

Mental Strength and Career Development Among Youths in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area (LGA), Rivers State, Nigeria

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Abstract

This study examined the impact of building mental strength on career development among youths. It is built on the rationale that youths need to build mental strength to be able to understand them and make the right career choices especially in the choice of courses they eventually study in school as a foundation for their career path in life. To achieve these four research questions and four objectives were raised to guide the study. The key indicators of lack of mental strength (stress, fear and pressure etc.) were identified and measured against those of career development. The indicators identified further informed the research questions and the objectives of the study. Two theories were adopted, and they are; social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura and John Lewis Holland theory of career and vocational choice theory, these aided the theoretical focus for the study. A sample of 400 questionnaire respondents was determined using the Taro Yamane formula and 22 key persons were purposively determined for interview. The study adopted the mixed method design and a multistage sampling approach to select the questionnaire respondents and interview participants. Following the mixed method design, the data collection techniques involved the use of a self-designed questionnaire to gather quantitative data and an interview guide to collect qualitative data from key persons. To analyze the data collected, simple percentages presented in tables were used for the quantitative data, while the thematic content analysis was deployed to analyze the qualitative data. Drawing from the analysis, the findings show that 56.2% of the participants strongly agreed that youths need to build mental strength, and 58.8% agreed that building mental strength can help to fight fear; which is one of the indicators of lack of mental strength based on the findings. Hence, the study recommends among others, that programs should be created to encourage mental strength building and resilience, and that all concerned stakeholders such as parents, guardians, teachers, government etc., must act in ways that enhance psychosocial support for young people.

Keywords: *Mental Strength, Parent Pressure, Fear, Stress, Career and Development*

Introduction

Globally, youths are faced with all kinds of real challenges in their career and life in general. These challenges may not necessarily be about their learning context, but can be associated with lack of affordable university education, fear of failure, low economic status, lack of skills, social media addiction, pressure, peer influence, low self-esteem, confusion in career choice, drug or substance abuse, homelessness, acceptance in the society, unemployment, confused identity or identity crisis, lack of close role model, wrong parenting style, pre-marital sex/teenage pregnancy, suicidal thoughts, crime/delinquent, early marriage, lack of focus, depression, and stress etc. These challenges have adverse effects on their mental health/strength that may invariably affect their career development. There is a known fact that youths hold the future of any country in their hands. In the United States of America, the Department of Mental Health and Human Service (DMHHS, 2019) expressed the concern that 7% of youths have mental health problems with some form of depressive episode. The challenge can lead to more problems that can invariably affect their career development.

In the United Kingdom, youths' challenges are same as mentioned above. In Africa and in Nigeria today, youths are faced with more difficult problems ranging from tribalism/ethnicity, insecurity, mental health issues, sexual abuse to harassment, low socioeconomic background, cultism/violent, ritualism, kidnapping, drug and substance abuse, homelessness, gangsterism, rejection, unemployment, internet fraud (yahoo yahoo and yahoo plus), peer influence, lack of skills, political thurggery, get rich syndrome etc. the situation is not different in Obio/Akpor Local Government, where this study is situated. This is because, youths are heavily challenged with a likely adverse effect on their mental strength and by extension their career development. A homeless youth is not thinking of career development or building mental strength, but how to get a home and his or her daily meal. Similarly, political thugs are not thinking of building mental strength and career development but; what he or she can get out of the politician they are working for. Most times, those thugs aspire higher and in the end are able to build a successful career. But this cannot be said for all of the young people in Obio/Akpor who may find it rather difficult to pursue a healthy career due to the absence of mental strength to achieve their set development goals.

Career development is a process of choosing a career, improving your skill and advancing along a career path. According to Dawn Mckey (2020), career development is a self-knowledge, exploration, and decision-making that shapes your career. Developing a career can be very challenging, because it starts from a tender age. Aseel (2017) notes that not knowing what to do is a common problem among youths and for youths to find a dream job in their field of study is even very difficult. She notes that 25% of youths work in jobs that are related to their field, whereas 55% of youths found one related to their field of study. While 70% of youths feels that they will eventually find opportunities to succeed in their desired career. Imagine a student that applied to study nursing in the university, and he or she is been given psychology to study. In other words, a youth that wants to study nursing in school he or she is been told to go to a private hospital to learn it as a skill (apprenticeship), what a confusion. It is believed that if young people get the right guidance, they are more likely to build the required mental strength that is necessary to walk through a healthy career path. This research is focused on examining how building the right mental

strength could affect the career development trajectory of youths in Obio/Akpor Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria.

Studies on mental strength in relation to career development are almost non-existent as only minimal efforts have been made to discuss the issue. Even those that exist present scanty details on career development with almost nothing on mental strength. For instance, in a study by Porfeli and Lee (2009), it was established that children learn from others in the society as they go through work experience and this is because children lack independent focus on specific career. Additionally, the study by Atuyeyi and Isiaku (2011) revealed that building a career is a focal point to any significant development. It is very important that a youth builds his/her career because it gives them the skills and zeal to build their nation. This will also help in job satisfaction, business growth, community development and national development. Some years back, a preliminary engagement with some young people from a neighboring local Government that went to University of Ghana and dropped out after their 100 level suggest that they had low mental strength occasioned by drug abuse. This lived experiences are commonplace today among several young people in schools. Very little institutional measures are taken to build their resilience as a way of helping them adjust. Instead, schools are quick to expel them with no alternative means to add value to their lives and this has a way of reinforcing a low mental strength among youths.

Although previous studies have narrowly implied the issue of mental strength in the context of career development for youths, very little has been achieved in terms of identifying the indicators of lack of mental strength among youths and how these relate to their career development especially in Obio-Akpor LGA. This clearly suggest a gap in the existing body of literature on mental strength with emphasis on how youths build a healthy career path. Hence, this study is a step in the right direction to filling this gap since it establishes career development concerns associated with mental strength. To achieve this, the study examined the empirical link (based on observation and experience) between mental strength and career development among youths in Obio/Akpor Local Government in Rivers State, Nigeria, focusing on key indicators of mental strength like; stress, parental pressure and fear of failure. Essentially, the study seeks to answer the following research questions: how does parental pressure affect the career development path of youths?, to what extent does fear of failure affect career development among youths?, how does stress affect career development among youths in Obio/Akpor?

Objectives of the Study

- i. Determine how parental pressure can affect career development among youths;
- ii. Examine if fear of failure has any adverse effect on career development among youths;
- iii. Determine if stress can adversely affect career development among youths.

Conceptual Schema and Theoretical Framework

Conceptual Schema

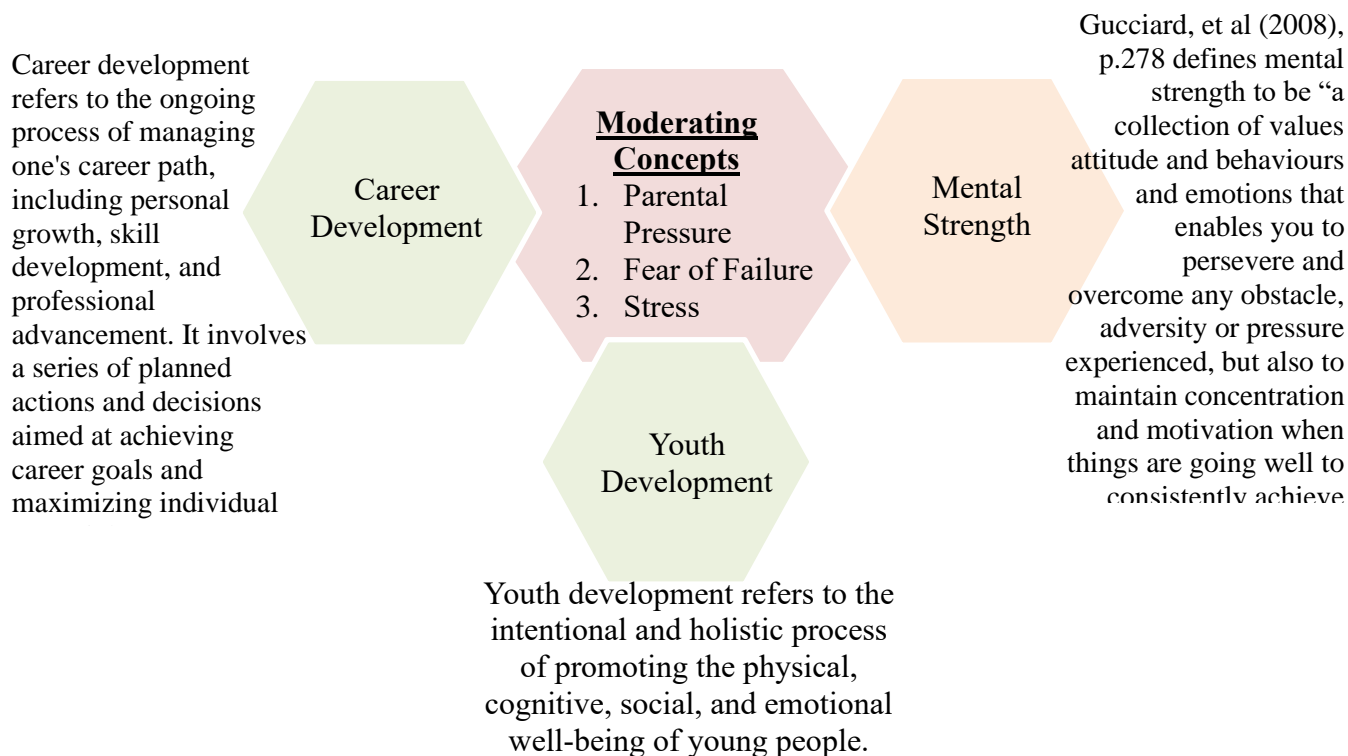


Fig. 1: Conceptual Schema for the Study

The Figure above simply shows the different concepts associated with the study and their connections especially within the scope of the moderating concepts. Hence, it is the submission here that career development as defined in the schema is very much can be largely linked to the mental strength of youths which is moderated by parental pressure, fear of failure and stress.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts the social cognitive theory of Albert Bandura and the career and vocational choice theory of John Lewis Holland. *The Social cognitive theory* was propounded by an American psychologist Albert Bandura (2001). This theory's basic premise rests on how individuals gain new skills or new behavior by observing a model by their cognitive ability in their environment. By learning from a model, you reciprocate to reproduce the learnt behavior. “This theory is on how people think and learn about career and also how they use the learnt behavior to influence their career development” by Tristram (2021). More also, how learning from individual environment can affect the behavior.

Learning takes place from individual environment and influences his/her career decision of persons. There is a relationship between individuals' environment and behavior in Social Cognitive Theory by Bandura. The theory is on the hinge that individual or people learn by observing others, and this has a way of making impacts in the lives of the youth. In Banduras view, we have different levels of learning, and there are key factors in Bandura social cognitive theory;

- We learn by watching others and we react to it (modeling).
- We learn according to our self-efficacy.
- We have expectation as we learn (outcome)
- Our actions can either be rewarded positive and negative from the wider society.

In the course of this work we will be majoring on the concept of “**self-efficacy**”. Our self-efficacy is how well we will see ourselves confident enough to do our job or our assignment well. “The higher your self-efficacy, the more likely you are to pursue a goal and ultimately, be reinforced by the outcome of your efforts” (Maddux & Volkmann 2010) in Ronald, et al in psychology around us (2012).

On the other hand, the theory of *Career and Vocational Choice* was developed by John Lewis Holland in 1958. The theory holds that career choices should express our personality. And also, career is determined by our reciprocal actions in our environment as regards to our personality types. Holland assert that when people are in the job or career that match their interest, they become productive and have more stable career path. Such person is likely to be very successful and fulfilled. A wise man once said and I “if you do what you love you’ll never work a day in your life”.

Holland believes that most persons can fit into more than one personality, especially female. He maintained that in choosing a career or vocation, individual will like to work with people of their kind. And also, they look for professions they can utilize their potentials, abilities, skills and be themselves at all times. John Holland is of the opinion that we find or follow a career or vocation that fit our personality, is key fundamental to enjoy work. He therefore hypothesized 6 (six) personality types, referred to for short as R.I.A.S.E.C., (D’silva, 2019).

- R - Realist personality
- I - Investigative personality
- A - Artistic personality
- S - Social
- E - Enterprising
- C - Conventional

Most people don’t match some career path, because of their personalities, meanwhile some persons are attracted to different career; more especially females supposedly or allegedly. Personality is purely a psychological term and hence is all about who a person is. This is the totality of one’s behavior towards oneself and others as well. This includes everything about the person, his physical, emotional, social, mental and spiritual make up by Yogesh, & Cattell, defines personality as that which permits a, prediction of what a person will do in a given situation (2005, p. 386). In summary, personality of an individual is all that a person is in his totality. A person’s personality is his or her covert, overt system, outward appearance, his cognitive and unconscious layers of behavior.

In synthesizing these theories, the social cognitive theory of Bandura talked more on how people think and learn from human environment that influence their behaviors and even career choices. The theory made emphasis on self-efficacy and John Hollands theory of career/vocational choice

as it relates to their personality and career choices. This theory rest on the basic premise that a person's occupation or career should fit or match their and personality, vocational stability and achievement etc. the various literature that were reviewed notwithstanding, there are still gaps especially because none of the research or authors was able to link mental strength and career development. All work done have been rather isolated as we find some talking solely on career development and other made emphasis on mental strength. This perhaps why the study is a novelty, we are able to established an empirical link between mental strength and career development especial among youths.

Review of Related Literature

A good number of studies have been done mostly on personality traits and career development and these shall be reviewed alongside others that are relevant to this study. For instance, Alkhali, (2016) conducted a research on relationship between personal trait and career choice, using secondary school students. The results show that the narrow traits alone accounted for an additional 5.6% variance in career development (CD) above and beyond abroad traits (5-8%). CD Correlated positively with chronological age as predicted. However, carrier decidedness only increased through the first three of four year of college, and contrary to predictions showed a non-significant decisive in the senior year.

Angela (2000) conducted a research on Career Development and Youth Empowerment in Nigeria. The study revealed that the link between career development and youth empowerment can't be over emphasized. In order to achieve this, education must be implanted in the lives of our youths and relevant skill needed to make a total or a functional individual in the society. This is also to help our graduates to be able to predict as a result of study the business world and have a clear vision on the needs of the society in the nearest future.

Porfeli and Lee (2012) came up with a research on Career Development during Childhood and Adolescence. The study revealed that career Development begins from childhood, and cut across adulthood. The work made mention of identity development, that is to say that children want to understand what they will be like in the work environment. Mekinda (2012), studies the Support for Career Development in Youth: program models and evaluations. The study identified the major lessons from the work, as implication for career development initiative; "firstly, career programming can and should be designed for youth across a broad age range, secondly career programming does not have to come at the expense of academic training or preparation for college. Thirdly, program effectiveness depends on intentional design and high-quality implementation".

Methodology

The study adopts the mixed method design. The method is a more practical approach and just as the name implies, the design allows a researcher to combine both quantitative and qualitative approaches as a way of ensuring a balanced data generation for in-depth information on the subject under study. The area of the study is Obio/Akpor LGA which is the 8th LGA in Rivers state. It is located within the Rivers East senatorial district. City Population (2016) puts the population of Obio /Akpor, at 649,600. The Taro Yamane formula was applied to the population to get the sample size, from the entire population of 649,600.

$$n = \frac{N}{\dots}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 N &= 1+N(e)^2 && \text{total population} \\
 n &= && \text{sample size} \\
 e &= && \text{level of significance}
 \end{aligned}$$

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{find } n &= \frac{649,600}{1+649,600(0.05)^2} \\
 &= \frac{649,600}{1+649,600 * 0.0025} \\
 &= \frac{649,600}{1+1624} \\
 &= \frac{649,600}{1625} \\
 &= 399.7538 (400)
 \end{aligned}$$

Drawing from above, the sample size for this study is 400. However, this is just for the questionnaire respondents. In addition, a sample of 22 persons was also targeted for interviews given the nature of the study. These comprises of parent, social workers, police, school administrator and teachers. This puts the sample at 422. The simple random technique was adopted to select four wards out of the 17 wards that make up the LGA. After doing this, the same technique was adopted to select 1 community each from each of the four wards earlier selected. Thereafter, the systematic sampling technique using inclusion criteria was applied strategically. Table 1 below captures details of the sampling structure.

Table 1.1: Selected wards, communities and related sample size

| S/N | Wards | Selected Communities | Number of Respondents |
|--------------|----------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1 | Ward 7 | Rumuokoro | 100 |
| 2 | Ward 13 | Rumuola | 100 |
| 3 | Ward 8 | Rumuomasi | 100 |
| 4 | Ward 14 | Rukpokwu | 100 |
| Total | 4 Wards | 4 Communities | 400 |

Lastly, the purposive sampling technique was used to deliberately target stakeholders in the LGA that have knowledge of the subject matter under study. Hence, social welfare staff, members of the Nigerian Police Force, Clergymen, Teachers and Parents among others were selected. The size of the interview sample is 22. (i.e. 400 questionnaire respondents and 22 interviewees). Data were collected using questionnaire, Key Persons Interviews (KPIs) and observational techniques. The quantitative (percentages and descriptive diagrams) and qualitative (thematic analysis) approaches were used for data analysis.

Results

Quantitative Analysis

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Information of Respondents

| Variables | Answer Alternatives | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|----------------|---------------------|------------|----------------|
| Age | 18 to 21 | 180 | 45% |
| | 22 to 25 | 111 | 28.38% |
| | 26 to 29 | 100 | 25.57% |
| Sex | Males | 220 | 56.26% |
| | Females | 171 | 42.75% |
| Education | No formal Education | 20 | 5% |
| | Primary | 30 | 7.5% |
| | Secondary | 120 | 30.69% |
| | Tertiary | 221 | 55.22% |
| Marital Status | Single | 300 | 76.72% |
| | Married | 91 | 22.75% |
| Religion | Christians | 250 | 62.5% |
| | Islam | 20 | 5% |
| | Pagan | 121 | 30.25% |
| Occupation | Students | 201 | 50.25% |
| | Employed | 38 | 9.5% |
| | Unemployed | 102 | 25.5% |
| | Self-employed | 50 | 12.5% |
| TOTAL | | 391 | 100 |

Table 2 above shows the socio-demographic information of the respondents in this study. Drawing from the data, it is easy to see that the first part of the table addressed the age of the participants. Based on this, the ages of respondents shows that 180(45%) fell between the age bracket of 18 to 21 years, also, 111 (28.3%) of them came under the age bracket of 22-25 years, while the remaining 100(25.57%) fell under the age bracket of 26-29 years. With regard to sex of respondents, the data in the table shows that 220 (55%) of the respondents are males, while 171 (42.75%) of them are females. The next part of the table captured information on the marital status of the respondents. Drawing from the data, 300 (75%) of the respondents are single, while 91(22.75%) of them are married. This is not surprising given the age bracket that this study focused on. On the issue of religion, captured in the section after marital status, the data reveals that 250 (62.5%) of the respondents are Christians, 20(5%) of them are Muslims, while the rest 121 (30.25%) are pagans. The last section of the table captures the occupation of the respondents and the data shows that 201(50.25%) of the respondents are students, 38 (9.5%) of the respondents are employed, 102 (25.5%) of them are unemployed, while self-50(12.5%) of them are self-employed.

RQ1: Does parental pressure affect the career development path of youths in Obio/Akpor LGA?

Table 3: How Pressure can invariably affect Career Development in Youths

| S/N | Items | SA | % | A | % | D | % | SD | % | Total | Total% | Remark |
|-----|--|-----|-------|-----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|-------|--------|-----------------|
| 1 | Feel pressured when people do better than you | 92 | 23.5% | 200 | 51.1% | 58 | 14.8% | 41 | 10.4% | 391 | 100% | Agreed |
| 2 | Feel Pressured when my parents or guardians make career decisions for me | 202 | 51.6% | 150 | 38.3% | 29 | 7.4% | 10 | 2.5% | 391 | 100% | Strongly agreed |
| 3 | When I am compared to my peers, I tend to feel massive pressure with regard to career choice | 220 | 56.2% | 130 | 33.2% | 30 | 7.6% | 11 | 2.8% | 391 | 100% | Strongly agreed |
| 4 | The pressure to succeed in what I do affects my composure either as a student or worker | 90 | 23.0% | 210 | 53.7% | 30 | 7.6% | 61 | 15.6 | 391 | 100% | Agreed |

Source: researcher Fieldwork 2022

RQ2: To what extent does fear of failure affect career development among youths in Obio Akpor?

Table 4: Extent to which fear of Failure affects career development among youths

| S/N | Items | SA | % | A | % | D | % | SD | % | Total | Total % | Remark |
|-----|--|-----|-------|-----|-------|----|-------|----|------|-------|---------|--------|
| 5 | Fear of failure affects career decision negatively | 110 | 28.1% | 201 | 51.4% | 50 | 12.7% | 30 | 7.6% | 391 | 100% | Agreed |

| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|---|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----|-------|-----|------|-----------------|
| 6 | I am always afraid of failing because of my parents | 90 | 23.0% | 180 | 46.0% | 90 | 23.0% | 31 | 7.9% | 391 | 100% | Agreed |
| 7 | Have a way of overcoming fear. | 50 | 12.7% | 70 | 17.9% | 170 | 43.4% | 101 | 25.8% | 391 | 100% | Disagreed |
| 8 | The fear of uncertainty in my chosen field of study and career path instils fear in me | 120 | 30.6 | 191 | 48.8% | 50 | 12.7% | 30 | 7.6% | 391 | 100% | Agreed |
| 9 | Career failure makes youths afraid | 230 | 58.8% | 110 | 28.1% | 30 | 7.6% | 21 | 5.3% | 391 | 100% | Strongly agreed |
| 10 | Fear has a way of limiting my belief and strength | 110 | 28.1% | 250 | 63.9% | 21 | 5.3% | 20 | 5.1% | 391 | 100% | Agreed |
| 11 | The fact that I didn't make the decision of what choice of career progression I am involved in is what intensifies the fear in me | 260 | 66.4% | 100 | 25.5% | 20 | 5.1% | 11 | 2.8% | 391 | 100% | Strongly agreed |

Source: researcher Field work 2022

RQ 3: Does stress have any adverse effect on career development among youths in?

Table 5: How stress adversely affects career development among youths

| S/N | Items | SA | % | A | % | D | % | SD | % | Total | Total % | Remark |
|-----|--|-----|-------|-----|-------|----|-------|----|-------|-------|---------|-----------------|
| 12 | The fact that I did not choose my career path always makes me irritated and this reduces my likeness for the career path | 100 | 25.5% | 260 | 66.4 | 21 | 5.3% | 40 | 10.2% | 391 | 100% | Agreed |
| 13 | I am always depressed each time I think of the career path that I am on | 120 | 30.6% | 180 | 46.0% | 51 | 13.0% | 40 | 10.2% | 391 | 100% | Agreed |
| 14 | The stress of coping with a career path that I did not choose makes me sad always bad this affects my mental strength | 201 | 51.4% | 110 | 28.1% | 50 | 12.7% | 30 | 7.6% | 391 | 100% | Strongly agreed |
| 15. | Sometimes I have panic attacks just thinking of the career path I am on | 110 | 28.1% | 249 | 63.6% | 21 | 5.3% | 20 | 5.1% | 391 | 100% | Agreed |

Source: researcher Field Work 2022

Qualitative Analysis

Theme 1: Linking Pressure to Career Development Challenges

Interviewees expressed the view that:

youth are pressured generally, the environment itself is pressuring. Youths pressured that affect career building are numerous ranging from peer's pressure, to parental pressure, extended family relatives and the environment itself. The environment is not encouraging career building, because of the get rich quick syndrome (KPI Participant/a community leader/ aged 58 years)

Theme 2: Fear and its Consequences on Career Development

One of the interviewees noted that:

fear for career development can come in different forms, fear on how the future of your chosen career will be, fear of not making the wrong decisions and fear of not failing in life etc. these and many more questions are in the heart of youths. Some youths want to go into carpentry, but hate technical drawing or basic tech teacher. These two teachers can shape you into this career. This can also be how the teacher delivers the lesson with unkind attitude that can result to the student feel unsafe and unwilling to learn. (KPI Participant/a male teacher/ aged 51 years)

One of the interviewees notes that;

most time youths walk by observations, when they see adult succeed in a particular field or career, they tend to follow suit, when they see some adults struggling through that career, they become very fearful and, they get discouragement and despair. Fear can destabilize our youth and affect their cognition that will invariably affect their assimilation in their skill, training and classroom. This from (KPI Participant/ Male Medical Doctor /age 42 years)

Theme 3: Sources of stress among youths and how it affects career development

One of the interviewees had this to say:

Stress has a way of affecting the career of youths, when is coming from the environment like the home. When the home is unstable like; separated parent, definitely, there will be stress and pressure from the environment for instance; peer pressure will set in and also unhealthy competition cause stress etc, this can greatly affect the career development of youths. (KPI Participant/ a parent / aged 39 years)

Findings

Results from the analyses shows that youth feel pressured when they see their peers do better than them in the society, since about 51.1% agreed to the statement, on the other hand 23.5% strongly agreed to that statement. They need to learn about the scientific facts about why they feel the way they feel, and how they can strengthen it (Bill, 2018). This clearly shows that parental pressure has huge link to mental strength and by extension career development of youths.

From the above analysis, there is a clear expression that fear of failure affects the mental strength of youths and also their career development. The fear can be, in taking general decision about life and career etc. because fear can limit one's belief system and decisions making in life, but to some

extent building mental strength can help fight fear and pressure etc. Rohn (2020), opines that perseverance can make you learn how to overcome obstacles or challenges, we can learn it as we learn to drive a car. Perseverance is the technique that can help you learn.

Similarly, stress has a strong influence on career development among youths. On this note, about 66.4% of the respondents agreed to the fact that stress can affect the ability to build a career path or career development among youths. Chowdhury et al. (2022) have noted that stress and depression is a serious challenge among young people and this largely undermines their ability to think straight.

Conclusions

The study examined the indicators of lack of mental strength among youths and how it relates to career development in the study area. In the end, the study has proven that lack of mental strength can bring about fear, stress as well as pressure and these affect career building and development among youths. Drawing from the findings, it is easy to see that youth's feel pressured by their parents when their peers do better than them. Additionally, the fear of failing has been a major obstacle for young people, this can affect their career development. This fear can be in taking general decision about life and career etc. fear have a way of limiting one's belief system and the instinct to make right decisions in life. On other hand, stress has an adverse effect on career development among youths. Stress and pressure are prevalent among youths and are considered as strong emotional forces that can create mental tension, can upset mood and affect decision making. Finally, young people are faced with a lot of pressure in the society and this pressure can be from; parents, peers and the environment at large. This pressure has affected the career development of youths and can make them not to understand their intrinsic abilities that can lead to loss of identity or identity crisis.

Recommendations

Drawing from the findings and conclusion reached in this study, the following recommendations have been proffered.

- More programs should be created to build mental strength of young people. Just as we incorporated physical and health education to our school system; so, we should initiate programs that build resilience among youths.
- Let guidance and counseling in school be strengthened, let more counselors be employed. Every pre-primary, primary, secondary and tertiary institution should have a social worker and some guidance and counselors. This is because they need to engage these young minds with career conversation, parents, teachers and school counselor needs to come together to achieve this. More free counselling centers and vocational schools should be created by government agencies and non-governmental organizations. Also, government should partner with Non-Governmental Organizations to work this out.
- Right policies should be made by governments to help the youths contend with issues that undermine their mental strength. Policies that discourages get rich quick syndrome, criminality, god fatherism, favoritism but emphasize hard work, and honesty should be encouraged etc.

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