

## **COUNSELLING STRATEGIES FOR MODIFICATION OF DEVIANT BEHAVIOURS AMONG YOUTHS**

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### **Abstract**

*Deviant behaviour among Nigeria youths is increasingly becoming worrisome due to its overbearing impact on family and the society. This paper is essentially anchored on this social crisis. In examining this issue, the researcher carefully identifies tendencies such as stealing, truancy, lateness, bully, fighting, lying, disobedience, insubordination, cultism, cheating, examination malpractice, indecent dressing, smoking & Alcohol consumption among others associated with deviant behaviour which may require certain counselling methods to change. The method which counsellors use to effect this behavioural change is called behavioural modification. Conclusion and recommendations are drawn from the discussion on factors and causes of deviant behaviours.*

**Keywords:** Counselling, strategies, behaviours, modification, youths

### **INTRODUCTION**

The term behaviour is synonymous with manner, conduct, bearing, action etc. According to Egbule (2007), human behaviour is a psychological concept, defined as the sum total of actions, feelings and ways of life of an individual as perceived by others. Behaviour is a broad term that encompasses the entirety of an individual personality (i.e., one's unique pattern of behaviour); and all the positive and negative traits of the individual whether acceptable or otherwise which are observable and can be measured in the individual.

Modification on the other hand, represents a process or change or improving upon the quality or performance of anything. Therefore, behaviour modification is a systematic process of improving or changing human behaviour. Egbule (2007) defines behaviour modification as the scientific procedure for correcting and preventing abnormal behaviours through techniques such as, counselling, modelling, and punishment.

Youth constitutes about 80% of the population and only 47% of this ratio is economically active. Thus it shows that the youths are expected to be the pillars and vanguard of accelerated development, and also exhibits behaviours that can drive the country forward. As engine room of national development, they possess the power that propels the visionary force behind success in our national endeavour. But unfortunately, it is the opposite that is often exhibited as manifested in stealing, truancy, lateness, bullying, fighting, lying, disobedience, insubordination, cultism, cheating, examination malpractice, indecent dressing, smoking and drinking alcohol and destruction.

The following behaviours are discussed in this paper:

**Stealing-** Stealing is simply the act of taking another person's possession by deceit or without permission or express approval. The mention of expression implies that stealing could involve both material and non - materials things. According to Tor-Anyiin (2015) material things include books, food stuff, clothes, money and any other physical things. While non - material things include mental aspects like dishonest, taking of another person's work as yours or sneaking in without notice to obtain information with the aim of causing harm or advantage for self or agent. Deceit involves taking something that belongs to another person furtively, scrumptiously or through trickery. Stealing, cuts across age, gender, marital status, literacy level, socio-economic levels, the lower, middle and high. Thus, Lar (1995) reported stories of burglaries and similar cases of theft committed by children of professors and lecturers. Children from low professional occupations were however found to be more involved in stealing than others, probably because parents in low professional occupations do not have money to take care of their needs and so their off springs steal to meet urgent demands. However, children from the upper class families are not exempted as peer's group membership influences is usually strong.

The counselor in the school setting should use the eclectic method of behaviour modification. Tor-Anyiin (2015) points out that treatment of stealing must start from identification of the causes. A look of the family background, home, school and peers is the first stage in the modify act of stealing. The cause needs to be handled during counselling. There is high need to discuss with the youth the negative consequences of stealing on their personality, self-confidence and self-esteem.

Odoemelan and Ajoku (2006) advocate the use of contingency management, aversive training, self-management, self-reinforcement and self-control techniques as counselling strategies for the treatment of stealing. Contingency contacting is a counselling behaviour modification technique in which the client acknowledges his negative behaviour and agrees with the counsellor to follow a pattern towards giving it up. This, the client does by stating the punishment to be given if he does not desist from the negative behaviour as well as the possible reward he should receive if he desist from it. Aversive training is another counselling modification technique that can be used to curb the act of stealing. One may use an aversive stimulus, which involves the use of unpleasant substance to discourage a child or to refrain from the exhibition of an abnormal behaviour. This mostly involves food or drinks. The self-management, reinforcement or control behavior modification technique is act of renouncing stealing through personal efforts. The behaviour of the thief needs modification while the victim needs some adjustment.

**Truancy-** Truancy is a situation where a child stays away from school without good reason. Truancy is a deliberate absence from school, without a valid reason (Nwoye, 1990). The deliberate absence and without a valid reason presupposes that a child causes the absenteeism no matter the reason he has. For instance, if a child who is targeted is afraid of bullying and stays away from school, would this be regarded as a valid reason? A child has needs like play and if this forces him to be absent from school, would this be a valid reason? The fault of this definition is that valid reason is subjective. So the question is, without whose valid reason? No child lacks personal valid reasons for being absent from school. The school and parents may however, not regard such a child's valid reason as valid. Invariably, truancy could be defined as a child's poor attendance to school not on account of the child's ill health and family or school approval.

Longe (2010, cited in Tor – Anyiin, 2015), defines truancy as “absence from school without permission, leaving school without authorization and evading specific lessons, probably typical of adolescent rebellion, self-assertion and reaction over certain developmental and psychological problems”. Truancy therefore is a symptom of psychosocial adjustment problem. It starts from being absent from school without adequate knowledge of the parents and or significant other and one's poor attention to school; It also includes losing of school materials or school fees. And other complaints about the school, the best school is that which they have not gone to and wish to go to. They hate anything related to their school and so their school attendance drops without any health problem or parental knowledge. Thus, according to Odomelaiam and Ajoku (2006), “truancy is a situation where a pupil loiters, wanders, and idles about, gallivants, rigmaroles, walks about and perambulates while lessons are progressing in the class”. This explains why such children can leave home for school without reaching there.

To modify truancy, psychological needs (such as love, affection, protection, independence, freedom, adventure, exploration, and self-esteem among others) which are the foundation of truancy should be deployed. Psychologically, Tor – Anyiin (2015) suggests cognitive restructuring - a psychological concept that requires appealing to the mental capability of an individual to have his /her thinking on an issue re-examined. Counsellors must liaise with parents to get to the roots of truancy by examining the various needs of the child in the given psychological environment. Meanwhile, parents must inspect children or wards' work and examine results and discuss with the class teacher freely. This explains the rationale behind regular attendance to Parents Teachers Association (PTA) meetings by parents or guardians. Both parties must work together in order to create some motivations for children since lack of school motivation can also cause truancy among youths.

For effectiveness, avoid sarcastic comments, scolding, lecturing, punishing and preaching. This is because the intimidations accompanying threats are not always efficacious and irrelevant. It rather impedes the willingness of such individuals to open up. Self-reporting techniques could also help the truant to drop the practice. Self-reporting or self-regulating is the setting of goals, evaluating one's performance and adjusting to meet the goal in the content of on-going feedback (Odoemelum, 1997). This democratic process will help truants to adjust positively to schooling.

Capitalize on the truant's ambitions and future and allow him/her to visualize the future if the truancy continues. This can be done through adequate information. Identify goals and how to work towards the goals and use behavioral contract. The child could equally visualize the life of the park touts and write about their future as compared to

their age mates who continue school. The psychological approach to the treatment of truancy is likely to produce better results than scolding, denial of love or food, corporal punishment, suspension and expulsion from school.

**Lateness-** Lateness is a social problem that attracts the attention of the school authority; lateness is coming to school not on time. Pupils and students (youth) come late to school, class, lecture hall, games, work e.t.c. coming late to school, work, church, mosque etc. Is a behavioural problem, which attracts the attention of time counsellor and school organization authority? The Nigerian youth are expected to come to school or work at a specified time limit.

Behavioral skills of counting, frequency and graphing are mastered to draw base rate data of lateness prior treatment. The counsellor would train the pupil's students (youth) the skills of self-control, self-monitoring and self-management. The counsellor needs to inform the youth/parents, the importance of punctuality, and parents should wake children early and keeping their time through the use of alarm clock is important.

**Bullying-** A bully is someone who uses his or her ability and strength to threaten or hurt those who are smaller and weaker sometimes the bully uses words to intimidate his or her victims. Pepler and Craig (2000) observe that bullying is the most common form of violence permitting the most powerful to dominate the less powerful. These researchers were of the opinion that bullying starts at very young and small age, it is or push during kindergarten recess or some name callings.

According to Rana (2004), bullying has two key components. Repeated harmful act and an imbalance of power, It involves repeated physical, verbal or psychological against a victim who cannot properly defend him or herself because of size, strength or because the victim is our numbered or less psychologically resilient. Bullying is a type of aggressive behaviour to hurt the weaker ones. Bullies are everywhere, at school, at home, on the street and even the church and mosque. Such people take delight in making others cry. They don't really need any reason to do that. Most of the common types of bullying include: kicking, beating, biting, threats, locking the victim inside a room, insects, harsh teasing, gossip and making unreasonable demands etc.

Behavioral skills of self-control and social skills are acquired to stop it. According to Ekpo (1996), bullying is an environmental issue not learnt but can be unlearned. This implies that with appropriate individual and group counselling in school is likely to control bullying. The home could be a centre of bullying. The implication is for counsellors to investigate the family environment just like the school will be in a better position to identify the source of bullying within the school setting. It is possible to inform parents of their wards' common school bullying behaviours. Family counselling will also help in curbing school bullying. Parent's involvement could be visit to homes or discussions during Parents Teachers Association (PTA) special meeting. Monitoring and supervision or student against bullying will go a long way towards modifying the youths' behaviour. Senior students should be enlightened on their obligations towards the junior ones. Orientation on the consequences of bullying should be intensive.

**Quarrelling and Fighting-** Psychologists regard quarrels as cathartic (i.e., helping the people quarrelling to off-load their grievances) and didactic (i.e., helping the people quarrelling to learn what others think about their), yet quarrels are not a healthy development. When quarrels are not controlled, they usually escalate into physical fights. In school, work or home, quarrels generate ill feelings, bad blood and thus, weaken interpersonal co-operation and relationship. Fighting is an aggressive behaviour and involves muscle flexing, exchange of blows, beating, battering of women or domestic violence. Some may even faint as result of fighting. Some who fight with rods, chains and mortars have killed their opponents. The Guidance counsellor should use the behavioural counselling technique to discourage quarrelling or physical fighting. They should also train, acquire and use the skill of hazard exposure, modelling, contingency management, self-control and aversive therapy these will reduce the aggressive behaviour.

**Lying-** Lying is the act or practice of telling or speaking falsehood. It is an act which when repeated often becomes a habit. Quite often, lying is resorted to as a cover up for some misdeeds or pranks. Youth often tell lies to the teachers, parents and school authority to avoid being punished for wrong doings. The Guidance counsellor should explain and educate such individual on the danger of lying, insist on honesty, praise him/her after every act of honesty and reassure him/her of unconditional love despite the misconduct.

**Disobedience/insubordination- disobedience:** - This is refusal to obey either at school or at home. It is also called indiscipline or defiance, while insubordination refers to rebellion, defiance and ungoverned ability. A disobedient and insubordinate youth or child is somebody who does not obey his teacher, parent or elder, and one who does not easily follow the ruler ship of the teacher, parent and elder. The teacher's instruction and teaching are not accepted by the youth. The Guidance Counsellor should develop skills of persuasion and encouragement to apply so that the youth will be draw back to the teacher, parent and elder.

**Cultism** - Secret cult is referred to as a system of worship that is expressed in rituals and which is kept from the views of others expect the cult members. Members concentrate in cult language which is peculiar to them. The secret cult members carry out their heinous activities in the night. The Federal Government of Nigeria (1999), defines cultism or secret society as: an organized group with its own ideology, and objectives, which are only known to their members.

The desire to fight for only members in the secret cult reduces cultism to youth delinquency and crim. The drive for more members influence inter-cult squabbles and guest for supremacy and general social independence characterizes cult activities. Most undergraduates join secret cult societies in schools in order to make up for their deficiencies either academically, socially or economically (Akinboye, 1987). Enrolment from secondary and primary schools is on is now a commonplace due to the above stated.

Adequate school counselling orientation should be organized is schools to provide proper information to the new entrants about the dangers of cultism. It is during

the orientation that students could be informed to be aware of the Greeks gifts in the school. They should be told that unsolicited gifts could be a bait to get them into a cult group. Both the new and the old students need to be aware of the characteristics of cultism, only then will they be able to avoid involvement. Community counselling equally helps in the dissemination of information on the dangers of cultism and in educating parents on how they can identify their cultism offspring.

Parents equally must be able to identify only change in the behaviour of their children. Parents must check their children's activities, visitors and outings as well as possessions, particularly dangerous weapons. Parents must be committed to the cause by exposing rather than hiding their children who are victims. Referring their wards to school counsellors is the most ideal thing to be handled with confidentiality and behavior modification.

**Cheating** - Cheating means deceiving or tricking people or acting in dishonest way to gain Advantage over people. According to Denga (1998) cheating may take place within and outside the school. Cheating in the school is often referred to as malpractice. The importance attached to grades and academic certificates make youths engage in cheating in order to earn good grades for a certificate that can merit a job or further education for them. Cheating out of school may occur in business transactions, family relations and even between members of the church or mosque. Those who cheat may enjoy some temporary gain or get away with offences, but cheating is a vice and not a virtue. Youths must be taught in school, at the family level, in the church/mosque and through the mass media to shun cheating. The guidance counsellor can modify this undesirable behaviour among youth and Nigerian workers even our leaders by organizing occasional seminar and talks using the cognitive restructuring technique. There is also need for every cheat to reorient his or her philosophy of life and life style through hazard exposure.

**Examination Malpractice-** The issue of examination malpractices is not new in our schools. According to Ogbodo (2016), examination malpractices is any act of wrong doing or neglect that contravenes the rule of acceptable practice before, during and after an examination by anybody in any way is tantamount to malpractice. According to Maisamari (2005), examination malpractices are seen as "misconduct or improper behaviour by a candidate or anybody in or after examinations thereby contravening the stipulated rules and regulations for the examinations". Hence in order to regulate life in our schools as a whole, sets of simple rules and regulations are in force. Oparaku (2005), observes that examination malpractice is an activity which reduces students (youth) ability in education achievement from primary, secondary and tertiary institution.

It is a fraudulent method of obtaining or scoring marks that are not merited or deserved. It is an art of indiscipline or improper practice which student (youth) employ to score high marks in order to impress people. It is a method of achieving success without working hard for it. This practice has eaten deep into the marrow of the youth. It has become a cankerworm and monster haunting students all around. The Guidance counsellors should counsel them on responsibility, good morals, positive study behaviours, hard work, determination and dedication to studies to avoid a fraudulent method of passion examination.

**Indecent Dressing** - Some people regard the way the youths dress, particularly female as indecent while others argued that they are free to dress the way they deem fit because we are in a free society (Okwuaishu, 2005). The girl dresses skimpy and short, transparent with spaghetti hands. The dresses expose their sensitive bodies because they are immodestly and nakedly dressed. They are seduced or harassed by people of the opposite sex. Odoemelam (1997), says that the outcomes of indecent dressing are the following: fornication, self-abuse, pregnant prematurely and commit abortion, sell their bodies for money (both male and female prostitutes), adultery, rape, assault, and touching and holding hands in the public.

Guidance counsellors should train in skills of teaching about the danger of indecent dressing and set to youths, train girls. Indecent dressing means putting on cloth that shows parts of the body that are not covered. It is a behaviour that is a thought to be morally offensive on how to be assertive and how to say no, (refusal skills). Behavioural counsellor should use songs (zip up, say no, no, no, etc). Talk to them on the consequences of indecent dressing and sexually transmitted diseases (STDA), HIV/AIDS.

**Smoking and Drinking Alcohol**- Smoking of cigarettes is often associated with drug addicts since some of the drugs are in the form of shredded leaves or other substances that are usually wrapped up in papers and smoked like cigarettes. While drinking alcohol is a perpetual activity of those who are mostly members of any cult. These cultists, as they are called drink all forms of alcohol to stimulate them. Smoking and alcoholism are currently topical issues. In some decades back it was unheard of that children and youth smoked or went to bars to drink beer and 'ogogoro' (hot drink).

Today some children and youth smoke as a gang, their peers and idle adults encourage them. They smoke and drink alcohol openly in bars, hotels and motels. The hotel industry is booming in Nigeria because our youth both male and female are patronizing them. Behavioural skills used by counsellors include identification, observation, charting, graphing, and experimenting (self-control and self-management) and evaluation. These enable counsellors to monitor target behaviours prior to their treatment.

**Destruction**- Destruction is the act of putting asunder solid materials: this could be through fire setting, use of hands or other instruments to demolish structures or any other materials. When youths in secondary schools and tertiary institutions often get angry with their cooks, welfare, teaching methods or certain school policies, they rebel against the principals and teachers and go on demonstrations and strikes. Some students break up teachers/lecturer's properties like cars, or burn up administrative buildings to destroy glasses and school properties. Additionally, they are told to bring their parents/guardians by school management to sign undertaking of good behaviours for their wants.

Destruction, has certain goals or causes which according to Nwoye (1989), include, the need for attention, reaction to feelings of rejection, anger, a need for power or revenge as well as envy and jealousy or reacting to failure. Destruction could also arise due to envy and hatred (Tor – Anyiin 2015). The guidance counsellor should identify a model for emulation and provide resource persons for discussion. Modelling is a process by which a client learns and performs a behaviour or response by observing

and internalizing some aspects of a model's performance (Akinade, 2013). Having identified their model, they should follow a discussion on how such model's characteristics can be imbibed.

### **Recommendations**

1. That behaviour modification should be incorporated into the programme of activities for school counselling as a matter of urgency in Nigeria.
2. Seminars/workshops on behaviour modification should be accorded a national social reformation project because of its redemptive impact on national social landscape.
3. Functional and effective Guidance and counselling services should be established across all tiers of education.
4. Training and retraining of Guidance and Counsellor Practitioners should be given top priority by every tier of governance.
5. More research should be carried out on behaviour modifications on different areas that are affecting our students and other people in our society.
6. Government should try to provide all the necessary modern equipment such as; computer, laptops, internet facilities, to support counsellors in carrying their duties successfully for record purpose.

### **CONCLUSION**

This paper has examined the role of counselling as a form of behavioural modification among Nigeria youths. The paper also extensively discussed some of these components of deviant behaviour notably: stealing, truancy, lateness, bully, fighting, lying, disobedience, insubordination, cultism, cheating, examination malpractice, indecent dressing, smoking & Alcohol consumption among others exhibited by the Nigerian youths and at the same time explained how counselling can be effective in modifying these undesirable behaviours. Based on this discussion the following recommendations are made:

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