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## Traumatic Effect of Cult Activities on the Victims' Parents and Educational Development of the Child in Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria, from 2008 to 2017

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### Abstract

*The researchers were poised to do this work, because of the eye witness occurrences of cult activities and its effects on the victims' parents and the schools. The population for the study comprises of the entire clan heads (15 in number) and 35 prominent men and women of the most affected communities that were prone to these cult activities, totaling 50 respondents. They were purposively selected. Data collection was through face-to-face interview on Post Traumatic Effect of Cult Activities on Victims' Parents and Educational Development of the child in Emohua LGA of Rivers State" (TECAPEDC). Data collected was analyzed using Bar Chart. Findings of the study shows that one of the major causes of children of the communities joining cult groups is peer influence and drug addiction. The findings also revealed that very few female counterparts get involved in the cult activities in these communities compare to what is happening in the tertiary institutions. It was also discovered that many of the victims' parents had permanent ailments like high blood pressure and some die or run amok due to the shock of seeing their children been murdered in cold blood. The study concludes that cultism has come to create a way forward for community extinction of youths. The study recommends that there should be massive sensitization of the youth on the ills of cultism. Parents too should advice their children on the company they keep because peer group and drug addiction were found to be the most prominent influence of the child.*

**Key words:** Traumatic, cult, victims' parents, drug abuse and peer influence.

### Introduction

Cult activities or cultism has become an epidemic hydra-headed virus that came into the society and has eaten into the nooks and crannies of Nigerian institutions in particular and over flown into the society in general, specifically in the area of this study, Emohua Local Government Area of Rivers state (EMOLGA). Tertiary institutions include Universities, polytechnics, Monotechnics and teacher training colleges, have been known to be the center of academic work and to provide the social atmosphere which allows students, administrators and academics alike to enjoy peaceful co-existence and excellence in education. In the case of students, the involvement in clubs and organizations on campus ensure that they become well-rounded and well-adjusted individuals at the conclusion of their course of study. This is the scenario applied to institutions of higher learning all over the world until two decades ago when cultism reared its ugly head on campuses. As it stands now, it is no more campus problem alone. This ugly virus has reared its head into the post primary institutions in particular and the society at large. The presence and infliction of mayhem on the schools, society and parents and guidance in Emohua Local Government Area in particular prompted the authors to go into this study.

Azelama, Alude and Monad(2014) stated that “cult is an assemblage of people united by certain ideals, or symbols and whose rites and ceremonies of veneration are unique and shrouded in mysteries with a secrecy that cannot be broken”. They went further to trace the meaning of cult from the Latin word to mean ‘to worship or give reverence to a deity’. Thus, in its original usage, it was simply applied to a religious worshipful group of people regardless of the object or person they venerate.

Rotimi (2015) cites the anthropological definition of ‘cult’ by Oxford Concise Dictionary of Sociology (1996) as ‘a set of practices and beliefs of a group in relation to a local god’. The same dictionary gives a sociological definition of a cult as ‘a small group of religious activists whose beliefs are typically secrete, esoteric and individualistic’. Aguda and Ogunbameru, (2010) defined cult in a similar manner. Langone, (2012) posits that cult leaders have absolute control over the members of the movement and as such they use force to subdue them under their command. In the experience of the authors during interactions with some members, it was discovered that cult groups tend to be leader centered, exploitative and harmful. There was no positive ideology. They come into conflict with and threatened by the rational open and benevolent system of members’ families and the society at large. It is an exploitative manipulative and abusive group in which members are induced to serve the group leader(s). From these accounts, it can be deduced that cults and cultism have certain elements in common. They are esoteric, shrouded in secrecy, usually made up of a small group of people with a charismatic leader, and may or may not be religious in nature.

### **Forces Enhancing Cultism**

Several writers have attempted to uncover the underlying factors that were responsible for the evolvement of these harmless social groups on tertiary education campuses into the harmful groups that they have now become, more so characterized by violence. Smah (2011) was of the opinion that the emergence and perpetration of such violent sub-cultural societies in Nigeria were partly to counter the harassment unleashed on students and staff by the state security operatives during the military eras. Smah, (2011) as cited in Alemika(2000) stated that ‘Under Babangida and Abacha military dictatorship, Vice Councilors, Provosts and Rectors derived or arrogated to themselves, undeserved powers to harass, intimidate and cause the arrest of progressive students and academics, a culture of authoritarianism and impunity was institutionalized during these regimes. All sorts of security were brought into campuses.

Thomas (2015) stated that students are attracted to cult groups for a variety of reasons. He noted that generally, the social atmosphere prevailing in Nigerian universities provides an inspiring environment for secret cults to thrive. These may include lack of virile student unionism, erosion of the traditional academic culture, absence of intellectual debates, sensitization and all other activities that are components of traditional campus culture. The authors added that those who eventually enlist in secret cult groups might have been encouraged to do so because of “sagging egos” that need to be boosted. Others join in order to have a sense of belonging and the need to be well connected and still others may join because of the need for financial assistance, to secure girl-friends, for self-protection or because they are seeking meaningless direction, comfort and love.

These, at the end turn mirage. This is likely the same reason why non-students or post primary school students join cult in the larger society. Most students from higher institutions come home to intimate their victims of pseudo-benefits of cultism. Sometimes, they use force to make victims join.

In specific case of secret cult activities, the militarization of university campuses with the army, police and other uniformed personnel enhanced it. This according to Nzimiro(2010) is one cause of the existence of secret cults when he opined that:

*“The very nature of military coupriests, their characteristics and operations are similar to those of the cultists. In other words, both groups have common similarity of secrecy, discipline, vigilance and surveillance of each other and control of weapons of destruction to annihilate their purported enemies. That most of these cultists were born during the era of coups and counter coups adding that... a violent society has been our lot ... over .....(the) years....thus giving birth to secret cults”*

### Devastating Effect of Cult Activities on the Area of the Study

The bar chart is plotted on number of killings against the years involved.

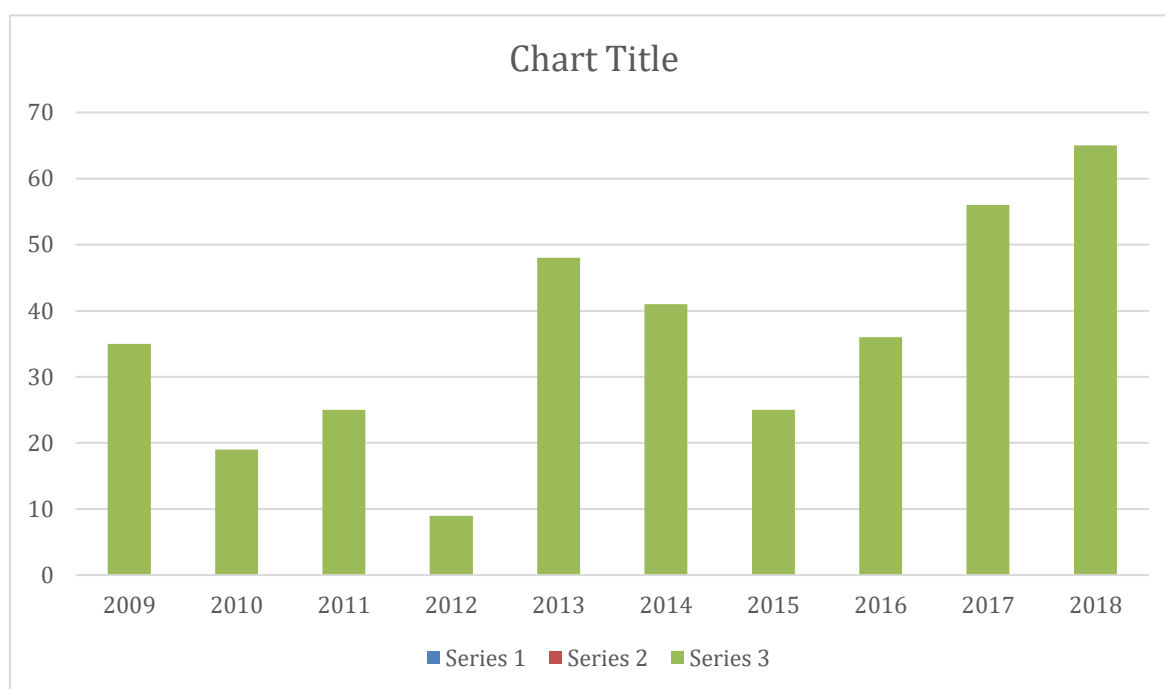


Fig. 1: Bar Chart Table showing the level of killings in EMOLGA Nnamdi (2017)

From the table and the eyes witness report of the events in 2009, the total number of youths that were killed was 35, sparsely distributed in the Emohua Local Government area. Amongst them were graduates of universities and members of one cult group or the other. In 2010, the killings among rival cult members reduced to 19 youths. In 2011, it rose to the tune of 25 young youths. 2012 was a year of minimal peace because the killing reduced to 9 persons. 2013 it metamorphosed into a blood bath competition amongst the rival cult groups in some particular villages in Emohua. In this year, over 48 young youths were killed and so many mimed for life, hence cannot use some parts of their bodies and so many homes were devastated and destroyed beyond repairs. 2014 also did not have peace as these miscreants and gun boys caused desertification in some of the villages under study by killing well over

41 persons and destroyed so many homes. 2015, 2016, 2017 and 2018 became the years were killing was as free as the air we breathe every day. 25, 36, 56 and 65 persons were killed respectively in each of these years. The last three became the era of killing, beheading and chopping off of the hands and legs and spread them to different parts of the community. Not only were that some of the body including the heads were taken away to an unknown destination. These beheaded bodies were buried headless. This caused so much devastation on the schools in the local government area.

### **Impact of Cultism**

The gravity of the impact and consequences of intra and inter cult clashes on the schools in Emohua Local Government areas and the villages that are particularly prone, have resulted in physical harm on individual, disruption of the learning process, destruction of both primary and post primary schools' properties. It has also led to the death of many school children either through stray bullet or purposeful shooting into the school. This contributed to the breed of feelings of insecurity leading to the close down of so many schools for some months. Hence, distortion of academic activities.

Opaluwah (2010) noted that cult clashes led to an outburst of violence on campus which left many students wounded, maimed or killed. In a study carried out in some universities of the middle Belt zone in Nigeria, Smah (2011) reported that 15% of students had either observed or reported cult/gang motivated deaths on the university campuses between one and two times in the previous years. Yusuf (2013) noted that at least one hundred students in higher institutions in Nigeria were killed in cult related incidence in the year 2006 alone.

Apart from physical damage and loss of life, cult activities may also have devastating effect on the learning process itself. Opaluwah (2010) stated that cult clashes led to the incarceration, rustication or expulsion of both innocent and guilty students and hospitalization of students thereby suspending learning for some period of time. In addition to the physical damage and disruption of the learning process, life on university campuses where cult activities prevail can be very unpleasant and insecure for those who are not directly involved with them. Based on these, the authors were of the opinion that the psyche of the students and the peace of the campus could be adversely affected. Smah (2011) noted that the feeling of insecurity and fear of unknown were high in Nigeria, both in primary and post-primary schools and worst in tertiary education campuses. One worrying development is that the activities of cults in institutions of higher learning are now influencing groups in other institutions including secondary schools and eventually has erupted its ugly head into the larger society. This is evident on the cult activities that took place in the area of the study from 2009 to 2018. The events left so many homes devastated, people maimed or killed, and destruction of properties in the whole Emohua clan became a 'routine activity' of the cult members.

The statistics and other information gathered from the village heads and some prominent indigenes in the area of the study, revealed that the number of killings and properties damaged in each of the years under study and the devastating effects on the schools in particular, victims' parents and the entire clan in general as indicated on the chart table, were so traumatic and has led to so many parents' death. The information further revealed that so many parents have gone to their early grave because of the death of their loved ones due to cult clashes in the area. Some are having terminal ailments such as heartbreak, high blood pressure and fovea of sound of guns and a lot more.

Primary and post-primary schools in the study area were distorted. Children forfeited some school terms if not dead, and parents to take care of them may be dead or relocate for fear of unknown. The entire villages and sub-towns were deserted, stealing, vandalism, rape, and kidnapping became the order of the

day. The entire communities that made up the local government Area became terrorized and people lived in fear of who knows when next.

It is unequivocal that the perpetrators of cultism and its incessant violence are the youths. It is the same youths that are said to be the catalyst of development, social change and leaders of tomorrow. Their activities, actions of exuberances have overwhelmed the society, noticed and unbearable by the entire society. It becomes extremely important that youths be nurtured, trained, tailored, and guarded towards a progressive vibrant and sustainable future before the generation of these sets of youth go extinct. The essence of the above is that a well-trained youth is a reflection and embodiment of concerted efforts for positive social change. That is why in a seminar organized by Oduoha Elite Union on its 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration on cult activities in Oduoha Emohua, (Nnamdi, 2017) “stated that the perishability and uplifting of Oduoha Community in particular and Emohua in general are in the hands of the youths. He continued by saying “that when a child is well trained he or she becomes the real child of the parent and a reflection and embodiment of concerted efforts for positive social change in the society”. It is a solid and firm insurance against social anemia, chaos, juvenile delinquency, cultism, political thuggery and misdirection. The underlying fact remains that youths cannot fulfill their manifest destiny in a volatile environment saturated with fraternal wars, illiteracy and barbaric attitude. Such an environment will produce youth infected with the hydra-head virus of injustice, bizarre life style, and low intellectual development. To these youths, survival means of waging wars against everything becomes vitreous. It is important to state that any society or community whose youths have resigned themselves to negative ventures, and vegetating for survival is on a fast lane of destruction. This is the case of the study area.

The possible effects of cultism on the teaching and learning process in primary and post-primary institutions are tremendous in any society where they exist. The outburst of violence among the rival cult groups left many innocent children wounded, maimed and even killed in 2016 and 2017 as a fact and evidenced (Nnamdi, 2017). There are enough documentary accounts from newspapers and other research work that clearly show the rate of killing in many of the communities as a result of cult related violence. It also led to the incarceration, destruction of properties worth millions of naira of both innocent and guilty parents from the community. It became very clear that the teaching and learning process, the mentality of the pupils and students and the general peace and tranquility of the entire communities were in jeopardy.

Taiwo (2014) in an article in the Daily Times noted that cultism is of particular interest because it touches on one of the most frequently mentioned problems in the education section any day it occurs. The authors pointed out that indiscipline in schools is a central factor which are attributes of the fast dwindling, declining and deteriorating standards. The various acts of indiscipline commonly perpetrated by acts such as truancy, stealing, hooliganism, examination malpractice, sexual immorality, shoplifting and cultism among others are all distinctive tendencies to the educational system. Cult activities also create restriction of the exercise of the people’s right to movement due to harassment, embarrassment, humiliation and intimidations.

### **Findings of the study**

In cause of the study and investigation, the authors found out that “there was nothing substantial that was bringing this unfortunate scenario of vandalism and wanton destruction of lives and properties rather than war of “supremacy”. Further investigation reveals that the ugly trend reared its head due to unemployment, poverty, negative political empowerment, peer group influence, drug abuse, and

forceful recognition among others. It was also discovered that much drug consumption and alcoholism occur and enhance cultism.

## **Conclusion**

The presence and deadly activities of cult groups in the entire society cannot be overemphasized. The task therefore confronting school children, parents, village heads, prominent community leaders, primary and post-primary school heads, tertiary institutions and their administrators, policy makers, researchers, educational planners and implementers is on how to go about curbing this hydra-headed problem called cultism invading the entire society.

So many attempts have been made to put this issue of cultism under control, but to no avail. Some of these attempts were financial inducements from government and some well-meaning individuals, psychological manipulation to invocation of laws and imprisonment, all aimed at curbing this menace. But up till the time of this study, all actions by the government and other well-meaning individuals to curb or minimize the actions of these groups of blood sucking demons have proved abortive. Especially in the area of study, because cultism continues to pose serious problems on primary and post primary institutions and the society at large.

## **Recommendations**

After a critical review of these activities, the following recommendations were made. These include among others:

1. Students and indeed the general public should be sensitized on the inherent dangers of secret cults.
2. Religious bodies and organizations should equally supplement the efforts of educational institutions in this direction through their preaching and sermons where the evils and possible rewards of these activities should be highlighted.
3. The security departments of the schools should be strengthened both in terms of personnel and equipment to fight the menace of secret cult.
4. Recreational activities should be provided in schools and in specific positions of the community to enable the students and other children occupy themselves during their leisure hours. This is to keep them busy, as idle minds are usually the devil's workshops. In this direction, dramas, games (out and indoor) and educative films are some of the channels through which campus authorities can engage the minds of these youths profitably apart from academic work.
5. Drug has been discovered to enhance the activities of the cult group, the federal drug censoring agencies such as NAFDAC and NDLEA, that are in the forefront of drug control and administration and elimination of drug trafficking should be provided with adequate manpower and material resources to carry out their assigned duties. Corrupt officials among them should be sanctioned and efficient officers rewarded. Again, more health workers especially doctors and nurses should be encouraged to specialize on psychiatry and drug-related disorders.
6. Sales of alcohol and other dangerous drugs in and around school campuses should be avoided.
7. Periodic search of students to identify the signs and other items associated with secret cult should be

conducted.

8. Known cult members and drug addicts in the larger society should be exposed and deprived of certain privileges such as appointment into sensitive positions. The principles of meritocracy should be considered paramount in matters of admission so that only those who are qualified are admitted. This is so because it is mostly the never-do-well from wealthy backgrounds who find themselves in the school through their parents 'connections' that find enough time to engage in cult and drug related activities as a way of squaring up their academic inefficiencies.

9. Again, the admission of under-aged children into the post-primary schools and tertiary institutions should be discouraged as these fragile youth constitute easy prey for cult groups and drug addicts to be indoctrinated and recruited into their fold.

10. Government should fund the educational sector adequately. This will enable the sector to provide the basic infrastructural facilities such as decent and adequate accommodation, sport and games facilities, well-equipped and stocked laboratories and libraries, workshops, adequate electricity, portable water among others. This is suggested because one factor that breeds cult related activities in our schools is the poor academic learning environment characterized by shortage of virtually all the enablers of the teaching and learning process.

11. In a specific case of secret cult activities, the militarization of university campuses with the army, police and other uniformed personnel should be reintroduced.

12. Accordingly, the preventive measures of guidance and counseling should be used. This should be made functional to provide periodic counseling services to adolescence who are potential targets of these campus menace. This process will give students a sense of belonging and assurance that they are part of the society.

### **13. The role of parents in the fight against secret cult activities**

Parents as the first teachers can do the following to discourage their children from joining secret cults and being involved in drug related crimes:

i. Be good role models;

ii. Show genuine love to their children;

iii. Correct evil and rewarding good behaviours;

iv. Teach them to respect wholesome traditional values;

v. Introduce them to God; and

vi. By not ignoring the signs of rebellion when children are small, for such signs will quickly develop into something serious that might result in this menace. Children in most cases do not understand the pressures on them. It is the parents who have to recognize these and do what they can to help their children in their proper moral upbringing.

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