

Combating Harmful Cultural Practices Through Effective Community Education

By

Idowu, Victor Akinsanya

Department of Adult and Non – Formal Education, School of Education
Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Ogun State, Nigeria
E-mail: idowuvictor1234@gmail.com

&

Agbolahor, Adenike Adewale

Dept. of Edu Foundation & Management, School of Education
Federal College of Education, Abeokuta, Nigeria.
E-mail: agbolahoradenike@gmail.com

Abstract

Cultural practices are a major part of the community plan put in place by the community leadership for proper governance. Due to human nature and its quest for development, these practices change overtime; while some remain as beneficial as ever, some are tagged as being harmful since their demerits are adjudged to have devastating effects on people (victims); hence the call for discarding such harmful cultural practices is inevitable. To this end, the paper examined community education as a vital tool for combating harmful cultural practices in Nigeria. To achieve this, the paper discussed the concepts of harmful cultural practices and that of community education. The paper goes further to discuss some harmful cultural practices and their health implication to people and to the entire community. Finally, and most importantly, the paper discussed various strategies employed by community education in combating harmful cultural practices in our community. It was recommended that curriculum for primary and post primary schools be reformed in such a way that it accommodates community education and all important contents to advance frontier of knowledge.

Key words: *Combating, Effective Community Education, Harmful cultural practices,*

Introduction

In a layman concept, culture is regarded simply as a way of life of people. But, in a broader sense, culture encompasses the total summation of human values held in high esteem over years for life satisfaction. Oladebinu (2019) asserted that

culture is the pattern of human movement and the symbols that give importance to them. In the bid to elaborate further, Oladebinu listed arts, literature, clothing, custom, language and religion as platforms through which culture presents itself.

Culture is known to be dynamic in nature; hence, the changes observed in culture are transmitted from generation to generation through contact with a community or different communication channels. The dynamics in culture often lead to the creation of other cultural practices which may sometimes be harmful or serve as steps to accomplish the ideology of the community stakeholders perceived to be in good fate for the fulfilment of the community rights. Ekeh (2012) argued that culture is a construct used in an attempt to analyze and integrate events and ideas in a broad spectrum of areas of society.

The introduction of harmful cultural practices has proved to be detrimental to human existence over years. International Public Policy Forum (IPPF) (2019) averred that harmful cultural practices are a type of violence that has consequences for the physical and psychological health of those affected, undermines their ability to live full lives and constraints their life choices. In many communities, harmful cultural practices are perceived to be part of the norms; and despite the trauma many girls and women are subjected to, the atmosphere remains as calm as ever since everyone in such communities look elsewhere or face their businesses. However, boys and men are not totally exempted from the shackles of harmful cultural practices.

Total eradication of these cultural practices requires arrays of strategies of which community education is one. Community education in its approach employs a variety of techniques to transmit knowledge, skill and understanding bothering on issues of concern to its recipients for decision making and also for taking correct action at the appropriate time. Community education is more flexible when compared to formal education; hence it includes all approaches that are concerned with running educational programmes within local communities rather than relying on universities, colleges and schools as mediums of transmission of knowledge. Although, it employs informal approach in its delivery, yet with some elements of formal approach can also be observed in the course of its delivery.

Concept of harmful cultural practices

The continuous and dynamic nature of culture has created new ones which are either beneficial or harmful to the members of the community. Ordinarily, if all cultural practices are beneficial to humans, no one would have raised an eye brow; rather everyone would have embraced them and guarded them jealously; with the view of preserving them for the coming generations.

Harmful cultural practices are forms of violence committed primarily against people especially boys, girls and women. Abdela (2018) affirmed that harmful

cultural practices encompass a range of abuse which results in physical and psychological harm, disability and even death for significant number of women. These practices have been in existence for a long time and they are often considered as part of accepted cultural practices by the perpetrators. The greatest concern about harmful cultural practices is that they are hinged on beliefs and values held by the members of the community. This makes it somehow difficult to discard the practices even when they have adverse effects on the community members.

Harmful cultural practices are many but some are peculiar to certain regions while few are practiced by different regions with minute differences. United Nations (UN) (2006) listed harmful cultural practices to include:

- (i) Genital cutting (including female genital mutilation, cutting of girls' sexual parts and male circumcision).
- (ii) Child sexual abuse including girls married very young or being forced to marry.
- (iii) Honour killing, where men kill girls in the name of family honour; for example, for having sex outside marriage, or refusing an arranged marriage. Others include female spouse sharing, son preference, polygamy, violence against women, scarification, wife inheritance, sleeping with corpse.

Concept of community education

The term "*community education*" is known to be one of the major means of liberating community members from the shackles of ignorance, poverty and other indices that limit their joyful existence. Besides, this form of education affords community members the opportunity to be abreast of all the happenings around them since it serves as a communication channel that helps to equip them with all the necessary information needed for taking important decision within the community.

Although, many people see community education as a kind of learning experience having to do with the knowledge of the community folklore, culture, value, norms and the general history of such community; but in actual sense, community education has gone farther to employ formal education strategies which incorporate learning contents borrowed from the formal school curriculum to advance frontier of knowledge. Community education refers to learning and social development of individuals and groups within their communities that employs a broad spectrum of formal and informal methods (Beneke, 2016).

Based on the flexibility of community education, its contents and activities are developed jointly by the organizer which happens to be the community itself and the participants (community members). These two parties collaborate to arrive at a common consensus through dialogue. There, the values, interests and aspirations

of the community members are considered without jeopardizing the smooth running and the general existence of the community. Beneke (2016) further argued that community education can only succeed if the requirements of the individual in the community are addressed. As a learner centered type of education, community education is not about working for the people but with the people.

Basically, community education is used to describe the work of individuals and groups within different independent communities with differing missions and rationales. It includes sections of further education, local authority adult education provision, youth and community work, literacy and vocational education, political and civic education, charitable enterprises and sections of university adult education (Jones, 1994).

Some harmful traditional practices in Nigeria

Nigeria as a multiethnic nation, has many cultural practices. Many of these cultural practices are harmful; especially to women, girls and children. Some of these practices are highlighted and discussed below.

- (i) ***Forced marriage:*** Forced marriage is common among some tribes in Nigeria. Basically, girls are the victims of early marriage. Many parents marry off their girls to older men for their selfish interest, while the girls in question are left to wallow in hardship ranging from forced sex, rigour of pregnancy to obstructive labour. In fact, many of these girls are given out to men older than their parents for economic and political benefits. Ajayi (2019) submitted that women are often reduced to a mere pawn that can be bought or sold at will.
- (ii) ***Preference for male children:*** Many tribes in Nigeria relegate female children to the bottom. Their argument is that girls are not members of their family; rather they belong to the husband's family. They justify this by arguing that there is continuity of their lineage when they have male children. Ajayi (2019) submitted that women are facing a lot of problems relating to gender equality and uncountable cultural barriers, prejudices, retrogressive traditional practices and conspicuous discrimination which tend to undermine and restrict women from benefiting from education like the male counterpart.
- (iii) ***Female genital mutilation:*** This practice is premised on hygiene. The female genitalia is perceived to be unclean; hence agitation for its removal is imminent. The removal of the genitalia can be partial or total depending on the dictate of the culture. World Health Organization (WHO) (2007) opined that female genital mutilation encompasses all procedures involving partial or total removal of the external female genital organs whether for cultural, religious or other non-therapeutic reasons and does not include medically

prescribed surgery or that which is performed for sex change reasons. Sometimes, this practice is done to initiate girls into womanhood after they must have reached puberty stage. This practice is also regarded as female circumcision.

- (iv) **Wife inheritance:** This practice affords a relative of the dead husband the opportunity to take over the custody of his wife after his demise. The husband's relative like father, son, uncle and brother will continue to play the role of a husband to the widow while the widow in question has no option than to accept the person as her husband. Umah (2003) maintained that gender equality and its manifestation on women makes it difficult for them to rise and effect change in the role which the society has placed on them.
- (v) **Sleeping with corpse:** Sometimes, after the death of a man, the wife will be forced to sleep with the corpse of her husband. The reason behind this is that the husband's kinsmen have the assumption that the man was killed by the wife; hence they want the wife to prove her innocence. Erinsakin, Alumona and Awogoke (2019) stressed that the differences in social equality between men and women is attributed to cultural legacies, historical development, geographical location and religious norms which permeate or pre-dominate the society.
- (vi) **Tribal marks:** Giving tribal marks to children at a tender age is common in the middle belt, northern and western parts of Nigeria. On many occasions, the initial facial look of a child is transformed to a face lined with very deep marks. To these sets of people, tribal marks are forms of adornments that beautify the face and a means of identification.
- (vii) **Honour killing:** This practice involves the killing of a person by his or her kinsmen or local community members on the premise that the person has brought shame to the family or entire community. The belief is that unacceptable behavior like loss of virginity, rape, refusal to accept a forced marriage and a host of other will tarnish the village and community honour; hence the person that committed the act must be punished through death in order to restore honour and integrity of the family and that of the community at large.

Harmful cultural practices: Health implications

Essentially, harmful cultural practices violate the fundamental human rights of boy, girls and women. These practices infringe on the right to life; denying one of access to quality education and health services, depriving one of his/her integrity

and exposing its victims to all forms of humiliation and discrimination. The practice of harmful culture may as well be regarded as torture, abuse, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment because severe pains and trauma are inflicted on the victims (Sepulveda, 2003). For instance, the effect of female genital mutilation is better imagined than experienced.

Immediately after the procedure, the girl (victim) may experience shock as a result of severe pain and psychological trauma subjected to. This is often accompanied by heavy bleeding resulting from the cutting of the genital organ. It is worthy of note that the process of female genital mutilation is mostly done in an unhygienic environment; therefore, the wound may be contaminated with tetanus and other infectious disease thereafter. The effects discussed so far are also applicable to children that have undergone scarification and processes of making tribal marks.

Early marriage, forced marriage and marriage by abduction are forms of sexual violence against girls and women. The victims of these harmful practices are often maltreated, brutalized; leading to severe disability and death. The victims are unhappy; with attendant psychological stress written all over their body. At times, the victims may discontinue their schooling and lose many other opportunities meant to prepare them for standard living. Besides, the combination of all these may confine the victims to a state of hopelessness which may result to suicide.

Generally speaking, harmful cultural practices inflict both immediate and long term physical and mental pains on their victims. These practices expose boys, girls children and women on most occasions to sickness, unbearable humiliation through torture, infection, psychological trauma, depression, undue stress, fatigue, death from haemorrhage and prolong labour which often occur when girls get pregnant at a very tender age. In fairness to many Nigerian culture, good number of these cultural practices are put in place to control women sexuality and reproductive capacity; but these practices end up exposing girls and women to serious reproductive health risks which subsequently pose a serious threat to their fertility prowess and general existence.

Combating harmful cultural practices through effective delivery of community education

As discussed earlier, community education employs arrays of strategies to deliver its contents to the community members. It affords the facilitators the opportunity to explore different methods; hence its learning approach is that of learners' centered approach. The strategies employed by community education to facilitate the comprehension of its learning contents include:

- (i) Training and capacity building on harmful cultural practices to traditional leaders, religious leaders and other concerned stakeholders:

It is ideal and natural to involve community leadership in all activities carried out in the community especially the ones that bother on the development of such community. The people in the helms of affairs of any community have great influence on their subjects; and as such, their full participation in community education cannot be compromised. Undoubtedly, they can easily mobilize all community members to participate in community education regardless of its contents.

Therefore, training and capacity building on harmful cultural practices through seminars and symposia given to these category of people will give them firsthand information and knowledge that can in turn be imbibed without any hindrance or opposition by the rest of the community members. Even if the community members have not been educated on the demerits of harmful cultural practices in their domain, they would have grabbed some vital points as regards the practices, and this will go a long way to clear the atmosphere for further understanding of the knowledge working against the practice of harmful cultures.

(ii) Using traditional and participatory method

The use of this method will yield better and immediate result when it comes after the training of the community leadership. Here, community members are assembled and guided by a facilitator. Learning materials are produced based on the harmful cultural practices which happen to be their immediate concern. The facilitator delivers the contents of his subject matter logically; using the combination of other andragogy methods which include participatory method that allows learners to participate fully in the learning process. One unique feature of this method of propagating community education is that learning is in the language chosen by the community members.

(iii) Creating community awareness through film shows, drama, sports and social events

Community education which makes use of film shows, drama, sports and other relevant social events to propagate the demerits of harmful cultural practices to the community members will achieve its objectives within the possible shortest time. This is possible because people learn faster through film shows especially on the screen, on stage and on the field of play. Halladu (2005) submitted that cinemas operated by the Native Authorities (NAs), Ministry of Information and Ministry of Agriculture play a major role in educating and enlightening people in the rural areas. The use of film shows, drama, sport and social event to complement learning is quite expensive but community education encourages increased use of community resources and volunteers to augment viable and purposeful educational programmes.

(iv) Using information campaigns through media like national and local radios

Through community education, millions of people can be reached through national and local radios. The facilitators would have organized his points in sequence and in such a way that it will address all issues that bother on harmful cultural practices. Through this medium, the orientation and mindset of some community members may change, hence many of the harmful cultural practices in their community may as well be discarded. Adaku (1992) submitted that the main strength of the radio lies in the fact that ability to read and write is not required for one to take advantage of the benefit offered by this media. In the same vein, Solomon, Maud, Samuel and Nana (2001) stated that its accessibility and affordability is another advantage since the low cost of purchasing radio sets and batteries makes it affordable to all groups.

(v) Using Information Education Communication (IEC) materials and promotional materials like T shirts

Facilitators in community education make use of information education communication like flyers, leaflets, booklets, stickers, posters, brochures etc designed in a colourful manner to catch the attention of people. These printed materials help to disseminate clear messages and awareness on problems created by harmful cultural practices in the community. More importantly, the attractive pictures and catchy messages on these Information Education Communication materials are a means of promoting desired positive behavior in the community. Ajayi, Adediran and Idowu (2019) reported that print materials such as posters, billboard, pamphlets, handbills and stickers; expertly designed and produced are capable of being effectively used in educating adults in certain aspects of their lives and mobilizing them to participate and be involved in rewarding adult literacy and non-formal education programmes for improved nation building. Also promotional T shirts having messages against harmful cultural practices inscribed on them are also capable of changing the initial mindset of community members to a more enlightened one.

(vi) Formation of community based clubs and school related clubs

Through community education, communities can develop educational partnership with schools, public and private service providers. The partnership between the community and these figures affords the community the opportunity to use school facilities and other facilities owned by the public and private bodies as community centres for meeting educational, social, health and recreational needs of all ages. Besides, the partnership can further be capitalized upon to mobilize children and other community members of different age grades to form community based clubs and school related clubs with the view of acting as ambassadors working against all manners of harmful cultural practices. These clubs are

mandated to propagate all demerits of harmful cultural practices to their members who also have direct link with other members of the community.

Conclusion

Harmful cultural practices are perceived to be part of accepted values and norms of a community. They are often premised on beliefs and customs of the people. Despite their toll on health status and the general lives of people (victims), they are still very much in existence. The prevalence of these practices calls for community education which has proved to be a vital tool for combating harmful cultural practices in our community.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made:

- (i) Considering the significance of community education to community members and the entire community, it is necessary that the curriculum for primary and post primary schools be reformed in such a way that it accommodates community education and all important contents to advance frontier of knowledge.
- (ii) Through local governments, state governments should strive to work hand in hand with community leadership and the Community Development Associations to disburse needed resources for the running of community education in our various communities. This will help to bring out the aesthetic value of community education.
- (iii) All community members are enjoined to support their leaders wholeheartedly especially when issues of concern in community education are raised. Their mobilization and participation will go a long way to help in achieving the set goals and objectives.
- (iv) Education is power. Sequel to this, our girls should be given preferential treatment when it comes to the issue of gaining admission into higher institution of learning. Such preferential treatment include reduction in the number of credit pass in SSCE and WAEC requirements, accepting "PASS" in core subjects like English and Mathematics and reduction in school fee. Undoubtedly, this will automatically increase the enrolment rate of our girls in many higher institutions of learning. Simultaneously, this will also help to reduce the domineering characters exhibited by male over their female counterpart.

References

- Abdela K (2018) Harmful traditional practices: An analysis of its prevalence and associated factors among children in Ethiopia. Unpublished Bachelor Thesis.
- Adaku K. A (1992) Utilization of radio and television for adult education in Ghana. *The journal of Education in Africa*. 4, 109-128.
- Ajayi A., Adediran E. M. T and Idowu V. A (2019) The contribution of mass media in the delivery of adult literacy and non-formal education in Nigeria. *Universal Journal of Early Childhood and Primary Education Studies*. 1(1) 98-108.
- Ajayi E. S (2019) Promoting gender equality and girl child education for African development. *International Journal of Early Childhood Care, Primary, Adult and Non-Formal Education (IJECPAE)* 2(1) 54-58.
- Beneke E (2016) *Community education: How communities change through learning*. Language: EN.
- Ekeh P (2012) Culture and its development through time: The African indigeneous experience. *Journal of Minorities Studies*. 2, 92-97.
- Erinsakin M. O., Alumona M. N. & Awokoge F. O (2019) Achieving gender equity and equality through inclusive women education in Nigeria. In J. A Ademokoya, R. A. Aderinoye & T. V Gbadamosi (eds) *Africa and education: 2030 agenda*. Faculty of Education, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Gab Edu. Printers.
- Halladu A. A (2005) The role of mass media in the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in Nigeria. *Journal of Adult and Lifelong Learning* 1(1) 105-115.
- International Public Policy Forum (IPPF) (2019) Leaders task.lead eradicating fgm.africa.au.summitreport2019.<https://www.wippfar.org/blogs/politica>.
- Oladebinu A. O (2019) The influence of culture on socialization of the Nigerian child. *Universal Journal of Early Childhood and Primary Education Studies*. 1(1) 41-49.
- Sepulveda M. M (2003) *The nature of the obligation under the International Covenant of Economics, Social, and Cultural right 18*. Intersentia.
- Solomon P. Maud O. N (2001) Using folk media in HIV/AIDS prevention in rural Ghana ARCN project, Obuasi, Ghana.
- Umah P. E (2003) *Women's right in Igbo land: A Christian appraisal*. Aba: Soul Winners.
- United Nations (2006) *Study on violence against children*. Accessible at <http://www.unicef.org/violencestudy>.
- World Health Organization (2007) *Elimination of female genital mutilation in Nigeria*. Plot 6/7/6/8 Diplomatic drive, Central District Abuja, Family Health Department, Federal Ministry of Health, Phase II Federal Secretariat Abuja.