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Moral Decadence among Igbo Youths: A Challenge to African Values

By

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Abstract

In the past, Africans have been known by different values which they portray through their good morals and characters. In the contemporary today, Igbo land as an example, reverse has been the case. That is the good morals and values Africans in general and Igbo people in particular were known for had been thrown into waste bin hence, the moral decay that is rampant not only in Igbo land but also in Africa and in the world at large. These days, Moral decadence has been the virus that has eaten deep into the fabrics of African culture, which has become plague to African values thus affecting every facet of African countries, thereby hindering economic growth and development. It has become a huge problem in Igbo land and in Africa as a whole which, if not tackled early and now will seriously and entirely mare the Igbo and the entire African values in no distant time. It will not be out of place therefore to discourse these ills and nightmares of Africans as a whole and Igbo people in particular. This is why the writer chose this topic to make a clarion call to Igbo people and Africans especially mothers to make hays while the sun shines. This work therefore intends to discover some of the prevalent moral decadence in our contemporary society, their effects on the society and unit families in particular. It seeks also to investigate the place of mothers in the proper upbringing of their children. It is expected that the views of other writers about what moral decadence is, and the place of mothers in child's raising will help the writer to x-ray the topic better. The knowledge from the findings and recommendations will be of great help to the contemporaries to seek ways of curbing the problems so that Igbo and African values will be preserved and maintained for posterity.

Introduction

Prior to the coming of white men and the introduction of Christianity which emphasize on the training of children (Proverbs 22:6), Igbo people had been known the value of bringing their children up in the right and good values of their people, they had known that mothers play a very vital role in the training of their children. It therefore entails that moral decay can be controlled by a proper training of children in their different homes. Igbo land is part of Africa and as such whatever that affects Igbo people invariably affects Africa. Over the years, people in various

facets of the society have been entangled with much hues and cries concerning the falling standards of moral attitudes chiefly in the contemporary Igbo society. When one sits to give deep thought to this ugly situation, he finds out likely visible parameters that would be useful for sustaining the assertion. These parameters include the increasing incessant violent crimes and some other unwholesome behaviours that are exhibited by the citizenry. Worthy of mention are the indiscriminate and unending examination malpractices, reported cases of misconducts amongst political office holders, security operatives, the clergies, traditional leaders/rulers, and many other administrators as well as those considered to be subject to the administrators irrespective of the sector in which these individuals may be found.

Ocho (1998) asserts that,

> the usefulness of an individual is partly determined by the way through which the individual acquires and internalizes the values, norms, beliefs and behaviours of the community which invariably are customarily and socially acceptable in the society; thus such person being useful to both himself, the community and society at large(45).

Critics in both public and private sectors including those who feel concerned about the chaos as it concerns the moral laxity in the contemporary Nigerian society has had their blames on the youths – whom they say are unwilling to keep societal norms and values while some others lay their blames on the government, the schools, the churches and parents where mothers fail to handle the children and wards in the ways of uprightness towards social responsibilities.

Anigbogu (2005) states

> that parents should at all times ensure proper training of their children and wards at their various homes since a child who is well disciplined from home, upholds such principle laid by the parents such like "obedience with sweet rewards, and disobedience (indiscipline) and its attendant sorrowful rewards – punishment (236).

Igbo (2002) also opines that "psychology reveals that individuals possess boundless urges and impulses which are constantly seeking expression" (112). She added that discipline refers to the limitations of an individual or a group of people and the practice of restraint which may be self-imposed or externally imposed as may be most effective for social orderliness. One can easily say that there is no society without laws and traditions that help it to guard the activities of individuals

and groups within and outside the society. Taking from Ocho, Igbo and Anigbogu, one wonders if the present day Igbo parents specially mothers have any form of values to hand down to their children and wards.

Harry Schofield describes moral as "… selected behavioural standard of a society used to measure the different modes of behaviour" (230). To Schofield, every society has established norms or standards against which she measures the different modes of behaviours of the individuals hence, determining its acceptability and otherwise. He added that "since norms or standards are established by the society to guard the boundless urges in individuals within the society; there exists a link between the trio logy – values, value-judgments and morals.

According to Peters (qtd. Schofield 234), "values refer to the worthwhile attachments to behavioural pattern which a society considers highly important that it can be passed on to each succeeding generation". On value-judgments, Peters said that it is a set of societal established norms of good and bad behaviours. It becomes pertinent to state that some forms of character(s) exhibited by certain individuals at certain times are to them good and acceptable but to others, displeasing or unacceptable. To buttress the above assertion, Schofield added that a given society (the church for instance defines sexual promiscuity as being immoral) may define an act as immoral but to other society, such act is considered as being morally good or acceptable.

Considering the former statement as put down by Schofield, one can discover that the assertion is an attribute of value – judgment but the universally hues on AIDS and other related sexually transmitted disease cases, the restraint on promiscuous sex becomes an issue of general acceptability. Indiscriminate sexual indulgence world over, has been widely described as being very dangerous in that it is an easier access to the much dreaded "Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (AIDS) which every self-loving individual would like to avoid in all ramifications. Thus, the instruction to abstain from illicit sex is for the common good of all.

Dewey in Schofield says,

> It is not knowledge that is important but the uses to which individuals or people put it that matters most. Hence, all acts aimed at personal aggrandizements with little or no thoughts for the after effects or its usefulness to the society are to be considered as immoral acts (200).

The Christian holy book – the Holy Bible beckons all to "do unto others that which they would like them to do unto them" (the Golden rule – "love your neighbour as yourself"). In other words, that which you will not like to come to you do not do it to your neighbour.

Moral therefore, refers to the generally acceptable behavioural standards of a society used to measure her different modes of behaviour, thus determining whether such behaviour is good-moral or bad – immoral.

Though some people think it wise to say that whatever works for an individual is "right" to him but that which does not work out fine or favour him is "wrong"; this is based on pragmatism. It becomes therefore important to state that what may be right to a person because it favours him may not be right to another not only just because it does not favour him but also because it does not conform to the societal social norms.

A Roman Poet – Lecretius in Schofield in the fifth of his "De Rerum Natura" asserted that men entering into social contract (nec lacdere nec lacdi) do so neither to harm those around them nor for them to be harmed" (235). This means that social contract is in its entire content a pragmatic practice where as experience is the ultimate. Moral rules are the outcome of the knowledge gained by men in the natural life. It is a known fact that no man wherever, would like to be cheated, harmed, disrespected, dishonoured or live in discomfort. Thus, a morally balanced individual would at all times be conscious of the fact that whatever he sows, same shall he reaps.

Just as can be found from the golden rule, if man should be able to refrain from doing those things they consider could be harmful to others, they too would live unharmed by neighbours hence a more peaceful society. Taking from the Holy Book, behaviours are regulated with reference to those external absolutes which bring about questions as: can we have morality without religion? The answer is "no". Another question is, among parents, who stays always very close to the children and wards? The wisdom of God and writers exposed the duo here in: religion and morality as two inseparable entities and the mother/child relationship. A breakdown or violation of these laid down life principles with little or no sanctions in turn brings about rampant violations thus referred to as moral decadence. To this, moral decadence refers to the indiscriminate violation of the rules of social living.

Moral decadence can as well be described as a fall in expected societal social behavioural standards or principles at a higher rate. These behavioural patterns are as well described as being anti-social, criminal etc which in all ramifications do not conform to societal social norms.

The Concept of Motherhood

Onyehalu (1998) describes the family as the oldest and most unique human institution and the cradle of discipline. This is to say that the training of every child starts from the family which is the basic and most fundamental unit of the society through which any individual receives life training in first instance. It becomes imperative that the family provides the nurturance, care, protection as well as the rudiments of social skills and etiquette which the older members of the family under the guidance of the parents specially mothers transmit to the child through verbal and non-verbal communications.

Bowly (1982) in Onyehalu states that mother/child attachment established in the home, forms a prototype for most future behaviours found in the child. Piaget in his own contribution states that the child's moral growth starts from the pre-school time when he entirely depends on parents who at the stage of childhood, give the children and ward an earlier moral training in the form of categorical imperatives where the child would be asked to "do what is right (moral) and not to do those things that are wrong (immoral) by both parents and guardians.

The child learns that when he obeys the categorical imperatives (instructions), the parents and guardians are pleased and that when they are pleased, he enjoys praise(s) from them and some other meritorious rewards. Based on the satisfactions derivable from his obedience to the parents' and guardians' instructions (his earliest forms of moral behaviour) he is motivated to uphold socially acceptable character in the outside societal world. This he would do because at the family level, he had learnt that by obeying his parents and guardians, he enjoys the satisfactions accruing from it and so, he sees it as that and he continues in the larger society.

More so, the significant role of the home especially mothers, continue beyond childhood since an average person below the age of eighteen years is likely to spend the greater part of the day at home. This child is influenced mainly by the attitudes and identification models of his immediate environment, one of which is the mother. It is worthy of note that the social and moral life and

lessons gotten at home during the early impressionable life of the child and prior to the commencement of formal schooling tend to last long.

Formerly, the character exhibited by an average African child depicts a hybrid of the parents, hence the family background but today, it is a hybrid between our traditional and western practices. The present Nigerian society is neither a traditional society nor the Westerners. It is no longer baffling to hear that an average Nigerian would like to dress like the whites, eat like the whites etc. For instance, in our society today, there are paid – working mothers; a situation which necessarily had reduced the mother/child contacts right from the critical formative early period following birth. It becomes obviously clear that this new heritage and social order must adversely affect the behaviour and life style of the society at large. Onyehalu (1987) asserts that there seem to be more cases of social mal-adjustment and psychic disorder today than in the past when intimate child upbringing prevailed.

Motherhood therefore refers to the ability of a woman to care for the child or children whom she has given birth to; treating the child with great or excessive protection and nurture.

Forms of Moral Decadence

Everybody in every country all over the world knows that youths are the future hope of every country, and if anything should happen to them, the future of that country is impeded. In line with Anigbogu (23) while searching for the forms of moral decadence prevalent among the contemporary youths asserts that the forms include:

a) **Tugging/Revolt**: This is a situation whereby youths and some adults who have formed destructive habits or those who feel that the best way to making ends meet or laying their complaints on issues not genuinely handled, is through violence and have believed it to be their means of livelihood. Sometimes, these set of individuals engage in the burning down of structures just because they are being hired to do so with little or no pay. In schools, it is referred to as students' revolt to school authority which may be in the form of disobedience to school rules and regulations and/or destruction of school property or plant whereas others resort to pelting of school staff including other individuals involved in the management of the said institutions.

b) **Stealing/Robbery**: This is the illegal removal of another person's property without the owner's consent. This has been attributed to the value-structure obtainable in the society such like the "get rich quick syndrome" in the nation which had led many young Nigerians to the false convention that there is no need to pursue life course(s) through the seemingly appropriate hard work and waiting for the right time to come for God's given riches. Virtually, every Nigerian is in a hurry to make money and other wealth through "whatever means". This is because of the much importance attached to wealth acquisition than moral uprightness.

c) **Sex abuse/Rape:** Stemming from the indiscriminate sexual activities, is sexual immorality like rape which is as a result of body changes resulting from the use of drugs or other such stimulants. These stimulants once taken and finally upsets the user, he is by this engaging in promiscuous or immoral sexes (Anigbogu, 2005:24).

d) **Drug addiction:** Drug addiction or mal-adaptability refers to the extreme use of any form of drug in such a way that the addict cannot do without the drug and as such, spends both most of his time and money on it. In the contemporary society, it has been described that the indiscriminate usage of drugs had become worrisome and rampant too. Igbo in Anigbogu (2005:24) enlisted the most abused drugs to include cigarettes, alcohol, tobacco, heroine and the smoking of herbs among others.

e) **Examination malpractice:** Cheating of all forms in an examination has been best described as examination malpractice. According to the Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary, it refers to "an act of dishonesty or unfair practice at winning an advantage in an examination.

f) **Abortion:** This is the destruction of pregnancy so as to prevent the unborn baby from developing and being born alive. One then wonders why perverse sexual addictions have become ordinations and most recently, the word – "gender" has been shifted in meaning to incorporate such addictions. Advocates in this form of practice no longer see reason to consider the biological definition but has taken an artificial socially preferred meaning for abortion. The termination of pregnancy or elimination of an unborn child is now considered as "choice", associating it with freedom. It remains the resultant of immoral sexes especially amongst youths. It is no longer baffling to hear that teenagers in

secondary schools get impregnated and as a result drop out of school hence fearlessly roam the streets in search of whom to help them eliminate the unborn baby.

g) **Killing:** Killing, the world over and in Nigeria to be precise and in Igbo land to be more précised is becoming a relatively legalized practice. Some years back, there was a reported case of a student of Nnamdi Azikiwe Secondaary School, Abagana – Anambra State who killed the fellow student. Also from Abakiliki in Ebonyi state was the fought one another and before long, a relative to one of them helped the relation to maim and kill the other students. Killing therefore refers to the prohibition or destruction of human life. Students at present without fear of arrest and detention or punishment take weapons to school and examination halls or any such other places so as to terminate the life of anyone who dares to disturb their personal or group affairs.

h) Cultism: Despite all warnings and threats against cultism, many more youths specially students even those in the secondary schools still indulge in secrete cult activities – a worrying trend which at present had extended to the primary schools (Anigbogu 2005:25). In Edo state, it was discovered in Benin that primary school pupils who were initiated into the cults had resorted to using it to molest some of their classmates and some others who could not yield to their sexual and other immoral behavioural demands. A condition of this kind calls for one asking – where is the nation heading to, especially in an era of an unending increase in immorality like this.

i) Bribery: Bribery and extortion they say, corrupts the mind. Most offices in the country have had the slogan – "roja" in use for the collection of bribes from citizens. It had become a commonly known and accepted practice to the extent that even thousands of the Nigerian office heads that are expected to be role models and help curb the ugly state of affairs are on the contrary, culprits who aid and abet the chaos. Today, it had merely become a common belief that whosoever that is serious in every sector of life in the country must prove such by his/her "readiness to co-operate".

This same case holds in every other sectors of endeavour so long as the nation is concerned. Hence it is worthy of absorption if one looks very well into the above different

listed levels of moral decadence. Also, one can ask; who must be responsible for the best moral training of the child and the answer becomes mothers.

Findings

Devising means of curbing moral laxity through mothers who are the closest to the children and wards would to a great extent help to address the mayhem of the menace. First, the much dreaded scourge of examination malpractices, teenage pregnancy and its corresponding illegal termination drop. The misdeeds found among the youths would be low in that these mothers know the best ways of handling issues of great concerns and worry like these and coming up with the most positive results. Also, the lots of our teaming youths who live frustrated and miserable lives will be changed. School leavers would have the course to smile and be sure of whatever kind of certificates they parade.

Parents on their part would because of their actualization of self/family set goals for their children have the course to rejoice. This is because parents have had their children's tomorrow well prepared for them to uphold and transmit to their younger generations yet unborn. These legacies from the parents to their wards and children invariably affect the societal life of the people.

As it concerns the individual, family and societal life at large, one should know that if individuals in any community are disciplined to keep the moral codes of the said community, the community in question must be free from immorality. It is obvious that in an immoral society like ours today, where interest has shifted from morality to immorality, everybody screams with no one to rescue him. If mothers could help address the issue of moral decadence in our contemporary society, the society must change because the society itself had not spoilt rather, the people are corrupt. Hence, where mothers could not help in restoring the dignity and respect of the society, through moral training of their children and wards, then the society is doomed for destruction.

Recommendations

Mothers who are the closest parents/guardians to children and wards (youths) should always see themselves as;

i. ***Moral instructors/teachers of their children***: The fact made by Bowley that the mother-child attachment established at home, forms a prototype for most future behaviours found in the child stands undisputable. Mothers should be aware of the above assertion. They should start from the infant stage of their children and wards to give the models to be expected of them when they grow up. Mothers should avoid any form of engagement thought to be unethical especially when these youngsters are around and at the same time, keep away from discussing issues that concern immoral engagement as a way of achieving expected ends. This is because it has been observed that children learn by imitation. They should start early enough to acquaint their children and wards with sound trainings. The Holy Bible (Proverbs 22 vs 6) says "train up a child in the way he should go and when he is old, he will not depart from it".

ii. ***Role models:*** Mothers should always endeavour to live lives worthy of emulation in and outside their various homes. They should be aware that children learn faster through imitation and so, whatever they do before the children, these youngsters do quickly grab them.

According to Ken & Shalom

> The eye of a man is the door to his thinking faculties. A man does not always do what he wants or desires though it may be right. He does what he thinks. Whatever a man sees, he thinks about. What he thinks about, one day he will do (7).

This means that man sees with the eyes, he thinks of and that which he thinks of, he will one day try his hands on it. If mothers should at all times avoid all forms of immorality such like violence, gossip, arson, assassination, stealing, illicit sex, immodest dressing and others, the children who learn by trying hands on what they have seen with their eyes, would because they did not see such in their parents try all they could to avoid them.

iii. ***Law/moral enforcement agents:*** Since mothers are closer to the children than the fathers, they should be at alert all the time to discipline any of the children who tend to violate the family/social rules of living. By doing this (starting from childhood), if any of the children goes wrong at any point in time, he should be called and admonished, and

where such child proves or seems to be careless with such admonition with little or no remorse, appropriate punishment becomes the alternative. Thus, at any other chance of repeating such punishable activities, the child because of fear of being punished again try all he could to avoid engaging in it and being punished again. In the same manner, mothers should learn the art of rewarding good behaviours in their children and wards. The reward when given to the child encourages him to struggle to do more good so as to receive more praise or gifts.

Discipline here refers to stamping out those boundless urges and impulses that are constantly seeking expression but are anti-social through verbal correction(s) and others as well as punishment.

iv. ***Counselors:*** Mothers are to see themselves as advisers to the children around them. They should help the children in making appropriate decisions by advising them in whatever course they would like to undertake. She advises the children against anti-social desires such as get rich quick syndrome, violence, slander etc. She tells the children that good name is better than riches gotten through fraudulent means and encourages hard work in them.

v. ***Interpreters of societal ethos:*** Mothers because of their most mild way of approaching life issues know how best to explain to their children and wards the ethics of their respective communities. Where the child may wish to get flared, the mother calms him, changes her tone and must finally convince the child to accept that what the society or community had set as her code of conduct cannot easily be changed.

vi. ***Helpers of the poor/down trodden:*** In some families today, the kind of life parents live in relation to the poor masses around them portrays to their children and wards that giving arms or extension of hands to the poor and needy amongst them is a waste of resources since these set of individuals are not going to pay them back. These parents forget that at least, the prayers of the poor reach his creator. A mother is expected to teach the children to extend hands of assistance to the poor and needy not only in their neighbourhood but also wherever they find such group of people.

vii. ***Lovers and promoters of justice, peace and unity:*** Every good mother should train up her children in such a manner that they shall be lovers of their fellow individuals and so,

help promote justice, peace and oneness amongst every lover of good deeds as well as help in guiding those who in any way had strayed from moral standards. She abhors idleness and foolish gains but encourages hard work and humility on everyone who comes her way and who would accept reproach. She should not be the type that even when her child or ward goes wrong, would like to bring in any form of confusion, which seeks to trample the truth not because it cannot be seen but because the person(s) concerned are from corrupt, well-to-do families.

Summary and Conclusion

Based on the prevalent moral decadence observed in the society and the screaming of the people about the chaos, investigations revealed that moral laxity had become the major concern of every conservative citizens of the country in which Igbo land belongs. In the light of investigating the ugly trend, it has been discovered that examination malpractices, tugging, assassination, arson, abortion, alcoholism, drug addiction, stealing, rape and illicit sex among others are the forms of the moral decay.

However, a number of adverse effects of the chaos on both the youths, parents and the entire society has been found and discussed. Thus, suggesting what mothers would do to help in combating the menace. One may ask if she alone can affect a whole family, community, state or national change. It is possible if you consider yourself a change agent. Most times people say that the society is corrupt but it is not true; it is only the people in the society that are corrupt. If the people in the society can only do away with whatever they consider to be evil, unethical and unjust, the society will turn out to become a most comfortable place of habitation.

To achieve this, it has been said that the people must change in their immoral life styles and turn out to live in love, peace, justice and unity with one another. The above expectations cannot hold if proper child upbringing is not incorporated. The initiation of a harmonized upbringing of the youngsters cannot also take place without the mothers in action. Mothers as important models whose interactions, mannerisms and life examples help in guiding and shaping the behaviours of the youths who are the futures of the nation should see the moral training of the child as a personal, family, community and national obligation that should not be toyed with.

Children hold their mothers in highest esteem and recognize their appeal and instructions. It should be noted that it is easier for mothers who know the best tone and time to speak to the child and he listens and understands (having certain psychological knowledge of the child) to indoctrinate the child in moral beliefs. Thus, if children are given sound moral training from their earlier stages in life and the parents live harmoniously, without looking out for whom to cheat or maim, their children would see no reason to deviate from what they have learnt from their family and so, will live morally upright lives which will help to sustain good values Africans and Igbo people were known in the past. Conclusively, all hands should be at work if we want our society to be affected positively thereby having a better society devoid of corruption and moral decay.

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