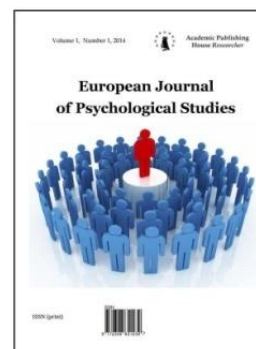


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Review of Works on the Role of Religion in Tackling Deviant Behaviours Among Adolescents: Implication for the School, Family and Church in Nigeria

¹Omomia O. Austin
²Omomia Taiwo

¹Olabisi Onabanjo University, Nigeria
Department of Religious Studies,
Ago Iwoye,
Ogun State.
E-mail: austin.omomia@yahoo.com
²Yaba College of Technology, Nigeria
School of Technical Education,
Yaba, Lagos.
E-mail: taiwoomomia@yahoo.com

Abstract. Deviant behaviour is seen as any behaviour that violates the norms of a society and attracts a negative formal or informal sanction. The deviants share a variety of behaviour that run afoul of the demands and desires of the society to which they belong. Their activities are generally contrary to the norms of the society to which they belong. This includes pick-pocketing, robbery, arson of different kinds, harassment of law abiding citizens and so on. If their activities are not checked, they portend great danger to the law abiding citizens in the society. The paper employed both historical and sociological methods of investigation. Therefore, it examined deviant behaviours among adolescents and the role played by religion in addressing the challenge. It further examined the role played by both right parenting and checking substance abuse in ameliorating deviant activities. It is recommended that religious education be included in the primary, post primary and tertiary education curricular. The school, family and church should organize different activities to engage the adolescents. They should see themselves as stakeholders in the attempt to ameliorating the challenge of deviants.

Keywords: Adolescents; Deviant behavior; Family; Religion; School.

Introduction

Deviance constitutes antisocial behaviours that have negative impact on the society. Deviants often perpetrate crimes against the society and others. Their activities run afoul of the demands of the society where they subsist. There are situations when they have caused great havoc and pain which they unleash, without remorse on the law abiding citizens. Their activities have also affected business/economic climate of their society. This has caused great economic disasters as notable prospective businesses are withdrawn or not even brought the way of such communities for fear of the activities of deviants. The reviewed work on deviants will, to a large extent orchestrates their nefarious activities. Consequently, the role that religion can play in ameliorating their activities.

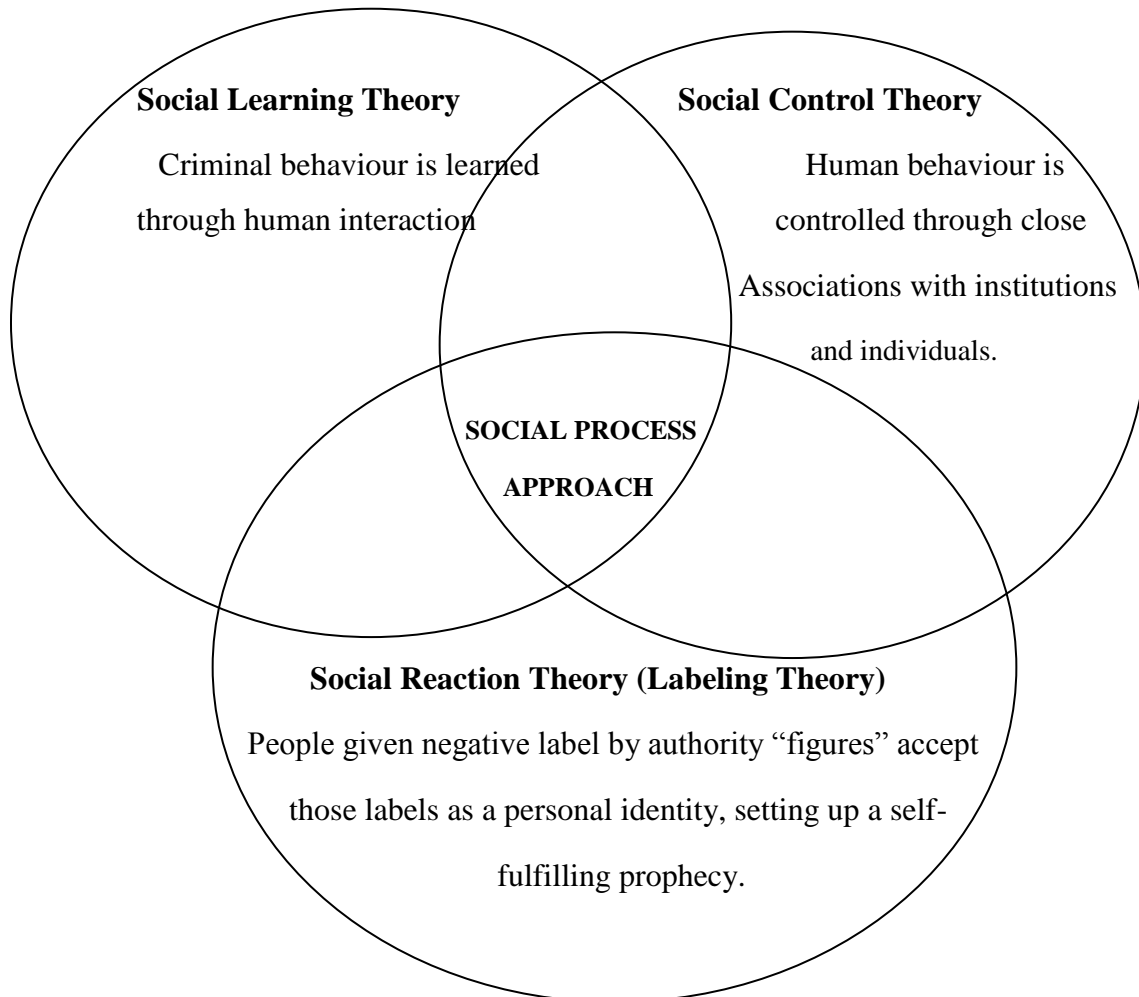
Several researches have shown that favourable attitudes towards deviance are correlated with a wide variety of behaviours. This include status offences (Stylianou, 2002), drug and alcohol use and abuse (Durkin et al, 2005, Benda, 2005, Hawdon 2004, Stylianou, 2002), sexual activity (Hope & Constance, 2005) and criminal activities ranging from gang membership (Hope & Kelly, 2002), to interpersonal violence (Li, 2004) and economic crimes (Hawdon, 1999, Li, 2004, Ford, 2005).

On the other hand, Clinard & Meier (2007), examined deviance from four main perspectives. This is based on the definitions of deviance. The first which is the “statistical definition” identifies deviance as any behaviour that is statistically infrequent. The “absolutist definition” sees it as constituting a violation of principles and values that are assumed to be universal. While the “reactivist definition”: regards a deviant act as the transgression of a specific prohibition, be that formal or informal. Finally, the “normative”: describes deviance as a violation of a norm, namely, of a standard conduct to which most people feel they have to conform.

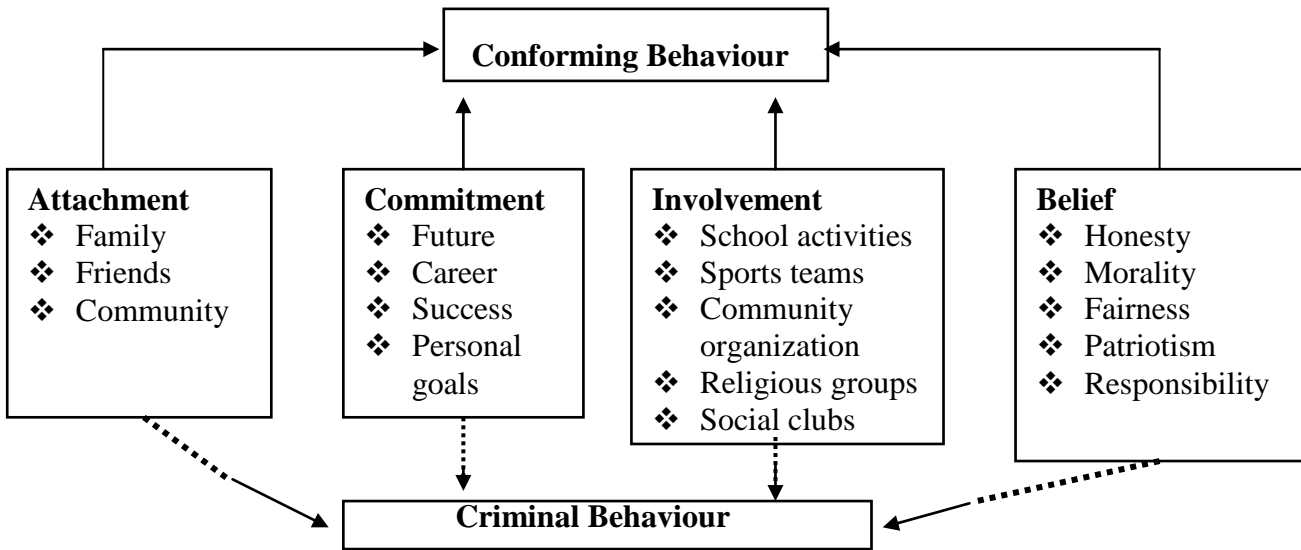
In the work of Akers & Jensen (2011), they reviewed the “empirical research evidence on the validity of social learning theory as an explanation of deviant and criminal behaviour”. This means that social learning is a general theory which offers an explanation of the acquisition, maintenance, and change in criminal and deviant behaviour that embraces social, non-social and undermine conformity. The basic proposition according to them is that the same learning process in a context of social structure, interaction and situation, produces both conformity and deviant behaviour (Akers & Jensen, 2011). There are three basic positions canvassed by the theory of socialization (social learning). This includes; “Definition” – those learned from socialization into general religious, moral and other conventional values and norms that are favourable to conforming behaviour and unfavourable to committing any deviant or criminal acts or general beliefs or world views that support the deviant act”. Some of the “definitions” that support deviance are so tenaciously held as part of a learned belief system. For example, the radical beliefs held by militant groups involved in terrorists acts. These ideologies provide strong positive motivation for criminal activities (Akers & Jensen, 2011). The second one is “Reinforcement” in operant conditioning. This is a form of response stimulus response process. Here, the behaviour produces “consequences that in turn produce the probability of the behaviour being repeated” (Skinner, 1959, in Akers & Jensen, 2004). There is also “differential association”. It is concerned with “direct association and interaction with others who are engaged in certain kinds of behaviour or express norms, values, and attitudes supportive of such behaviour as well as indirect association and identification with more distant reference groups”. It will be noted that this group with which one is in differential association will often provide the major “immediate and intermediate social contexts in which all the mechanism of social learning operate”. Clear examples are the family, friends (primary ones). Fourthly, we have “imitation”. This refers to the engagement in behaviour after the direct or indirect observation of similar behaviour by others.

The theory of crime causation can be considered diagrammatically in this form: Social Process that controls Human Behaviour, Elements of Social Bond Theory and Differential Associations (Siegel, 2011).

Social Process that Control Human Behaviour

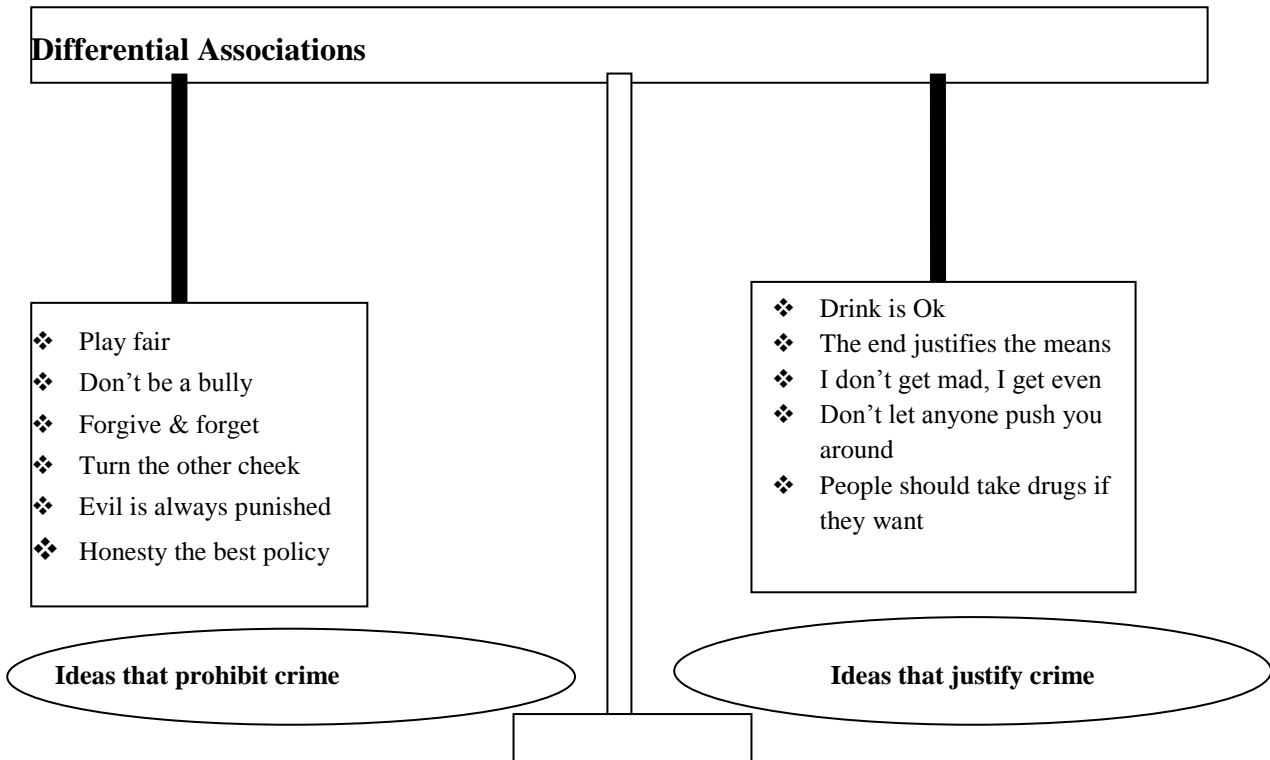


Theories of Crime Causation (Siegel, 2011). (Fig 1)



Elements of Social Bond Theory (Siegel, 2011) (Fig 2)

Hirschi tested the Social bond theory by administering a self-report survey to a sample of 4,000 junior and senior high school students in California. He found considerable evidence to support the theory (Siegel, 2011).



Differential Associations (Siegel, 2011) (Fig 3).

Deducing from the figures (1, 2, and 3) above, it can be observed that, a perceived deficit in the ability to exercise control in circumstances where autonomy is valued will dispose the individual to adopt deviant patterns that would permit the individual to alter the balance of control he or she is subject to. According to Tittle and Paternoster (in Krohn, Lizotte and Hall, 2011) “desire (i) to avoid control, or (ii) to exercise more control than one is subject to, constitutes the major compelling force for humans, and this is implicated especially in criminal or deviant behaviour.” As a result of this, deviance can be understood as “a maneuver to alter control imbalances and thereby to overcome feelings of humiliation provoked by being reminded of one’s unbalanced control ratio” (Krohn, Lizotte & Hall, 2011).

Deviant Behaviours among Adolescents

It has been commonly canvassed that deviant behaviour is tied, to some extent, to age factor. The age of the adolescents ranges mainly from 13-19 years. Criminology researches have emphasized the strong relationship between age and crime, with involvement in most crimes peaking in adolescence. However, there is also evidence of the “early onset of delinquency and of stability of criminal and deviant behaviour over the life course” (Sampson & Laub, 2011). Zdun (2007) argued that “street code and legitimizations contribute to each other as their interaction causes many conflicts and dynamics amongst youths on the street”. His position is further confirmed by the results of some contemporary studies (Agnew, 2006, Anderson, 1999, Dowdney, 2005, Foglia, 1997, Jacobs, 2004, Stewart et al, 2006, Topalli, 2005, Zdun, 2005).

Deviant acts by adolescents were further established through empirical studies (Georges, 2011). The study was conducted with school children and teachers of primary and secondary schools as well as adolescents in Luxemburg. The findings showed that cannabis use and alcohol consumption was a problem there. In a local survey, 15.7% of adolescents (17-25years) reported that they have been drunk at least five times in their life time. 7.2% of 12-16years old and 16.5% of 17-25 years old have consumed cannabis. 3.2% of 12 – 16years old students and 5.8% of 17-25 years old students, consumed cannabis on a regular basis (Georges, 2011).

In another research survey carried out in 1999/2000 on health behaviour among school aged children conducted in Luxemburg schools, they were asked about risk behaviours, violence, and bullying in school (Siegel, 2011). A total of 7,397 students (from secondary schools), that is 26.5%, and 963 primary pupils, that is 10.4% were surveyed. 55.9% primary pupils (Grade 5th and 6th) and 85.5% secondary students all accepted that they have had a drink in their life. While 1.9% of primary and 29.8% of secondary schools have been drunk. 11.4% of the boys in primary school and 4.2% of girls in primary schools have consumed drugs. Before the age of 19 years, 50% of the boys took drugs, while 40% of the girls took drugs. In addition, it was also discovered that 19.5% of primary pupils and 14.4% of secondary students have been bullied, while 18.5% of primary and 20% secondary, have bullied others. The national survey also showed that 40% of teachers have been victims of physical assault. This agreed with the findings from German students (Siegel, 2011).

Although the findings above showed some differences in the participation of females in deviant activities, it is clear that their role is generating some level of interest. Lanctot & Blanc (2003) observed that studies in the 1990s often included mixed-gender samples rather than only male’s samples. They contend that although females have increasingly been included in empirical studies, their representation remains limited. In most cases, instead of focusing on the factors responsible for “adolescent females’ participation in deviance for example, most studies with mixed samples, use gender only as a control variable”. The implication is that such empirical weaknesses, no doubt, contribute to superficial understanding of adolescent females’ deviance. The lack of sufficient knowledge in this regards, they claimed, comes from theological fragmentation (Lanctot & Blanc, 2002).

Some common factors incriminated in adolescent deviant behavior include poor parenting and substance abuse. The authors opined that these factors have contributed tremendously to adolescents’ deviant behaviour.

Poor Parenting and Deviant Behaviours among Adolescents

It is commonly argued that most of the adolescents who exemplify deviant behaviours are likely to have come from poor parenting backgrounds. Some of them are either products of polygamous homes or broken homes.

In a research carried out by Sanni, et al (2010) on family types and juvenile delinquency issues among secondary school students in Akwa – Ibom State, Nigeria, the results indicated three family variables. These are: “family stability”, “family cohesiveness” and “family adaptability” as impacting strongly on juvenile delinquency among secondary school students in Uyo metropolis. They further posited that, “children who are inadequately supervised by parents, whose parents fail to teach the difference between right and wrong, whose parents do not monitor their whereabouts, and who experience some measure of violence in the home, are more likely to become delinquents. A healthy home environment is necessary to keep children from becoming delinquents”. Supporting this position, Muehlenberg (2002) in his findings, concluded that the “absence of intact families makes gang membership more appealing, because the delinquents succour in the presence of their group members, which help to reinforce the delinquency tendency in them.” This position is also supported by the findings of Robinson & Hyde (2011). They concluded that; “Many aspects of the American family system have been found to be inversely related to delinquency and criminal behaviour, while humanistic or permissive parenting has been shown to be linked to delinquent behaviour.” It is worthy of note that the humanists support the idea of “relative values, claiming that no one set of values can be correct. They condemn the teaching of values to children” (Robinson & Hyde, 2011). This teaching to a large extent can indulge adolescents in their continuous perpetration of their nefarious activities.

The empirical findings of Vega (2011) is worthy of mention. He used data derived from 6th – 7th grade Cuban – American adolescents in Greater Miami, Florida area, U.S.A. The family factors are related to the development of attitudes favouring deviance (Vega, 2011). He was able to identify family factors playing a role in deviants’ behaviours.

Substance Abuse and Deviant Activities among Adolescents

Apart from poor parenting, substance abuse is also incriminated in adolescents’ deviant behaviour. All forms of illicit substances like drugs, alcohol, cigarettes and others are said to be common among some adolescents who manifest deviant behaviours. This should be checked and brought to the barest minimum in order to reduce deviant activities.

In his research, Nwadiwe (2008) identified substance abuse as a serious problem in Africa. He declared that this is aggravated by abject poverty, wars, socio-political upheavals and inefficient/ineffective social welfare programmes across the continent. According to him, drug abuse now starts at an early age, particularly among street children. Akers (1992), Bachman, O.Malley & Johnson (1984), Elliot et al (1989), in their empirical findings, concluded that drug use, especially hard drugs, increases sharply during the late teenage years, and continues to increase through the mid 20’s.

Drug and alcohol abuse contribute significantly to the incidence of domestic aggression, violent crimes, broken homes and juvenile delinquency in Nigeria (Ebie & Pela, 1981, Adelekan, 1991, Obot, 2004).

Role of Religion in Checking Deviant Behaviours among Adolescents

Recent scholarship shows that religion and religious participation are able to shield adolescents from delinquent tendencies (Regnerus, 2003, Smith & Faris, 2002, Johnson, Jang, Larson & Li, 2001). Deep link or positive correlation was found between stronger religiousness and decreased delinquent behaviour for adolescents (Johnson, Jang, Larson & Li, 2001), including lower rates of drug and alcohol use (Li, 1998, Benda, 2005), and less deviant behaviour in general (Li, 1997). It also showed that, adolescents who claim that religion is important in their lives were more likely to do volunteer work in the community than are young people who say that religion is not important (Hood, Hill & Spilka, 2011). By extension, it is deeply believed by many in the U.S. that religion plays a profound and necessary role in the creation and maintenance of a moral and law-abiding community (O’connor & Perryclear, 2002). The positive correlation between faith and morality is further supported by Lewy (1996), who declared: “No society has been successful in

teaching morality without religion, for morality cannot be created. It requires the support of tradition, and this tradition is generally linked to religious precepts”.

In a research to authenticate the above claim, Benda (2005) analyzed data collected from two Southern States in America. The attempt was to assess the relationship between religion and drug use among adolescents. It was concluded that church attendance is inversely correlated with drinking, controlling for demographic factors such as race, social class, age and family structure. Net Industries (2011), reporting on the research conducted by Lee and others, claimed that they conducted a large scale survey of Seventh - day Adventist youths in grades six to twelve. More than seven thousand completed the questionnaire. This was obtained from a stratified random sample of the United States and Canada. They reported that youths who did not follow worship practices were most likely to report higher levels of alcohol and drug use.

Religious involvement decreases domestic violence between men and women, according to a national study by Ellison & Anderson (2001). Church attendance has also been associated with decreased levels of assault, burglary, and larceny (Bainbridge, 1989) and religiosity promotes decreased levels of violent crimes, both at the individual and the state level (Hummer et al 1999, Lester, 1987). Increased levels of religiosity also directly decrease deviant behaviour, such as drug use, violence and delinquency among at risk youths (Fagan, 2006).

On the role of African – American churches in reducing crime among Black Youths in America, Byron (2011) examined this hypothesis. His paper examined the hypothesis that the religious involvement of African – American youths significantly shields them from the deleterious and negative effects of neighbourhood disorder and decay on youth crime”. He tested the hypothesis by examining the fifth wave data from the National Youth Survey (NYS), focusing on black respondents, given the historical as well as contemporary significance of the African – American church on the spiritual quest by black Americans. The following were the results from the research: “The effects of neighbourhood disorder on crime among black youths are partly mediated by an individual’s religious involvement.” Secondly, involvement of African – American youths in religious institutions significantly buffers or interacts with the effects of neighbourhood disorder on crime, and in particular, serious crime”.

The classification made by Dilulio (2011) in respect of religion and deviants is quite instructive. He examined what he called the “three faith factors”, viz:

- (i) **“Organic Religion”**: This he described as belief in God and regular attendance of religious services in a church, mosque or other traditional place of worship.
- (ii) **“Programmatic Religion”**: He described this as individual participation in social programmes run by various organizations that have religious affiliation.
- (iii) **“Ecological Religion”**: This refers to the exposure to religious influence, even without any formal religion. For example “for many urban youths, the only institution more ubiquitous than liquor outlets are churches. Even without any formal religion in their lives, such youths may still be exposed to religious influence.”

On the strength of this, Dilulio (2011) further argued that, the “empirical research to date, suggests that, especially for low income urban children, youth and young adults, these different forms of religious influence help to counter other negative individual and social influences.” He further posited that, all things being equal, “church attendance, participation in faith-based programmes, and benefits received or services delivered from the hands of people working through local congregations are each associated with a greater probability that urban youths will escape poverty, crime and other social ills”. This is mainly the role of religion.

It has also been observed that pro-social activities, which include participation in religious activities and extra-curricular activities, for example school clubs or music programmes, reduce deviant activities. Studies carried out by Borden, Donnermeyer and Sheer (2001) of 11th graders, and Shilts (1991) of 7th and 8th graders, concluded that participation in extra-curricular activities isolate youths from substance use. Duncan, Duncan, Strycker & Chaumeton (2011), found that “White and Native American Students (grades 7-12) more frequently attending church, were less frequent or heavy users of alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana.”

Conclusion

Decreased level of deviance will lead to marked economic and social progress. Lewis (2011) argued: “decreased levels of deviance, aid in bringing about social order, increase in the likelihood that businesses will expand into local areas and bring economic opportunities, and decrease government expenditure into programmes and institutions that reduce, punish, and compensate for deviance”. While fielding questions from newsmen at the opening of “Britain in Nigeria Exhibition” in Lagos, the former governor of Lagos state, Senator Bola Ahmed Tinubu, decried the activities of deviants. He admitted that they pose serious problems and threats to the nation’s foreign investment inflow drive (Tinubu, 2000). He further blamed their rising activities on the high level of unemployment among them.

If the nation desires economic, social and political progress, the authors argued that, the challenge posed by adolescent deviants must be aggressively addressed. The paper therefore argued that religion stands out as one of the panaceas for tackling this menace. In this wise, the church, family and school in Nigeria must aggressively rise to the challenge posed by adolescents and their deviant activities in order to ameliorate the aforementioned problems.

Recommendations

- Religious education should be made compulsory in the curricula of the primary and post primary institutions where most of the adolescents belong.
- The school, family and church should mount formidable advocacy against substance abuse.
- There is the need to create different co-curricular activities. This could be in form of athletics, football and other competitions. The adolescents are able to dissipate their energies here, rather than on nefarious activities.
- Reach out to adolescents through different programmes/ activities that appeal to them. For example, visiting the beach or other sites during special festivals, like Easter, Christmas and other holidays.

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