

## **EFFECTIVE PARENTING STRATEGIES FOR INSECURITY IN NORTHERN NIGERIA: COUNSELLING IMPLICATION**

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### **Abstract**

*The issue of insecurity in recent years is one of the challenges bedeviling Nigeria especially in the northern part of the country. A day hardly passes without one hearing of an attack by armed groups in Nigeria that result in loss of life, properties, businesses, means of livelihood, displacement of people from their homes and communities and disruption of children education. Despite efforts put in place by government to forestall future attacks by these insurgences, the issue of insecurity is still on the increase. More worrisome is the number of children joining these groups. Past media reports, policy reports, newspapers, and academic literature were reviewed in this paper. The paper examined parenting as a contributing factor to insecurity in Nigeria and focused on effective parenting strategies as a means of forestalling insecurity in Nigeria with particular reference to the North. Also discussed in this paper is concept of parenting and effective parenting, insecurity, parenting strategies in cubing insecurity and the counselling implications of the study. Stiffer parenting guidance and monitoring and were recommended among others.*

**Key words:** Parenting, Effective Parenting, Insecurity, Parenting strategies, Counselling

### **Introduction**

Establishing a solid foundation for children and trusting that they strive in their future endeavours is the desire of every parent. Unfortunately, because of some reasons in the north such as high level of illiteracy, high rate of poverty, wrong religion teaching, high rate of unemployment among others, most parents have failed in their

parental duties and as a result many children do not receive the right parenting needed for proper growth and development. Such children are left to fend for themselves as is the case of most almajiri and/or street children in the north, making them vulnerable of being recruited into armed groups terrorizing most communities in the north. Adnan, Arifin and Borhan (2014), asserted that parental role towards proper upbringing of children is one means to address indiscipline problems among children and if parents are aware of the obstacles impeding the moral development of their children, it will help them in formulating solutions that target the root cause of the problem. In which case, if parenting is effective, the children are more likely to stay away from any form of insecurity, but when the reverse is the case, the children are more likely to be of serious concern to the society. Thus, effective parenting is necessary in promoting peace, stability and maintaining order in the society.

In recent times, many children in the north have derailed from the path of peace and are often involved in the violence attacks perpetuated daily by armed groups. The increase in these attacks and the high rate of children involvement shows that many parents in the north have failed in performing their responsibilities in bringing up their children uprightly devoid of any form of indiscipline and violence. Parents who are supposed to imbibe in their children norms and values important to the growth and development of their children personality are often overwhelmed by the responsibilities of parenting and struggle to provide for their children. Factors such as poverty, unemployment, economic stress among others have been forwarded by researchers to stand in the way of parenting in the north. Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) revealed that most parent are faced with unprecedented levels of social and economic stress, poverty and its accompanying stressors make it difficult for them to create a decent life for themselves, much less protect their children from harm and plan for their future. On his part Utting (2007) stated that, the main influence of poverty on parenting is that it causes some parents to be more stressed, depressed or irritable, and this in turn disrupts their parenting practices and styles. Similarly, Ahmed (2005) argued that financial stress most often constrains parents' ability to devote scarce time and resources to parenting.

Since parenting demands a high degree of commitment, sacrifice, perseverance, tolerance and determination, this paper argue that effective parenting strategies are needed to address issues of insecurity in the north. Parenting strategies such as enrolling children in school, getting involve in their life, creating a home environment that encourage learning, inculcating good morals and family values, planning and deciding on the number of children to have among others were suggested in this paper. It is opined that effective application of these strategies can go a long way in reducing children involvement in insecurity which is the major issue bedeviling the north in recent times.

**Meaning and Concept of Parenting and Effective Parenting**

Over the years, parenting has been an area of interest to researchers in the field of counselling and psychology. This is because it is universally acknowledged as being an essential part of child development (Lee and Bowen, 2006). The term parenting comes from the Latin verb 'parere' which means 'to bring forth, develop, or educate' (Hoghughi, 2004). Hornby (2006), defines parenting as "the process of caring for your child or children. Sandler, Schoenfelder, Wolchik, and MacKinnon (2011), see parenting as a function which includes having a positive effective relationship with the children, providing advice and information, being aware of the youth activities, supporting behavior that promotes effective adaption and discouraging behavior that hinders positive adaptation. On their part, Okoroafor and Njoku (2012) viewed parenting as an act of entrenching social norms and values, training and education of children and youths and keeping close guidance and control over the children in the family. Sandler, Schoenfelder, Wolchik, and MacKinnon (2011) described parenting to include a broad range of function that parents engage in to promote their offspring's accomplishment of culturally and age appropriate developmental tasks and to reduce problem behaviors. Parenting in its natural form is a difficult task that may not be easily done satisfactorily by any parent. Thus, to be effective in it requires a high degree of tolerance, perseverance, dedication, commitment, sacrifice, determination and hope. Effective parenting involves facilitating children's ability to meet the demands of social contexts beyond the family, including the school environment and peer relationships, and to avoid potentially dangerous and high-risk situations (Sandler, Schoenfelder, Wolchik, and MacKinnon 2011)). It implies good and resourceful parenting in which children are given the best, or at least, adequate care, treatment, attention, nurture and proper upbringing that they require to be normal, well-functioning, well-behaved and useful members of their family and society (Okoroafor and Njoku (2012). Broadly speaking, effective parenting involves caring, and, meeting the children basic needs, enrolling them in school and getting involve in their lives, being around to support them emotionally, and ensuring that they realize their potentials.

Consequently, not all parents in the north are aware of the role expected of them to bring up their children uprightly. Ewetan and Urhie(2014) had revealed that across the states in Nigeria, especially in the north, millions of school-age children are not enrolled in school, exacerbating illiteracy levels in the country and making them vulnerable to manipulation by extremist groups. The growing number of children without adequate parental guidance has become a societal condition that has contributed to the problem of youth radicalization in Northern Nigeria. Shepler (2012) had revealed that when the terrorist groups are recruiting children, they generally target children that lack adequate parental care or supervision, making

them easy targets to be lured with the promise of quick money and a source of livelihood. Similarly, Onuoha (2014) revealed that Boko Haram draws its members mainly from disaffected youth, unemployed high school and university graduates, and destitute children. This shows that effective parenting goes beyond enrolling the children in school and giving them the best education and care without getting involve in their live. It required constant guidance, healthy supervision, monitoring and control over the children. If children are giving adequate parenting, the rate of children involvement in insecurity in the north will be drastically reduced.

### **Concept of Insecurity**

Obi (2015) postulated that, insecurity is viewed differently by different scholars and often associated with how it affects individual lives and existence. Obarisiagbon and Akintoye (2019) defined insecurity as a state of being subject to fear, threat, danger, molestation, intimidation and harassment in all aspect. Beland (2005) defined it as a state of fear or anxiety stemming from a concrete or alleged lack of protection or inadequate freedom from danger. Achumba, Ighomereho and Akpor (2013) simply see insecurity as the opposite of security which tends to affect human life and existence. For the purpose of this paper, insecurity is viewed as severe threat to parenting, peaceful co-existence, threat to human life, properties, education and future of the children, and the north.

Insecurity in recent times is one of the major challenges bedeviling Nigeria especially in the northern part of the country. A day hardly passes without one hearing of an attack by armed bandit, cattle rustlers, Boko Haram, among others, leading to loss of life, properties, businesses, means of livelihood and displacement of people from their homes/communities and disruption of children education. Some of the activities of these groups include bombing, sporadic shooting of unarmed and innocent citizens, burning of police stations, Kidnapping, abduction, armed robbery, cattle rustling among others (Ewetan and Urhie, 2014). Despite efforts put in place by government to forestall future attacks by these groups, the issue of insecurity is still on the increase. More worrisome is the number of youth joining these groups. According to United Nation Office on Drug and Crime (2017), about 8000 children have been recruited and used by Boko Haram since 2009 in Nigeria. The report also stated that, more and more children are travelling from their states of residence to areas controlled by terrorist and violent extremist groups in order to join them. Similarly, United Nation had reported that between January 2013 to March 2019, the Nigeria Armed Force detained over 3,600 children including 1,617 girls for suspected involvement with non-state armed groups. In 2017 alone over 1,900 children were detained (Human Right Watch, 2019). Factors such as high level of illiteracy, poor parenting, high rate of poverty and unemployment, free

flow of migrants from other countries into Nigeria through our ungarded borders, non-prosecution of perpetrators and sponsors of Boko Haram, degeneration of family and cultural value system, weak Judicial and security system among others have been forwarded by scholars as causes or reasons for insecurity in Nigeria (Onuoha 2014, Udoh 2015, Eme and Onyishi 2011, Onifade, Imhonopi and Urim 2013).

The issue of insecurity in the north has affected every aspect of life with no end in sight. No part of the north today can claim to be safe from attacks by armed groups. Obi (2015) argued that, the situation of insecurity in Nigeria will worsen because the government appears unprepared to face the security challenges. Yusuf (2020) on his part believed that governors in the north appear helpless with many of them literally blackmailed into negotiating with bandits. Since government had so far failed to forestall insecurity in Nigeria, effective parenting should be considered seriously since the people causing insecurity are mostly young children who have or once had parents. Unless this is done, the country will continue to suffer from insecurity which had crippled economic activities and disrupted educational activities in most states in the north.

### **Attachment Theory**

The theoretical perspective for this paper is the Attachment theory propounded by John Bowlby. The theory is based on the pattern of a long-term relationship between parents and the child. The theory asserts that, attachment begins in infancy and continues throughout the lifetime of a person (Bowlby, 1969). According to the theory a child is expected to develop a relationship with parents that will enhance the child's successful social and emotional development and in particular for learning how to effectively regulate their feelings. Bowlby believed that attachment behavior is instinctive and will be activated by any condition that seems to threaten the achievement of proximity such as separation, insecurity and fear. Lack of bond or long-term consequences of parenting deprivation may lead to delinquency, increase aggression, depression and affectionless psychopathy (an inability to show affection or concern for others).

This theory made one to understand the parent child relationship and how the bond created between them can help the child stay away from any form of insecurity. Yinusa, Oluyemi, Bashiru, Abdulateef, Emmanuel, and Adejoke (2018) believed that, when a bond is formed between parents and their children at infancy, such bond develop into a form of intimacy, resulting into trust and cordial communication between parents and the children. In which case, when a bond is not created between parents and their child and the child is not adequately monitored and guided especially at their formative stage, the child is likely to involve in anti-social behavior, constituting a security threat to a nation.

**Effective parenting strategies in curbing insecurity in northern Nigeria**

Parenting is an act that demands a high degree of commitment, sacrifice, perseverance, attitude, knowledge, tolerance and determination to be successful in it. To be successful in parenting lies on the degree to which parents are willing and able to take-up the challenges of parenthood. The following were suggested as strategies to effective parenting in forestalling insecurity in northern Nigeria:

**1. Adequate preparation and planning:** Although having children is considered to be a relatively natural part of the life course, it must not be done without adequate preparation and consideration (Okoye, 2015). Lack of adequate planning can result to parents giving birth to so many children that they may not be able to cater and care for as is the case of many parents in the north. Therefore, effective parenting must begin with deciding the numbers of children to have and when to have them. Giving birth to children for Forsberg (2009) is something parents should choose and carefully plan and should not be undertaken by chance or by other selfish desires. Isteni (2007) asserted that it is the responsibility of parents to determine and achieve the desired number, spacing, and timing of their children according to their own family life, economic status and aspirations, taking into account psychological preparedness, health status and socio-economic concerns. Planning can help parents have the desired number of children, reduce the number of children on the street and reduce the likelihood of their children being recruited by terrorist.

**2. Getting involve in the lives of children:** Being involve here means being responsible and accessible to the children, preparing them for the future by enrolling them in school, monitoring and regularly participating in their activities both at school and at home, contributing to the children healthy development, sharing economic responsibilities, meeting their needs and inculcating in them the right moral and values (Isteni, 2007 and Okoye, 2015). When all these are put in place, the children are most likely not to involve in insecurity and this can help them develop self-control and stay away from bad company. Effective parental involvement in children up bringing have shown to have significant effects on the children development. Their conscience develops based on what they learn from their parents (Adnan, Arifin and Borhan, 2014)

**3. Family Dialogue:** An important strategy that can influences youth not to join insurgency is family dialogue. Sharief (2019) described it as family democracy meeting where members meet every week to review family rules, discuss current family affairs, such as discipline matters, events that happened outside the home and school, how to solve dispute among siblings, the company the children keep, among others. Every member of the family is considered equal and is free to discuss family

matters with no consequences. Report by Marcy Corps (2016) revealed how family meeting had help some youth in the north to resist being recruited by Boko Haram. The report revealed that a girl from Gombe had reported that her family use to debate about the negative impact of Boko Haram and the important of western education and that her parents have confidence that she and her sibling cannot join the insurgency. The report also revealed that some youth who resisted recruitment by Boko Haram but had the opportunity to do so cited strong family influence, particularly of parents. This show that parents who meet and talked openly about Boko Haram with their children seemed able, in some cases, to influence their decisions of joining them

**4. Enrolling children in school:** An important and efficient parenting strategy that can help forestall insecurity in the north is enrolling every child (including the girl child) in school to acquire western education. Abok (2008) sees education as the best legacy any parents can give to their children, this is because it is a key to unlocking the social problems of any nation. Rogers (2012) and Durotoye (2015) asserted that, lack of adequate education is instrumental to the prevailing terrorism in the northern region of Nigeria and is one of the major causes of Boko Haram insurgency in the country. Similarly, Onuoha (2014) in his study revealed illiteracy as one of the major factors influencing young people involvement in insurgency in the north. Thus, the more children acquired education, the stronger the nation's security (Is'haq, Musa and Abdulhafiz, 2019). Therefore, enrolment of children in school must be a priority to parents in the north and parents must ensure that children are provided with basic needs necessary for attainment of quality education

**5. Creating a home environment that encourages learning:** This strategy can help parent discuss the importance of learning with their children. Beyond having discussions with children, parents should create a home environment that encourage learning by establishing family routines that include time for learning and by modeling skills necessary for academic achievement, such as self-discipline, hard work, and goal setting (Steinberg, Lamborn, Dornbusch and Darling, 1992). Creating a warm acceptable home environment that encourages learning can help children develop self-confidence devoid of any form of manipulation by any criminal gang.

**6. Inculcating good moral value:** According to Omede and Omede (2015), people with sufficient moral values are equipped with virtues for mutual co-existence, they are disciplined and organized, have their characters reformed, have respect for human lives, protect and defend one another, will be responsible to their families and communities among others. Where all these virtues are in display, bad governance and oppression which are among the reasons for young people involvement into armed groups will disappear.

**Counselling implication of the study**

Adeoye (2004) sees counselling as a specialty in the field of psychology whose practitioners assist people to improve their well-being, alleviate their distress, resolve crisis and increase their ability to be creative, innovative and make appropriate decisions. Given this definition, it will be in place to say that counselling can help parents to cope with various life challenges that poses as strain in the discharge of their duty as parent in order to achieve discipline in the lives of their children. The increase in the number of children involvement in insecurity to certain extent shows that most parents in the north have failed in their duties. When children are not adequately supervised or monitored by their parents especially at their formative stage, it increases their risk of involvement in anti-social behavior or recruitment into armed groups or criminal gangs. To reduce children involvement in insecurity, all hands must be on deck. As a matter of urgency counsellors must advocate for parental involvement in their children lives, this is necessary for the future of the north. Being involve here means to be responsible and accessible to the children, preparing them for the future by enrolling them in school, contributing to the children healthy development, sharing economic responsibilities, meeting their needs and inculcating in them the right moral and values (Isteni, 2007 and Okoye, 2015). When all these are put in place, the children are most likely not to involve in insecurity.

Counsellors in Nigeria through the media, dailies or community sensitization must continue to advocate for value reorientation. Okoroafor and Njoku (2012) argued that our traditional values that are part of our cultural heritage which in the past guided our thought, feelings and actions have been eroded, misplaced and suppressed by negative values. The problem with the present value system is that it is characterized by elements of materialism which has led a lot of youth into joining criminal gang to enrich themselves. This is evidence in the high involvement of youths in acts of indiscipline and violence, such as terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, cattle rustling and other vices that are perpetrated openly on daily basis in the north. These show a breakdown in the value system by way of poor parenting. When parents do not train their children with the right morals, and instill the right family values in them especially at their formative stage, the children will be of serious concern to the family and the society at large. Counsellors therefore must lead the campaign of changing the behavior and attitude of parents, children and youths towards conforming to acceptable and right values that can help forestall insecurity in the region.

The campaign must also be extended to school which also has a role to play in the life of the children. The literacy level in the north when compared to other regions in Nigeria is still below average. illiteracy is still an impediment to effective parenting and one of the reasons for insecurity in the north. To reduce this level of illiteracy and

have educated parents in the future, every child in the north today must be enrolled in school. According to Okoroafor and Njoku (2012), Parents who have acquire or gain some degree of schooling (formal education) are better equipped to offer their children good training by inculcating into them good traditional and Western values that they need to succeed in life.

The poverty level of most families in the north has been considered in this paper as one of the strains to effective parenting. Many children who are supposed to be in school are on the street because their parent cannot afford to pay for their school fees. Most parents even encourage the children to go out and beg or do menial jobs to support the family, thus making them easy prey or vulnerable of being recruited by armed groups. Since jobs are not readily available and a vast majority of youth in the north do not have the right qualification for employment, parents must find alternative way to engage their children into learning meaningful skills to solve the issue of idleness or unemployment. This can help the children stay away from the street, associating with bad companies and avoid being trapped in an unending cycle of poverty.

Provision of socio-economic support for parents and youth who are likely to be recruited into armed groups can be a step in the right direction. Counsellors should use their association (CASSON) to approach big Organizations, NGOs, government among others for sponsorship of an empowerment program that will train unemployed parents and teaming youth in the north on various skills and provide them with grants that will help them start their own business. This can provide parents with opportunity to earn money to train their children in school, thus reducing the number of children on the street.

### **Conclusion**

The security of a nation to a very large extend depends on how well parents bring up their children. Since the government at all level has continually failed in her attempt to forestall insecurity in the country, the security of Nigeria especially the north depends on effective parenting. Therefore, to reduce children involvement in any form of insecurity, parents need to sit up in the discharge of their parental duties and try to internalize some of the parenting strategies suggested in the paper. This will help parents identify and addressing the conditions that make it possible for armed groups to recruit young children, thus reducing the likelihood of children getting involve in insecurity. Effective parenting is essential in forming children with peaceful and forgiving heart, devoid of any form of violence and/or anti-social behavior.

### **Recommendations**

In line with the issues raised in this paper, the following recommendations were given:

1. To checkmate the activities of children and prevent their likelihood of being recruited by armed groups, stiffer parenting guidance and monitoring should be encouraged among parents.
2. Apart from schooling, parents should also engage their children in vocation that will empower them economically in the future. This can reduce their risk of involvement in any form of insecurity for economic gain.
3. Lack of adequate education has been considered as one of the reasons for children involvement in insecurity. Enrolling children in school and ensuring they have access to quality education should be a priority for every parent in the north.
4. To avoid having so many children on the street and their likelihood of being recruited by criminal gangs, parents should consider the number of children to have base on their economic status.
5. To reduce the likelihood of youth involvement with armed groups, the government in all the northern states should create opportunity for job creation. This can be achieved by creating an enabling environment and providing infrastructural facilities that will attract investors to invest in the north, thus providing job opportunity for the teeming unemployed youth and supplementing government efforts in providing jobs.
6. Sensitization program which is beneficial to children development should be organized and promoted on media (in the language the parents understand), to educate parents on effective parenting.
7. Parental involvement in the life of the children should be considered as a matter of urgency. This is because parents have the potential to positively influence children achievement in ways that no other person can imagine.

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