



**EDUCATIONAL THEORY
AND PRACTICE
ACROSS DISCIPLINES**

(PROJECTING BEYOND THE 21ST CENTURY)

Edited by

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22 Health and Safety of Young People: Looking Beyond the 21st Century

Adio-Moses, R.O.

Abstract

Young people (children within the ages 14 to 24) in Nigeria today are faced with a lot of safety challenges due to modernization and technological advancement. The continuous breakdown in the family system is also not helping matters. In most cases, young people are left to make their own decision on vital issues in life. The resultant effect of some of the decisions they make put them at risk and harms them. This paper explained the safety hazards of young people in Nigeria by providing insight to the problems as we look beyond the 21st century. Special attention was given to vehicular crash, recreational injuries, use of fire arms, human attacks, physical trauma, illicit sexual practice and the use of drugs, and any substance that constitutes a grave threat to their physical and mental well-being, as well as significantly impedes the process of learning and personal development. In looking beyond the 21st century, it is important to value the rights of young people to make their own choices. But, as with any privilege, there is a responsibility which must be sustained by young people in relation to choosing a lifestyle pattern, that is consistent with the laws of the state and community norms, which involves respect for the rights of others. Safety education should therefore be introduced to young people early before they form habits that will predispose them to safety hazards.

Introduction

Safety has been defined to mean; protection from harm, freedom from harm or danger, a condition of being safe and protection from fear. Safety is one of the essential needs of man, irrespective of gender, age, race or social status. Young people in Nigeria today are faced with a lot of safety challenges due to modernisation and technological advancement which has made communication and movement easier. The need for economic buoyancy within the family has resulted in both parents working and thereby reducing quality family time. The continuous breakdown in the family system is also not helping matters. In most cases, young people are left to make their own decision on vital issues in life. The resultant effect of some of the decisions they make jeopardize their health and put them at risk and harm's way.

Indeed, the health of the young is very important to every nation. Health is the main source of human existence. Briggs (2005) defined health as the bed rock for all life's activities, while Ajala, (2005) asserted that, health is more than the absence of illness but a matter of how well the body's components are functioning. The importance of good health to a young person cannot be overemphasized and so, everything possible must be done to preserve it and protect it. Education is one of the ways which can be used to protect the health of young people because it has been defined as the process of impacting knowledge on the learner with the hope of making him/her to have a change of behaviour or being able to make a wise decision (Akinsola, 1993). It is important that young people remain in good health and protected from hazards by exposing them early to a kind of education that will provide them knowledge about vulnerability and the hazards around them. Health education which is defined by Moronkola and Okanlawon (2003) as a process by which health information is successfully imparted in such a way that the learner is able to make informed decision is seen as the best way to awaken the consciousness of young people towards their health and safety.

Tope-Ajayi (2004) stressed that, the aim of health education is to effect health behavioural changes that will enable the learner to recognize the signs of disease and dangers. Since health and safety education is a sub-unit of health education and going by the health education definitions given above, one can infer that health and safety education is the process of assisting people to acquire sound knowledge of health and safety issues and ability to recognize dangers or safety hazards and make informed decisions that will protect and prevent a person from risk and dangers or harms.

Living safely is a challenge that must be accepted by all irrespective of age or class if we are to continue to move forward in our ever changing society (Ajala, 2002). In other words both young and old, rich and poor people must accept the challenges of safety living. Young people, like everybody in Nigeria desires safety all the time. However, the environment (school, home, workplace and community) carry their own hazards. Each day brings a safety challenge and young people are more exposed to these safety hazards. Berman and Snyder (2011) observed that, injuries or harms are often caused by man's activities. The safety needs of young people in Nigeria could be analysed as be security, protection from danger, protection from risk of harm or injuries and freedom from fear (Ajibode, 2006).

Who are the Young Persons?

Adolescents and young people are terms often used interchangeably. They are the youngsters who constantly seek independence (Omoegun 1995). They are those group of the population that are between childhood and adulthood (Berman and Snyder, 2008; Akinbola, 2004) they are within the age spectrum of 14-24 (Nugent, 2005; Lule, Rosen, Singh, Knowles and Behrman, 2006). They seek to wean themselves from the family and become self-sufficient, self-actualized and independence (Omoegun, 1995). They love to experiment and explore with a wide range of behaviours and life

patterns, are willing to conform with peer group pressures and are more inclined to hold on to peer group values (Alpizar, 1994; Nwazuo, 2004; Boroffice, 2004 and Awake, 2011). They also make up a large percentage of the world population. The United Nations Population Fund (UNPF) and the Action Health Incorporated (AHI) (2002) gave the young persons' statistics world over as over 3 billion.

In addition, Ugochukwu (2004) warned that, there will be conflict when independence and autonomy is denied them. Jones and Meyer (2009) asserted that, the youthful period is a period of emotional stress resulting from the rapid and extensive physiological changes occurring at pubescence, this view supports Nwazuo, (2004) explained that, unlike the child, young people reason in abstract manners. Indeed young people are creative and very daring, they feel free and have the ability to exploit new things and ideas with fear. With all the submissions and observations above one can then posit that they are the future of any society, that they can be easily influenced by their environment and by their peers either negatively or positively. This influence if not handled properly can become hazardous to their health and safety thus exposing them to dangers and risk of injuries. In other words, their age, stress and pressure from peers expose them to health and safety problems thus making them to be a vulnerable group to hazards. Awake (2003) and Moronkola (1999) confirmed this by reporting that, drug and alcohol use are some of the dangerous acts that young people in Nigeria engage in while Hersh, Lane and Feijoo (1999) also added sexuality, as one of the problems of young people.

Worrisome Safety Hazards of Young People in Nigeria

Some of the safety hazards of young people are as follow:

- i. Vehicular crash
- ii. Recreational injuries
- iii. Fire and fire arms

- iv. Drug abuse
- v. Harm from human attacks
- vi. Physical trauma.
- vii. Illicit sexual practices (Berman and Snyder (2008), and AIHW 2007)

Vehicular (Motor Cycle, Bicycle and Automobile) Crashes

Many authorities attribute vehicular accidents to traits like carelessness, foolhardiness, procrastination, lack of concentration and taking a chance. Young people are observed to have most of these traits and are therefore exposed to risk of accidents. Encarta (2009) study of 1998 and Better Health (2011) showed a large number of adolescents involved in risky behaviours like drinking and driving, non use of seatbelt and helmet. Berman and Snyder (2008) pointed out that, because young people do not use protective devices like helmet, car seatbelts or because they drive under the influence of drug or alcohol they are exposed to vehicle accidents. Many authorities attribute this to the facts that the young people have high thirst for experimentation or wanting to show off. In other words, because they crave for adventure they take unnecessary risk which exposed them to vehicular crashes.

Recreational (Sports) Injuries

It is a fact that the young people are full of strength and vigour and are very keen in sporting activities for their recreation. However, these activities can also expose them to injuries. Berman and Snyder (2008) said that, it is due to the fact that adolescent's coordination skills are not fully developed. Some other authorities attribute it to lack of use of safety devices.

Firearms

Access to firearms and explosives these days is very common among young persons all over the world. Though there is no statistics to show for the rate in Nigeria but every now and then mass media relay news of young persons' involvement in

the use of firearms or engagement in the use of explosives in robbery, cultism or terrorism to drive home their threats, or relay victims of firearms attacks. Some literatures linked this action to influence of peer groups, to experimentations. Thus, possession of firearms has added to the risk factors of the young groups of the population.

Illicit Drug Use

Alpizar (1994), Nwazuoke (2004) Bamigbose (2004) Better Health (2011) and Awake (2011) stated that, young persons have engaged in experimentations. Some other authorities agreed that, the use of illicit drugs like heroine, cocaine, tobacco, alcohol, marijuana and many others are part of the experimentation they practice. Similarly, Obot (1999), Moronkola (2003) and Encarta (2009) all agreed that, young people are involved in illicit drug use. Okuoyibo and Okuoyibo (2007) also reported self prescription and exchange of drugs among young persons. All these make the adolescents vulnerable to hazards.

Harm from Human Attack/ Physical Trauma

Harms from human attacks researches have shown to be common occurrences with youths. This is because of peer group influence and activities which most often end in a fight resulting in injuries or which may leave them permanently handicapped or even dead. Apart from the above factors Berman and Snyder (2008) added cognitive awareness, as one of the factors exposing the youth to danger. However, Gore, Bloem, Patton, Ferguson, Joseph, Coffey, Sawyer and Mathers (2011) said that, the understanding of the reason for the increased prevalence of risky behaviour among the adolescents can not be really explained

Illicit Sexual Behaviour

Illicit sexual acts are some of the dangerous practices the adolescent engages in. This often results in exposure to sexually transmitted diseases, unplanned pregnancy, criminal abortion, unwanted babies and even death. Many adolescents drop out of school because of unwanted pregnancy or babies.

Encarta (2009) and Feldman, Hodgson, Corber better Health (2011) and Quinn (1986) confirmed young peoples' involvement in illicit sexual acts. Hersh, Lane and Feijoo (1998) also showed illicit sexual acts to be a common practice among the young people in sub Sahara Africa.

Purpose for Safety Education

It is a fact that, prevention does not lie mainly on the use of safety devices, but on the prevention of hazards and the use of the safety devices accurately and religiously. The need for young people to become fully grown in the power of understanding their strength and their weaknesses is very important for decision making. Jones and Meyer (2009) explained that, each adolescent shares a unique task that is to develop from a dependent to an independent person who relates to others in humane and well socialized fashion as well as live a life free from stress. Safety education will help young people reduce health risk behaviours that affect their physical and mental health. Nugent, (2005) noted that, youth come face to face with lots of health risks along the path to adulthood many of which can affect the length and quality of their lives but these effects will be reduced to minimum if exposed to health and safety education early. It will increase young people's awareness of the harm associated with risk behaviours and provide them with skills to protect themselves (Chown, Kang, Sanci, Newnham, and Bennett (2008). NSW Commission (2010) stated that, young peoples healths is often complex and requires a comprehensive, bio - psychosocial approach. But Gore et al (2011) noted, that young people have been largely neglected in global public health issues and it is now time to give them their deserved attention. Feldman, Hodgson, Corber and AIH (2007) advised that, intervening at an early stage will prevent young people from health and safety problems in their adulthood. Health and safety education programme for young people should be tailored towards their unique concerns and needs. This can only be attained through knowledge of safe living.

Ajala (2002) and Tope-Ajayi (2004) listed the following as the aim of safety education:

- i. To develop individuals on safety precaution
- ii. To equip people to know how to cope with pressure and pressure group.
- iii. To teach people the dangers in certain practices.
- iv. To develop people to know how to create safe environments.
- v. To develop individuals on how to cultivate safety habit and culture.
- vi. To assist learner use the new found way of safe living for a worthwhile purpose.

From the above points it is quite obvious that health and safety education will be a great asset to navigate the storming seas of young people in the 21st century.

Conclusion

Young people are exposed to numerous health and safety hazards. This is attributed to their quest for adventure and influence of peer group. Considering the aims and objectives of safety education it can be said that, it is the main panacea for sustainable health and safety culture among young people now and beyond the 21st century. But it has been observed by many authorities that health and safety education is rather introduced to the young people a little too late. That is, when they have formed habits that exposed them to danger or when they have compromised on their safety. In looking beyond the 21st century it is important to expose young people to a sustainable culture that will help them make sound healthful and safe decisions anytime and anywhere.

It is very important to entrench the teaching of safety issues and skills in every aspect of the Nigerian educational system where a large number of young people are found in order to promote a sustainable safety culture among young people in Nigeria. The hazards young people expose themselves to will be greatly reduced if:

- i. Health and safety education is included in the school curriculum right from the primary school level.
- ii. There is an integrated health and safety education Programmes in the curricula that will involve group participation (student , teachers and communities).
- iii. All teachers are exposed to safety education and are made to teach it from time to time.
- iv. Drama and or play can be used to teach safety education
- v. Electronic media could also be used to teach and illustrate some safety topics without ambiguity.
- vi. Health and safety lessons could be given according to the age and mental maturity of the learners.
- vii. Teaching of safety education is not left in the hands of the teachers alone and parents are also made to play their part at home.
- viii. Mass media and adverting agencies could also participate in informing young people about safety precautions.
- ix. A safe, supportive and functional clinic and clinical environment could address the unique needs of each individual in this population age group.

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