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Psychosocial Environment and Cognitive Development in Young Adults of Diobu Settlement Area of Port Harcourt Metropolis

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Abstract:

The argument on the effect of psychosocial environment on the cognitive development in young adults of Diobu settlement area is central in this paper. It is argued that psychological spheres of young adults are easily influenced by the social conditions of the environment where they grow up. Social conditions of environment where young adults grow up have significant affect on the world view and perception of what they consider to be good or evil in society. When cognitive perception of young adults in Diobu were observed, it was discovered that psychosocial environment where they grew up impacted significantly on their latter behaviour in life. This informed the basis of analysis for the study. Materials for the study included both qualitative and quantitative sources. Questionnaire, in-depth interviews, community town hall discussions and observation methods were used to collect data for the study. Copies of questionnaires were distributed to 208 households. Results show significant relationship between psychosocial environment and cognitive development of young adults in the study area. Social reintegration, gentrification and livelihood support programmes have been identified to aid in healthy development of young adults in the area.

Keywords: Psychosocial, environment, cognitive development and young adults

1. Introduction

Diobu settlement of Port Harcourt is an area characterised by dilapidated social amenities and inner city decay. The settlement best can be described as an urban slum. Like all Slums, squatter or any form of marginal settlements, Diobu is socially excluded from modern urban aesthetics. The areas are typically preoccupied with decayed infrastructures. The slum exists with little municipal attention in terms of drainage system, good roads network, beautiful structures, recreational parks and leisure spots. It is a typical example of decayed settlements in most inner-city centres around developing countries of Africa and in particular, Nigeria.

The case of Diobu in Port Harcourt has its peculiarity with intense criminal activities. The bad conditions of the environment and exclusion of Diobu inhabitants from the rest of the city has its concomitant psychosocial disorders. The worst affected of cases in this instance is that of young adults which over the years have been an issue of public concern. Obinna et al., (2010) noted that there is high prevalence of criminal activities that accompany cases of environmental decay, poor urban services, deplorable housing situation and lack of social amenities in Diobu settlement. The slum in Diobu has become an area of criminal squalor and major source of inner city decay (Nwisi, 2013). This stench of criminality in the slum as observed by Fisher (2012) has assumed massive proportion due to unprecedented influx of migrants and is capable of undermining basic forms of morality in the area.

What may have brought about this unprecedented drift in morality in the area? Some writers see the issue of influx of migrants as a contributing factor to this. Aworemi et al., (2011) argues generally that push-pull factors in Nigeria have continuously attracted unabated massive population influx into the city. Such population drift into a city like Port Harcourt with no social welfare programmes for young adults is capable of creating an atmosphere susceptible to crime. Then again, the issue of Diobu neighbourhood peculiarities readily attracts those who finally locate the environment. In this instance, psychosocial conditions of Diobu lifestyle become a pull factor for these young adults. This has left visible signs of rise in criminality in the neighbourhood of Diobu.

More so, the situation of decaying infrastructure has engulfed Diobu area with environmental degradation and deterioration in housing types the most worrisome condition for the Government. Some decaying houses serve as abode for criminal activities. It is observed that young adults take advantage of such places for kidnapping activities, as centres for smoking of banned substances and cult related activities. The environmental consequence of unregulated slum habitation is manifold in nature. Apart from urban aesthetics and criminal rascality, slum settlements generally lack in basic conditions of life. The UN-Habitat (2012) maintained that slums are residential areas lacking in any of the following conditions:

- i. Durable housing of a permanent nature that protects against extreme climate conditions.
- ii. Sufficient living space, which means not more than three people sharing the same room.
- iii. Easy access to safe water in sufficient amounts at affordable price.
- iv. Access to adequate sanitation in the form of a private or public toilet shared by a reasonable number of people.

v. Security of tenure that prevents forced evictions.

Be that as it may, majority of the housing types in Diobu neighbourhood are houses built before the Nigerian civil war fought between 1967 and 1970. These houses have over the years deteriorated with or without renovation. It is worrisome that most of the housing types in Diobu lack in entirety the characteristics stipulated by the UN-Habitat. As such, there is a huge tendency that the psychosocial wellbeing of young adults raised in Diobu could result in adverse development. Studies in social cognitive development support this assertion. It is stated that social relationships take strategic positioning during adolescent personality growth. Choudhury et al., (2006) argues that conducted historical and MRI studies support claims of human brain conditionally developing structurally during adolescence stage than any other stage in personality life cycle. Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) is a technique used in clinical psychology and medicine for the measurement of brain activity. But in this study, its principle is applied to the estimation of socialisation and personality development of young adults. Applying MRI principle to socialisation and personality development succinctly estimates the place of psychosocial environmental factors in young adult personality formation.

Social cognitive development in young adults occurs within their social background. Cherry (2014) aver that social cognitive development deals with the social factors surrounding perception and impression management as a whole. The central concern in social cognition underscores how individuals process, store and interact in the social system. Be that as it may, cognitive development goes further to identify the manner in which people think about others, feel and react with the world around them. To this end, young adults whose social cognitive process is undergoing socialisation and personality development have a tendency of being adversely affected by the criminal subculture within the environment in which they are raised. This informs the position that young adults raised in Diobu neighbourhood in this case where there are visible signs of criminality and violence are vulnerable to criminal involvement. In an earlier study by Nnanna et al., (2009) it was discovered that Diobu is a dreaded neighbourhood of criminal subculture with notoriety in drug related crimes such as street fighting, cultism, kidnapping, rapping, burglary, pick pocketing, touting, object snatching, intimidation and harassment of passersby as well as other forms of deviant behaviours in Port Harcourt. This informed the decision to study young adults in the neighbourhood to unearth peculiar factors accountable for the situation enunciated in above.

2. Theoretical Framework

Theories are analytical constructs used in interpreting events occurring in the social world. Theories also perform a predictive function. This occurs such that it provides a direction and sequence of events in human society. As such, theories play a vital role in analysing the social world which we inhabit. Cognitive dissonance theory was used to explain events in the study.

2.1. Cognitive Dissonance Theory

Festinger (1957) developed cognitive dissonance theory. Festinger's resolve was to solve an age long disharmony between individual's thought processes vis a vis their attitudes, belief system and associated moral behaviours. The main assumption in cognitive dissonance theory is that individuals struggle over time to balance within them a consistent psychological sphere where dissonance exists. Dissonance is that dissension between self perception (a body of impressions held by people about themselves) and socially defined means of goal attainment. McLeod (2014) drives on this to explain that individuals have a tendency to maintain an inner balance in attitudinal and belief systems where disharmony (dissonance) within them may occur to bring about cognitive consistency. The explanation for this is given that sometimes people find it difficult to quit certain attitudes so they end up devising a way to sustain such attitudes despite the social consequences. In so doing, they may become acculturated into that subculture over time by their regular socialisation of the attitudes of that group not minding whether such behaviours are morally acceptable or not. Over time, such individuals fully internalise the mode of behaviour consistent with that subculture. This explains why people resist effort to alter their criminal and deviant behaviours; a situation seen as forced compliance (McLeod, 2014).

The fact in cognitive dissonance is the idea that individuals constantly take decisions at one point or the other in life and these decisions evoke an occasion of dissonance (Festinger and Carlsmith, 1959). The lack of agreement and harmony between an individual's means and socially provided means is a product of that individual's cognitions. Cognition here encompasses how individuals interpret the laws, folkways, mores and norms of the social world which they live vis-à-vis their quest for goal attainment. That individual's body of knowledge, understanding, thought pattern, experience and interpretation of socially acceptable means of pursuing goal is also contingent upon cognitions. These cognitions generally are summations of self perception, family interest, worldview as well as sub cultural norms. Young adults in socially excluded neighbourhoods have a higher tendency of adaptation to criminal behaviour due to the frail nature of their cognitive properties. The frail nature of their cognitions could arise due to a number of factors substantiated with the continuous inner struggles to achieve societal goals. This idea largely explains the case of Diobu neighbourhood in Port Harcourt.

Young adults in Diobu area of Port Harcourt battle with cognitive imbalance especially in dealing with material scarcity and attainment of goals. The psychosocial environment of Diobu neighbourhood which is bereft of the right atmosphere for goal attainment therefore becomes a dissonance for these young adults. To bring about an equilibrium state within their inner formations, they turn to criminal behaviour and deviance to entrench their cognitions. The cognitive path for these young adults is that which is inclined negatively towards goal attainment. The result is drug related criminal behaviour, violence and deviance in the area. A career in crime among young adults in Diobu becomes a normal way of life. Kidnapping, gang rapping, cultism, gun running, street fighting, touting, object snatching, robbery, burglary, intimidation and harassment of public peace are outward manifestations of unrestrained inner struggles of goal attainment among young adults in Diobu area.

3. Materials

This study was conducted in Diobu settlement within Port Harcourt municipality in Rivers state, Nigeria. The data generated for the study were derived from qualitative and quantitative sources. Quantitative data which were primary data sources came from questionnaires, in-depth interviews and observation method. Also, data was derived through community town hall discussions. On the other hand, secondary data were derived from print media, internet sources, archives and library sources. A total of 208 households in Diobu neighbourhood were systematically drawn with the help of a simple lottery process for the study. Participants at the community town hall discussions were 13 in number. This number was purposively selected. Among them were traditional leaders, market women, businessmen, artisans, civil servants and students.

4. Methods

A two-staged random sampling process was conducted. In the first instance, various streets in Diobu were delineated based on data from the Rivers State Ministry of Urban Development. After that, five streets were systematically drawn using a simple lottery procedure. Secondly, streets were selected on a ratio of one is to five (1:5) where copies of questionnaires were administered. This procedure brought about 5 streets within Diobu neighbourhood that were studied. In the 5 streets systematically drawn for the study, questionnaires were administered in 208 households. Therefore, a sample size of 208 constituted the respondents' base for the study. Demographic distribution of respondents indicates that 126 were adult males, 51 adult females, 25 young adult males and 6 young adult females respectively.

A 4 point Likert scale questionnaire instrument was designed for the study. The independent variable in this study being psychosocial environment was given operational interpretation in three basic concepts. These concepts include social exclusion, slum environment and Diobu lifestyle. Respondents' knowledge was tested based on these three concepts in relation to the dependent variable being cognitive development in young adults. Respondents' knowledge of the dependent variable was tested based on the 4 Likert scale set of assumptions. The first part of the questionnaire contained personal data section and the second part contained a set of hypothetically structured assumptions from which respondents completed copies of questionnaires administered to them. Statistically, the chi-square formula was used to verify the assumptions in the hypothesis. Interviews and community town hall discussions also centred on concepts such as social exclusion, slum environment and Diobu lifestyle. Non-participant observation method was also carried out in some strategic locations within Diobu axis of Port Harcourt.

5. Results

Psychosocial Environment	Cognitive Development in Young Adults				
	SA	A	SD	D	TOTAL
Social exclusion	23 (30.8)	18 (14.7)	9 (7.2)	10 (7.2)	60
Slum Environment	36 (33)	20 (20.1)	6 (8.4)	8 (8.4)	70
Diobu lifestyle	44 (40.4)	17 (19.1)	10 (9.3)	7 (9.3)	78
TOTAL	103	55	25	25	208

Table 1: Showing Relationship between Psychosocial Environment and Cognitive Development of Young Adults in Diobu
Source: Field work 2016

5.1. Research Hypothesis

- H1. Psychosocial environment of Diobu area is more likely to have adverse effect on cognitive development in young adults.
- Ho. Psychosocial environment of Diobu area is less likely to have adverse cognitive development in young adults.

In the chi square table, the observed value of 7.13 is lesser than the expected value of 12.5 at 0.05 level of significance and 6 degrees of freedom, the alternate hypothesis is rejected. In this instance, the null hypothesis stating that psychosocial environment of Diobu area is less likely to have adverse cognitive development in young adults is accepted. The implication of this is that surrounding variables to psychosocial environment no doubt should have adverse effect on cognitive development in young adults but the rate at which such effect may occur occurs is not statistically significant in this situation.

However, analysis of informed opinion of participants in the community town hall discussions substantially favours a relationship between observed variables. A rating scale was prepared for participants with five operational variables to psychosocial environment. Participants were then asked to rate social status, family income, personal drives, life style and sub cultural values. Each concept was rated based on a score of one over five. The score was taken as an interpretation for rate of cognitive development in young adults on whether the effect was high or low. So, from the analysed computational figures, psychosocial environment showed significant indication of adversely affecting cognitive development in young adults. Therefore, it was interpreted that there exist an association between the observed variables. The rate of influence from associated variables of psychosocial environment on cognitive development in young adults was established based on positive score obtained from participants. This claim may be further supported

with the explanation that since human brain development activity occur more within young adulthood, there is a tendency for psychosocial environmental influence occurring in young adults at this stage. More so, the crisis of social exclusion, slum habitation and young adults' lifestyle may add up to have adverse effect on their healthy development.

6. Discussion

Psychosocial environment in this study was conceptualised based on certain social conditions around Diobu neighbourhood. The social conditions surrounding Diobu environment as perceived in the study creates room for adverse socio-psychological development in young adults. This is made possible by the nature of socialisation internalised by these young adults whose cognitive ability is undergoing personality formation. Choudhury et al., (2006) argue strongly that there is room for much behavioural negativity to occur in these young adults because of sensitive brain development sequence taking place during this period of their growth. Historical and Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) studies corroborate this assertion. It is argued that since brain development structurally occurs during adolescent stage in life other than any other stage in the entire personality life cycle, assimilation of wrong impressions may have adverse effect on individuals. In the light of the foregoing, it entails that the social cognition of personality traits in young adults raised in socially excluded environment has a likelihood of behavioural negativity. To a large extent, there exist stronger ties between environmental variables and socio-psychological attributes of people ranging from attitudes, beliefs system and worldview (Dietz et al., 1998).

In the analysis of findings, psychosocial environment of Diobu settlement is less likely to influence significantly an atmosphere of adverse cognitive development in young adults. This finding does not out rightly preclude the effect of psychosocial environment of Diobu on the social cognitive development in young adults. The issue here is rather the extent to which such psychosocial environment could affect social cognitive development in these young adults. Nevertheless, deductions from community town hall discussions conducted provided a wider look at associated variables such as social status, family income, personal drives, life style and sub cultural values. Summations from the discussions showed adverse effect of psychosocial environment on social cognitive development of young adults in Diobu neighbourhood. Whereas, the implication of this is that psychosocial environment of Diobu creates an atmosphere of adverse social cognitive development in young adults. Therefore, there is high tendency of influence from associated variables to psychosocial environment and adverse social cognitive development in young adults.

Environmental values, situational attributes and psychological factors largely influence predictive behaviour which cannot be separated from cognitive development (Barr, 2007). The inconsistency in behaviour arising from individual perception of these enumerated social attributes largely account for negative socialisation received by these young adults. Therefore, on the long run, such behaviour inconsistency amount to negative self perception, wrongly managed impressions and negatively motivated achievements which are expressed by these set of people in pursuit of individual goals. In that case, the tendency to eschew socially established means for goal attainment becomes an acceptable sub cultural norm among young adults. It is on this basis that the need for a social assessment of the situation becomes inevitable in Diobu settlement. Social assessment of behaviourally inconsistent people gives an estimate of the consequences of certain actions in advance which could be detrimental to the society if left unguided. Assessing the social effect of such actions through specific policy and development needs may help heal the effects of such actions inflicted on society (Burdge and Vanclay, 1996).

7. Recommendations

The following recommendations can be useful in dealing with social reintegration, livelihood support programmes and gentrification exercise in Diobu neighbourhood of Port Harcourt Metropolis.

Social reintegration and livelihood support programmes to be provided may include:

- i. Granting of state amnesty to the socially excluded criminal elements in Diobu.
- ii. Creation of social youths and business clubs to conscientise the emotionally displaced persons.
- iii. Organise social mentorship programmes for the youths for impression management purpose.
- iv. Creation of micro credit revolving schemes for youth livelihood support services.
- v. Establishment of skill centres specialising in sectors such as:
 - Leather works.
 - Wood works.
 - Industrial fabrication and welding.
 - Metal recycling schemes.
 - Electrical works.
 - Construction works.
 - Entrepreneurship schemes.
 - Oil and Gas supply chain distribution.

Gentrification exercise in Diobu neighbourhood should involve the demolition of buildings especially water front areas and those adjoining the backend of Rivers State University of Science and Technology back gate. and reconstruction to suit new purpose.

8. Conclusion

The effect of psychosocial environment on the cognitive development in young adults of Diobu settlement area has been brought to the fore in this paper. It has been argued in the paper that psychological properties which determine individual's decision to act in

certain ways can be influenced by the social conditions of the environment. Environment here connotes the socio-cultural and physical attributes of things where someone grows up in the society. Be that as it may, environment cannot stand on its own outside the social conditions of life. Social conditions of environment where young adults grow up in this case become a significant determinant of their world view and perception of what they do and say. The decision of right or wrong in the society in this context is heavily linked in some way to individuals' cognitive ability to rationalise the morality of any of these two extreme forces in the society. Cognitive perception of young adults in Diobu where this study was conducted tended to be influenced negatively by psychosocial environment. Attributes of psychosocial environment such as social exclusion, slum environment and Diobu life style can be addressed through social reintegration and livelihood support programme. More so, gentrification of Diobu especially the water front areas are highly recommended.

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