

Niger Delta Youth Militancy – The Bayelsa Experience: Antecedents and Consequences and the Counselling Implications

Rachel D. Uche and Agnes Ebi Maliki*

*Department of Educational Foundations, Guidance and Counselling,
University of Calabar, Calabar, Cross-River State, Nigeria*

**Department of Educational Foundations, Guidance and Counselling
Niger Delta University, P.M.B. 071, Wilberforce Island 560001 Bayelsa State, Nigeria
E-mail: agnesmaliki@yahoo.com*

KEYWORDS Militancy. Violence. Youths. Background Variables . Oil Companies

ABSTRACT This study was designed to investigate the antecedents and consequences as well as the counseling implications of youth militancy in Bayelsa State of Niger Delta, in Nigeria. 525 male and 255 female drawn from the 39 local government areas (LGAs) participated in the study. Their age ranged from 14 – 35 with a mean of 23. Since the state is a predominantly rural one, most of the participants are rural dwellers. The study confirmed that antecedents and consequences are rooted in the fact that these youths have been underprivileged, unemployed and raised mostly by their single mothers of very low socio economic status, within a weak family structure, who have little control over the youths in their impoverished, swampy rural environments that are devoid of modern conveniences and facilities. The implication for the counselor thus recommend is that of advocacy for good governance and dialogue facilitated by the counselor, to achieve a lasting peace in the state.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary prevalence of youth violence, according to Staub (1996), is attributable to the social trends that affect the atmosphere in which youths grow up. Staub noted that rise in divorce and single parenthood, changing gender roles, drug use, unemployment, poverty, weakening values and standard and lack of structure in the home are some of the antecedents of youth violence. Bayelsa, embedded in the tributaries of the Niger Delta, an all Ijaw state, is under siege by militant youths of the area, ostensibly fighting for control or greater share of the resources derived from the area. The antecedents of such militant behaviour is seen to be rooted in the social, economic and political atmosphere in which the youths have grown up.

There is a high prevalence of poverty, disease, unemployment/underemployment, low level of education, lack of exposure and enlightenment, coupled with harsh and difficult wetland, swampy, island terrain with little or no outlet for recreation further compound the situation. Also, weak family structures rooted in polygamy, single parenthood, teenage parenthood and absentee fathers create the environment for children to grow out of control.

The flood gates of violence were further flung

open for these unemployed poverty stricken youths by unscrupulous politicians who use them as tools for electoral violence. They equip them with guns to intimidate opponents and electoral officers and eventually get themselves declared as winners (Amaize 2007).

Politicians and government functionaries living in affluence and flaunting the wealth accruing from oil resources do not help matters. The winner takes it all and the rest can wallow in deprivation syndromes aggravates the desperation.

Youths acquire expensive tastes as politicians stuff them with millions of naira for doing their dirty jobs of electoral intimidations and even political assassinations. The tastes of these youths eventually become insatiable. The oil companies practice of stay-at-home pay to disgruntled youths further increased their appetite for money (Mckenzie 2004).

The greed of local authorities – Chiefs, elders and councilors and their injudicious use of financial allocation accruing to the communities have further incensed the youths. They feel sold out by these hitherto trusted authorities.

Employment policies of oil companies also cause feeling of alienation among these youths. They feel people from outside the state, especially at the management level, are preferred over them.

*For all correspondence:
E-mail: agnesmaliki@yahoo.com*

Myth surrounding the power and authority of government is completely eroded, more so, since the youths installed most of the government functionaries through default, they have completely lost respect for the constituted authority of government whom they see as conniving with oil companies to deprive them of their God-given resources (Okonta 2000).

The consequences of the foregoing is a state where youths have gone out of control and unleashed a reign of terror on their own people, oil companies and government. The legitimate cause of the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC), for greater control of the resources of the state and environment justice have been hijacked by groups of misguided youths to satisfy their voracious appetite for money and material things. It is now the practice to break into pipelines and siphon crude oil for export which is referred to as bunkering. Pipelines are vandalized to harvest petrol for sale in the black market. Armed with the guns supplied by politicians for electoral purposes, youths have become more brazen and trigger-happy to engage in the inter and intra-communal clashes and blood letting for territorial control and sharing of booties (Amaize 2007).

Kidnapping and taking of hostages for ransom is now a common occurrence (Oyadongha 2007). Confrontation with and killing of law enforcement agencies such as policemen and soldiers is no longer new (Oyadongha 2007). They go around terrorizing and extorting money from oil companies and their workers and also, terrorizing, extorting, raping, maiming and killing of fellow members of the communities (Mckenzie 2004). Destruction of properties of politicians and government functionaries has reached a frightening proportion (Ofiebor 2007).

Statement of Problem

Bayelsa is gradually slipping into anarchy. Youths have become law to themselves and law enforcement agencies have been rendered helpless in communities in the state. War, albeit of low-intensity variety, has already broken out in the state. It is no longer an exaggeration to say that youth militancy has assumed an epidemic proportion in the Bayelsan Niger Delta. This study is therefore guided by the following hypotheses:-

- 1) Background variables such as youths level of education, parental level of education,

type of family, parental occupation, youth employment status, facilities available at home and level of parental control do not significantly predict youth militancy in the Bayelsa Niger Delta.

- 2) There is no significant difference in the militant attitude of youths to government/ local authorities, oil companies and politicians on the bases of locality, age, sex, family size, parental socio economics statues and level of parental control.

Design of Study

The research design used in this study was the descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey design is the research that is directed towards determining the nature of a situation, as it exists at the time of investigation.

Sample

Sample consists of 780 youths drawn from the 39 local government areas of the state, that is, 20 from each local government area Lists of registered youths in various youth groups were collected in the local government headquarters and table of random numbers was employed to select the 20 participants from each local government of the total number, 525 (67.3 per cent) were males while 255 (32.7 per cent) were females. Their ages ranged from 14 – 35 with a mean of 23. Their level of education ranged from primary school dropout to Bachelors degree. Apart from a few who live in the state capital, Yenagoa, the only urban centre and a few local government headquarters which are semi urban, the rest live in rural areas since the state is a predominantly rural one.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

A 22-item questionnaire was constructed for the study. These were carefully scrutinized by two test experts before they were administered on an initially random sampled 100 youths of Rivers State, Niger Delta. These were re-tested after two weeks and the test re-test reliability coefficient derived was 0.87.

Section A of the instrument which has 12 items requested for participants to supply background information such as age, sex, location, youth's level of education, head of family (mother or

father), estimated age of mother, marital status of parents, number of siblings, level of education of parents, type of family and who takes decisions for the youth (parents or the youth). Section B consists of ten statements that were constructed in the form of a summated 5-point attitude scale. Some of the statements include:-

- (1) I am impressed with the employment policies of the oil companies operating in the state.
- (2) The oil companies should improve on their stay-at-home pay to the youth.
- (3) Youths should be sympathetic with the government since it has provided basic facilities for their communities.
- (4) Youths should co operate with chiefs and councilors

The questionnaire was administered by the investigators assisted by clerical officers in each of the local government headquarters.

RESULTS

The results of the data analysis are presented below in tables 1 and 2. Table 1 shows the stepwise multiple regression analysis procedure that was applied to determine the contribution of the background variables towards the prediction of militancy of youths.

The indication from these results is that all the variables listed above contribute significantly to the prediction of youth militancy in the state. Indeed the seven variables accounted for 71 per cent of the variance in militancy. The result also suggested that parental control accounted for the highest degree of variance (25 per cent) in mili-

Table 1: Summary of Stepwise Multiple Regression analysis depicting the relative contribution of the background variables to the level of youth militancy in the Bayelsan Niger Delta

S. No.	Background variables	Multi-ple R	R2	Change in R
1	Level of education of youth	.19	.04	.04
2	Employment status of the youth	.68	.46	.16
3	Parental level of education	.45	.23	.12
4	Type of family	.58	.32	.15
5	Parental occupation	.24	.06	.04
6	Facilities available at home	.35	.14	.05
7	Parental control	.85	.72	.25

tancy. Given this level of variance, it could be concluded that all seven background variables did optimally predict youth militancy. The null hypothesis is therefore rejected.

Table 2 shows independent t-test procedure that was employed to ascertain differences in the militancy level of the bases six background variables.

The indication from the above result is that significant differences exist in youth militancy on the bases of the six background variables. Rural youths tend to be more militant than their urban counterparts; older youths appear more militant than younger ones; males tend to be more militant than the females; youths from larger families tend to be on the more militant side than those from smaller ones; those from lower socio-economic status appear to be more militant than their higher socio-economic status counterparts and youths from families with higher parental control tend to be less militant than those from families with lower parental control. Thus, the null hypothesis is rejected.

Table 2: Means, standard deviations and t-values depicting mean differences in youth militancy on the bases of background variables

Background variables	Dimensions (N)	Mean	SD	t- value
Locality	Urban	220	60.25	12.05 4.63**
	Rural	560	66.47	14.19
Age	Older	480	65.77	13.37 2.65***
	Younger	300	62.03	12.82
Sex	Male	525	64.84	11.85 2.98***
	Female	225	60.78	12.28
Family size	Large	490	68.79	11.32 4.26**
	Small	290	55.65	9.26
Parental socio-economic status	High	260	58.44	9.67 4.56**
	Low	520	67.23	11.22
Level of parental control	High	250	54.31	10.61 4.78**
	Low	530	70.03	12.44

** P< .01, critical t value = 2.326 *** P< .001, critical t value = 3.291

DISCUSSION

There is an overwhelming indication that parental control is a major index of youth militancy in the state. This may be so perhaps because these youths are predominantly from impoverished families headed by the female parent who may not be much older than the youths themselves and as such not able to provide the leadership and role model these youths require. Strasburger and Donnerstein (1999) noted that one of the factors that contribute to violence among youths in difficult circumstances is lack of a positive strong role model.

Also the harsh and constraining rural terrain with very limited or completely absent industrial activities and the near absence of basic amenities as well as recreational facilities leave little or nothing for these underprivileged and unemployed youths to do. The idle mind is the devil's workshop. They, especially the males, therefore could willingly find outlets to expend the pent up youthful energies and frustrations in mischief and outright crimes or find themselves as tools to wreck havoc. Overtime, these become favourite pastimes, especially if the financial dividends are well worth the trouble. The American Psychological Association (1993), contend that boys in poor, unstable neighborhoods' are most likely to become involved in violence.

COUNSELLING IMPLICATIONS

The indication from this study is a vicious cycle of poverty, underprivileged, low level of education, early unwed teenage pregnancies and parenthood and weak family structures that ultimately drive youths, especially the males into militancy against government authority in the Bayelsan Niger Delta.

The implication for the counselor is mainly that of advocacy. Advocacy for good governance that will provide the necessary infrastructure and the enabling environment for children and youths to receive good education and blossom socially, economically and politically into

mature, well adjusted responsible adults, useful to themselves and the society. Advocacy for education of the girl-child to improve her status in society, form solid committed relationships and firm family structures, and boost her respectability so that she can have a firm grip and control over her offspring's.

Advocacy that will commit the counselor to working with both governmental and non-governmental agencies to building the economic capacities of the rural women, empowering them financially to meet the needs of their families. Also, for the skill acquisition programmes to be extended and improved upon.

Working with oil companies to step up their scholarship schemes and show more sensitivity in their employment policies.

Financially and most urgently, advocacy for a truce in this on going war of sorts so that dialogue can take place. Dialogue facilitated by the counselor, for complete cessation of hostilities so that lasting peace can reign in the state.

REFERENCES

- Amaize E 2007. Rumbling in Militants Camp. *Sunday Vanguard*, May 27, 2007, 23. (1068956): 10 – 11.
- American Psychological Association 1993. *Violence and Youth: Psychology's Response*. Washington D.C: APA.
- Mckenzie G 2004. Oil disputes fuel Nigerian violence. *The Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, 45(23): 65-74.
- Ofiebor O 2007. Who want Jonathan dead? *The News*, 28 (17): 7.
- Okonta I 2000. *The Lingering Crisis in Nigeria's Niger Delta and Suggestions for a Peaceful Resolution*. London: Centre for Democracy and Development (CDD).
- Oyadongha S 2007. Military beef up security around oil installations. *Sunday Vanguard*, May 6, 2007, 23 (1068953), 7.
- Oyadongha S 2007. Gunboats Deployed in Yenagoa, *Sunday Vanguard*, May 20, 2007 23 (1068955), 5 – 7.
- Staub E 1996. Cultural-societal Roots of Violence. The Examples of Genocidal Violence and of Contemporary Youth Violence in the U.S. *American Psychologist*, 51: 117-132.
- Strasburger V Donnerstein E 1999. Children, Adolescents and the Media; Issues and Solutions. *Pediatrics*, 103: 129-139.