

# **PREVENTING YOUTH VIOLENCE IN IKUN COMMUNITY**

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## **Background**

Violence by young people is one of the most aggressive forms of violence in society. Youth violence is traumatizing and can lead to injury, disability, and even premature death. In a December 11, 2014 post on the facebook page of Ikun Youth Parliament (IYP), the moderator of the forum, Mr. Babatunde Awoyemi sensitized the global audience of Ikun-Ekiti youth to the apparently rising wave of political violence among Ikun youth. He also offered some thoughtful and general antidotes to the problem.

While there have been several reports of violence among Ikun youth, including physical assaults, as well as threats to life and property of political opponents, and community leaders, the latest incident which reportedly occurred on December 8, 2014, claimed the life of Mr. Wale Owoye. This senseless and premature death should be cause for concern for all well-meaning citizens of Ikun-Ekiti. Clearly, an urgent plan of action seems imperative at this time to stop the current wave of youth violence in Ikun-Ekiti, with a view to bringing lasting peace, harmony, stability and development to our beloved fatherland. The purpose of this article is to explore some strategic ways our community can adopt to stop youth violence.

## **The Problem**

Research shows that targeted youth violence incidents are rarely impulsive. There is a visible process of thinking and behavior that results in an attack, typically comprised of an idea to harm, a plan of attack, and a motive for revenge. Thus, youth violence is a psychological problem and strategies for prevention must necessarily address some of the underlying risk factors which predispose young people to violence.

## **Prevention Strategies**

Youth violence is systematically becoming a serious problem in Ikun-Ekiti. This can have lasting harmful effects on the local economy, the perpetrators, as well as the victims and their family, friends, and the community as a whole. The goal for youth violence prevention is simple - to stop youth violence from happening in the first place. But the solutions are as complex as the problem. Below are some specific strategies we can adopt to prevent youth violence in our community.

**1. Adopt a commonsense approach to problem solving**

If we take a commonsense and peaceful approach to solving our community's problems, we can decrease violence and enhance public safety. But if we adopt an overtly partisan and subjective approach leading to troubled youth or political opponents being prosecuted, these problems will remain – because “A kii ti kotu de d’ore” meaning that, “court litigation destroys mutual friendship.” An objective, responsible, and consensus-based approach to solving community-related problems can prevent youth violence and make our town safer for the benefit of everyone.

**2. Cultivate leadership virtues for change**

Parents, educators, as well as community, religious and political leaders must lead by example so that their exemplary lifestyle can inspire and serve as a positive role model to young people.

**3. Organize community-based educational campaigns**

The goal of such public campaigns is to increase awareness that youth violence can and should be prevented. Community-based organizations (e.g. FIDUO, IPC, FIDU, IYP, etc) could sponsor such initiatives aimed at stopping youth violence before it even starts.

**4. Ensure a quality education for every child**

The community should focus on improving educational outcomes for youth as a core solution to reducing violence. To this end, we can recruit mentors to help students stay on track in school, stay away from crime, and contribute fully as adults and

productive members of the community. It is also essential that the school provide an environment conducive to learning so that all students can successfully complete high school and attend post-secondary or vocational training schools that lead to well-paying jobs in our town or elsewhere.

**5. Provide rewarding employment opportunities for youth**

Research shows that communities with high unemployment have high rates of violence. Studies also show that rewarding economic opportunity is a powerful antidote for community violence. One study found, for example, that ten percent increase in salaries could reduce young people's participation in crime by as much as 9 percent. These findings underscore the need to ensure that all our youth have access to entry-level jobs upon graduation from post-secondary or vocational training schools. This is essential because "an idle hand is the devil's workshop" says an adage. Local philanthropists, successful entrepreneurs, political office holders and community-based organizations should be encouraged to provide the much needed support to ensure gainful and rewarding employment opportunities for our youth.

**6. Develop a comprehensive youth violence prevention initiative**

A comprehensive youth violence prevention program should be developed in Amure High School to engage youth as stakeholders in the process of finding lasting solutions. The program could focus on creating awareness of the problem and discussing prevention strategies – through structured dialogue, drama, song, and organized community projects that foster character development.

**7. Provide community-wide mental health services**

Government should ensure that everyone has equal access to culturally appropriate mental health services that promote healing and empowerment. Youth that are currently engaged in violent behaviors should be identified and referred for mental

health services.

#### **8. Seek divine intervention**

The Ikun community should continually call upon the Lord and pray for peace in the land, especially in the day of trouble; and he will surely deliver his people for his glory (Psalm 50:15). To this end, a monthly community prayer and fasting day could be declared and observed for divine intervention in the affairs of our community.

### **Concluding Remarks**

Preventing youth violence in our community is a complex issue that requires a multi-systemic approach for solution. It also requires a sense of urgency in order to prevent undue premature deaths among Ikun youth and to ensure a peaceful and stable community. While several sustainable solutions could be developed, we believe that adopting the strategies outlined in this article, is a good step towards developing effective long-term violence prevention solutions. To achieve this goal requires a collaborative effort by all the stakeholders – the youth, school system, government, parents, community-based organizations, as well as religious, political and community leaders. By working together, we can build a safer community and consequently improve the overall quality of life for all!

### **References**

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NOTE:

\*The author of this article is a native of Ikun-Ekiti, Moba Local Government, Ekiti State, Nigeria, currently residing in New York, USA. The article was written on December 17, 2014, in memory of late Mr. Wale Owoeye, who reportedly lost his life in a youth violence incident on December 8, 2014.

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