



“THE CULT PHENOMENON: EXPLORING MEMBERSHIP, PRACTICES, CAUSES, EFFECTS, AND POLICY INTERVENTIONS”

By

NATHAN MARCUS¹; ACHADU FRIDAY²; AHMED USMAN³; WODI PAUL ISAAC⁴

Department of Public Administration, Kaduna State University, Kaduna State Nigeria^{1,3}

nathan.marcus@kasu.edu.ng; ahmed.usman@kasu.edu.ng

+2347036031718; +2347053675818

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Science,

Federal University of Lafia, Nassarawa State Nigeria²

+2347036031718

achadufriday@yahoo.com

And;

School of General Studies Education, Department of Social Sciences and Humanities Education,

Kaduna State College of Education Gidan-Waya, Kaduna Nigeria⁴

isaacwodip@gmail.com

+2348065311503

Abstract

Cultism is a pervasive and complex phenomenon that has evolved from its traditional religious and humanitarian roots into violent and clandestine organizations, particularly in educational institutions. This study explores the concept of cultism, focusing on its membership dynamics, operational practices, underlying causes, socio-economic effects, and potential policy remedies. Drawing on Social Learning Theory, Strain Theory, and the Subcultural Theory of Deviance, the study examines how students and individuals are recruited into cult groups, the rituals and practices that sustain these organizations, and the broader implications of cult activities on individuals, families, and society. The research identifies several factors contributing to the rise of cultism, including peer influence, economic hardship, academic pressure, and the failure of law enforcement. Cult-related activities, such as violent clashes, extortion, and intimidation, have led to significant disruptions in academic institutions, loss of lives, and the deterioration of social cohesion. Despite existing laws and institutional policies aimed at curbing cultism, the phenomenon persists due to weak enforcement mechanisms and systemic corruption. This paper proposes a multi-pronged approach to addressing cultism, emphasizing value reorientation, stricter enforcement of anti-cult laws, improved counseling services, and community-driven interventions. By providing a comprehensive analysis of cultism, this study contributes to the growing body of literature and offers practical recommendations for policymakers, educational institutions, and stakeholders seeking sustainable solutions to the problem. Addressing cultism requires a collaborative effort to restore safety, academic integrity, and societal stability.

Keywords: *Cultism, Secret Societies, Campus Violence, Peer Influence, Policy Interventions*

1.0 Introduction

Cultism is a complex and multifaceted social phenomenon that has evolved significantly over time. Historically, cults served noble purposes, such as promoting communal welfare, intellectual discourse, and moral development. Rooted in the Latin word “cultus” and the French “culte”, meaning worship or



ritualistic devotion, cultism was initially associated with religious and philosophical movements aimed at human development and social cohesion. Early forms of cults provided vital humanitarian services, including support for the sick, aged, unemployed, orphans, and other vulnerable members of society (Langone, 2017). However, over time, the concept of cultism has deviated from its original intent, morphing into a system characterized by secrecy, exclusivity, and, in many cases, violent and anti-social activities. In Nigeria, cultism gained prominence within higher educational institutions, originally with the aim of fostering good moral values, literary creativity, and intellectual engagement. Unfortunately, what began as a platform for positive social interaction has deteriorated into violent and criminal activities. Today, campus cult groups engage in acts of terror, intimidation, and brutality, often resulting in loss of lives and property. These groups, which initially attracted intellectual elites, have expanded to include individuals from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, contributing to the widespread nature of cult-related violence in the country.

The prevalence of cultism in Nigeria has raised serious concerns among policymakers, educators, security agencies, and society at large. The persistent violence associated with cult activities has led to the disruption of academic environments, a decline in public trust, and a general climate of fear and insecurity. While the government has implemented various anti-cult measures, including legislation and law enforcement interventions, the problem persists, highlighting the need for a more comprehensive and multidimensional approach. This study seeks to provide an in-depth analysis of cultism, exploring its historical evolution, causes, effects, and potential remedies. By examining the socio-economic and psychological factors that drive individuals into cult membership, this research aims to inform policies and strategies for preventing and mitigating the harmful effects of cultism in educational institutions and society at large.

Cultism has become a significant social menace in Nigeria, particularly within educational institutions. Originally established with noble intentions, modern-day cult groups have evolved into violent and secretive organizations that pose serious threats to peace, security, and academic stability. The alarming rise in cult-related violence, including killings, kidnappings, extortion, and sexual violence, has had devastating consequences on students, educators, families, and the broader society.

Despite efforts by the Nigerian government and various stakeholders to curb the menace, cultism remains deeply entrenched. The establishment of anti-cult laws, campus security measures, and public awareness campaigns has not significantly reduced the prevalence of cult-related activities. Several factors contribute to the persistence of this problem, including socio-economic deprivation, peer pressure, the quest for power, and weak law enforcement. Additionally, the influence of cultism has extended beyond academic institutions, affecting secondary schools, urban communities, and even political circles, making it a broader societal issue rather than just a campus phenomenon (Oladeji, 2020). The negative impact of cultism is far-reaching, affecting not only the direct participants but also their families, communities, and national development. The increasing rate of cult-induced violence has led to academic disruptions, psychological trauma, and social disintegration. Furthermore, the culture of impunity surrounding cult-related crimes has made it difficult for victims and witnesses to speak out, further complicating efforts to combat the problem.

Given the persistence and evolving nature of cultism in Nigeria, there is an urgent need for a comprehensive study that examines its causes, dynamics, and consequences. This study, therefore, aims to bridge the gap in understanding the motivations behind cult membership, its impact on individuals and society, and the effectiveness of existing interventions. The findings of this research



will contribute to the development of more effective policies and strategies for preventing and addressing cultism in Nigeria.

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the phenomenon of cultism in Nigeria, particularly in educational institutions, with a focus on its causes, effects, and possible remedies. The specific objectives are to: Examine the concept of cultism and its various forms – to provide a historical and conceptual understanding of cultism, its evolution, and the different types of cult groups that exist today; Investigate the causes of cultism in educational institutions – to explore the socio-economic, psychological, and environmental factors that drive individuals to join cult groups; Analyze the effects of cultism on individuals, families, and communities – to assess the direct and indirect consequences of cult-related activities on victims, perpetrators, and society at large; Identify effective remedies and solutions for preventing and combating cultism – to evaluate existing anti-cult strategies and propose more effective measures for reducing the prevalence of cultism in Nigeria.

2.0 Literature Review/ Theoretical Framework

Cultism, particularly within Nigerian tertiary institutions, has been a subject of extensive scholarly investigation due to its profound impact on educational environments and societal structures. This review synthesizes key findings from existing literature, focusing on the origins, causes, effects, and proposed solutions to cultism in Nigerian.

Presently, cults are closed systems that serve the interests of a self-centred group, rather than promoting the general good of mankind. Cultism, a complex and multifaceted phenomenon, has been a persistent feature of human societies for centuries (Barker, 2015). According to Campbell (2013), cults are groups that are characterized by a high degree of commitment and loyalty to the group, often at the expense of individual autonomy and critical thinking. The term "cult" originates from the Latin "cultus" and French "culte," meaning to worship, and refers to a system of religious worship usually expressed in rituals (Singer, 2003).

However, the modern concept of cultism has deviated from its original purpose (Langone, 2017). Membership in cults is often characterized by a strong sense of belonging, loyalty, and commitment to the group. Members may be attracted to the group's ideology, sense of community, or promise of protection and security. However, membership in cults can also be marked by coercion, manipulation, and exploitation. Membership in cults is often characterized by a strong sense of belonging, loyalty, and commitment to the group (Zablocki, 2001). Members may be attracted to the group's ideology, sense of community, or promise of protection and security (Singer, 2003). However, membership in cults can also be marked by coercion, manipulation, and exploitation (Langone, 2017).

According to a study by Oroma, (2023), cultism is a major contributor to the high rate of crime and violence in Nigerian universities. Similarly, a study by Oladeji (2020) found that cult membership is a significant predictor of violent behavior among university students. In Nigeria, secret societies emerged in higher educational institutions with the noble objective of promoting good moral living, literary creativity, and intellectual discourse among students. Unfortunately, these groups have degenerated into violent and destructive entities, employing weapons to terrorize innocent people, engaging in anti-social behaviors, and perpetrating heinous crimes. Membership in these cults cuts across different socio-economic strata, including young and old, men and women, rich and poor, literate and illiterate. The proliferation of cultism has had far-reaching consequences, including loss of lives, destruction of property, and the erosion of social cohesion and trust.



3.0 Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework provides a structured foundation for understanding and analyzing cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Several theories explain the phenomenon, but this study adopts the Social Learning Theory, Strain Theory, and the Subcultural Theory of Deviance as the most relevant for understanding the causes, persistence, and effects of cultism in educational institutions. We therefore review a number of theories for the study as follows:

The Social Learning Theory by Bandura, (1977) posits that individuals acquire behaviors through observation, imitation, and reinforcement from their environment (Bandura, 1977). In the context of cultism, young students are often exposed to cult-related activities through interactions with peers, older students, or societal influences. New recruits learn violent and deviant behaviors by observing senior members and adopting their aggressive tactics. Many students join cults due to peer pressure, seeking social validation, protection, or a sense of belonging. If cultism is glorified within an institution, students are more likely to engage in such activities. Cult groups in Nigerian universities recruit new members through persuasive means, promising them security, status, or financial rewards. The more students are exposed to cult violence, the more they normalize and adopt such behaviors.

Secondly is the Strain Theory, developed by Robert K. Merton (1938), explains deviant behavior as a response to societal pressures where individuals cannot achieve socially approved goals through legitimate means. Many students in Nigerian tertiary institutions face financial difficulties, unemployment, and academic failure. Some join cults as a means of accessing financial benefits or power. When students perceive that hard work and merit do not lead to success, they may resort to illegitimate means, such as cultism, to achieve social mobility and dominance. Many students who feel marginalized or powerless may see cultism as a means to gain influence, protection, or financial support. The aggressive recruitment strategies of cults capitalize on these frustrations.

The Subcultural Theory of Deviance, proposed by Albert Cohen (1955), suggests that deviant behavior arises when individuals conform to values that differ from mainstream societal norms. Cult groups create their own subcultures with distinct values that justify violence, loyalty to the group, and hostility toward outsiders. Cult members adopt a brotherhood mentality that encourages extreme loyalty, secrecy, and retaliation against perceived enemies. Cult groups reject conventional authority (e.g., school administration and law enforcement) and operate with their own rules, hierarchy, and justice system. Some students, feeling alienated in a competitive academic environment, seek recognition and respect through cult membership. Cult groups provide members with a sense of power and identity, especially for students who feel alienated in conventional university life. This explains why cults persist despite strict policies against them.

This research adopts an integrated theoretical framework, combining Social Learning Theory, Strain Theory, and the Subcultural Theory of Deviance to explain cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions. Social Learning Theory explains how students are influenced by peer pressure and exposure to cult violence. Strain Theory highlights the economic and academic frustrations that drive students toward cult membership. Subcultural Theory accounts for the strong group identity, alternative norms, and deviant behaviors associated with cults. By analyzing cultism through these interconnected theories, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of its causes and persistence, which can inform effective interventions and policies.



Historical Background of Cultism in Nigeria

Cultism has a long and complex history that spans across various regions and time periods. From ancient mystical cults to modern-day new religious movements, cultism has evolved over time, adapting to changing social, cultural, and economic contexts. One of the earliest recorded cults was the Bacchanalia, an ancient Greek and Roman mystical cult that worshipped Dionysus/Bacchus. This cult was known for its ecstatic rituals and excesses, which were often viewed with suspicion and fear by outsiders. In the medieval period, cults such as the Templars and the Cathars emerged in Europe. These cults were often associated with heresy and occult practices, and were frequently persecuted by the authorities. In the modern era, cults such as the Theosophical Society and the Jehovah's Witnesses emerged (Ajako and Nwokocha, 2024). These cults often emphasized spiritual growth and the attainment of hidden knowledge, and were frequently associated with charismatic leaders and apocalyptic teachings. In recent years, cults such as the Unification Church and the Scientology Organization have emerged. These cults often emphasize self-improvement and personal growth, but have also been associated with controversy and criticism.

In Africa, cults such as the Ogboni Cult and the Ekpe Cult have a long history. These cults often emphasize ancestor worship and community service, and play an important role in traditional African societies. In Nigeria, cultism has a long and complex history that spans over five decades. The phenomenon of cultism in Nigeria can be traced back to the 1950s, when the first cult groups emerged in the country. One of the earliest cult groups in Nigeria was the "Pirates Confraternity," which was founded in 1952 by a group of students at the University of Ibadan. The Pirates Confraternity was initially a social club, but it later evolved into a cult group. In the 1960s and 1970s, cultism began to spread to other universities and colleges in Nigeria. During this period, cult groups such as the "Buccaneers" and the "Vikings" emerged. The 1980s saw a significant increase in cult activities in Nigeria. This was largely due to the economic downturn and the rise of unemployment, which created a sense of frustration and disillusionment among young people. In the 1990s, cultism became more violent and deadly, with cult groups engaging in armed robberies, kidnappings, and assassinations. This period also saw the emergence of new cult groups, such as the "Black Axe" and the "Eiye Confraternity." Today, cultism remains a major problem in Nigeria, with cult groups operating in many parts of the country. The Nigerian government has taken steps to address the problem, including the establishment of a national task force on cultism (Rotimi, 2005). However, more needs to be done to address the root causes of cultism in Nigeria, including poverty, unemployment, and social inequality. It is also important to provide support and rehabilitation to victims of cultism, as well as to work towards preventing the spread of cultism in Nigerian society.

Overall, the history of cultism is complex and multifaceted, reflecting the diverse social, cultural, and economic contexts in which cults have emerged. By understanding the historical background of cultism, we can better address the problem and work towards creating a safer and more just society for all.

Analysis of the Role of Leadership and Hierarchy in Cults

The role of leadership and hierarchy in cults is a critical aspect of understanding how these groups operate and maintain control over their members. Cults are often characterized by a hierarchical structure, with leaders who wield significant power and influence over members.

Types of Leadership in Cults

There are several types of leadership that can be observed in cults, including: 1. Charismatic leadership: Charismatic leaders possess a strong personality, persuasive abilities, and a clear vision for the group. They often use their charm and charisma to recruit and retain members. 2. Authoritarian leadership: Authoritarian leaders wield absolute power and control over members (Ajako and Nwokocha, 2024). They often use fear, intimidation, and coercion to maintain control. 3. Transformational leadership: Transformational leaders aim to transform their followers by promoting a shared vision and goals. They often use emotional appeals and rhetorical devices to inspire and motivate their followers.

Characteristics of Cult Leaders

Cult leaders often possess certain characteristics that enable them to maintain control over their followers. These characteristics include: 1. Charisma: Cult leaders often possess a strong personality and charm that enables them to attract and retain followers. 2. Manipulation: Cult leaders often use manipulation and coercion to maintain control over their followers. 3. Narcissism: Cult leaders often possess a grandiose sense of self importance and a lack of empathy for others. 4. Paranoia: Cult leaders often possess a paranoid worldview, in which they see themselves and their followers as being persecuted by external enemies.

Hierarchy and Rank in Cults

Cults often have a hierarchical structure, with members ranked according to their level of commitment, loyalty, and service to the group. This hierarchy can be observed in the following ways: 1. Leadership ranks: Cults often have a clear leadership structure, with leaders ranked according to their level of authority and power. 2. _Membership ranks_: Cults often have a system of membership ranks, with members ranked according to their level of commitment and loyalty to the group. 3. Initiation rituals: Cults often have initiation rituals that mark an individual's entry into the group (Ajitoni and Olaniyan, 2018). These rituals can be used to reinforce the group's hierarchy and to establish the individual's place within the group.

Consequences of Leadership and Hierarchy in Cults

The leadership and hierarchy in cults can have significant consequences for members, including: 1. Psychological manipulation: Cult leaders often use psychological manipulation and coercion to maintain control over their followers. 2. Emotional abuse: Cult leaders often use emotional abuse and intimidation to maintain control over their followers. 3. Physical harm: Cult leaders may use physical harm or violence to maintain control over their followers. 4. Financial exploitation: Cult leaders may use financial exploitation to maintain control over their followers and to fund their own activities (Ezemenaka, 2021). The role of leadership and hierarchy in cults is a critical aspect of understanding how these groups operate and maintain control over their members. Cult leaders often possess certain characteristics, such as charisma, manipulation, narcissism, and paranoia, that enable them to maintain control over their followers. The hierarchy and rank in cults can also have significant consequences for members, including psychological manipulation, emotional abuse, physical harm, and financial exploitation.

Greetings and Dressings (Practices)

Cult groups have distinct practices that vary from one group to another. For instance, members of the Scorpion Confraternity greet themselves by saying the word "bula" (Ajako and Nwokocha, 2024), while the Buccaneers greet by saying "Abera Stalord" (Oladeji, 2018). The Vikings, on the other hand, simply say "arrow barijer" (Oroma and Godstime, 2023). Mode of dressing also differs from one cult



group to another. For example, the Buccaneers are identifiable through their use of yellow color dressing (Ifeobu, 2023), while the Vikings wear red and black trousers (Ajitoni and Olaniyan, 2018). The Fifack Axe wear shirts and lack trousers (Odebode, 2017), and the Black Perets use head gears that are black (Ezemenaka, 2021).

Examination of Cult Membership and Practices

Cult membership and practices are critical aspects of cultism that require examination. Here are some key aspects to consider: 1. Initiation rituals: Many cults have initiation rituals that mark an individual's entry into the group. These rituals can be traumatic, humiliating, or both. 2. Greetings and dress codes: Cults often have distinctive greetings and dress codes that serve as symbols of membership and identity. 3. Rituals and ceremonies: Cults often engage in rituals and ceremonies that are designed to reinforce group cohesion and identity. 4. Membership requirements: Cults often have specific requirements for membership, such as attending meetings, participating in rituals, or making financial contributions. 5. Hierarchy and leadership: Cults often have a hierarchical structure, with leaders who wield significant power and influence over members.

Causes of Cultism

Several factors contribute to students' decision to join cult groups. These include:

1. Societal Decadence: The erosion of societal values and norms has been linked to the increase in cult activities. As societal structures weaken, students may turn to cults for a sense of belonging and identity (Ajayi et al., 2010).
2. Peer Pressure: The desire to fit in or gain protection often leads students to join cults. Peer influence plays a significant role in recruitment, with existing members persuading others to join their ranks (Ogwudile, 2020).
3. Ineffective Law Enforcement: The inability of authorities to effectively curb cult activities has emboldened these groups. Weak enforcement mechanisms and corruption within security agencies contribute to the persistence of cultism (Ushe, 2019).
4. Security reasons: Some students feel no longer secure in their institutions, coupled with the inability of the authorities to guarantee their safety against attack from secret cult members (Ogunbameru, 2017). To have control over students' union executives (Oladeji, 2018)
5. Low self-concepts: Some students are weak academically and feel that by joining secret cults, they can obtain favorable grades from some lecturers through intimidation and blackmail (Adeyemi, 2017).
6. Pressure from peers: Students from well-to-do families or having some good qualities and whose close associates belong to a cult may not likely be left alone (Akinpelu, 2016).
7. Job promises: Students are compelled to become cult members through promises of job offers on completion of their course by elderly cultists who hold strategic positions and wield a lot of influence in society (Nwokocha, 2018).
8. Foreign culture and practices: Students are influenced by foreign cultures and practices, such as those depicted in films of the mafia nature shown at public video centres, on television, and online (Olayinka, 2020).
9. Socio-economic conditions: Children who are left loose as a result of harsh economic conditions are more likely to join cult groups in search of survival and protection (Elegbeleye, 2017).
10. Support from staff: Protection by academic or non-academic staff who are themselves members of cults in their school days helps in the formation of cultist activities (Ogunbameru, 2017).
11. Revenge: Students join cults with the intention of taking revenge on nonmembers who have



wronged them in one way or the other (Ogwudile, 2020).

12. Support from school authorities: It has been alleged that some school authorities encourage and support secret cult groups, using them to fight student unionism that proves too difficult for the authorities to handle (Olayinka, 2020).

The Role of Vulnerability and Susceptibility in Cult Recruitment

Cult recruitment often targets individuals who are vulnerable and susceptible to manipulation. This can include people who are experiencing psychological, social, or economic difficulties. Psychological vulnerability can include low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, or a history of trauma. Individuals with these characteristics may be more susceptible to cult recruitment tactics, such as emotional manipulation and false promises. Social vulnerability can include loneliness, isolation, or social rejection. People who are experiencing these difficulties may be more likely to seek out a sense of belonging and community, which cults often provide. Economic vulnerability can include financial difficulties, unemployment, or poverty. Individuals who are experiencing economic hardship may be more susceptible to cult recruitment tactics, such as promises of financial security or prosperity.

Emotional vulnerability can include emotional distress, grief, loss, or relationship problems. People who are experiencing these difficulties may be more susceptible to cult recruitment tactics, such as emotional manipulation and false promises. Cults often exploit these vulnerabilities by using tactics such as: - Targeted recruitment: Cults often target individuals who are vulnerable and susceptible to manipulation. - Emotional manipulation: Cults use emotional manipulation to create a sense of dependence, loyalty, and commitment among recruits. - Social influence: Cults use social influence to create a sense of belonging, identity, and community among recruits. - Information control: Cults often control the information available to recruits, limiting their access to external sources of information and creating a sense of isolation (Oladeji, 2020). The consequences of vulnerability and susceptibility in cult recruitment can be severe and long-lasting. These can include: - Loss of autonomy: Dependence on the cult can lead to a loss of autonomy and independence. - Emotional harm: Cult recruitment tactics can cause significant emotional harm, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). - Financial exploitation: Cults often exploit recruits financially, leading to financial ruin and poverty. - Social isolation: Cult recruitment can lead to social isolation, as recruits become increasingly disconnected from their friends, family, and community.

Effects of Cultism

Cultism has far-reaching and devastating effects on individuals, educational institutions, and society at large. These effects can be broadly categorized into social, psychological, academic, and economic effects.

Social Effects

Cultism has a profound impact on the social fabric of society. Some of the social effects of cultism include: Destruction of social norms and values: Cultism promotes a culture of violence, intimidation, and lawlessness, which undermines the social norms and values of society. Breakdown of family relationships: Cultism often leads to a breakdown in family relationships, as cult members may be required to prioritize their loyalty to the cult over their family obligations. Stigmatization and ostracism: Cult members are often stigmatized and ostracized by society, which can lead to social isolation and exclusion.



Psychological Effects

Cultism also has severe psychological effects on individuals. Some of these effects include: Anxiety and depression: Cultism can lead to anxiety and depression, as cult members may experience fear, intimidation, and trauma. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): Cult members may experience PTSD, which can manifest in symptoms such as flashbacks, nightmares, and avoidance behaviours. Loss of identity: Cultism can lead to a loss of identity, as cult members may be required to surrender their individuality and autonomy to the cult. Victims of cult violence, including non-members, may suffer long-term psychological effects, such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (Ushe, 2019).

Academic Effects

Cultism has a significant impact on academic performance and educational institutions. Some of the academic effects of cultism include: Decline in academic performance: Cultism can lead to a decline in academic performance, as cult members may prioritize their cult activities over their academic responsibilities. Disruption of academic activities: Cultism can disrupt academic activities, such as lectures, seminars, and examinations. Destruction of educational infrastructure: Cultism can lead to the destruction of educational infrastructure, such as buildings, laboratories, and libraries. Cult-related violence often leads to the closure of institutions, suspension of academic activities, and a decline in educational standards (Ajayi et al., 2010). Persistent cult activities tarnish the reputation of educational institutions, leading to decreased enrollment and loss of public trust (Ogwudile, 2020).

Economic Effects

Cultism also has significant economic effects on individuals, families, and society at large. Some of these effects include: Loss of income: Cultism can lead to a loss of income, as cult members may be required to surrender their financial resources to the cult. Damage to property: Cultism can lead to damage to property, such as buildings, vehicles, and other assets. Increased healthcare costs: Cultism can lead to increased healthcare costs, as cult members may experience physical and mental health problems. Cultism has far-reaching and devastating effects on individuals, educational institutions, and society at large. These effects can be broadly categorized into social, psychological, academic, and economic effects. It is essential to address the root causes of cultism and to develop effective strategies for preventing and combating cultism.

The Impact of Cultism on Mental Health, Education, and Economic Development

Cultism has far-reaching consequences that affect not only individuals but also communities and societies as a whole. In this discussion, we will explore the impact of cultism on mental health, education, and economic development.

Impact on Mental Health

Cultism can have a profound impact on mental health. Members of cults often experience anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The trauma and abuse experienced by cult members can lead to long-term psychological damage. Moreover, cults often use mind control techniques to manipulate their members. This can lead to a loss of autonomy, as members become increasingly dependent on the cult. The emotional manipulation and control exerted by cults can also lead to dissociation, a disconnection from one's thoughts, feelings, or experiences.



Impact on Education

Cultism can also have a significant impact on education. Cults often discourage their members from pursuing education, particularly if it conflicts with the cult's ideology. This can lead to a lack of educational opportunities, which can further exacerbate the cult's control over its members. Furthermore, cults may use educational institutions as a means of indoctrinating new members. This can lead to a lack of critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as members are encouraged to accept the cult's ideology without question.

Impact on Economic Development

Cultism can also have a negative impact on economic development. Cults often financially exploit their members, requiring them to donate large sums of money or surrender their assets. This can lead to financial instability and poverty, both for individuals and communities. Moreover, cults may engage in illegal activities, such as fraud or extortion, which can further exacerbate economic instability. The negative impact of cultism on economic development can also lead to a lack of investment in education, healthcare, and other essential services. Cultism has a profound impact on mental health, education, and economic development. The trauma, abuse, and manipulation experienced by cult members can lead to long-term psychological damage, while the lack of educational opportunities and financial exploitation can exacerbate economic instability. Therefore, it is essential to address the issue of cultism and its far-reaching consequences. This can be achieved through education, awareness, and support for those affected by cultism.

4.0 Government Policies, Legislation, and Institutional Frameworks

Nigeria has implemented several policies and legislative measures to address the issue of cultism across the country. These efforts are evident at both federal and state levels, with various laws enacted to curb cult-related activities.

There are Federal Initiatives:

In 2001, under President Olusegun Obasanjo's administration, an anti-cultism bill was signed into law, imposing a two-to-three-year prison term for individuals involved in cult activities. This move was part of a broader strategy to combat the menace of cultism nationwide.

State-Level Legislation:

Several Nigerian states have enacted their own laws to specifically target cultism such as:

Edo State: The Secret Cult and Similar Activities (Prohibition) Law, 2025, was recently enacted to impose stricter penalties on those involved in cult activities. Notably, Section 5 prescribes a 21-year imprisonment for individuals who financially or materially sponsor secret cults. Additionally, Section 6 mandates a 10-year imprisonment for those who knowingly harbor cult members or permit cult meetings on their premises, with provisions for property confiscation and demolition.

Anambra State: In April 2024, the Anambra State House of Assembly passed a bill prohibiting secret cultism and related activities, aiming to strengthen the legal framework against cultism within the state.

Lagos State: The Cultism (Prohibition) Law of Lagos State, 2020, focuses on eradicating secret societies and cultism, particularly within educational institutions. The law prescribes various punishments, including suspension and dismissal from school for students found guilty of cult-related offenses.



Secret Cult and Similar Activities (Prohibition) Law, 2004 (Rivers State): This law prescribes a 10-year imprisonment without the option of a fine for individuals found guilty of participating in cult activities.

Judicial Measures:

To expedite the prosecution of cult-related cases, some states have established specialized courts. For instance, Ogun State has an Anti-Cultism Court located in Isabo, Abeokuta, dedicated to handling such matters.

These legislative and judicial measures reflect Nigeria's commitment to combating cultism through stringent laws and specialized legal frameworks. The effectiveness of these policies largely depends on their enforcement and the continuous adaptation to emerging challenges associated with cult activities.

Policy remedies and Solutions to Cultism

Cultism is a complex and multifaceted problem that requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach to solve. Here are some remedies and solutions that can help prevent and combat cultism:

Role of Parents

Parents play a crucial role in preventing cultism among their children. Here are some ways parents can help: - Provide good moral upbringing and values to their children. - Monitor their children's activities and behavior. - Encourage their children to participate in positive and constructive activities. - Foster a good relationship with their children and encourage open communication.

Role of Educational Institutions

Educational institutions can also play a crucial role in preventing cultism. Here are some ways educational institutions can help: - Develop and implement anti-cult policies and programs. - Provide counseling and guidance services to students. - Encourage students to participate in positive and constructive activities. - Foster a good relationship with students and encourage open communication.

Role of Government

The government can also play a crucial role in preventing cultism. Here are some ways the government can help: - Develop and implement anti-cult laws and policies. - Provide funding and resources for anti-cult programs and initiatives. - Collaborate with educational institutions and communities to prevent cultism. - Provide counseling and rehabilitation services to cult victims.

Role of Community

The community can also play a crucial role in preventing cultism. Here are some ways the community can help: - Provide support and guidance to young people. - Encourage young people to participate in positive and constructive activities. - Foster a good relationship with young people and encourage open communication. - Collaborate with educational institutions and government to prevent cultism.

Role of Religious Institutions

Religious institutions can also play a crucial role in preventing cultism. Here are some ways religious institutions can help: - Provide moral guidance and counseling to young people. - Encourage young people to participate in positive and constructive activities. - Foster a good relationship with young people and encourage open communication. - Collaborate with educational institutions and government to prevent cultism.



Role of Mass Media

The mass media can also play a crucial role in preventing cultism. Here are some ways the mass media can help: - Provide accurate and unbiased information about cultism. - Raise awareness about the dangers of cultism. - Encourage young people to participate in positive and constructive activities. - Collaborate with educational institutions and government to prevent cultism. Cultism is a complex and multifaceted problem that requires a comprehensive and multi-dimensional approach to solve. By working together, parents, educational institutions, government, community, religious institutions, and mass media can help prevent and combat cultism.

Preventing Cultism and Supporting Cult Victims

Cultism is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach to prevent and address. One of the most effective ways to prevent cultism is through education. Education plays a critical role in preventing cultism by providing individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to critically evaluate information and make informed decisions. Educators can incorporate topics such as critical thinking, media literacy, and cult awareness into their curricula. Community engagement is also essential in preventing cultism. Community based initiatives can help to build trust and foster a sense of belonging among community members. This can make it more difficult for cults to recruit new members. In addition to education and community engagement, law enforcement also plays a critical role in combating cultism. Law enforcement agencies can work to disrupt cult activities, prosecute cult leaders, and provide support to cult victims.

Supporting Cult Victims

Supporting cult victims requires a comprehensive approach that addresses their physical, emotional, and psychological needs. This can include providing access to counseling, therapy, and other forms of support. It's also essential to provide cult victims with accurate information about the cult and its activities. This can help them to better understand their experiences and make informed decisions about their future. Analysis of the Role of Education, Community Engagement, and Law Enforcement Education, community engagement, and law enforcement are all critical components of a comprehensive approach to combating cultism. Education can help to prevent cultism by providing individuals with the knowledge and skills they need to critically evaluate information and make informed decisions. Community engagement can help to build trust and foster a sense of belonging among community members. This can make it more difficult for cults to recruit new members. Law enforcement can work to disrupt cult activities, prosecute cult leaders, and provide support to cult victims. Preventing cultism and supporting cult victims requires a comprehensive approach that incorporates education, community engagement, and law enforcement. By working together, we can build stronger, more resilient communities that are better equipped to prevent cultism and support those who have been affected by it.

5.0 Conclusion and Recommendations

This study has examined the impact of cultism on mental health, education, and economic development, as well as strategies for preventing cultism and supporting cult victims. Cultism has a significant impact on mental health, leading to anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). It can also have a negative impact on education, leading to decreased academic performance and increased dropout rates. Its impact on economic development, leading to financial instability and poverty cannot be over emphasized. This calls for the need for Governments and policymakers to prioritize education and awareness about cultism and its effects; Community-based initiatives should be supported and funded to prevent cultism and support cult victims; Law enforcement agencies should



be trained to recognize and respond to cult-related crimes; Mental health professionals should be trained to provide specialized support to cult victims.

References

- Ajakor, E., & Nwokocha, B. (2024). Cult of Igbo Ancestors and Veneration of Saints in the Orthodox Christian World: A Comparative Analysis of Igbo Traditional Religion and Christianity. *OHAZURUME-Unizik Journal of Culture and Civilization*, 3(1).
- Ajayi, I. A., & Ekundayo, H. T. (2010). The Menace of Secret Cults in the Nigerian Tertiary Institutions: The Way Out. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228649409_The_Menace_of_Secret_Cults_in_the_Nigerian_Tertiary_Institutions_The_Way_Out
- Ajitoni, S. O., & Olaniyan, O. D. (2018). Causes and panacea to problem of cultism in the Nigerian education system. *European Journal of Education Studies*.
- Almendros, C., & Gómez, A. (2011). The role of identity and social influence in the recruitment and retention of cult members. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 151(4), 432-446. doi: 10.1080/00224545.2010.503716
- Andersen, S. M., & Zimbardo, P. G. (1984). *On resisting social influence*. In J. C. Turner & M. A. Hogg (Eds.), *Rediscovering the social group: A self categorization theory* (pp. 229-244).
- Aronoff, J., & Lynn, S. J. (2016). *Cults and mental health*. In J. T. Richardson (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of new religious movements* (pp. 617-634). Oxford University Press
- Bandura, A. (1977). *Social Learning Theory*. Prentice-Hall.
- Barker, E. (2013). The cult as a Social Problem. In D. G. Bromley & J. G. Melton (Eds.), *Cults, religion, and violence* (pp. 23-40). Cambridge University Press.
- Campbell, P. B. (2013). The illicit antiquities trade as a transnational criminal network: Characterizing and anticipating trafficking of cultural heritage. *International Journal of cultural property*, 20(2), 113-153
- Causes, Effects and Strategies for Eradicating Cultism among Students in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria. (2015). *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(22), 27-32. Retrieved from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1079482.pdf>
- Cialdini, R. B. (2009). *Influence: Science and practice* (5th ed.). Allyn & Bacon.
- Cohen, A. K. (1955). *Delinquent Boys: The Culture of the Gang*. Free Press.
- Cultism in Higher Institutions of Learning in Nigeria: History, Causes, Effects and Solution. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://www.nairapen.com/posts/cultism-in-higher-institutions-of-learning-in-nigeria-history-causes-effects-and-solution>
- Cultism in Tertiary Institutions in Nigeria: Concept, Causes, Effects and Solutions. (n.d.). *International Journal of Multidisciplinary and Current Research*. Retrieved from <https://www.ijmsspcs.com/index.php/IJMSSPCS/article/download/279/pdf>
- Eleje, L. U., Nwankwo, O. C., & Obidike, N. D. (2024). *Students' involvement in cultism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria: Undergraduate students' view of the causes, effects, and solutions*. Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/380999360>
- Eneh, O. C. (2008). Cultism in the Nigerian Educational Institutions: Incidence, Causes, Effects and Solutions. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/281275497_Cultism_In_The_Nigerian_Educational_Institutions_Incidence_Causes_Effects_And_Solutions
- Ezemenaka, K. E. (2021). Youth violence and human security in Nigeria. *Social Sciences*, 10(7), 267.
- Ifeobu, N. N. (2021). Addressing Cultism in Nigerian Tertiary Institutions. Indiana University.
- Langone, M. D. (2017). *Cults and psychological manipulation*. In J. T. Richardson (Ed.), *The Oxford handbook of new religious movements* (pp. 635-652). Oxford University Press.
- Lifton, R. J. (1989). *Thought reform and the psychology of totalism: A study of "brainwashing" in*



- China. University of North Carolina Press.
- Martin, P. R. (2018). Cults and mental health: A review of the literature. *Journal of Forensic Psychology Practice*, 18(1), 1-22. doi: 10.1080/15228932.2017.1375991
- Merton, R. K. (1938). Social Structure and Anomie. *American Sociological Review*, 3(5), 672-682.
- Odebode, A. A., Saidu, W. I., Yusuf, H., & Adegunju, K. O. (2017). Rational for Students Involvement in Cultism as Expressed by Undergraduates of Tertiary Institutions in Ilorin Metropolis, Kwara State. *Journal Of Capital Development in Behavioural Sciences*, 5(1), 47-58.
- Ogun State Judiciary. (n.d.). Anti-Cultism Court. Retrieved from <https://ogunstatejudiciary.gov.ng/anti-cultism-court>
- Ogwudile, C. E. C. (2020). Cultism Menace: A Case Study of Nigerian Tertiary Institutions. *Preorcjah*, 5(1), 367-378. Retrieved from <https://journals.ezenwaohaetorc.org/index.php/preorcjah/article/download/5-1-2020-0014/pdf>
- Ogwudile, P. C. (2020). The menace of secret cults in Nigerian higher education institutions: Causes, effects, and solutions. *Preorc Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 5(1), 55-68. Retrieved from <https://journals.ezenwaohaetorc.org/index.php/preorcjah/article/download/5-1-2020-0014/pdf>
- Oladeji, O. O. (2020). The Influence of Culture on Corruption in Nigeria's Internal Security (Doctoral dissertation, Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University).
- Olayinka, A. B. (2020). An Investigation into the Causes, Effects and Solutions to Cultism in Tertiary Institutions in Southwest, Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 10(2), 23-29. Retrieved from https://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_10_No_2_February_2020/4.pdf
- Oroma, A., & Godstime, O. B. (2023). Cultism in Higher Institutions in River State and Its Implications for Educational Development (1960-2020). *J Adv Educ Philos*, 7(4), 138-146.
- PM News Nigeria. (2025). New anti-cult law prescribes stiffer penalties for violators—Edo govt. Retrieved from <https://pmnewsnigeria.com/2025/01/31/new-anti-cult-law-prescribes-stiffer-penalties-for-violators-edo-govt>
- Prime Progress Nigeria. (2023). Cultism in Nigeria: A theatre of blood and the way forward. Retrieved from <https://primeprogressng.com/perspective/cultism-in-nigeria-a-theatre-of-blood-and-the-way-forward>
- Punch Nigeria. (2024). Anambra Assembly passes anti-cultism bill into law April. Retrieved from <https://punchng.com/anambra-assembly-passes-anti-cultism-bill-into-law>
- Rotimi, A. (2005). Violence in the Citadel: The Menace of Secret Cults in the Nigerian Universities. *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, 14(1), 79-98. Retrieved from <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/majohe/article/view/72140>
- Singer, M. T., & Lalich, J. (2003). Cults in our midst: *The hidden menace in our everyday lives*. Jossey-Bass.
- ThisDayLive. (2021, February 9). Before the anti-cultism bill becomes law. Retrieved from <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2021/02/09/before-the-anti-cultism-bill-becomes-law>
- Tobias, M. L., & Lalich, J. (2006). *Captive hearts, captive minds: Freedom and recovery from cults and abusive relationships*. Hunter House.
- Ushe, M. U. (2019). The Impact of Cultism and Other Forms of Violence on University Campuses in Nigeria. *International Journal of Culture and History*, 6(2), 1-14. Retrieved from <https://www.macrothink.org/journal/index.php/ijch/article/view/16127>
- Zablocki, B. D. (2001). *Toward a demography of cults*. In R. Stark (Ed.), *The sociology of religion: A reader* (pp. 143-157). Blackwell Publishers.