

Students' Perception of Cult Activity on United States Colleges and University Campuses

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Abstract: The study investigated students' perceptions of cult activity on United State Colleges and University campuses. Three hundred students from 6 Colleges and University campuses in US were involved. The students were randomly selected from the school population. The instrument used was a validated self-developed questionnaire. Five research questions were raised and answered. Chi-square and t-test statistics were utilized to analyze the research questions. Findings revealed that United States Colleges and University students perceived male dominance in cult membership and identified broken home as a potent factor to cult membership, while significant difference in the effect of cult activity on social order on the campuses were perceived by the respondents.

Key words: Students' perception, cult activity, United States, colleges and university

INTRODUCTION

The recent terrorist dimension that cult activities have taken on university and college campuses is becoming alarming especially in some developed countries like America, Spain, Britain, Germany, Italy, Africa most especially Nigeria and also in the Middle East. Cult groups have metamorphosed into gangs causing violence across the globe, the violent nature that cult activities have taken can no longer be pinned down to a particular environment or nation. In Nigeria for example, they have developed into ethnic militias causing serious problems in the oil rich areas of the country and creating tension and fear across the southern part of the country tertiary institutions. In the Middle East particularly in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, Israel, Lebanon and Syria, they have emerged in different terrorist groups. In other words the activities of these groups have taken a horrid dimension. This phenomenon results in a number of social and psychological problems such as loss of lives, maiming, killings and kidnappings. A structural analysis of primary and secondary research data shows cultism, (Terrorism) is a common place, albeit different in a degree of their manifestation in selected countries and offer sustainable threats to peaceful, harmonious co-existence and social order among the people.

It was as a result of the fear, tension and agony created by this group that this study was conceived to examine students' perception of cult activity on United States Colleges and University campuses and to provide empirical backings on the ways cult activity influence behavior of members and whether their activities is a

problem in United States colleges and University campuses as we have in Nigeria. After providing the basic background information to the problem through review of literatures, the study presented the methods used in investigating students' perceptions of cult activity on United State Colleges and University campuses. Three hundred students from 6 Colleges and University campuses in U.S were involved. The students were randomly selected from the school population. The instrument used was a validated self-developed questionnaire. Five research questions were raised and answered. Chi-square and T-test statistics were used to analyze the research questions. Findings revealed that United States Colleges and University students perceived male dominance in cult membership and identified broken home as a potent factor to cult membership, while significant difference in the effect of cult activity on social order on the campuses were perceived by the respondents.

The general objective of this study is to examine students' perceptions of cult activity on United State Colleges and University campuses. Specifically, the study will seek:

- To examine the effect of cult activity on social order on United States Colleges and University campuses.
- To examine how United States Colleges and University students perceive the effects of Cult activity.
- To identify which sex, does membership of cult in United States Colleges and University campuses are more pronounced.

- To identify ways through which cult activity influence behavior of members in United States Colleges and University campuses.
- To know whether cult activity is a problem on United States Colleges and University campuses
- To identify plausible option in dealing with the problem.

CULTISM A PROBLEM

Human beings can generally be described as social creatures. We have intricate social networks that consist of family, friends, colleagues and even strangers. As a result of these relationships we are also subject to a set of unwritten rules of conduct, known as norms. For the most part, people act in accordance with these norms. However there are some people who do not conform to accepted social values, but rather hold beliefs that are extreme, ridiculous or unfounded. Such individuals are exemplified in settings such as cults.

Cultism or secret society is as old as history, spanning over diverse societies and world cultures. For instance, Western and Eastern Europe, the Americas, the Middle East and most African Countries have had practices of cultism in one form or the other (Bulus, 2003). The members of these cult groups engaged in humanitarian services and provided aids to their members during illness, old age and unemployment. They also catered to orphans, the handicapped and donated blood to the needy. From this perspective cultism contributed positively to the development of society (Adamolekun, 1998; Ogunsanya, 2000). From this historical foundation the campus secret cult or fraternities as sometimes called emerged. These fraternities first made their appearances in Europe during the Middle Ages. They grew out of the guild system, which was established by craftsmen and merchants. This idea later gained prominence in medieval Universities in Europe (NISER, 2005). Since this period, there has been a proliferation of fraternities in Europe and American Universities distinguishing themselves in helping to provide a conducive atmosphere for learning in the various institutions. Some of them provide organized socio-economic activities while others provide scholarships for brilliant students (Bulus, 2003). The United States of America has more than 400 fraternities on their college and university campuses. These fraternities have produced US presidents, senators, governors, CEO's, military generals, scientists, medical doctors, attorneys, accountants and other successful law abiding citizens. These fraternities are well organized and controlled by the U.S. Government and legislative supports are established through the Inter Fraternity Council (IFC). IFC is made up of fraternities and they

regulate and coordinate the activities of all recognized fraternities such as Kappa Alpha Order, Tau Epsilon Phi, etc (Martins and Hummer, 1996).

It is a common practice for students to join clubs, social cultural and academic and even political associations registered in a college or University setting (Ede and Adaji, 2003). In addition to these approved and registered groups, other clandestine societies often referred to as cults are also on the University scene. Members of these groups have been found to engage in criminal acts including such crimes as: arson, stealing, destruction of public property, physical attack of innocent students, rape, murder and all sorts of violent activities (Falaiye, 2003). Supporting this view, Martins and Hummer (1996) argued that many rapes that come to the public's attention occur in fraternities' houses on college and university campuses.

The recent terrorist dimension that cult activities have taken on university and college campuses is becoming alarming especially in some developed countries like America, Spain, Britain, Germany, Italy, Africa most especially Nigeria and also in the Middle East. This terrorist dimension led scholars such as Onyechere (1998) and Okpetu and Dittimiya (2000) to describe campus cults as criminal gangs similar to armed robbery gangs, assailants, drug syndicates, advance free fraud syndicates etc. Although to some scholars like (Falaiye, 2003; Whitsett, 1992) cults are typically religious or spiritual minorities that hold views outside of those that are socially acceptable. Unfortunately, the views of these groups are typically in direct conflict with societal norms and often gain media notoriety based on their deviant beliefs and actions.

In recent years cults have become synonymous with such things as mass suicides, pedophilia and even terrorist attacks (Fayokun and Kayode, 2003). According to Fayokun, the issue of the negative influences of cult was very abruptly brought into public consciousness with the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11th September 2001. Several hijackers overtook aircraft and crashed them into the World Trade Center towers in New York, the Pentagon in Washington and rural Pennsylvania, killing themselves and thousand others. This activity, which has been deemed as the worst terrorist attack in the history of the United States, is clearly outside of socially normal behavior (Opatola, 2002). The terrorists according to Opatola (2002) are believed to be members of an Islamic militant cult under the leadership of Osama bin Laden. The people involved in this attack clearly showed no regards for their own lives or the lives of the others, which calls many to question their motivation in committing such a heinous crime.

One of the most targeting groups for cult recruitment is college and University students (Smah and Sam, 2000). This group is considered vulnerable due to the fact that many students are living away from home and have a great deal of stress resulting from the need to form new social net works and the educational demands linked to academic performance. Cults often identify vulnerable people and use effective recruitment techniques in order to get them to join their cult. Under the coercive and manipulating hands of cults, ordinary students can become intertwined in a series of immoral, criminal, terrorist and illegal activities (Azuka, 2002).

Many people recognize cults as deviant groups and avoid their propaganda, but there are still others who fall prey to the appeals of these groups. A major factor affecting a person's susceptibility is their level of perceptions. People who are aware of the presence of cults, their negative influence on the beliefs and behaviors and how their deviant acts could cause social disorder in any society, are less likely to become involved in such groups (Owuamanan, 1998). However, as cults generally operate outside of mainstream society and their actions causes social disorders particularly since it is reported that cult groups recruit most members from University and college campuses (Omoluabi, 1992). Given the events associated with 9/11/2001 and it's aftermath a question we seek to answer is Do University students have sufficient awareness of cults in order to protect them from the coercive measures of cult recruiters.

The major purposes of this study specifically are to ascertain students' perception of cult activity on selected United States Colleges and University campuses and to identify the ways they believe cult activity influence behavior of it's members and if their activities are considered a problem on their campuses.

Research questions: The following questions would be answered in this study:

- What effect does cult activity has on social order on United States Colleges and University campuses?
- How do United States Colleges and University Students Perceive the effects of Cult activity?
- In what sex, does membership of cult in United States Colleges and University campuses are more pronounced?
- In what ways does cult activity influence behavior of members in United States Colleges and University campuses?
- Is cult activity a problem on United States Colleges and University campuses?

Table 1: Distributions of sample

School	Male	Female	Total
1	21	29	50
2	23	27	50
3	20	30	50
4	23	27	50
5	25	25	50
6	22	28	50
Total	134	166	300

Research design: The study was a descriptive survey research. It attempted to focus on data collected with a view to describe, in a systematic way, the perception of the target population.

Population and sample: The target population of the study was University and College students in United States. The sample involved in the study consisted of 300 University and college students selected from 6 niversities and Colleges in both Southern and Northern parts of United States. Stratified sampling was used to select equal number of students from the Universities and Colleges. The subjects were stratified according to gender. One hundred and thirty four were males, while 166 were females (Table 1).

Instrumentation: A self-developed 5-point Likert type validated questionnaire, approved by the Southern Illinois University Carbondale Human Subjects Committee was used for the study. The questionnaire was made up of two sections. Section A was meant to elicit, among other things, demographical data on the students including age, academic classification and major, gender, religious affiliation. Section B was mainly a Likert based questions on perceptions of cult activity on United States Colleges and University campuses with a point rate scale of Strongly Agree, Agree, Undecided, Strongly Disagree, Disagree.

Rationale for the choice of data analysis: The Chi- Square and t-test analysis correlational technique were used for the study. The Chi-Square analysis was used to test the differences in the perception of the respondents and to estimate the likelihood that some other factors other than chance accounts for the apparent relationship in their responses. The t-test statistics was used to estimate the direction of the relationship (positive or negative) and also the extent of the relationship between the respondents perception of which sex, does membership of cult in United States Colleges and University campuses are more pronounced.

RESULTS

The research questions were tested making use of Chi-Square statistics and t-test.

Research question 1: What effect does cult activity has on social order on United States Colleges and University campuses? From Table 2, Chi-Square (X^2) calculate (256.3) is grater than Chi-Square critical (26.3) at the significant level of 0.05. This then implies that the research question is rejected and concludes that there is significant difference in the effect of cult activity on social order on United State Colleges and University campuses.

Research question 2: How do United States Colleges and University Students Perceive the effects of Cult activity? The Table 3 reveals that X^2_{cal} (89.2) value is greater than the $X^2_{Critical}$ (15.5) at 0.05 level of significance. This means that there is a significant difference between the United States Colleges and University Students' perceptions of the effects of cult activity.

Research question 3: In what sex, does membership of cult in United States Colleges and University campuses are more pronounced?. Table 4 shows the t-calculated to be 0.09 at 0.05 level of significance, whereas the critical value is 1.96. Since the calculated value does not exceeds

the critical value, the research question is therefore accepted. The mean, standard deviation of male and female is also shown in the Table 4.

Research question 4: In what ways does cult activity influence behavior of members in United States Colleges and University campuses?. The result of Table 5 shows that $X^2_{calculated}$ value of (197.3) is greater than $X^2_{critical}$ value (15.5) at 0.05 level of significance. The research question is therefore rejected, this imply that significant difference exist between the ways cult activity influences behavior of members in United States Colleges and University campuses.

Research question 5: Is cult activity a problem on United States Colleges and University campuses?. From Table 6above $X^2_{calculated}$ value 295.1 is greater than $X^2_{critical}$ value of 15.5 at 0.05 alpha level. Therefore it can be explained that there is a relationship in cult activity problems in United States Colleges and University campuses. This implies that the research question is hereby rejected.

Table 2: Chi-Square analysis of the effect of cult activity on social order on United States Colleges and University campuses

Questionnaire items No	Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	X^2 cal	X^2 critical	df	Prob	Decision
10	fo	13	50	83	106	36	288					Reject at 0.05
16	fe	7.8	36.7	120.4	81.9	41.3	288					
15	fo	3	20	141	73	22	259					0.05
16	fe	7.0	32.9	108.2	73.6	37.1	259	256.3	26.3	16		
	fo	11	58	161	50	12	292					S*
19	fe	7.9	37.2	122.1	83.1	41.8	292					
	fo	1	6	76	110	99	292					S*
20	fe	7.9	37.2	122.1	83.1	41.9	292					
	fo	11	49	140	70	37	307					S*
20	fe	8.3	39.1	128.3	87.3	44	30.7					

S* Significant at 0.05

Table 3: Chi- Square analysis showing the United States Colleges and University Students' perception of the effects of cult activity on campuses

Questionnaire Items No	Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	X^2 Cal	X^2 Critical	df	Prob	Decision
12	fo	22	78	102	73	12	287					Reject at 0.05
	fe	11.9	58.2	127	74.7	15.2	287					
15	fo	3	20	121	103	22	269	89.2	15.5	8	0.05	
	fe	11.2	54.5	11.9	70	14.3	269					S*
15	fo	11	78	161	50	12	312					
	fe	12.9	63.3	138	81.2	16.5	312					

S* Significant at 0.05

Table 4: T-test showing mean differences between male and female cult membership on United States Colleges and University campuses

Variables	N	X	SD	df	t-cal	t-crit	Prob	Decision
Male	130	47.2	6.5	286	0.09	1.96	0.05	NS
Female	158	46.8	61					

NS*: Not Significant at 0.05

Table 5: Chi-square summary showing how cult activity influences behaviors in United States Colleges and University Campuses

Questionnaire Items No	Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	X^2 Cal	X^2 Critical	df	Prob	Decision
13	fo	4	38	58	163	20	283					Reject at 0.05
	fe	10.5	58.7	110.8	82.6	20.3	283					
20	fo	11	49	140	61	27	288					0.05
	fe	10.7	59.7	112.8	84.1	20.7	288	197.3	15.5	8		
21	fo	17	92	140	28	15	292					S*
	fe	10.8	60.6	114.4	85.3	21	292					

S* Significant at 0.05

Table 6: Chi-square summary showing whether cult activity is a problem in United States Colleges and University campuses

Questionnaire Items No	Items	SA	A	U	D	SD	Total	X ² Cal	X ² Critical	df	Prob	Decision
15	fo	3	20	141	103	22	289	295.1	15.5	8	0.05	Reject at 0.05
	fe	1.7	9.4	75.4	91.9	110.6	289					
19	fo	1	6	69	110	99	285	295.1	15.5	8	0.05	
	fe	1.7	9.3	74.4	90.6	109.1	285					
22	fo	1	2	15	61	209	288	295.1	15.5	8	0.05	
	fe	1.7	9.4	75.2	91.5	110.3	288					

S* Significant at 0.05

DISCUSSION

It can be noted from the findings that:

- There is significant difference in the effect of cult activity on social order on United State Colleges and University campuses.
- There is a significant difference between the United States Colleges and University Students' perceptions of the effects of cult activity.
- That significant difference exists between the way cult activity influences behavior of members in United States Colleges and University campuses.
- There is a relationship in cult activity problems in United States Colleges and University campuses.

From the results of this study, it is therefore evident that there is a wide gap in the United States Colleges and University students' perception of the orientation of the earliest cult organization and the present day cult in United States Colleges and University Campuses. The change in recent time has been systematic and progressively militant, which is evident with the increasing use of violence (terrorism).

It was also discovered that the membership of cult groups cut across all social background, age and gender. Apart from local sources of revenues, certain godfathers, especially those who were once member of such cult groups, sponsor the cult groups.

The study also identified family conflicts and disruption as precursors to student involvement in cult activity in United States Colleges and University Campuses. Specific variables noted in families with youth cult participants are parental abuse disruption due to absence of a parent; parental history of psychiatric illness parental alcoholism; and youth experience of being rejected, unloved or harshly criticized. This agrees with Levine (1980) evaluation of adolescent involvement in cult activity, which he discovered that One's involvement might begin with early child-parent interactions. Additionally, parents who raise their children in a manner that tends to be obsessive or compulsive, encourage children to be preoccupied with issues relating to guilt. A second feature associated with obsessive-compulsive

personally development is predisposition towards rituals that lead to exaggeration of morality (Beck, 1995). A failure to resolve these dichotomous issues may reappear and affect the child later when adolescent identity conflict surfaces. These aspects of parenting and childhood experiences are contributing factors. These are:

- Emotional withdrawal by the parents
- Adolescents who are casually accepting violence are likely to have had early experience of violence themselves, either as observers or as victims; and
- The parents as role model are significant, especially in cases where the parents display double standards in their behavior. Beck (1995) concludes as follows:

When care is turned to neglect, affection to absence and need into greed by parental thoughtlessness, indifference and cruelty... the chronic frustration will find expression as hostility and defiance.

From our findings, it can also be observed that cult generally provide a sense of family and acceptance, which attracts people who have been alienated from mainstream society. This is further explained by Zelner and Petrowskley (1998) that the social isolation exhibited by most cults is not enough in itself to cause deviance, but must be integrated with other coercive technique.

Above all, the study reveals that a decline in community and traditional social structures, the foreign policy of United States Government has resulted in cultist or terrorist surges and this is relevant, in that it emphasizes the potential for cults to replace family units and other social constructs. Cults can therefore become the source of morality and guidance for those who become members and this has a direct relationship with their resulting beliefs and behaviors. This agrees with Robbins and Dick (1981) that cult often tries to provide a close- and family-like environment as a means to attract new members.

It also clear from the findings of the study that there are male involvement in cult activity than females in United States Colleges and University Campuses and that aspect of home/family have remarkable influence on students involvement in cult membership. A lot of variables not considered in the study are prominent

determinant of cult membership in United States and Colleges and University Campuses.

In view of many constraints, the attempts at eradicating cultism, which now metamorphose into terrorism, have not been met as there continue to be terrorist threat around U.S.A and across the globe. The following recommendations are therefore put forward:

- Prevention is the best medicine. Since terrorism emerged out of cultism and since cultism is a moral issue, it is expected that a proper attention be given to the moral soundness of the youths, while the home should from cradle instill in its wards values that are in consonance with societal norms and attitudes.
- In this era of global tension as a result of terrorism, religious organizations on Colleges and Universities should be more aggressive in their drive to win souls to the kingdom of God.
- The foreign policy of the United State should be soften to open room for more democratic diplomacy that will not encourage hostility against United States and her allies.

Cultism, which now results in terrorism, is evil; It is hinged on low self-esteem and lack of confidence. From the experience of 9/11, it has its root in Colleges/ University Campuses due to numerous problems facing not only the home but also the society at large. It has caused sorrow and anguish in the lives of many families in the society. Life long ambitions and dreams have been destroyed, while the whole world including U.S is now living in fear. It is therefore, the duty of all to wrestle the menace to a stand still.

The Universities should develop a policy of providing a well-articulated and comprehensive programme of guidance and counseling to identify violent suspected cult members. This programme will enable the university to trace the students to their homes and develop deeper understanding of the problems of cultism which is now turning to terrorist group across the globe, this is assumed will help in the re-moulding of the character of the students.

Furthermore, since moral and social decadence on the part of our youth has equally contributed to cultism, terrorism and social disorder across the globe, the school curriculum should be re-appraised to embrace civic, religious and moral education. This will make the youth worthy in both learning and character. Thus, the curriculum needs to be reviewed and revamped. Courses in the area of Sociology of Education and Guidance and

counseling must be offered by students along with moral and religious education, irrespective of their choices of career. The curriculum needs to be revamped so as to reflect belief systems, norms and values in the society. The students or learners being referred to, as future leaders need to learn and share the culture of the society. Linton and Kluckhoh as reported in Haralambos and Heald (2002) explain that culture must be learnt and shared and failure in this, society will be unable to communicate and cooperate and confusion and disorder would result. This shows that the curriculum needs to be heavily loaded with African culture and less emphasis on western culture. However, moral and religious education should be part and parcel of the curriculum from primary, post primary and post secondary levels this will in a way make Nigerian education to achieve the objectives which informs its conceptions to make it functional and qualitative.

The exposure to civic, religious and moral education has earlier stated has been found to positively affect learners. The findings of this study have therefore revealed the importance and integration of civic, religious and moral education to the school curriculum in order to create awareness on the danger inherent in cult membership and how and why individuals can aspire to promote social order in the society.

Academic programs in the universities should be strengthened to keep the students intellectually engaged in their studies, with no spare time for cult activities. This could be done through reactivation of seminars, tutorials, projects and assignments to the students and various sporting activities.

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