A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF DRUG ABUSE AND TEENAGE PREGNANCY

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ABSTRACT

The resources of any given society are limited. Consequently individuals have "personal troubles" in coping with their day-to-day activities. Many individuals, although isolated from each other, share similar situational logic and this directs them to adopt the same tactics to ameliorate their personal troubles. When these troubles exceed their tolerable limits they become problems and "public issue". Public issues then are nothing but refractions and reflections of personal troubles of individuals. Two specific areas of major concern with their resultant problems facing Ghanaians currently and in fact the years ahead are the twin evils of so-called drug abuse and teenage pregnancy. It is the modest aim of this paper to demonstrate that what are considered problems are in reality effects of the "structural" sources of "contradictions" between the group that would be defined as the youth and the major institutional structures of society.

Keywords: Personal troubles, public issues, refractions, reflections, structural contradictions.

INTRODUCTION

Societies are normally regarded as "Sui Generis" a la Durkheim, i.e. a fact of existence [1]. This means that the individual is normally born into an already organised and on-going society.

For the smooth running of any society, sociologists are agreed that four problems referred to as functional pre-requisites must be solved [2]. The first of these is the need for survival purpose to meet the physical requirements of its members. Food and shelter are the minimum requirements. Their provision usually involves some system of production and distribution. The term Economy describes this institutional structural arrangement of society. The sec-ond requirement for survival is the need to ensure that these requirements reach the society. The term Polity, i.e. Goal Attainment, is used to describe this structural arrangement of society. Goal Attainment is necessary because the resources of society are always scarce or in short supply. It is this term, polity, i.e. goal attainment that brings politics into this picture. Political arrangement are involved because to determine the priorities of scarce resources it is necessary to wield state power. And normally, there are two main ways of attaining this end: one is through the ballot box, the other is through the barrel of the gun. Luckily in Ghana, we have experienced both. The third functional prerequisite is that of kinship i.e. the institution of marriage and family. This important institution is saddled with the problems and responsibilities of procreation and socialisation of the young. The final one consists of community organisations, and these are religious institutions, educational institutions, mass media and communications. In fact community organisations share the functions of integrating the various elements and institutions. Ideally, they can create, demonstrate and reinforce social values. They may however require help from formal agencies of social control such as the Police and the Military, or from the legal institutions of the courts and the judiciary, should they prove inadequate on their own.

CONCEPT OF YOUTH & EMERGENCE OF YOUTH CULTURE

The young are and must be socialised and committed to a special set of values, standard expectations and behaviour patterns. This special set is what is regarded as the mainstream culture or the dominant culture, i.e. the way of doing things or way of life of a people.

Sociologically, the Concept of Youth simply refers to the state or time of being young. In this sense, a young person is someone not far advanced in

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life, growth or development. Three groups normally fall within this category. The first is the infant, from age one (1) to seven (7); the second group is from age eight (8) to eleven (11) years. The final group, the most problematic within the category, is the adolescents, the years between 12 and 17. The concept of youth is therefore always contrasted with the old.

Youth culture or "subculture" emerges when the young attempt to reflect and express their experiences, activities and values (3). It is at this stage that one begins to perceive two value systems, i.e. that of adults, namely, the main culture, and that of the youth, subculture. At the most extreme, it implies a fundamental rift between the two categories - what some people with sense of humour normally describe as "a war between the generations."

Essentially, it is a period that calls for sober reflections from all members of society. This is the more so, because it is a period characterised by factors that could create crises and trigger off many unpleasant repercussions if not handled with the utmost care, tact and diplomacy. Effective appreciation of this point is crucial because according to Berger and Berger, "To a considerable degree, the youth culture cuts across class lines... It has created symbols and patterns of behaviour that are capable of bestowing status upon individuals coming from quite different backgrounds. [4] For the youth, especially the adolescents, it is not difficult to decipher their sources of tension. Generally, three dominant issues characterize this phase. The first is the search for excitement; the second, that of autonomy, and the third, that of identity. The strains of adolescence mean that the youth share common problems and interests in handling a difficult period of transition as a means of adjusting both to these problems and to imminent adulthood, i.e. from dependence to independence. From their social class background, the youth in different ways attempt to negotiate with their elders. This is done within the context of a society in which dominant and mainstream culture is the arbiter. In the process of negotiation and in the attempt to define for themselves what is important, the social class background of the youth is crucial and in fact in most cases becomes the major determinant. Inequalities of wealth, education and income are all effects of social class positions. Different classes not only live differently quantitatively, they live different styles qualitatively [5].

The following analysis should indicate that it is purposeless living that basically leads many youth to abuse drugs and sex.

DRUG ABUSE

The term Drug is a very broad and nebulous concept. Basically, it is "any substance other than food that by its chemical nature affects the structure or function of the living organism"[6]. The initial drug use seems to be the outcome of numerous social and personal forces. However, from the legal standpoint, deviant drug use is drug abuse, and involves the use of psycho-active drugs without prescription. Psycho-active drugs are normally divided into four categories [7]. These are:-

1. Depressants, i.e. alcohol, barbiturates, heroin.
2. Stimulants, i.e. amphetamines, cocaine.
3. Hallucinogen, i.e. L.S.D.
4. Marihuana

One common characteristic of most of these drugs is that they have the propensity of altering perception. The deviant drug-users we have in mind attempt to explore or escape from various aspects of their environment. Depressants can produce relaxation, drowsiness or deadening of pain and easing of anxiety; stimulants are capable of producing increased activity, alertness or excitation, while hallucinogen and marijuana produce sensory experience which represents a "reality" not verifiable in the non-drug state. The loss of time senses and euphoric feelings normally associated with this attract the youth. "All drugs will have a range of psychological sequelae; will touch off a number of physiological responses in the organism. But it takes human consciousness to react to these effects subjectively - that is, to internally experience and reflect on these effects. Some of these effects may be ignored, others will be enjoyed and sought out under the influence......users learn that certain effects are "supposed" to happen and that others will not. These expectations and group definition of drug reflects here a powerful influence on what the user experiences under the influence [8]. The most vulnerable are those who find themselves in bad company and those affected by rural/urban migration. In the latter, teenaged girls are predominant whereas the male counterpart features prominently in the former.

TEENAGE PREGNANCY

Teenage girls fall within the group that has been defined as adolescents, i.e. of the years between 12 and 17. In Ghana, as in most countries, one is regarded as an adult at the age of 18. There are numerous advantages on attaining this status of womanhood. They include the right to bear and rear children. Child-rearing requires certain pre-conditions because of the long period of gestation as well as the long period of helplessness of the baby during infancy.

Teenage Pregnancy is considered as deviant behaviour in Ghanaian society because it violates the

fundamental principles of marital arrangements. It therefore belongs to the bracket of unplanned child bearing. By virtue of its unplanned nature, Teenage Pregnancy has very serious and far-reaching implications not only for the unplanned baby and the mother but also for the family and the entire society. Teenage girls who unfortunately assume this deviant identity consequently create numerous problems for society at large. The twin problems of drug abuse and teenage pregnancy are predominantly but not exclusively working-class phenomena. The working classes are the most vulnerable because of their status in life. In terms of life chances they are the most disadvantaged. Their lack of education is a major handicap. Education broadens the mental horizon of the individual. Consequently one's perception, understanding and interpretation of the world is dependent on one's level of education. Lack of education therefore breeds ignorance. In terms of interaction and communication within the family it is the working class that experience and suffer for its lack of performances. What is disturbing is that the youth easily go astray without effective parental control. Essentially, there are always antecedent conditions which breed contradiction between individuals and the institutional structures of society.

SOURCES OF CONTRADIC-TION. CONTRADICTION BETWEEEN THE ECONOMY, THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM AND THE INDIVIDUAL WITHIN THE SOCIETY

One of the major responsibilities of the educational system (i.e. School) is to prepare and provide the necessary workers for the prevailing system of production and the level of technology (Economy) which society requires. In a superficial way this may mean teaching the kind of subjects in schools which pupils will need to know in their future jobs. The source of tension is that the contents of most subjects taught in school are unrelated to the world of work. This is a genuine problem in Ghana and has been a source of concern to academics. Prof. Max Assimeng echoes the sentiments of many when he laments that

"A nation which is basically agricultural should have had a system of education in which agriculture as a teaching subject would have a deserved priority in educational curricula. But again the various stresses have been at the verbal level only, and the bias and prejudices of administrators entrusted with the implementation of radical policies on education merely became evident [9].

In fact the relationship is more subtle than this.

The school system, in addition, unfortunately acts as a kind of "sorting out Agency" or a clearing house for employment. This is done largely through the workings of its examination system. From this angle the picture in Ghana is very pathetic. According to Addae Mensah et al.

"Some of the major problems inherent in our present educational system is that... where as 70% of the total number of school going age receive some form of primary education; only about 10% of them are able to proceed beyond this level, with 5% of them gaining access to secondary education, and the remaining being distributed among technical, commercial, vocational or post-primary teacher training [10].

A series of unpleasant repercussions flows from this. Unemployability results. Indeed, this lapse is perhaps the most unfortunate major unintended consequence of our educational system. Prof. Max Assimeng puts the picture succinctly when he writes:

"Most of the causes of unemployment in this country may be appropriately sought in the structure of the country's system of formal education and its historical connection. It has been mentioned on several occasions, almost ad nauseam that the pattern of the educational system is in need of a radical re-orientation" [11]. The disturbing aspect is that the affected groups are described and unfortunately labelled as "failures" and "dropouts". Consequently, they feel humiliated, rejected and alienated. Lack of counselling in our schools accelerates and in fact worsens the process of frustration already in motion. This is with regard to those who have managed to go through the system. For those in the system the system becomes very gloomy and oppressive. They look at their elders who are jobless including those who have completed the sixth form. Those in the group become even further insecure when they see unemployed graduates, and they are coming out in their numbers! The result? Most of the people in this category become absent-minded in class and in turn misbehave.

A FOCUS ON TEACHERS AND PARENTS

For teachers, misbehaviour creates problems. The sad truth is that the teacher has also got his own personal troubles. There is the desire to make ends meet at a time when the take-home pay is incapable of taking him. For most teachers it is no longer a question of Hand to Mouth, it has become Hand to Chest! Most teachers are not content to be happy with the notion that their reward is in Heaven. The reaction and attitude of the public and the comtemptuous attitude shown to teachers by people who are supposed to sympathise with and appreciate the situation are all headaches. Consequently the urge to

do some extra work becomes paramount. Overburdened with physical and mental fatigue, the teacher finds the over-populated class a great source of strain. An ideal class of 35 is now doubled for the average teacher when the corresponding rewards are lacking. The teacher's plight in the scenario becomes complete when he contemplates his powerlessness, the loss of his major coping resources. This involves the abandonment of the traditional way of solving the problem of "problematic children." Society has now become so civilised that there is currently a different notion of justice and injustice - what is considered a reasonable punishment. Physical caning is now a thing of the past.

This is where the family role becomes crucial. In addition to the working class handicap already touched upon, there are many broken homes to contend with. It is at this stage that financial troubles add their share and compound the problems. Lack of wholesome family education crowned by the lack of good exemplary life by adults in the community for the youth to emulate accelerate the disturbing motion already in process. The desire to experiment with everything that comes their way becomes compulsive, i.e. an irresistible urge. It is this desire to explore and experiment that causes the youth to indulge in drugs and pre-marital sex.

SOLUTION

The truth of the matter is that every member of society has a role to play in the solution and elimination of these evils. The starting point must be from the home. The role of parents is crucial because they constitute the "significant others" of the individual. Parents must exhibit special concern and interest in the upbringing of their wards. This commitment must be total. For instance, mere provision of basic needs is not enough. It must be matched by persistent dialogue to identify the problems, fears, anxieties etc. of the teen.

On the educational system, a radical restructuring of the academic curriculum is essential. It is unfortunate that the academic curriculum of most developing countries, Ghana not exceptional, follows the apron strings of the former political overlords. Restructuring must be in line with the management and eploitation of the economic base to suit the changing trends in industry - primary, secondary and tertiary. A dynamic relationship must be established between the humanities, the sciences and the world of work. Students must be selected and trained to fill opportunities that would avial themselves in the world of work rather than absorbing students regardless of their professional inclination who make the grade for University admission. The Junior Secondary School (J.S.S.) despite its teething problems, is indeed a step in the right direction. The former

educational system didn't give adequate avenues for pupils who didn't have aptitude for academic work.

There is, however the need to institute course and career counselling at the onset of Senior Secondary as well as beginning of the Polytechnic and the Universities so as to eliminate frustration often experienced by students preparing to pursue University education as well as graduates who come out of the University looking for job. In both cases, aspiring candidates must be adequately informed as to the job opportunities that may be available and to the changes that are likely to develop. Sex education must be included in the school curriculum. The hostile attitude of some conservative adults against the discussion and discrimination of sex education must be disabused because most of the unplanned pregnancy is the result of ignorance.

The other important agencies, i.e. the 'generalized others' are the community organisations, namely, religions, institutions and the mass media. Their role as definers, interpreters and enforcers of social values is crucial. What is required is an integrated approach. The mass literacy campaign already started is a step in the right direction. Public awareness of the consequences of unplanned child birth and drug abuse must be integrated by the Minsitry of Health, Education, Information, Mobilization, Social Welfare and the Churches. In fact teachers, religious leaders and communication have a moral duty to discharge. It is not a question of preaching morality alone that matters. It is more of a conscious and integrated approach to provide the tools to combat liberal indulgence in drugs and sex. Most importantly it must be backed by good exemplary lives by adults for the youth to emulate.

Success in life must not be measured by the achievement of material acquisition and academic laurels alone. Moral uprightness leads to the achievement of inner peace and this must be inherited through self-control which is needed in every area of life. The truth of the matter is that every youth has been endowed with a useful potential. They must be made to realise this. Community Organisations could be a focal point for the mobilization of the youth in recreational activities such as boys scouting, red cross, boys and girls brigade etc, which will occupy the youth and direct their energies towards a better commercial development rather than purposeless living which leads to these twin evils.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the above analysis it is clear that individuals in any given society have personal troubles, and it is these personal troubles that eventually become public issues. Many families are unable to fulfil these important obligations because they are handicapped in one way or the other, for instance,

poor finances or ignorance. The state must in this respect recognise the plight of some working class families. Inequalities in wealth, income and education must be appreciated. Parents authority and influence over their children cannot be complete until there is a corresponding qualitative improvement in their style of living. Most often the state, for good reasons, succeeds in diverting attention from real issues. Until the structural sources of contradictions are faced squarely, these vulnerable youth will always easily be led to experiment with drugs and sex.

Notes and References

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10. Addai Mensah et al. page 134
11. Assimeng, Max. op.cit