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## Addressing Social Inequalities in the Nigerian Society: The Role of Community Psychologists

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### Abstract

*This article examines social inequality and its effects on social exclusion, poverty escalation aggravation of ill – health and political instability. Social inequality has been found to be responsible for many vices in the modern – day society which have resulted into psycho–social and mental health disorders. The psychosocial disorders have in turn culminated into rising frustration which has led to rampant suicide as witnessed on a regular basis in contemporary Nigeria. Consequently, the situation has become so tensed that corrective measures need to be taken to address the ugly situation. The Nigerian Government is therefore, urged to employ the services of community psychologists specialised in addressing community problems through various forms of interventions. Community psychologists specialised in analysing social problems and identifying their causes and effects. The main focus of community psychologists is to avert human problems, they are therefore preventive rather than curative, and hence they differ from clinical psychologists in terms of approach. This group of psychologists try to apply psychology to improve social conditions in societies in order to prevent the development of psychological and other forms of disorders. Community psychologists have realised that the prevention of social problems goes beyond change of individual person's behaviour; it involves intervening into the social, political and physical systems that affect behaviour. This category of psychologists has certain guiding principles, such as that, social environmental factors are critically important in determining and changing behaviour. They have also spelt out guiding values such as individual wellness which encompasses the physical and psychological, social and spiritual health of citizens. They have also mapped out research areas, such as stress and mental health research area which examines the relationships among stress coping, social support and psychological well – being, among others.*

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**Keywords:** *Social Inequality, Social Exclusion, Poverty, Social Problems, Community Psychologists Interventions*

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### Introduction

Social Inequality is a global issue that is why it has been of concern to scholars, particularly community psychologists. The United Nations has set a bench mark for social equality the world over, the absence of which amounts to inequality. The benchmark was contained in a UN Declaration that:

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and wellbeing of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age, other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control (Article 25 (1),

Universal Declaration of Human Right) in Burma Human Right Year Book, 2006.

Contrary to the expectation of the united Nation these are not happening in many countries including Nigeria. This is because even with a cursory glance at the social structure of the contemporary Nigerian society, one can conclude that there is social inequality in the society. Moreover, the social inequality is becoming more pronounced by the widening gap between the rich and poor and specifically the Upper class and Lower class categories in the Nigerian society. This stratification is clearly manifested in the social relationships between the haves and have – not, even within the social institutions being patronised by members of the different social strata in the Nigerian society. For instance, there is a sharp distinction in the types of schools being attended by children of the upper and lower social categories of the Nigerian society; so also in the patronage of hospitals and commercial stores; use of means of transportation; housing accommodation, etc. While it is difficult to have a society where every member is equal in all respects, it is, however, expected that every member of a society should have at least, the minimum wage to live on, commensurate with the resources of the society. Looking at the natural endowment of the Nigerian society, one would naturally expect that every Nigerian citizen should live above the poverty – line in accordance with the standard set for the world by international organisations. The situation is however not, so, in the contemporary Nigerian society. Records have indicated increasing rate of poverty in Nigeria. In 1980 for instance, the statistics of Nigerians that earned below US \$1 per day was only 27.2 percent representing only 17.7 million people. By 2010 however the figure had rose to 69% with 112.5 million people. This figure is considered outrageous. A study conducted by the Central Bank of Nigeria and the National Bureau of statistics, 2010 has given a breakdown of the incidences of poverty by Geo-political Zones in Nigeria.

**Incidence of poverty by Geo-political Zone**

<b>Geopolitical Zone</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1985/6</b>	<b>1992</b>	<b>1997</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>2010</b>
North East	35.6	53.2	54.0	68.0	72.2	76.3
North West	37.7	48.4	36.5	62.0	71.2	77.7
North Central	32.2	48.4	46.0	53.0	67.0	67.5
South East	12.9	30.9	41.0	79.5	26.7	67.0
South West	13.4	42.0	43.1	74.1	43.0	59.1
South South	13.2	38.0	40.8	78.6	35.1	63.7
Nation Wide	28.1	43.0	42.7	69.2	54.4	69.0

Central Bank of Nigeria, and National Bureau of statistics, 2010

The above findings corroborate those of Aig-bokham, (2000), who studied poverty, growth and inequality in Nigeria. The study investigated inequality and poverty in Nigeria using data from national household survey. The main purpose of the study according to the scholar was to examine how far poverty has been reduced by the policies introduced during the period (1986-1988 structural adjustment programme) and particularly the pattern of grown these policies engendered. The widening gap between the poor and the rich termed polarisation and characterised by the disappearance of the middle class, was of particular interest (Aigbokhan, 2000 pp.1).

The study using the head-count index discovered that:

An increasing number of Nigerians were living in absolute poverty over the study period: 38% in 1985, 43% in 1992 and 47% in 1996. Poverty is higher in rural areas, than in urban areas. The corresponding numbers are

38%, 35% and 37% in urban areas, and 41%, 49% and 51% in rural areas..... The regional distribution of poverty is profiled at two level: at the level of the individual status of the federation and at the level of geo-political zones. Poverty tends to be lower in the southern zone than in the northern zone. (Aigbokhan, 2000 p.1)

The findings of the study has brought to fore the implication of the increase in the poverty rate in the country particularly the issue of polarization exemplified by the disappearance of middle class or the widening gap between the poor and the non-poor. The major implication is the possibility of increased social tensions as a result of increased inequality due to increasing poverty rate in the country (Aigbokhan, 2000).

In reality many Nigerians live below the poverty – line; many others are otherwise deprived since they have no good schools for their children; yet many others also lack good hospitals, decent accommodation, and reliable means of transportation and still many more others cannot afford the least effective general medication for their sick family members, even for common ailments such as malaria. In fact, many Nigerian youth (Male and female) today are unemployed even though adequately educated. The social inequalities, therefore, have resulted into an avoidable burden on the entire nation and its populace through various forms of criminal activities mainly by unemployed youth and other socially frustrated member of the society. As such, the rampant cases of kidnapping – for – ransom, militancy, armed robbery, cattle rustling and of late military insurgency by hoodlums, especially in the Niger Delta region and North Eastern states of Nigeria respectively, are all attestations to the socio – economic difficulties and other frustrations suffered by Nigerian youth due to unemployment and other forms of disadvantages experienced day – to– day. Indeed the Nigerian society can be said to be becoming socially moribund at present, since its necessary revitalisation requires some form of remedial action or even drastic reconstruction. For instance, consider the rampant cases of suicide being committed all over the country. In a situation where people rather prefer to die than to live in a society in which they were born and brought up, this means the country has reached the peak of societal morbidity. Suicide which is defined as the act of intentionally causing one’s own death is increasing and gaining currency in Nigeria. The act which is attributed to many psychological factors such as depression and other despair such as financial difficulties, among others is taking a fearsome proportion which is worrying and disturbing. Even though it is quite true that some people are to be blamed for their predicament, yet the society should be apportioned some of the blame since many would not have fallen into such terrible situations where they able to make ends meet with relative ease. In view of the above, therefore, the Nigeria society needs restructuring to make it more equitable and to address the prevalent social discriminations which ultimately culminate into frustration, criminal activities and mental maladjustment for many adults. Community psychologists can therefore, play a significant role in this regard, since their field of practice concerns, effective and efficient programmes of intervention, capable of addressing such emergencies as social problems, stress and mental health problems; the low quality of individual and community life, etc. In addition community psychology as a professional practice is greatly concerned with justice, especially the right to have a more equal and equitable distribution of resources, right to live in peace and freedom from social constraints, and right to equality and fair treatment, among others.

This paper appraises the concepts and scopes of social inequality, social exclusion, poverty; the relationship between social inequality and societal problems; the relationship between inequality and political instability, and the relationship between social inequality and

psychological and mental health disorders. The paper also discusses community psychology as a field of study and practice as well as community psychologists as experts in the field of community psychology. The paper went further to identify the guiding principles, and values and; community research areas; as well as community intervention, being the main service provision of community psychologists.

### **Meaning and Scope of Social Inequality**

The issue of social inequality refers to the existence of variations in terms of valued attributes which some members of a society possess more than others. The attributes can include income, wealth, status, knowledge and power. The possession of these attributes can vary among individuals, families, social groups, communities, and nations. The major issues of concern are what factors are responsible for the inequalities and what are the consequences of the social inequalities on individuals and societal livelihood?

Social inequality has been defined as “differences in income, resources, power and status within and between societies. Such inequalities are maintained by those in powerful positions via institutions and social processes (Naidoo and Wills, 2008). Social inequality can be measured through a number of ways, such as through differences in social class or role, for example position such as in the Indian caste system which divides the society into rigid hierarchies, other social divisions related to inequalities which include gender, age, ethnicity and ability (Warwick – Booth, 2013).

Moreover, Ortiz and Cummins (2011) suggested an examination of social divisions in order to view income distribution in terms of their effect on groups such as women, children and the poor. The scholars stated that:

The human development index is another way in which inequality can be measured. The index measures the three dimensions of health, education and living standards’ to assess how countries are progressing in development terms and to offer international comparisons. This measure is broader than simply examining income (Ortiz and Cummins, 2011: 5).

This submission of the above scholars has, however, been criticised on the ground that human development does not end with just education, health and income; it extends to other conditions people face, in terms of distribution of advantages in the society they live in, and also the possibilities of participating in decision – making and how it affects the wellbeing of future generations (United Nations Organisation, 2010: 25,cited in Warwick – Booth, 2013: 5).

Scholars such as Sen (1999), also, suggest a wider view of measuring and examining inequality. In his view, standard of living is also very important. Furthermore, his approach, which was termed as the ‘capability approach’, is also concerned with poverty, justice, and quality of life and freedom within context. The empirical works carried out by the scholar in 1985 and 1998 analysed many inequalities such as sex bias, are these inequalities. It was also discovered by the studies that wellbeing is another useful measure of development, as it provides an alternative picture. This is because, according to him, “countries that have the highest income do not necessarily have the highest levels of wellbeing” (United Nations Organisation, 2009 cited in Warwick – Booth, 2013).

Furthermore, the work of Sen (1999) has led to the development of the Multidimensional Poverty Index, which is characterised thus:

The index highlights deprivations at the household level across the same three dimensions used within the human development index: education, standards of living and health, the index looks at specific indicators within each dimension to report on deprivations. For example, in the living standards dimension, the index looks at the access, that households have to a toilet, cooking fuel, water and electricity as well as assets. There are ten (10) indicators and a household is classed as multi-dimensionally poor if it is deprived in at least two of these cited in Warwick – Booth, 2013: 5).

The above index was accepted as having provided a more comprehensive determinant of deprivation (United Nations Organisation, 2009 in Warwick – Booth, 2013). This leads to the reasoning that as social inequality leads to deprivation; deprivation also leads to social exclusion.

### **Meaning of Social Exclusion**

According to scholars, social exclusion is another term which is also related to inequality and encompassing the issues of health, education, living standards and income. Social exclusions have been explained as follows:

Social exclusion is a shorthand label for what can happen when individuals or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems, such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime environments, bad health and family breakdown (Exclusion Unit, 1997 cited in Warwick – Booth, 2013:6)

Social exclusion therefore has three (3) main domains: Resources, which entails material and economic status as well as access to services, and social resources.; participation, mainly economic, and usually via work, social education and political participation,(i.e. voting), and quality of life, which includes health and wellbeing, the environment in which one lives and crime levels in the area in which one lives (Warwick – Booth, 2013:6). Levitas (2006, cited in Warwick – Booth, 2013) is of the opinion that to measure social exclusion, one needs a wide range of quantitative indices. This is in view of the fact that there are many dimensions of social exclusion and, to that effect, parameters for measuring social exclusion have been developed with six (6) dimensions and sixteen (16) indicators as follows:

<b>Dimension</b>	<b>1</b>	-	<b>Low Incomes</b>
Indicator 1		-	Households below half average income
Indicator 2		-	People dependent on income support
Indicator 3		-	Children entitled to free school meals
<b>Dimension</b>	<b>2</b>	-	<b>Access to Employment</b>
Indicator 4		-	People of working age not in employment
Indicator 5		-	Long term unemployment
Indicator 6		-	Full time employees on low pay
<b>Dimension</b>	<b>3</b>	-	<b>Housing Quality and Availability</b>
Indicator 7		-	Over crowding
Indicator 8		-	Homelessness

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<b>Dimension 4</b>	-	<b>Education</b>
Indicator 9	-	Unauthorised absence from school
Indicator 10	-	School leaver's qualifications
Indicator 11	-	Working – age people with no qualifications
<b>Dimension 5</b>	-	<b>Health and Fertility</b>
Indicator 12	-	Underage Conceptions
Indicator 13	-	Low birth weight babies
Indicator 14	-	Premature deaths
<b>Dimension 6</b>	-	<b>Citizenship and Community Participation</b>
Indicator 15	-	Election turnout
Indicator 16	-	Fear of selected crimes

**Source:** (*Scottish Parliament, 1999, cited in Warwick – Booth, 2013:7*).

The parameters for measuring social exclusion have indicated the close relationship between poverty and social inequality and since poverty is still a serious issue globally, as it is widespread in many parts of the world within both- high and low- income countries (Warwick – Booth, 2013:7). In addition, measures of poverty are, classified into absolute and relative types. At this juncture, it is worthwhile to consider what absolute and relative types of poverty are and how they relate to social inequality and social exclusiveness.

### **Defining Poverty**

The United Nations Organisation (2009) has defined poverty as:

Absolute poverty refers to a set standard (usually income) that can be used to measure poverty as those living on less than \$1.25 per day. There is, however, evidence to suggest that measuring poverty according to poverty lines underestimates the actual extent of poverty. In comparison, relative poverty is a standard that is used within countries and it is about a minimum standard that no one should fall beneath. Relative poverty is again usually represented by a figure (United Nations Organisation, 2009 Warwick – Booth, 2013:pp8).

In trying to establish a relationship between poverty and inequality, Dorling (2009 cited in Warwick – Booth, 2013:pp.8) has suggested that:

Children who are labelled as delinquents, adults who are in debt and unable to manage financially, and households without a car in countries where car use is the norm are all examples of contemporary experiences of inequality (cited in Warwick – Booth, 2013:pp. 8).

Moreover, Bauman (2011) has also submitted that:

Income inequality is a conceptualisation that is too narrow because social inequality encompasses poverty, vulnerability, danger and the denial of dignity. In addition social inequality has to be understood as encompassing the factors that include, and more particularly, exclude people from information, especially with a global world context that is increasingly information – driven (2011, cited in Warwick – Booth, 2013:pp.8).

The question to ask, at this point, is how do poverty and social inequality result into health and social problems?

### **Social Inequality and Societal Problems**

Many scholars are of the view that social inequality and poverty are the major factors in health and social problems. Wilkinson and Pickett (2009), for instance, argued that, both health and social problems are related with income in most societies. The scholars further elaborated, thus:

Ill health and social problems such as crime and violence are more common in the less economically well – off groups within all societies. Furthermore, the overall burden of these problems is much higher in the most unequal societies (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009; Warwick – Booth, 2013:18).

To Wilkinson and Pickett, apart from poverty due to material conditions, the scale of differences between people within societies is also a source of concern. For these, scholars, therefore, the more equal a society the better, as far as social problems are concerned. Wilkinson, (2011) further added:

The problems associated with inequality are huge, with those in the lowest positions being the most detrimentally affected. Differential health outcomes are strongly correlated with inequality. The relationship between income and health is complex but, generally, individuals living in high income countries tend to experience both better health and life chances when compared to those in lower income countries. (Wilkinson, 2011 in Warwick- Booth, 2013:18)

A study conducted in by World Health Organisation (WHO) 2001, on the effect of lack of access to clean drinking water further provided evidence that poverty and inequality are significantly associated with ill –health. The study indicated that the lack of access to clean water resulted to the death of two million people every year. It was noted that their lives could have been saved had they had access to uncontaminated food and clean drinking water. The conclusion was that in many societies death rates are often higher among the poorest people of the society (Kindhauser, 2003 in Warwick – Booth, 2013). Consequently, because there exists a relationship between inequality, poverty and ill – health, there is also a relationship between inequality and poverty with political instability.

### **Inequality and Political Instability**

It is also noted that, there is a strong relationship between inequality and political instability because a good number of studies have revealed that societies with a greater prevalence of social inequality experience more cases of political instability and are more destabilised. The study of Ortiz and Cummins (2011) has shed more light on the relationship between inequality, poverty and political instability as follows:

Unequal societies are much more prone to destabilisation, politically motivated violence and terrorism because conflict originates from social grievances and perceptions of inequality among groups. Inequality effects individual lives, results in more poverty and simply slows progress. This leaves more people feeling dissatisfied with their economic position and

creates a society in which political consensus is hard to achieve  
(cited in Warwick – Booth, 2013:19)

In a related study conducted in India by Justino (2004) where political conflict and rioting between 1973 and 2000, were analysed, the conclusion was that:

Redistributive policies are effective in diffusing conflicts which stemmed from the discontent experienced by those who were faced with persistent poverty and inequality. Therefore, societies need to be more equal in order to be more stable (Justino, 2004 in Warwick – Booth, 2013:20).

In another related study, Alesina and Perotti (1996) have established that there is a strong relationship between social inequality, income inequality and socio – political instability. The study of Soubboting (2004) has further linked political instability with decreased investments and low economic growth and which has further created a vicious circle of unemployment and poverty. In addition, the scholars elaborated as follows:

Political instability also means that countries are less likely to secure investment and therefore development is often compromised and undermined. To achieve a favourable investment climate, political stability is highly important because investors do not want to face political changes that may result in economic changes, for example higher taxation rates, countries that experience political instability often experience a vicious circle of low investment then low or even negative growth, further poverty and social conflicts, and therefore further political instability (cited in Warwick – Booth: 20).

The effect of social inequality pervades the entire human and societal life spectra, after causing or aggravating physical ill health and political instability, social inequality further creates psychological and emotional instability which degenerates into psychological and mental disorder and which in turn affect individual communities and the entire society.

### **Social Inequality and Psychological and Mental Health Disorders**

Many sociologists and psychologists have agreed that psychological and mental health problems are caused by frustration due to deprivation and other forms of social inequality. Social inequality, as discussed earlier, has been found to be responsible for social exclusion and poverty; it has also been considered to be the major factor in physical ill – health and political instability. These facts have been buttressed by studies earlier cited, such as Wilkinson, and Pickett, 2009; Ortiz and Cummins 2011 among others, who suggested that societies that experienced higher social equalities are the ones that have higher incidences of health problems and political instabilities. The political instabilities, apparently, are mostly caused by frustrated youth who are mostly poor due to unemployment and which has made it very difficult for them to be able to afford their basic needs.

This appears to be the current situation in modern day Nigeria. Social inequality is evident in the Nigerian society and is manifested in virtually every relationship among members of the society, especially in the institutions being patronised by members of the society, such as educational Institutions, health care facilities, shopping activities; private ownership of means of transportation, and residential accommodation as well as other similar



services. The fact is that many Nigerians are living below the poverty line and the country is characterised by massive unemployment, even among educated youth. This problem has made many Nigerians poor and frustrated and which has even culminated into so many vices particularly crimes in the form of armed robbery, kidnapping – for – ransom, cattle rustling and militancy, to mention a few. The effect of social inequality has also made Nigerian youth more susceptible to recruitment by deviant groups such as insurgents and other groups of criminals.

The situation has indeed become so tensed up some Nigerians are being pushed beyond the point they could personally endure and for which they have, therefore, resorted taking their own lives by committing suicide. This, no doubt, symbolises the highest level of personal frustration. As such the Nigerian society has reached extreme levels in terms of psychological and mental maladjustment. In contemporary Nigeria, therefore, what we now face is situation where citizens of a given society prefer to take their own lives than to continue to live in the society they have been born and brought up. Reports from Nigerian dailies have indicated the alarming rate at which Nigerians commit suicides. Many factors have been identified to cause suicide e.g. “depression, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, borderline personality disorder, alcoholism or drugs abuse, as well as stress factors such as financial difficulties, trouble with interpersonal relationships, and bullying” (Pilot, 13 Sept, 2016). In Nigeria, suicide notes found with people that have committed suicide, have indicated one or a combination of the above stated factors, especially financial difficulties.

At this point therefore, it is imperative for the Nigerian Government to find a way of addressing this sad situation. Not only does the Nigerian Government needs to identify the factors responsible for this extreme poverty situation but also re-examined the social structure with a view to reducing the widening gap between social classes in the society. Moreover, in view of the natural endowments of the Nigerian society, it is expected that the Nigerian Government would endeavour to ensure that Nigerians live above the poverty line which is one dollar per day.

Among other things, too, in trying to address the social inequality which has created poverty in the midst of plenty, the Nigerian Government should employ the services of community psychologists who have specialised in identifying and addressing individual and community problems, especially as are related to psychological issues and mental maladaptation in the society.

### **Who are Community Psychologists?**

Community psychologists are experts in the field of community psychology, which is a branch of psychology that deals with community wellbeing. They are unlike clinical psychologies that treat the patients or victims of psychosocial disorders; hence community psychology essentially attempts to prevent the problems, community Psychology therefore, preventive rather than intervening. Maton (2004) has shaded more light on the orientation of community psychology thus:

The field of community psychology develop during the mid-1900s as a reaction against the limitations of traditional intra-psychological approaches to research and social problems. In contrast, the developer of the field emphasised the importance of social context and social environments in understanding behaviour and social problems, envisioned a strength-based approach rather than a deficit- based approach to research and action, and emphasised the importance of the prevention of

problems rather than the treatment of problem (Marton 2014 PP.421).

The above submission has summarised the entire spectrum of Community Psychology. As a branch of Psychology, it is more concern with the application of Psychology to improve social conditions in societies with a view to preventing the development of psychological and other forms of disorders. This branch of psychology, therefore, has emerged as a result of the realisation by Psychologists that the prevention of social problems goes beyond merely changing the behaviour of individuals. It involves intervening into the social, political and physical systems to effect changes on peoples' behaviour. In other words, it serves to squarely face the debilitating problems of oppression, racism, class exploitation and other forms of social inequality associated with clients (Waikato, 2014).

Moreover, although the areas of Community Psychology and Clinical Psychology have a common origin, the two disciplines differ in their approaches to counselling. Community Psychologists go beyond the individual, to focus also on the community and its environment as well as other factors influencing people's livelihoods, such as culture, politics, economics and health care issues, (Idealist, 2010). According to the said Idealist, therefore, the focus of Community Psychology is:

Advancing theory, research, and collaborative social action (at neighbourhood, organisational, state, national and international levels) to promote positive wellbeing, increase empowerment, advance social justice, encourage understanding of each other and of issues that society faces and to prevent the development of problems (2010:1)

This discipline of knowledge and service that is Community Psychology coordinates action and service with research and evaluation as well as community members as partners in promoting change. This is in consideration of the experience of community members regarding matters that affect them and equally for the need to get them involved when implementing culturally and situationally appropriate and sustainable progress (Idealist, 2010). Having examined the orientation, focus and intent of Community Psychology, it is pertinent to also examine the principles of Community Psychology as the guiding values for community research methods, community research areas, prevention of social disorders and promotion of social wellbeing.

### **The Guiding Principles of Community Psychology**

Scholars in the sub discipline of Community Psychology such as Murray, Douglas and Devid, (2005) have identified major some principles of Community Psychology as follows:

1. Community psychology challenges traditional modes of thought and avoids blaming the victim for problems or labelling people as deviant;
2. Community psychology focuses on a whole ecological system, including political, cultural and environmental influences, as well as focusing on institutional and organisational factors;
3. Community Psychology emphasizes community and personal strengths and competencies, as opposed to weaknesses and pathologies;
4. Community Psychology emphasizes ecological thinking, which leads to looking beyond trying to change individuals, to considering ways to improve

- the interaction between persons and environments which can have an important effect on behaviour and well-being;
5. Community Psychology devolves around the theme of prevention. It asks for the possibility of action to be taken before undesirable behaviour actually appears or, in the alternative, learn to position assistance resources, so that, the problem resolution can occur very early in the development of the problem;
  6. Community Psychology directs attending to a large context within which plans are developed and implemented, but the possibility of gaining resources must be carefully evaluated;
  7. Community Psychology tends to advocate social change more than individual change. Community psychologists work to achieve the goals of providing humane effective care and less stigmatising services to those in need while enhancing human psychological growth and development;
  8. Community Psychology encourages citizen participation, relative to the client and recognises the demand for local empowerment, bureaucratic decentralization, self- help and mutual aid;
  9. Community Psychology also simultaneously stresses the utility of research, not only for theory development but for program evaluation and policy analysis, and
  10. Community Psychology is concern with the relationships of individuals to one other as a community and a differentiated social grouping with elaborate systems of formal and informal relationships.

Based on the guiding principles developed by the early scholars, seven (7) guiding values have also been identified by scholars in the Community Psychology to guide the activities and make them more effective, as summarised below:

1. Individual wellness, which encompasses the physical, psychological, social and spiritual health of citizens;
2. A sense of community, which entails citizens' senses of belonging to a larger group;
3. Social justice and empowerment, which entail the equitable distribution of economic, political, and psychological resources in society;
4. Citizen participation, which requires the active involvement of citizens in all aspects of community life;
5. Collaboration and community strength, which entail working together with citizens and groups in the community and building up their strengths;
6. Respect for human diversity, which entails respect for human differences such as differences in ethnicity, gender, religion, age, physical disability, and social class; and
7. Empirical soundness, which is the research basis for efforts to make a positive difference in communities and the larger society. (Maton, 2004:421)

Still, in line with the identified principles of the area of Community Psychology, experts in the area have mapped out potential community research areas, which comprise the following:

1. Social problems, which require studying, such as discrimination, poverty, education of minority students, substance abuse, HIV/AIDS, and homelessness, and which mostly focused on marginalised groups in society such as ethnic minorities and lower income populations;
2. Stress and Mental Health research areas which examine the relationships among stress, coping, social support, and psychological well-being.

3. Community and Quality of life research areas which examine the role of community settings in contributing to the quality of life of individuals and the general community life and
4. Sense of community research area which refers to study of the sense of community or connectedness to a larger group. (Maton, 2004:425).

In view of the aforementioned guiding principles, guiding values and research areas, it is, therefore, evident that Community Psychologists have, no doubt, been involved over time with a comprehensive agenda for identifying and addressing social problems, and which are mostly often exacerbated by social inequality, social exclusion and poverty concerns. Furthermore, applying the principles and values of researches in the above areas would thereby serve to provide insights into how social inequality ignites social exclusion and accentuate poverty as well as how these, in turn, culminate into conditions of poor health, political instability and social disorder in societies. Finally, the findings from such researches would afford Community Psychologists a clearer understanding of such problems and the practicability of their being addressed.

### **Conclusion**

From the views of experts reviewed, it is clearly shown that social inequality is the major cause of social exclusion and poverty in society. Social inequality is also responsible for many social problems such as physical and mental ill health, political instability, individually or communally, among others. In the Nigerian society, in particular, social inequality has even led to abject poverty and which has culminated into the prevalence of criminal activities such as kidnapping – for – ransom, armed robbery, and illegitimate militancy. Equally so, the social problems generated by social inequality and poverty have further resulted into high scene of frustration which has led to many Nigerians committing suicide.

The Nigerian society is so ill, that it needs the urgent intervention of Community Psychologists to assist in identifying and remediating the social problems militating against individual and societal wellbeing in this country. The Nigerian Government is, therefore, urged to provide all the necessary support and encouragement to this cadre of psychologists in order to enable them provide the necessary interventions required to put the Nigerian society back on its tracks, regarding social and psychological wellbeing.

### **Recommendations**

In view of the need to urgently address the social problems bedevilling the Nigerian society, this paper has the following recommendations:

1. The Federal Government of Nigeria and all States of the Federation, should evolve measures to ameliorate the economic hardships in the country through provision of employment for employable youth and a good social security system for the unemployed;.
2. Government should also relax the stringent economic policies inadvertently strangulating the social life of the Nigerian society;
3. The Well – to – do Nigerians should also come out to assist the Nigerian Government by establishing small, medium and even large scale industries which would provide job opportunities for the teeming Nigerian citizens unengaged.
4. All unemployed Nigerian youth should also endeavour to consider taking mini jobs and be essentially entrepreneurial and avoid relying on white collar jobs;

5. Government should identify and employ Community Psychologists so as to empower them to design and implement community intervention programmes which could address the social problems in the Nigerian society, and
6. Religious leaders and the media have a central role to play in sensitising Nigerians on the need for endurance and perseverance in difficult situations, since such situations are not always permanent, and also that many countries in the world had experienced similar situations in the past and have scaled over them.

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