



THE CAUSES AND EFFECTS OF YOUTH RESTIVENESS IN THE NIGER DELTA OF NIGERIA: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

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ABSTRACT

The Niger Delta region has been in perpetual crises during the past decade. The reason for the crisis is the presence of oil wells in the area. The exploration and management of the environment and their resources are among the many reasons for the crises. Government unfavourable policies have further deepened the crises in the region. This has been manifested in the forms of youth restiveness which has continued to plague the region. The effects of the youth restiveness in the area are numerous. They include economic hardship on the people, Government insensitivity to the needs of the people because of the activities of the restive youths who continue to disturb the exploration process in the region, untimely death of people caught in the crises, etc. In the light of the causes and effects of youth restiveness in the region, this article made some recommendations that could help in solving the problems of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta.

Keywords: Youths, Employment, Education, Counselling, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is an unending crisis in the Niger Delta region, which is often expressed in the various forms of youth restiveness. Youth restiveness is an expression of anger and dissatisfaction over a seeming unfavourable condition. In the Niger Delta, youth restiveness is a reaction against the perceived neglect of proper maintenance and compensation of host communities by multinational and trans-national oil exploration companies and government agencies. The restiveness has been expressed in the forms of bombing of oil installations and the kidnap of foreign oil workers (Ofehe, 2007).

One reason that has been adduced for this is the lack of understanding between stakeholders in the oil rich region. The companies on their own have always failed to keep to the term of understanding and agreement reached by their host communities. The failure of the Nigerian government and political class to address the politics of oil exploration has also led to the inevitable youth restiveness in the forms of the kidnap of Britons, Hondurans, Americans, Bulgarians and other Nationalities in the recent past. There is also the seizure of oil exploration vessels and attacks on flow stations and sometimes killing of soldiers of the Joint Task Force codenamed "Operation Restore Hope". There are also records of robbery operations carried out on major multinational Oil Companies location. The group claiming responsibility for all these attacks call themselves the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) (Uwhejevwe-Togbolo, 2007).

Each time radical militants in the Niger Delta seize oil flow stations, kidnap oil workers and inflict punishment on Nigerian security forces, the international price of crude oil shoots up. The daily production output of the oil companies in the Niger Delta drops, and so Nigeria loses revenue. Oil theft is made easier, and perhaps more important for the purpose of the militias, the international community focuses afresh on the problems of the Niger Delta. Their action is dramatic. The effect is even more so. Shell which depends on the Niger Delta for ten percent of its global oil production, as well as the other oil majors are already used to crises of this nature. There can be no doubt that they consider violent attacks on their processes and installations, part of the price to be paid for doing business in Nigeria.

Another reason for youth restiveness in the Niger Delta is when environmental and economic conditions in areas where oil explorations take place deteriorate to unbearable levels. The result is that oil-bearing communities naturally react. Shell, Mobil, Chevron or any of the international oil corporations respond by securing the assistance of the Nigerian Police or military to terrorize and brutalize Protestants. Most of the complaints relate to unemployment, environmental degradation, destruction of means of livelihood and health. The attitude of security agents towards protesters has been responsible for the maiming, outright killing and other cases of human rights abuses in the affected oil communities.

Youth restiveness has become also a plague inflicted by the government on the people of the Niger Delta; no civilized society will tout the future of her youths. The region contributes 90% wealth to the economy of the country and there is little or nothing done by the government and the operating companies to show restitution for this huge contribution. The government in the past has always sidelined this region from meaningful development, thereby shying away from the plight of these people. This disposition is borne out of the fact that the government keeps blaming military continued stay in office until 1999, but a survey of the last seven years of rule by this present administration has shown that we are still living in an extension of military rule in the camouflage of a democratic institution (Ofehe, 2007).

In some other Urhobo communities where there were oil wells, there was the additional question of the quest for fair sharing of compensations from oil companies. The presence of oil companies and the consequent promiscuous debasement of the environment has spurned the emergence of compensation agents and a veritable compensation crisis. There are accusations in a number of Niger Delta communities concerning the hijacking of such compensation by agents, and traditional authorities. Youth groups have emerged to ensure that they are not short-changed (Onoge, 2006).

The Niger Delta region is recognized with bad roads, low infrastructural development, high level of unemployment, female prostitution and low industrialization rates. You will agree with me that it grieves and naturally energizes conflict as they watch the treasury being footed by government officials. The agitation of the youth is that, what are their restitution for their depleted land and sea environment caused oil spillage or gas flaring, global warming experienced where oil flared causing the greenhouse effect, the ozone layer depletion leading to sun burnt and cancer, acid rains and many more.

The lack of commitment of the Federal Government towards the enforcement of standards in the oil companies has encouraged the oil companies to operate without hindrances. Notwithstanding, Nigeria is a signatory to a number of international conventions on standards of compliance by the Oil and Gas Companies. These Conventions/Treaties have been honoured in the breach than in their observance. Federal Government Bodies, such as DPR and the Federal Ministry of Environment have exhibited such inexplicable nonchalance that has left the host communities with no hope of a better tomorrow. They have abandoned their statutory role of policing the oil and gas companies; leaving one to wonder and doubt their patriotism and regard for the oil producing communities.

The Federal Government is making matters worse by an incessant increase in petroleum product (PMS) almost every quota. The poor people in the society mostly live on Kerosene for domestic uses. Kerosene product is even more expensive than fuel... where are we going from here? The incessant increase in impoverishing the poor more and more; the bulk of youth restiveness in the society is caused by the children of the poor people, most of whom cannot be taken care of by their parents. The inflation rate is on the increase; the government should not kill the timid citizens in the name of deregulation. In as much as deregulation is good; it should be done with policies put in place to cushion the effect in relation to eliminating the sufferings of the masses (Uwhejewe-Togbolo, 2007).

Youth Restiveness and other social vices can be curbed when our leaders lead by good example, when there are jobs, when there is food on the table, and when our youth have a hope for better tomorrow, we sincerely hope that the leaders of today should not only talk and talk, but also talk and follow it up with action and reality when it comes to setting good examples for our youths. Our leaders should be transparent and have an open policy from the top to bottom.

Peer influence has been identified to have significant impact on the behavior pattern of youth people (Ebochukwu & Obiunu, 2006, Obiunu 2006). Young people of the same age bracket listen to each other and influence each to a large extent. The youths in the Niger Delta are not left out in this experience. The large number of youths who are involved in the restiveness gives credence to their influence on one another.

The youths in the Niger Delta region are jobless; they need assistance from all stakeholders through the introduction of empowerment programmes to make them more productive. The injustice, operation and inequality meted on the people of the region is unfair, questionable and a bridge of human right. Posterity will judge everybody (Uwhejewe-Togbolo, 2007).

1.1 Hypotheses

The three hypotheses tested are:

- Children's exposure to actual violence does not relate to youth restiveness.
- Environmental exploitation does not relate to youth restiveness.
- Government policies do not significantly relate to youth restiveness.

2. MATERIALS AND METHOD

This study adopted the survey design, which adopted the expo-facto design. The aim to identify the cause of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta and also to establish its relationship to the political instability in the region. The population for the study consist of all the youths in the Niger Delta region. The sampling procedure adopted the purposive sampling technique. A total of 500 youths were selected from the region for the study. One coeducational school was selected from five states in the Niger Delta region. These States are, Delta, Rivers, Cross Rivers, Bayelsa and Edo. From each of the coeducation schools, a total of 100 students were randomly selected. 50 males and 50 females were selected. This accounted for the total of 500 students for the study of the region.

The instrument for the study was a questionnaire titled Causes of Youth Restiveness Questionnaire. (CYRQ) The questionnaire consists of sections. Section A was designed to elicit demographic information, such as age, gender, level of education, and religion. While section B measures the various causes of youth restiveness. In order to determine the suitability of the instrument for the study, a test retest reliability procedure was adopted to find the level of reliability of the instrument. Analysis of data contained revealed that the instrument had a reliability level of 0.66.

Method of data analysis employed for the study was the Chi-square. The hypotheses were tested at .05 level of significance.

3. FINDINGS

Hypotheses 1: There is no significant relationship between peer group influence and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta

Table 1: Peer Group Influence

	Q	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
Bad influence	92	80	8	64	80
Violent computer game	53	80	-27	729	9.11
High aspiration	63	80	-17	289	3.61
Wrong education	85	80	5	25	.31
Drug abuse	90	80	10	100	1.25
Cultism	96	80	16	256	3.20

Df = 5

Calculated $X^2 = 18.28$

Calculated $X^2 = 11.07$

Decision = Reject

Significant at 0.05

Remark: significant

From the table above, the analysis of data revealed that the hypothesis was rejected. This is because the calculated X^2 (18.28) is greater than the critical X^2 (11.07). This implies that there is a significant relationship between peer group influence and youth restiveness.

Hypotheses 2: There is no significant relationship between exposure to violent activities and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta.

Table 2: Exposure to Violent Activities

	Q	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
Access to destructive works	89	72	-17	289	4.01
Horror films	52	72	-30	400	5.55
Ethnic crises	89	72	-17	289	4.01
Marginalization in development	56	72	-16	256	3.55
Inappropriate ideology	75	72	-3	29	0.12
Total	361	360	-73	1243	17.24

Df = 4

Calculated $X^2 = 17.24$

Critical $X^2 = 9.49$

Level of significance = 0.05

Remark = Rejected

Decision = Significant

The analysis of data in the above table revealed that the calculated X^2 is 17.24, which is greater than the critical table value of 9.49. This implies that the null hypothesis is rejected. The conclusion therefore is that there is a relationship between exposure to violent activities and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta.

Hypothesis 3: There is no significant relationship between environmental degradation and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta.

Table 3: Environmental Degradation

	Q	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
Environmental neglect	88	100	-12	144	1.44
Inadequate compensation	78	100	-22	484	4.48
Environmental degradation	81	100	-19	361	3.61
Oil spillage	72	100	-28	324	3.24
Neglect of the environment	82	100	-28	324	3.24
Total	401	500	63	2097	20.97

Df = 4

Calculated $X^2 = 20.97$

Critical $X^2 = 9.49$

Level of significance = 0.05

Remark = Rejected

Decision = Significance

The analysis of data in the table above shows that the calculated X^2 (20.97) was greater than the critical table value of 9.49. This implies that there is a significant relationship between environmental degradation and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta.

Hypothesis 4: There is no significant relationship between Government policies and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta.

Table 3: Government Policies

	Q	E	O-E	(O-E) ²	$\frac{(O-E)^2}{E}$
Government negligence	89	97	8	64	0.65
Harsh economic policies	89	97	8	64	0.65
Location of State Capital	60	97	-37	369	14.11
Marginalization	67	74	-30	900	9.27
Unequal distribution of amenities	85	97	-12	144	1.48
Total	390	485	95		26.16

Df = 4

Calculated $X^2 = 26.16$

Critical $X^2 = 9.45$

Level of significance = 0.05

Decision = Reject

From the table above, analysis of data revealed that the calculated X^2 value of 26.16 is greater than the critical table value of 9.45. This finding shows that there is a significant relationship between Government policies and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The present study has shown that there is a significant relationship between peer group and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. This is not surprising as several studies have shown that peer group has significant impact on the behavior patterns of youths (Obiunu & Egbochukwu, 2006, Obiunu, 2006). Peer group has been observed to impact and influence youth people towards youth restiveness because young people easily accept the views of their peers as they communicate with each other at their own level. The findings of this study agree

with that of Egbule (2005) who states that peer group interests and activities when not guided can manifest opposite tendencies to societal expectations. The possible reason for this finding is that there is sufficient evidence in the Niger Delta Region of youth restiveness which seems to be on the increase. At the slightest provocation, the youths are ready to engage security agents in a battle which has often times claimed a lot of lives (Beneke, 2005, Ojomeruage, 1999).

This study has also observed that there is a significant relationship between environmental degradation and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. Environmental degradation which is an effect of oil exploration, has often led to youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. The possible explanation for this is the neglect by the multi-national companies and government agencies over the maintenance and proper compensation of those communities. The only language that the government and the multi-national companies hear is violence which has often been expressed in the form of youth restiveness. It is an observed fact that oil exploration and the consequent exploitation of the environment and the host communities, have often left behind tales of destruction of the environment. The negative impact of oil exploration contributes to the anger of the host communities that is very often expressed in the various forms of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta.

Furthermore, this study has also revealed that there is a significant relationship between government policies and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. Government policies have often been exploitative and does not take into account the sufferings and hardship that the people experience because of oil exploration in their communities. When the government who is suppose to be the mouthpiece of the people fails, the people may not have any other option than to express their anger and dissatisfaction. The most common ways that this has been done in the past is through peaceful or violent demonstrations, hostage taking, shutting down of flow stations etc. All of these are usually done by the youths in the area. The above situation establishes a direct link between government policies and youth restiveness. It can therefore be said that if government policies are good and favourable to the people, there will be no youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. The findings of this study in this regard are consistent with those of Ekanpon (2000), who observed that government neglect, hardship, poverty, inter and intra ethnic wars and as well as hard economic measures are among the many reasons for youth restiveness in the Niger Delta.

Finally, the study observed that there is a significant relationship between exposure of young people to violent activities and youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. A lot of violent activities take place in the Niger Delta by adults. These activities are in the forms of inter and intra ethnic crises. These crises arise either from the sharing of forms of compensation for oil exploration in those communities or over ownership of lands in which oil wells may have been found. Such violence can be very physical and destructive. When youths are exposed to these violence and when they observe that this seems to be only means of seeking redress, they are likely to be restive when they become unhappy about the effects of oil exploration in their environment.

5. CONCLUSION

There is a high level of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. The possible causes of the youth restiveness include lack of adequate compensation either from the multinational or transnational companies and government agencies. Other cause includes unfavourable government policies, peer pressure, exposure to various forms of violence in the Niger Delta and a host of others. These factors continue to inspire restive activities in the area of the youth. The effects of the restive acts of the youth are numerous. They include crises in the area which slows down or sometimes halts economic activities in the region. Others are killings of people in the case of physical combats, shut down of flow stations, economic hardship, robbery and

youth militants taking the laws into their hands. All of these continue to bring hardship and difficult life for the people. There is therefore the need for the problems and demands of the people of the Niger Delta area to be addressed so that what is due to them can be given to them.

6. THE WAY FORWARD

Employment opportunities should be created for the youths of the Niger Delta. The unemployment and sufferings among the youth of the Niger Delta even among those with university certificate should be addressed spontaneously, as the increase in armed robbery hostility to company's staff and properties, prostitution among the female youth, ritual killing is becoming too alarming, these activities are carried out by youth who after seeing the high level of unemployment and sufferings even with university and polytechnic graduates after spending years of education, still roaming the streets and many still staying with their parents, resort in these vices for quick money making. If this problem is not addressed urgently by the government it will simply endanger the future of the country.

The government should generate policies that will be favourable to the host communities of the oil exploration companies. Policies that constantly exploit the people and bring untold hardship to them will only continue to breed more violence. There should be a working understanding between government and host communities. The use of force by Government in solving the problems in the Niger Delta should be discontinued.

Ethnic clashes which may result into youth restiveness must be resolved with a good political will and sincere dialogue among the stakeholders. Also, the government should be more responsible to the yearnings of the people of the Niger Delta, and there should be re-orientation by way of counselling to help the youths deal with issues of oil exploration in their communities.

7. IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

In order for the problems of youth restiveness to be properly managed in a way that will be beneficial to all the stakeholders in the oil exploration enterprise, counseling intervention should take note of the following:

- *Counselling strategies*: Some of the counseling strategies for the management of youth restiveness in Nigeria include behavior induction or training for youths, organization of seminars, workshops and conference for youth skills acquisition training, the use of military personnel as well as the meeting of youth leaders, government officials, community leaders and consulting professionals counsellors (Egbule, 2004).
- *Value clarification for effective citizenship*: Values give direction to human activities which are prone to inhibit or promote national development. This means that value clarification is very essential in our present effort to tackle the problem of youth restiveness in the Niger Delta. This will help the youths to develop values that will contribute to national development. Values that relate to probity in office, faithfulness, restraints in negative political activities, shunning tribalism, refraining from drug abuse and alcoholism, condemning fraud and dishonest behavior, disrespecting men who acquired wealth through fraudulent means will be very helpful re-orienting the values of youth people in the Niger Delta (Okorodudu, 2006).
- *Parents/Guardians*: Parents and guardians are the primary custodians of morality and value system within the home. Without their active involvement, the enterprise of counseling and managing our youths in ways that will be helpful to the common good

everyone will be difficult. Many parents are not living up to expectation in this regard because most times parents are out in search of daily bread. Parents should therefore wake of their responsibility in taking care, providing useful experiences and information to young people under their care.

- Youth Empowerment Schemes: Various programs that may contribute to skill acquisition of various kinds should develop and youths should be encouraged to participate actively in those programs. It will help to distract their minds from negative tendencies and bad companies, and consequently has the right focus in life.

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