

**CULTISM AMONG POLYTECHNIC STUDENTS IN OFFA LOCAL GOVERNMENT,
KWARA STATE: IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING**

FOLORUNSHO, Owolabi Wahab

08057076784/wahabowolabi36@gmail.com

Department of Educational Management and Counselling,

Faculty of Education,

Al- Hikmah University, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

&

TIAMIYU, Kamoru Abidoje, Ph.D,

08067353465/kamorutiamiyu@gmail.com

Department of Educational Management and Counselling,

Faculty of Education,

Al- Hikmah University, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Abstract

Cultism among polytechnic students in Offa Local Government, Kwara State, presents significant challenges that necessitate effective counselling interventions. This study explores the etymology and characteristics of cults, emphasizing their secretive nature and ritualistic practices. It highlights the prevalence of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions, including polytechnics, citing factors such as peer influence, societal decadence, and the erosion of educational standards. The Innovative Defiance theory by Robert K. Merton serves as the theoretical framework, explaining how students pursue illegitimate means, like cultism, to achieve legitimate goals. The study proposes counselling solutions tailored to mitigate the psychological and emotional consequences of cult involvement. These include peer education programs to empower students with knowledge about cult dangers, group counselling sessions to address peer pressure dynamics, and individual counselling to support vulnerable students. Additionally, resilience-building workshops and trauma-informed counselling are recommended to facilitate recovery and resilience among affected students. The implications for counselling underscore the need for comprehensive, trauma-informed approaches that create safe spaces for students to heal and thrive. Collaborations with mental health professionals and community leaders are advocated to strengthen support networks and enhance intervention effectiveness. By implementing these strategies, educational institutions can mitigate the impact of cultism, fostering a safer and more conducive learning environment for all students.

Keywords: cultism, polytechnic students, Offa Local Government, Kwara State, counselling implication

Introduction

The term ‘cult’ is derived from the Latin word ‘cultus,’ which means to worship. According to Oyeniyi (2021), a cult is a social group characterized by its unique religious, spiritual, or philosophical beliefs and identity. Members share a common interest in a particular person, object, or

goal, and their meetings often occur secretly at unconventional times and locations, typically in secluded areas like forests or under the cover of darkness. Thus, a cult is a cohesive social group whose membership and activities are kept secret, and marked by collective actions.

Cultism is also linked to the Latin word 'occukre,' meaning something hidden, concealed, or mysterious (Mediyanose, 2016). A cult is generally defined as a group that displays intense devotion to a specific cause or idea while keeping its activities and participation hidden from outsiders. These groups are often referred to as secret cults due to their secretive nature.

Secret cults operate in secrecy, conducting their activities at unusual hours that conflict with conventional or publicly accepted norms (Ogunbameru, 2004). Ogunbameru notes that such activities are concealed from the public and are usually carried out behind closed doors. Therefore, a secret cult can be defined as a group whose actions occur in exclusive, unusual locations and times, deliberately avoiding exposure to those not involved. It is frequently reported that new incidents involving secret cults in Nigerian tertiary institutions emerge almost daily (Abubakar *et al.*, 2022).

Odebode (2020) highlights that some cult activities involve significant bloodshed, which might include human or animal blood. Conflicts between opposing groups in academic settings like universities and polytechnics often result in bloodshed, injuries, and sometimes fatalities. Adegbenro (2023) defines cultism as ceremonial activities performed by a group whose membership, initiation, and operations are secretive and have harmful effects on both members and non-members.

Erughe (2015) describes cultism as the dedication to the practices and activities of a cult. Oyeniyi (2021) characterizes it as an anti-social or deviant behaviour that involves unusual religious beliefs and activities that violate institutional norms meant to provide education. Cultism, therefore, involves ritual practices by confraternities with activities and membership concealed from outsiders, who are seen as 'Jew.' Despite various efforts to tackle the issue, covert cult activities in higher education institutions persist, and proposed solutions often fail to address the root causes. This study aims to provide insights into the counselling implications of cultism among polytechnic students in Offa Local Government, Kwara State.

A polytechnic is a technical institution that offers post-secondary education programs leading to diplomas or certificates such as the National Diploma (ND) and Higher National Diploma (HND). Graduates are equipped with entry-level employment skills for roles as technicians, technologists, or professionals, depending on their specialization. Polytechnics are designed to facilitate learning in a peaceful and safe environment, which is why they are often located on the outskirts of cities to ensure a serene atmosphere conducive to study and research. Unfortunately, this desired tranquillity has been disrupted by issues such as cultism, substance abuse, and arms proliferation on campuses (Adegbenro, 2023).

Cult-related violence has adversely affected learning in Nigerian polytechnics, leading to frequent campus closures, destruction of lives and property, and psychological trauma for students. These issues have significantly reduced the standard of education in Nigeria, transforming what should be an environment for effective learning into a space marked by harassment, extortion, physical assault, theft, threats, attacks, and other forms of organized violence. Consequently, the peace and safety necessary for effective learning and research have been severely compromised (Abubakar *et al.*, 2022).

Cultism poses a recurrent and violent menace in Nigeria, tracing its origins to the 1950s. Initially unrelated to criminality or violence, cult groups have evolved into violence-centric associations over time. This transformation has paved the way for gang attacks, predominantly orchestrated by the youth, often resulting in injuries and fatalities. In Nigeria, youths have become both the primary perpetrators and victims of cult wars. According to data from the Nextier Violent Conflict Database, 203 incidents leading to 473 casualties were documented between January 1, 2021, and July 24, 2023 (Nextier Violent Conflict Database, 2023).

According to Mediyanose (2016), campus cults have become the major cause of insecurity in institutions of higher learning. Students have been severely extorted, assaulted, injured, maimed and even murdered on account of cult-related attacks.

The biggest and most embarrassing problem that Tertiary institutions in Nigeria are facing today is the renewal of the menace and aggressiveness of cult-related activities. Cultism was linked to

the Seadog Confraternity (also known as Pyrates), which was started by Wole Soyinka and six other individuals at the prestigious University College, Ibadan (UCI). Wole Soyinka is currently a professor. The non-violent and peaceful confraternity that was founded in 1952 changed into a hidden cult in 1968 and has been known to engage in strange and violent activities at Nigerian tertiary institutions ever since (Muhinat, 2022). However, to achieve a clear direction for the conduct of this exploration, the following objectives are put forward as a guide, such are to:

- ✓ explore the divergence of cultism in Nigerian societies and campuses
 - ✓ explore the causes of cultism among polytechnic students in Offa L.G.A
 - ✓ explore the prevalence of cultism on Nigeria campuses
 - ✓ identify and explore the prevalence of cultism in polytechnic campuses in Offa local government
 - ✓ explore the effect of cultism in the polytechnics in Offa local government Area
 - ✓ provide counselling solutions to the divergence of cultism in Nigerian societies and campuses;
- and
- ✓ ascertain implications of cultism for counselling

Methodology

This study employs a systematic review methodology to explore cultism among polytechnic students in Offa Local Government, Kwara State through ascertaining its implications for counselling. By conducting a comprehensive search across various databases, including Google Scholar, ACM Digital Library, IEEE Xplore, and educational psychology databases, relevant academic articles, conference papers and case studies are identified. The literature search is guided by keywords such as “cultism, polytechnic students, Offa Local Government, Kwara State, counselling implications.” To ensure the review’s rigour, inclusion and exclusion criteria are established. This ensures that only high-quality and relevant sources are considered. Factors such as relevance to the research objectives, publication date within a specified timeframe, and focus on cultism among polytechnic students in Offa Local Government, Kwara State are used for inclusion. Exclusion criteria include sources that lack peer review, are not written in English, or are inaccessible in full-text format.

A thorough analysis of the selected literature is conducted, and key data points are extracted. This includes information such as authors, publication year, research methodology, theoretical frameworks, major findings, case study details, and implications for counselling. A systematic approach is followed to maintain consistency and accuracy in data extraction. The extracted data is synthesized to identify common themes, trends, and patterns related to cultism among polytechnic students in Offa Local Government, Kwara State within the context of counselling and psychology field. The contents are analyzed and organized to provide a comprehensive overview of the implications and opportunities for counsellors.

Connections between different studies and their implications were explored. Throughout the review process, ethical considerations regarding data privacy, informed consent, and research integrity are taken into account. Potential ethical concerns raised in the literature are discussed and addressed within the review. Practical recommendations and insights are provided to guide counsellors and psychologists in effectively and responsibly integrating counselling approaches for the reduction of cultism among higher institution students.

Divergence of Cultism in Nigerian Societies and Campuse

Throughout the nation’s history, various regions have been home to secret religious groups. Medaiyanose (2016) notes that among the Yoruba people, there is the Ogboni secret cult; the Efik people have the Ekpe secret cult; the Delta region is known for the Ekine cult; and the Edo people have the Owegbe cult. Across the globe, different types of secret ritual groups serve diverse social and political functions. There is considerable variation among these cultures regarding what is deemed private versus public. In some societies, ritual participation is public but membership is secret, while in others, membership is public but ritual participation is secret (Onyemwinmina & Aibieyi, 2015).

These societies often have the advantage of avoiding harm unless provoked and can act as mechanisms for purging societal ills. They typically require minimal maintenance. For example, the Poro and Mende societies in Sierra Leone and the Oviaosese of Ogoniland serve as socializing agents,

guiding young adults into maturity. In contrast, contemporary college campus cults are known for their aggressive and anti-social behaviours, including acts of violence such as murder and assault. This necessitates various measures to curb their presence on campuses (Adegbenro, 2023).

Before the creation of the Seadogs confraternity (also known as the Pyrates) in 1952 by Wole Soyinka and six other founders (Olumuyiwa Awe, Ralph Opara, Tunji Tubi, Daign Imokhuede, Pius Olegbe, and Olu Agunloye), secret cults were not linked with Nigerian educational institutions. The confraternity was not intended to be a covert cult; its foundational principles were rooted in patriotism and community service (Muhinat, 2022).

The Seadogs aimed to revive chivalric values, peacefully oppose the imposition of foreign norms and address tribalism and elitism. Today, there are approximately forty-five hidden cults within Nigerian educational institutions, each with its complex hierarchy, symbols, and distinctive attire. Notable clandestine cults include the Black Axe, Eiye Confraternity, Vikings, Amazons, Buccaneers, Mafia, and Dragons. Female students are also involved in occult activities through their organizations such as Daughters of Jezebel, Temple of Eden, Frigates, and Barracudas (Oyeniya, 2021). Ajitoni and Olaniyan (2018) report that Nigerian tertiary institutions have deteriorated into environments of fear, dominated by secret cult violence, drug abuse, and widespread cases of examination malpractice, rape, and murder.

Causes of Cultism among Polytechnic Students in Offa L.G.A

The causes of cultism among polytechnic students in Offa L.G.A. are not different from those that prevail in campuses throughout the country. This is so because; students of the polytechnics in Offa L.G.A. come from all over Nigeria, so there is a fair mix and representation of ethnicity, and economic and social classes in all the tertiary institutions alike. Nnajieta and Ahamefula (2015), submitted that several factors contribute to cultism in tertiary institutions in Nigeria, including the need for protection, the need to exert authority or supremacy, a lack of direction or guidance, drug abuse, the influence of politicians on school administration, the need for revenge among peer groups, poor school conditions, restrictions on unionization, parental influence, among others.

There are various causes of cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions (polytechnics inclusive) which according to Abubakar *et al.*, (2022) include the following amongst others:

- i. Peer Group: Peer group influence is one of the reasons students join cults during their studies. As a teenager loses all dependency and contact with his or her parents, he or she shifts to a newly acquired group, which in most instances is any organization on campus that he or she accepts.
- ii. Parental Background: Students from homes where outstanding conduct and discipline are strictly enforced are less likely to join a cult or be cultists, even though a tiny number of them may join in certain situations. Cult participation may be influenced by family history, a lack of moral direction at home, and how a child is nurtured. Too much parental control, and too many limits, might make a person get tensed and uncomfortable, while a child with boundless freedom may be a great candidate for cult membership in specific conditions. Some parents cherish their children to the point of pampering them. When they make a mistake, rather than chastising them, they let the children off the hook. They grow up with such bad habits and, as a consequence, imbibe criminal conduct, which includes joining a cult
- iii. Societal Decadence: Nigerian culture has created an enabling environment for all forms of crime, including the issue of campus cults. It was highlighted that the present generation has immoral ideas implanted in them rather than moral and respectable standards.
- iv. Erosion of Education Standards: The country's economic difficulties in the 1980s and early 1990s encouraged corruption and lowered educational standards. Despite possessing doubtful credentials, the majority of students were admitted to universities. Because of low self-esteem, some students seek solace in cultism to survive scholastic rigours at any cost. Survival in the academic system becomes a game of survival at any cost for such students, and as a consequence, they join cult groups to intimidate teachers and school administrators.
- v. Need for protection: Some students join cults because members get excessive "protection". Cultists work relentlessly to protect their adherents' interests, regardless of what it takes. They are continuously seeking special treatment for their members and may be violent to achieve this. Some

vulnerable students get convinced or coerced into joining cults out of fear of being abused or harassed by members of covert cults or other unfriendly individuals.

vi. Creation of fears: Some students join cults to scare their peers. This permits them to commit whatever evil they choose on campus. Students and university management are both at their mercy since they may wreak havoc at any time, killing or frightening their classmates or lecturers. Any effort to control their activities may result in violence and often disrupt academic activities.

vii. Broken homes: The family serves as the primary agent of socialisation, imparting social views and behavioural expectations in the child. It is an agent that imparts social culture to the kid. As a consequence, some children turn to cultism as an escape from difficult home conditions, especially when the parents have separated.

viii. Poor School Management–Students relationship: The school management of some tertiary institutions does not have a good relationship with the students. In some cases, students' unions are not allowed to function and the authorities are very autocratic in their engagement with students. In such a situation, numerous students who consider the school management too powerful and rigid join secret cults to protect their interests. Sometimes when school management and the government disallow or limit student unionism, students fight back through cults.

ix. Encouragement of Cultism by those in government circles: it is not uncommon to see Politicians and government officials sometimes inspire cultism by displaying insignia, handshakes, etc., that are suggestive of occultist affiliations. Some others use cultists during elections and to get to perceived enemies, giving the appearance that they are above the law. The rule of law is no longer popular, some politicians shield those caught by law enforcement agents from being punished. All these have emboldened cultists over time and motivated many students in our higher institutions to join cults. Hence, assurance of connection to important persons in school and politicians from larger society might be a motivating element for some potential cult members.

x. Love of Power to Control Others: Individuals who seek to assert authority or dominance sponsor cults, from within or outside the campus, in order to demonstrate their power or influence to others. The fight for dominance in the society, as well as the use of violence to dominate others fosters cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions. It forces politicians to engage in do-or die politics, land grabbing by self acclaimed land owners, widespread election manipulation, arson, and the death of innocent people.

Prevalence of Cultism on Nigeria Campuses

Despite its longstanding presence on Nigerian tertiary institution campuses, the violent nature of cultism only became apparent approximately thirty years ago. The presence of these groups has made campus life distressing and unsafe for both students and faculty. Cult activities include, but are not limited to: bullying non-members who become involved with a member's romantic interest, harassing female students who reject their advances, and intimidating lecturers who uphold academic merit. In female cultism, the term "sugar daddy" refers to an older man who financially supports a cult member.

One of the earliest recorded incidents of cult violence occurred in 1985 at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. This incident arose when a non-cult student displeased a cult leader by dating the leader's girlfriend, marking one of the first known cases of covert cult violence (Omebe & Omebe, 2015).

According to Oyeniyi (2021), additional notable incidents include: in 1991, a student at the University of Port Harcourt was beheaded during a clash between cult members; at Delta State University in Abraka, secret cult activities led to the murder of a Principal Assistant Registrar and his wife; on August 5, 2002, a 300-level economics student was shot and killed in the Dallimore area of Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State; and on June 8, 2006, members of a cult attacked the University of Ado-Ekiti, setting fire to the cadet's office, killing three students, and injuring many others.

On July 10, 1999, five students from Obafemi Awolowo University were killed, including George 'Yemi Iwilade, Secretary General of the OAU Students Union, and Tunde Oke of the Democratic Socialist Movement. In October 2003, Kehinde Dosumu, Olalekan Ajao, and Omotayo Suraju were killed while students at Kwara State Polytechnic. Furthermore, Tony Ileogbuna, Acting Head of the Geology Department at Enugu State University of Science and Technology, was killed;

Yomi Edeki, a professor at the University of Benin, was murdered on February 4; and Vincent Uloho, a professor at the University of Benin, was killed on March 9, 2004. Additionally, Ashifat Olatunji Saheed, a student at The Polytechnic Ibadan, was murdered in March 2005, and Wale Adeyori and Banji of the Federal Polytechnic Ilaro were killed in July 2004 (Erughe, 2015).

In June 2005, Gbenga Joseph, a police officer with the Kwara State Police Command's anti-cult squad, was killed by suspected cultists. In September 2005, Bolaji Toniwa, a student at Lagos State University, was murdered by cult members. Between August 13-18, 2015, more than sixteen students were killed in a cult rivalry at Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin.

Prevalence of Cultism in Polytechnic Campuses in Offa Local Government

Offa Local Government Area (L.G.A.) is one of the 16 local government areas in Kwara State, with its administrative headquarters located in Offa. The area is home to three polytechnics:

- i. **The Federal Polytechnic, Offa** (a public polytechnic established in 1992)
- ii. **Lens Polytechnic, Offa** (a private polytechnic established in 2012)
- iii. **Graceland Polytechnic, Offa** (a private polytechnic established in 2013)

Incidents related to cult activities are minimal in the private polytechnics, so much so that none has garnered significant media attention. However, students with occultist tendencies from these private institutions often connect with members of the Federal Polytechnic, Offa, or have been initiated into cults before enrolling at the private polytechnics. This pattern is common as students expelled for misconduct from other institutions frequently seek admission into private polytechnics. The relatively low or non-existent official records of cultism at these private polytechnics may be attributed to their smaller student populations—Lens Polytechnic has about 9,000 students, and Graceland Polytechnic has approximately 4,000 students—as well as their smaller campus sizes.

The Federal Polytechnic, Offa, which enrolled over 11,500 students for the 2023/2024 academic session, has a total student population exceeding 30,000 (Source: Directorate of Students' Affairs). Fedpoffa's two campuses are considerably larger than the combined size of the two private polytechnics. Consequently, examining cultism at the Federal Polytechnic, Offa provides a representative view of cultism among polytechnic students in Offa L.G.A.

On June 16, 2016, Kazeem Oloto, an HND 1 student at Fedpoffa, was shot and killed by suspected rival cult members (Source: Saturday Punch, June 17, 2016).

The Punch newspaper reported on July 11, 2018, that the Kwara State Command of the Nigerian Police Force paraded the SUG President of Fedpoffa, his vice president, and others for attempting to initiate students into the Aiyé cult.

On November 16, 2023, Toyin Bamidele, an HND 1 female student from the Food Technology Department, was killed along with another student. Toyin was reportedly the girlfriend of a leader of one of the cult groups.

An Ilorin High Court, under Justice Sikiru Oyinloye, sentenced Fatai Olasile, a Fedpoffa student, to ten years in prison for being a member of a secret cult and engaging in cult-related activities, in violation of Section 2 of the Secret Cult and Secret Societies Law of Kwara State. On July 10, 2018, the Federal Polytechnic, Offa suspended two students, Tajudeen Salim and Temitope Omotosho, indefinitely, pending the outcome of a police investigation. The students were suspected to be members of a cult group.

Effect of Cultism in the polytechnics in Offa Local Government Area

Oyeniya (2021) has noted that the detrimental effects of cultism on tertiary institutions, including polytechnics, are extensive. The following are some key impacts briefly discussed:

- i. **Poor Academic Performance:** Effective teaching and learning thrive in environments free from threats such as violence, terrorism, and gangsterism. The reign of terror instigated by cults in polytechnics creates an atmosphere of fear and tension on campus, which hampers both teaching and learning. Consequently, students' academic performance suffers. When cult members are involved in violent confrontations or are preoccupied with avoiding attacks from rival cults, their focus on academic work diminishes, leading to decreased diligence in their studies.
- ii. **Examination Malpractice:** Cults often encourage cheating during exams and other antisocial behaviours, such as violence, rape, arson, and drug abuse. Cultism can lead to examination malpractice

as cult members who have not adequately prepared for exams may attempt to undermine the assessment process through inducement, aggression, or blackmail.

iii. **Disruption of School Calendar:** Cult activities frequently disrupt academic calendars, sometimes leading to prolonged closures of institutions. There have been instances where campuses were shut down for over two months due to violence or cult-related activities. In severe cases, school management has been forced to close institutions for extended periods due to damage to lives and property caused by cultism.

iv. **Loss of Life:** Cultism can lead to tragic loss of life. Some students are murdered by cult members, while others may suffer severe mental health issues from drug abuse and the consumption of harmful substances. Cult-related violence, including shootings, stabbings, acid attacks, and other assaults, can result in death or long-term disabilities for students, staff, and members of the school administration. Such violence significantly affects the educational environment and results in the untimely deaths of innocent individuals.

v. **Destruction of Property:** Cultist violence often results in significant property damage and disturbances to public peace and order. Cultists may destroy the property of their targets or educational institutions to draw attention to their grievances.

vi. **Heinous Crimes:** Students expelled from tertiary institutions due to cult involvement often become societal nuisances. Many turn to violent activities on various campuses, while others become political thugs, miscreants, or ethnic militia, causing harm to society. Cult members may engage in illegal activities such as armed robbery and prostitution to support their lifestyles. They also resort to violent actions to intimidate victims and may obtain weapons through corrupt law enforcement personnel. When attacked, cult members may incur expenses for medical care and legal representation, further compounding the social problems caused by cultism.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this study is based on the Innovative Defiance Theory developed by Robert K. Merton in 1938. This theory emphasizes the creative use of illegitimate means to achieve important legitimate ends. It centers on the concept of breaking societal rules to reach normative objectives, such as engaging in theft to acquire wealth (Britannica.com). The theory explores how individuals may accept societal goals but deviate from the established, legitimate means of achieving them by resorting to socially unapproved methods (Wikipedia.org). According to Merton, individuals who innovate seek to attain goals that cannot be achieved through legitimate means by employing criminal or deviant strategies (Openstax.org).

In the context of this study, the Innovative Defiance Theory is particularly relevant. It is observed that students involved in cult activities on campus often aim to acquire the necessary credentials from their educational institutions but choose a path of violence, suppression, intimidation, and torture, rather than engaging in legitimate and rigorous academic efforts to achieve academic success. This behaviour reflects the belief that the end justifies the means.

Applying Merton's Innovative Defiance Theory to the study of the counselling implications for cultism among polytechnic students in Offa Local Government, Kwara State, offers a framework for understanding the motivations and s of students involved in such activities.

Counselling Solutions

1. **Peer Education Programs:** To combat the menace of cult activities effectively, peer education programs are essential. These initiatives leverage the influential role peers play in each other's lives, aiming to empower students with knowledge and skills to resist cult involvement. Key elements include a carefully designed curriculum that explores the history, dangers, and consequences of cults. By educating students through their peers, these programs can create a supportive environment where students are more aware of the risks and better equipped to make informed decisions.

2. **Group Counselling Sessions:** Group counselling sessions are an effective strategy to address peer pressure dynamics, especially concerning cult recruitment. These sessions provide a space for students to discuss and navigate the pressures they face collectively. By engaging in group discussions, students can share experiences, gain insights, and develop strategies to resist peer influences. This collective approach helps in understanding and mitigating the impact of behaviour peer pressure in a supportive environment.

3. **Individual Counselling for Vulnerable Students:** Individual counselling is crucial for addressing the specific needs of students vulnerable to cult recruitment. This intervention strategy focuses on personalized support, including stress management, self-reflection, and goal-setting techniques. By providing a holistic approach, counsellors aim to enhance students' emotional resilience and assertiveness. This support equips students with the tools to handle challenging social dynamics and external pressures effectively, helping them to navigate and resist cult influences.

4. **Parental Involvement:** Engaging parents in the prevention and mitigation of cult involvement is a robust strategy. Families play a crucial role in shaping a child's values and decision-making processes. By raising awareness about the signs of cult involvement and fostering open communication, parents can become proactive contributors to their children's well-being. This collaboration helps in identifying and addressing potential issues early, creating a supportive home environment that reinforces positive choices.

5. **Resilience-Building Workshops:** Resilience-building workshops are designed to fortify students against negative peer influences and cult recruitment. These workshops aim to cultivate resilience, self-esteem, and effective decision-making skills. By equipping students with the ability to handle external pressures confidently, these workshops empower them to navigate complex peer dynamics with autonomy. This proactive approach helps in strengthening students' ability to resist the allure of cults and make positive life choices.

Implications for Counselling

i. Trauma-Informed Counselling: Trauma-informed counselling is a crucial approach to addressing the psychological impact of cult involvement on students. This strategy recognizes the potential trauma associated with cult experiences and aims to provide tailored support sensitive to the unique needs of individuals who have faced distressing situations.

The core principle of trauma-informed counselling is to create a safe, non-judgmental space where students can openly share their experiences and feelings. This environment fosters trust and openness, acknowledging that individuals affected by cult involvement may carry significant emotional burdens. By offering a supportive and understanding atmosphere, counsellors empower students to express themselves without fear of stigma or judgment, laying the foundation for healing.

The counselling process involves exploring the psychological impact of cult involvement collaboratively. This includes addressing feelings of fear, betrayal, guilt, or shame associated with the experience. The goal is to validate these emotions and help individuals process and make sense of their traumatic experiences.

ii. Rehabilitation and Support: Rehabilitating students who have been involved in cult activities requires a comprehensive approach that addresses the psychological and emotional dimensions of their experiences. Providing essential emotional and psychological support is crucial in guiding students toward recovery and reintegration into a healthy community.

In the rehabilitation process, tailored counselling strategies are essential. This begins with individualized assessments to explore each student's unique experiences, including the factors leading to their involvement, the duration of participation, and the challenges they now face. Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is used to help students identify and challenge distorted thought patterns related to their cult involvement, fostering healthier cognitive processes and coping mechanisms. Additionally, resilience-building workshops are offered to equip students with skills to overcome adversity, focusing on emotional strength, coping mechanisms, and adaptive strategies for life beyond the cult.

iii. Individual Therapy Sessions: Individual therapy sessions are a vital strategy for addressing the specific psychological and emotional challenges associated with cult involvement. These tailored sessions provide personalized support, recognizing the diverse experiences that may arise from cult participation.

The one-on-one setting of individual therapy allows for a collaborative therapeutic relationship between the counsellor and the student. This relationship is crucial for building trust, empathy, and support, facilitating the student's journey toward healing and recovery. By addressing individual challenges and fostering a supportive environment, these sessions help students navigate their recovery process effectively.

iv. Support Groups: Establishing support groups for students affected by cult experiences is a compassionate strategy aimed at fostering a sense of community and mutual understanding. These groups provide a space for individuals with similar challenges to come together, offering support and collective healing. Support group discussions are facilitated by trained professionals who guide conversations, ensuring a supportive, respectful, and constructive atmosphere. Facilitators help participants navigate their emotions, share their stories, and explore effective coping mechanisms. This structured approach ensures that the support group becomes a safe space for expression, reflection, and personal growth.

v. Collaboration with Mental Health Professionals: Collaborating with mental health professionals is an integral strategy to enhance the breadth and depth of counselling services, especially for students dealing with severe mental health issues resulting from cult experiences. This collaborative approach acknowledges the complexity of mental health challenges and aims to create a seamless continuum of care. Collaboration involves forming partnerships with psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, and other specialists with expertise in trauma, cult-related issues, and severe mental health conditions. Integrating these professionals into the support network allows educational institutions to offer a more comprehensive range of therapeutic interventions, tailored to the diverse needs of affected students.

Conclusion

The prevalence of cultism among polytechnic students in Offa Local Government, Kwara State, highlights the urgent need for comprehensive counselling interventions to address the complex challenges associated with cult involvement. In conclusion, effectively combating cultism requires a unified and concerted effort, with counselling playing a crucial role in raising awareness, enhancing resilience, and providing targeted support to those affected.

The strategies outlined—ranging from peer education programs and group counselling sessions to individual therapy and collaboration with mental health professionals—form a holistic framework for mitigating the psychological and emotional impact of cultism on students. These approaches aim to not only address immediate concerns but also to foster long-term recovery and resilience.

Cultism jeopardizes not only the individual well-being of students but also the overall harmony and safety within educational institutions. Therefore, it is essential for educators, counsellors, parents, and the broader community to engage pro-actively and collaboratively. By implementing these counselling solutions, the goal is to prevent, intervene, and rehabilitate, ultimately empowering students to overcome the challenges posed by cultism and thrive in their educational pursuits.

Suggestions

The recommendations extracted from the above study are as follow:

1. School counsellors, in collaboration with institutional management, should ensure the allocation of resources to strengthen peer education programs. This includes funding for materials, training, and other necessary supports to enhance the effectiveness of these initiatives.
2. The institution's management, through the school guidance and counselling units, should conduct periodic training sessions for peer educators. This training should focus on developing their skills in addressing cult-related issues and ensuring they are well-equipped to provide accurate and impactful guidance to their peers.
3. Institutional management, in partnership with the guidance and counselling units, should collaborate with local community leaders and law enforcement agencies. This collaboration will help reinforce the anti-cult message and create a unified front against cult activities within the community.
4. Regularly organize group counselling sessions that focus on peer pressure and cult resistance. These sessions should be led by experienced counsellors who can offer expert guidance and create a supportive network within the educational institution. This network will help sustain the positive impact of group counselling initiatives.
5. Establish a systematic approach to identify and reach out to vulnerable students. Offer confidential, personalized counselling sessions for those at risk of cult pressures. Individual counselling programs should incorporate stress management techniques, self-reflection exercises, and assertiveness training to build resilience and empower students.

6. Regularly conduct workshops aimed at building resilience among students. These workshops should focus on enhancing self-esteem through interactive exercises and discussions. Additionally, integrate decision-making skills training to help students navigate negative peer influences and make informed choices.
7. Train counsellors in trauma-informed approaches to effectively address the psychological impacts of cult involvement. Create safe and non-judgmental spaces where students can openly share their experiences. Collaborate with mental health professionals to enhance the quality and effectiveness of trauma-informed counselling services.
8. Develop a well-defined crisis intervention plan within the institution, including specialized training for counsellors in handling acute emotional distress. Raise awareness about available crisis intervention services among students, faculty, and staff. Establish connections with mental health professionals for cases requiring advanced intervention.

References

- Abdu-Raheed, B. O. (2020). An Investigation into the Causes, Effects and Solutions of Cultism in Tertiary Institutions in Southwest, Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 10(2), 23-28.
- Abdu-Raheem, B.O. (2020). "An investigation into the causes, effects and solutions to cultism in tertiary institutions in Southwest Nigeria". *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 10(4):23- 28. Retrieved from https://www.ijhssnet.com/journals/Vol_10_No_2_February_2020/4.pdf. Accessed 10/02/2022.
- Abubakar, A. I., Gyeyir, F. T., & Adangabe, A. A. (2022). Counselling Needs Assessment of Students of WAPolytechnic in The Upper West Region, Ghana. *South Asian Journal of Social Science & Humanity*, 3(4), 11-29. <https://doi.org/10.48165/sajssh.2022.3402>
- Adegbenro, G. A. (2023). Cultism Development and Its Sinister Influence in Nigeria Universities. *British Journal of Education*, 11(6), 65-75.
- Bernard, T.J. (2022). Sociological Perspective. Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/deviance-Sociological-Perspectives-Encyclopedia-Britannica>. Accessed 27/5/22
- BR, A. D. M., & Khoirunisa, K. R. (2021). Obedience pressure vs. peer pressure: an explanation of Muslims' religious role in budgetary slack. *Journal of Indonesian Economy and Business*, 36(2), 124-135.
- Elujekwute, E.C. (2019). Educational management, concept and theory. Makurdi; Destiny Ventures.
- Erughe, S. (2015). 'Effects of cultism on campuses'. Nigerian Observer. *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law Issue*. Retrieved from <https://nigerianobservernews.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/obs.jpg>"alt="Nigerian Observer"/> Accessed 2/01/23.
- Mediayanose, O.E. (2016). Cultism and education in Nigeria tertiary institution. *Policy Implication Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law*, 10:42-54 Website: <https://www.eajournals.org/> Publication of the European Centre for Research Training and Development-UK 75
- Muhinat, B. B. (2022). Causes and Consequences of Cohabitation among Students of Federal Polytechnics Offa, Kwara State, Nigeria. *Equilibrium: Jurnal Pendidikan*, 10(1), 9-15.
- Nextier Violent Conflict Database (2023). 2022 Annual Review of Nigeria's Violent Conflict Profile. Retrieved from: <https://thenextier.com/2022-annual-review-of-nigerias-violent-conflict-situation/>.
- Nnaiyeto, C.C. & Ahamefula, N. (2015). Poverty and cultism in our contemporary society: Implication for Nigeria students. *African Research Review*, 9(2), 24-40
- Odebode, A. A. (2020). Self-Image of In-School Adolescents in Offa Local Government Area of Kwara State, Nigeria: Implications for Counselling Practices. *International Journal of Instruction*, 13(1), 523-534.
- Omebe, S.E & Omebe, C.A. (2015). The crisis of education in Nigeria. *International Journal of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education (IJHSSE)*. 2(12)1-8

- Onwuemeodo, A. U., & Nwosu, F.I. (2015). "Cultism in Nigerian tertiary institutions and its effects on national development. *Journal of Research Development*, 24(2). 1-8. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/user/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/IE/2YUVJYQ8/CULTISM%20IN%20NIGERIAN%20TERTIARY%20INSTITUTIONS%20AND%20ITS%20EFFECTS%20ON%20NATIONAL%20DEVELOPMENT.pdf. Accessed 27/5/22.
- Onyemwinmina, C, & Aibieyi, S. (2015). Cultism a destructive concept in the educational development of tertiary institutions in Nigeria. *African Research Review*, 9(4), 221-236
- Openstax.org. "Theoretical Perspectives on Deviance and Crime. Retrieved from <https://openstax.org/books/introduction-sociology-3e/pages/7-2-theoretical-perspectives-on-deviance-and-crime> Accessed 26/5/22.
- Oyenyi, M. B. (2021). Cultism in Nigeria: Causes, effects and solutions to cultism. Retrieved from <https://learnallinfo.com/cultism-in-nigeria>, accessed 26/12/2023
- Udo, V.C. & Ikezu, U.J.M. (2015). Causes, effects and strategies for eradicating cultism among students in tertiary institutions in Nigeria-A case study of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka Anambra State Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice*, 6(2), 22-28.
- Wikipedia.org. Strain theory (sociology). Retrieved from [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strain_theory_\(sociology\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Strain_theory_(sociology)) Accessed 27/12/2023.
- Wonkhe.com (2019). Student and graduate view of the purpose of universities. Retrieved from <https://wonkhe.com/blog/student-and-graduate-view-of-the-purpose-of-universities/>
- www.washington.edu (2022). Violence-prevention and response Program. Retrieved from www.washington.edu/safecampus/ Accessed 26/12/2023.