

# Assessing the Impacts of Indecent Dress Codes on Students in Sierra Leone (Case Study: Eastern Polytechnic Kenema Campus)

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**Abstract**— This paper looked at indecent dressing, a dress pattern that is common among students of higher institutions of learning in Kenema particularly the female ones by examining the various forms that these dresses appear, reasons why these students dress indecently such as poor parenting, peer pressure, wrong use of the internet, fading values as well as demonic influence among others. The negative consequences of dressing indecently were identified to include, rape, prostitution, HIV/AIDS and other venereal disease infection as well as armed robbery, lying and poor school grades. Recommendations put forward included that parents be good moral exemplars to their children, give them attention and regulate the films they watch at homes, the mass media must promote good moral values, religious leaders must preach against indecent dressing, counsel those under demonic influence, government reinforcing dress code as well as the introduction of college or university uniforms for students.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Indecent dressing refers to a style of dressing that exhibit areas of the body that should be covered with clothes in the view of society. Such modes of dress are usually rejected by society because they are deemed inconsistent with cultural norms and ethics.

Cole (1960) defines indecent dressing as “dressing which a particular society frowns at or rejects entirely, simply because it does not reflect its culture and acceptable way of dressing.”

A dress code is a set of rules governing what garments may be worn together and in what setting. Examples of dress codes are combinations such as “smart casual”, or “morning dress”. A classification of these codes is normally made for varying levels of formality and times of day.

In traditional western dressing for men, the more formal dress codes, such as “black tie”, are highly codified with essentially fixed definitions, mostly unchanged for more than fifty years, while the more casual classifications change very quickly and a worldwide or widely relevant discussions are impossible. For women, changes in fashion are more rapid. In practical use, dress codes are either followed intuitively or enforced by peer pressure, so that people wear similar clothing in the same situation. Alternatively, at more formal events where a dress code is specified, invitees wear cloths at the specified level, if so, variations are permitted. For example, black tie preferred, the host will wear the most formal options to save guest the embarrassment out-dressing him. Appropriate national variations are also widely worn as an exception to the trend of uniformity with peers, often in the form headgear.

Every country formulates laws that guide the smooth and orderly functioning of their society. In formulating or legislating laws in any society, the difficulty has always arisen as to whether the government or legislating authority has the power to legislate on issues that should be considered within the personal or private realm of the individual.

The general question here is, can the government or legislating authority legislate on issues of individual controversy around the world consider as private or personal? One of such issues is that of dressing. There has been a major controversy over this issue across the globe. Some see the laws of dress code as the violation of human rights especially the rights of women because the issues of indecent dressing centers mostly on the female gender. The law of indecent dressing has been kicked against by others, which has been a major source of controversy around the world. Their dress patterns are mostly anti-African, and are invented. They usually dress in a manner that does not show that they are responsible as it could be expected by people in a tertiary or higher institution of learning. The African culture and most particularly that of Sierra Leone encourage modesty in appearance as do the Christian and Islamic religions, the anti-African dress pattern among the citizenry of the country’s religious institutions as well as institutions of learning are not resting on their oars to watch this immoral act being perpetuated. Sierra Leone is one of the countries in West Africa that has much linguistic and cultural diversity which clearly depict their ways of living and cultural practices. However, cultural practices which include mode of dressing differs one culture to the other, which could be viewed acceptable or rejected by these cultural groups.

Indecent dressing therefore is a relative concept particularly with regards an increase acceptance of western culture in the mode of dress in cities, towns, schools as well as institutions of higher learning in Sierra Leone. However, several reports were published by both Eastern Polytechnic and that of Njala University journalists condemning the act and requesting for the imposition of rule to be established. Details on these laws were that women must not expose their sex organ. In spite of this, on many campuses, students still dress indecently.

In the same vein at the Eastern polytechnic, it seems that the introduction of a dress code is misinterpreted by the students to mean they should dress indecently. This is because

what becomes obvious with students in this College after the introduction of this dress code was the alarming and rampant ways that they began to dress indecently. One is not however surprised because what is typical of most Sierra Leonean administrators is that, there is always a wide gap between policy formulation and execution. Indecent dressing though is not accepted as the normality, is seen to be gaining ascendancy. One then wonders what becomes of the society tomorrow with the calibre of students that are being trained. If rules are made for people, they are supposed to be adequately informed, why such rules are made and to implement it. Eastern Polytechnic is one of the institutions in Sierra Leone where indecent dressing is practiced on an alarming rate. This research therefore seeks to look at the effects of indecent dressing and its cause vis-à-vis the challenges. This chapter therefore will give a detailed background of the study.

## II. STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In academic institution, dress pattern should be regulated and treated with care; so that the outside population should emulate this as a role model. This is really farfetched in several institutions of higher learning in Sierra Leone, of which Eastern Polytechnic is not an exception. Students dress out of context of Sierra Leonean culture and religious acceptance which is very appalling; that has left a host of disorderliness in our institutions of learning as well as in the community. Although the study is based on a single higher learning institution in Sierra Leone, it aims at looking into the dress code of other Colleges and Universities in Sierra Leone. With the aid of the other institutions, this study would be able to ascertain the dress code of various students in those institutions to bring out the rate of indecency of the dress pattern study would be able to ascertain the dress code of various students in those institutions to bring out the rate of indecency of the dress pattern vis-à-vis their implications. Many students have been asked out of the lecture rooms because of their indecent ways of dressing.

On this note, indecent dressing at the Eastern Polytechnic campus is a deliberate act by students to expose sensitive parts of their body for public view. This issue has become alarming and deserves urgent attention if we are to safeguard present future and generation from immoral practices such as indecent dressing. According to A.S Horby, in Oxford learners dictionary, 2006, 6<sup>th</sup> edition, he describes indecent dressing as the state being naked. Indecent dressing is the state of wearing on cloth or being half naked. It is sometime used to refer to wearing significantly less clothing than expected by the convention and particularly exposing the bare skin of intimate parts of the body. A seminar presentation at the eastern polytechnic campus on an indecent dressing reveals that every culture has its dress code that may vary according to cultures. Despite this variation, one is certain that every culture has an acceptable dress code. It further reveals that every dress code that deviates from the one acceptable to the community especially if it affects the set moral standard or judgment of the community is termed indecent.

It is also stressed that the term decency and indecency have so much to do with morality of the individual person and

judged by others. A dress is therefore indecent when it has provocative or stimulating influence on almost all those that happen to view it on the user. (Mrs. Denga, lecturer home economics department).

According to a "Source Magazine" (2011), any outfit that shows too much skin could be termed as an indecent way or dressing. Egon (2010) referred to indecent dressing in a more specific term as the attitude of someone, male or female that dress to show off parts of the body such as the breasts, buttocks or even the under wear particularly those of the ladies that needed to be covered. This exposure is obviously a deliberate act to look sensuous, tantalizing and stimulating so as to draw the attention of the opposite sex and is more prevalent among singles and student; this term of dressing is provocative and frustrating particularly for learning institutions. This dress patterns are morally offensive and reveals the high rate of moral decadence in the society of our time.

Cole (1960) refers to indecent dressing as that which a particular society frowns at and or rejects entirely, simply because it does not reflect their culture and acceptable way of dressing. Indecency, in terms of dressing and other forms of behavior seems relative but what that is considered to be indecent emanates from the cultural norms and values that have been inculcated by people in the countenance of cultural heritage.

Research conducted also reveals that indecent dressing is as a result of youth culture on campus. This is visible in the sense that youth emulates each other particularly in the sense of dressing when they are grouped either in social association or any other form of gang they may organize. Recent campaign against an indecent dressing by the college administration factors in to the 'theme' indecent dressing deters the smooth running of quality education in tertiary institutions. In his presentation, Dr. Bockarie submitted that indecent dressing in an academic institution like ours and any other one in the globe reconstruct the personality of the students and veer their attention on to other spheres of like that are not economical to their economic, social and physical well-being. He reiterated that a decent way of dressing depicts and add prestige to your personality which will meritably command one's respect in the area of academia. He added that in the past, college student were immediately identified by way of neatness in appearance and also the manner in which they were communicating in English which are all not represented by today's students in colleges and universities in our beloved country Sierra Leone, which is very frustrating, he concluded.

### *Aim and Objectives of the Study*

The general aim of this research work is to assess the manner in which students at the Eastern Polytechnic dress, so as to minimize their indecent ways of dressing.

### *Specific Objectives of the Research*

1. To identify the modes of indecent dressing among students on the Eastern Polytechnic Campus

2. To examine the various factors responsible for decent dressing on the Eastern Polytechnic Campus
3. To evaluate the effectiveness of dress control measures on the campus.

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### III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS FINDINGS

This chapter covers both written and figure collection of data and analysis. All data collection was focused mainly on how students dress indecently on campuses in Sierra Leone particularly the Eastern Polytechnic. The quantitative data collection was done through face-to-face interviews and that of direct observation for the qualitative research a questionnaire was prepared and submitted to the relevant target people. A Higher Educational institution has been chosen as a way of examining or assessing the rate at which most students dress indecently on campuses especially the Eastern Polytechnic. The Eastern Polytechnic has been chosen for this study simply because it is one of the high class higher institutions in Sierra Leone that actually handles a large number of students every academic year from all districts in the country and also other countries like Guinea and Liberia that Sierra Leone share boundaries with. This institution being one of the higher academic institutions of learning situated in the Eastern region of Sierra Leone is mainly situated along the Combema Road at the central of Kenema.

A research design could provide clues to what problems to expect during data collection, the likely cost of the study in terms of time, materials and money and how best to allocate resources to achieve optimum results. The research design of this study is a descriptive study on the effect of indecent dressing on campus. A sample population of (25) students were targeted with a purposeful of (25) students Five (5) students from each department. From the two sections, twenty five (25) were selected i.e. five (5) for Department of Education, Engineering, Business and Management Studies, Banking and finance and Accounting department. The method used in collecting and analyzing data for this research work is mainly the self administered questionnaire and that of individual and or private interviews. Both qualitative and quantitative data collection methods were applied in collecting both primary and secondary data for the qualitative data collection, questionnaires were distributed among the students that would cut across all the five departments at the Eastern Polytechnic being the target group. It was also administered to the Administration. It also covered the non students, young people in the township of Kenema and beyond. This was done to ascertain whether this practice is only predominant in

higher institutions or they are actually brought from home. Various methods were used in analyzing the data obtained from this study. However, I focused mainly on the use of tables for the interpretation. This study covers higher institutions in Sierra Leone particularly the Eastern Polytechnic found in Kenema in the Eastern region of Sierra Leone. This research therefore covers a vivid analysis of the rate at which students on the campuses of higher institutions in Sierra Leone dress indecently or half naked, particularly at the Eastern Polytechnic in city of Kenema.

#### IV. ANALYSIS OF DATA GATHERED

This chapter deals with the analysis of data gathered from both quantitative and qualitative investigations. Therefore, the quantitative data presented in this research work, specifically talks about the manner at which students of the Eastern Polytechnic dress with little or no regard for dress code that resembles their course of study and the society in which they live. The analysis is done through the use of tables which include the number of respondents and the percentage of respondents in each category.

TABLE 1: Shows the number and percentages of students per Department.

Department	No. of Students	Percentage of Students
Education	6	24
Engineering	4	16
Business/management	5	20
Banking and Finance	5	20
Accounting	5	20
Total	25	100

Survey Data

The above table shows the total number and percentage of students as distributed by department at the Eastern Polytechnic. The data depicts that the highest number of students targeted found at the Eastern Polytechnic is the department of Education at 24%. This is followed by the department of business and management studies, banking and finance and accounting all at 20% while the engineering department is at 16%. Therefore, as clearly shown, the data describes the fact that the Eastern Polytechnic mainly aims at producing teachers who will serve as role models and as such the department carries the highest number of respondents which is followed by the other departments.

TABLE 2: Shows the number and percentage of both male and female students per department.

Department	Male	Percentage	Female	percentage
Education	2	18.2%	4	28.6%
Engineering	1	9.1%	3	21.4%
Business/management	2	12.2%	3	21.4%
Banking and finance	5	45.5%	-	-
Accounting	1	9.1%	4	28.6%
Total	11	100%	14	100%

Survey Data

The above data shows the number and percentage of both Male and Female students targeted per department at the Eastern Polytechnic from the data. It is shown that the number of males in all the departments is 11 representing 100%. While

the total number of females targeted in all the departments is 14 representing 100% also.

Therefore, the variation between the male and female population of the various departments concluded that the male students are willing to learn than the females at the Eastern Polytechnic. This disparity induces intended dress code of students especially female which negates the expected dress code of the Eastern Polytechnic.

TABLE 3: Shows the age range of both male and female students per department.

Department	Male age 18-35	Female age 18-35	Male age 36 and above	Female age 36 and above
Education	3	3	-	-
Engineering	2	2	-	-
Business/management	1	4	-	-
Banking and finance	1	4	-	-
Accounting	2	3	-	-
Total	9	16	-	-

Survey Data:

The above data illustrates the fact that the age-range of students enrolled in tertiary institutions has a greater linkage on their dressing habit. From evaluation, it is viewed that at this level, students must dress in reflection of their course of study of which the Eastern Polytechnic is no exception.

TABLE 4: Shows the indecent dress of the male and female students per department.

Department	Male	Per %	Female	Per %
Education	2	20	4	26.6
Engineering	4	40	-	-
Business/management	1	10	4	26.7
Banking and finance	1	10	4	26.7
Accounting	2	20	3	20
Total	10	100	15	100

Survey Data:

The data presented above shows the percentage of indecent dress among the male and female students targeted at the Eastern Polytechnic. The data reveals that the department of Education has the highest percentage of indecent dress among females at 26.6%. Since most students enrolled in this department between the ages of 18-35 and mostly unmarried. They see their dress as ordinary fashion that keeps them in tune with modernization and globalization to attract male students or to tell those whose dress is more expensive in terms of worth. Also the Engineering department carries the highest number of indecent dressing among the male students on campus at 40%. Note however that, the reason for this dress habit is not clear, as such it ranges from family background, peer groups influence, society and fashion style.

TABLE 5: Shows the factors responsible for the indecent dressing among students on the Eastern Polytechnic campus.

Factors	Frequency	Percentage %
Family background	3	12
Peer group influence	7	28
The society	6	24
Fashion	9	36
Total	25	100

Survey Data:



The above data shows the factors responsible for indecent dressing among students on the Eastern Polytechnic campus. The data illustrate that 12% of the respondents stated that family background is a responsible factor for indecent dressing. They maintained that some families are not able to properly teach their children the ethic of societal approach and as such they end up going into the street dressed in whatever way they feel. Also, some rich families who are able to support their children have little or no time to monitor the way they dress.

Furthermore, 28% accounted for peer group influence as responsible factor for indecent dressing. This shows a greater percentage of students dress the way they do due to peer group influence. That is, they want to be like others whether accepted or not.

In addition, 24% indicated that the society is also another responsible factor why student dress indecently on campus.

Also, 36% account for fashion-style as a factor for indecent dressing. In fact it has the greatest percentage than all the other factors. This is because, most student want to satisfy new fashions so they dress any how to satisfy this desire.

TABLE 6: Shows the marital statuses of students interviewed.

Marital status	frequency	Percentage %
Single	23	92
Married	2	8
Divorce	-	-
Widow/widower	-	-
Total	25	100

Survey Data:

The above data shows that 92% of the students interviewed are single and only 8% are married.

#### V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter deals with summary, conclusion and recommendations. There are many things in society that have effect on the people life, but nobody seems to be paying attention to their hazardous effects simply because they are part and parcel of society. This investigation is to call on all stakeholders in society to be aware with such things and realized the need for appropriate action.

##### Summary

The fight against indecent dressing on campus of higher learning in Sierra Leone can only be completely won when every facets of the society makes it a responsibility to put a stop to it. Television, newspapers fashion and style magazines and soft sell magazines are contributing their own quota to indecent dressing and giving them title like; sexy, stumping and killing, there by elevating vice to the lever of virtue. No wonder advertisers are using the opportunity to make use of the female folk for sex appeal to advertise their products.

Hence, the media, parents and all relevant authorities should stand up to the challenge of making sure that all manners of indecency in females are eradicated. Men also dress indecently by searching their trousers, putting on earrings, plaiting of hair, long and bushy hairs and beards etc,

all have greater extent of the student in Sierra Leone, and Kenema in particular.

##### Conclusion

Most students in institutions of learning dress immodestly. This dress pattern has negative consequences that may still not be known to those who dress immodestly. The trend is fashion today mislead youths/students especially girls to dress almost semi-naked; this is causing quite a lot of sexual harassment, including rape and it endangers youth life in terms of risk of contracting venereal diseases, including HIV/AIDS. The choices students make in terms of taste and values are quite uniquely different from their parents or the rest of the older population, which is causing a lot of economic constraints on them. This pressure leads some students in to prostitution just to satisfy their demands for new products, which most of them are indecent dressing. The way students dress today does not appeal to the rest of society and does not command respect for their very image, and their family background.

These youths when fully given the right mind set and the right environment will reposition this nation. As we all know that education is the backbone of any nation, our educational system should not be allowed to decay. It's possible to have a better educational system. To this end, youths dress put our culture/traditional heritage at risk of diminishing.

##### Recommendations:

The effect of indecent dressing has become alarming; therefore society must circumspect in dealing with such negative effects.

- First, students need to be sensitized about the effect of indecent dressing on their life.
- If college and university students are vehemently engage dressing indecently and provocatively, a viable and very results-oriented option is a legislation that will introduce the use of uniforms in public higher institutions of learning in Sierra Leone.
- Parents should be good moral exemplars to their children. Regulate the films they watch at homes, and mass media must promote good moral values.
- Youths/students should be contented with what they have.
- Youths/students should involve in campaign against indecent dressing.
- Government should reinforce policies that governed the code of dressing especially for students in educational institutions as to minimize dropout rates and indecent dressing in the country.

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