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ROLE OF FAMILY ETHICS IN MITIGATING MORAL DECADENCE AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTH

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of family ethics in reducing or mitigating moral decadence among Nigerian youth. According to scholars, moral decadence, as seen in Nigerian youth lately, is a matter of great concern regarding the future of social development in the nation. The family institution remains the primary socialising arena for instilling ethical values capable of counteracting such negative currents. Hence, the paper also examines the moral rehabilitation of young people from ethical principles founded in family upbringing. A descriptive research design was employed in the study. Results from the study revealed that Family ethics is among the foremost influences on behavioural and attitude disposition for children as they age. The study also showed that the impact of family ethics depends on parental or guardian involvement, the household quality of communication, and the extent to which adult role models model ethical behaviours. Therefore, the study was concluded with a recommendation that families, communities, schools, and the government would work together to reinforce ethical values at every level of society.

Keywords: Family Ethics, Youth, Nigeria, Moral Decadence



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Introduction

Moral decadence is a social issue that affects a society or nation. It defines an act or behaviour that does not agree with the margins and codes of society. It may not be a mental deviation but an abnormality that causes a fundamental conflict with the value system of people in society. Many Nigerian youths indulge in such anti-social behaviours because they are influenced by family upbringing; some grew up in homes broken by divorce or deficient in amenities to meet every fundamental need of the child, let alone parental love. Investigations carried out by Njoku have proven family instability as a leading cause of moral decadence among Nigerian youths (Njoku, 17). The entire question of moral growth or training of children has been a concern in the country. The researchers' concern, however, is with the moral decadence of the growing Nigerian youths.

The phenomenon of moral decay among Nigerian youths has reached the height of it in modern times. Research studies have recently revealed that many secondary and university students indulge in several immoral activities, including examination malpractices, cultism, violence, cyber-crimes, and sexual immoralities (Adebisi, 190). Behaviours ranging from petty thieving, smoking, maiming, and gross disobedience to school rules to truancy, sexual harassment, and gangsterism, to mention a few, have been exhibited by students. In school, at home, or anywhere in the wider society, negative behaviour has had effects enough to be felt by parents/guardians, school authorities, and society. Most of these behaviours manifest effects like teenage pregnancy/abortion, suicide, early marriage, confinement in homes for reformation, madness, as well as other social evils.

As a basic unit of society, the family plays an important role in shaping the younger generation's character, values and attitudes. In this light, the researcher felt that studying how family ethic could contribute to controlling moral decadence among Nigerian youths as part of the recommended steps in bringing society back to accurate values is imperative. The descriptive research approach was then used in this study to x-ray the causes of moral decadence among youths and the place and prospects of family ethics towards curbing moral decadence.



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Understanding Moral Decadence

Morals can be said to educate one on a decent and honest manner of behaving or defining right and wrong in personal and public issues. It can be called ethical, good, right, proper, honourable, just, and principled. People put nominally positive moral values- truthfulness, honesty, integrity, respect for constituted authority- above all else in their societies, burying beside and idolising them in those who want to survive. Decadence is of decline or decay in a society, especially of its morals. It also means a state of immorality, corruption, debauchery and dissolution, and baint. Moral decadence is all the behaviours that are contradictory to the ethical values and norms governing the individual and society. It is decline, decay and profligate in the moral value of individuals and societies (Chinedu, 280). It is the decline in moral value within an individual and the societal construct.

It is a society of deterioration in moral values: what should appear as abominable becomes acceptable in the society; things which should be abhorred by such society are held high by it (Afuye, 8). Moral decadence takes different forms, such as cultism, corruption, examination malpractice, teenage pregnancy, rape, and sexual harassment, among other socially unacceptable actions. Such behaviours do, therefore breach the accepted norms and values of that society, running directly against the values of the society. Further, the process of acting in such a way portrays low moral standards (Adebisi, 199). Thus, it can indicate a dilapidation of moral norms, values, and ethical standards, which further add to moral decadence.

Moral Decadence and its causes Among Nigerian Youth

Family Instability: Families have become completely disorganised; peace, orderliness, love and safety do not exist, but chaos has become the normal ideal for them as they pursue daily life. The children are deserted in this practice, where they easily find their way to clubhouses, hotels, neighbours' houses, and other similar places, and thus learn different vice habits easily. They learn their first lessons in smoking, drinking, aberrant sexual behaviour, dishonesty, and murder from their parents. Research conducted by Njoku has proved that family instability is the major factor of moral decadence among Nigerian youths (Njoku, 16). If the parents fail to demonstrate their love, guidance, and strict discipline,



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their children are in the soapbox and then bound to go astray: it signifies that discipline should be taken care of on a familial basis. When parents either ignore the wrong acts of their children at home or cannot impose suitable punishment whenever there is an error in doing things by the children, it is thus an absolute fact that they will only grow wilder in it.

2. School Factor: Distance from the family is school, as it plays a vital role in the moral upbringing of a child. It is not easy to talk about the school, which contribute immensely to the moral degradation. Some schools have problems, such as being substandard, underfunded, and lacking classrooms, libraries, laboratories, and other materials. School is referred to as the ground for training children; instead, it becomes quite the opposite. Teachers expected by all to be trainers, directors, guardians, and character moulders are acting in a very morally corrupt way- seducing young girls to immorality (Misham, 5).

Unemployment: Adebisi states that “the youths have now been regarded as nuisances by the society” because many of them roam the streets, looking for jobs or hanging around loose-ended academic sessions. For instance, all these unemployed young people are easy prey for radical organisations that manipulate and use them as tools by ambitious politicians to create mayhem, especially around the election season (Adebisi, 195).

4. Peer Influence: Peer pressure is another significant factor contributing to moral decadence. Association with peers who indulge in risky behaviour is one of the strongest predictors of a youth’s character. The absence of discipline and willingness to learn, especially in primary and secondary schools, has also led to immoral acts in Nigeria (Adebisi, 197).

5. Mass media: Research by Adebisi revealed how the mass media encourages youths to do immoral acts. Most of what is read by the people on media is uncensored and broadcasted to the public. Young people who watch pornographic scenes, war movies, drug addiction, and trafficking scenes learn what they see and practice them (Adebisi, 1997). Media and technology have played a significant role in mass moral decadence.

The effects of these immoral vices on educational and economic decay in the nation are immeasurable. Awoniyi summarised a visit to both police and courtrooms as being able to prove that the youth commit



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most crimes within the society. They partake in acts like arson, cultism, and forgery, among others. All of these lead to a progressive downfall of the whole society (Awoniyi, 95). Moral decadence has drastically affected Nigeria in all corners of human endeavours. With the passing of time, corruption and any immoral acts in the country damage the much-important image that Nigerian societies can create internationally (Chinedu, 278).

Family as the Bedrock of Moral Formation

A family is a group of people tied together by birth, blood, marriage, or any link. Family may mean a social unit God created through blood, marriage, or adoption (Oladapo, 5). It is the smallest social unit yet the most important one. In this society, children are nurtured by their parents, who give them all love and tenderness. The family can give birth and grow a healthy and good individual. It creates a place for developing the child's moral and character building (Oladapo, 7). Hence, a morally centred family is a particularly apt metaphor because it provides a fundamental environment in which a child learns moral values such as honesty, respect, responsibility, tolerance, loyalty, peace, and justice are instilled in the thoughts, feelings, and actions of the children and the function as ethics that govern their actions (Bik and Adriaansens, 8). The best environment in which people may learn moral principles is within a family.

Furthermore, parents and elders have historically had significant roles in shaping the ethical behaviour of youths in Nigeria. Most young people grow into and live within family environments that imprint on them values by which character is formed and nurtured to promote moral lifestyles essential to civil society. Early childhood should present that instruction, which must be reiterated as years pass. Hauerwas also referred to families as "schools of character" (Hauerwas, 285). Virtue and character are nurtured in a formative community like the family rather than deduced through autonomous reasoning (Sandage and Hill, 260). The caregivers' parents instil these values through their actions, beliefs, and teachings in an environment that provides the emotional, psychological, and social framework for development to lay the foundation for ethical principles. In this way, families are crucibles for moral formation. Healthy moral characters are instilled into the youths at home by family ethics.



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The Role of Family Ethics in Preventing Moral Decadence

The word ethics means character, nature, and temperament. Technically, ethics is the area of thought concerned with what is considered morally good and bad. Family ethics convey moral principles and values developed and reinforced within the family ambience. These refer to values such as respect, honesty, discipline, empathy, responsibility, and loyalty; family ethics forms a primary medium through which socialisation takes place and, thereby, affects the behaviour and attitude of a child as it moves to maturity (Ofie, 4). Family ethics effectiveness is directly proportional to parental or guardians' involvement; quality communication at home and the degree to which ethical behaviour is exhibited through adult models will influence the efficacy of family ethics. Family ethics, therefore, becomes a primary factor in moral behaviour formation (Oladipo, 149). The ethics of the family are intertwined with cultural and religious beliefs. Many Nigerian families hold tight to traditional and religious values, stressing the right to live. Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions are positive in stating the socialising of an upright character from a tender age in the family setting. Family ethics can help abstain from any possible situations of moral decay among Nigerian youth in the following ways:

Modelling Ethical Behavior: Parents usually remain the primary model for children, alongside siblings and other family relatives. Roostin states that the most important part of the family in educating their children comes largely from parents and other family members (Roostin, 11). Children learn more through observation, and when they see their parents and other family members' model, they tend to adopt values like honesty, fairness, respect, or integrity. Therefore, in a state of moral decadence, showing ethical behaviour that would directly affect the moral outlook of the younger generations had become crucial. It paves the parent's effort to spend time with children and teach family ethics. Here is where Oladapo opines that one of the most important things adults can do to children is model the type of person they want that child to become (Oladapo, 6). Hence, a family would greatly impact teaching and putting an example of ethical behaviour for children into their moral formation and exhibition.

Instilling Discipline and Accountability: Teaching discipline, most importantly, is an important aspect of family ethics. This is where children are taught what a responsible action looks like and that



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it would also matter after taking it. As would be the case in a society with widespread moral confusion, families have to set very clear ethical standards and consistently enforce them. All this embodies a sense of responsibility in the young, forbidding them from becoming entrapped in activities leading to moral decay (Oladapo, 12).

Promoting Open Communication and Emotional Support: Open communication between parents and children can easily ennoble their morality. Such an environment is generally a supportive family setting where openness leads to the healthy expression of minds, feelings, and concerns. The family's relationship, in general, is said to influence children's attitudes and behaviour patterns as they relate to others later in life (Roostin 142). Oladapo states that "many parents find it difficult to communicate and cultivate the right virtue in their children because their lifestyles do not reflect godly virtue" (Oladapo, 7). For instance, they can create an atmosphere of closeness to discuss the evils of peer pressure or other societal expectations, reveal their feelings, and further discuss the issue with the children sometimes for further refinements on what it entails to make a good decision. Young people who feel emotional backing are less likely to succumb to external evils that invite them into immoralities or harmful behaviours.

Encouraging Religious and Cultural Values: Nigeria is a country endowed with deep-seated religions and rich cultures. Religion and culture serve as powerful sources of moral compass. It is within families that such teachings pass on, usually accompanied by strong ethical standards (Andriy, 11). It is only with the family that children first learn what all these virtues- like honesty, kindness, respect for others- the Christian values, the Islamic values and the traditional African thoughts. Strengthening the role of family in religious and cultural education can help moral degeneration youth tackle the adverse effects with which they have been afflicted. Abroto, Sri and Rizka, note that ferocious influence is there among children, which is very high in the family fabric, when they are brought up, taught all things, and further received cultivation on ethics and culture (Abroto, Sri and Rizka, 13). The children inherit from their parents the moral-spiritual values reflected in the parents' everyday life.

Fostering Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement: Family teaching of young people about contributing to society positively has also proven to enhance community participation through active



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involvement in volunteerism or civic responsibility. Youth raised under such circumstances develop a sense of belonging and a greater understanding of other people's needs. These experiences nurture values such as empathy, social responsibility, and ethical decision-making (Oladapo, 6).

Conclusion

This research investigated the contributions of family ethics towards curbing moral decadence among Nigerian youth. The research pointed out the cause of moral decadence and illustrated the meaning of moral decadence in youth. Family ethics are very important as far as moral decadence is concerned. Several challenges contribute to moral degeneration, but the family is the first place where moral decadence could be combated. Modelling ethical behaviour and promoting strictness, open communication, and cultural and religious values could contribute to creating a generation that values integrity, responsibility, and respect. Therefore, family, community, educational institutions, and government are called to cooperate towards establishing strong ethical values in society.

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