

## PERCEPTION OF RELATIONSHIP DETERIORATION AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTHS: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL APPRAISAL

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### Abstract

Human beings in general go through life with different kinds of needs - physical, emotional and psychological. Some of these needs require reaching out to others for the satisfaction of such needs. Hence, relationships are part of human existence, and this predisposes people to seek and get into relationships with others. However, the level of relationship deterioration among youths is alarming, hence the need for this study. The study seeks to find out the causes of deteriorating relationship among youths in Nigeria, determine the consequences of deteriorating relationship on youths, investigate the ways of reducing relationship deterioration among youths, examine the various psychological remedies available for unhealthy perception of deteriorating relationship among youths and find out how to help youths already involved in unhealthy relationship. Furthermore, the study was anchored on social exchange theory by George Homans (1958). The researcher adopted both primary and secondary sources of data collection. The primary sources were direct oral interviews and interactions with some of the participants. While the secondary sources of data collection were the print media, journals, books, social media sources and broadcasting media. The study found out that liberation of sex, relationship prophecy and the wrong

people seeking for the right people to marry are some of the causes of relationship deterioration among youths. It was recommended that counselling psychologists should educate the youths and improve the quality of romantic relationship which will be used to develop a template to be used when need arises.

***Keywords: Deteriorating relationship, Perception, Psychological appraisal, Social exchange theory, Embarrassment.***

## INTRODUCTION

All living beings exhibit a fundamental drive to connect. Most young persons may not choose to enter romantic relationships that would be harmful to them, however, every romantic relationship has the potential for both positive and negative outcomes (Collins, Welsh, & Furman, 2009). It is estimated that abuse/violence in romantic relationships affects between 9% and 38% of young couples (González-Ortega, Echeburúa, & De Corral, 2008, Umeaku, et al., 2024) and women tend to be the major victims of relationship abuse and violence with 35% of women worldwide having experienced abuse and violence in intimate relationships (World Health Organization, 2017). For clarity, unhealthy romantic relationships do not always involve physical violence. Young people also experience physiological and emotional abuse in romantic relationships, which are nonphysical behaviours designed to control, subdue, punish or isolate a partner through humiliation and fear (Engel, 2002; Umenweke et al., 2024).

In several cases of unhealthy romantic relationships, people who are lethal in the relationship are rarely aware of their toxicity. They may be too self-absorbed and preoccupied with their own emotions, interests, needs, and goals which makes them unaware of the needs, goals,

interests, and emotions of others (Brown, 2017). Again, unhealthy romantic relationship is not selective of age, race, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, or location of residence; hence, anyone could become a victim (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006). Research suggests that the risk of getting into an unhealthy romantic relationship and becoming a victim emerges in adolescence (Hickman, Jaycox, & Arnoff, 2004; Tharp et al., 2009), with many of the related risk factors becoming more pronounced from early to late adolescence (Wolfe & Feiring, 2000, World Health Organization, n.d), while its effects may continue to manifest throughout adulthood. Experiencing abuse in an unhealthy relationship has been associated with an increased likelihood of repeatedly entering and experiencing unhealthy relationships in the future (Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode, & Rothman, 2013; Public Health Agency of Canada, PHAC, 2006). This may be because most relationship skills and patterns developed as adolescents, have been shown to show up in future relationships (Lundgren & Amin, 2015; McElwain et al., 2016; PHAC, 2016; Tharp et al., 2009). (PHAC, 2006; Tharp et al., 2009).

Healthy relationships help in optimum functioning of individuals, whereas unhealthy romantic relationships bring individuals to a state of despair and frustration. Kerpelman et al. (2010) identified some of the positive outcomes associated with romantic relationships such as positive effects on academic performance, interpersonal skills, support for future goals, sexual pleasures, happiness, increased self-esteem and resilience. Negative effects were noted to include abuse, violence, depression, unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and other harmful aftermaths. Unhealthy romantic relationships can also lead to psychological abuse and intimidation, stalking (in person or through social media, kidnapping, property damage, robbery, threats and harassment, assaults, and homicide (Cornelius & Resseguie, 2007; Achebe &

Onyemaechi, 2023; Hickman et al., 2004). It could manifest also in emotional violence – name calling, shaming, purposeful embarrassment, shouting, putting down and/or keeping a partner away from friends and family (Vagi et al., 2013), and unhealthy coping strategies for victims (PHAC, 2006). This shows that unhealthy romantic relationship is a public health concern that requires the intervention of social work, a profession that aims at improving the lives and social functioning of individuals (Okoye & Ijebor, 2013; Okonkwo, et. al. 2023), with the improvement of human relationship and the protection of the vulnerable in the society among its core mandates. Hence, the study aims at investigating relationship deterioration among youths.

For instance, killing or abusing a partner, can be attributed to poor coping mechanisms associated with wrong perception of deterioration in relationship. Suicidal tendency also seems to be associated with poor coping systems associated with poor perception of deterioration in relationships.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general aim of the study is investigating relationship deterioration among youths and how it can be managed psychologically. Specifically, this study sought to:

1. Find out the causes of deteriorating relationship among youths in Nigeria.
2. Determine the consequences of deteriorating relationship on youths
3. Investigate the ways of reducing relationship deterioration among youths.
4. Examine the various psychological remedies available for unhealthy perception of deteriorating relationship among youths.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are the causes of deteriorating relationship among youths in Nigeria?
2. What are the consequences of deteriorating relationship on youths?
3. In what ways can relationship deterioration be reduced among youths?
4. What psychological remedies are available for unhealthy perception of deteriorating relationship among youths?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study has both theoretical and practical significance. Theoretically, this study will provide relevant theories that can be used to explain relationship deterioration among youths. Also, this study will make available several literatures that explain the meaning of unhealthy relationships among youths. Practically, this study will be of great relevance to psychologist, youths and educational institutions. To psychologist, this study will be useful in managing emotional and relationship cases among youths. To the youths, this study will help them to understand why they should speak out when they found out that their relationship is already becoming violent. To the educational institutions, this study will help them to educate the students on the essence of being in a healthy relationship with the opposite sex.

### **Literature Review**

#### **Theoretical Framework**

##### **Social Exchange Theory by George C. Homans (1958):**

The study is guided by Social Exchange Theory (SET) and it was propounded by George Homans in 1958. Social exchange theory proposes that social behavior is the result of an exchange process. The purpose of this exchange is to maximize benefits and minimize costs. According to this theory,

people weigh the potential benefits and risks of their social relationships. When the risks outweigh the rewards, they will terminate. Most relationships are made up of a certain amount of give-and-take, but this does not mean that they are always equal. Social exchange suggests that it is the valuing of the benefits and costs of each relationship that determine whether or not we choose to continue a social association.

### **Empirical Review**

Aji et al (2013) observed that, adolescents' sexual activities are on the rise and rapidly emerging as a public health concern. Samkange-Zeeb, Spallek, and Zeeb (2011) reported that over 16% of teenage girls and 8.3% of boys are reported to have had first sexual intercourse by age 15. This is in line with CDC (2009) when it opined that nearly half of 19 million new STDs each year are among young people aged 15-25 years. In the same vein, Aji, et al (2013) reported that young people, aged 15-24, accounted for an estimated 45% of new HIV infections worldwide in 2007. About 16 million girls, aged 15-19 years, give birth every year, most in low- and middle-income countries. An estimated 3 million girls of the same age group undergo unsafe abortions every year (Okonta, 2007). According to CDC (2004), there are approximately 870,000 pregnancies occurring every year among women 15-19 years old and about 3 million cases of STDs, now STIs are reported annually among 10-19 years old.

Ajuwon, Funmilayo and Osungbade (2011) carried out a cross-sectional survey to assess experience and perpetration of physical, sexual and psychological violent behaviours among school-based adolescents. A total of 1366 students (50.4% females and 49.6% males) randomly selected from six public secondary schools in Ibadan, Nigeria were interviewed using a 36-item questionnaire. Respondents answered questions regarding demographic profile, sexual behaviour,

and the extent to which they had experienced or perpetrated physical, sexual and psychological

violent behaviours. The predictors of experience of violence among males were use of parental use of alcohol and being young were predictors of violence. Reports of perpetration of physical, sexual and psychological violence among males were 75.3%, 44.9% and 13.3% respectively.

Furthermore, an earlier study by Gryl, Stith and Bird (1991) assessed prevalence rates of physical dating violence among college students, by comparing violent relationships to non-violent ones.

In reference to initiating violence respondents reported that 51% of the time their partners initiated violence, 41% reported they initiated and 8% reported both individuals were equally responsible (i.e. pushed, slapped, hit with object, kicked, use of lethal weapon, etc.).

Brown and Leedom (2008) conducted an online survey of 75 women who reported being intimately involved with a man with psychopathic traits. They found that 95% of the women experienced emotional harm, 71% experienced financial harm, 67% experienced professional harm, and 51% experienced sexual harm. Perhaps the most staggering finding was that none of the women surveyed reported no harm. These survivors reported experiencing anxiety and stress symptoms, depressive symptomatology, dissociation, and problems with interpersonal relationships.

More recently, Humeny et al. (2021) examined the association between psychopathy and intimate partner violence in 475 individuals (89% women) who self-identified as being in an abusive romantic relationship. Victims reported experiencing diverse types of abuse with emotional abuse (99%) being most common, followed by deception (95%), financial abuse (83%), physical abuse (62%), and sexual abuse (59%). Examining the different dimensions of psychopathy, the affective dimension was most strongly related to the length of the relationship, the affective, lifestyle, and

antisocial dimensions to the degree of physical injury, and all dimensions were related to frequency and versatility of abuse. Overall, these studies suggest being in an intimate relationship with someone with psychopathic traits causes substantial negative impact.

## **Methods**

### **Participants:**

Participants used for this research were Nigerian youths. The participants for the study were Nigerian youths with direct experiences of deteriorated or deteriorating relationships. Nigerian youths with indirect experiences, for instance, having a friend with direct experiences or indirect experiences were also explored. The participants for the research had wide psycho diversity characteristics in terms of intelligence, personality factors, gender, age, educational level, religion, social-cultural and economic background,

### **Instruments:**

The instrument for the research were of both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources were direct oral interviews and interactions with some of the participants. The interviews were done both on the face to face basis, telephone discussions and social media chats with some of the participants. The secondary sources of data collection include print media, journals, books, social media, and broadcasting media. Their information, experiences and ideas served as a data for the study.

### **Procedure:**

For the primary sources of information, the researcher approached the participants and enlightened them on the study and why their opinions would be very much appreciated. After seeking their consents, the researcher went further to conduct a structured interview with the



participants assuring them that their opinions are meant for only research purposes. However, for the secondary sources of information, the researcher accessed and reviewed information from the print media, books, journals, broadcasting and social media that dealt with deteriorating relationships. In doing this review, the psychological appraisal of the experiences of the participants were made. Through this process, findings for the research were distilled out.

### **Design:**

An analytical design was adopted for the study. According to Cohen (2004), an analytical design is used when a research is doing a simple analysis of a phenomenon. Behavioral phenomenon of research is the deteriorating relationship and its perception among Nigerian youths.

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### **Causes of relationship deterioration among Nigerian youths**

**Wrong people looking for the right people to court:** Those who have negative attitude are looking for those who will accept them for who they are, those who are broke are looking for those who are financially independent, those who are not ready to commit are looking for those who will stick to them, those who can't love are looking for unconditional love, those who can't add value are looking for people of substance, those dealing with insecurity and low self-esteem are looking for partners to put on the same radar with them, abusers are looking for submissive, (Anazonwu, et al., 2019).

**Liberation of sex/sexual inducing media:** Africans have westernized their customs and traditions in such a way that our generational values and virtues have been lost over time. Modern relationships are now all about sex, without which relationships can't thrive. Most media marketers openly sell and market sex inducing and entrapment drugs without consideration for age limit.

**Acculturation:** Due to the influence of pornography, which was introduced to us by our western counterparts, sex now has a different meaning in relationships. When a partner is unable to keep up with the trending and back breaking sex positions, the other partner sees it as an avenue to cheat.

**Irresponsible parenthood:** Parents are no longer intentionally committed in raising their children. They are either too busy, nonchalant, or too woke to care about the activities of those who are their primary responsibilities.

**Peer influence/pressure:** Many youths have destroyed their relationships because of the bad advice and nudging of friends. While some other destroyed their because they sought to recreate the relationship of their friends that may or may not have been practically feasible (Onyemaechi, et al., 2022)

**Relationship prophecy:** Deteriorating relationships in Nigeria has mostly been caused by the prophecies and revelations that have been disclosed by our Nigerian clerics. Most of these clerics happen to be more invested in the given relationship than the actual couple.

**Lack of perception and communication:** Youths are so engrossed in themselves that they fail to notice the anomalies in their partners; therefore, have no way of soothing things out via communication. Genuine and open conversation leads to conflict resolution.

**Poor socialization goals:** The Nigerian education system, religion, social media which should have been preparing the youths in ways to uphold healthy relationships have managed birth forth unprepared and underage youths.

Economic Instability: This is a major factor in any relationship. Economic crises which can be as a result of unemployment have been discovered to affect love relationship negatively. There is no happy and good relationship in existence without stability in finance (Onyemaechi, 2025)

### **Consequences of relationship deterioration among youths to national developments.**

**Relationship deterioration can lead to relationship and dating violence:** Relationship deterioration which may arise as a result of falling out of love may make a partner abusive, since all the positive emotions previously shared are no longer attainable. It can increase harmful social practices which will adversely become a norm in the society. It can also increase youth restiveness, thereby marring social and economic development.

**It makes youth prone to relationship failures, toxicity, depression, stress, and aggression:** Youths at the receiving end of the deteriorating relationship, may become depressed, stressed and some even develop toxic traits when their emotions become unrequited for a prolonged period of time (Onyemaechi, et al., 2021).

**It can lead to death of promising youths:** A lot of youths have committed suicide and have also been murdered because they were jilted by their partners. Others commit suicide when they can't get the desired affection they seek from the opposite gender

**It can promote crime among the youths:** Some youths have committed murder when their partners left them for another. Some even went into a life of crime just to meet or exceed their partners' demands and keep the relationship afloat according to (Onyemaechi, et al., 2017).

## Discussion

This study explored relationship deterioration among youths in Nigeria. Findings from the study revealed that participants perceived unhealthy romantic relationship as a relationship that is toxic to the individual(s) in the relationship. They further indicated that it could manifest as emotional, psychological or/and violent physical abuses which invariably affect the victims social functioning. This was seen in such view as “Those relationships that can mar academic excellence, it can also bring about bodily harm especially when it is violent and can be physical, emotional or psychological.” These findings agree with that of Kerpelman et al. (2010) who reported that unhealthy relationships are those relationships that include abuse, violence, depression, unplanned pregnancies, sexually transmitted infections (STIs), and other harmful aftermaths. Findings from this study showed that majority of the research participants indicated that unhealthy romantic relationship is detrimental to both the perpetrator and the victim in the relationship. They stated that it affects an individual’s overall wellbeing negatively, their academic performance and their present and future relationships with others. This finding extends prior literature showing that victims were also more likely to withdraw from school, engage in harmful eating behaviours, and attempt suicide; they are also likely to experience, or recreate abuse in future relationships (Exner-Cortens, Eckenrode, & Rothman, 2013; PHAC, 2006). This may be because the relationship skills and patterns learned and indoctrinated through the developmental processes continue to guide and dictate the relationship pattern of the grown adult (McElwain et al., 2016; PHAC, 2016; Tharp et al., 2009). Many of the young female adults in the study stated that they discovered that their relationship deteriorated because their partners did not care about how they felt; rather they did whatever they wanted without considering the adverse effect on them. Their partners became self-

absorbed and blamed them for all the problems in their relationship while exonerating themselves.

This is in line with the findings of Streep (2015) that perpetrators of abuse in an unhealthy relationship are frequently described as arrogant, self-centered, manipulative, and demanding. They may also concentrate on grandiose fantasies (e.g. their own success, beauty, brilliance) and may be convinced that they deserve special treatment. The findings indicated that young adults have divergent views on the role of patriarchal culture and societal structures on the development of unhealthy tendencies in relationships. Although, it was not within the scope of the current study, further investigations for a deeper understanding of patriarchy in relation to romantic relationships would make for a broader understanding of the subject matter. Ending the relationship is the consensus solution on how the young adults in this study deal with their unhealthy romantic relationship when they discover that the relationship is harmful to them. Many, at first, attempt to fix the relationship by soliciting the counsel of family and friends but they quit the relationship when they realize that the abusive partner would heed no pleas and guidance. The study further found that the initial prerequisite for helping a young person deal with an unhealthy romantic relationship is for the person to first acknowledge he or she is a victim of an unhealthy relationship; subsequently, systems such as the family, community, and counsellors play the vital role of helping such young adults deal with the unhealthy relationship. Such a timely intervention is invaluable because **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended that:

1. Youths need to develop strong bond and emotional connection to a partner and desist from multiple relationships. They have to imbibe healthy lifestyle through avoidance of illicit sexual affairs.
2. Churches have to go beyond their comfort zones in establishing their position on dating and romantic relationship as they have been doing for married individuals. Clergymen need further training to bolster their counseling skills and deliverance of healthy sexual life talks. Effective Skill-Building Programs need to be organized, as this can help young adults develop skills for healthy relationships.
3. Counselling psychologists have to look into the occurrence of several factors that have been highlighted to improve the romantic relationship quality of the young adults and use them as a basis to develop a template, model and map to exercise significant control over it when need arises.
4. **Creation of awareness on the importance of having healthy relationships:** Youths should be constantly reminded on the importance of having healthy relationships, and the dangers involved in unhealthy relationships.
5. **Morality should be revived:** Practices of chastity, fidelity and mutual respect among partners, just like in the days of our forefathers should be hampered on.
6. **Psychological assessment and Psychoeducation are the pivotal wheels on which good relationship drives.**
7. **Providing marital counseling to those in a deteriorating relationship:** Counsellors and relationship experts should make themselves available to those who seek them and those

they come across. They should opine on the situation by either helping the youths fix or break their relationship.

**8. Reorientation on responsible parenthood and creation of friendly home environment:**

Parents should be reoriented on how to efficiently and effectively carry out their parental duties. They should be taught how to create friendly home environments in order to raise responsible citizens who can hold healthy relationships.

**9. Parents should teach their children to build safe and respectful relationships:**

The primary place of learning a healthy living is at home and likewise healthy relationships. Parents should mentor their children on how to build safe and respectful relationships.

**10. Organizing seminars and symposiums that can be used to educate the youths on the need to have a healthy relationship with the opposite sex.**

**Ways youths already involved in deteriorating relationship can be helped**

**Through constant investment in themselves:** Youths should constantly work on themselves in other to add, as much as create value for their partners so as to maintain a healthy relationship.

**Identifying toxic patterns of behavior and working on them:** Red flags in a relationship are always obviously displayed but many youths seek to down play it for their partners or completely ignore them with the excuse that the said partners will change once theirs a marriage vow; a step that never happens. Youths should be conscious of their toxic patterns and work on them in order to have a healthy relationship

**By being self-aware and knowing when to let go:** People in deteriorating relationships should know their self-worth. This will help them fight to keep the relationship or let go when they can't handle the obvious red flags in the relationship.

**By letting them know that they are good enough and deserve the best:** Youths in deteriorating relationships may decide to stick on because of the mental entrapment they feel. Some of the youths have already developed low self-esteem because of the provocative words instilled in them by their abusive partners. These youths should be reminded that they are much more than how they view themselves and can develop themselves better if they so wish.

**By curbing the influence of peer pressure:** Youths should learn to be contented, be able to differentiate between good and bad advice from friends.

**Reflect and learn:** Youths should constantly have introspection in order to fix their negative behaviors, mindsets and most importantly learn from their mistakes. Attitudes like this can help build up healthier relationships where everyone is willing to get better for each other. Early adulthood is a crucial time period for establishing healthy relationship skills and patterns.

## Conclusion

From the findings of the study it can be concluded that though violence in relationship is not uncommon but can be managed through various psychological measures such as psychoeducation, psychological assessment, counselling, behavioural therapy, constant seminar and awareness on how to promote healthy relationship among youths

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