Parental Conflict and its Effects on the Spiritual Development of Youth

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Introduction

Human beings are a final reflection of myriad things: culture, religion, background, and several other issues surrounding human development. Among the several issues that contribute to human development, parental role is one of the most important. There are various ways in which the life of parents affects their wards particularly, emotionally, educationally, culturally, psychologically, and economically and many more. The family plays a large role in the outcome of the teenager's development all-round. Parental conflict is inevitable and can occur in different forms. This writer assumes that parental conflict has effects on a child's overall development and particularly on the teenager's spiritual development. Therefore, the analysis of the consequences of parental conflicts on the child is of fundamental importance. According to Salma et al (2017, 1394) the effects of parental conflict behaviors on the child's condition have been widely researched since the 1980s.

However, the focus of this paper is predominantly on the negative effects of this concept on teenagers' spiritual development. In this paper, it is imperative for the reader to note that the concepts youths, teenagers and adolescents are the same. The writer explain that these terms represent a distinctive and exhilarating period for growth and development in a young individual's life, a time during which they experience many developmental indicators that mark their transition from childhood into adulthood. Consequently, this writer will interchange these terms in this paper to connote the same

meaning. This paper will discuss the concept of parental conflict, give an understanding of whom youths are, explain what spiritual development is and discuss the effects of parental conflict on teenagers' spiritual development.

Concept of Parental Conflict

Conflict is a common phenomenon in human relationships. Regardless of whether people are deliberate or not, as long as human beings have the opportunity to relate with one another there is the possibility of conflict. Though the concept has myriad definitions depending on the perspective with which it is viewed, it would be sufficient to infer that it is centrally about a product of differing interests. According to Diez et al (2006, 565) conflict refers to strife or competition between people with opposing demands, opinions, feelings, preferences, or aims. Defined in its most ubiquitous sense, conflict signifies the incompatibility of subject positions. The emphasis of this definition is that incompatibility at the center of conflict, and originally omits the precise nature of the initial incompatibilities

Based on the above definition, conflict is not necessarily always identified by violence, though, conflict might escalate and lead to catastrophic results. For instance, physical violence may result from conflict as conflict intensifies. Conflict is an escalation of a disagreement, which is its common prerequisite and is characterized by the existence of conflict behavior, in which the beings are actively trying to damage one another. Rahim (2010, 15) insists that certain attitudes are responsible for the manifestation of conflicts, starting with disagreement, verbal abuse, and interference.

In other social units, conflicts are a normal occurrence in family life; and it is the assumption of this paper that certain occurrences in the family form a significant foundation for the spiritual development of children regardless of their age. It is therefore imperative to consider what parental conflict means. Goeke-Morey et al (2007; 7) opine that parental conflict is

considered a disagreement that leads to a deeper or shallow relationship among parents. This interaction can vary from very positive to very negative. An extensive analysis of previous research in the field has drawn a distinction between constructive and destructive conflict styles, which shows that parents can adopt different conflict behavior patterns.

Grych and Fincham affirms that parental conflict applies to a wide variety of rift that takes place between married couples. These rifts could be caused by many factors and could either be violent or non-violent conflict. The concept has diverse appellations like inter-parental dispute, spousal friction, and Husband/wife conflict (2011, 1). The term parental conflicts depict vividly the ideology this paper attempts to portray.

According to the World Health Organization, parental conflict refers to behavior within a couple's relationship that results in physical, emotional, or sexual harm to those in the relationship. These conflicts assume varying dimensions and they may occur because of the propinquity of intense negative emotions, misperceptions, poor communication or miscommunication, or repeated negative behaviors. Individual parents may hold contrasting opinions, ideas, values, and priorities which cause disputes among them and these conflicts have differing effects on children (WHO, 2007). Conflict management among parents has a significant effect on their children's psycho-emotional wellbeing and also their spiritual fitness (Stith et al., 2000, 643). When parents are in conflict, children are greatly affected. Such conflict has a profound effect on their children, causing many problems, such as behavior and academic difficulties. Parental attitudes have a strong impact not only on family relationships but also on the attitudes and behavior of children.

Seltzer, (1994, 56) posits that individuals raised amidst constant negative parental conflict are characterized by anxieties, tension, and regression, feelings of confusion and embarrassment, feelings of responsibility and self-blame, withdrawal or clinging behavior at transitions, long-term

emotional and behavior at transitions, long-term emotional and behavioral wounds, feelings of disillusionment, fear, insecurity, or vulnerability, temper tantrums schools problems or self–destructive behaviors. Cummings and Davies, (1994, 74) also observed that increasing children's emotional responses, they propose that exposing children to inter-parental discord can make children more emotionally reactive to later stressors. Cummings (1995, 426) explains that the stress that is resultant of the exposure to anger is possibly the most striking consequence of parental conflict on children. Joan and Robert (2003, 16) observed that children from homes with frequent parental conflict are likely to be hyper-vigilant and distrusting of others, and they do not expect the world to be a co-operative or protective place. These children turn inwards, unto themselves.

Understanding Youth

The term youth is used to represent individuals between ages 13 to 24 Sickels (2004, 28). The ideology of using the term youth as an age indicator had been used before the 1920's. However, since the 1940's the term developed beyond an age indicator to more of a mentality, it became more of a closely knitted groups having similar characteristics and developing icons and celebrities that fit their age group and mentality. Similarly, Cordier (2016:32) explains that up to the 1960's the term youth was used by sociologists and media professionals to illustrate the gaps that existed among different generations. Cordier is convinced that the concept is a creation of commercialists who intended to differentiate between different levels of customers.

This creation, according to Cordier, gave rise to the generation of carefree, valueless, pursuers of pleasure. This ideology is prevalent today, several still consider youths as a generation of individuals that are concerned with pleasure and always opposed to tradition. Humphrey (2002, 1) laments the uncomplimentary nature of definitions ascribed to the concept by those who belong to older generations. While differentiating

the term teenager from adolescence due to the difference in the age groups involved in the two concepts, Humphrey explains that teenagers are individuals between the ages of 13 to 19. Danesi (2003, 8) also admits that the concept youth was made popular in the 1940's, the concept was more than a new way of referring to youth, according to Danesi and similar to the thoughts of Humphrey the term was a commercially created term to advocate for a more commercially profitable set of individuals that are more pop culture conscious.

Conventionally, youth age is considered a critical developmental period between the inception of puberty and the establishment of social independence. Steinberg (2014,6) affirms that the teenage years are a part of the wider age range depiction of adolescence which can be descriptive of the middle-aged adolescence between early adolescent and young adult.

Erford and Mayorga (2015, 1) explain that it was conventional to view youth age as a stage of life characterized by inevitable personal crisis; the modern view however recognizes this period as a normal, healthy developmental stage. According to Moronkola and Aremu (2004, 36-37), the youth period is a time when youths experience transition from one stage to the other. This stage affects every facet of their lives and can incidentally be experienced in a negative way by some of them especially when they are not prepared for it. Also, in supporting this view Erford and Mayorga affirms that youths do not handle this development in the exact same way, but there are a number of normal developmental markers that individual youths pass through, including changes in physical, cognitive, emotional, social, language, career, and spiritual domains. It is imperative to properly understand the kind of changes that occur during each of these periods so that adults can be enabled to better understand, connect, and communicate with teenagers. For the purpose of this paper, the writer will define youth as citizens of Nigeria whose age falls within 12-40 years. This category of people are ambitious, enthusiastic, energetic and promising.

Characteristics of Youth

Five dimensions of teenager's characteristics is recommended by Lateju (2015, 7) which are the physical characteristics, social characteristics, spiritual characteristics, emotional characteristics, and intellectual characteristics. According to Lateju, teenagers' physical characteristics are diverse in relation to different sexes. Generally, there would be an increase in the size of genitals, appearance of pubic hair among both sexes. Physical characteristics peculiar to male teenagers would include a deepened voice, chest enlargement, and sperm development while female teenagers would develop breasts, hip and pelvic enlargement, menstruation and regular ovulation. Lateju (2015, 9) further discusses the socio-emotional characteristics of teenagers explaining that teenagers have the tendency to develop personal identity, action centered reactions more than word reactions to events, rejection of authority and discipline, mood swings, and sometimes taking uncalculated risks. Concerning the intellectual characteristics of teenagers, Lateju (2015, 9) posits that teenagers are usually curious about knowledge and self-discovery, this stage is when discovery of individual talents also occurs, teenagers become more organized in handling responsibility, they develop ability to memorize, and absent mindedness because teenagers can be easily distracted. Erford and Mayorga (2015, 2) recommend the following characteristics as specific for teenagers:

Early Adolescence (12–14 years)

During this period both male and female teenagers experience the commencement of puberty which is caused by changes of hormones in the body, females usually begin their puberty earlier than their male counterpart. Changes common to both male and female teenagers in the course of puberty include rapid growth spurts as a result of improved height and weight, development of organs necessary for reproduction, and other observable physical changes. For females, puberty means body fat increases, breast enlargement, growth of pubic and

underarm hair, start of their first menstrual period, widened hips, and possible appearance of acne. Male teenagers have physical changes that include growth of facial, pubic, and body hair, enlargement of testes and penis, increased muscle size and bone structure, cracking voice and deepening of vocal cords, and possible appearance of acne.

Armstrong (2016, 4) also suggests that the brain of the teenager also experiences certain changes which also results in the ability for more intellectual thinking and sophisticated problem-solving. Other changes include changes in the language domain which allow for enhanced aptitudes in the way that teenagers use speech to express themselves and understand cynicism and satire, which means that teenagers will naturally become better at making arguments and inquiries on what they are informed by parents, teachers, and peers.

Changes also occur in the bodies of teenagers during this stage which is likely to cause teenagers to feel awkward and self-conscious, causing teens to balance their high self-expectations with low self-esteem. During this time teens experience increased moodiness as they search for their identity, which is mostly driven by peer pressure and the strong need for conformity and acceptance. Individuals with similar behaviors, interests, and attitudes tend to form peer groups, but not necessarily close friendships.

 Increased independence from parents becomes important as adolescents will spend less time with their family and more time with peers. This can lead to conflict because adolescents begin to show less overt affection toward their parents, and, frequently, an increase in rudeness. There is the possibility of teenagers experimenting with alcohol, tobacco, and hard drug use and developing interest in the opposite sex.

Middle Adolescence (15–17 years)

In this stage of teenage development Basacki (2016, 196) explains that female teens have naturally completed a full physical development circle while their male counterparts are characteristically reaching their developmental peak and are usually close to finishing their physical growth. As muscle mass increases male teenagers also develop body satisfaction. Conversely, some female teenagers develop dissatisfaction with their bodies and weight because there is usually an increase in body fat. Some female teens may even develop eating disorders such as *anorexia nervosa* in order to feel better about their bodies. Generally, at this stage teens also become better at daily planning and decision making. They develop the ability to understand the magnitudes of their behavior and planning for their future. However, these skills are often used inconsistently by teens, who often respond at the spur of the moment without thinking their actions through and there is the possibility of sexual activity during this stage of teenage development. There is also the possibility becoming aware of their personal sexual orientation develops for example many teens self-identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual are developed by 16 years of age. At this stage teenagers begin questioning who they are and what they should do with their lives. Their attempts to answer these questions teenagers explore careers, religion, philosophical and political issues, and social causes. Usually, teenagers consider their parents as often interfering with their independence and teens will question and challenge their parents' rules, even resist their parents' belief systems or cultural orientation. Though older teenagers develop a tougher sense of self and rely less on the opinions of others, allowing older teens to better resist peer pressure than younger teens.

Late Adolescence (18–19 years)

This stage in the teenager's development is referred to as the leading developmental landmark. Generally, it is during this stage that the transition from secondary education into postsecondary education, work, or military occurs. At this stage some teenagers still explore their identity in regard to education, work, family role, and personal relationships. At this stage peer pressure does not have as great an impact on decisions and values because improved cognitive abilities enable teenagers to reflect and respect different points of view. This age group of teenagers distinctively established their sexual identity and is beginning to develop serious intimate relationships. At this stage most teenagers are sexually experienced and engage in casual sex with friends or acquaintances. This idea may not be true in all cases; it is proposed that teenagers at this stage have higher rates of alcohol and drug use than at any other age with the major issue being the indulgence of casual drinking. Conflicts with parents tend to decrease as teenagers change their relationships with parents in a way that balances independence with connection.

Spiritual Development: A Discuss

The term spiritual development is not strange to human parlance; this is because from time immemorial man has been known as a religious being. The term is a common concept specifically among the religious populace in human society. There are diverse definitions of these term. In an attempt to define the concept, one may define the words that make up the concept that is "spiritual" and "development". The term development generally refers to activities that constitute a new stage in a changing situation or the process that constitutes change itself. It could also mean improvement, either in the general situation of a system, or in some specific constituent element of the system. The process of development may happen due to certain deliberate actions carried out by single agents or by some authority pre-ordered to achieve

improvement, to favorable circumstances in both Bellu, (2011, 2). Spirituality according to Sheldrake (2012, 1) is an evasive term, due to broad nature. The concept can be considered as lifestyles and practices that embody how the human spirit reaches its highest potentiality. Similarly, Hyson (2013, 28) explains that spirituality is the intrinsic nature of human beings to desire to be close to something higher than themselves. This means that spirituality is a natural thing with all human beings, there exists an innate desire for God in man and the developing and satisfying this innate desire is what is known as spirituality.

Since understanding the terms development and Spirituality, the concept of spiritual development according to Roehlkepartain, Benson, and Wagener (2006, 9) could be explained in a humanistic understanding that spiritual development is a dimension of human experience that is as significant as cognitive, emotional, and social developments. These writers opine that the spiritual development an individual serves as a link for other dimensions of human development. The centrality of spiritual development to other dimensions of human development, it is important to understand that it cannot be reduced to mere human need and desire. They further explain that spiritual development is a complex multidimensional process that should involve sophisticated theories, measurement and analysis across divergent populations, cultures and traditions. The concept introduces questions on the nature of spiritual change, transformation, maturation and also life phases and stages.

Collaboratively, Richard and Jan Potter (2006, 6) insist that spiritual development is a multifaceted process, they posit that spiritual development addresses the revitalization of an individual's spiritual potentials which involves cultivating the head and heart and other facets of human life. It requires accessing novel knowledge, the acquisition of new skills, and taking leaps of faith within new frontiers of spiritual experience. Similarly, Peter, Benson, Roehlkepartain, and Rude (2003, 7)

opine that spiritual development can be perceived as the practice of developing the human fundamental capacity for self-transcendence, in which the human self is entrenched in somewhat superior to the self, including the sacred. It is the developmental apparatus that drives the pursuit for connectedness, meaning, purpose, and contribution. It is shaped both within and outside of religious traditions, beliefs, and practices.

Spiritual development is therefore concerned with how an individual deliberately takes steps towards the advancement of the soul. There is an intentional improvement in building the God consciousness in the life of a man in spiritual development. Based on the foregoing, spiritual development is not a once and for all activity, it takes deliberate efforts over a period of time and within different aspects of human life that relate to the spiritual well-being. In agreeing with the above, Damarest (2009, 21) explains that spiritual development is growth of an individual's experience with God that begins with salvation and continues all through the individual's spiritual journey. Astin, Astin, and Lindholm (2011, 2-3) also explain that spiritual development is primarily concerned with how individuals build their values and how those values change over the years. It is an interest in how a meaningful philosophy of life is built over one's spiritual journey.

Boyatzis (2012, 151) explains that despite the increase of spiritual development as an area of focus in the domain of development, it is still difficult to come to a consensus on the definition of the concept. Despite this lack of scholarly consensus however, Boyatzis explains that the concept advances towards the mainstream of the religious development domain as never before. Smith (2001, 5) in explaining spiritual development states that the concept can be defined by examining four different windows of human spirituality which are: spiritual capacity, spiritual experience, spiritual understanding, and spiritual response as parameters within which spiritual development can be defined. The first window

represents the human being's capacity to grow spiritually which is in the nature of all human beings regardless of their religion. The second are the ways in which individuals experience the spiritual dimension. The third window is the specific issues human beings need to understand in order to grow spiritually, and the last window represents the standard for the connection between the spiritual development and way that individuals live.

The understanding presented by Smith is that all human beings regardless of their religions have the capacity to grow spiritually; this is because all human beings can experience the supernatural dimension though in different ways. However, Smith assumes that all human beings must understand certain specific issues which should become evident in their lives as signs of their spiritual growth, only then can an individual be said to be developing spiritually. This invariably means that spiritual development is evidenced by changes that occur in the life of an individual based on the spiritual experiences that individual has passed through. In other words, spiritual development has not occurred if a change in actions in relation to current spiritual understanding has not taken place.

The Life Way Christian Resources created a spiritual development assessment template that includes six specific indices that can be used to evaluate spiritual development. These indices are: abiding in Christ, Living in the word, praying in faith, fellowshipping with other believers, witnessing to the world, and ministering to others.[1] This spiritual development paradigm focuses on the individual's personal dedication in relation the observance of personal devotion, personal prayer, and personal bible study, fellowship with others, and service to others. Higgins-Norman and Scott (2009, 10) also agree with the above paradigm specifying that spiritual development in children and teenagers cannot be measured as it is in adults.

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[1] (https://alsbom.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/05-spiritual-growth-assessment.

These editors explain that a model that will accurately measure spiritual development among teenagers would focus on issues relating to the practical aspects of living, they assert that spiritual development among teens should consider the teens relationship with God, with self, and with other believers. These issues raised by M. De Souza, L. J. Francis, J. O'Higgins-Norman, and D. G. Scott is in tandem with the specific elements identified by Life-Way Christian Resources.

Effects of Parental Conflict on Teenagers' Spiritual Development

This paper has attempted to show how parental conflict and teenagers' spiritual development are linked; this part of the paper highlights the specific negative effects that parental conflict has on the spiritual development of teens. Three major negative effects are proposed by this writer:

First, parental conflict has the possibility of disrupting the intergenerational transmission of religious values and practices. Teenagers who are raised in circumstances where there is constant parental conflict may find it difficult to adopt their parents' religious practices and convictions (Myers 1996, 859). This is because Teenagers may experience more stress, dispute, and ambiguity, as parents lack firm agreement about how to instill spiritual or moral values. In the context of this lack of clear spiritual guidance, teenagers from conflict prone families have the tendency to reject their parents' religious lifestyles and instructions, as compared with their counterparts from families where parental conflicts are more properly managed (Marquardt 2005, 17). Loose spiritual guidance and poor spiritual role modeling is characteristic of homes with frequent parental conflict on their own conscience and moral judgments, rather than on family or religious authority figures (Marquardt 2005, 23). To be sure, these individuals might abandon both religion and spirituality. However, as they enter adulthood, it is also possible that they may find individualistic

spirituality more comfortable and appealing than institutional forms of religion.

Second, studies reveal that teenagers from conflict prone families have a more permissive child rearing environment which may foster less conventional religious practices in adulthood (Roof 1999, 94). Permissive parents tend to show greater tolerance when their children begin to explore and adopt alternative religious practices. In the aftermath of conflict, couples confront a wide variety of complex challenges and issues such as procedural, material, and emotional, that may reduce regular supervision of children by parents; this makes it possible to allow teenagers greater latitude to explore alternative spiritual beliefs and practices, and to grow away from the traditions of their upbringing.

Third, parental conflicts have the tendency to disrupt institutional religious practices, such as regular religious attendance in Church, family devotions, and personal prayers. For example, Lawton and Bures (2001, 105) find that children who experience parental violence leading to divorce in childhood and who are raised Catholic are more likely to switch denominations, or to abandon organized religion altogether, during adulthood than their counterparts from intact families. Further, as adults, offspring from divorced families are much less likely to attend religious services, although they display similar levels of spiritual engagement and practice (e.g., prayer, feelings of closeness to God).

These three effects may snowball into several crises in the life of the teenager which may hinder spiritual development. Issues of personal prayer, bible study, devotion to a particular church group, or demonstration of personal faith in God may be amped by the disruption of institutional religious practices, permissive parenting, and lack of transmission of the parental faith.

Conclusion

The spiritual development of teenagers is maximally affected by parenting. Couples prone to conflict may have negative effects on the spiritual development of their teenagers and may be unable to guide them towards the same religious convictions as themselves. Parents should put in place a proper conflict management system to aid in their conflict settlement to avoid the negative effects of parental conflict on their wards. This paper has considered the concept of parental conflict, understanding the youths, spiritual development: a discuss, effects of parental conflict in teenagers' spiritual development and concludes.

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