

## Indecent Dressing on Campuses of Higher Institutions of Learning in Nigeria: Implications for Counseling

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### Abstract

*This paper looked at indecent dressing, a dress pattern that is common among students of higher institutions of learning in Nigeria particularly, the female ones by examining the various forms that these dresses appear, reasons why these students dress indecently such as poor parenting, peer pressure, wrong use of the Internet, fading values as well as demonic influence among others. The negative consequences of dressing indecently were identified to include rape, prostitution, HIV/AIDS and other venereal disease infection as well as armed robbery, lying and poor school grades. Recommendations put forward included that parents be good moral exemplars to their children, give them attention and regulate the films they watch at homes, the mass media must promote good moral values, religious leaders must preach against, counsel and deliver those under demonic influence, as well as the introduction of college or university uniforms for students.*

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**Keywords:** indecent dressing, higher institution, peer pressure, HIV/AIDS

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### INTRODUCTION

Indecent appearance has come to characterize the dress pattern of many students on the campuses of higher learning in Nigeria. There is hardly any higher institution of learning in this country that is not faced with this nauseating problem. The way students on these campuses of learning particularly, the female ones, dress seductively leaves much to be desired. What the girls call skirts that they wear is just "one inch" longer than their pants. When they put on such dresses, they struggle to sit down, find difficulty in climbing machines, cross gutters as well as pick anything from the ground. Apart from the skimpy and tight fitting nature of these dresses, they are again transparent; revealing certain parts of the bodies that under normal dressing patterns ought to be hidden away from the glare of people.

In the case of boys, their pattern of dress is different. It makes them to look so dirty and very unattractive with unkempt hairs and dirty jeans having pockets of holes deliberately created around the knees and the lower part of the trousers allowed to flow on the ground because they go through their heels into their legs as socks. The waist of their trousers are lowered and fastened tightly at the middle of the two bottom lobes to reveal their boxers (pants). And when they are walking, they drag their legs and one of their hands particularly, the left one, cupping their invisible scrotum as if they will fall to the ground if not supported. Many of them because of how they dressed had at one time or the other become victims of rape, lured into prostitution, used for ritual purpose, unable to complete their education or training and also engaged in other ancillary social and

moral problems like cultism and lying to mention these few. Although, there are no universally acceptable way or ways of dressing, dresses are meant to serve some definable purposes, country or region notwithstanding. They are part of a peoples' culture and they define their tribal or ethnic identity. Apart from dresses being a means for cultural identity, they are for ornamental or aesthetic purposes, for protection of the body against harsh weather conditions as well as for covering the intimate parts of the body (Answer.com, 2011; &Articlesbase.com, 2011). These purposes are important especially as they form major aspects of a person's personality. But as important as these purposes are, they have been defeated by the generation of Nigerian youths (Articlesbase.com, 2011). Their dress patterns are most times anti-African, and are invented. They usually dress in a manner that does not show that they are responsible (nigerianfilms.com, 2009). The African culture and particularly that of Nigeria encourage modesty in appearance as do the Christian and Islamic religions where the larger population of these youths claim to be worshipping God.

This un-African dress pattern among the youths of this generation has generated lots of concern and worry among the citizenry of the country. Religious institutions as well as institutions of learning are not resting on their oars to watch this immoral act being perpetuated, but they speak against it. For instance, Olori (2003) reported that at the University of Abuja rules were made that any dress won must cover intimate parts of the body, must not expose the breast, stomach, navel and bare chest. But on this

very campus students still dress indecently. In the same vein, in Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa, where this study is focused, it seems that the introduction of a dress code was misinterpreted by the students to mean they should dress indecently. This is because what became obvious with students in this college after the introduction of this dress code was the alarming and arrant ways that they began to dress indecently. One is not however surprised because what is typical of most Nigerian administrators is always a wide gap between policy formulation and execution. Indecent dressing even though is not accepted as the normality, is seen to be gaining ascendancy. One then wonders what becomes of the society tomorrow with the caliber of students that are being trained. If rules are made for people, they suppose to be adequately informed why such rules are made. It is for this very reason that this paper attempts to counsel students about the cause-effects of dressing indecently as well as suggests solutions that could remedy the further spread of this immoral act on campuses of learning in Nigeria.

#### **Meaning and Types of Indecent Dressing**

Every culture according to Articlesbase.com (2011) has its dressing code that may vary according to cultures. Despite this variation, one thing is certain and that is that every culture has an acceptable dress code. So every dress code that deviates from the one acceptable to the community especially as it affects the set moral standard or judgment of the community is termed indecent. The terms-decency and indecency-have so much to do with the morality of the individual person and as judged by others. A dress is therefore, said to be indecent when it has provocative or stimulating influence on almost all those that happen to view it on the user. It is according to Source Magazine on Line (2011), any outfit that shows too much skin. Egwim (2010) referred to indecent dressing in a more specific term as the attitude of someone, male or female that dresses to showoff parts of the body such as the breasts, buttocks or even the underwear particularly those of the ladies that need to be covered.

This exposure is obviously a deliberate act to look sensuous, tantalizing and stimulating so as to draw the attention of the opposite sex and is more prevalent among singles (unmarried women and men). This form of dressing is provocative (Olori, 2003), improper and unacceptable (Source Magazine on Line, 2011). These dress patterns are morally offensive and reveals the high rate of moral decadence in the society of our time. In what form are these dresses? This question is answered in the next sub-title.

#### **Types of Indecent Dressing**

Kogi State College of Education, Ankpa (2010:8-9) in her student's Handbook and Academic Regulations

states "As a Teacher Training Institution, the Management decided not to condone indecent dressing on campus. Towards this end, a dress code has been recommended by the Academic Board and approved by Council for students' compliance as follows:"

#### **Female Students:**

According to this Handbook, no female student is to put on any of the following attire on the campus of the college:

1. Sleeveless tops
2. Body hugs
3. Short Knickers
4. Transparent clothes
5. Head gears e.g. Canopy head ties
6. Bogus fashion jewelries
7. Spaghetti tops
8. OFF shoulders
9. Wicket Straps
10. Mono Straps
11. Mini Skirts
12. Dress and Skirt with slit above the knees
13. Tight trousers and dresses
14. T-Shirts and jean which carry immoral messages
15. All clothes that reveal sensitive parts of the body such as the burst, chest, belly, upper arms and buttocks
16. Rosy Chicks
17. Eye Shadow
18. Excessive Lipsticks
19. Rastafarian hairstyles
20. Nail attachments

#### **Male Students:**

Male students are not to wear the under-listed on campus:

1. Shirts or any wear revealing the armpit
2. Short Knickers above the when not required
3. Head ties
4. Earrings
5. T-Shirts and jeans which carry immoral messages
6. Kaftans without trousers
7. Long and busy hairs and beards
8. Braiding
9. Permed hairs
10. Jerry curls
11. Plaited hairs
12. Dreadlocks

The lists of prohibited attires above on this campus reveal what was earlier pointed out that the concept of indecency is relativistic. There is nothing immoral with the use of head gear especially the canopy type, but everything is wrong with it if students come with it to lectures or examination halls. Jewels, long beard and long hairs may not be provocative or stimulating, but the school environment is not to promote and

patronize their usages. In addition, it is not yet seen that students in this college dress decently as a result of the introduction of dress code and nothing punitive is seen to be done to defaulters. It seems as if students dress more indecently now than when the dress code was yet to be introduced. Why have some of these students come to be so homely appearing in indecent attires? This forms the next issue for discussion.

#### **Possible Reasons Why Some Students Dress Indecently**

This behavior is of a hydra-headed origin. It is not just a behavior that developed overnight, but an accumulated behavioral pattern that could be attributed to the home (neglect and or poor parenting), the effect of globalization arising from wrong values' exportation and importation, a reflection of the high rate of moral decadence in the larger society (corruption and high rate of indiscipline among the leaders and the led), peer pressure and the desire to belong as well as fading values and demonization or demonic influence. Each of these points is discussed in details.

#### **Poor Parenting**

Every child in a community whether good or bad has a home as well as parents. The influence of home environment on the development of children is not in any way doubtful (Omede and Odiba, 2000). The home is every child's first window to the outside world. What the parents do with the child at this level in terms of training and orientation go a long way to determining what the child becomes tomorrow. Children live or die, thrive or wither, due to the decision of their parents (Gushee, 2004). It is from the parents that the child learns about values, beliefs and other forms of behavior acceptable to the community. The child is taught these through instructions, observations and practices from parents and other siblings particularly the senior ones. The implication of this is that parents must be seen to be morally exemplary. They are, according to Whitehurst (2004) the most important people in their children's lives. But how many parents model good moral character? How many of them give good attention to their children? Children are kept incommunicado as a result of the perpetual and prolonged absence of either or both parents from home for business and other engagements, social and or spiritual (Omede and Omede, 2004). As a result, the children are left to themselves, become rudderless or at best under the tutelage of nannies. Most parents have no time to check their children's wardrobes and the implication of this is that they can wear anything in the form of dress.

Apart from this issue of neglect, many parents especially mothers buy anything in the form of dresses for their children. They did not see the need to be discreet and modest in the choice of dresses

they buy. A little female child of less than three years is adorned with hair attachments, rosy chicks, and eye shadows so lavishly that she becomes an embarrassment to onlookers. This little girl is made to grow with this form of dress pattern and when she becomes of age, she finds it difficult to depart from this way of behavior or life.

To be sincere, I doubt if most of our university ladies today own and tie wrapper apart from the one they use as coverlets in the nights. Improper home upbringing is a major factor responsible for this moral problem. When right values, beliefs and attitudes are concretely laid at the childhood stage such a child is more likely to grow and develop latter in life healthily. Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it (Proverbs 22:6).

#### **The Society**

The child leaves in a community and so he/she is influenced by what goes on in the community either directly or indirectly. The arrant display of moral decadence in the forms of corruption, indiscipline, prostitution, bribery and other forms of vices in the community at the full glare of youths and children call for great concern. Not even parents, teachers, government officials and community leaders including the spiritual leaders have the moral rights to challenge, correct and discipline erring youths and children because their slates are not clean. No section of the society-from the leadership to the led can be exonerated from morality problems as noted Okigbo in Nwabuisi (2006:6) "...how else can we explain a situation which the prophet cheat his priest, the priest his congregation, the judge the accused, the teacher the students, the doctor the patient and the ruler his subjects." The youths are learning fast from what is going on in the society around them.

#### **Wrong use of the Internet**

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) has helped to revolutionize the community tremendously. It has via the use of Internet, Communication satellites, mobile phones etc, helped to bring people together distance, culture or language notwithstanding. Through the activities of home videos, satellites and other media agents, values (faulty or correct), fashions (modern, modest and immodest) are traded across cultures and nations. In as much as ICT is helpful, consequential to human, and societal developments, the rate of abuse and the un-regulatory ways they are used call for great concern. Most of the youths and children that are exposed to some of their contents that most times are negative so quickly fall vulnerable. The parents of these children and their senior siblings in Diasporas are the ones promoting indecent and immoral practices and they are relayed through videos, pornography, and music as well as advertisement and

fashion parades. In as much as ICT is good and beneficial to humanity, the associative evils need to be checked and resisted.

#### **Peer Pressure**

Peer pressure is a force that gravitate friends together and most times for evil or negative tendencies. The desire to belong and the fear of rejection have led many youths into evil or immoral acts sometimes against their will. Some of them lack the strong will to say no to evil for fear of being isolated. And apart from isolationism, peer conformity could be the result of faulty foundational home training. A child with healthy home training should be able to so quickly resolve identity crises, distil between rights and wrongs no matter how the wrongs are colored and then maintaining his/her integrity and the good name of the family. It is obvious that a mango tree will not bear orange fruits. The pressure of peers will be inconsequential when there is healthy parental upbringing and the fear of God in the life of any youth.

#### **Fading Value**

Africa has a very rich culture that she needs to be proud of and preserve for posterity. But the unfortunate situation is that most cherished African values are fast fading due to non-patronage and modernization or acculturation. Today's youths cannot tell very well what these values are. For instance, the beautiful hair braiding typical of African ladies are being traded for hair "roasting" in saloons, modern and dignifying dress patterns are giving ways to the skimpy, transparent and provocative dresses found all around today. Many of these youths that dress immodestly may not even know what is wrong with the way the dress because nothing suggests to them that is wrong. Their parents applaud them in those dresses, do not even ask how they came about those dresses and when they appear in public, they are cheered by their mates and friends and to make the matter worse, all around them, what they see on people is not reasonably different from what they wear. Their home videos, televisions and Internet providers do not differ either in the contents of what they relay as programs. How can these youths be different when the society has no good moral values as legacies to bequeath to them? It is odd for a culture to look different in the midst of other cultures.

#### **Demonization or Demonic Influence**

This is a strong factor that accounts for the stimulating and provocative ways that some youths dress on campuses today. Some of these youths particularly, the female ones, are agents of the devil on a mission to lure many men into immorality and away from God. This matter is spiritual and we may tend to oppose it as academics. But if we must be sincere, we should know that many of these youths

are in cults and occults and their operations are sometimes mystical, magical and devilish. Several of them that had been confronted with a higher spiritual power had kowtowed and confessed to their evils and the origin of such powers. It should really bother us how and why youths of this generation have become wild, rudderless and aggressively immoral. Why on earth should a lady expose her intimate parts of the body to the full glare of people? These parts of the body are supposed to be sacred with only her legitimate husband being the "title holder" and in the privacy of their bedrooms. They have the spirit of Jezebel-the spirit that lures people into immorality. The effect of this pattern of dress on people is great and this is what will form the next sub-topic.

#### **Effects of indecent dressing**

Indecent dressing could lead to the following:

- ❖ Sexual harassment
- ❖ Ritual killing
- ❖ Tendency to steal
- ❖ Lying
- ❖ HIV/AIDS explosion
- ❖ Poor performance in school work
- ❖ Sin against God and humanity

#### **Sexual Harassment**

There is the likelihood that ladies who dress indecently or provocatively could be prone to sexual harassment and or rape. These forms of dresses suggest that such ladies need attention and that they are irresponsible and so there are always irresponsible men to dialogue, lure or force them to bed for sex.

#### **HIV/AIDS**

This is another risk factor that immodestly dressed ladies could be prone to. When such ladies are forced into sex against their will they may be exposed to venereal diseases because of lack of protection. One of such killer diseases is HIV/AIDS.

#### **Campus Prostitution**

Skimpy, transparent and or body exposing dresses are known in ancient Africa to be the dress pattern of prostitutes or whores. Most ladies found in such dresses are always negotiated for sex or social intimacy because they are most times thought to be without husbands. Apart from this notion, most campus ladies that dress this way engage in prostitution and commercial sex to be able to sponsor and sustain these forms of dresses. The cumulative effect of this is unwanted pregnancies, HIV/AIDS infection and death.

#### **Ritual Killing**

This is another consequence that indecently dressed youths particularly the female ones are amenable. Many of them based on their mode of dressing had

been invited for a supposed sex only to be murdered by ritual killers.

#### **Tendency to Steal**

In attempt to look modern and be like others, many of these youths had taken to stealing and armed robbery. The boys for instance, under financial pressure from their girl friends could resort to armed robbery to square up to this demand to impress and keep their “babes”.

#### **Lying**

The home background of some of these students may not allow for prostitution, stealing or armed robbery but to keep afloat and up-to-date with what is in vogue, they may resort to lying “the lesser sin”, to obtain the money they need from their parents.

#### **Poor Performance in School Work**

Most students in this form of dresses tend to have little or no serious time for their academic work. Their concern is mostly how to look good and appear in the latest stuff. Several of them battle with carry over courses with the consequences of staying longer in the school than is normal to graduate, graduate with very weak grades and some may not even graduate at all having outlived their studentship in the college and not being able to pass some prescribed courses. Some of such get back into the society frustrated. They become confrontational and destructive. If they are not thugs, they are armed robbers, prostitutes, home or marriage breakers, drug traffickers or addicts.

#### **Sin against God and Humanity**

Sin is seen to be the transgression of the law. Every society has a code of conduct. There are moral and penal codes. A violation of any is always sanctioned. A lady that dresses to lure men into immorality whether the act is practiced or imagined in the heart is guilty against God. Armed robbery, prostitution, rape, lying and ritual killing which are associated with indecent dressing are all sins that God and humanity hate.

#### **Possible Solutions to Indecent Dressing**

The problem of indecent dressing requires an integrated approach because of its multifaceted causes. The following suggestions are discussed:

#### **Parents are to serve as role models**

Children watch their parents and copy their ways of behavior. The behavior of parents impresses on their children more greatly than what they tell them either to do or not to do. Parents are to be obligated to their children by bringing them up properly and in the fear of God. They are to teach them the fundamental things they need to learn about correct values, attitudes and beliefs cherished by the society by being exemplary. Apart from being moral exemplars,

parents should have time for their children. Children need the attention and love of their parents more than gifts they think they can buy for them as substitutes. Parents need to occasionally watch home videos with them, regulate and restrict the films they watch and also run commentaries by condemning and approving certain acts or actions of the actors and actresses. Parents are to be their children’s best friends. A child with proper parental upbringing will not so quickly succumb to pressure from peers especially if it is to do evil.

#### **Dress code**

Some colleges and universities in Nigeria have variously introduced dress codes for their students. The problem is not just in making the rules but in their enforcements. For these rules to be enforced, lecturers should be made to collaborate with the college or university management staff and their security personnel. Lecturers are to be empowered to prevent indecently dressed students from attending their lectures, refuse to attend to such students in their areas of needs. The administrative staff should disallow such students from their offices while the security staff should serve as watchdogs. They should be allowed to open a record in their office for immodestly dressed students and forward such names particularly those who are not first offenders to the disciplinary committee of the college or university for appropriate sanction that the code must have spelt out.

#### **Domesticating African or Nigerian films**

The Nigerian celebrities especially the female ones are to be cautioned by the film production regulatory bodies to be modest and dress like the Nigerians that they are. Africa and Nigeria in particular, have very rich heritage of cultures that we should be proud of and also promote. Their wrong dress patterns and the way they openly show love making in their films even though not real, do not suggest that they are Africans. They should domesticate their films by reflecting and promoting the rich culture of African dress pattern, sanctity of sex, etc.

#### **The mass media**

The mass media is one strong agent of socialization. Radio houses, televisions, newspapers and magazines should confront rather than support indecent dressing. The display of some indecently dressed young girls for adverts and attraction should be discouraged. Radios and television jingles that promote moral values and the sanctity of sex should always be aired and relayed. Programs that sample opinions of Nigerians on indecent dressing should be regularly put in place in addition to debates on the issue by youths in institutions of learning as means of effective sensitization.

### **Religious institutions**

Through regular sermons or preaching as well as counseling, Pastors and Imams should resist and insist on healthy development of their members. From counseling of some members they may discover those that are demonized or demon possessed and they can by their pastoral anointing deliver such ones and help them to be born again". It is a regenerated person that can act Godly.

### **Formation of campus brigade**

This brigade or club is to stand against indecent dressing by sensitizing and promoting good moral values particularly, the modest African dress patterns. Members of this brigade or club should be empowered by the college or university authority to advise or counsel, and insist that decent dresses are worn. Membership of this club is to be limited to students and should be made voluntary. The ceremony for its formal inauguration is however, to be performed by the college or university authority. The office of the Student Affairs is to monitor and supervise the operations of this brigade.

### **Use of uniform**

Students in primary and secondary schools use uniforms to classes and those on the campuses (boarding schools) have compound wears and game dresses. If college and university students are vehement on dressing indecently and provocatively, a viable and very result-oriented option is a legislation that will introduce the use of uniforms in public higher institutions of learning in Nigeria. This I feel is not draconian and absurd because these very students on their graduation use uniform during their National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), or may be privileged to be employed in some establishments and military formations where uniforms are used. Introduction of uniforms on our college and university campuses can be a viable panacea to this mess of indecent dressing that tends to be recalcitrant.

### **CONCLUSION**

Most Nigerian ladies in institutions of learning dress immodestly. This dress pattern has negative consequences that may still not be known to those who dress immodestly. It is in the light of this that this paper examined the causes and effects of indecent dressing and suggested solutions that could reduce the rate of spread of this immoral act.

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