

## Etiology and Menace of Secret Cults in Secondary Schools in the South-East Region of Nigeria

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**Abstract:** *In the last two decades, there has been a geometric increase in the activities of secret cults in secondary schools in Nigeria which have wrought incalculable havoc on the lives and psyche of Nigerians. This study aims at unraveling the etiology and menace of secret cult activities in secondary schools in the South East region of Nigeria. The study employed the descriptive research design in studying this phenomenon. Hence, 450 respondents comprising of secondary school students and their teachers who were selected from the five states of South Eastern region of Nigeria participated in the study. Results show that the causes of cultism among secondary school students include peer pressure, impatience towards life, lack of guidance and counselling amongst others. It was also found that the menace of cultism in secondary schools includes maiming and injury, loss of lives and property as well as academic disruption. Recommendations and suggestions on how to eradicate secret cults in secondary schools were proffered.*

**Keywords:** *Secret cults, Menace, etiology, cultism, secondary school*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Before the 1990s, cultism was the exclusive preserve of students of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. However, in the last two decades, cult activities have stepped down to the secondary and primary schools. According to Aniekpeno (2017), cultism can be defined as the practice of activities that are associated with organisations whose membership and modes of operation are considered to be unconventional and known to members only. Members pledge their allegiance to the cult, devoting themselves under oath to support and carryout the activities of the group without objection.

Cultism is one of the major social vices confronting the educational sector as all levels of education are not left out. The activities of these groups have caused the deaths of many (members and non-members inclusive). Secret Cult groups are rampant in higher institutions in the Country and has become a smear on the proper development of the Nigerian youth as their activities take various destructive forms such as torture, armed robbery, drug abuse, kidnapping, murder and so on (Aniekpeno, 2017).

According to Obadan (2015), the rise of secret cults in secondary schools is a recent disturbing trend that has left school administrators, teachers, parents and pupil themselves confounded. In schools known to have cultists, many pupils live in overwhelming fear. This is because occasionally there are mysterious illness, accidents, disputes, threats and even deaths. Serious academic work can hardly ever take place in a climate of fright and insecurity. Besides, many students become suspicious of one another (Obadan, 2015).

Noticeably in the last two decades, cult culture has gone down the ladder to secondary school in the South East region of Nigeria and ravaging our youngsters therein. In schools noted for cultism, teachers charged with discipline and strict classrooms teachers come under frequent threats. This leads to decline in the quality of education and general academic performance. A good number of cultists have been accused of robbery, rape, harassment and intimidation of male teachers. Some have also been used by politicians to cause crisis in a bid to achieve their selfish gains. Thus, young secondary school children may acquire negative attitudes, which may manifest in all their lives (Obadan, 2015).

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Obadan (2015) notes that cultism in secondary school can lead to violent crimes like armed robbery and kidnapping, describing it as a societal problem. The above lends credence to the fact that today, thousands of teenagers as well as primary school pupils have been exposed to cultism. Sunday Mirror gathered that this ugly trend has not only contributed to moral decadence, but has also increased the spate of thuggery and violence witnessed in the country.

Who then can be blamed for this? Could it be the parents, the teachers, the school authorities or lack of moral values in the society? Everyone has a role to play in making the future better. If something is not done soon to check cultism in secondary schools, then both the family and the greater society are at great risk of social insecurity. Despite concerted efforts by government and concerned stakeholders to provide Nigerians with quality education, a few have chosen to toe the line that leads to destruction through voluntary initiation into different cults, which has eaten deep into the education system (Obadan, 2015).

Secondary schools are intermediate educational institutions where adolescents are tutored and prepared for the certificate examinations which qualify them for placements into the higher institutions. The existence of secret cult activities in secondary schools is a serious threat to the realization of this noble objective. It has been observed that cult activities have led to the death of students and even teachers. If this ugly trend is not checked, the future role of secondary schools as agents of social change and national development will be seriously threatened. It is against this background that this study sets out to investigate the etiology and menace of cult activities in secondary schools in the South East Region of Nigeria and possible measures that can address the problem.

## **2. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING**

This study is premised on the Frustrations- Aggression Theory. The main assumption of this theory is that violence becomes a defence mechanism strategy when it becomes apparent that means of satisfying pressing human needs are being denied. This could take the form of bio-social and economic denials. Frustration- aggression theory as basis for explaining human motivational state, and destructive pattern of response as a mode of behaviour, has been elaborated by Uguru-Okorie (2001) and Gbolahan (2003). These authors state emphatically that “the occurrence of aggressive behaviour always presupposes the existence of frustration and contrariwise, that the existence of frustration always leads to some form of aggression. Olabisi et al. (2003) elaborated on this view when they pointed out that, “frustration is displaced elsewhere, usually to some less threatening object or to oneself, when it is impossible or dangerous to direct the aggression toward the frustrating event”.

Against this background, it is not difficult to find a link among the social phenomena of crime, cultism and crises in Nigeria’s tertiary institutions, particularly in the light of the frustration-aggression theory. An observation of the Nigerian society, particularly of the dying decades of the 20th century and the dawn of the 21st century shows that the society is pervaded with frustrating events and frustrating circumstances, one in which it could be said that frustration is endemic. Since the 1980s, oppression and injustice have been rife, poverty has spread like wild fire, and frustration of the basic needs and aspirations of the vast majority of citizens, including the children and the youth, has been a cardinal feature of our decadent society. One result of widespread and severe frustration of the legitimate needs and aspirations of the masses of Nigerians has been the development in the personalities of ordinary Nigerians of varying degrees of hostile and destructive traits, which manifest, in certain cases, in criminal behaviour, cult membership and sometimes, crises orchestrated by frustrated youths in our educational institutions. Thus, it may defensibly be asserted that a common denominator shared by the phenomena of cultism, crime and crises in our institutions is the existence of hostile and destructive urges in criminals, secret cult members and ring leaders of violent crises in our higher institutions. As we have seen, this personality trait, characterized by hostility, and destructiveness, can be traced back to early experiences of frustration, and such experiences come from the environment.

## **3. HISTORY OF CULTISM IN NIGERIA**

Rotimi (2005) reports that secret cult phenomenon is not new in Africa. It has been part of the culture of ethnic nationalities in most parts of Africa. Rotimi (2005) reported that the activities of secret cults have been recorded in Central Africa as well as in other parts of Sub-Saharan region. Nzubechi (2012) reported that the Mau-Mau cult of

East and Central Africa is one of the oldest local cults in the world. The earliest form of these cults flourished in Egypt, Greece, Rome and China. These cults are there for purposes, like security of member by the performance of rituals. Amongst the Mende tribe of Sierra Leone, men's and women's secret societies provide passage to nobility and influence. The men's group, the Poro trains boys in civic duties and organize positive collectivities for its members (Uweru, 2010).

In the case of Nigeria, Rotimi (2005) noted that secret cults have always existed in many parts of the country. For instance, among the Yorubas of the Southwest the Ogboni Secret Cult can be found while among the Efiks of the Southeastern part of Nigeria, the Ekpe Secret Cult was prominent (Rotimi, 2005). The Ekine Cult is to be found in the Delta region, the Edo of the Midwest have the Owegbe Cult, just to mention a few. Membership of these secret cults provides sources of status, economic, social and political security, to their adherents (Rotimi, 2005). In Nupe and Tiv ethnic groups in Nigeria, sex antagonism in witchcraft cults is a reflection of male wish for superiority in societies where the female are economically successful (Uweru, 1988).

The introduction of cultism into educational institution can be traced back to the Pyrates Confraternity, also known as National Association of Sea Dogs, that was founded at the University College, Ibadan (now called the University of Ibadan), in 1953 when the institution was still a satellite campus of the University of London. It has the skull and crossbones as its logo (Rotimi, 2005). The Seadog Confraternity was similar to the numerous fraternities and sororities, which are so ubiquitous in many American universities and colleges both in membership requirements and activities. In the United States, the fraternities and sororities are sometimes called Greek Clubs because of their Greek names and symbols. These Greek clubs promote, among other things, moral uprightness, patriotism, community service and high academic and intellectual standards (Rotimi, 2005).

Several studies reported that the Pyrates Confraternity at the University College, Ibadan, was formed by the first African Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka and a few others who were students of the university at time (Rotimi, 2005; Ewara, 2006; Aniekpeno, 2017). The original aims of the association were very lofty and noble. They aimed at producing future Nigerian leaders who would be very proud of their African heritage. Thus, the Pyrates Confraternity aimed at abolishing convention (Thomas, 2002). It also wanted to revive the age of chivalry as it boasted of the cleanest, the brightest and the most politically conscious among the students (Rotimi, 2005).

Orintusin (1990) as reported in Rotimi (2005) highlights that the seadogs had as its aims and objectives as follows; (i) to fight non-violently but intellectually and effectively, against the imposition of foreign conventions, to revive the age of chivalry, (ii) to find a lasting solution to the problems of tribalism and elitism. Professor Wole Soyinka was the first democratically elected "captain" of the society with the name, Captain Blood. Professor Muiyiwa Awe was Long John Silver. Many prominent Nigerians who were founding fathers of the Confraternity include Pius Oleghe, Ralph Opara, Aig I'Moukhuede and others. The outfit of the seadogs resembled those of the pyrates of the old. Everything done was healthy, fun and harmless (Rotimi, 2005).

According to Soyinka (2002), the pyrates wanted to be different from the "stodgy establishment and its pretentious products in a new educational institution different from the culture of hypocritical and affluent middleclass, different from alienated colonial aristocrats". He also explained that confraternities are not cults (Dixon 1994). According to him, Confraternity was part of the social life of the university, which existed then, and as Adebayo (2001) has pointed out some evil minds have twisted the original aims of this noble tradition that was simply one of campus life. According to Rotimi (2005), Soyinka further points out that the original Confraternity did not swear any oath of secrecy, no binding of blood and the identities of members were known to both students and staff.

As noted by Rotimi (2005) and Ewara (2006), long after the founding fathers had left the University of Ibadan, the Confraternity (seadogs) continued to thrive. Unfortunately towards the end of the 1960s, the social, political and educational changes which were occurring in Nigeria began to affect the operations of the Confraternities. The first notable departure came in 1968 with the formation of the Eiye Confraternity at the University of Ibadan. The Eiye Confraternity had sprung from the "Buccaneers" which also had sprung up from the seadogs. The major force that led to the formation of new splinter groups from the seadogs was basically doctrinal (Thomas, 2002 cited in Rotimi, 2005). For example, members of the new groups were not able to meet the high academic standard originally set by the sea dogs Confraternity and this resulted into them forming a splinter group (Rotimi, 2005).

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This resulted to several splinter groups emerging from the seadogs. These groups claimed that the seadogs were elitist whose campaigns had outlived their usefulness (Owoeye, 1997). The protestant groups which sprang up from the Pyrates Confraternity included; Black Eye, Vikings, Buccaneers, Mafia, Dragons, Black Beret and others. The female cults include, Temple of Eden, Frigrates, Barracudas, Daughters of Jezebel and others. Today in Nigeria, there is hardly tertiary institution which has not suffered the adverse effects of the activities of secret cults which have been characterized by violence (Rotimi, 2005).

#### 4. METHODOLOGY

The design of the study was descriptive survey. Descriptive survey design studies are mainly concerned with describing events as they are without any manipulation being observed. Descriptive survey design is used for studies which aim at collecting data and describing in a systematic manner, the characteristic features or facts about a given population (Nworgu, 2006). This design is suitable for this study since the researcher intends to survey and describe cult activities in tertiary institutions without manipulating the activities of these cult members.

The study was carried out in the five states of Enugu, Imo, Anambra, Abia and Ebonyi that make-up the South East. The population of the study comprised all the teachers and students of all the secondary schools in the South East. A total number of 10,000 teachers and 2 million secondary students constituted the population for the study. The sample for the study was made up of four hundred and fifty (450) respondents. The researcher adopted convenience sampling to select three (3) secondary schools in all the South East states. Thereafter, the researcher adopted simple random sampling technique to draw 30 teachers and students from the fifteen secondary schools selected for the study making altogether 450 respondents.

The instrument for data collection was a questionnaire which was developed by the researcher. The instrument is divided into two sections. Section A sought information on personal data of the respondents. Section B elicits responses that relates to the objective of the study. The instrument is in a four point rating scale ranging from Strongly Agree (SA) to Strongly Disagree (SD). Data was analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Based on the four point scale, the acceptance level for the mean score was 2.50 and above and anything below 2.50 was rejected.

#### 5. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

##### What are the Etiologies (Causes) of Cultism in South East, Nigeria?

**Table 1:** Mean and Standard Deviations of Respondents views on the causes of cultism in South East, Nigeria

SN	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	MEAN	SD
1	DEVELOPMENTAL PROBLEMS	2.81	0.87
2	LACK OF PROPER PARENTAL MENTORSHIP	2.98	0.76
3	SOCIETAL DECADENCE	2.98	0.82
4	LACK OF GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING	2.87	0.68
5	IMPATIENCE TOWARDS LIFE	3.38	0.67
6	POOR ORIENTATION AND EDUCATION	3.05	0.74
7	EGO AND POWER STRUGGLE	2.82	0.83
8	POVERTY	3.05	0.80
9	TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT	3.10	0.95
10	PEER GROUP PRESSURE	3.38	0.66

The analysis of data collected as presented in table I to determine the etiologies (causes) of secret cults in secondary schools in the South East shows that all the items of the instrument that addressed the issue were rated positive and their ratings were above the criterion mean of 2.5. A look at the table reveals that the highest rated items were items 5 and 10 with mean scores of 3.38 respectively. The item 5 implies that due to impatience towards life, secondary students engage in secret cultism while item 10 indicates that peer group pressure lead them to secret cultism. On the other hand, the least rated item was item 1 with a mean of 2.81 which although is above the criterion mean of 2.50. This reveals that owing to developmental problems they get involved to secret cultism.

Based on the analysis, it was established that factors leading students to secret cultism are developmental problems, lack of proper parental mentorship, societal decadence, lack of guidance and counselling, impatience towards life, poor orientation and education, ego and power struggle, poverty, technological advancement and peer group pressure.

### **Menace of secret cult activities in secondary schools in South East Region**

**Table 2:** Mean and Standard Deviation on the menace of secret cult activities in secondary schools in South East Region

S/N	QUESTIONNAIRE ITEM	MEAN	SD
1	ACADEMIC PROBLEMS/DISRUPTIONS	3.38	0.98
2	LOSS OF LIVES AND PROPERTY	3.27	1.05
3	MAIMING AND INJURIES	2.97	0.82
4	VIOLENCE AND ARMED ROBBERY	3.37	0.99
5	DISRUPTION OF SOCIAL/RRECREATIONAL EVENTS	2.98	0.72
6	INSECURITY	3.74	0.83
7	LEADS TO POOR EDUCATION QUALITY	2.79	0.86
8	EXPULSION FROM SCHOOL	3.27	1.05

The analysis of table 2 determines the menace of secret cult activities in secondary schools in South East Region of Nigeria. It reveals that all the identified menaces were rated positive and the ratings are above the criterion mean of 2.50. From the table it could be observed that the highest rated item in the table was item 6 with a mean score of 3.74. This implies that insecurity is the major menace of secret cult activities in secondary schools. Also, the analysis of data in the table reveals that the least rated item were items 3 and 7 with mean scores of 2.97 respectively which although were above the criterion mean of 2.50. These items revealed that members of secret cults maim and cause injuries while clashing with themselves. Again, cult activities lead to poor education and academic quality.

Based on the analysis, the menace of secret cult activities are academic problems and disruptions, loss of lives and property, maiming and injuries, violence and armed robbery, disruption of social and recreational events, insecurity, leads to poor educational quality and expulsion from school.

## **6. DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The results on table I show that students agree that impatience towards life with an item mean score of 3.38 is a powerful factor. This view is in line with Arogundade (1994) that society decadence is a constructive factor. The quest to get rich quick has pervaded the psyche of an average student, as they resort to all sorts of decadence such as cultism to achieve quick success in life. Students bulldoze their way to pass examinations and even force ladies to be-friend them. To these students, there is no need for hard work as success can be achieved through the backdoors. In addition to these, the study found that developmental problem is the least rated item with a mean score of 2.81. This result however agrees with Olabisi (1993) which explained that most students in secondary schools belong to the adolescent age bracket, a stage they are subjected to psychological fluctuations, while searching for their personalities.

Lack of guidance and counselling also is a factor as found out by this study. This finding agrees with the view of Olabisi (1993) that as a result of lack of elaborate guidance and counselling programmes in schools, students do not have vital information, thus they are lured into these cults as novices. Also, this finding is in line with Olukoye (1994) findings that identified faulty admission system as one of the factors that motivate the occurrence of secret cults in schools.

The findings in table 2 about the menace of secret cult activities in secondary schools agree with Olukoye (1994) findings which reported that students study under fear of being attacked by cult members thereby affecting learning which in turn affects the quality of education. Olukoye reported how they rob students of their valuables. Amachere (1992) reported how cultists maim and inflict injuries to students and teachers.

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is need for Parents to sow discipline in their children at home from the cradle by providing them with parental guidance and materials they need. Parents should also lead good lives and serve as role models to their children.

2. Secondary school authorities should have guidance and counselling services to guide students properly in terms of curricula and extra curricula activities.
3. School authorities should monitor their students and take up any suspicious behaviour observed with all seriousness.
4. It is also hoped that the government will improve the funding of the education sector so that the secondary schools will return to their former glory where they will remain centres of excellence. For all these to occur, the various levels of government need to have a moratorium on education. This will include a very thorough and objective examination of funding, admission policy and the general welfare of students and staff.
5. Some Nigerian leaders are dishonest and unreliable to the core: masses-oriented and people-centric only in their campaign promises, but oblivious of manifesto contract and thoroughly self-centered in their activities throughout their tenure. This attitude ought to be reversed, if the conundrum of social vices, including cultism, must become anachronistic. Since cultism stems chiefly from poverty, poor social and recreational facilities, preventing cultism is a better approach than punishing it. Therefore, the government ought to initiate attacks on the conditions that breed cultism.

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