-orientation as counselling strategies in preventing youth restiveness in Nigeria. The relevance of youths to the society, youth restiveness, and the issue of values, assertiveness training and its effects on restiveness, value re-orientation and restiveness, and also counselling implications were discussed. Training of Youths on assertiveness and value re-orientation by counsellors and also the establishment of Society for Assertiveness and Value Re-orientation (SAVRO) in schools were recommended.

The diverse challenges confronting Nigeria as a nation have threatened its growth and development. These challenges which rear their ugly heads as corruption, bribery, tribalism, religious bigotry, robbery and kidnapping to mention but a few, are the precursors of youth restiveness. Egbochukwu and Imo (2007) commented that the Nigerian society today has many behavioural problems of youths to grapple with. Nnachi (2003) outlined such problems to include truancy, drug offences, disobedience to constituted authority, assault, insult, stealing, violent demonstrations, vandalism, examination malpractices, robbery, secret cult activities, and so on. All these have bearing with restiveness.

The issue of youth restiveness in Nigeria has assumed such an alarming dimension that there is hardly any discussion that will not touch an aspect...
of it. Youth restiveness has cost Nigeria colossal losses in terms of lives and property. One would not be very surprised at the existence of restiveness especially among the youths in a country like Nigeria which is a conglomeration of people of diverse social, economic, political, psychological inclinations, needs and aspirations.

According to the National Youth Development Policy (2001) youths are people of ages between 18 and 35 years. Youths are known to significantly contribute to the development of any society when their energy is appropriately channelled to positive ventures, but if otherwise, youth restiveness manifests. Anasi (2010) asserted that disciplined, focused and law-abiding youths are an asset to any nation and make a bright future for the nation whereas lawless, indulgent, and violent youths are a threat to the peace and security of a nation.

A good starting point in addressing the national problem of youth restiveness is subjecting the youths to assertiveness training and value re-orientation early enough as meaningful national development is impossible in the face of incessant restiveness of youths. Unfortunately, many parents, teachers, government and significant others have failed in one way or another to pay due attention to youths and their challenges. This has led to restiveness on the parts of the youth who feel that it is the only way out for getting needed attention. Youths without jobs engage in all types of vandalism and wanton destruction of lives and property (Akinola, 2011). The issue of marginalisation, denial of social rights, environmental degradation and economic devastation activities by the government of Nigeria had triggered off the irate youths in the Niger Delta region to involve in all sorts of restiveness in demand for their rights (Chukwuemeka and Agbara, 2011). Youths in other parts of Nigeria are known for one form of restiveness or the other such as the ‘Area boys’ of Lagos known for incessant harassments of innocent citizens, the youths in certain parts of the South East who practise kidnapping, the youths in the South-South zone known for militancy, the members of the ‘Boko Haram’ in the North known for insurgency, and so on.

This study is therefore undertaken to look into the issue of youth restiveness in Nigeria with the aim of suggesting practical tips on the use of assertiveness training and value re-orientation on the youths so as to equip them with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that are necessary to transform them from restive to well-adjusted citizens.

The Relevance of Youths to the Society

Youths constitute half of the 148million people of Nigeria (Olusakin, 2010). They occupy a prominent place in any society. Onyeikpe (2007)
commented that apart from being the leaders of tomorrow, the youths outnumber the middle-aged and aged and their energy and ideas are great potentials to the society. According to the National Youth Development Policy (2001):

The youths are the foundation of a society; their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation. Through their creative talents and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic developments and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes, a nation finds her motivation; on their energies, she builds her vitality and purpose and because of their dreams and aspirations, the future of a nation is assured (p1).

As the most active segment of any society, youths are the major determiners of peace and stability of a nation (Ozohu-Suilaman, 2006). On the other hand, the degree of disorderliness and instability in a society is also determined in part by youths. According to the National Youth Development Policy (2011) the extent of the responsible conduct and roles of the youths in a society has a direct relationship with the development of that society.

The Concept of Youth Restiveness

In spite of the inherent virtues in the youths as people capable of taking the nation to the next level, if the youths are not carefully handled to bring out these inherent virtues, negative qualities such as restiveness may start manifesting.

Youth restiveness has to do with youths embarking on socially unacceptable behaviour in order to achieve their demands from the relevant quarters. Elegbeye (2005) described it as a sustained protestation embarked on to enforce desired outcome from a constituted authority by an organized body of youths and is marked by violence and disruption of lawful activities. Chukwuezi (2009) defined youth restiveness as a combination of actions or conduct that constitutes or runs contrary to accepted social norms and standards. Chika and Onyere (2010) observed that to be restive is to be unable to stay still or unwillingness to be controlled especially because one is bored or not satisfied with certain decisions, changed or existing laws considered to be unfavourable.

Some of the factors that contribute to youth restiveness include illiteracy, poor child upbringing, unemployment, and imbalance in the distribution of national resources. Elegbeye (2005) added the peer-motivated excitement of being a student, the jingoistic pursuit of patriotic ideals, and perceived victimization arising from economic exploitation to this list, while Ofem and Ajayi (2008) suggested lack of humanitarian and social welfare, lack of good governance, corrupt practices of
government officials, inadequate training programmes, unemployment, inadequate recruitment facilities, and lack of quality education, etc.

Youth restiveness goes with devastating consequences such as increase in social vices and crimes like cultism, kidnapping, armed robbery, hostage-taking/abduction, destruction of lives and properties, and raping, etc.

The Issue of Values

Having looked at the concept of restiveness among the youths, it is necessary to consider the issue of values and subsequently value re-orientation. Values give meaning and purpose to the life of any society. Halstead and Taylor (1991) cited by Elendu (2012) stated that values are principles, fundamental convictions, ideas, standards or life stances which act as general guides to behaviour or as reference points in decision-making or the evaluation of beliefs and actions. Values are strong socio-cultural elements that drive and direct a society (Elendu op cit). The way people behave speaks volumes about their value system.

Section 23 of the 1999 Nigerian Constitution as shown in Wikipedia (2014) has made provisions for ethics and values to guide the conduct of the citizens of Nigeria. Discipline, integrity, dignity of labour, social justice, religious tolerance and patriotism have been outlined as the national ethics. Section 24 enumerated the duties of the citizens to be: abide by the constitution, respect its ideals, the national flag, the national anthem, and legitimate authorities, help to ensure the good name of Nigeria, defend the country and render national service and respect the dignity of other citizens. Respect for authority, elders and others, chastity, dignity of labour, courage and self reliance can also be added to the list of values.

The rationale for highlighting the core national values in the national constitution is for every Nigerian to internalize and live them out to his or her own advantage and that of the nation. The family, the school, radio, television and peers as the chief socializing agents for inculcating societal values into individuals have to be judiciously used to portray these national values in the economic, social, political, cultural, religious, educational and every other aspect of life.

Igbusor (2013) opined that core values serve as the driving force for the development, growth and progress of any nation and so every individual, group and the entire nation must have them. The value system of any society greatly checks the behaviours and attitudes of the citizens, but unfortunately, Nigerians do not strictly abide by the national ethics and values as enshrined in the constitution. Indiscipline is the order of the day and there is lack of integrity. Greed, laziness, religious bigotry, lack of respect for our institutions and national symbols have
negatively affected the dignity of labour. Added to these are unpatriotic spirit, ethno-tribal sentiments, lack of time consciousness, examination malpractice, nepotism, ‘God-fatherism’ which according to Elendu (2012) affect the attitude to national development. Many of the youths are restive instead of being at the forefront of positive transformation in the nation. However, for Nigerian youths not to go into restiveness, they should be encouraged to imbibe the culture of honesty, transparency, integrity, hard work, and self-reliance. This can be done through engaging them in assertiveness training and value re-orientation.

Assertiveness Training
It is a well known fact that wealthy politicians often lure youths into thuggery, rigging of elections, destruction of lives and property and other acts of restiveness. Youths are also influenced by their peers to take to restiveness. Youths who are assertive will know how to say no to these unwholesome acts in spite of the huge sums of money which the greedy politicians will offer them. Assertiveness is the ability of one to express his or her emotions and needs without violating the rights of others and without being aggressive (Radwan, 2014). To be assertive means that one will not violate his own rights nor sacrifice his own needs in order to please others. Being assertive means being direct with what you need, want, feel or believe in a way that is respectful of the views of others; it is a communication skill that can reduce conflict, build your self-confidence and improve your relationship in the work place (Better Health Channel, 2014). One often ends up losing his or her self-confidence if he or she is overly nice so as to win his friends. Assertiveness does not mean shouting at people or scaring them but it is the act of asking for what you want in a confident way that harms no one but at the same time preserves your rights.

Being assertive falls right in the middle of being passive and being aggressive. If you are passive, you will never get to vocalize your needs; if you are aggressive you will look like a big bully and will likely be misdirecting your frustrations. But if you are assertive, you will be able to express your desires while respecting the needs of others and you will have a better chance of getting what you want and deserve (wikiHow, 2014).

Assertiveness is a skill that one can learn if he makes up his mind since it is not hereditary. It involves one changing the words he uses and also his body language. Assertiveness has a lot to do with one’s upbringing. Telling a child that he must be nice in order for others to like him might make him not to be assertive when he grows up.

Assertiveness involves a thorough understanding of who you are and a belief in your value. This gives one the basis to be self-confident.
In the course of training youths on how to be assertive, they must learn that they have the right to have their own values, beliefs, opinions and emotions; refuse to justify or explain their actions to others, tell others how they wish to be treated and to express themselves. They can also say ‘No’, I don’t know’, ‘I don’t understand’, or even ‘I don’t care’, they can make mistakes and should be treated with respect.

Youths must be taught that if they do not do the above and if they are not assertive, their self-confidence could be affected, thereby giving them a feeling of worthlessness. Better Health Channel (2014) enumerated the following as tips for helping one to be more assertive:

i. Make the decision to positively assert yourself. It is better to be assertive than passive or aggressive.

ii. Aim at open and honest communication. Remember to respect others when sharing your feelings, wants, needs, beliefs, or opinions.

iii. Listen actively. Try to understand the other people’s point of view and do not interrupt when they are explaining it to you.

iv. Agree to disagree. Remember that having a different point of view does not mean you are right and the other person is wrong.

v. Avoid guilt trips. Be honest and tell others how you feel or what you want without making accusations or making them feel guilty.

vi. Stay calm. Breathe normally, look the person in the eye, keep your face relaxed and speak in a normal voice.

vii. Take a problem-solving approach to conflict. Try to see the other person as your friend not your enemy.

viii. Practice assertiveness. Talk in an assertive way in front of a mirror or with a friend. Pay attention to your body language as well as to the words you say.

ix. Use ‘I’. Stick with statements that include ‘I’ in them such as ‘I think’ or ‘I feel’. Don’t use aggressive language such as ‘You always’ or ‘You never’.

x. Be patient. Being assertive is a skill that needs practice.

wikiHow op cit categorised what one can do to be assertive into three namely projecting confidence, adjusting your mindset and making your demands.

A. Projecting Confidence

i. Have confident body language since the way you hold yourself speaks volumes about you long before you even get a chance to open your mouth. Keep your shoulders squared and your chin up, avoid fidgeting and look people in the eye while
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speaking to show that you do not intend to be brushed off.

ii. Speak slowly, calmly and clearly so that people can listen and also appreciate that you are worth the wait. You need to make yourself heard but you do not need to be loud. Do not be apologetic when you have not done anything wrong. Be concise so as not to lose your audience. Keep your suggestion or point short and sweet-long enough to say everything you need to say but not so long as to get away from the main point.

iii. Work on your appearance. It is good to look good.

iv. Rehearse what you are going to say so that you can always sound firm and decisive. You can practice in front of a mirror or before a trusted friend.

b. adjusting your mindset
i. Be honest with yourself about what you want. For instance make a concrete choice as to where you want your friend to take you to dinner instead of ‘wherever’

ii. Set firm boundaries for yourself before a conversation so that you do not derail and compromise your needs in the middle of a conversation. It helps you to avoid conflicts.

iii. Do not expect people to read your mind. Always make them know what you need or how you feel and do not assume that people know.

iv. Take responsibility for your own problems. Be active.

v. Stop trying to please everybody. For instance advise your neighbour to stop throwing loud parties so that you can sleep well rather than keep quiet and suffer in silence.

vi. Stop feeling guilty about not giving people what they want. You do not need to feel guilty for advising someone to tidy up her room.

C. Stating Your Demands
i. Know what you want out of a situation. Do not just express general disagreement or unhappiness in a conversation but be specific about what you want.

ii. Stick to your goals in the conversation no matter how much people want to derail you.

iv. Break patterns. Work hard to change a pattern you feel is not good.

v. Say what is in your mind instead of being silent when you have something to say.

vi. Learn to say no when you should.

vii. Learn to speak up in public

viii. Kindly ask someone to stop doing annoying things
Effects of Assertiveness Training on Restiveness

Assertiveness training leaves youths with the following qualities which help them not to be restive:
1. empowerment to find solution to problems. They become better problem-solvers
2. ability to feel unthreatened or not victimized when things do not work out according to expectation
3. ability to get things done
4. ability to act fairly and with empathy
5. leadership qualities become clear

Value Re-orientation and Restiveness

The fact that the value system of Nigeria is seriously being eroded is very glaring judging from the declining standards in various facets of life such as education, a battered economy, and a poor image of the nation. Value re-orientation is a way out of this mess. This should begin with the youths who are the leaders of tomorrow. Value re-orientation has to do with a changed set of attitudes and beliefs. Re-orientation in terms of values is the act of changing direction in which one is orientated, a turnaround, a reversal or a change of course (Ogbonmwan, 2012). Value re-orientation must involve a refocusing on our values to enable individuals imbibe the right values with an ultimate aim of restoring dignity in Nigeria. Value re-orientation translates to everyone trying to do things the right way. Fall outs from the acceptance of good values by all citizens especially the youths will include a reduction if not total eradication of corruption, robbery, kidnapping, terrorism poverty, and indiscipline as well as other social vices. For any society to be seen as being free from youth restiveness, it must be known for giving good values a centre position. Igbuzor (2013) aptly observed that nowadays people become wealthy overnight without being asked questions about the sources of the wealth while the communities of the embezzlers of public funds reward them with chieftaincy titles. According to him, there is a brazen display of wealth in the midst of widespread poverty, a destruction of the extended family system while a great number of the population has been caught up with the get rich quick syndrome.

A quick and effective way of curbing youth restiveness through value re-orientation is to redefine the national values. The youths must be made to accept the fact that money is not the ultimate thing in life. They must be mobilized to wake up to the reality that hard work, integrity; honesty and accountability have greater value than money. They must be encouraged to acquire functional education. Through serious campaigns using the mass media, the re-orientation of values can take the form of substituting positive values for negative ones such as discouraging shunting (i.e. one not waiting to take his turn but preferring life on the fast lane without commensurate hard work), ensuring that
hard work plays out in promotions and recognitions, discouraging kickbacks, examination malpractice and the likes. Discouraging bad governance and creating employment are also very necessary in value re-orientation. Also through value re-orientation, unhealthy lifestyles of cultism, gang formation, drug and alcohol dependency, can be replaced with socially-acceptable and healthy ones. To drive the concept of value re-orientation, there should be emphasis on the need for valuing human life, honour and respect especially for one’s parents, exemplary living, truthfulness, support for government, being trust-worthy, competent, and industrious, etc.

Counselling Implications

The task of preventing youth restiveness through the use of assertiveness training and value re-orientation is quite enormous. Bearing in mind the definition of Counselling by Lar, Okpedo and Bulus (1992) as a face to face interaction between psychologically troubled person/persons known as the counsellee(s) and a help professional (counsellor) for the purpose of resolving the counsellee’s conflicts, counsellors should:

1. advise the government on the need for assertiveness training and value re-orientation among the students especially through formation of clubs and societies saddled with such responsibilities.

2. counsel youths on the need for hard work, and the consequences of violating the law

3. counsel youths on the need for exemplary living through the exhibition of the right values

4. advise youths to use the patriotic spirit to replace the Nigerian factor syndrome

5. train youths on assertiveness and value re-orientation

Conclusion

An appropriate management of youths and their challenges will highlight their good qualities and suppress the negative ones such as restiveness. Quality education with emphasis on assertiveness training and value re-orientation can do the magic of transformation of youths from restiveness to being in the vanguard of economic recovery for the nation in the near future.

Recommendations

In view of the need to curb youth restiveness, efforts should be made to encourage exercises that promote the inculcation of the right attitudes among the youths, while discouraging activities that promote restiveness. The following recommendations are therefore made:

1. Infusion of topics into the curriculum that will debunk the idea that restiveness is the best way to get demands met

2. Formation of Societies for Assertiveness and Value Re-
orientation in schools (SAVRO) with the specific aim of curbing youth restiveness.

3. Establishment and Empowerment of Functional Counselling units to reach out to all facets of the society.

4. General condemnation /outcry against corruption, and support for transparency

5. Ensuring that awards for good behaviour at all levels including the schools are given meritoriously and not to the highest financial bidder.

References


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