PREJUDICE, DISCRIMINATION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SOCIAL WORK PROFESSION IN NIGERIA: A THEORETICAL ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Inspite of the advanced level of civilization and higher quality of educational attainment in the 21st century, prejudice and discriminatory behaviours has continue to poss significant existential threat to humanity globally. In Nigeria like other societies, most ethnic group holds or possess prejudice against each other with the implications being that the out-groups are seen with disdain and treated unfavorably by members of the in-groups. Thus, prejudice and discrimination are either the byproducts or consequences of all forms of social exclusion such as ethnocentrism, racism, ageism, sexism and classism, and lookism, etc. This study examines prejudice, discrimination ad implications for social work profession in Nigeria. The study argues that, the wide spread devastating hazardous effects of prejudice and discrimination in Nigeria calls for the professional services of the social worker. The study conclude that, as agents of social change, social workers must work alongside and on behalf of the vulnerable and oppressed people and groups to address issues of prejudice and discrimination.

Keywords: Prejudice, Discrimination, Implications, Social Work, Profession

Introduction

Prejudice and discrimination continue to be major global issues, despite decades of civil rights activism. It is not uncommon for people or groups in all known human societies to hold certain assumptions or opinions about certain individuals, groups, or objects without having accurate information (knowledge). Societies around the world continue to make distinctions based on ethnicity (cultural affiliation), race, sex or gender, age, heights, and a variety of other characteristics that have no bearing on people's achievements or well-being (Zastrow, 2010; Giddens, 2010; King, 2015; Quiros & Dawson, 2013; Torres & Vallejo, 2015; Williams & Mohammed, 2009; Barkan, 2014; Schaefer, 2008; Eitzen, 2000 Prejudice and discrimination are major causes of social exclusion and a byproduct of all other factors.

In Nigeria, for example, the Ibos possess prejudices towards the Hausas, while the Hausas are prejudiced against the Igbos. Tivs and Jukuns are also present, as are Igalas and Igbellas. Even within the same group, prejudice and discrimination can take place. Within the Igbos society, for

example, members of the upper (higher) castes are prejudiced against those from the lower castes, known as Osu (Ugal, 2003). Thus, prejudice of all kinds, levels, types, forms, sizes, or shapes is not essentially based on experience and knowledge (accurate information), but on various fears (phobias), emotions, ignorance, hostility, tendencies (superstition and irrational judgment), wrong beliefs, and hasty judgment. Such sentiments, according to Zastrow and Kirst-Ashman (1988), cause members of one's group to regard their culture as the best, superior, and the one that other cultures should emulate. As a result, feelings of cultural superiority are frequently accompanied by a strong belief that political and economic dominance by one's own group is natural, morally correct, in one's best interests, and possibly also God's will (Charles et al., 2011). Examples abound around the world of how, even within the upper strata, people still show prejudice toward each other. Prejudices differ from place to place and also between classes: intergroup, interethnic, interracial, and minorities.

Racism, sexism, ageism, classism, nationalism, and ethnocentrism are all forms of prejudice that appear to separate men from one another. Prejudice, on the other hand, can be measured in terms of contempt, disrespect, or even hatred, and it is frequently fueled by the perception that an outgroup holds values that are contemptible or disgusting (Abrams, 2010). One's nationality, identity, or ethnicity may be one of the factors or focal points that leads to a person being labeled (judged) and discriminated against. Aronson, Wilson, and Akert (2010), on the other hand, contended that:

> It is incorrect to conclude that only minority groups face prejudice at the hands of the dominant majority. This aspect of prejudice, of course, is both powerful and poignant. But the truth is that prejudice is pervasive; it affects us all in some way. Prejudice is a two-way street that frequently flows from the minority group to the majority group and vice versa. Furthermore, any group can be prejudiced against (p. 420).

Some major ethnic groups face prejudice as well. Other aspects of one's identity, such as gender, sexual orientation, religion, appearance, or physical state, such as obesity, disabilities, and diseases such as AIDS, can arouse prejudice or leave people vulnerable to prejudice, resulting in unfair treatment by others (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2010). Furthermore, one's occupation or hobbies can lead to stereotypes (a generalized opinion). Some people dislike lecturers in Nigeria because they harass female students for sex in exchange for grades, while others dislike the police for extortion and political office holders for corruption. The point is that none of us is immune to prejudice, implying that prejudice and discrimination are a problem shared by all humans.

Extremist and vicious prejudices against black people exist in the United States of America and Europe. Black people share this sentiment. Prejudice against black non-nationals exists among South African blacks, as evidenced by xenophobic violent attacks and discriminatory behavior (Holtman, Louw, & Tredoux, 2005).

It is important to remember that "prejudice" does not always have to be negative. According to Ugal (2003), "it should not be deduced that prejudice is always against someone or something" (p. 37). According to Giddens (2010), "people may harbor favorable prejudices about groups with

which they identify as well as negative prejudices against others" (p. 636). In this sense, cooperation and conflicts may exist: positive, favorable, or adverse. Prejudiced people's preconceived views are frequently based on hearsay rather than direct evidence, and they are resistant to change even when confronted with new information (Giddens, 2010). People frequently cooperate with those with whom they have favorable prejudices, whereas they have negative prejudices against those with whom they disagree. The implication is that a person who harbors prejudices against a particular group will not treat its members fairly (Giddens, 2010; Holtman, Louw, & Tredout, 2005). Prejudice and discriminatory behavior can thus result in social injustice and suffering for those who are affected or disadvantaged Social workers must challenge prejudice and discrimination while also promoting social and economic justice (Haradiman & Jackson, 2007; Pelton, 2001; Forsythe, 1995). In light of this, this study is being conducted to investigate prejudice and discrimination, as well as their implications for social work practice in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

For better understanding of the concepts used in this study, some key concepts will be selected and clarified.

The Concept of Social Work

Friedlander (1951) defines social work as a professional service based on scientific knowledge and skills in human relations that assists individuals, alone or in groups, to obtain social and personal satisfaction and independence. This definition is considered one of the most elaborate and comprehensive definitions of social work. According to Friedlander, social work is a profession like any other in which a trained social worker with scientific knowledge and an outlook on human relations assists individuals and groups in achieving social and personal fulfillment..

According to the United Nations (UN), social work is the discipline concerned with all social relationships that may result in mutual adjustment problems between the individual and the environment. In this regard, social work as a profession assists individuals, groups, or communities in restoring or improving their capacity for social functioning while creating social conditions conducive to their objectives. Poverty, discrimination, abuse, addiction, physical illness, divorce, loss, unemployment, educational problems, disability, and mental illness are just a few of the challenges that social workers help people overcome (Ambrosino et al., 2008).

A definition by the Council on Social Work Education in the United States in 1959 is still useful today. It states that:

> Social work aims to improve the social functioning of individuals, both individually and in groups, by focusing on the social relationships that comprise the interaction between man and his environment. These activities can be divided into three categories: capacity restoration, individual and social resource provision, and social dysfunction prevention (p. 54).

According to the curriculum, the cardinal goal of social work is to improve social functioning wherever the need for such improvement is perceived socially or individually. This means that

whenever a social interaction problem arises, whether for an individual or a group in the community, the professional services of a social worker are required. According to the definition above, the underlying assumptions of social work are:

1. Social work, like other professions, has problem-solving functions.
2. Social work is an art with a scientific and ethical foundation.
3. Social work practice takes its values from those held by the society of which it is a part. However, its values are not necessarily or altogether those universally or predominantly held or practiced in society.
4. The scientific base of social work consists of three types of knowledge (a) tested knowledge (b) hypothetical knowledge (c) or "practice wisdom" that requires transformation into the hypothetical, and from there into tested knowledge.
5. The knowledge needed for social work practice is determined by its goals and functions and the problems it seeks to solve.
6. The internationalization of professional knowledge and value is a vital characteristics of the professional help.
7. Professional skills are expressed in the activities of social worker.

In its approach to assisting clients to function optimally within their environments, professional social work practice differs from other helping professions. The approach of the person-in-environment is central to social work practice. Through this perspective, professional social workers are uniquely trained to help clients maximize the opportunity for change in themselves and/or their situations. The term "client" encompasses individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities.

Ambrosino et al. (2008) contend that:

> The primary profession that works within the social welfare system and with those it serves is social work. Social workers implement planned social change activities prescribed by social welfare institutions. They facilitate change by working with individuals, families, groups, organizations, and communities at the societal level to improve social functioning. Social workers and advocates for social and economic justice within the social welfare system make needed resources available to members of vulnerable populations, including children, the elderly, people with disabilities, and those living in poverty. (p.6).

Social work is concerned with activity that seeks to help individuals, families, organizations, groups, and communities engage resources that will alleviate human problems. Clients were assisted by social workers in developing capacities and strengths that will improve their social functioning.

According to Pincus and Minahan (1973), social work is concerned with the interactions between people and their social environment, which affect people's ability to complete life tasks, alleviate distress, and realize their aspirations and values. Ambrosino *et al*. (2008) define social work as an

active, doing profession that affects positive change in problem situations through problem solving or prevention.

According to Skidmore and Thackeray (1982), social work is an art, a science, and a profession that assists people in solving personal, group (especially family), and community problems and achieving satisfying personal, group, and community relationships through social work practice, which includes casework, community organization, administration, and research. Social work is an art because it requires exceptional abilities to understand people and assist them in helping themselves. Because of its problem-solving method and attempt to be objective in ascertaining facts and developing principles and operational concepts, it is a beginning science. It is a profession because it possesses the characteristics of a profession.

Siporin (1975) defined "social work" as the method of assisting people in preventing and resolving social problems, as well as restoring and enhancing social functions. According to the National Association of Social Workers (NASW), the primary mission of social work is to help people:

> Improve human well-being and assist in meeting the basic needs of all people, with a focus on promoting social justice and addressing the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, or living in poverty... (Social workers assist people in identifying and managing environmental forces that cause, contribute to, and address living problems (p.1)

Social work is a profession that was created to manage the very large and complex human service system that society has put in place. According to Ekpe and Mamah (1997), social work is a process in which the practitioner uses scientific knowledge of giving and accepting help to raise the standard of living of the client to the point where the client can function without the social worker's assistance.

According to Compton (1980), social work is a process that works to assist individuals (as individuals or groups, and as members of groups) in increasing their control over their own lives by making satisfying choices, coping satisfactorily with the outcomes of their choices and life events, and working to provide societal changes that make available to individuals and groups the social resources and support necessary for the selection of meaningful alternative options. Mirza (1969), for one, sees social work as a professional service based on knowledge of human relations and relationship skills and concerned with intra-personal and inter-personal adjustment as a result of unmet individual, group, or community needs.

Social work is a practice-based academic discipline that works with individuals, families, groups, communities, and society as a whole to meet basic needs and improve social functioning, self-determination, collective responsibility, optimal health, and overall well-being (International Federation of Social Workers, IFSW, 2014). The Canadian Association of Social Workers (2011) stated that social work consists of the professional application of social principles and techniques to one or helping people obtain tangible services; counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families, and groups; assisting communities or groups in providing or improving social and health services as well as taking part in the legislative process. The practice of social work requires

knowledge of human development and behavior, of social, economic, and cultural institutions, and of the interactions of all these factors. The British Association of Social Workers indicated that social workers work with individuals and families to help improve outcomes in their lives. This may involve helping to protect vulnerable people from harm or abuse or supporting people to live independently. Social workers support people, act as advocates, and direct people to the services they may require. Social workers work in multidisciplinary teams alongside health and education professionals.

All of the above definitions agreed that social work is a practice-based profession and academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and people's empowerment and liberation.

Prejudice and Discrimination

On the one hand, the word prejudice is derived from the Latin verb "to judge before." Prejudice is a pre-determined bias that people usually have about other people before they get to know the other people or have all the necessary information about the other people, situation, or event. It is concerned with forming an unfavorable opinion or feeling about a person or a group of people without a full examination of the situation. Prejudice is an unjustified or incorrect attitude towards an individual based solely on the individual's membership in a social group. For example, a person may hold prejudicial views towards a certain ethnic group or gender. However, Randall & Esheman (2003) posit that prejudice cannot always be described as irrational or unjustified and that it is therefore "better to define it as a negative evaluation of a social group or an individual that is significantly based on the individual's group membership" (p. 414). Cashmore (1996) defines prejudice as "learned beliefs and values that lead an individual or group of individuals to be biased for or against members of particular groups." Individual and group false dominances are perpetuated by prejudice. According to Elliot et al. (2011), "prejudice is a hostile or negative attitude towards a distinguishable group of people, based solely on their membership in that group" (p. 423). It means making a negative prejudgment towards an entire category of people, often an ethnic or racial minority. Prejudice is defined as "bias which devalues people because of their perceived membership in a social group" (Abrams, 2010, p. 3).

Allport (1959) defines prejudice as thinking negatively of others without sufficient justifications. Prejudice is a pattern of hostility in interpersonal relationships that is directed against an entire group or against individual members of that group; it serves a specific irrational function for its bearer. Gondon Allport's definition has two (2) key elements: unfounded judgment and a feeling of scorn, dislike, fear, and aversion. Prejudice often persists because of the need for the dominant group to feel superior to others. The minority group, or rather the disadvantaged group, may be said to lack intelligence, be violent, aggressive, and dangerous, or take dreaded drugs. This fear is powerful to the extent that it can increase prejudice and discrimination against minority group members (Elliort et al., 2011). In the words of Giddens (2010), "prejudice refers to opinions or attitudes held by members of one group towards another" (p. 636). Prejudice is the presumption,

without the benefit of facts, that certain behaviors are characteristics of all members of a specific group. As a consequence, members of the dominant group may demean members of a minority group by assuming that assigned behaviors are true and then relating to individual members of that group through the filter of prejudice. (Zawstrows, 2001).

Prejudice is a value learned through the process of socialization. Once internalized, prejudice becomes part of an individual's value system. Werth & Mayer (2008) used the word "prejudice" to mean an attitude towards members of a group that is solely based on their belongingness. Kretch & Crutchfied (1948) see prejudice as attitudes and beliefs that serve to place the objects of the attitudes and beliefs at an advantage or disadvantage. Prejudice is defined here as an individual's or group of individuals' favorable or hostile attitude and beliefs toward an object.

According to Young (1946), prejudice is a composite of stereotypes, myths, and legends in which a group label or symbol is used to classify, characterize, and define an individual or group considered as a whole. Prejudice is defined as a stereotype, an irrational judgment based on strong emotions of likes and dislikes. Stereotypes are beliefs that members of certain groups behave in specific ways. It is a generalization about a group of people in which identical characteristics are assigned to virtually all members of the group, regardless of actual variation among the members (Giddens, 2010; Elliot et al., 2010). One basic reason why stereotypes are so insidious and persistent is the human tendency to make dispositional attributions that lead to the conclusion that a person's behavior is due to some aspect of his or her personality rather than some aspect of the situation. Prejudices are often grounded in stereotypes, which are fixed and inflexible characterizations of a group of people.

Discrimination is frequently caused by prejudice and stereotypes. Discrimination occurs when prejudices and stereotypes based on class, age, ability status, employment, gender discrimination, national origin, race/ethnicity, color, religion, and sex influence decision-making, according to Quiros and Dawson (2013).

Discrimination on the other hand, involves arbitrary denial of rights, privileges, and opportunities to members of some groups because of certain characteristics. It is seen in activities that disqualify members of one group from opportunities open to others (Giddens, 2010). It is the denial of equal opportunities and rights to individuals and groups. Discrimination is defined as an unjustified negative or harmful action taken against a member of a group solely because of that group's membership. Mann (1983) defines discrimination as "differential treatment of people as ascribed to particular social categories" (p.95). Social discrimination implies a superordinate term for any form of adverse treatment of members, of social groups (Zasrows, 2008). This may concern, persons with a particular skin colour (racism), people of a specific nationality (nationalism) or ethnic group (ethnocentrism), person of a certain sex (sexism) or any other people who are categorized as a group based on a shared feature. In the nutshell, discrimination can be defined for this study as the behaviour or actions, towards an individual or group of people on the basis of sex, race, ethnicity, social class, and other distinguishable features.

According to Pincus (1994), three different levels of discrimination exists: individual, institutional, and structural. Individual discrimination refers to the behaviour of individual members of one race/ethnic/gender group that is intended to have differential and/or harmful effects on the members of another race/ethic/gender group. Individual discrimination refers to the discrimination against one person or another. It is a personal act of discrimination caused by certain negative attitudes towards another person. Individual discrimination may often occur in work places. It can occur because of ethnic or racial differences between the affected individuals. Institutional discrimination, on the other hand, refers to policies implemented by dominant race/ethnic/gender institutions that are intended to have a differential and/or harmful effect on minority race/ethnicity/gender groups. Barkan (2014) observes that institutional discrimination often pervades the practice of whole institutions, such as housing, medical care, law enforcement, employment, and education. Institutional discrimination affects large number of people just because of their race or ethnicity or sometimes also based on gender, age, disability, or other related characteristics. Eitzen (2000) hinted that institutional discrimination is subtler (invisible) and less intentional than individual acts of discrimination. Therefore, establishing blame for this kind of discrimination is difficult. Lastly, structural discrimination according to Pincus (1994), refers to the policies of dominant race/ethnic/gender institutions and the behaviour of the individuals who implement these policies and control these institutions, which are race/ethnic/gender neutral in intent but which have a differential and/or harmful effect on minority race/ethnic/gender groups. Structural discrimination involves discrimination that arises from the institutional policies that directly favour some individuals and hurt others. Although, policies of institutions are meant to be fair to everyone, individuals with influence have ways of using them to discriminate against others.

Discrimination may be directed at groups because of their membership of a supposed racial or ethnic groups (Thompson & Hickey, 2012; Ravelli & Webber, 2016; Kendall, 2011; Hensling, 2012; Ferrante, 2011; Ferris & Stein, 2010). However, according to Halambo & Holborn (2008), the use of these terms has become less common and racism has largely replaced them as the most widely used term. Wellman (1993) reveals that racism is concerned with protecting an advantaged position in society. According to Solomos (1993), racism is defined as ideologies and social processes that discriminate against others based on their allegedly different racial membership. Marshall (1998) pointed out that racism is "the unequal treatment of a population group purely because of its position of physical or other characteristics socially defined as denoting a particular race" (p.548). Racism, therefore, is a belief in racial superiority that leads to discrimination and prejudice towards those races considered inferior" (Encyclopedia of Sociology, 1974, p.236). racism is prejudice that is systematically applied to membership of a group. Racism is attitudes, beliefs, or behaviours that favours one group over another. Again, Solomos (1993) argued that racism need not to be based upon any specific theory about biological or cultural superiority because racism is not a static phenomenon. People may hold stereotypical views about those from

supposed racial groups and may discriminate against them without necessarily believing the group to be inferior.

The term "race" is seen as a social relationship that allows individual groups to be located and various attributes or competencies assigned on the basis of biologically grounded characteristics. Race is a "major grouping of interrelated people possessing a distinctive combination of physical traits that are the results of inheritance" (Lewis, 1969, p. 56). Bohanna (1959) notes that the term "race" is derived from a Latin word for "root." As such, race is a social, cultural, and political creation, a product of human invention or construction (Barkan, 2014; Giddens, 2010; Schaefer, 2008; Haralambos & Holborn, 2008; Olson & Defrain, 1998). Race, according to Barkan (2014), is a social "categorization of people who share certain inherited physical characteristics, such as skin color, facial features, and structure" (p. 102). Eitzen (2000) warns that race must not be seen simply as a matter of two opposite categories but as a range of power relations among differently situated people. Thus, people may be described as racist when they discriminate against members of other "races" or express derogatory or stereotypical beliefs about them, regardless of what sort of theory, if any, underlies their actions or beliefs (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008).

Racism is inextricably linked to ethnocentrism, and may even be a byproduct of it (Olson & Defrain, 1998). All isms tend to distance humans from one another, ignoring fundamental similarities that frequently lead to tension and conflict. Ethnocentrism is the belief that one's own culture should be used to judge other cultures. In the Encyclopedia of Sociology, ethnocentrism is defined as "the tendency to regard the norms and values of one's own culture as absolute and to use them as a standard against which to judge and measure other cultures" (1974). People who are ethnocentric judge other cultures by the standards of their own group, which can easily lead to prejudice against cultures they consider inferior. Ethnocentrism, according to Zastrow & Kirst-Asman (1988), makes members of one ethnic group view their culture as the best, as being superior, and as being the one other cultures should adopt. Ethnocentric feelings may cause communal or ethnic conflict as well as genocide.

Relationship and/or Differences between Prejudice and Discrimination

Prejudice and discrimination are inextricably linked. Prejudice and discrimination typically go hand in hand; the two are generally related in the sense that social injustice and social inequality are viewed as products of prejudice and discrimination. In other words, social distance is always a reflection of prejudice, just as discrimination is a means of maintaining social distance. When prejudices and stereotypes based on class, age, ability status, employment, gender discrimination, national origin, race/ethnicity, color, religion, and sex influence decision-making, discrimination occurs (Quiros & Dawson, 2013).

Prejudice and discrimination are frequently based on stereotypes about specific groups of people. According to Ewan (2010):

> Stereotyping in itself is not necessarily negative. It is something that all of us engage in based on our views of the world. Nevertheless, it may also be argued that stereotyping is

the cause of many prejudicial attitudes. At the core of the prejudicial attitude is the process of attributing negative attributes to particular individuals. It can also be argued that much discrimination is based on stereotyping. Discrimination is understood in this context as referring to putting prejudicial attitudes into effect (p. 45).

Stereotypes are oversimplified or untrue generalizations about social groups (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008). Stereotypes are often applied to ethnic minority groups, for instance, such as the notion that all black men are natural athletes or that all East Asians are hardworking, diligent students, etc. Some stereotypes may be true; others are simply a mechanism of displacement in which feelings of hostility or anger are directed at objects that are not the true source of those feelings. Such stereotypes become embedded in cultural understandings to the extent that it is difficult to erode them, even when they are gross distortions of reality (Giddens, 2010). For example, short people might be stereotyped as being usually aggressive and women as being weak. When stereotypes imply a negative form of prejudice, and when they are acted on, they become discrimination (Haralambos & Holborn, 2008).

Discrimination is defined as any action that promotes or maintains prejudice. It entails oppression and unjust use of power by dominant groups against non-dominant groups, as well as allowing the dominant group to exploit these groups to its advantage (Zastrow, 2010). Prejudice and discrimination have negative connotations when applied to the concept of treating people equally. Both involve prejudiced attitudes toward specific groups of people.

Although prejudice is frequently used to justify discrimination, the two can coexist. Prejudice and discrimination can occur independently of one another, according to Merton (1949), Barkan (2014), Giddens (2010), and Zastrow (2010). Sometimes one can be prejudiced while not discriminating, and sometimes one cannot be prejudiced while discriminating (Barkan, 2014). People may harbor prejudices that they do not act on. Equally important, discrimination does not always stem from prejudice. As a result, people can have prejudiced attitudes while still acting discriminatorily.

Prejudice is thus about what people think and does not always translate into actions. A prejudiced person may or may not act on their prejudice. As a result, some people may harbor prejudices against a particular group while not discriminating against them. Prejudice is a mental construct that can lead to discrimination. Although prejudice can exist in the absence of discrimination (and discrimination can exist in the absence of prejudice), the two usually coexist. Prejudice fuels the fire and serves as an excuse for discrimination. This implies that prejudice and discrimination are not synonymous, and that either condition can exist without the other. There is a significant distinction between them.

The basic difference between them is that while prejudice describes attitudes and opinions, prejudice is an attitudinal expression-a state of mind- and is usually negative. While discrimination refers to actual behavior or action. Discrimination, according to Mann (1983), refers to the "differential treatment of people ascribed to particular social categories" (p. 95). Prejudice also includes all three aspects of an attitude (affective, behavioral, and cognitive), whereas discrimination involves only behavior. Kornblum (1997) succinctly summarized the difference

between prejudice and discrimination when he wrote that "prejudice is an attitude that prejudges a person, either positively or negatively, on the basis of their real or imagined characteristics (stereotypes) of groups to which that person belongs." In another sense, discrimination refers to actual unfair treatment of people based on their membership. It is the negative treatment of all people socially assigned to a specific category (Cashmore, 1994). For example, a prejudiced person does not always act on his or her biases. This means that prejudice only describes attitudes and opinions, while discrimination refers to actual behavior towards another group or individual (Giddens, 2010).

Prejudice may exist only in a person's head. Discrimination is the application of prejudice against a group of people. Being prejudiced may not be a crime, but acting on it by discriminating against certain groups is illegal.

Theoretical Framework of Analysis

Theoretically, many studies have identified some common factors that may contribute to the presence of prejudice and discrimination. These theories are authoritarian personality theory and conformity to social norms theory.

Authoritarian Personality Theory

The authoritarian personality was central to one of the first social-psychological explanations for the causes of prejudice and discrimination (Adorno, Frenkel-Brunswick, Levinson, & Sanford, 1950). According to this theory, authoritarian personalities evolved in response to harsh discipline from parents. Individuals with authoritarian personalities value obedience to authority, strict adherence to rules, and a lack of acceptance of people from other groups. Ewan claims that (2020):

> Adorno et al.'s (1950) description of authoritarian personality applies psychodynamic theory to explain the formation of prejudicial attitudes. Adorno popularized the notion of a personality type that is "authoritarian" or intolerant of others. The theory proposed that the personality type has its origins in childhood. It is generated in response to "strict" parental upbringing. Adorno argued that such a social environment encouraged a "love-hate" relationship between children and parents. The child "loves" the parents because they give clear messages about right and wrong, making the child feel secure and aware of boundaries. Conversely, the child "hates" its parents because of the strict physical and emotional punishments that are given. This contradiction produces anxiety and anger that is unconsciously repressed. In later life, this unconscious repression is displaced onto those who are perceived as being "weak" and "inferior" (p. 47).

The theory argues that there is a high correlation between family discipline and the personality types of children. The assumption at the heart of this theory is that those with an authoritarian personality tend to be:

1. Hostile to those who are of inferior status but obedient to people of high status.
2. Obsession with rank and status
3. Respect for and submissiveness toward authority figures
4. Fairly rigid in their opinions and beliefs.

5. Conventionally, upholding traditional values
6. Preoccupation with power and toughness

This implies that an authoritarian personality rigidly conforms, submits to their superiors without question, and rejects those they consider inferiors. Adorno believes that authoritarian traits predispose some people to "fastic" traits like ethnocentrism, or the tendency to favor one's own ethnic group. Individuals with authoritarian personalities, according to this viewpoint, develop an aversion to differences from their own values and norms, resulting in an overtly negative attitude toward minority groups. People are predisposed to cruelty, according to Adorno, because they were raised with authoritarian personalities. The authoritarian personality may have its roots in unloving and aloof disciplinarian parents. The child is then taught how to control his or her anxieties through rigid attitudes.

Adorno concludes that people with authoritarian personalities were more likely to categorize people into "us" and "them" groups, seeing their own group as superior Individuals who were raised by critical and harsh parents, according to Adorno, were more likely to develop an authoritarian personality. Adorno argues that this is because the individual in question was not able to express hostility towards their parents (for being strict and critical). As a result, the individual would direct his or her aggression or hostility toward less vulnerable targets, such as ethnic minorities. Barkan (2014) reveals that:

> Authoritarian personalities emerge in childhood as a result of harsh discipline from parents. Individuals with authoritarian personalities value obedience to authority, strict adherence to rules, and a low acceptance of people who are not like them (outgroups). Many studies have found that such people have strong racial and ethnic prejudices (p. 110).

Children or individuals from harsh and strictly disciplined homes tended to be highly ethnocentric, as their parents instilled in them a distorted view of out-groups through discipline and forced compliance. According to Adorno, authoritarian children suppress their negative perceptions due to their parents' demands for perfection, obedience, and respect, which are enforced with harsh discipline. These suppressed negative perceptions are then projected onto others, particularly members of different groups. Their anger and hostility toward their parents, on the other hand, is displaced onto other members of the minority group and rationalized by the notion that the out-group members deserve discrimination because of the negative characteristics that they have projected onto them.

Criticism

In the 1950s, Adorno's theory of personality variables, or authoritarian personality, was very popular (Saul, 2021). It is now considered outdated, owing to the fact that it fails to account for observed changes in prejudice and discrimination over time. Although there has recently been renewed interest in the theory (Funke et al., 2016), Adorno's explanation still has many flaws:

1. Harsh parenting style does not always produce prejudice children or individuals.
2. Some prejudice people do not conform to authoritarian personality type.

3. The theory doesn't explain why people are prejudiced against certain groups and not others.

Conformity to Social Norms Theory

This theoretical approach, also known as socio-cultural learning theory, attempts to offer explanations for the causes of prejudice and discrimination. The theory suggests that prejudice and discrimination are learned through socialization processes and that people who are prejudiced are conforming to the culture in which they grow up. This view argues that prejudice and discrimination are the consequences of socialization by parents, peers, the news media, and other various aspects of their culture. Thus, influences that cause individuals to be ethnocentric, sexist, or racist, for example, may come from peers, parents, or group membership. Conforming to social norms means people adopt the "normal" set of behaviors associated with a particular group or society. Social norms or behaviors considered appropriate within a social group are one possible influence on prejudice and discrimination. People may have prejudiced beliefs and feelings, as well as act prejudicedly, in order to conform to what is considered normal in the social groups to which they belong (Rogers & Frantz, 1962).

Pettigrew (1959) revealed that people who tended to be more conformist would also be more prejudiced. This approach argues that people tend to become more prejudiced when they move to areas where people are very prejudiced and less prejudiced when they move to locations where people are less prejudiced (Aronson, 2008). People perceived what attitudes their peers had and shaped their own attitudes to conform. This "socialization" or "social learning" approach allows for the formation of prejudice in children even if they have never seen a member of the group against which they become prejudiced (Mboto, 2001). The parents play an active role in this regard by rewarding their children positively when they find some prejudiced attitudes or expressions against other people. Parents also serve as role models for their children, teaching them to dislike other groups, which is reinforced by peers and/or punished (sanctioned) by peer groups for associating with other groups, which is aided by the media, because stories in newspapers and on television frequently support stereotypes about groups.

Again, according to Pettigrew (1959), discrimination, which is the overt manifestation of prejudice, is more likely to occur when the individual is in a group of other prejudiced people. Similarly, Newcumbe (1943) observes that while individuals do conform to the dominant ethnic or racial attitudes of their reference groups, they tend to change, particularly when they change group membership or relocate to another part of the country. Prejudice and discrimination are dynamic because group norms are not static.

Criticism (Evaluation)

Conformity to social norms theory may offer an explanation for prejudice and discrimination in some cases, at least to some extent. At the same time, however, norms change over time, so this can only go some way towards explaining prejudice. (McLeod, 2008)**.**

Effects of Prejudice and Discrimination on Disadvantaged or Less Privileged Groups: Prejudice and discrimination has enormous deleterious effects on targeted or disadvantaged groups, individuals, families, and communities:

Restriction of Targeted groups in decision-making Roles: Prejudice and discrimination prevent targeted groups (disadvantaged or less privileged) from serving in decision-making roles or participating in discussions where their thoughts and leadership skills are considered and acted upon (Mueller et al., 2008). Prejudice and discrimination keep the dominant or powerful from realizing how much they share with minorities. It undermines the fact that all might gain by cooperating and uniting. The diverse experiences of both disadvantaged and targeted group members promote and enrich business strategies, projects, events, and other work-related tasks in positive and different ways. The limitation of targeted groups' participation in decision-making implies that society will lose the contribution that the targeted group would have made if given the opportunity to participate in decision-making. Abrams (2010) observes that "prejudice and discrimination can affect people's opportunities, their social resources, their self-worth and motivation, and their engagement with wider society." "Moreover, perceptions of equality and inequality are themselves drivers of further discrimination" (p. 6). Development, according to Abanyam (2019), is a multi-dimensional process that needs the cooperation of the dominant and disadvantaged groups in society. As a result, limiting the targeted group's decision-making power or a lack of unity or cooperation may likely slow or stall society's development.

Lack of Equality in the Distribution of Wealth: According to Giddens (2010), prejudice and discrimination leads to inequality in the distribution of wealth and material goods since one group (a dominant group) occupies a position of power over another (minority groups).

Restricted Opportunities and Lack of Wellbeing: Prejudice and discrimination are more likely to affect people's opportunities, their wellbeing, and their sense of agency. Prejudice and discrimination affect opportunities in other institutions (type of job, level of remuneration). Poor children are probably more likely to receive an inferior education, suffer from bad health, and be treated unjustly by the criminal justice system (Eitzen, 2000). Housing discrimination, for example, prevents inter-generational accumulation and transference of wealth within families through housing-related investments. Being restricted from leaving a low-income housing complex or neighborhood may expose a person to communities with higher crime rates. Discrimination may lead to people not using health and social care provisions, and this can lead to poorer health. Unfair treatment of others has a significant impact on sleep and psychological functioning in middle age (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2010).

Causes negative behaviours such as aggression or Criminality: Negative behaviours, aggression or crime can be partly caused by discrimination. Living in poverty and experiencing discrimination may likely affect individual's behaviour. People may vent their anger on those they see in a position of power and health professionals can find themselves being verbally or physically attacked. Drug users may also display negative behaviour while in care.

Perceived Marginalization and Disempowerment: Prejudice and discrimination may likely make people feel that they are not part of the main group in the society since they are treated as insignificant. Individuals or groups that are discriminated against by other individuals or more powerful groups may become depressed and devalued and disempowered, which in turn may lead to more health issues.

Internalization of Stigma directed against: Persistent exposure to prejudice and discrimination can lead individuals to internalize the prejudice or stigma that is directed against them, manifesting in shame, low-self-esteem, fear and stress, as well as poor health. For instance, Barnes (1972) reviewed the theoretical perspectives on self-concept and notes that in the United States, black families have been socialized to believed, that their black colour and hair texture is culturally viewed as being undesirable. He further revealed that such discrimination is apt to lead to incomplete self-image or at worst a negative self-image. Barnes conclusion is that the black child's cognitive status, emotional wellbeing and achievement orientation are bound to be adversely affected by discrimination.

Diminution or lowering of one's self-concept and self-identity: Prejudice is very dangerous. Giddens (2010), Elliot et al. (2010), and Aronson, Wilson, and Aker (2010) reveal that simple dislike of a group can be persistent (relentless) and can escalate to hatred, to thinking of its members as less than human, and to torture, murder, and even genocide. However, even when murder or genocide is not the culmination of prejudiced beliefs, the targets of prejudice will suffer in less dramatic ways.

One focal consequence is that prejudice and discrimination lead to a diminution or lowering of one's self-esteem or identity (Charles et al., 2012; Aronson, Wilson, and Akert, 2010; Giddens; Elliot et al., 2010; Haralambos, Holborn, and Heald, 2008). Self-concept is a vital aspect of a person's life. How we think we are is a key determinant of how we behave and who we want to become. A person with low self-esteem will, by definition, conclude that he or she is unworthy of a good education, a decent job, or an exciting romantic partner and will be more unhappy and unsuccessful than a person with well-founded high self-esteem. Zastrow (2010) explains the implication:

> A failed identity is likely to feel worthless. People with a failure identity are likely to be depressed, lonely, anxious, reluctant to face everyday challenges, and indecisive. Escape through drugs or alcohol, withdrawal, criminal behaviors, and the development of emotional problems are common (p. 60).

In a democracy, such a person is also less likely to take advantage of available opportunities (Aronson, Wilson, & Akert, 2010). A person with low self-esteem will experience negative self-identity, which brings a feeling of worthlessness and depression. The seeds of low self-esteem are usually sown early in life for the targets of relentless prejudice. For example, in a classic experiment conducted by social psychologists, Clark and Clark (1947) revealed that African American children—most of them only three (3) years old—were already convinced that it was not particularly desirable to be black. In this experiment, children were offered a choice between

playing with a white doll and playing with a black doll. The majority of the black children rejected the black doll, feeling that the white doll was prettier and generally superior.

Physical and Emotional Impact on the Victim: Exclusion (rejection) directed to individuals can cause extreme worry to the individual. It may consequently result in anxiety, sadness, depression, and a feeling of guilt and emptiness. These frequently manifest as depression, loss of interest, eating disorders, and stress-related illnesses.

Social Educational and Financial Impacts: Discrimination, harassment, and victimization leave a person befuddled and broken. Such person may take to alcohol or drugs or may form their own opinions (prejudice) on other, develop a hatred for others, or withdraw from people. Also, such disadvantaged people can be affected financially, and may lose their job, quit school, or do poorly at school.

Lowered Productivity in Society: Community and businesses that fail to take action against discrimination tend to be lower in productivity. People feel disgruntled and lose interest in working hard. There is a drop in morale, trust, and confidence on the part of the employees. People with talents and exceptional skills and abilities are not attracted to those places for the fact that they do not want to be discriminated against.

Conflict and Social Discords: Victims of discrimination may regroup with some vengeance in mind against other groups. That can fuel conflicts and social discords. Several conflicts and wars have started in this way.

Negative Mental and Physical Health Outcomes: Discrimination is associated with negative mental and physical health outcomes (Williams & Mohammed, 2009). When discrimination occurs repeatedly, the negative consequences become more pronounced, leading to increased depressive symptoms, poorer physical health, and more chronic illness, possibly through the activation of stress response systems or changes in health behavior. Exposure to racial or ethnic discrimination is perceived as traumatic and stressful, leading to higher anxiety, feelings of hopelessness and helplessness, and increased depressive symptoms (Torres & Vallejo, 2015). Stress caused by differently experienced events can also lead to physical depletion, illness, and death. For instance, experiences of racism are associated with elevated blood pressure in African Americans across the life span (Fernado, 1984).

Lowered Job Satisfaction and Reduced Organizational Commitment in terms of Job Performance: Work place discrimination are related to a host of negative organizational and employee outcomes, such as lowered job satisfaction, reduced organizational commitment, reduced job performance, decreased helping behaviours and increased turnover intentions.

Persecution and Execution: Prejudice and discrimination may likely lead to persecution and execution of members of the less privileged groups. Members of the targeted group may get shot, lynched, beaten up or harassed and do not get good jobs, education and a desirable place to live (Giddens, 2010).

Anxiety and Fear of Rebellion: There are certain levels of unmeasurable psychic cost to majority/the dominant group due to anxiety and fear of rebellion. The majority's sense of security and freedom is always at stake (circumscribed) so long as they restricted the freedom of others, knowing that rebellion, an act of retribution is a constant possibility. This may lead to massive investment in police forces and other instruments of social control (Olson & Defrain, 1998).

Violence and Prohibition of Inter-marriages: Prejudice and discrimination may lead to violence and prohibition of marriages. Groups may employ violence to advance their interest. The dominant groups may undertake acts of violence against members of the underprivileged groups in order to maintain statusquo or hold on to their distinctive positions, privileged. In the same way, members of the underprivileged groups may also turn to violence as a means of trying to improve their situation. According to Giddens (2010), "discrimination and prejudice may also limit or prohibit inter-marriages between groups and there may be restrictions of social contacts or economic relationships like trading" (p.642).

Biopsychosocial Impacts: According to King (2005), discrimination has been found to be damaging to individual's biopsychosocial functioning and found to be a significant stressor associated with physical and psychological distress. In particular, racial discrimination has been found to place adolescents at risk of psychosocial distress, externalizing behavioural problems, and poor academic outcomes (Riina & Mchale, 2012). Stress related to racism according to Rosenberg et al., (2002), was associated with higher infant mortality rates among native-born black mothers as compared to non-native-born black mothers in the United States of America.

Prejudice, Discrimination and Implications for Social Work Profession in Nigeria

Considering the hazardous consequences of prejudice and discrimination, social workers have a major role in understanding the effects of prejudice and discrimination and implementing strategies to end them. A role, according to Runciman (1990), is a position embodying consistently recurring patterns of institutional behavior informed by mutually shared beliefs about their incumbents' capacity directly or indirectly to influence each other's behavior.

The mission of social work is to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic needs of all people, with particular attention to those who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. The scope of social work practice in the profession of social work means the assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and evaluation of individual, interpersonal, and societal problems through the use of social work knowledge, skills, interventions, and strategies to assist individuals, dyads, families, groups, organizations, and communities to achieve optimum psychosocial and social functioning.

In line with the social work code of ethics (2008), social workers have the responsibility to reduce and prevent social discrimination based on race, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical disability (Code Sections 4.02 and 6.04). Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility, and diversity are central to social work (International Federation of Social Work, IFSW, 2018). Social work, therefore, as a profession and a discipline,

aims to address and eliminate social discrimination in the lives of people. In doing so, social workers can play the following roles:

1. **Help Legislators Enact Just Laws:** Social workers can play an important role to help advocate for anti-discriminately policies and meaningful social change. Prejudice can be eliminated by enforcing laws against discriminative behaviour. Eliminating prejudice and discrimination starts with dismantling barriers and ensuring equal equality in access to training, education as the ability to own and use resources such as land.

2. **Raise Awareness:** Social workers (activists) must be critical of discriminatory practice, take a confrontational stance of social action, raise awareness, and fight to win decisive battles.

3. **Engagement in the Community Cultural Responsive Approaches:** Cultural responsiveness implies the ability to learn from and relate respectfully with people's own culture as well as those from other cultures. Social workers must engage in community-level change strategies by implementing culturally responsive approaches in ameliorating discrimination.

4. **Discouragement of all forms of Discrimination:** Social workers must attack and discredit all forms of discrimination. The social workers should act to eliminate and prevent discrimination of individuals, groups, and/or communities based on race, ethnicity, national origin, colour, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age, height, marital status, political belief, religion, immigration status, or mental or physical disability. The idea of alleging the inferiority of one's group under the other no matter how subtly they are stated should be discouraged. The assumption that one's ethnic group is the epitome of knowledge, wisdom and intelligence while other groups are less competence should be discouraged in all ramifications.

5. **Fostering of Intergroup Contact:** The best solution to prejudice is to bring together members of different groups so that they can learn to appreciate their common experiences and backgrounds. Social workers should foster or encouraged positive contact with members of both the in-groups and the outgroups. This would erode or modify prejudice, stereotypes and discrimination. Contact between members of different groups fosters positive intergroup attitudes if the contact also involves similarity, common goals, institutional support and equal status. However, this depends on the type of contact prejudice and discrimination will decrease when both groups interact on an equal status and both share a common goal not as a master and slave kind of contact. This assumption is called the contact hypothesis. Allport (1954) claim that:

   > Prejudice may be reduced by equal-status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if the contact is sanctioned by institutional support (e.g., by law, custom, or local atmosphere, and if it is of the type that leads to perceptions of common interest between members of the two groups) (p.281).

Central to contact hypothesis is that contact and positive interaction between different groups based on equal status is key to eroding all forms of prejudices and discriminations.

6. **Engagement in Cooperative Learning:** Conflicting groups need to cooperate by laying aside their individual interests and learning to work together for shared goals. Social workers can also create an enabling environment for cooperative learning. Cooperative learning is an educational approach, teaching method, or strategy that is used in organizing classroom activities and rewarding based on the success of the group rather than the success of the individual. It is sometimes called "group work." This strategy can be employed to enable children to learn how to collaborate and work with others from diverse groups in order to complete tasks. Maves & Brown (1996) evaluate a cooperative learning intervention that involved non-disabled children taking part in regular activities with disabled children. Such activities were carefully structured to eliminate discrimination so that children could collaborate with others irrespective of sex or gender, class, race, and ethnic groups. School-based contacts or activities of this nature can contribute to the promotion of positive attitudes.

7. **Promotion of Good Relations and Harmonious Cohesive Tolerant:** Social workers must promote good relations and encourage harmonious cohesive tolerant behaviours among diverse groups: it is likely that some efforts to promote good relations may reduce prejudice and discriminatory behaviours. The idea of good relations tends to emphasize on a situation in which people feel part of a cohesive group and focus on sustaining harmonious and positive relationships within that group (which may include bridges to other groups) and with a positive outlook towards members of other groups.

8. **Changing of relevant norms that devalue Outgroups:** Discrimination occurs as a result of a particular prejudice. Social workers can educate people to unlearned such negative attitude or prejudice that can lead to discrimination by changing certain norms. Social norms are important because they define what is appropriate and inappropriate.

9. **Fostering of self-esteem:** Social workers can assist in educating and fostering self-esteem among members of society. People's prejudices will fade as they gain a better education and higher self-esteem.

Conclusion

Prejudice and discrimination are obviously major social issues in society, influencing the daily lives of their victims in terms of employment, income, financial opportunities, housing, educational opportunities, and medical care. Prejudice and discrimination have negative consequences for individuals, groups, and societies because they limit targeted groups' ability to make decisions. Prejudice and discrimination create social inequality, limit the opportunities of disadvantaged groups, and result in negative behaviors such as aggression or criminality, perceived marginalization and disempowerment, and a decrease in the victim's self-esteem. As a result, social workers are in high demand to educate people (raise awareness) and unlearn such negative attitudes (prejudices) that can lead to discrimination. Equally important is the fact that prejudice and discrimination reduce self-esteem, which has a negative impact on an individual's positive development. A social worker or other social care professional must ensure that an individual's

self-esteem is maintained (if it is high) or can be raised (if it is low) in order to assist the person in coping with their situation.

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