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CHILDREN SELF-DISCIPLINE AS PROACTIVE ANTIDOTE FOR VICIOUS INDISCIPLINE IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY: THE PSYCHOSOCIAL COUNSELLING SOLUTION

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Abstract

It is axiomatic that a nation thrives on the culture of discipline, etiquette and sanity. However, indiscipline of various dimensions and descriptions have characterized the Nigerian social space with serious negative effects. Many children that are supposed to be guided aright are being over-pampered or exposed to various acts of indiscipline with the tendency of growing up to become nuisance, misfits and saboteurs in the society. Therefore, this paper argues that the hope for a disciplined and sane society would be a mirage if children are not inculcated with self-discipline at the early stage. It discusses the prevailing indiscipline in society, its spiral effects, indices and consequences. It submits that it is imperative to employ psychosocial skills to foster self-discipline in the Nigerian child as counter-conditioning to the deplorable acts of indiscipline prevailing in the society to ensure a culture and future of discipline and sanity in the nation.

Introduction

Indiscipline is a behaviour that develops casually or imitated by children and increases viciously till adulthood when the whole society is saturated with infamy. For instance, some children are seen being naughty, restless, stubborn, silly, rude, temperamental and hostile at home, school and the entire society. Parents describe such children as troublesome, disobedient, unhappy, depressed and hyperactive. Teachers label them as undisciplined, problematic, heady, aggressive and lacking in home training. Social workers view them as dysfunctional and socially maladjusted. Law enforcement agents brand them as aggressive, anti-social, non-conformists, delinquents, law-breakers,

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offenders and criminals. Psychologists and psychiatrists see them as psychotic and emotionally disturbed. Guidance counsellors regard them as children undergoing emotional stress on account of intrinsic and extrinsic stressors requiring professional assistance, psychological skills, empathy and understanding. By and large, those children exhibit indiscipline requiring self-discipline as prerequisite for personal and societal peace, harmony, progress and self-fulfillment. Indeed, children devoid of self-discipline serve as a fabric for a dysfunctional society and bleak hope for the future.

There are two dimensions to the concept of discipline. The first is a field of academic knowledge (that is, academic discipline/specialization), while the second involves personality attribute. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2024) defines discipline as the ability to control one's behaviour for societal harmony and progress. The Encarta World English Dictionary (2024) equally proposes these definitions: (i) training to ensure proper behaviour; (ii) order and control; (iii) conscious control over lifestyle and; (iv) calm, controlled behaviour. The personality aspect of discipline being the focus of this discourse serves as basis for order, progress and smooth operation of the home, school system and the entire society. Without discipline, there could be riot, class boycott, destruction of property, truancy, apathy, insubordination, stealing, raping, aggression, thuggery, drug abuse, fighting, lateness, absenteeism, "presenteeism", rudeness, smoking, disruptive behaviour, lawlessness, examination leakage, organized crime and so forth (Adesina, 2008). This means that without discipline, no home, school, establishment, organization or society that can operate smoothly or achieve its set goals, vision and mission. The need for discipline is necessity for self-controlled behaviour of an individual. Olawale (2000a) states that parents and teachers use discipline to control children's behaviour so that they will succeed in future and that society could be orderly. When this happens, self-discipline is already at work.

This indicates that self-discipline is the capacity to govern one's behaviour and way of doing things. It is a type of selective training, creating a new habit of thought, action, speech and habit towards improving oneself and reaching goals. It is taking responsibility and being responsible. Williamson (1988) submits that self-discipline is required to acquire self-control, good character, orderliness and efficiency, because children are not born being disciplined. Therefore, effective discipline helps children learn to control their behaviour so that they act according to their ideas of what is right and wrong, not because of the fear of punishment. For example, they are honest because they think it is wrong to be dishonest, not because they are afraid of getting caught. This is the philosophy, principle and practice of self-discipline.

Some people misunderstand discipline for punishment. While punishment involves sanction or penalty imposed on a person for his misbehavior, wickedness entails feelings of happiness at the discomfort, harm, distress, disappointment and injury suffered by

someone else. In essence, discipline is all about helping, assisting, empowering, learning, understanding and agreeing with another (younger) person in an undertaking. In other words, discipline denotes fortifying someone with self-regulation and self-control rather than being coerced from outside (such as punishment) to do the right thing. This is the cornerstone of societal harmony be it in the home, school, church and mosque and at workplace.

It should be noted that parents and teachers who use physical punishment are unwittingly setting an example of using violence to settle problems or solve conflicts. Children imitate their parents' and teachers' behaviour immensely and precisely. When they use physical punishment, children are more likely to use violent acts to settle their conflicts with others. Another disadvantage of using physical punishment is that parents and teachers have to find other discipline methods when the child becomes as tall and as strong as the parents.

In another dimension, when reward and punishment focus on the child, then encouragement and discipline target the act. Ironically, reward and punishment teach the child to be "good" as long as the adults are looking. When only rewards are the prime way of motivating children, the society runs the risk of creating "carrot seekers"; that is, children who are always looking for and expecting a reward every time they do something good or right. If we give child money for making his bed this week, he will wonder where his money is next week. Instead of being self-motivated by a desire to cooperate or help other family members, we have taught the child to look to us for his source of motivation. This in itself can be the beginning of corrupt practices both for the adults and the child. Therefore, effective discipline helps the child learn self-control. This can be used to build the child's self-esteem and set a good example of effective ways to solve problems. On the other hand, harsh punishment teaches the child to deceive parents, tear down children's self-esteem, and teach the child that violence is an acceptable way to solve their problems.

Characteristics of an undisciplined child

From psychological viewpoint, indiscipline develops from social and emotional disturbance such as traumatic incidences (or emotional shock), feeling of insecurity, cultural deprivation, unresolved conflict, uncontrolled anxiety, detrimental social learning, and lack of beneficial social learning experiences. This makes an undisciplined child express his problems in terms of behavioral problems, conduct disorders, personality maladjustment, relationship breakdown, or bright potentials unrelated to school achievement. Ogbue, Obani and Abosi (1987) cited by Nweze (2006) and Olawale (2000b) stated that an undisciplined child may exhibit any or all of the following:

- Fighting, biting, hitting, kicking, cursing and/or using abusive language at the slightest provocation.

- Inappropriate behavior under normal conditions. (For instance, he may complain of headache during a particular school lesson in order to avoid participating in the lesson).
- Being moody or unhappy in situations when other children express excitement and happiness.
- Express unrealistic fears and phobias where other children do not.
- Unable to build or maintain satisfactory relationship with peers and teachers.
- Hyperactivity: The child may run about, climbs on objects excessively, having difficulty sitting still or attending to any meaningful activity for a reasonable period of time.
- Being impulsive, shifting excessively from one activity to another, unable to organize his work, has difficulty waiting for his turn.
- Over-dependent on teachers and peers.
- Truancy.
- Having no regard for rules and regulations.

Motivators of children's acts of indiscipline

There are various sources of children indiscipline ranging from the society, peer influence, the home(parentage), school environment, the teachers, to children themselves. For instance, at societal level, the prevailing dress styles, slang, mannerism, moral perversion, belief system, corroded media projections and indiscriminate use of psychoactive substances can motivate children to exhibit acts of indiscipline. Similarly, peer influence could condition children to be silly, disobedient, aggressive, maladjusted or antisocial. This means that influence of peer group among children can stimulate acts of drug pushing, delinquency, gangsterism, violence, cultism and criminality.

Sometimes, children indiscipline arises out of parental authoritarian or permissive style of child-rearing. Olawale (2013) confirms that children from authoritarian homes often feel discontented, insecure, hostile and stressful. Conversely, children from permissive homes show symptoms of being spoilt, disrespectful, inconsiderate, peevish and easily upset by mere trifles. Likewise, in the educational set-up, if the school environment is not friendly, children may develop interest sneaking out to find pleasure and excitement elsewhere. In like manner, teachers could inadvertently encourage indiscipline when their lessons are not interesting enough, when they do not engage children meaningfully, when they display favoritism in the award of grades, when corruption pervades the school system, when there is no feedback in teaching-learning situation, or when they use a discipline procedure that encourage learners' misbehavior or revolt.

Indiscipline as the bane of the Nigerian society

No one requires any coaching on exhibition of indiscipline because the Nigerian society is a laboratory for indiscipline. It is pathetic that a nation once reputed for decency and morality is now swimming in the ocean of indiscipline which is the live wire of corruption

threatening the fabric of our nation. Olawale (2015) paints a gloomy picture of indiscipline in the country when he decried that Nigeria is the greatest killer of talents - the land where mediocrity and falsehood are celebrated, where excellence is despised and punished, and where progressive citizens are suppressed.

Nowadays, indiscipline has assumed a fearful dimension in terms of corruption, maladministration, avarice, nepotism, sexual orgies, prostitution, murder, arson, drug addiction, miscarriage of justice, criminality, nudity, cultism, killing of human beings for rituals etc. The Nigerian society has got to a point where abnormal behaviours are regarded as normal way of life and a requirement for a "stable" society! This shows that those who want to live normal, decent, faithful and upright lives stand the risk of being regarded and labeled as abnormal and saboteurs to the existing abnormal system. Therefore, people who want to raise a decent generation in the country should be aware of the enormity ant unpopularity of their task in the ocean of extant waywardness, indiscipline and corruption. The worst of it all is that the Nigerian child has become a perfect mentee of such indiscipline and insanity.

Trends of tackling indiscipline in society

The first attempt to rid the nation of budding indiscipline was made by late General Murtala Muhammed in his 200 days in office as Military Head of State between July, 1975 and February 13, 1976. This exercise was referred to as 'Civil Service Purge' when those who were regarded as corrupt government officials and dead woods in civil service were shown the way out (Atu, 2005). This exercise was meant to reposition civil service and the nation in general towards sanity and efficiency.

The next was that of retired General Muhamadu Buhari's/late General Tunde Idiagbon's regime (between December 1983 to July 1985) that tacked indiscipline squarely. This was the era when "WAR AGAINST INDISCIPINE (WAI) was launched and executed with series of enabling decrees. The whole nation felt the impact of discipline (even though under coersion) until General Ibrahim Babagida sacked that regime through a counter coup de tat in July 1985. The latter renamed the programme "War Against Indiscipline and Corruption "(WAIC). Ironically, that was the beginning of full-blown indiscipline, "settlement" and institutionalized corruption in the country.

Furthermore, it was during the time of President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration (1999-2007) that constitutional efforts were made to tackle the menace of corruption. To achieve this, two agencies were established. The first was the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC), established in Year 2000 (FGN, 2000); while the second was the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), which was established in 2003 (Ribadu, 2024). Since then, the two agencies have started exposing and dealing with

corruption in high and low places. Yet, corruption is still spreading and ravaging the fabrics of the nation like wild fire.

Approaches of inculcating discipline in the past

There were two general principles of inculcating discipline: meeting children's (or people's) needs and sanctioning their misbehaviour. These are also known as carrot and stick methods. This means that any misbehaviour occurring after an individual's basic needs have been satisfied would be meted with scolding, denial of right, punishment and /or presentation of fearful events. The Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs would indirectly depict these needs (starting from the primary need to the utmost, viz: (1) physiological needs; (2) safety/security needs; (3) love/belonging needs (4) esteems needs; (5) desire to know and understand; (6) aesthetic needs and; (7) self-actualization needs. However, this theory has its limitation because man is a personality being with fluctuating needs, interest, arousal and motivation of people's abnormal behaviour.

Therefore, the understanding of people in society is to use "punishment" to stop a child from doing what an elder or authority-figure doesn't want, and thus, using painful or unpleasant methods to stop his misbehaviour. Ruffin (2015) lists four basic kinds of such punishment, viz:

- Physical punishment e.g. slapping, spanking, switching, paddling, and using a belt or hair brush to cause discomfort.
- Verbal punishment e.g. shaming, ridiculing, using cruel words, saying "I don't love you."
- Withholding rewards e.g. "You can't watch TV if you don't do your homework."
- Penalties e.g. "You broke the window so you will have to pay for it with money from your allowance."

As a follow-up to the above, Gershoff (2008) suggests four psychosocial principles in fostering effective discipline in children, viz:

- Guide, not punish: The goal of discipline is to teach children acceptable behavior. Children learn how to behave only when you tell or show them how. Punishment shows children what not to
  do, only guidance and teaching show children what to do. Children will behave better when they are motivated by the promise of rewards rather than by threats of punishment.
- Focus on the Positives: Effective discipline hinges on a positive, trusting, and respectful relationship between the parent (or teacher) and your child. When one develops a positive relationship with the child, he or she will be more motivated to behave well.

- Be Prepared: A crucial component of effective discipline is providing guidelines and expectations for appropriate behavior ahead of time. In other words, parents' discipline work consists
  not only of reacting to misbehavior but also of preparing children for situations and life realities, providing clear expectations for how they should behave. Such preparation can prevent
  children from misbehaving in the first place.
- Be Consistent: Children thrive on consistency. When they know their world is predictable and certain, children know they can behave in ways that "worked" in the past. When life is unpredictable and uncertain, children do not know what to expect and cannot rely on their past experiences to know how to act. Providing children with a consistent environment allows them to use what they have learned about what is and is not appropriate behavior in given situations and contexts.

Psychosocial t*echniques of fostering self-discipline in children*

Psychosocial psychology was blazed by Erik Erikson in the 1950s (Cherry, 2024) when he postulated that people advance through the eight stages of development based on how they adjust to social crises at every stage of their lives. The stages are: prenatal, infancy/todderhood, early childhood, middle childhood, adolescence, early adulthood, middle adulthood, and late adulthood. The word *"psychosocial"* comprise two words: psycho (denoting mind, thought, behaviour, brain, personality of an individual) and social (meaning one's external relationships with all categogies of people in the environment). Sutton (2021) defined psychosocial counselling as a therapeutic relationship between a trained/professional counsellor and an individual overwhelmed by social, emotional and behavioural difficulties such as immorality, indiscipline, anxiety, depression, violence, cultism, religious fanaticism, psychoactive substances and sexual abuse. These are called psychosomatic problems that are not organismic, medical or somatic in nature. Therefore, psychosocial skills are imperative for an individual to cope effectively with the social challenges of everyday life.

For instance, there are three main problems necessitating psychosocial counselling in this 21st century. These are: (1) the magnitude of indiscipline and corruption in society; (2) advancement in knowledge, science, technology and ICT as well as exposure to debased foreign cultures; and (3) metaphysical (or spiritual) issues. While the first problem has been discussed above, the second is self- evident in the kind of the exposure children have nowadays with even without the aid of their parents and teachers. However, the third problems are unseen forces influencing children to become extraordinarily wayward, immoral and unruly even when their parents are upright. Moreso, children in modern times are twice as smart in vices as children of the 1960's and 1970s were because of civilization.

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Therefore, self-discipline must have a ground to hold to and hold by. Consequently, Tracy (2015) makes an eight-dimensional psychosocial inventory of self-discipline, viz:

- The Discipline of Clear Thinking: Thinking is the hardest discipline of all. But there are three types of people in the world: those who actually think (these are in the tiny minority); those that think they think, and those who would rather die than think.
- The Discipline of Daily Goal-Setting: Ambition, focus and concentration are the essential qualities for success. One should ash himself what does he really want to do with his/her life? One should ask this question over and over again until one gets a clear answer.
- The Discipline of Daily Time Management: Every minute spent in planning saves ten minutes in execution. The more one plans, the better one uses his time, and the more one accomplishes. One should begin by making a list of everything that has to be done. The best time to write your daily list is the night before so that one's subconscious can work on it while one sleeps.
- The Discipline of Courage: Courage requires that one you should do what is expected to be done, that one deals squarely with one's fears rather than avoiding them. The biggest obstacle to success in life is fear of failure expressed in the feeling that, "I can't! I can't! It is beyond me!
- The Discipline of Excellent Health Habits: One's goal should be to live to 100 per cent superb physical health. To achieve this, one should design and imagine what one ideal body would look like without estimation. The key to health and life can be summarized in five words: "Eat less and exercise more."
- The Discipline of Regular Savings and Investing: Resolve today to get out of debt, stay out of debt and become financially independent. Everyone's goal should be to achieve financial independence as soon as possible in life. This requires continuous financial discipline with every Naira, Dollar or Pound sterling one earns. The key is for one to save progressively starting from 1%, 2%, 5%, 10%, 15%, 20% and even up to 25% of one's income throughout one's lifetime. This means that if one is in debt already, one should begin by saving 1% of one's income and discipline oneself to live on the other 99% until this becomes a habit.
- The Discipline of Hard Work: One should develop a reputation for being a hard worker.

  The harder one works, the luckier one becomes. For instance, it is a common saying that an average American spends 32 hours per week at work. The key is for one to save 10%, 15%, and even 25% of one's income throughout one's life, one should be prepared to do extra work. However, it is sad to say that an average person wastes about 50% of the workday in idle chit-chatting with co-workers,

extended coffee breaks and luncheons, personal business, reading the newspaper and surfing the internet.

Therefore, to arrest multi-dimensional acts of indiscipline in the society, the following forty-nine psychosocial strategies shown in the table below in as well as the consequences of indiscipline among children and adults.

S/N	PSYCHOSOCIAL METHODS OF FOSTERING SELF-DISCIPLINE	CONSEQUENCES OF INDISCIPLINE
1	Make honesty a principle	Practice dishonesty/falsehood as lifestyle
2	Respect/treat others decently	Disgrace/disrespect others
3	Expression of love and kindness	Be cruel/wicked/inconsiderate
4	Live to bequeath worthwhile legacy	Live for temporal/materialistic philosophy
5	Show hard work/industry.	Manifesting indolence/laziness
6	Exhibit justice/fairplay/rule of law	Show injustice/discrimination
7	Being democratic/rational	Being autocratic/erratic
8	Being principled/firm	Being unprincipled/inconsistent
9	Being modest	Being flamboyant/shallow/frivolous
10	Being careful/patient	Being carefree
11	Being broadminded	Being narrow/parochial
12	Being humorous /friendly	Being unsmiling/grave
13	Being open-minded	Being secretive/mysterious
14	Being committed/productive	Being half-hearted/uncommitted
15	Being responsible	Lack of sense of responsibility
16	Excellent goal pursuit	Mediocrity/lack of sense of purpose
17	Selflessness	Selfishness
18	Perseverance/diligence	Lack of endurance/over-pampering
19	Principle of dialogue/communication	Frequent imposition of one's idea on others
20	Caring/provision of basic needs	Showing uncaring attitude
21	Principle of tolerance for ambiguities	Intolerance of other views and attitudes
22	Having self- control	A life without self-regulation
23	Obedience for constituted authorities	Disobedience for constituted authorities
24	Having high emotional intelligence	Having low human feelings
25	Practicing fulfilled promise(s)	Reputed for failed promises
26	Practicing novel teaching methods	Practicing obsolete teaching methods
27	Having positive self image/self respect	Commanding no respect from others
28	Self development	Static/obsolete knowledge and skills
29	Reasonable staff remuneration	Poor staff salaries and allowances
30	Staff periodic in-service training	Overlabored and regimented staff

31	Encouragement of creativity and innovation	Primordial teaching methods of regimented staff
32	School and community regular interaction	School and community communication barriers
33	Guidance and counselling services.	Lack of professional guidance counselor
34	Effective rules and regulations	Allowing elements of lawlessness
35	Effective supervision	Lack of supervision of staff and students
36	Trained and adequate personnel	Untrained and inadequate personnel
37	Incentives for impressive behavior	Lack of reinforcement for desire behaviour
38	Periodic address by different role models	Boring children with same speakers/announcers
39	Moral and religious teachings	Expecting children to discover moral by themselves
40	Open forum at periodic intervals	Giving no opportunities for children viewpoints
41	Provision of suggestion box	Having no feedback on the school by the children
42	Emphasize law of cause and effect	Making children feel that wrongdoing can go scot-free
43	Emphasize evil effect of unearned wealth	Making children feel that money can be earned without sweat
44	Explain how the love of money shortens one's lifespan	Making money to be the sole aim of existence
45	Acknowledging personality differences among humans	Expecting the same response/behaviour from people
46	Teaching moral/ cultural practices directly	Expecting children to discover moral standard by themselves
47	Pray for the children continually	Lack of prayer for the children
48	Reward children's virtues and moral exploits deliberately and openly	No reward for children's discipline
49	Think about the effect(s) of your words and actions on other people's	Does not bother about what problem your words and action will have on others

The benefits of self-discipline

There are several benefits of practicing self-discipline in every area of one's life. Tracy (2015) lists seven benefits of self-discipline as stated below.

- The habit of self-discipline virtually guarantees one's success in life, both with oneself and others.
- One will get things done faster and of higher quality with discipline than with any other skill.
- One will be more efficient, receive more pay, and getting faster promotion.

- One will experience a greater sense of self-control, self-reliance and personal power.
- Self-discipline is the key to self-esteem, self-respect and personal pride.
- The greater one's self discipline, the greater will be one's self-confidence, and the lower will be one's fear of failure and rejection.
- With self-discipline, one will have the strength of character to persist over all obstacles until one eventually succeeds.

Conclusion

Indiscipline constitutes the source of many societal problems in this dispensation and generation. Since children delinquency often develops to adult delinquency and general low ethics in society, indiscipline exhibited by the children should be a focus of attention by parents, teachers, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, educationists, guidance counsellors, law enforcers and the larger society. It is only then that indiscipline will give way to self-control, good character, orderliness and efficiency. Therefore, in this 21st century, the methods and approaches to effecting discipline are not the same as in yesteryears. It is only when people apply modern strategies of discipline that self-discipline could be fostered in the children.

Therefore, in this dispensation and generation, it is very difficult inculcating discipline in children by force. Thus, it is necessary to observe the do's and don'ts of discipline so that our homes, schools and society can be populated by patriotic nationals rather than undisciplined citizens otherwise known as saboteurs.

Suggestions

Based on the foregoing, the following suggestions are advanced:

1. Taming children's indiscipline should start with the identification of the type and degree of misconduct because it is only when their personal psychological make-up is known that one can device appropriate methods of correcting or managing such to the desirable level.
2. Corporal punishment should be discouraged among the parents, caregivers, teachers and significant others because of their negative psychological effects on the child.
3. Behaviour modification techniques should be employed by parents, teachers and counsellors to manage abnormal behaviour of the child as alternative corporal punishments of different kind.
4. A school should have a set of rules and regulations that will guide all actions and inactions of the students during school hours and should be constantly read to the hearing of all students.
5. A school should have a functional disciplinary committee headed by a trained couselling psychologist.

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