

INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE FACTORS LEADING TO CULTISM AND VIOLENCE IN TERTIARY EDUCATION INSTITUTION CAMPUSES IN SIERRA LEONE.

By

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ABSTRACT

The term cultism has been controversial among scholars in sociology, educators, anthropologists and interested groups and individuals because of the mirage of differences in their professional work and preparation, group interest, desire and goals, personal experiences and other influencing factors. Whatever the differences, sound documentary evidences point to immeasurable negative impact of cultism on students' life, social bearing, academic performance and their related communities. There has always been an attempt to link cultism to violence in tertiary institution campuses. The objectives of this research were to identify the factors leading to cultic activities and violence in tertiary institutions. In order to address this study's objectives, the researchers used a survey research method and design that involved a thorough planning and systematic arrangement of the means to identify the study setting, the variables, samples selection, data collection and analysis and the report format.

Of the nine teacher training institutions in the country, three (33.3%) were randomly selected for the study. The research population comprised present and past students, lecturers and administrators of the senior, intermediate and junior ranks. Data collection consisted of two sets of questionnaires, an interview schedule and a Focus Group Discussion Guide (FGD).

Regarding the main causes of students joining cult groups, peer group pressure attracted the highest responses in all three institutions followed by popularity needs.. Also, 40.2% of the students of all three institutions attributed violence on campuses to cultic activities and some students also pointed to student union politics (38.3%) as another source of campus violence. In addition, 53.3% of the students admitted that they were involved in violent confrontations with other groups and they identified student union politics as the flash point of violence. In conclusion, by all indications cultism is a menace in tertiary education institutions and the campus communities. It provides the platform for student violence.

INTRODUCTION

Tertiary education institutions which include universities, polytechnics and teacher training colleges have been known to provide the social atmosphere which allows students, administrators and academics alike to enjoy peaceful co-existence and excellence in education. In the case of students, the existence of and participation in clubs and organizations on campuses ensure that they become well adjusted individuals at the end of their study. This scenario applied to institutions of higher education in Sierra Leone until two decades ago when cultism emerged on campuses.

In defining cultism, Azelama, Alude and Imhonda (2004) noted that "cult is an assemblage of people united by certain ideals, or symbols and whose rites and ceremonies of veneration are unique and shrouded in mysteries with a secrecy that cannot be broken" (p.1). Thus, in its original usage, it was simply applied to a religious "group of people regardless of the object or person they venerated. Egbochuku (2009) stated that cults are groups that often exploit members psychologically and/or physically, typically by making members comply with leadership demands through certain type of psychological manipulation popularly called 'mind control'."(p.17)

According to Opaluwah (2000), what is known as a secret cult in tertiary institutions started at The University College, Ibadan, Nigeria in 1953. The author stated that it was formed by Nigeria's only Nobel Laureate, Professor Wole Soyinka and others. Their main objectives included the abolition of convention, the revival of the age of chivalry and the end of tribalism and elitism. Nigerian students formed this group, which it must be noted, was not to harm, maim or kill and destroy. The club therefore became an elite club only for the cleanest, brightest and politically conscious. Nowadays, cult groups exhibit extreme barbarity and wickedness on individual members especially new recruits and outsiders. Rotimi (2005) asserted that the secret cult phenomenon is not new in Africa. What is different about the recent cult activities is the violence associated with it.

The activities of cultism have been in existence in tertiary education institution campuses in Sierra Leone for a considerable length of time. Over the years, some social clubs and organizations which included fraternities and sororities had long gained recognition by different college administrations at Fourah Bay College (F.B.C). The same filtered down to Milton Margai College of Education and Technology (M.M.C.E.T) and the Freetown Teachers College (F.T.C.). They gained approval as a result of their non-violence and non political stance. By then, they were purely social organizations aimed at social integration of students on campus. Members of this group invariably belonged to the upper class of society. On the other hand, there were other social groups that did not enjoy the same recognition and approval of the different college administrations. One of such groups was the 'Gardeners' at F.B.C. Members of this group were drawn