

SEXUAL BEHAVIOURS AMONG ORPHANED ADOLESCENTS IN NIGERIA: A SOCIAL WORK APPROACH

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Abstract

Teenage sexual behaviours present a myriad of problems to the orphaned adolescents, the immediate family, and the society, all of which invariably end up with aborted prospects of developing to the limits of their full potentials. Most of these adolescents have no knowledge of the implications of indulging in adolescent sexual behaviour. This paper examines some of the factors responsible for orphanhood in Nigeria and the causes and consequences of teenage sexual behaviours, with a view to identifying some of the control measures that could be effective in enhancing the social functioning of the orphaned adolescents in Nigeria. The paper concludes by highlighting the implication of social work practice on sexual problems of adolescents.

Keywords: Sexual behaviour, orphans, adolescents, social work.

Introduction

There has been sexual revolution in the developed countries of the world. Following this revolution, sex is now seen by youths as a recreational activity. This new orientation is fast spreading to the developing countries with its attendant perils (Kinsey, 1995). Specifically the young ones are easily susceptible to sexual relationships because their characteristics are still in formative stages.

The sexual risks faced by orphaned adolescents and their specific requirements vary a great deal depending on the situation in which these children find themselves (World Bank, 2004). These sexual risks range from economic and social risks to psychological risks. Understanding the sexual behaviours of orphaned children is critical for attaining the millennium development goals set by the united Nation for education, health, nutrition and poverty. The reason is that the exposure of these children to sexual risks has a critical impact on the school enrollments, health and

nutritional status of several million of vulnerable children.

The teenage sexual behaviours are more often found among those who are experiencing discrimination and oppression and individuals experiencing depression especially those children whose parents have died of HIV/AIDS. Members of marginalized groups such as the orphaned adolescents who are outside the main stream of society are more at risk because they are more likely to be unemployed and living in poverty. Regardless of ethnicity, many orphaned adolescents turn to sexual behaviours as coping mechanisms to overcome starvation, and feelings of despair and hopelessness. A major way they do this is through the social institutions of marriage and family which shape people's ideas of right and wrong. As children learn the norms of their society, they learn what sexual behaviors are approved (Henslin, 2000). Although it is a fact that sexual behaviors from the points of view of social scientists is learned. The differences

in sexual desires and behaviors among human beings are responses to social rather than biological stimuli and from the foregoing, human sexuality is socially determined, the adaptation of the people to situation prevalent at any given time is achieved to a large extent through disciplining of their sexuality.

These orphaned adolescents that involve themselves in this act of sexual behaviors are expected to be leader of tomorrow that would lead our great country Nigeria to greatness. When these youths are faced with this problems, they are usually get so embarrassed, disturbed, confused and become totally dislodged and disintegrated in life. Thus, the future of would be leaders are shattered.

Sex education is one of the ways in which sexual behaviors of these orphaned adolescents in particular could be resolved. Awam (2008) notes that the rising incidence of teenage pregnancy and spread of sexually transmitted diseases are as a result of inadequate guidance and education about sex related matters. Sex education like education, generally would bring into being fully aware of sex matters. Sex education would certainly help, to curb orphaned adolescents sex related problems. It is basically about providing adolescents with knowledge that will enable them to make informed and responsible decisions about sexual behavior at all stages of their lives.

Theoretical orientation

This study adopted the biological perspective as its framework of analysis. The biological perspective was developed by Claire and Susan (1998) and has the largest tradition among theorists of adolescents. The theory posits that adolescents are associated with physical growth and maturation and biochemical changes – a physical process that predicts the social behaviour in adolescents. The authors maintained that since it is difficult

to argue that social behaviour cause physical growth, hormonal secretions or biochemical changes, most theorists have argued that certain biological processes are casual mechanism that generates social behaviour change in adolescents.

Claire (2008) says that through an evolutionary mechanism, adolescents could acquire certain traits, which could be transmitted to one's progeny at the time of conception. If adolescents are exposed to the kind of environmental conditions, their acquisition and transmittal of positive traits will improve humanity itself. Adolescence is a period of rapid physical growth and improvement in co-ordination. During this period, different parts of the body grow at different rates, so that the individual is advanced according to some developmental index but behind on others. Adolescents at this time begin to exhibit their interest in the opposite sex. The two sexes increase their contacts, usually in groups and these group contacts are the mechanism by which adolescents identify and interact with the group. The adolescent begin to feel certain attractions towards another associates with pleasant sensation which provides the foundation for sexual relationship.

Causes of orphaning of children

The situation of the world's children (UNICEF, 2006) reflects the deepening and widening exclusion and invisibility of children in Nigeria (FMWA, 2006). The HIV and AIDS epidemic is closely accompanied by a resurgent TB epidemic, opportunistic infections, malaria and growing unprecedented problems of orphans and vulnerable children as a result of rising number of deaths of one or both parents due to HIV/AIDS. These are further compounded by the worsening vulnerability of children through high material mortality, poverty, diseases, armed conflicts and communal clashes leading to family

dislocation and instability in income (Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, 2006).

In addition, a survey conducted by the World Bank in 12 states of Nigeria in 2002 showed that the causes of orphaning of children were due to accidental deaths 42%, ethnic/communal conflicts 22%, death during child birth 17% and HIV/AIDS 11%. About one quarter (1.8 million) of the 7 million orphans estimated in 2003 were orphaned due to HIV and AIDS (Children on the brink publication - 2004). FMWA (2006) posits that following the slow progression of HIV/AIDS, the number of children orphaned by AIDS will continue to rise in the next decade even in the unlikely event that the transmission of the infection is drastically reduced within a short time. The pandemic is depleting entire communities of their most valuable resources, killing men and women in their most productive years and in their reproductive years. Beside, depriving children of their basic needs and exposing them to sexual risks. AIDS

increases the risks that children will end up on the street, where they will be sexually abused or infected with HIV (Ramphela, 2001) or caught up in criminal activities (Schoentech, 2001).

AIDS undermines children's live and the feat of a "lost generation" is strong. If nothing is done, the risk of not meeting the millennium development of future socioeconomic development will remain gloomy (World Bank, 2004). Indeed, the long – time implications of the problems call for a search for solutions that can be sustained over the coming decades. In this study orphaned adolescents could be defined as those children who are under 18 years increased negative outcomes compared with the "average" child in their society. The major risks affecting orphaned children are classified into two broad categories

1. Economic and social risks
2. Psychological risks and vulnerabilities.

Potential impacts of AIDS on children and communities

Impacts on children	Impacts on communities
Loss of family and identity	Reduced labor
Depression	Increased poverty
Reduced well being	Loss of skilled labor
Increased malnutrition	Reduced access to health care
Starvation	Elevated morbidity and mortality
Loss of Health status	Breakdown and psychological stress
Increased demand in labor	Inability to maintain Infrastructure
Loss of inheritance	
Homelessness	
Crime	
Exposure to STDs/HIV	

Loss of Education opportunities	
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Source: Hunter and Williamson (1997) cited in UNAIDS (1999).

However, because child labor in Africa relies mainly on family based activities, lack of access to assets such as land or livestock after the death of parent may force the poorest orphans into idleness (Andvig 2000). Teenage female orphans seem particularly at risk of being put to work because of cultural practices and the limited educational opportunities available to them, and of being physically and sexually abused. Indeed, the lack of parental protection and guidance may leave a door open to these orphans to indulge in sexual behaviors where they think their immediate problems could be solved.

Poverty in the land has led to the shrinking of the formal economy and this has resulted in the preponderances of informal economy. The informal economy accommodates various practices such as prostitution and drug trafficking. This informal economy has contributed to the high level of orphaned and vulnerability in Nigeria. (UNAIDS, 2006) summarized the main causes of orphan hood and vulnerability as:

1. The unprecedented high level of poverty
2. Low level of education and inadequate training
3. Lack of parental care/control
4. Inadequate sources of information.
5. The issue of HIV/AIDS
6. Weak capacity of Government institutions
7. Infant/child mortality and morbidity.

Preventing children from becoming orphans

Preventing children from becoming orphans should be the first critically important strategy

adopted by governments, NGOs and donors (World Bank 2004). Different ways have proven effective in preventing the number of orphans from rising. These includes preventing unwanted pregnancies, reducing maternal mortality, preventing HIV transmission and enabling people living with HIV/AIDS to live longer (Hunter 2000).

Family planning services, voluntary counseling and testing (VCT) facilities, antiretroviral (ARV) therapy and health care services for women are major interventions that could greatly help to reduce the incidence of orphan hood, by among other things, prolonging the life of HIV positive parents. The World Bank's multi country AIDS programs have a major role to play in improving access to these interventions by helping to find projects such as prevention activities.

Problems of teenage sexual behaviour:

Sexual behaviours among adolescents have been widely condemned by many, some condemned the phenomenon on the grounds of medical problems while others on grounds of personality and psychological pre – dispositions it has on the teenagers themselves. However, researchers have argued that the consequences of sexual behavior, thereafter, are that adolescents contract sexually transmitted diseases, HIV Virus and run the long – term health effects such as infertility (Cuttmacher, H. 2000). The health, physical, economic, social and psychological disadvantages of adolescent sexual behaviors heavily out weighs any known advantages, and this calls for urgent and drastic attention to the

ravaging epidemic, both in developing and developed countries (Macoby, 2006).

Teenage sexual behavior present a myriad of problems to the adolescents of orphaned children, the immediate family and the society, all of which invariably end up with aborted prospects of developing to the limits of their full potentials (Chelman, 2000). Any orphaned adolescent who is known to have contracted HIV/AIDS is labeled as a wayward person and he/she is ridiculed from the home and outside the home, coupled with loss of academic opportunities. All these joined together can get the person depressed chronically and will make such a person to withdraw from social activities and if not checked well, these could lead the adolescent person to suicide.

It has been noted that adolescents face myriads of problems in their bid to assert their sexuality. This is owing to faulty or inadequate preparation given to the child for effective sexual adjustment (Awam, 2009). They run the risk of being infected by sexually transmitted diseases especially the deadly HIV/AIDS among others like gonorrhea or syphilis. Most of these children have dropped out of school owing to early or unwanted pregnancy. According to Jessor (1995) little or no thought is given to the psychological effects which arise from these teenage irresponsible sexual exploits. Hence, the psychological and emotional implications are grave and better imagined than experienced. Teenagers that indulge in early sexual acts are subjected to psychological trauma, because when an adolescent is so engrossed with sexual immoral act he is bound be emotionally depressed.

Causes of adolescent sexual behavior

The intense sexual drive experimentation exposes our youths to early sexual behaviors (Owuamanam, 2002:81). The factors responsible for this awful situation include –

crave for money and materialism. One of the obvious causes of teenage sexual behaviour is crave for money and materialism. The youths today have become slaves to money and material values, young girls sleep around with their male counterparts in order to earn money to meet up with their material needs. These adolescents are so entangled with fashionable dresses and jewelries.

The issue of lack of sex education posses another danger to youth's sexual activities. According to Durojaiye (2002) the traditional ways of dealing with sex education have not been replaced by the school system which at present has no clear plans for sex education. It is improperly done where it is given at all because most people emphasize the negative aspects of it, that is the "Don'ts" only. Most of the information about sex come from the peer group and often brings misconceptions. It has been investigated and found out that adolescents aged 12 and 16 years are already more involved in sex exploration than adults and they got their information from their peer group instead from their parents. Most people in Nigeria believe that sex education is a forum for promoting promiscuity and premature genital involvement.

Studies have also shown that peer group influence and alcoholism no doubt, lead to adolescent sexual behaviors. Some of them who were victims confessed that "if they had not gotten bad company, they would not have entered such a mess". It is evil company that corrupts our good morals, he said. The truth about adolescents and the effects of alcohol or drug enhances the reason why adolescents indulge in sexual behavior. A survey done by the National Campaign to prevent teenage sexual behavior showed that almost half of sexually active teenagers used marijuana in the past, while only ten percent of non- sexually active had tried it.

Illiteracy and Ignorance also contribute to the consequences of sex. Most of these adolescents have no knowledge of the implications of indulging on adolescent sexual behaviors. They engage in sexual activity for the mere fun of it. Some of them are lured into it and out of either stupidity or sympathy for those involved; they do not tell any adult of their affairs. According to Eelli (1999) two parent's family is then ideal family for bringing up children. The number of one parent family has been on the increase as rapidly as that of traditionally two parent families with a growing proportion being represented by newly married teenagers. One of the major problems in single parenting is that the parent may not be able to check way ward attitude of their houses at will and without restrictions. The ways parents interact with their children affect them either positively or negatively. Some parents are very harsh to their children even to the extent that they are scared of them. In like manner, most parents portray bad life style, which if emulated by their children could lead to adolescent sexual behavior. This negative reaction of parents emanates from the wrong notion of morality that "sex is sinful and corrupts the mind.

Implication of social work practice on sexual problems

The National Association of social workers defines the social work as a profession that exists to provide humane and effective social services to individuals, families, groups, communities and society so that social functioning may be enhanced and the quality of life improved. Based on the above functions, social workers are called upon to improve the quality of life of the maladjusted children, especially those with sexual problems.

Why is it so important and necessary for social workers to be able to intervene in the area of sexuality?

According to Zastraw (1999) the most compelling reasons are:

1. Because sexuality is an extremely important aspect of the human personality, indeed, a driving biological force and
2. Because many other professionals who should be helpful to people with sexual concerns, such as physicians and psychotherapists, often are not. Historically, sex offenders have been incarcerated which addresses society's need to punish them, but the mental health aspects of their problems have been largely ignored. More recently, social workers have been in the fore front of the development of innovative and effective treatment methods that have been proven effective in reducing sex offences. These methods, according to Zastrow, (1999) include the following:
 1. Providing assertiveness training to reduce anger (a motivation for rape) or passivity (a motivation for seeking children as sexual targets).
 2. Implementing behavioral interventions to reduce deviant sexual arousal while promoting non deviant (Adult, Consenting) pair in appropriate sexual impulses with their consequences.
 3. Clarifying sexual values to address confusion clients may have about sexual thoughts and behavior.
 4. Reducing the rationalization sex offenders use to justify their behaviors.
 5. Increasing victimization awareness to assist the client in recognizing the full extent of harm in his or her sexual assaults has likely caused.

Social workers play crucial roles in creating awareness and teaching members of the public the right attitudes to sex and sex related habits thereby changing the age – long wrong perception about sex education at the early

stage. Social worker acts as a mediator between the parents and the maladjusted children, as a reformer for the rehabilitation of the drug addicts and the outlaws etc, he re – orients the conscience of the abused, the less privileged and the generality of the populace. Sex education as propelled by social workers gives a sound knowledge of sexual matters, which aims at alleviating the wrong opinions originally held against sex. It speaks against the negative conceptions of some parents to the effect that sex education shall create the morbid curiosity in the minds of the adolescence and may cause them to engage in a reckless experimentation. Sex education gives the adolescents the insight on how to handle issues of sex and provides for them, a means of avoiding the dangers associated with its abuse. With the involvement of social work in sexual problems, sex education has its importance to adolescents/youths, parents, and society as a whole because it controls pre – marital sex, abortion, sexual transmitted disease, sexual promiscuity and all dangers associated with lack of sex education which in one way or other attested the development of a nation.

Conclusion

Social workers believe in society that takes care of its vulnerable members, in a world where children do not suffer from hunger, abuse, illness and hardship (Ngwu, C. 2009). The social worker is always placed in a position of being the professional person most likely to facilitate linkage between the orphaned adolescents and community resources. With this linkage, an orphaned adolescent will be able to address some of his/her psychological and financial needs which probably may have been the cause of his/her sexual experimentation.

Studies have shown that the health, physical, economic, social and psychological disadvantages of adolescent's sexual behaviours heavily outweighs any advantages

that may be associated with it. However, the consequences of adolescent sexual behaviors are that they contract sexually transmitted disease, HIV Virus and run the long – term health effects such as infertility. A proper knowledge and sound attitude towards sex and sexual habits are very vital for happy and healthy life.

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