

INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN THE CRISIS OF IDENTITY CONFRONTING NIGERIAN YOUTHS

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"A society that cuts itself from its youth severs its lifeline, but a society that engages their interests, enlists their talents and liberates their energies brings hope to the entire world" Nelson Mandela

Abstract

The youth constitutes a sizeable percentage of the Nigerian population and they are the actively energetic than other age groups. Historically speaking, they are the change agents of development and progress in society. The nationalists who fought and won the struggle for independence were in their 20s and 30s years of age in Nigeria and other African nations. However, in the light of the present realities, the youths have seemingly been transformed to be used as triggers of violent crises and this consequently distorts their identity. The study examines the crisis of identity among the Nigerian youth, using the Erikson's theory of identity and psycho-social development. The In-Depth Interview guide was used to collect the qualitative data. The paper investigates the issue of identity crisis confronting young people in Nigeria. The results reveal some of the factors responsible for identity crisis among the youths. It concludes that Nigerian youth identity crisis is a product of the contradictions in the political economy and failure over the obligations of the State towards the citizenry. Social workers, especially school social workers were recommended to enhance the social functioning of youths and young adolescents in Nigerian society so as to prevent youth identity crisis.

Keywords: Adolescence, Identity Crisis, Nigerian Youth, School Social Work, Youth Culture

Introduction

The youths or young people, aged between eighteen and thirty, are the driving force behind economic prosperity or engine room of any given human society. In all societies, youths are associated with some attributes. They are given to creativity, exuberance, hard work, courage, altruism and adventure. Youths are very daring and willing to test and confirm new ideas. However, one of the problems of Nigerian youths is the lack of cultural awareness. The youths are, therefore, exposed to western culture and the effects on them have been very unbecoming.

Rather than to take pride in their Nigerian identity and culture, they prefer to associate with 'modern', European and American life styles and culture.

Background to the Study

The youth is a socio-demographic construct characterized by age and other distinctive features of the social position they occupy in society. Youthfulness is a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, which is both biologically determined in that certain physiological changes take place and socio-

culturally, an individual remains a youth as long as he or she depends on his family. Young people at this stage are faced with challenges of adjustment to self and society at large. Hence, this position refutes youth as a uniform, homogenous body in race, ethnicity, gender, class and ability because of the mismatch between biological and social definitions of youth. This contradiction, along with other factors, creates an identity problem for many young people.

Youth have been variously described. In Indonesia, they are described as “the hope of the future” (Wyn & White, 1997) and in Libya, they are “future partners” (Sharafi, 2001) and as “leaders of tomorrow” in Nigeria (Soyombo, 2012). These appellations are suggestive of their age, physiognomy, strength and prospects among others. In other words, this state of being young is characterized by rapid physical, emotional, intellectual and social changes. For instance, change occurs from infancy, through childhood to adulthood as indicated in some changes in physical structure and appearance in young people (Kuna, 2004). An average youth is endowed with strength and is fearless, adventurous and militant (Nwabueze, 2006). Youth phase is not only an impressionable age but also a problematic period. They can be easily manipulated and hence, the need to be properly catered for (Abati, 2009).

Defining youth is a problematic task. Definitions based on age offer a degree of objectivity, but overlook many important realities. To a large extent, youth is socially constructed, and it has less to do with age than with status and behaviour (Najati, Ahadi & Delavar, 2006). The meanings of youth, and the way society regards youth, vary across time and space, as well as within

societies. In particular, youth has an important gender dimension: boys and girls might experience being young in a considerably different way (Heidary, 2000). Hence, in addition to being defined chronologically (as a period of age between certain demographic brackets), youth is also defined functionally (involving a process of transition from childhood to adulthood, marked by rituals or physical changes), as well as culturally (pertaining to the role that individuals play in a given social context) (Nwabueze, 2015).

The problem of defining the youth has become more complex and paradoxical, especially in this modern time. Put differently, the usage of the concept of “youth” varies. The term “youth” is traditionally used to refer both to young people of certain age bracket and to a time of life between childhood and maturity (Roche & Tucher, 1997). It has acquired distinctive yet contradictory meanings since the 19th century. The term “youth” also describes a specific set of human subjects (adolescents, teenagers and young people in general) (McDonald, Pini, Bailey & Price, 2011). For the United Nations and the World Bank, for example, it is 15 – 24 years, while the Commonwealth Youth Programme specifies 15 – 29 years; and for many countries, the figure varies from 13 - 18 years, 20 - 25 years and even 12 – 30 years (UN-Habitat, 2010). The Nigerian National Council on Youth Development describes youth as all young males and females aged 18 – 30 years who are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Soyombo, 2012).

For example, in pre-colonial African societies, adulthood was reserved for men with relative wealth and social status, and a very small number of older women. Everybody else retained the status of minors,

however old they were (Buckingham & Bragg, 2004). With colonialism and mission education, the idea of an automatic transition based on age was introduced. To a large extent, youth is a sort of transition territory between the more established social categories of childhood and adulthood ((Fritz, 2005; Hart, 2009). Adding to which, there is considerable cross-cultural variation as to when an individual becomes an adult. As a transition concept, youth is intrinsically linked with rites of passage of some kind. In most traditional societies, there are well defined rituals that mark this transition. In the case of West Africa, for example, the important role of “secret societies” in the initiation of young boys and girls is demonstrated (Nwabueze, 2015). In contemporary societies, a number of symbolic steps can be identified, such as acquiring the rights to vote, getting married, obtaining a driving license, or buying alcohol among others (Bosch, 2007).

Almost every culture and multinational institutions have got a “youth policy” and this can be seen in the case of the Nigerian National Youth Policy, the ECOWAS Commission on Youth Policy, African Youth Charter, Commonwealth Youth Charter and United Nations World Programme of Action for Youth. In 2006, the Obasanjo Administration even established the Ministry of Youth Development. The Nigerian Youth Policy, for example, regards youth as the greatest assets that any nation can have. All the youth policies of different societies or countries are speaking of “empowering” young people in terms of political, social, economic and development efforts; all pledge to put the youth at the center of national, regional and global /international development (Nwabueze, 2006).

However, the term “youth” beclouds three overlapping situations. First, the biological-physiological aspects of the age-process are variously described as “puberty” and “adolescence”, which include persons in the 13 – 19 years’ bracket (Buckingham, 2000). But in this sense, “youth” describes a sociological situation, rather than the physical-biological changes related to human development (France, 2007). Second, the transitional stage between childhood and adulthood, describes by the term “young man”. In this case, it describes a “stage of incompleteness”; a transitional process. Third, is a situation described by Nilan and Feixa, 2006:80 as the “rebalancing of young positive and negative connotation”, that is, a re-description of the negative connotation (i.e. ignorance and recklessness of a youth) and the positive ones (the vitality and freedom of young people) to mean that youth is not only a specific determinacy but also indeterminacy and incompleteness (Fritz, 1985).

In this sense, youth no longer depicts the transition from childhood to adulthood or even a specific or actual age but a free-play of style, a free self-definition, a life-style or in fact, the institution of self-creation and self-making. It is partly in response to these situations that the term “youth” had to change and did change, from a singular noun (e.g. a Youth) to a collective noun (‘Youth’), which now describes not only specific persons or individuals within a particular stage or time of life but also a state of mind, a life style, so that even adults and older people (in their mid-life or after) can be young as a matter of life-style or feel young as a matter of personal choice (Soyombo, 2012; Nwabueze, 2006).

Furthermore, what is significant about all this is that it is now no longer possible to

distinguish clearly those shifting and contradictory meanings of the term “youth” in either the public understanding of the term or its analytical implications in the academic literature. For example, Amstrong (1999) argued that many urban societies across the world saw the transition from childhood to adulthood as problematic and that this awareness intensified more as families moved from rural to urban areas. With the development of industrialization, bureaucracy, professional work, the market system and universal education, all of which combined to disrupt the normative and socializing function of the family and other traditional units, the youth came to be associated with social dislocation and problematic identity, crime, alienation and sexual hedonism (Fritz, 2005).

The usual response from society and the State to see “youth” as a social problem, which requires resolution within specific institutions such as Youth Courts, Youth Prisons and Youth Services for correctional and counseling measures within the wider institutions of social control (Kjelgaard & Askegaard, 2006). Nevertheless, within this institutional response to “youth”, there also exists and has existed a positive affirmation of youthful activity or youth self-making. This is conveyed by such terms as youth clubs, youth workers and youth conservatives and in Nigeria by the National Youth Service. All of this collectively affirms the universal problematic image of youth and it can be surmised from the preceding discussion that youth in the present circumstances describes contradictions in the concept of young people rather than the problem of transition of young people.

Identity and Identity Crisis

It is the practical, personal and group demonstration of culture. Identity is also psychological, social and material demonstration of a people through their culture. Identity is thus the epicenter of the self that demonstrates the position of cultural acceptance of an individual and (Ruddick, 2003). It is the core of the self and the group. Identities are codified and expressed in language, dressing, greetings, education (content and mode), family patterns, marriage, economic systems, politics, institutions, values, attitudes, behaviours, thoughts, religion, rituals and general worldviews (Hansen, 2008).

Identity can be said to be a combination of socio-cultural characteristics which individuals share, or are presumed to share, with others on the basis of which one group may be distinguished from others. Identity is a group concept in the sense that it is based on traits which make individual members of a group; such traits also provide responses to the question, “Who am I?” Identity has a combination of ethnic, religious, gender, class and other layers of characteristics applicable to a person or a group or defined by others (Nwabueze, 2015).

The complex and often contentious nature of the concept make identity politics a natural outcome. Identity politics is used here to denote the process of categorizing and de-categorizing people (ethnic, religious, gender, etc) into groups on the bases of shared and presumed similarities (Walberg & Greenberg, 2006). More often than not, such similarities may be based on assumptions and stereotypes rather than actual traits, attributes or characteristics. There is thus a regular sense of “in their character” or, in the more popular Nigerian

Pidgin English, “na demdem”; even when differences between people being pidginholed into one group are striking. Such categorization and de-categorization becomes the basis for a range of issues related to rights, opportunities, privileges and entitlements. Identity politics is a basis for determining who is in and who is out (Alubo, 2006) and hence there are contestations and struggles to maintain the status quo by those favoured and for change by those left out in the cold.

Moreover, identity can be regarded as all information associated with an individual or organisation. It is a set of meanings applied to the self in a social role or situation defining what it means to be who one is (Karthika & et al., 2015). Put differently, it is the distinct personality of an individual regarded as a persisting entity. Identity is also multi-layer concept going beyond self image and including biographic or historical orientation. Identity is the state of remaining the same one under varying aspects or conditions. It is the condition of being oneself and not another (Fritz, 1985).

Erik Erikson (1968) described identity as a subjective sense as well as an observable quality of personal sameness and continuity, paired with some beliefs in the sameness and continuity of some shared world image. Essentially, identity is the fact of being who or what a person or thing is and the characteristics of determining this. It is of interest to know that knowing who we are is also known as ego identity, which allows us to interpret information about the world and execute an appropriate response. Identity crisis is a time of intensive analysis and exploration of different ways of looking at oneself, that is the individual feels unsure about his/her role in life and experiences confusion about who she is in reality

(Boeree, 2006). It is distress and disorientation resulting from conflicting pressures and uncertainty about one’s self and one’s role, in which the most obvious root of uncertainty stems from a lack of knowledge about where someone has come from or where they are going (Buckingham, 1999).

Besides, identity crisis has psycho-social implications. Sociologically, it can be regarded as a state or condition of disorientation and role confusion occurring especially in adolescents and youths as a result of conflicting internal and external experiences, pressures and expectations and often, producing acute anxiety (Heidary, 2000). Psychologically, it can be described as the failure to achieve ego identity during adolescence (Miles, 2000). The young people, without a strong sense of identity, will exhibit role confusion and struggle to find themselves throughout early adulthood in life. During this stage of identity cohesion versus role confusion, youths are faced with physical growth, sexual maturation and integration of their ideas of themselves and about what others think about them. The youth are at a stage of life where there is a lot to sort out. This sort of unresolved crisis leaves teenagers and youths struggling to find themselves (Sharafi, 2001). The teenage years harbour some of the most confusing and impressionable years in the life of any human being (Oyekanmi, 2011; Soyombo, 2012). There are many expectations, both individual and societal, that play a large role in the development of young people.

Methods

The study used a non-experimental research design and was carried out among youths and young adolescents who are between 18 and 30 years of age at Yaba College of

Technology, Federal College of Education (Technical), Akoka and University of Lagos, Akoka, Lagos State.

In-Depth Interview guide (IDI) was used as it enables us to have a better understanding of why and how the respondents experienced identity crisis. In addition, it allows the researcher and the respondents to have a form of conversation to clarify issues, whenever any issue looks confusing.

Forty-five respondents who met the selection criteria consented to participate in the study. Twelve of them refused participation citing various reasons such as not interested in the study, having no time for such a chat and also considering such experiences as a private matter publicly.

Karthika Identity Crisis Scale (Karthika, 2013) was used to pre-qualify them for the study. The respondents were purposively selected (15 participants in each of the three study locations) because they must meet the selection criteria to participate in the study, they are mostly young undergraduates. The study used In-Depth Interview guide (IDI), and the respondents were all individually interviewed. All the interviews were conducted in English Language. Direct quotes from the data were used in data presentation.

Theoretical Framework: Erikson's Theory of Personality Development

Erikson (1902 - 1994), a German-born American psychoanalyst heavily influenced by Sigmund Freud, explored three aspects of identity: the ego identity (self), personal identity (the personal idiosyncrasies that distinguish a person from another) and social/cultural identity (the collection of social roles a person might play).

Erikson's psychosocial theory of development considers the impact of external factors, parents and society on personality development from childhood to adulthood. According to Erikson's theory, every person must pass through a series of eight interrelated stages over the entire life cycle. Erik Erikson (1968), still a major figure in the study of personality development, attaches much importance to youth since it is the main period of identity formation, which some young people find difficult to go through. Those who cannot develop fidelity to their society end up having either fanaticism or repudiation.

Though an early-twentieth century figure, Erik Erikson is still accepted as one of the leading scientists to deal with adolescence. His works such as *Childhood and Society* (1950), *Identity and the Life Cycle* (1959), *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (1968) and *The Life Cycle Completed* (1982) are particularly revealing since Erikson does not isolate youth but elaborates on it as a part of life and hence, as a fundamentally significant stage in personality development. Furthermore, being a man of letters interested in psychology, sociology, psychoanalysis and anthropology, he has an interdisciplinary approach to the development of personality.

Erikson is generally quoted as a Freudian ego-psychologist. It is true that he accepts the basic theories of Freud on id-ego and super-ego; he also partially accepts Freud's five stages of personality development. However, he added three more stages to Freud's theory by indicating that personality development does not end with adulthood but goes on up to deathbed. In modification of the first five stages of Freud as well as his own stages, Erikson adopts a social and cultural approach since development of

personality takes place in a social setting. In his book titled *Identity: Youth and Crisis*, Erikson starts explaining the personality development theory with the epigenetic principle. To understand growth, it is well to remember the *epigenetic principle* which is derived from the growth of organism. Somewhat generalized, this principle states that anything that grows has a ground plan, and that out of this ground plan the parts arise, each part having its time of special ascendancy, until all parts have arisen to form a functioning whole (Gilles, 1974). The principle suggests that “we develop through a pre-determined unfolding of our personalities in eight stages. Our progress through each stage is in part determined by our success, or lack of success, in all the previous stages” (Boeree, 2006:23). Erikson states that each stage includes a certain crisis. This crisis, psycho-social in content, is not very different from neurotic conflict of Freud since both are normative. Once these crises are overcome successfully one by one, the individual accumulates his means of leading a healthy life. For Erikson, psychological health is more than mere existence or staying away from illnesses: the outcome of successful tackling with crises is a vital personality; re-emerging from each crisis with an increased sense of inner unity, with an increase of good judgment, and an increase in the capacity to do well. The personality characteristics that an individual accumulates in each stage is called virtues. Each stage has an optimal time for the attainment of the endorsed virtue which includes finding a balance between a positive and a negative characteristic (McDonald, Pini, Bailey & Price, 2011). To be precise, the virtue of hope of the first stage of life is attained when the child finds a balance between trust and mistrust. He must learn mostly to trust people but he must also

develop a capacity for mistrust by providing a balance between the positive and the negative element (Kuna, 2004). Otherwise, he will develop to be a gullible adult.

Results and Discussion of Findings:

The respondents were asked: How do you understand identity crisis? What do you think is responsible for identity crisis among young people? and other similar questions. The study shows Nigerian youths are faced with the problems of identity crisis. They often seem to have no idea about who or what they are; where they belong or where they want to go.

This section presents some major factors that predict how the identity of young people in Nigeria is mostly influenced according to the respondents:

Causes of Identity Crisis Among Youths

Participants were asked to provide information on what they think is responsible for identity crisis among young people. New media such as internet and television were mentioned as reasons or causes of identity crisis among youth. Narrating how social media played out, here is how a participant summarized the point below:

“the magazines, music and all those things we read or listen to have nothing to do with Nigerian content and one will never even remember our Naija culture, our values and norms”.

So, *Mass Media/Urban Modern Culture* plays important role in formation of identity. This is drastically affecting youth identity in Nigeria. The effects that we can see is the depressing mental climate of children and youth are sufficiently frightening. Essential

to identity formation is the influence of media exposure and opinion. Youth perception of themselves change depending on what they think is in vogue. Most of the respondents also mentioned either the internet or television as ways through which they are exposed to alien culture.

Internet is a phenomenal advancement in information and communication technology over the last four decades, and the youths are experiencing remarkable social and cultural changes. This drastic change has generated psychological and social dislocations among many young people. Moreover, technology has influenced the way they think about life in general and interpersonal human relations in particular.

Television also in particular has gone beyond its mandate to assist the family and the school in providing visual aid and education to the young. It has taken upon itself to appeal to the destructive and disintegrative instincts, to provoke greed, unlimited self-gratification, and absence of moral restraint in its young audience. There is a need for more responsible TV programming and more media coverage of the human condition without the celebration of outrage and obscenities.

Another set of the participants have this to say on causes of identity crisis among youth:

“The name ‘Nigeria’ was a product of amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups with no cultural, social, or linguistic affinity, by the girlfriend of Lord Lugard, the first Nigerian imperialist administrator.”

“This forced marriage of convenience to the British colonialist has become the paralysis which modern-day Nigeria cannot divorce

itself from.” “There is no consensus of the people themselves because the name was imposed on us.”

“What should Nigeria do is to foster ‘Nigerianism’.

That is unique to Nigeria such that when adopted, and perhaps celebrated would foster a sense of belonging.

So far, there is none.” “The last attempt by the Obasanjo government to create a national holiday known as Democracy Day was badly adopted and pursued.”

Lack of National Identity is what underlined the above submissions of the participants on the causes of youth identity crisis. Every nation in the universe ought to have a unifying factor, although in this age of globalization, one may argue that multinational corporations such as McDonalds Fast Food Company, Coca-Cola, located across countries and continents negate this. However, there is need for nations to build a national identity that will unify the different ethnic nationalities.

Countries should have unifying event that glues their citizens together. For instance, United States of America celebrates Memorial Day, Veterans Day, Columbus Day, Presidential/ George Washington Day and Thanksgiving. These events are uniquely USA alone. The dates when these events are celebrated are not shared with another country, unlike Christmas, Easter, and New Year, which are universally celebrated.

In the light of the above, Nigerians should celebrate New Yam festival or cultural day, a memorial day that would recognize those that perished during the brutal Nigerian civil

war that lasted for thirty months, rather than unknown soldiers which was imposed on Nigeria by the Europeans. There are tens of festivities that are celebrated by the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria that could be brought together and celebrated the same day. Nigerians should promote the diversity of the ethnic groups making up the beauty of the nation rather than creating unnecessary tensions and animosity with each other.

Moreover, one participant also described the cause of youth identity crisis like this:

“when you are jobless or lack some vital things of life even as a student, you will forget who you are in the name of trying all those different illegal levels or ways to make ends meet”.

So the issue of *Poverty* in Nigeria is a national one, but studies have shown that urban poverty can be more threatening than rural poverty considering the number of young people that are usually residing in the cities and attendant multiplier effects on other social problems. Most of the youths start working at an early age and the money they earn contributes to the family income or to their own living expenses. The implication is that young people are exposed to hardship and suffering early in life and this negatively affect their identity formation.

In addition to the causes of identity crisis among the youth, a participant remarked:

“show me your friends and I will tell you your personality make-up, your likes, values and belief patterns because close interaction among us create look-alike”.

Peer Pressure is the strongest factor that causes identity crisis among youths because pressure from friends has the greatest influence on an individual. This has to do with group conformity; whereby an individual wants to conform and identify with his/her peers and in that process, identity crisis sets in because he wants to be identified, neglecting his/her own personal expectations. In other words, as youths interact with their peers, they are mostly focused on the impression they are making to others and would often do what they think others want them to do. They also seem to imbibe and accept the attitude and behaviour of their mates as ‘normal’ and they often try as much as possible to conform.

Similarly, another participant has this to say on the causes of identity crisis:

“when we young people begin to have low self esteem or persistent feeling of inferiority complex; we constantly feel that we can never be right in anything we do and so we attempt to ‘copy’ others who are supposed to be ‘modern’ or superior”

Insecurity/Low self esteem is a great challenge facing many young people in the light of the above. The inability to find oneself can lead to depression and self-destruction. Youths are given a very difficult task of figuring out who or what they are. This may be one of the most important decisions or discoveries that any person can make. For instance, Nigerian youths imitate the attitudes and behaviours of the western world in terms of dressing style and fashion among others.

Social Networking is another reason provided as one of the causes of youth identity crisis.

“For me, what we see and follow online these days, they are American Idols to emulate because we don’t find Nigerians dominating on the internet for good morals, except for bad reputation or give ugly image...”

Nigerian youths often tend to identify with famous people to the point of apparent loss of their own identity or individuality. In Nigeria and other climes, there are thousands of rock stars, celebrities, professional athletes, movie actors and television personalities available for youths to idolize. Identity crisis occurs when there is disconnect between what or who they are and what they are representing in the name of idols. Social networking platforms like facebook and twitter are giving rise to a generation of self obsessed people who want constant reassurance from their peers.

Family Background is also noted as a predictor of identity crisis. This revelation also came from another participant:

“Within the family, adolescents struggle with finding a unique identity when they are among their siblings.

For instance, if the first child decides to be an academician,

the second may seek individuality by becoming a comedian.

Seeing these two, the third child may choose to be an athlete.

Each child will look for individuality in their search for identity.

When a child cannot find his/her own identity, then an identity crisis will manifest”

Family is the first core of people’s identity formation. The parents give names to children with special meanings which tend to influence their individuality. It is important to note that parents and other family members provide the home environment for the younger ones to grow up.

Besides, *Improper Upbringing* is another factor that was mentioned. A participant had this to say on the question: What do you think is responsible for identity crisis among youths:

“The way a child is brought up will determine, to a great extent, the way that child will live his or her adulthood.

Many adults today cannot express love to their children because nobody expressed love to them while growing up.

The funny thing is that many people don’t even know what it is to be truly loved so it is not usual for such people to express love to other people”.

One of the primary responsibilities of parents in the present day society is to make sure that their children experience love. So many parents want to act love by making sure they get good education. That is very important but young people grow faster with the seeds of the right words sown into their lives. There is need for parental cordial and peaceful relationship that will motivate the young ones to look forward to living a meaningful life.

Moreover, *Lack of affirmation*: Some participants also remarked on the causes of identity crisis:

“One of the things that I have noticed is that many parents find it easy to scold young people or their children than to encourage them. Over and over again I have been in a

situation where I get scolded for doing some seemingly insignificant things but when I do things that make me deserve a pat on my back nobody gives the pat.

Everybody stands at a distance and watch until that moment of glory gradually folds away. When a child does not receive encouragement for doing something well, it is most likely that child will not want to continue.

When a child gets scolded every time for doing something wrong the child begins to focus on the next chance of making a mistake rather than the next opportunity to do

something great and be a better person”.

There are words that you must say to your children or young ones and when they do not hear such words they gradually begin to withdraw into their shells and ultimately into identity crisis. Never assume a child or any other person knows that he or she is loved. You need to affirm the love. People get into identity crisis when they do not hear words confirming the fact that they are loved.

There is need to demonstrate love to people around to help some of them get out of identity crisis, especially the youngsters and this can be done by saying more encouraging

words rather than abusive words to them for there will be a big difference in their lives over a period of time.

The last but not the least factor that was mentioned is *Demoralizing Experiences*: One of the study participants said:

“when people start out on something new, they often start out with a dose of seemingly inexhaustible energy but when things start turning in an opposite direction, they get discouraged. This simply means that futile attempts at what one is doing can be demoralizing enough to push people off the right track”.

For some other people, the demoralizing experience can be a public disgrace at one time or the other and they will never recover from it. Youths, therefore, need to be encouraged and they should not let past failures frustrate them but keep doing what they are good at, focusing on it until they become successful.

Consequences of Identity Crisis among Nigerian Youths

On the consequences of identity crisis among young people, the participants were asked to provide information (*what do you think are the results or consequences of identity crisis among young people?*). The content analysis of the study findings from the participants revealed that high risk behaviour, loss of self esteem, depression; delinquency and lack of personal development were mostly mentioned as consequences of identity crisis confronting the youths. The points are explained below:

1. **High Risk Behaviours**: Young people who face this challenge of identity crisis

experience difficulties because they tend to float and may be led astray. They may get involved in high risk behaviours in the process of finding the suitable identity for themselves.

2. Loss of Self Esteem: Young people who cannot overcome the challenge of confusion and role identification, suffer the loss of self esteem. These young ones do not have self confidence to initiate and implements ideas to better their lives or society.

3. Depression: A youth undergoing identity crisis will be prone to sadness and sorrow. This is due to the fact that the individual will not have a sense of fulfilment. In other words, such an individual will feel that he/she has failed himself/herself. This will lead to self withdrawal from others.

4. Delinquency: It is failure to identity oneself that may lead young ones into exhibiting some criminal behaviours or tendencies such as being political thugs, drug abuse, crime, murder, internet fraud - yahoo plus, 419ners and the like as a way of dealing with the crises associated with identity crisis. In some extreme cases, some individuals commit suicide.

5. Lack of Self Development: Young individuals having problems of identity crisis will not be able to achieve self fulfillment and self actualization. This is due to the fact that they cannot understand themselves. More often than not, young people who cannot set goals for themselves will not be able to develop strategies for the realization of their dream goals.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Identity crisis is a necessary turning point, a crucial moment, when development must move one way or another, marshaling

resources of growth, recovery, and further differentiation. Identity development is a lifelong process that begins in childhood and extends till old age. Identity is a dynamic fitting together of parts of the personality with the realities of the social world so that a person has a sense both of internal coherence and meaningful relatedness to the real world.

In other words, our identity encompasses the choices we make, our priorities and the basic tenets that guide our life. It becomes a way to organize our experiences, to understand ourselves and others in relation to us. The paper examines the social constructions of identity among the Nigerian youth, using the Erikson's theory of identity and psychosocial development.

Nigerian youth are experiencing identity crisis consequent upon the nature and character of the Nigerian State and this is manifested in their various involvements in all kinds of activities that trivialize their esteemed status and instrumental role. It concludes that continuous youth enlightenment as well as empowerment programmes will boost the image of youth in Nigerian society and elsewhere.

In the light of the foregoing, the study recommends the following social work-based strategies to tackle the question of crisis of identity among the Nigerian youths:

1. The stakeholders such as families, schools and other similar institutions should provide a platform for social workers in helping or improving youth's image with regard to their education, employment and other basic needs, which can be good riddance to combat the crisis of identity amongst them. They need to understand who they are. Many youths follow family traditions, religious ceremonies without

fully understanding why they do so or what they stand for.

2. Social workers can also promote that the rights of youths should be respected and society should accept them as “they are”, reinforce their positive behaviours and recognise their potentials/abilities. The youths should be encouraged to participate in designing and implementing development programmes in their respective localities.
3. Social workers as counselors can ensure that life skills should be imparted into Nigerian youths to overcome the challenges of life at their level and in their future and generate adaptive behaviours for young people through different empowering sessions and workshops.
4. Since identity crisis is derived from social environment, factors such as capacity building, educational environment, experiential learning, participation and involvement in community should be part of youth development initiatives to be handled by community social workers.
5. Social workers can help the youth to organize youth culture clubs and associations that will be dedicated to the promotion and preservation of Nigeria’s cultural heritage and identity. Such organisations could operate as pressure groups and be interested in areas such as language, dress, drama, folklore and the totality of indigenous knowledge systems.

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