Enhancement of Psychological well being of the Youth for Community Development in Kenya

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Abstract

Youth in any developing country is the largest and active portion of the population. In Kenya, youth are an important resource in community development. In most cases these youth are subjected to many psychological challenges within the family and community. The political class has misused this resource making them to engage in destructive activities leaving them with psychological scars. These youth need assistance to be psychologically stable so as to be productive in all aspects of community development. Youth need to be equipped with coping strategies to be able to deal with the psychological challenges. Youth who are psychologically stable are able to scale the heights of education and be harnessed to become developmental resource to transform their lives and that of the communities they live in. The Kenyan youth can be involved in self help groups, life skills and group counseling as a way of empowering them as individuals and in the community. This paper will address the key aspects of psychological wellbeing of the youth for development purposes, psychological challenges facing the youth in community development and suggest possible psychological interventions to mitigate these challenges.

Key words: *Youth, Empowerment, Community, Development*

Introduction

The United Nations (1987) defines youth as persons between the ages of 15 and 24. UNESCO (1995) has defined 'youth' as the period between ages of 15 and 24, a phase that has been commonly described as the period of adolescence. The influences of family, culture and society are all important in shaping their journey to adulthood. According to UNESCO young people are a heterogeneous group in constant evolution and that the experience of 'being young' varies enormously across regions and within countries. In Kenya today, for quite some time, many scholars and civil society organizations, youth organizations have blamed the old generation of leaders for ignoring the plight of the youth in all aspects like lifting them from endemic poverty, eradicating ethnicity and bad governance and this has yielded minimum results (Oloo, 2008). Community development is seen as a process by which youth's developmental needs are met, engagement in problem behaviours is prevented and youth are empowered to use their developing competencies or skills for their community's betterment (Perkins et al. 1997). Young people who get moral and social support from their community tend to be more confident and productive in the society.

1

In Kenya, youth face various challenges today including lack of meaningful representation in key decision making; inadequate vocational and training opportunities and many of them lack the urge to be proud of their own country in other words, they lack patriotism (Oloo, 2008). If these challenges are addressed and youth are given the necessary support, they can in turn play a good role in the community both morally and economically. Perkins et al. (1997) observed that preparing young people to meet challenges requires provision of good foundation that enables them to make decisions that will promote their positive development. The youth require strong social support from caring and supportive adults who place high expectations on youth and reinforce achievement. The accomplishments need to be recognized and celebrated by significant others in the community. The role of the adult leader is to serve as a guide and facilitator (Kim et al., 1998). There is need to recognize youth contributions and celebrate their success. This positive support boosts self-esteem and encourages such youth to perform better in the future. With recognition, celebration and encouragement positive relationships with both peers and adults develop. In fact, many of the factors known to help protect young people from developing problems (such as alcohol and drug abuse, early sexual experiences, teenage pregnancies and violent behavior) are supports that could potentially be provided by families and community resources. Such resources would include empowerment by the society through psychological support through counseling activities and life skills training (Chakua, Adeli and Mbutitia, 2011).

Empowerment is a multi-level construct consisting of practical approaches and applications, social action processes, and individual and collective outcomes. In the broadest sense, empowerment refers to individuals, families, organizations, and communities gaining control and mastery, within the social, economic, and political contexts of their lives. The youth experience much difficulty defining their roles. Uncertainty regarding their roles creates ambiguity in their motivations which in turn leads to emotional instability. The basic nature of the society within which they find themselves causes many conflicts. What the youth learn from books and from adults about whatever is desirable and good and what should be accomplished is full of contradictions. Youth often find themselves surrounded by adults who often pay scant respect to what they profess and preach. Some of the adults' practices are complete opposite to what adult profess to be correct in the growth. When youth are exposed to such conflicting experiences, they become estranged and alienated from the society.

Challenges facing the Youth in Kenya

Today's young generation experiences widening social gaps and faces manifold challenges. It is the young perhaps more so than any other social group because they encounter the uncertainties and risks generated by the process of economic and cultural globalization. Violence and suicide are growing problems in Kenyan communities as well as drug dependency among the young. Youth all over the world thus increasingly emerges as a specific social category which is laden with risk and uncertainty. Every country and this includes Kenya needs effective strategies able to help young people to make the right choices protect them from exploitation, neglect and ensure their participation in all spheres of society. Psychologically, the pressure comes from the need to break away from the norm and find a sense of belonging in the

2

society, while at the same time trying to achieve a sense of personal identity. The message to the youth is to 'get their act together because they are the future of this nation'. With all this pressure coming at them, it is no wonder that their potential for engaging in activities leading to negative outcomes far outweigh those that will lead to positive ones.

The search for an identity involves the production of a meaningful self-concept in which past, present, and future is linked together. Given the social, political and cultural upheavals that our country has experienced over the past two decades, contemporary Kenya can be described as a society in which the past has lost the anchorage of family and community tradition, the present is characterized by social change, and the future is becoming less and less predictable

The following are some of the challenges that face the youth in Kenya;

Empowerment and Participation; One of the greatest challenges in Youth Empowerment and participation is how to ensure that young people are passionate about causing transformation in Kenya. Youth Empowerment and Participation is the quintessential force for causing such transformation. Young people need a youth branded platform from where they can speak powerfully, take appropriate action, and inspire belief that will have a catalytic impact all over the country through youth-led development initiatives. Youth empowerment and participation is a dynamic cycle. Overall, it is anticipated that the outcome of Youth Empowerment and participation is strong contribution to National prosperity, economic competition and reduced unemployment. When empowered, young people can contribute greatly towards good governance and democracy with a passionate desire to be catalyst for National Development.

Social marginalization; The Universal Declaration on Diversity (UNESCO, 2001) pointed out that cultural diversity is necessary for humankind since it is the root of development to achieve a more satisfactory intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual existence. Since most of the youth have been marginalized by the elders, they tend to group themselves in terms of ethnic backgrounds and shut out the power of cultural diversity. The youth see themselves as victims of injustices and so they are emotionally unstable, they are not intellectually dissatisfied and behave in immoral manner. Although the community development ties together the concern for carrying capacity of natural systems with the social challenges facing humanity, there is need to check on these challenges since they will curtailed the progress of natural conservation.

Economic inequalities; Our current society is classified in two categories; the 'haves' and 'have not'. As the youth are growing up, they find themselves in either of the categories. Due this kind of disparities, the youth find themselves yielding into temptation of being lured to destructive activities. For us to achieve advanced and equitable community development we must embrace national integration and full participation in nation building rather destruction (Adams, 2006). Economic inequalities is manifested in the way the children of the rich and in particular the political leaders are doing well in terms of economic stability while the children of the

3

poor who the majority are languishing in dire poverty. These youth need to be engaged in community development if a successful is to be achieved in this country.

Crime and Drugs; The early mid 1980's saw a rapid growth in crime, drug and substance abuse among the youth in Kenya. Alcohol, cigarettes, khat (miraa), and cannabis sativa have remained the most popular abused substances. There is a fast emerging trend of injecting drug use especially narcotic. Moreover, abuse of drugs is highly associated with the risks of contracting HIV/Aids and other sexually transmitted diseases especially among the youth. Violent criminal attacks, including rape, mugging, armed carjacking and home invasions are increasingly being associated with the youth these days

Political exploitations; Negative ethnicity has been perpetuated by political exploitation where the youths have been used by politicians during political campaigns and thereafter the empty promises are never fulfilled. This act leaves the youth with enormous self-guilt behavior after getting involved in destructive behavior.

Lack of patriotism; Kenyan youth are no longer proud to call themselves 'Kenyans' due to lack of patriotism. The current society has become too individualistic, people are selfish and they lack the sense of purpose (Will, 2007). The nationhood has been overtaken by ethnicity and kingships ties. The fight for nation building has become a word of the past since people no longer value the community.

Lack of participations in National decision making; the failure to include youth in national decision process is a pointer to redirecting their efforts and skills into the cocoons of ethnic cycles. They are never involved in how the developments of the nation are intended to and so when any opportunity of explosions of emotions emerges, they direct their efforts to destroying any infrastructure that come their way. This was evidently manifested in Kenyan's 2007/2008 post election violence where the youth destroy buildings, railways, among others. This was due to lack of broad public participation in decision making which is the prerequisite for achieving community development (Hasna, 2007). The youth with their revolutionary energy and spontaneous outburst of emotions have fallen victims of destructions of development in our Neighborhood cohesion which used to bind the different tribes together in a region/Nation. They have no sense of community development due to lack of involvement in development decisions.

Education and unemployment; The 8-4-4 system of education was geared to imparting appropriate skills to enhance self-employment. However, due to the high costs, poverty and lack of facilities, there have been high school dropout rates. Most of the youth either drop out of school or graduate without necessary skills for self-employment. Many girls drop out of school due to pregnancy. The country's training institutions are also either inadequate or lack the essential facilities and technology to prepare students for the challenging market demands (Caspi, 1998). Recently, sub-standard training institutions have come up to take advantage of shortage of training opportunities to exploit desperate youth. In most cases, there is no linkage between the training institutions and either the formal or informal (jua kali) sector. The youth trained in these institutions cannot, therefore, be immediately absorbed into the job

4

market. Besides this, society's attitude towards the Jua kali sector discourages many youth from venturing into it, as they do not want to be regarded as failures in life.

Majority of the youths in Kenya are not employed yet most of them have certificates. This sad phenomenon comes as a result of the so called 'tall' relatives who hold positions in all institutions. Those who are unlucky to have the 'tall' relatives will keep on moving from one office to the other. Due to this inherent factor of frustrations the youth will begin to coil themselves into the shelves of ethnic groups. Like the ferocious snakes which are ready to attack at any given time, the youths will react violently as a way of releasing their frustrations when an opportunity comes their way. The youth will use their ethnic groupings as a resource for interest groups for achieving certain goals like wealth, power or even status. This is seen as a way of being interconnected to all members of the same ethnic identities for socio-cultural and behavioral benefits. The detrimental impacts of this notion can cause stagnation in development which can make the national development never to be achieved as desired and this will affect the community development (World Health Organization, 2005).

Early intervention

Early intervention will often be the most effective way of supporting the youth who are facing so many challenges. Intervening early can help divert youth from an anti-social pathway, before behaviour patterns become consolidated and resistant to change. Majority of youth however cannot be identified during childhood. For these offenders it is still important to have a range of age appropriate interventions. There is need to initiate new programmes for young people whereby a problem is defined, risk and protective factors are identified.   Interventions should be improving social ties, improving parental monitoring and positive relationships with the young person, reducing anti-social peers, and school performance. The following are some of the early interventions that can be used to enhance psychological wellbeing of the youth in Kenya;

Positive Parenting Program (Triple P): This comprehensive intervention includes parenting programmes for the parents of children aged 1-14 years with conduct disorder/severe antisocial behaviour (Block, 2002). Triple P has five levels of intervention of increasing strength from instructional material to comprehensive parent training including home visits.

Multi-systemic therapy (MST): This individualized intervention targets the biggest risk factors in a young person's life (school, family, peers, neighborhood, and organizations the young person connects with). It is a short-term intensive, community-based intervention. Practitioners have low caseloads (three to six), are on call 24/7 and provide an intensive level of client contact (multiple contacts per week, in person or by phone), especially early in the intervention process. Service delivery can be out of hours to accommodate family needs (Block, 2002). MST has been evaluated in the New Zealand setting, and been found to be capable of significantly reducing offending and other family and peer-related risk factors. This intervention can be applied in Kenyan situation in order to help the youth to reduce unbecoming behaviour and help them to be more productive.

Multi-dimensional treatment foster care (MTFC): Community families are recruited, trained and paid to provide placements for young people as an alternative to group homes (Block, 2002). Foster parents are provided with weekly group supervision with other foster parents facilitated by a supervisor. They also receive daily telephone calls covering problems during the previous 24 hours. The young person receives weekly individual therapy focused on building skills in problem solving, social skills and nonaggressive means of expression. When it is planned for the young person to return to the care of the biological family, weekly parenting training is provided. The young person is closely monitored, especially to prevent contact with delinquent peers. Supervisors are on call 24/7, which reflects the level of support required for foster parents caring for such difficult to manage young people in therapeutically effective ways.

Functional family therapy (FFT): This is a short-term behavioural intervention that involves 12-24 hours of therapist contact with a family seeking to change the patterns of family interaction and communication in such a way that adolescent conduct disorder or severe antisocial behaviour is no longer functional (Block, 2002). FFT is designed to improve communication and reciprocity between family members and includes many of the evidence-based interventions that are part of parent training programmes like Incredible Years, adapted for adolescents. There are currently few practitioners trained in FFT in New Zealand.

Self Assertive Skills: workshops need to be organized countrywide in schools to make the students and teachers aware of the need and reinforce the role of youth in the culture of peace. Assertiveness concerns with being able to express feelings, wishes, wants and desires appropriately and is an important personal and interpersonal skill. In all interactions with other people, assertiveness can help the youth to express yourself in a clear, open and reasonable way, without undermining the rights of yourself or others. Assertiveness enables youth to act in their own best interests, to stand up for themselves without undue anxiety, to express honest feelings comfortably and to express personal rights without denying the rights others (http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/assertiveness). Being assertive involves taking into consideration own rights, wishes, wants, needs and desires, as well as those of the other person. Assertiveness means encouraging others (youth) to be open and honest about their views, wishes and feelings, so that both parties act appropriately (http://www.skillsyouneed.com/ps/assertiveness).

Assertive behaviour includes:

• Being open in expressing wishes, thoughts and feelings and encouraging others to do likewise.

• Listening to the views of others and responding appropriately, whether in agreement with those views or not.

• Accepting responsibilities and being able to delegate to others.

• Regularly expressing appreciation of others for what they have done or are doing.

• Being able to admit to mistakes and apologize.

- Maintaining self-control.
- Behaving as an equal to others.

Life skill training: Life skills is a general term used to describe a large group of psycho-social and interpersonal skills which can help people make informed decisions, communicate effectively, and develop coping and self-management skills that may help them lead a healthy and productive life. While certain life skills programs focus on teaching the prevention of certain behaviors the Search Institute has found those programs can be relatively ineffective. Positive Youth Development, or PYD (LOGGA, 2013) as it's come to be known as, focuses on the strengths of an individual as opposed to the older methods which tend to focus on the "potential" weaknesses that have yet to be shown. The Family and Youth Services Bureau has found that individuals who developed life skills in a positive, rather than preventive, manner feel a greater sense of competence, usefulness, power, and belonging. The youth in Kenya need to be trained on life skills so as to gain more competences and avoid being manipulated by self-indulged individuals.

Way Forward

The following are some of the general ways of helping the youth to have sense of belonging in the society;

Youth should be Principled; For so many decades, the politicians have taken great advantage in manipulating the youth for their political gains. This is due to the fact the youths are idle and vulnerable to political manipulations. Living in a complex society where each individual will have to practice the law of the jungle where each person must struggle for his/her own survival, the youths need to be very keen observers of situations. They need to be able to account for their environment by being reflectively observant to demeanors and people's reactions in issues pertaining to development. As future leaders, they need to ascertain and give people's emotional reactions accurately before indulging themselves into destructive behavior. It is the duty of the government to provide youth with the necessary opportunities for them to acquire a broad range of competencies and demonstrate a full complement of positive connections to self, others and the larger community (Pittman, 1992).

Change of Attitude; it is good to note that our attitude to change the situation is what can determine our success in the future but not the amount of money we spend in setting up projects which will never achieve their ultimate goals. Community development does not depend so much on our prestigious titles which we carry a long but they depend on our willingness to sacrifice much of our time and resources to realize them. So it is through transformation of our attitude from negative perspective into positive view our development that will make us realize the ultimate goal of community development.

Youth empowerment; Most of our youth irrespective of ethnic group they come from, are virtually unemployed. These youth need political, social and economic empowerment in order to help them concentrate most in nation building and community development. It is a high time that people stop pointing fingers on the failures of our forefathers and parents or leaders. What counts most is not where we

7

have come from but where we are heading to. We need to cultivate a spirit of optimistic insights and not keep on nursing the pessimistic view of the past wounds of destructions. It is good to note that the moment we start observing, reflecting and committing ourselves to giving our best, is then we can be able to realize our success in sustaining our developmental strategies.

Involve the youth in political processes; For a long time, youths have never been involved in political processes yet they get used during campaign periods. The youths get forgotten soon after elections. There is need for full youth participation in political processes in Kenya including vying for competitive positions like senator, Governor, Member of Parliament or even civic leadership. The youth need to be assisted to concentrate on positive politics, develop their leadership skills, engagement in self-development as well as community development.

Conclusion

The challenges facing the youth in Kenya are so many and they need careful redress from all the stakeholders. The youth's psychological wellbeing can be enhanced through early interventions that empower them to be resourceful in the society. Empowerment through self awareness will ensure they are aware of their strengths are cognizant of their weaknesses and are able to make sound judgments. This will ensure that they are stable emotionally and judgments will be based on personal convictions, not on coercion or external influence. Empowering the youth psychologically will help them to effectively manage conflicts at all levels and challenges that they face every day. The youth will open up their inner world to promote peace and harmony hence constructively engages them in development. Through groups and at individual level the young people will be equipped with sufficient skills necessary to make them useful resources for community development.

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8

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