The significance of Inter-generational formation of youth in the context of drug abuse in Pretoria CBD, South Africa

Takesure Mahohoma C., PhD
Research Institute for Theology and Religion
University of South Africa
E-mail: ctmunyariwa@gmail.com

Abstract
The importance of the youth in any organisation cannot be undermined. The role of the youth in politics, religion, education, etc. can be manifested through the entities like youth league and youth ministry. Despite the significant role youth play in society little attention is given to their formation. In this paper we shall discuss importance of forming the youth affected by drug abuse in Pretoria CBD. Our main focus shall be on the adolescent stage because the youth are future of every community. De facto a society without youth has no future.

Introduction
The problem of drug abuse among the youth can be understood in relation to the development of the young people. As a concept, juvenile delinquency suggests a distinct way of assessing, analyzing and classification of juvenile offenders; and even the treatment of youthful misbehaviour (Thornton, Voigt & Doerner, 1987:4).

Drug abuse is a worldwide problem. Its occurrence in every country, state, and city is phenomenal; and in spite of frequent non-governmental and Church efforts to curb it, it continues to increase. Recently, the son of former President Robert Mugabe and his wife had to cancel cabinet meeting so that they could rescue their son Bellarmine Chatunga, who was caught with drugs in Dubai (Dewa, 2016:1). According to Sharia law, he was supposed to be hanged but the family negotiated for his release. In July 2017, the same son and his elder brother Robert Junior were involved in a fistfight with a security guard in Sandton (Thornycroft, 2017: 1).

Research has shown that most partakers in drug abuse are relatively young and that adult drug abusers begin their tendencies at young age. Further, more unreported drug abuse acts occur during school going age than those who left school (Elliot & Voss, 1974: 124). Nongovernmental and religious organizations thus have an important task, not only of analyzing the problem of substance taking as a concept, but also of establishing causal factors with aim of prescribing effective measures to control. Any Christian formation programme has to address the following issues: first, Christian formation must understand
the nature and impact of drug abuse in terms of actions that can be regarded crucial in molding a whole person. This is compounded by technical experts. Secondly, measurement of drug abuse has positive outcomes i.e. behaviour change. Thus, the issue of hidden drug abuse has to be solved. Third, peer group factors such as the family, school and peer group. They are important factors in the formation of the youth. Further, sex and age factors have to be viewed as important in understanding the problem of substance taking.

Family remains as one of the most important institutions for Christian formation of the youth. As a primary socialization agency, the family should offer emotional support and material benefits to its members (Mqadi, 1994:1). To achieve this, the family mechanisms should function very well. Among the Africans, there are no concepts for an orphan or old people’s home because one is related to another immediately or by extension. Hence the notion of extended family. Moreover, traditional leadership has the role to assist in the formation of young people. A young person is son or daughter of the community. This is why there is collaborative ministry in the community. Hence, the family as church in its smallness has to reflect good ethical, economic and religious principles that enable its members to have positive attitude or behaviour.

Research has shown that abnormalities found within the family have an effect on its members, especially the young. Such abnormalities have decisive consequences on their behaviour. This is why a Christian family is crucial in determining bad behaviour early and rectify it before it blossoms into a culture. Christianity is the dominant religion in South Africa. According to IndexMundi, Christians form 86% of the South African population. We seek to answer how Christianity can bring behaviour change among the youth.

**Conceptual Clarification**

**Christian Formation**: This is formation guided by Christian teaching. Christian teaching refers to the Scripture and some church documents like papal encycyclicals, documents of second Vatican council, various catechism handbooks (CCC, Anglican, Lutheran, Reformed Church, and Methodist. The Christian formation is of the mainline established churches. This means the research will at times imply but does not include teachings of prophetic and neo-prophetic movements.

**Youth**: We shall use two age groups: Adolescence and young adults

**Adolescence** (12 to about 20 years)

This stage is associated with identity and roles. It is regarded as highly significant in the individual’s psycho-spiritual development. It is also very important for our purposes in understanding human development. No longer a child but not an adult, the adolescent is confronted with various social demands and role changes that are essential for meeting the

---

1 In South Africa, youth are the majority. 66% of the population is made up of the youth i.e. those below 35 years. According to statistics South Africa, the youth between 14 and 35 years are estimated to be around 39%. This population is growing very fast when compared to the national annual growth rate. In the prevailing socio-economic conditions, it is vital to understand the youth component.
challenges of adulthood. Erikson has analyzed this stage of development more than any other scholar has. This shows his interest in this stage. According to Hjelle and Ziegler (1981:125), “adolescence is associated with a sense of ego identity at the positive end and a sense of role confusion at the negative end.” The two scholars further urge that the task confronting adolescents is to consolidate all the knowledge they have gained about themselves (as sons and daughters, students, athletes, musicians, girl scouts, choir boys, altar-servers etc.). In this stage, they try to integrate these various self-images into a personal identity that shows awareness of both a past and a future that follows logically from it. At this stage, the conflict is within the ego itself, namely, of identity versus role confusion.

This is a time in life when one wishes to define what life avenue is at the present and what one wants to be in the future. It is a time of making vocational plans. Due to the difficult transition from childhood on the one hand and a sensitivity to social and historical change on the other, the adolescent during this stage of identity formation is likely to suffer more deeply than ever before or over again from a confusion of roles or identity confusion. This stage therefore, can cause one to feel isolated, empty, anxious and indecisive. The adolescent feels he or she must make important decisions, but he is unable to do so. Adolescents may feel that the society is pushing them to make decisions, thus they become resistant. Consequently, the adolescent’s behaviour is inconsistent and unpredictable during this chaotic state. At one moment, he or she has an inner reservation not to commit himself or herself to anyone in fear of being rejected, disappointed or misled. The next moment she or he may want to be a follower, a lover, or disciple, no matter what the consequences of such a commitment may be.

**Young Adulthood (20 – 24 years)**

This stage marks the formal beginning of adult life. It is a stage of intimacy and isolation. This is generally the period when a young person becomes involved in courtship, marriage and early family life. It extends from late adolescence until early adulthood. During this time, young adults usually orient themselves toward enriching vocations and settling down. At this stage, the young adults are prepared and willing to unite their identity with others. They seek relationships of intimacy, partnerships and affiliations, and are prepared to develop the necessary strengths to fulfill these commitments despite the sacrifices they may have to make (Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981:127).

For Erikson use of the term “intimacy” is multi-dimensional in meaning and scope. To begin with, he has in mind the sense of intimacy that most people share with spouses, friends, brothers, sisters and parents or other relatives. Secondly, he speaks of intimacy with oneself, that is, “the ability of fuse one’s identity with somebody else’s without fear that one is going to lose something of himself or herself” Hjelle & Ziegler, 1981:128). It is this aspect of intimacy (that is merging one’s own identity with that one another person) that Erikson sees an essential for the establishment of a meaningful relationship. According to Erikson, only a person who has the ability to love and work is capable of intimacy. In fact, a true sense of intimacy cannot be attained unless the person has already achieved a consolidated personal identity. Some young people become disappointed in relationship so that they end up abusing themselves with drugs.
Method of Approach

This research used a qualitative approach to answer questions about the problem of drug abuse in Pretoria, CBD. Data were gathered from primary and oral sources. The primary sources included responses from interviews conducted by the author with respondents in Pretoria. There were 33 interviewees: 5 Tanzanians, 1 Zimbabwean, 27 South Africans. The purpose was to understand and describe the problem from the participants’ point of view. As part of large community, Pretoria is flooded with many young people who are neither employed nor going to school. The common characterisation of their living is taking drugs.2

Background of Research

The research has been necessitated by the current wave of drug abuse among youth in Pretoria, CBD. The young people encounter unemployment, identity crisis, family problems, etc. There are few safe places in the Pretoria. Most people from our interviews know that drugs, violence and crime are now common in the city. It is no longer safe to walk alone in some streets especially at night and during weekends. The common hideouts of these youth are former Founders Secondary school, Bloed Street, Corner Nelson Mandela and Walker streets, Corner Lilian Ngoyi and Bosmann streets there are groups of youth who are victims of drugs. In my interview with the police at Pretoria central station and Sunnyside there was a clear sign of pessimism. It is a problem beyond their control. Their response is, “There is nothing we can do to these young people.” They inject themselves with nyaope3, cocaine and dagga during the day.

For the past three months (May, June and July 2017) UNISA Sunnyside campus was under siege. The youth vandalized the flat and houses. They removed window, doorframes, and pillars in order to go and sell to scrap yard. During mass demonstrations, they are usually on the forefront of looting shops.4 This is the identity of the youth in Pretoria. Another problem is lack of trained counselors who can assist the youth in their journey to maturity.

Interdisciplinary Significance

The research seeks for behaviour change among the youth. It aims to assist the young generation to adopt self-direction by accepting tradition and formation of conscience. The research seeks help churches and civil society to come up with youth formation programmes in politics, morality, economics and development.

---

2 There were 33 interviewees: 5 Tanzanians, 1 Zimbabwean, 27 South Africans.
3 *Nyaope* is a concoction of different drugs. The substances include marijuana, low-grade heroin, rat kill, paraffin, ink, antiretroviral drugs. It could be in liquid or powder form. These youth inject each other and now use Bluetooth. Bluetooth is a system whereby if one is highly intoxicated other members draw blood from him/her and inject themselves so that they become drugged too. This drug is cheaper than cocaine and heroin. It is highly addictive. Once a person takes nyaope he/she quickly becomes addicted. When one fails to get nyaope he/she starts sweating or shaking uncontrollably. This is why these young people end up selling their belongings, begging in streets and vandalizing any property. The same drug is called by different names depending on the area. In Durban (KZN) it is called sugars, Ungah in the Western Cape and Pinch in Mpumalanga.
4 Political parties manipulate these youth. They are promised jobs, houses, money, etc. As a result, they engage in criminal activities and victimizing those who oppose their party.
Factors that contribute to Drug taking

Multiple causes contribute to drug abuse by the youth. Risk factors exist at all levels and influence the child, family, peer group and neighbourhood (Mqadi, 1994:3). There is a consensus that the problem of drug taking can be an individual endeavour, family or group undertaking. Hence, it is important to know the root causes and their impact. For purpose of this study, the focus will be on personal factors, family, peers, death and community.

Personal Factors

Van Staden argues that some of these young people are motivated by pleasure seeking (hedonist tendencies) (2015:2). Therefore, this is personal. The aim is to maximize pleasure. This is common among children from rich families who choose to be deviant. There is evidence that mental state, age and repeated drug taking later contribute to later habitual drug taking (Van Staden, 2015:2). Some of the youth regret why they are in this situation but find it very difficult to come out of it.

Sometimes taking certain drugs cause these youth to be violent (Van Staden, 2015:3) and engage in criminal activities as a source of income. In South Africa, the crime reports indicate that drug related crimes increased by 4% from 2006 to 2007 (Brunelle, Brochu & Cousineau, 2000).

Death and Consolation

The loss of parents of the loved ones can cause the young to resort to drug taking. Death of a loved one is a saddest experience that can affect anyone. While some people can be transformed, others can become depressed and devastated. To cope with this experience is a big challenge. The pain can be so overwhelming that young people experience shock, anger, guilt or sadness. This can trigger them to resort to drug taking.

Family

As shown above, children belong to a family either by immediate or extended relationship. Hence the significance of a family is paramount in the formation of the youth. However, a dysfunctional family can contribute to drug abuse (Van Staden, 205:4). Some families are not ideal. The behaviour of parents can have a negative impact on children, for instance alcohol consumption, inhaling substances, injection of drugs and so forth. Belonging to such a family exposes a child to high risks of wanting to test, experiment and put into practice without any reprimand from parents. As such, parental violence, styles and relationships can contribute to juvenile delinquency. Some children run away from family problems by engaging in drug taking. Barton (2006:149) and Henry et al. (2002:350) suggest that poor parenting fosters juvenile delinquency. There is a correlation between lack of parental monitoring, parental rejection, poor discipline methods and participation in drug abuse (Van Staden, 2015:4). In the process of bringing up their children parents who employ overly authoritative discipline like army barracks (punitive discipline in which physical violence is used), promote aggression and fail to relate with children amicably actually cause them to engage in bad activities (Unnever, Cullen
There could be lax discipline in which neither parent exerts control. This is coupled with erratic discipline in which one parent uses love-oriented method and the other is lax or punitive. Love-oriented discipline is one in which reasoning is with the child and punishment involves withholding rewards and privileges.

The fact of parental neglect, family conflict and disruptions, sexual abuse and parental unethical practices can contribute to delinquent and drug abuse behaviour in the children (Deschenes & Esbensen, 1999:78). Whereas parental warmth, supervision, support and involvement help children to cope with challenges. The absence of role models may adversely affect the upbringing of children. The extent to which a parent is accepted as role model with whom children can identify with has an influence on their character formation. If the profession or source of livelihood of the parent were admirable, the children would consider him a role model. Therefore, it is important that parents play an essential role in children’s lives by teaching norms, Christian values, regulating behaviour, providing emotional and financial support (Petts, 2009:474). While some thinkers advocate that two parents are better in instilling discipline in children than single parents, I am of the opinion that this is not automatic and the logic does not follow. There are single parents who have raised highly recognized people like Barack Obama, St. Augustine of Hippo, etc.

Another important factor is parental rejection. Neglected or rejected children who have never experienced love and affection, lacked support and supervision in a home set up tend to become victims of drugs. The whole thing becomes compensatory behaviour. Such children tend to find comfort in groups of deviant nature.

**Relationship with peers**

Another important factor that influence drug taking is peers. The problem of substance taking depends on the kind of peer relationships. (Van Staden, 2015:6). This phenomenon has no gender, race or creed. The youth influence one another easily but fail to sustain themselves later on. It could be solidarity in expedition. The young initiate one another into drug abuse. Thus youngsters end up taking drug substances due to social pressure. They think not doing it is being backward, rural minded and not up to date with fashion. Unresolved family matters can make the youth fall prey to their peers who seem to offer solutions to the problems they face. When a child associates with peers who take drugs, this is a clear indication that the peers are more likely influencing him/her (Burt & Klump, 2013:1278).

**Economic Conditions**

Strain theorists suggest that there is a connection between poverty and substance taking. Thus, children who live in poverty and lack education are more likely to involve themselves in substance taking. For a long time official data has pointed out that drug abuse is prevalent among the lower classes and that the occupation or employment status of parents has much in common with children taking drugs. The assumption is that children from a lowly economic income tend to engage in drugs more than those from rich families. Although this can be true but it does not apply always and everywhere. Some of the partakers in drugs are from very rich families and have been to best school. Those who take drugs sometimes when they started it thought it was
out of prestige. They wanted status and attention.

**Christian Formation of the Youth**

In the light of the problem of drug abuse by the youth, we move to the significance of Christian formation to curb this problem. Faith formation of the youth in the culture of choice has several challenges. However, the practice demonstrates that it can make a difference in the lives of the young people today and into their adult lives. This is confirmed by the national study on Youth and religion under auspices of soul searching. It confirms that Christian formation can nurture the youth. It improves in their family relationships, attitudes, behaviour or character. A programme that prioritises ministry to the youth and supports the efforts of their parents, invests in trained and skilled youth groups and fosters religious maturity will yield positive results.

**The importance of Christian formation of the youth**

This section deals with the unique quality of the youth. Many essays have been written on the formation of youth like “Choosing church, Effective Practices for Youth Ministry,” and “Exemplary Youth Ministry Project.” We have drawn some insights from them. In his personal and pastoral approach towards the youth Pope John Paul 11 said, “You are the future of the world, the hope of the church. You are my hope” (Osservatore Romano, 23-24 October 1978, 2). The pope saw the youth to be great hope for the church and for the world. As such, the Christian formation of youth is vital in the ministry of the church. In the context of technological advancement, the youth experience greater freedom that is sometimes detrimental to values. The United Nations International Youth Day is an opportunity to put youth at the centre of the church and the world. The youth have a task to transform themselves and promote relations among people. The youth have to feel that the church and the world care for them. Thus, the anxieties and concerns of the youth should be responded to. Youth are key players in the life and mission of the church. They are not personal property to any political party or church. Youth are a gift that should be shared with everyone, with society, with the Church and with all humanity (John Paul 11, Dilecti Amici, no. 1).

In the light of the above argument, the youth have to be engaged in true dialogue. The young people deserve to be listened to (John Paul II, 124). Listening is a form of giving the youth to talk to Jesus in a personal way. This is why it vital for church leaders to have a direct way of reaching out to the youth in the catechesis and other events of world youth Day. Hence, the liturgical celebrations should encourage the young to exchange experiences of faith. These are signs of younger generation to live out their spirituality. It is a form of transmitting knowledge of faith to young people. This calls for the attention of parents, teachers, priests and all those who have responsibilities to make a unique contribution to the formation of the youth. This is why a

---

5 John Paul 11, Address to Italian youth, 8 November 1978. He says the youth have preferential place in the heart of Jesus Christ.

6 In 1999, the UN General Assembly declared International Youth Day to be 12 August. It was recommended that youth should be promoted in national and international issues. The whole objective is to promote the value and sense of youth. They are encouraged to denounce nations that promote selfishness and oppression by creating new structures that are inspired by truth, solidarity and peace.
proper and considerable lifestyle has to be distilled to the young people. It is the right of the youth to get answers to questions about truth (Benedict VI, 21 January 2008). This means elders should become reliable friends to the youth.

**Christian Formation of the Youth: Praxis and vitality**

Effective Christian Formation involves development of commitment in youth through socialization. This is teaching the youth Christian way of life i.e. spirituality and create conditions where the young people meet God (religious experience). This enables the youth to actively participate in the church and at home. This becomes a two-way Christian formation; the church forms the youth and these youth transmit back their formation to the church.

This formation builds knowledge of the symbols, rituals, narratives and it includes the habits such as church attendance and Bible reading. This occurs through the example and mentoring of others, education in the Bible and Christian tradition, Sunday worship and youth meetings and activities.

Formation that gives a sense of Belonging, meaning and various competencies that assist them, as they become adults at homes and institutions or work places. The aim of Christian formation should be to address three fundamental conditions of human nature: i.e. belonging, believing (a sense of meaning) and achieve competence (opportunities to develop competence). This keeps the youth engaged. As Lytch states, “When churches’ ministries with youth include these three components, teens will restructure their time and attention to participate in them…” (2004:25-26).

Among Africans, sense of belonging is very crucial in the upbringing of a person. One wants to be identified with a family, clan or tribe. This reminds of the Ubuntu concept. According to Mbiti, “I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am”. It is building intergenerational relationships in the community. The same is true with Christian formation; it creates relationships with peers and the church. Sense of belonging attracts and holds the youth together. It gives meaning of the whole life. In addition, formation offers the youth the challenge and opportunities to develop competence. The youth want high goals, standards of excellence that demand their attention and energy as they grow. In their formation, the young people need opportunities to develop leadership, roles in church and families, planning programmes and public speaking and mentoring others.

**Spiritual Disciplines and practices**

This is developing approaches and tools for assisting the spiritual life of the young people. This can be done through retreats, seminars, and mentoring one another. This will assist in quenching their spiritual hunger. In this way, moral, spiritual and dogmatic or liturgical concepts are clarified and embraced. This helps in understanding how faith is lived out, how following Jesus Christ affects one’s perceptions and actions. Formation that equips and engages the young people to participate in life, ministries and practices of the church. This is willingness to involve young people as full members of the community. The youth are allowed to stand side by side with their elders so that they feel at home and are genuinely known. The elders also should respect the way
the young people learn today that are experiential, image-rich, multisensory, interactive, engaging and technological.

**Conclusion**

It would be meaningful to draw conclusions based on the causes of drug abuse. There are varying degrees of efforts in churches to cater for the youth. They assist them to reform and be integrated into the society. Although some have settled and become part of society, the challenge is to go to the main root cause and start the formation from there. Christian formation is an essential component in the life of the youth. As an integral element of the church, it teaches the youth to be part of the community. It creates roles, muntries, teams and qualities that make for a good community. Critical in the Christian formation of the youth is the role of mentors. They possess vital element to nurture the youth. Mentors are role models. They manifest the presence of God in their lives. They transmit their own faith and Christian tradition. Authentic relationships and effective practices should operate within clear vision that is strengthened by training and support. While admitting that Christian formation of the youth is important but it is not easy. Young people are sometimes unpredictable, moody and bulldozers. However, there is still need to create space for young people to find their own voices as disciples.

**Pastoral Recommendations**

Church leadership should develop pastoral activities that enable the youth to know each other foundationally with trust and confidence. To know one another by the root. More also Church pastors and parish councils should come up with the practical methods of evaluating how church programmes help congregants to evaluate themselves in their Christian formation. This is to strategize the purpose of pastoral programmes. The youth should as well develop companionship attitude in church and social participation that they value their dignity. Furthermore, the Church leadership has to facilitate youth participation in ongoing Christian education. This would enhance learning practices about their stages of human development. In addition, that drug lords and their chain of supply be exposed and stopped immediately. Finally, the youth to be open and ready to learn more about themselves in Christian formation programmes.
REFERENCES


John Paul II, Osservatore Romano, 23-24 October 1978, 2, St. Peter’s Square, after the Angelus.


Mischel. W.1993. Introduction to Personality, Texas: Harcourt College Publisher.


