

ETHICAL RESPONSE TO INDECENT DRESSING AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTHS

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Abstract

This paper discusses the ethical response to indecent dressing among Nigerian youths. The indecent dressing of our youths seems as if nakedness is more valued than modesty. When we see what some of our youths wear in the public to display their private parts in order to attract the opposite sex, one can say that morality has collapsed. This research discovered that some of the reasons why these youths dress indecently were as a result of wrong use of internet, poor parenting and peer pressure. This study involved three area of data collection namely: primary sources, secondary sources and observation method. This paper recommends that parents should give attention to their children and be good moral exemplars to their children. Religious leaders should preach against that too.

Introduction

Indecent dressing is a social problem in the society but it is common among our youths. Dressing has lost most of its values in our society. Certain styles of dressing are now a serious threat to our societal cultural values. The menace of indecent dressing is gradually becoming a norm and that which African society is known for, is gradually fading away. It is now becoming a custom that some people do not see anything wrong in dressing seductively. Some forms of indecent dressing are products of modeling top movie stars. Sometimes, these movie stars dress to complement the parts they play in a movie. As it is today, our girls are known for putting on very short skirts, towel-like linens which barely covered their breasts, leaving the rest of the body untended. Most people put on scandal dresses like sagging, trousers, show-breast and show-belly.

From the religious point of view, people are expected to dress modestly especially the women. This is to avoid attracting unnecessary attention which in turn arouses sexual urge from opposite sex. Before the fall of Adam, man was ignorant of his nakedness. The awareness of this, placed man in a position of seeing the need to covering the vital sensitive parts of their body. This type of fashion crazy has made people lose values and worth before others. It has brought about lapses in moral standard. This is the statement of the problem.

Our so called expertise in modeling and dressing have compounded the problem through their albums, films and by projecting some dress scandals like sagging trouser, show- breast, show belly, '*ikam ayi ara*', '*Anam efe efe*' and so on. The masses are really blinded and confused by the so called celebrity as they take them to be the models in everything, and people go on imitating them. Most parents are worse than our youths who are the replica of the Biblical Jezebel. They put on miniskirts, show-breast blouses, show back cloths, show laps cloths, coupled with different types of painting all over their faces that make them look like that of the masquerade. Most of them do not even know how to sit not to talk of dressing well. Some of them, who are new in the act or who have conscience do cover their laps with their handkerchief while seating down and head tie to cover their shoulder while putting on a sleeveless dress or show breast or armpit cloth.

Indecent dressing boils to high rates of promiscuity and immoral behaviours. Women have sold their womanhood by exposing their womanhood parts of the body like breasts and buttocks. They are no longer handled with care. They do expose them at random. Indecent dressing becomes obvious through increase of pornography in magazine as Sorensen [2003] states “this is explaining the concept that indecent dressing has turned into an advert slogan” (p. 6) The youths are always influenced by pornography because they develop desire and need to practice and experience whatever they see in the newspaper, videos, magazines, Televisions and so on.

Indecent dressing is the deliberate exposure of one's body to the public. It is dressing in a way that is likely to shock or offend people. Orakwelu (2012) collaborates that: Indecent dressing is the act that is against the morality or ethics of a given society, organization or group. In our society any dressing that exposes the nakedness (sensitive parts) of any person is considered indecent. This exposure can be by putting on transparent wears, exposure of breast, navel, Tommy, heap etc. This act is provoking and could trigger some immodest sexual advancement that could lead to assault and rape. (pp. 37-38).

Types of Indecent Dressing

A Ubaka, (personal communication, August 13th, 2013) enumerated the following types of indecent dressing among females to dressing include: Miniskirt, Bumper short, Armless, Spaghetti tops, Tight blouse, Show back, Tight skirt, Transparent clothes, Low-cut blouse, Hot pant, Show belly, Show laps, Show armpit, Show breast, *Ikam ayi ara*, *Ikam efe efe*, Body hugs, Short knickers, Bogus fashion, jewelries, Fixing of eye lashes, Fixing of eye ball, Off shoulders, Wicket straps, Mono straps, Tight trousers and dresses, Rosy chicks, T-shirt and jean which carry immoral,

messages (like 'I am sexy', 'suck sex' etc), Excessive lipsticks, Rastafarian hairstyles, Nail attachments. Among the males these types of dressing include: Earrings, Head ties, T-shirts and jeans which carry immoral messages, Braiding, Palmed hair, Jerry curls, Plaited hairs, Deadlocks, Long and busy hairs and beards.

Biblical Concept of Dressing

Men, by nature, are typically more visually stimulated than women. This is one reason pornography is usually more ensnaring to men than to women. In the book of Genesis 3:7-10 after Adam and Eve sinned, they made 'coverings' for themselves. We should note that, despite such coverings, they still felt naked. The Lord made 'tunics' for them as we can see in the book of Genesis 3:21. "Also for Adam and his wife, the Lord God made tunics of skin, and clothed them". This shows that God was not satisfied with the type of the coverings they had made.

Though the Bible speaks of nakedness occasionally to denote defenseless or destitution, the context is always associated with shame. The larger references to nakedness in Old Testament Scripture speak of bodily indecency and improper behaviour. Nakedness is cast in a favourable light only in respect to that exposure in private as between husband and wife. We can see in Genesis 2:25 "And they were both naked, the man and his wife, and were not ashamed".

It is shameful to expose or draw attention to private parts of the body. Exposure of such parts was often a form of judgment intended to shame the wicked as we can see in book of Isaiah 3:16-17. Moreover, the Lord says, "Because the daughters of Zion are haughty and walking without stretched necks and wanton eyes, walking mincing, as they go, making a jingling with their feet. Therefore the Lord will strike with a scab the crown of the head of the daughters of Zion. And the Lord will uncover their secret parts.

St Paul collaborates the fact that some parts are "un presentable and thus should be covered" as it is written in the 1Corinthians 12:23-24: And those members of the body which we think to be less honourable, on these we bestow greater honour, and our un presentable parts have no need, but God composed the body, having greater honour to that part which lacks it.

As we can see there are parts of the body that should remain private. We must not provide opportunities for fleshly lusts, provoking lust is clearly condemned in the scriptures. Romans 13:13-14: Let us walk properly as in the day, not in reveling and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts.

The question now is, can the way we dress excite fleshly lusts? The above quotation from the book of Romans 13:13-14 answered the question. Even Jesus warned about committing adultery in the heart as we can see in the book of Matthew 5:27-30: You have heard that it was said to those of old, you shall not commit adultery but I say to you that whosoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.

Though lust is inexcusable on the man's part, if the woman by her apparel or conduct has encouraged it, she shares in the guilt. We should note that God's law likewise prohibits a woman from looking at a man to lust after him, and the man also should dress and behave in a way not to evoke temptation. If the clothing we wear encourages the arousal of fleshly lusts in others, then we have clearly committed adultery.

Godly Appearance

We have seen what the Bible says about nakedness and lust, the proper attire of a Christian goes beyond merely the exposure of skin. In Timothy 2:9-10: In like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, but, which is proper for women professing godliness with good works.

A woman professing to be godly would never knowingly adorn herself in a way that excites lust in another person or attracts undue attention to her. Our appearance will affect our influence. If we appear in well decent way, others will be more likely to respect us. If we put on indecent dress, we will be neglected by others as unworthy and disregarded.

Current Style of Dressing in Nigeria Higher Institutions of Learning

Psychologically, the current styles of dressing have been causing a lot of concern and problems among parents, guardians, and authorities of the various Institutions. Dressing has become an entirely different thing altogether. What the girls call skirts that they wear is just 'one inch' longer than their pants. When they put on such dresses, they struggle to sit down, find difficulty in climbing machines, cross gutters as well as pick anything from the ground. Apart from the skimpy and tight fitting nature of these dresses, they are again transparent; revealing certain parts of the bodies that under normal dressing patterns ought to be hidden away from the glare of people.

For boys, their pattern of dress is different. It makes them to look so dirty and very unattractive with unkempt hairs and dirty jeans having pockets of holes deliberately created around the knees and the lower part of the trousers all lowered to flow on the

ground because they go through their heels into their legs as socks. The waist of their trousers are lowered and fastened tightly at the middle of the two bottom lobes to reveal their boxers (parts). And when they are walking, they drag their legs and one of their hands particularly, the left one, cupping their invisible scrotum as if they will fall to the ground if not supported. C. Okeke a second year student of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, (personal communication May, 22nd 2013) was of the opinion that skimpy clothes are cheaper and attractive as to make one feel belonged to the tune of the society. Many of them because of how they dress had at one time or the other become victims of rape.

Taking a close study of some of the Nigerian daily Newspapers, one would see series of pictures that testify to the fact that today, dressing among young people is sexy and indecent. Uba (2006) states that:

In the past years, when men were men and women were submissive, the basic essence of covering the female anatomy was of grave importance. Women were proud to cover up themselves, but today all that seem to have been swept off the dust of history. (p. 10). Wherever you turn, on the street, in the bus, in the campus, in the market places, there all shapes and types of breast rudely and embarrassingly stare at everyone in sight. Women now proudly and with utmost dignity flaunt those (breasts) with some expression of “*chere were*”, wait and take. Ilogu (1985) states:

This world is God's creation in which all men share equally as human beings the privilege of making it a happy place of abode for man's fullest development. It has opportunity for man to survive or to destroy himself. (p. 205)

Indecent Dressing in Today's Society

There are different modes of dressing around the world reflecting the various available cultures. A particular mode of dressing can be used to identify a certain society as a people (*for instance, Igbos are known for wrapper, Hausa are known for Danchiki, Youroba for Buba*). But regrettably in the present day society, dressings reflecting people's cultural background and scriptural admonition have been neglected. Thus it is very common these days to see people of both sexes particularly the youths, dressing indecently and abnormally. Dressing to attract attention invariably leads youths mostly the female gender to wear 'funny' or indecent cloths that are seductive and revealing, giving the opposite sex the impression of their readiness and availability for exploitation.

It is not uncommon to see young girls dress in trousers, transparent materials, miniskirts that exposes their thighs, blouses that exposes their breasts, an armpit and other irregular dresses that the scriptures have forbidden. On the other hand, young men appear in female outfits exemplified by ear-rings and hairs do. These types of dressing are influenced by a combination of factors.

Factors That Influence Indecent Dressing

Parental Influence

A child in a community whether good or bad has a home as well as parents. The environment has greater influence in the development of any child. Omede and Obiora (2000) collaborate that “the home is every child's first window to the outside world. What the parents do with the child at this level in terms of training and orientation go a long way to determining what the child becomes tomorrow” (p. 10).

Children live or die, thrive or wither, due to the decision of their parents (Gushee, 2004). It is from the parents that the child learns about values, beliefs and other forms of behaviour acceptable to the community. The child learns these through instructions, observations and practices from parents and other siblings. The implication of this is that parents must be seen to be morally exemplary, and they are the most important people in their children's lives. (Whiteburst, 2004). But the question is how many parents have good moral character? How many of them pay attention to their children? Children are kept uncared for as a result of the absence of the parents from home for business and other social and spiritual engagements. (Omede and Omede, 2004). Many parents especially mothers buy any type of dress for their children. Mothers even go a long way adorning their children with hair attachments, rosy chicks, and eye shadows to the embarrassment of on lookers. When the child grows she finds it difficult to depart from this way of life.

When right values, beliefs and attitudes are correctly laid at the childhood stage, such a child is more likely to grow and develop later in life well behaved. Proverb 22: 6 says “Train a child in the way he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it”.

The Society

The environment has greater influence in the development of a child. A child living in a society will be learning what is going on in the society directly or indirectly. The moral decadence in the forms of corruption, indiscipline, prostitution, bribery and other forms of social vices in the community affects the child. Nobody but a few can be exempted from this morality problems. It is an ugly situation for the judge to cheat his

accused, the teacher his students, the doctor his patients and the ruler his subjects. Okigbo (cited by Nwabuisi, 2006). The youths are learning fast from what is going on in the society around them, therefore the society must be careful the way they exhibit things.

The wrong use of internet

Information Communication Technology (ICT) has helped to bring people together irrespective of their culture. In as much as Information Communication Technology is helpful to societal developments, the rate of abuse is alarming. According to McCabe (2000). "A grainy photograph of a naked body that was intended to excite sexually may be pornographic" (p. 652) Most of the youths are exposed to some of these immoral practices that are relayed through Videos, pornography, music and advertisement.

Peer Group

Peer group is a force that bring friends together which may either be good or for evil. The desire to belong and the fear of rejection have led many youths into evil or immoral acts sometimes against their will. Some of them lack the strong will to say no to evil for fear of being isolated. However, a child with healthy home training should be able to say no to evil and then maintain his integrity and the good name of the family. The pressure of the peers will have little or no effect when there is healthy parental upbringing and the fear of God in the life of any youth.

Fading Value

Africa has a very rich culture that needs to be proud of. But the unfortunate situation is that most cherished African values are fast fading due to non-patronage and modernization. Today, youths cannot tell what these values are. For instance, the beautiful African way of hair do, like weaving, plaiting etc. is being traded for hair 'roasting' in saloons. Modern and dignifying dress patterns are giving ways to the skimpy, transparent and provocative dresses found all around the world. Many of these youths that dress immodestly may not even know what is wrong with the way they dress because nothing suggests to them that it is wrong. The question now is how these youths can be different when the society has no good moral values as legacies to bequeath to them.

Effects/Consequences of Indecent Dressing

Sexual Harassment

Indecent dressing is the major cause of the various assault and sexual harassment recorded in the society over time. Iheanacho (2005) states that skimpy, transparent and sexy dresses worn by female undergraduates elicit sexual responses in males; such

dresses were dresses that expose the legs, dress that expose the breast and dresses that show the exact size and shape of the buttocks. (p. 222)

Ibanga (1991) collaborates “exposing sensitive parts of the female body send wrong signals to the males” (p. 19). These forms of dresses suggest that such ladies need attention and that they are irresponsible and so there are always irresponsible men to dialogue, lure or force them to bed for sex.

Prostitution

Skimpy transparent and body exposing dresses are known to be the dress pattern of prostitutes. Most ladies found in such dresses are always negotiated for sex or social intimacy because they are most often thought to be without husbands. Apart from this notion, most ladies that dress this way engage in prostitution and commercial sex to be able to sponsor or sustain these forms of dresses. The cumulative effect of this is unwanted pregnancies, HIV/AIDS infection and death.

Stealing

In attempt to look modern and be like others, many of these youths had taken to stealing and armed robbery. The boys for instance, under financial pressure from their friends could resort to armed robbery to meet up to this demand, to impress and keep their “babes”. Many boys have been arrested as armed robbery just because of the way they dressed.

Poor Academic Performance

Most students in this form of dresses tend to have little or no serious time for their academic work. Their concern is mostly how to look good and appear in the latest stuff. Most of them battle with carry over courses with the consequences of staying longer in the school than is normal to graduate. Some of them graduate with very poor result. Some of such get into the society frustrated. Some become thugs, armed robbers, prostitutes, drug traffickers and drug addicts.

Broken Marriages

Many marriages crumble because of extra marital affairs on the part of the husbands who leave their wives at home and go after young ladies clad in skimpy outfits. These days, you see women dressing and exposing their sensitive parts and forcing the opposite sex to look at them with lust. As a result, many marriages have broken up because married men lust after these women. Eventually, the gap created and abusive words exchanges from both the wife and the husband about extra marital affairs created by the strange woman, brings an end to the marriage.

Possible Solutions to Indecent Dressing

Parents as Role Models

The way out of indecent dressing is for adults in the society to dress well and honourably to constitute good models for the younger generation. Children watch their parents and copy their ways of behaviour. The behaviour of parents impresses on their children more greatly than what they tell them either to do or not to do. Parents should teach their children the fundamental things they need to learn about correct values, attitudes and beliefs cherished by the society by being exemplary. Parents more especially women should spend time with their children and counsel them on the type of clothe to buy. Mothers should stop buying skimpy and revealing clothes for them. Parents should regulate the type of films their children and wards watch at home. It is not enough carrying Bible around, your Christianity should radiate in your dressing and the way your children dress.

Domesticating Nigerian Films

The Nigerian celebrities especially the female ones are to be cautioned by the film production regulatory bodies to be modest and dress like the Nigerians that they are. Nigeria has very rich cultures that one could be proud of. The wrong dressing pattern of our artists and the way they openly show love making in their films even though not real, do not suggest that they are Nigerians. They should domesticate their films by reflecting and promoting the rich culture of Nigeria, her dress pattern and sanctity of sex.

Religious Institutions

Religious leaders must preach against indecent dressing, counsel and deliver those under demonic influences. Through regular sermons as well as counseling, religious leaders should resist un- healthy development of their members. From counseling of their members, they may be able to discover those that are demon possessed and deliver them.

The Mass Media

The mass media is one of the strongest agents of socialization. Radio houses, televisions, newspapers and magazines should confront rather than support indecent dressing. The display of some indecently dressed young girls for adverts and attraction should be discouraged. Radios and television jingles that promote moral values and the sanctity of sex should be aired and relayed. Programmes that sample opinions of Nigerians on indecent dressing should be regularly put in place in addition to debates on the issue by youths in institutions of learning as means of effective sensitization.

Enlightenment Campaign and Seminar

Enlightenment campaign and seminars can be introduced as weekly programme by religious groups and other various youth empowerment societal clubs on campuses with concern on the issues of dressing, sexual harassment, morality and effects of the ungodly behavior on the youth and on their future. This seminar will be organized even in primary and secondary schools to encourage our younger women to dress better. People should be instructed to be original and attractive even without being naked and they can be admired.

Dress Code Should be Introduced in our Schools

Some colleges and universities in Nigeria have introduced dress codes for their students. In Nnamdi Azikiwe University almost all the departments have dress code which they wear once a week. The problem is not just in making the rules but to be enforced. Staff should be made to collaborate with the school management and security personnel. Lecturers should be empowered to prevent indecently dressed student from attending their lecture. Administrative staff should disallow such students from their offices while the security staff should serve as watchdogs. They should be allowed to open a record in their offices for immodestly dressed students and forward such names particularly those who are not first offenders to the disciplinary committee of the school for appropriate sanction that the code must have spelt. These are necessary if decency must be achieved. And we must note that dressing in a manner that parents, society and religion frown at is not civilization. Individuals should commit our youths to God always as we kneel down to pray.

Conclusion

Every culture has its dressing codes that may vary according to cultures. Every dress code that deviates from the one acceptable to the community especially as it affects the set moral standard or judgment of the community is termed indecent.

A dress is therefore said to be indecent when it has provocative or stimulating influence on almost all those that happen to view it on the user. Egwim (2010) refers to indecent dressing as:

The attitude of someone, male or female that dresses to show off parts of the body such as the breasts, buttocks or even the underwear particularly those of the ladies that need to be covered. This exposure is obviously a deliberate act to look sensuous, tantalizing and stimulating so as to draw the attention of the opposite sex and is more prevalent among singles. (p. 13).

These dress patterns are morally offensive and reveals the high rate of moral decadence in our society. Good and decent dressing elicits respect from people. It saves one from the hazards of being a target for rape, for most rape victims are bad dressers. Although there are no universally acceptable way of dressing, dresses are meant to serve some definable purposes. Dresses are for ornamental or aesthetic purposes, for protection of the body against harsh weather conditions as well as for covering the intimate parts of the body. These purposes are important especially as they form major aspects of a person's personality.

The Nigeria culture encourage modesty in appearance as do the Christian and Islamic religions where the larger population of these youths claim to be worshipping God. This indecent dress pattern among the youths of this generation has generated a lot of concern and worry to the researcher and among the citizens of this country, Nigeria. Religious Institutions like Roman Catholic Church as well as Institutions of Learning is not keeping quiet over this immoral act, rather they speak against it. Indecent dressing, though is not accepted as normal, is seen to be gaining ground in our society. One then wonders what becomes of the society tomorrow with the caliber of youths that are being trained. It is for this reason that this research has attempted to counsel youths about the cause effects of dressing indecently as well as suggests solutions that could remedy the further spread of this immoral act among our youths in Nigeria

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