VIOLENCE IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS AND PANACEA

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the primary correlates of violence in the contemporary Nigeria. It examines the scope of violence, those psycho-social factors that encourage violent behaviours among certain people in the society and the significant impacts of violence in the society. Violence is a serious social problem. This paper reveals that it is a physio-socially engendered phenomenon which exposes individuals to great physical injuries and intriguing psychological effects that should not be neglected. The researcher believes that in order to prevent violence we must have a clear and concise understanding of the nature and the implications of the problem which this paper aims at. Some recommendations were proffered to prevent or manage the already existing violent situations in the country.

INTRODUCTION

Some people seek peaceful resolution of conflicts both at family level and in the society at large. Others flout this fundamental pillar of co-existence among the human species and take to violence as a means of settling disputes. Violence creates a situation of social disorganization as well as physio-psychological damages among the individuals who are exposed to it.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines violence as the exercise of physical force to inflict injury on or cause damage to person or property. It could also mean treatment or usage of force or object to cause bodily injury. Violence is indeed forcibly interfering with personal freedom. (Attah, 2012). It comprises a variety of social vices such as physical assault, fighting, murder, robbery, theft, vandalism, sexual harassment, arson, and emotional/verbal abuse. Violence is found throughout the history of the human species and shows no sign of having been invented in one place and spread to the other (Pinker 2011). One basic thing about the acts of violence is that none goes without serious consequence(s). This is so because, it is considered evil and as we know "evil begets evil".

In our society today, violence is becoming the order of the day. People take to violence at every slightest provocation. This suggests that it is perhaps energized by forces from within. Based on the idea of human nature, scientists do agree that violence is inherent in man (Livescience, 2006). Violence is thus presumed to follow unconscious impulses (motives) which are derived from innate biological forces (instincts) that predispose individuals to act in a certain way under appropriate circumstances (Atkinson, Atkinson & Hilgar, 1983). These factors are considered basic to the animal nature of man. They impel people to act in animalistic manner or engage in irrational and animalistic behaviours. Violent behaviours are considered irrational and animalistic because man in his full human status is rational and is expected to modify his behaviours (actions and reactions) by his reasoning (intellect) which he is endowed with

and which separates him from other lower animals (Atkinson et al, 1983).

The above observation supports the notion that human nature accommodates motives that impel people to violence (Pinker 2011). Such motives include:

Contest for Dominance: This refers to a form of deadly human quarrel caused by quest for control or authority even when nothing tangible is at stake.

Predation: This is when individuals or other organisms strive to survive at the expense of others in the same community. It implies the survival of the fittest.

Dissension: This refers to very angry quarrel aimed at who gets better than the other in certain affairs. It depicts a fight between opposition parties.

Considering the above issues, one can say that violence is a very dangerous occurrence in our homes and in the society at large. A better understanding of the phenomenon, its nature and implications, will enable Nigerians avoid or peacefully improve the situations of incessant occurrence of violence in the country.

IDENTIFICATION OF VIOLENCE IN THE SOCIETY

Violence abounds in the society. It occurs every now and then. We hear, watch, and read about them in media reports and even witness them in our environments. Violence at domestic level

usually manifests itself in partner abuse, sibling rivalry, elder abuse, etc. This can be observed in abnormal, irritating and provoking behaviours such as verbal abuse, fighting, stealing, arson and even cases of sexual harassment in families. These are symptoms of instability in the homes. When the home is not "together" people put up a lot of negative attitudes in their relationships.

The family is the basis for formation of social behaviours. It is presumed that most of the characteristics that dispose individuals to violent behaviours are developed and nurtured in the family. It has to do with the formation of an individual's conscience. The conscience of a person depicts the internalized representations of the values and morals of the family society as taught to the child by the parents and other significant figures around him/her (Attah, 2010).

The parents inculcate the basic moral such as values, respects, sense of responsibility, unity, initiative, honesty, integrity and industry to the children. These qualities are surely seen in their beliefs, attitudes and actions as adults at later stages of life. They become the basis for successful interpersonal relationship in the wider society. Thus a family that experiences violence such as constant quarrelling, fighting and stealing becomes a breeding ground for violent prone individuals (perpetrators) who as children internalized these ideas and made them their own. And it is still these ideas (that way of life) that they will resort to as means of resolving conflicts which they meet in their interpersonal relationships at distinct stages of life.

Outside home, violence still occurs at varying degrees. There are cases of riots among students in schools and communities, mob actions in the streets which arose from dispute among individuals in a particular community or even outright fighting between different communities as a result of clashes of interest and struggles for power among individuals from different political parties and religions groups. These forms of violence are usually due to religion and political activities in the society.

Religious violence in Nigeria is dominated by the insurgency of Boko Haram Jihadist group which aims at imposing Sharia on the country. Political violence on the other hand stems from politics of self-aggrandizement, the dearth of concrete ideology and people-oriented programmes designed to profit only the few elites in the schemes.

Political violence in Nigeria is perpetrated by political manipulations by the elites following the violent conflicts of the independent era and the fact that the post independent policy was also enmeshed in violence. According to Kuna (2003), violence is indeed integral to all politicking based on massive inequality. Nigerian politics is markedly characterized by massive inequality. Such inequalities are fundamental to social decision wherein the majority of the people over whom government is exercised do not participate nor do they have a chance in decisions that influence their lives.

Violence here is based on what seems confused purpose and selfish goals of the government. This is in addition to the fact that the means of reaching these goals are obscure and devious to the masses over whom the decisions are placed. This is supported by Egwu (1993)'s assertion that "vast majority of Nigerians are alienated from state power and have become apathetic". It is precisely within this context that Nigeria elites see violence as a weapon for enforcing legitimacy and for retaining political power.

FACTORS RESPONSIBLE FOR VIOLENCE

Some of the salient factors that could lead people into violence include:

Biological Factors: This is genetic inheritance. It is the chief determinant of behaviour (cf. Santrock, 2002). People may inherit the personality characteristics that make them behave in ways that encourage discord when they relate with other people. For example such attitudes include nagging, being difficult to relate with, complaining and physical illness such as schizophrenia. The state of physical health may affect an individual's level of tolerance, feelings, perception, and thinking in such a way that he/she relates to people in a way that may likely cause discord.

Self Perception and Self Concept: Self perception and self-concept influence our behaviour. Negative self perception and low self-concept breed low self-esteem and are positively related to lack of confidence (cf. Onyeneje & Ugwu, 1997). Low self-esteem which is developed in the course of

socialization at family level disposes one to violence (cf. Pinker, 2011). Individuals with this personality disposition always over react in offensive situation and take to violence as retribution.

Learning and Developmental Experiences: An individual enters the larger society with all that he/she has learnt about social life from home. And also has a mind set of what his/her ideal social responsibility and expectations should be and expect others to be the same. If the people he/she meets behaves in contrary to these expectations, the individual feels hurts, anxious, or just uncomfortable and may react with behaviours that may lead to conflict which could in turn bring about violence among the people involved. Again, children who grew up in families where their parents argue and fight frequently imbibe that way of life (culture) and bring it into the larger society and often resort to arguments and fights as ways of resolving differences an their interpersonal relationship. So, the learning and developmental experiences an individual has can predispose him/her to violent behaviours. This is true because the dysfunctional pattern of relation in their homes never gave room for learning of basic morals such as tolerance, respect, proper value orientation, etc.

Language and Communication: Language can be used to enhance or destroy harmony in every group/organization. A person's mode of addressing issues in public matters a lot. One's choice of words (diction) in his expressions is a serious factor in enhancing or destroying harmonious existence.

Accordingly, the effect one's diction could have on the listeners should always be considered. If the words express the speaker's feeling without hurting the listener, the listener then becomes aware of the speaker's feeling and tends to respect this feeling. But if the speaker's words generate anger and resentment in the listener, this may lead to conflicts that might result to violence between them. Any communication that is not clear create misunderstanding and conflicts among the individuals involved and such can lead to violence.

Possession of Weapons such as guns by unauthorized individuals in the society can also lead to violence. This exposes them to easy use of the weapons when aggrieved.

The urge or willingness in people to handle their problems/conflicts through violence instead of dialogue: This is inflamed by those motives that impel people to act in ways that are considered irrational or animalistic.

IMPACT OF VIOLENCE

Violence has significant impact on the lives of the people that experience it. It disrupts the peaceful co-existence of the individuals in the society. As mentioned earlier, "evil begets evil". Every little act of violence creates negative impact on the relationship among the individuals involved. It also exposes people to physical injuries and psychological traumas that most often are hard to heal. Spouses who are victims of home violence sometimes live with the trauma and the stigma all through their life. Children who witness family violence live in

constant fear. They are at greater risk for abuse or neglect. They suffer greatly both physically and emotional as this affects their general growth and development. They are more likely to develop social, emotional, psychological and even intellectual problems which usually manifest in their behaviours as adults. Children who witness home violence show more anxiety, low self-esteem, depression, anger and temperament problems (cf. Ezeilo, 2005). In fact, victims of home violence may become perpetrators or social deviants as a result of wrong formation of their conscience.

Religious/Political violence has unleashed the country with massive destructions which include outright destruction of lives and property. Within the last three decades, the Islamist movement Boko Haram has done a lot of havoc in the country. These include armed rebellion against the Nigeria Military, sacking villages and towns, taking thousands of lives in battles and massacres against Christians, students and other deemed enemies of Islam.

There has been series of riots as a result of religious violence in the country which have claimed several thousands of lives, destruction of property and even denial of opportunities/chances to host or take part in world youth programmes. For example, the 2002 Miss World contest was moved from Abuja to London as a result of religious crisis (cf. Astill & Bowcatt, 2002).

Political violence on the other hand has done even much greater harm. The situation we are in today shows that our politicians

never really understood the legitimacy of power and the need to be civil and tolerant in their approach to power. Politically motivated killings and violence due to political manipulation by the elites such as rash military coups, media exploitations, thuggery, etc., are evident. Our politicians have lost or rather do not have the sense of political tolerance and non-violence in their approach to power and as such cling to violence as the only road map that guarantees secured political future for Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

This paper has firmly established the fact that violence in any society is a serious social problem that has effective feasible solutions. The researcher has, at the same time, argued that like any other societal problem, it is expected that understanding the nature and implications of violence would provide the enlightenment needed to overcome the problem. Thus, this paper provides the particular knowledge that will empower Nigerians in their quest to prevent and manage, skillfully, violence in contemporary country.

RECOMMENDATION

This paper cannot be concluded without making some suggestions on how violence can be prevented, controlled or eradicated in Nigeria.

1. Character development should be made an integral part of the school curriculum. Its focus should be the development of moral judgment and social efficacy de-emphasing the use of violence as a means of resolving differences in human relations.

2. Family being the basic social structure upon which growing children depend for basic formation, emotional expression and even instrumental support should upheld and inculcate basic moral principles such as proper value orientation, respect, industry, sense of responsibility, unity etc so as to raise people who can co-exist peacefully with others in the society

3. Government should make and enforce laws prohibiting the use of dangerous weapons like guns by unauthorized individuals in the society and reduce accessibility to hard substances in the society. This will help minimize the illegal use of guns and substances like hard/illegal drugs and excess alcohol especially among the youths.

4. Development of peace innovation programmes and establishment of dispute settling committees in our various schools, communities and other social institutions in the country. These committees should be charged with the responsibility of using peaceful mechanisms such as dialogue, negotiation or bargaining to settle discords among individuals in distinct organizations and also manage constructively the already existing violent situations around us.

5. The society should encourage NGOs especially those specialized in peace building. The aim should be to reduce physical and verbal aggression, oppressions and human rights abuses.

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