SELF EMPOWERMENT: A STRATEGY FOR REDUCING ILL-HEALTH AMONG NIGERIAN YOUTHS

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Abstract
The paper envisaged that acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies can enhance self sustainability and daily living which will build and create a sense of respect, contentment and relief in the youthful years through to adulthood. Improved socio-economic status through self-empowerment is expected to facilitate good health and as well as reduce the rate of social and health vices that may arise as a result of pressure associated with meeting basic daily needs and means of livelihood among Nigerian youths. Unemployment and inability to compete measurably socio-economically in the society may increase the involvement in risky behaviours like substance abuse, unprotected/multiple sex partners and promiscuity, poor dietary habits and unnecessary worries that are detrimental to good health in youthful years. The paper therefore stressed on some concepts, social determinant of health, priority areas of self empowerment programme, strategies for self empowerment, importance of self empowerment to health and implications on public health.

Keywords: Self-empowerment, knowledge, Ill-health, Youths, Strategies, sustainability.

Introduction
Unemployment may be said to be one of the biggest problems in Nigeria in the contemporary society. Continuous increase in birth rate leads to high rate of youth unemployment in the nation. There is a high turnout of graduates and school leavers from various institutions in the country for those who are privileged to acquire formal education. These school leavers have the aspiration of getting into the labour market. On the contrary, they are faced with the challenge of seeking for means of daily living due to lack of gainful employment. Also those who do not have the opportunity to acquiring education find it difficult to sustain themselves financially due to inadequate entrepreneurship skills. The situation has moved from bad to worst probably due to inadequate skills, knowledge, sensitization and fund for most job seekers. This ugly situation may increase poverty and suffering in this nation which may invariably contribute to the development of ill-health and infectious diseases among youths in this country.
UNESCO (2013), postulated that “Youth” is best understood as a period of transition from the dependence of childhood to adulthood’s independence and awareness of our interdependence as members of a community. The organisation stressed further that youth is a more fluid category than a fixed age-group, though age however is the easiest way to define this group, particularly in relation to education and employment. Therefore “youth” is often indicated as a person between the age where he/she may leave compulsory education, and the age at which he/she finds his/her first employment. This latter age limit has been increasing, as higher levels of unemployment and the cost of setting up an independent household puts many young people into a prolonged period of dependency. Nonetheless self-concept is influenced by several variables such as peers, lifestyle, gender and culture which are constructed during the period of youth. Social decisions on choice of behaviours that may contribute to the health of youths and invariably on later adult life are made during youthful periods of life. Social behaviours categorized as behaviours that contribute to unintentional injuries and violence; tobacco use; alcohol and other drug use; sexual behaviours that contribute to unplanned pregnancy and sexually transmitted Infections (STIs), including human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) infection; unhealthy dietary behaviours; and physical inactivity as well as overweight (UNESCO 2013). However adoption of health- threatening behaviours may also be influenced by material deprivation and stress. Also environments influence, whether individuals take up tobacco, use alcohol, experience poor diets, and have low levels of physical activity may arise as a result of inadequate provision of basic needs for youths. Since tobacco and excessive alcohol use and carbohydrate-dense diets are regarded as means of coping with difficult circumstances.

Nonetheless expansion, of knowledge of the social determinants of health among youths can improve the quality and standard of care for those who are marginalized and less privilege; poor or living in developing nations, by preventing early death and disability while working to improve quality of life. World Health Organization - (WHO) (2003) suggested that the social determinants of health included social gradients (life expectancy is shorter and disease is more common further down the social ladder), stress (including stress in the workplace), early childhood development, social exclusion,, social support networks, addiction, availability of healthy food, and healthy transportation. However the United States Centers for Disease Control (2010) defined social determinants of health as "life-enhancing resources, such as food supply, housing, economic and social relationships, transportation, education, and health care, whose distribution across populations effectively determines length and quality of life". These include access to care and resources such as food, insurance coverage, income, housing, and transportation. Social determinants of health influence health- promoting behaviours, and health equity among the population is not possible without equitable distribution of social determinants among groups.

Youths are capable of setting in order their potentials towards achieving
positive goals that may earn them high self esteem and self actualization in the society. This can invariably have positive socio-economic status implications on them, their families and the nation as a whole. It is plausible that greater economic resources would provide youths and the individuals with more resources to cope with both everyday and special challenges, and that limited economic resources in themselves can create stress (e.g., due to residential crowding, food insecurity, worry about making ends meet in general, and family conflict related to these stressors). Self empowerment is generally a crucial path to greater economic resources and also may reflect greater knowledge and skills that can be applied to problem solving and, hence, to stress reduction. Higher income and self empowerment both reflect and can provide access to social networks that have more resources and make fewer demands on one's own resources, thus potentially reducing stress. Further high social economic status can enhance a life free of stress, low self esteem and bring about positive mental health and physiological well-being.

Colbert and Harrison (2011) agreed that chronic stress plays a significant role in the increase of morbidity and mortality rates in the lower socioeconomic groups of the population. Large amounts of the stress hormone cortisol can result in excessive levels of glucose in the bloodstream, which in turn can result in plaque build-up in the arteries, increased heart rate, and high blood pressure. Data from the Coronary Artery Risk Development in Young Adults Study (CARDIA), conducted in the United States of 35- to 45-year-old men and women, indicated that lower income and education were associated with higher cortisol levels in the late afternoon and evening. Furthermore, elevated levels among those with lower socioeconomic status could be mostly explained by differences in health behaviours, such as smoking but also, to a lesser extent, by social network diversity, depression, perceived social support, and autonomy.

Nevertheless, empowering youths means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which they can act on their own discretion and terms, rather than at the direction of others. United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (2010), World Survey on the Role of Women in Development (2009) said empowerment refers to increasing the spiritual, political, social, educational, gender, or economic strength of individuals and communities. This includes encouraging, and developing the skills for self-sufficiency, with a focus on eliminating the future need for charity or welfare in the individuals or groups. Inadequate empowerment can reduce self-sufficiency, self-confidence and ability to be fully self-supporting. This in turn can lead to psychological, social and even mental health problems among youths. However through self-empowerment, marginalized youths may obtain basic opportunities either directly by themselves, or with the help of non-marginalized others who share their own access to the opportunities.

Also self empowerment is a process that involves examining and incorporating youths into sense of self by understanding the benefits of personal striving and subjective developmental goals in life. Self empowerment is a way
of developing or engaging oneself in gainful essential skills and entrepreneurship in other to meet the basic personal and social needs in life. It is a holistic approach that can advance solution to health problems in our communities and increase the opportunities for healthy living. It is a way of enhancing and developing youths into business leaders that can implement economic personalities by developing attitudes and skills necessary for personal success and social responsibility in the society. Youth need to be empowered so that they can work towards personal development and recognize their place as responsible and achievable members of the global populaces. This will keep and preserve them from the negative implications of the social determinants for health and infectious diseases which may result from low socio-economic status.

Self empowerment will contribute to the individuals functional and productivity capabilities as useful and valued citizens of a nation.

Hence, the development of a sound healthy youth will lead to productive and meaningful living. They will feel safe, valued and worthy of existing by themselves and this will also boost the value and worth of the entire nation in the global economy. When youth discover and reach their full potential socio-economically, they may become spiritually sound and grounded which may invariably have positive effect on their health and total well-being, because they are likely to avoid several of the health damaging behaviours. Therefore youth empowerment may be referred to as an attitudinal, structural and cultural process whereby young people gain the ability, authority and capability to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of other young people and adults.

Conflicts usually arise when adolescents find it difficult to meet many of their needs; this may result in manifestation of various forms of psychological disorders which may lead to poor health. But the realization of self empowerment and development will save youths from persistent health problems and invariably facilitate quality sustainable life. Youth need to be adequately empowered to improve their standard of living and be able to cope with their social needs in the society. The establishment of innovative programme in collaboration with the government, nongovernmental organizations, educational systems, families, local business and the community will provide the experiences needed for proper directions for Nigerian youths. This can help them master the skills necessary to increase their successful inclusion in independent productive life. It will also enable them to identify the information that is potent enough to empower themselves, give them an edge and help them with personal development, career growth, and of course, help them take a stand in the society. Therefore this paper explores the importance of building the nation and the entire world by enlarging the adolescent entrepreneurship capacities individually or as a group. As well as consider how self empowerment can prevent Nigerian youths from poverty as a social determinant of health and infectious diseases and point in the direction of
self-induced empowerment as a viable option for today’s Nigerian youth.

Priority areas of youth empowerment
Youth may empower themselves by focusing their attention on profitable areas to actualize their goals in life. Such profitable areas may include building essential knowledge, skills and competencies that can make them safe, successful, useful, spiritually grounded, and valued in the society through divers’ ways in their areas of interest, experiences, needs, talents and capabilities. These areas of self empowerment may include:

i. Quality education through enrolment in school without gender disparity at all levels of educational sectors.

ii. Professional port skills which deals with sensory and motor development for healthy body and sustainable income.

iii. Establishing electronic communication venture technology and internet communication technology (ICT) which are vital in the communication processes in the contemporary society.

iv. Production of creative human activities such as arts, tie and die, soap making, aesthetics and creative expressions graphic arts, clay and ceramic works and soap etc.

v. Decorative arts, such as jewel and textiles, and crafts which are designed primarily for their practical aesthetics uses, furniture and household items.

vi. Involvement in social processes and politics that are not biased and crime based to equip and them on leadership qualities.

vii. Vocational activities (crafts, baking, sewing and knitting) which give opportunity to work with their hands and to express their individuality and used in occupational therapy to reduce poor emotional and psychological health problems.

viii. Agricultural projects (fishery, poultry, bee keeping and honey production, snail, rabbit and grass cutter keeping and production projects etc), which may serve as self sustaining project for youths in life.

Social factors affecting health
Center for Disease Control (2012) defined social determinants for health as circumstances in which people are born; grow up, live, work, and age, as well as the systems put in place to deal with illnesses. These circumstances are in turn shaped by a wider set of forces such as economics, social policies, and politics. WHO (2008), reviewed the proposition of Center for Disease Control and Prevention's Commission on Social Determinants of Health, which identified two broad areas of social determinants of health that needed to be addressed. The first area was daily living conditions, which included healthy physical environments, fair employment and decent work, social protection across the lifespan, and access to health care. While the second area deals with distribution of power, money, and resources, including equity in health programs, public financing of action on the social determinants, economic inequalities, resource depletion, healthy working conditions, gender equity, political empowerment and a balance of power and prosperity of nations.
Poverty
Poverty and its consequences have been identified and recognised as a predisposing factor for infectious disease since the 19th century. Some correlates of absolute poverty, such as unhealthy housing and poor nutrition may be linked with poverty or lack of substantial income. Also health morbidity and mortality from ill-health is mostly associated with poor populations. Consequently disease permanently worsens a family's finances and people with little income are less likely to have better health.

Socioeconomic gradient
One of the most significant recent scientific advances with the potential to explain the socioeconomic gradient is an increased understanding of the physiology of stress and how, over time, stress can lead to wear and tear on multiple organs and systems (for example, through neuroendocrine and immune/inflammatory processes). Nonetheless greater economic resources would provide youths, their families and individuals with more resources to cope with both everyday and special challenges that may rise from inadequate economic resources which can create stress (e.g., due to residential crowding, food insecurity, worry about making ends meet in general, and family conflict related to these stressors). Self empowerment is generally a crucial path to greater economic resources and also may reflect greater knowledge and skills that can be applied to economic problem solving hence, to stress reduction.

Access to services
It has been recognized that not everyone has the same access to the services and supports that can help them to maintain their health. Inadequate income can lower access to health facilities and services. Insufficient health services and supports can increase the risk of HIV exposure and influence the management of HIV/AIDS and some infectious disease for some individuals especially youths that are economically impotent. Inadequate access to good diet, conducive housing and good water supply can aggravate transmission of high rate of infectious diseases. This may invariably reduced mental health potency or degenerate to death among youths and the affected individuals.

Water and sanitation
Water can act as a source of infection or as a breeding ground for vectors; on the other hand, adequate quantity and quality water supply is vital for hygiene and the avoidance of infection. Inadequate sanitation and consequent exposure to human faeces has a key role in the transmission of certain diseases. The right to water derives from the rights to health and to an adequate standard of living. This includes an entitlement to sufficient, safe, acceptable, physically accessible and affordable water for domestic and personal uses. Lack of access to safe water and good sanitation may result in risk of contracting infectious diseases like cholera epidemics, guinea-worm, diarrhoea morbidity and mortality, helminthes, dracunculiaasis lymphatic filariasis, chistozomiasis, hookworm. Youths are more venerable to diseases because of their active nature. However availability of water and good sanitation can be seen as key intermediary social determinants that influence health by reducing breeding sites for vectors of infection.
Housing and clustering crowding
Adequate housing is a key factor for healthy living. Studies recognised that housing and clustering are significant risk factors for sound health. The physical characteristics of a house, including materials and design; the peri-domestic area, including kitchen gardens, vegetation, solid waste dumps and domestic animals; and the clustering or crowding both within the home (number of people per room or area) and the neighbourhood (proximity to neighbours). Selection of new housing sites away from vector habitats, and improved and properly maintained housing, are important elements of environmental management for the control of vectors such as *Ascaris* infection, and leprosy. Limited economic resources can create stress about a place of abode. But self empowerment will lead to higher income for youths thereby enabling them to afford better residential facilities.

Migration, disasters and conflicts
Movement of people between countries, towns and villages is a major cause of health problems and infectious diseases. Migration may be temporary or permanent and includes the movements of nomads, refugees, labour migrants and people subjected to forced resettlement (Center for Disease Control 2010; European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) 2010; Colbert and Harrison 2011; World Health Organization 2003). Typical examples of migration and resettlement problem can be seen in the recent 2012 flood disaster in Nigeria which leads to both planned and unplanned migration in the country. Also people including youths may flee to neighbouring villages/town or to other areas within their own settlement in search of employment, daily living and place of abode. Movement from one place can lead to the spread and transmission of parasites and vectors. Natural disasters or conflicts often bring about breakdown health care services leading to differential health care outcomes (Center for Disease Control 2010; European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC) 2010; Colbert and Harrison 2011; World Health Organization 2003).

Benefits of Self empowerment on Health of Youth
The wealth of a nation is a strong indicator of the populations' health. But within nations, socio-economic position is a powerful predictor of health as it is an indicator of material advantage or disadvantage over the lifespan. Self empowerment is a strategy for improving social economic status of the individual and the nation as whole. In this case self empowerment may have positive effect on the life of youths through adulthood and the nation at large.

Self empowerment is a holistic approach that can advance solution to health problems in our communities and increase the opportunities for healthy living. Self empowerment and the acquisition of appropriate skills, abilities and competences is assumed to be able to build mental and physical components for the individual to obtain self respect, self worth and quality of life in the society.

Self empowerment is considered to be the most important instrument for reducing the most alarming
contemporary diseases like high blood pressure, stroke, heart failure which mostly have their up shoots from stress and pressures of meeting the basic needs of life. Self empowerment will generate commitment and build a sense of pride, confidence, self-worth that can raise youth morale because many of the youths will be gainfully employed thereby reducing the possibility of developing health crisis which may arise from inferiority complex as a result of poverty.

Self empowerment has the capability of inspiring youths to walk themselves out of the unemployment crisis and poverty which are major concern in Nigeria and other developing countries globally. They will be able to walk themselves out of poverty if they are adequately empowered and eventually prevent risks of social determinants of health and infectious diseases which may include substance use, cultism, robbery, hooliganism, risky sexual activities and crimes of different kinds that are associated with poverty and low socio-economic status.

Self empowerment can reduce the problem of homelessness that can have negative impact on health which has become a major concern in the public health sector in the contemporary society due to the country's recent economic downturn, especially in urban areas. Self empowerment will reduce the impact to a bearable minimum; everyone will be able to afford decent accommodation and shelter in the society rather than overcrowding in houses.

Self empowerment has the possibility of enhancing economic growth for youth, their families, communities and entire country which is a pre-requisite to eliminating a significant part of problems in the nation's workforce.

Self empowerment may create opportunities for youths to develop their creative ability, skills and potentials and to serve as productive and dynamic members of their societies and also contribute to the development of the nation's economic standards. Moreover, associating youths with adequate empowerment programmes which concern them will make them satisfied by the realization that they have been assigned, equipped and positioned to play a role in the nation's building and development. Once they are genuinely involved and engaged, their interest in constructive work will be aroused. They will be prepared to work sincerely for the welfare of the society and the country.

Socio-Economic position is a powerful predictor of the wealth of a nation's health as it's an indicator of material advantage or disadvantage over the lifespan. Self empowerment has the potential to boost the wealth of a nation which is a strong indicator of the population's health.

**Implications for public health**
Public health practitioners and leaders should insist that their practice be guided by current scientific knowledge. The latter indicates that social factors generally play a crucial role in health and health disparities this should be done in a way to affect not only the exposures people have to health-promoting or -damaging experiences, but also their vulnerability to health damage if exposed. Such factors also
affect an individual's access to timely treatment and the socioeconomic consequences of illness due to poverty, which then further transmit poverty and ill health across lifetimes and generations. Public health leaders and practitioners at various levels should consider the possibilities of doing this through joint action with education, housing, and child care sectors. Health leaders and practitioners can make substantial contributions to improve the health of youths by being vocal, visible advocates for policies to reduce social disadvantaged through self empowerment. They can seek to understand and speak to youths on the existing knowledge of the likely deleterious effects of social disadvantage on health and health disparities as a result of inadequate gainful income or employment.

Strategies for Disseminating Self empowerment Information to Youths these may include the following:

1. Formation of youth empowerment network worldwide by experts to enlighten the youths on issues that can help them establish new ventures which can give them the opportunity to fend for their daily income. These opportunities may include ventures like soap making, motor cycling, craft making etc.

2. Provision of information through youth friendly programme and services to enable the stakeholders in the life of youths (health workers, youth agencies, parents and religious organizations) to better communicate the issues affecting the life of youths.

3. Providing specific policies by the government which may include rules guiding substance use, violence, prostitution and other antisocial behaviours in form of juvenile justice (Beijing rules), criminal laws to protect the youths and the entire popular.

4. Creation of educational youth centers and forums that can adequately provide activities and training to encourage, educate and meet the unique needs and interest of youths on the vices of life.

5. Providing financial and material assistance and support to encourage and to enable the youths to start their own business ventures without much stress (Jacob and Ogundele, 2011).

Conclusion

Distribution of power, income, goods and services that are crucial to human health, such as people's access to health care, schools and education, conditions of work and leisure; their homes, communities, and rural or urban settings; and their chances of leading a flourishing healthy life cannot be determined except by improvement on the individual socioeconomic status. Socioeconomic status and affluence are highly influenced by gainful employment and good income which can mostly be obtained through self empowerment. Many people who are supposed to be vibrant during youthful years through adulthood are exposed to high morbidity and mortality rate due to inadequate or lack of substantial income. Improved socioeconomic status through self empowerment especially for the youths needs to be adequately ordered,
provided and broadened to solve some logistic problems on health and infectious diseases among the individual, society and the nation.

**Recommendations**

1. Stake holders should feel concerned and pay adequate attention to processes that can facilitate self empowerment for the youth in their care instead of leaving them to roam the streets and engage in issues that could be detrimental to their health.

2. Parents and elderly ones in the societies should facilitate and encourage the youths through formal and informal education right from the grassroots on how to empower themselves to be able to leave quality and healthy lives.

3. Youths should realize and be readily prepared to take positive steps to empower themselves to be able to meet up with their socioeconomic demands that will invariably improve the circumstances that could lead to good health.

4. Government should create opportunity by providing necessary and adequate equal opportunities for the less privilege and the affluent so that everybody can have the right to empower themselves without gender disparity in all domains and sectors of life in the country.

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