

The Level of Juvenile Delinquency among Adolescents of Public and Private Universities in Uganda

Faith Nakalema¹, Prof. Bantu Edward², Dr. Wilber Karugahe³

¹PhD Candidate, Kampala International University.

Email: nakalemafaith2018@gmail.com, +256783216396

²Senior Lecturer, Department of Applied Psychology, Kampala International University.

³Lecturer, Department of Applied Psychology, Kampala International University.

Abstract: Families serve as one of the strongest socializing forces in a person's life. They help teach children to control unacceptable behavior, to delay gratification, and to respect the rights of others. Conversely, families can also teach children aggressive, antisocial, and violent behavior. In adults' lives, family responsibilities may provide an important stabilizing force. Given these possibilities, family life may directly contribute to the development of delinquent and criminal tendencies. The research on the influence of family type, juvenile delinquency and adult criminality is important to unearth interventions to adolescents at risk of becoming latent criminals when adults. The following HO 1. That children raised in supportive, affectionate, and accepting homes are less likely to become deviant. HO 2. Children rejected by parents are among the most likely to become delinquent. HO3 that the child's disposition plays a role in this causal chain. HO 4. A troublesome child or adolescent is more likely to be rejected by parents, which creates an escalating cycle that may lead to delinquency. Results show that, since then practitioners, policymakers, and researchers have attempted to learn more about the role families play in the delinquent or criminal behavior of their offspring. Experts have developed a multitude of theoretical models and analyses linking family structure and relations to subsequent delinquency and later criminality. Criminologists suggest that a child who grows up in a dysfunctional family may learn aggressive or antisocial behavior; may not be taught to control unacceptable behavior, delay gratification, or respect the rights of others; or may not be adequately supervised to preclude association with antisocial or delinquent peers. As a consequence, they say, the child becomes inadequately socialized and unable to constrain his or her behavior within acceptable boundaries.

Keywords: Juvenile Delinquency and Adolescents.

1.0 Introduction

The United Nations estimate that scores of millions of children and adolescents live on the streets (UNICEF, 2020) and that most of these people reside in populous cities in Africa, Latin America and India. To make ends meet, these kids often resort to criminal and other delinquent behavior. The prevalence of juvenile delinquency is not limited to poor or developing nations. In the US alone, an estimated 1.5million juveniles were arrested in 2008 alone and since then, the number of arrests of minors involved in criminal activities has only gone up.

1.1 Background of the study

In every society, there are accepted modes of behavior and conduct that everyone is expected to follow, a deviation from such expected behavioral patterns is what is generally referred to as deviancy (Abotchie, 2008; Ryan, et al., 2013). Deviancy and crime are considered the quality enjoyed by members of a particular community (Adams & Evans, 1996; Reid, et al., 2002; Pechorro, et al., 2014). Because most nations thrive for peace and tranquility, the issue of juvenile delinquency has become a front burner issue in every nation of the earth. Hess and Drowns (2010) argue that if the issue of juvenile delinquency is not quickly addressed the young offenders could graduate into fully blown criminals.

From the foregoing, certain commonalities emerge, first and foremost, juvenile delinquency or juvenile crime must be committed by someone below the legal age of adulthood in the country where the crime was committed. Secondly, delinquency involves a contravention of norms and also criminal offences. A contravention of the norm like running away from home, missing school and other acts of truancy might not necessarily break any criminal laws, but when engaged by a juvenile, amounts to delinquent behavior. While other forms of delinquency involve committing crimes that are punishable under the law, but committed by a juvenile, these crimes can include, rape, robbery, stealing and many more. However, for the purpose of this study, Juvenile delinquency refers to antisocial and unlawful behavior among adolescents as they negotiate the transition from childhood to adulthood in an increasingly complex and confusing world.

1.2 Statement of the problem

Despite the inherent value of living in an intact family, in Uganda, the rate of divorce and the number of single parent households is increasing at an alarming rate. According to assessments carried out by the Single Parents Association of Uganda (SPAU) over 50%

of families in Uganda are single parent households. The implication is that majority of children in Uganda are being brought up in broken families and if research is anything to go by, then they run a higher risk of becoming delinquent and engaging in adult criminality in time. When this information is juxtaposed with the fact that in 2019, 24,048 male juveniles and 377 female juveniles were charged to court for various criminal offenses, representing 27% of the total offenders charged to court for various crimes (Uganda Police, 2020). It is evident from these reports released by the Uganda Police, right from time memorial a lot has been done in line with family life, in regard to preventing, controlling and eradicating adult criminality, yet there is still high rate of crimes in the country. In addition, this, there is no conclusive proof that, all things being equal, children from broken homes will definitely turn out delinquent, one thing that is generally accepted is that children who are rejected by their parents, grow up in homes with considerable conflict, and are inadequately supervised are at greatest risk of becoming delinquents.

1.3 Review of relevant literature

For some time now, there has been concern about the increase in the problem of youth delinquency and in a lot of cases, the family is held responsible for deviant behaviors of their wards. As young adults navigate their way from childhood into adulthood, they generally explore the world around them and try to fit in a very confusing and complex new world. This often leads to a change in behavior that many might term, delinquent behavior. (Horney et al., 2012) explained that juvenile delinquency is often associated with young people who just want to annoy people and make life difficult for decent, peace-loving individuals. Perhaps to proper understand the concept of delinquency and its level around the world, it is pertinent that a definition of delinquency is first attempted.

Delinquency according to Bartollas (2003) can be described as an action carried out by a minor that goes against the established laws and standards as set out by the constitution guiding the society in which such a minor resides.

Getting relevant and up-to-date statistics on juvenile crime around the world is a daunting crime, because majority of countries do not keep proper records of the number of children in jail or prison and what their exact crimes were/are. According to the Human Rights watch (2016), the United States have the highest recorded numbers and percentage of children in jail or detention facilities in the developed world. The convention on the Rights of the Child stipulates that locking children up should only be a matter of last resort after all else fails. Similarly, it is common for children to be arrested for activities that should not even be considered criminal by any standard, for instance, kids are often locked up for the simple action of just being on the streets. According to Human Rights Watch, Cambodia and Uganda are some of the guiltiest countries that arrest children for frivolous reasons.

There is however no gainsaying the fact that youths are increasingly being found at the giving end of violent crimes. According to a 2013 United Nations Fact Sheet on Youth, violence perpetrated by youths can be caused by various factors that work together to create a situation of social insecurity. Some of these factors include, the easy availability of arms, drug abuse, overpopulation, weak educational systems, weak policing systems, unequal distribution of wealth, and abuse of alcohol. All these factors work together to create an atmosphere of increase in delinquency levels among children and youth population in different parts of the world. In 2008, over 6000 arrests were made for every 100,000-child aged between 10-17years in the US alone (Law enforcement and Juvenile Crime, 2008). In the year 2009, juvenile courts in the US heard over 1.5million cases involving juveniles committing crimes and other delinquent behaviors. It is quite possible that the reason why it appears that more children are involved in the criminal justice system today might just be that the courts and law enforcement have become more efficient at processing these cases, but the fact still remains that juvenile delinquency and criminal behavior is on an increase in today's society.

1.4 Methodology

This study employed a mixed methodological approach to cater for numerical data. Amin, (2005), states that mixed methods entail collection of both quantitative and qualitative data to explain, predict and control phenomena of interest, data analysis being done both statistically and thematically. Using the Krejcie and Morgan sample size calculator for population of 87,000 and above give one a sample size of 384. Therefore, the sample size of this study is 384. However, 384 questionnaires were used for the study, which was more than the minimum sample size and therefore appropriate. An additional 20 respondents (key informants) were sampled for this study using a purposive sampling technique. The Sample size of 20 for qualitative data was arrived at after saturation was achieved.

1.5 Findings

To achieve this objective, the researcher collected responses from 384 respondents that fall under the ages of 18 years are in the first year at the university. The questions were in Likert scale requiring the respondents to choose from strongly agree to strongly disagree. Data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistics which were presented in a table and explained.

Findings in this study show that 67% of all respondents in this study were under the range of 25-33 which is moderate on the likert scale and this is because universities never had clear records on delinquent behaviors among the students since these were freshers (year one semester one student) and this puts everyone on tension because they ranged between moderate and high indicating they are more likely to involve in adult criminality when they are adults. This was backed up by an narrative from the key respondents: -

In my opinion, bad behavior in form of indecent dressing, indecent haircuts and other antisocial, in the traditional sense, is at an all-time high. Just last week a student approached me for assistance while very drunk. I could smell the alcohol on him from as far as 12 feet away. This guy reeked of it. And this is not an isolated case, there is no time you come to my office and meet a large number of students that the stench of alcohol won't be prevalent. Alcoholism is a major problem among the youths...I can attribute this bad behavior to them wanting to copy what they see on TV not knowing that it is all showbiz and of course, the issue of peer pressure will always remain.

In similar vein, a university counselor that works directly with troubled adolescents explained that;

I directly worked with troubled teenagers for over 10 years and I can tell you that from the year 2010 I have noticed a significant increase in delinquent behavior among young adults and even children. Children just seem more likely likely to act out which a lot of adults frown against. I personally think that majority of what we call delinquent behavior stems from generational differences. What adults think are anti-social behavior are perfectly acceptable to this generation of teenagers. This leads to clashes which in turn manifest as delinquent behavior.

A religious scholar that was interviewed for this study had a slightly different perspective on the issue of the prevalence of delinquent behavior among juveniles in central Uganda, he explained:

For me, perhaps because I am a spiritual person, I just see this bad behavior as a symptom of the open disregard for religion and the open embrace of everything western. Our children watch TVs and Films, music videos and surf the internet all day. They see what their peers abroad do, how they talk to their parents and how free they are and they want to emulate them. This has led to a situation where all the bad behaviours abroad are imported and imbibed wholesale by our youths and they begin to act out...in my opinion, this has become an epidemic. There is an urgent need to address the issue of juvenile delinquency especially as it has to do with alcoholism, sexual harassment and even theft.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the issue of juvenile delinquency has become a front-burner issue in Uganda and is on a rapid rise. This has mainly been attributed to increased exposure of the youth population and their tendency to imitate what they see happening elsewhere with little or no regard for their societal context. Therefore, in response to RQ1, it can be conclusively stated that juvenile delinquency is predominant in modern day among adolescents of private and public universities in Uganda.

1.6 Conclusions and recommendations

From the findings its concluded that adolescents in private and public universities are on a high risk of committing crimes when they become adults and therefore, the researcher recommends that there is a need for criminal reforms that decriminalizes things like running away from home recreational drug use, petty criminal offences, and instead seeks a means of rehabilitating such offenders. Previous studies have shown that once a person is indicted for a criminal offense at a young age, there is a very high likelihood that such an individual will commit even worse crimes as an adult. It is therefore pertinent that incarceration of minors should be a last resort and emphasis should instead be placed on proper rehabilitation and psychological help.

Measures to bring down the high rate of juvenile incarceration and delinquent behavior among adolescent. These measures should include, guidance and counselling from primary to university level. This means, mechanisms should be put in place in academic institutions and even in communities that allows young adults and children to interact with a professional therapist so their behaviors and responses to stimuli can be better controlled.

References

- Abotchie, C. (2008). *Social Structure of Modern Ghana*. Accra; Hans Publication.
- Adams, M. S. & Evans, T. D. (1996). Teachers Disapproval, Delinquent Peers and Self-Reported Delinquency: A Longitudinal Test of Labeling Theory. *The Urban Review*, 28(3):199-211.
- Amin, M.E. (2005) *Social Science Research Conception, Methodology and Analysis*. Makerere University Press, Kampala.
- Bartollas, C. (2003). *Juvenile Delinquency.6th ed*. NY: Allyn & Bacon.

Hess, K. M. & Drowns, R. W. (2018). *Juvenile Justice.5th ed.* Wardsworth: Cengage Learning.

Horney, J., Tolan, P. & Weisburd, D. (2012). Contextual influences. In: Loeber, R.; Farrington, DP., editors. *From Juvenile Delinquency to Adult Crime: Criminal Careers, Justice Policy and Prevention.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Human Rights Watch (2016). Children behind bars. The global overuse of detention of children. Retrieved from <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2016/country-chapters/africa-americas-asia-europe/central-asia-middle-east/north>

Krejcie, R.V. & Morgan, D.W. (1970) Determining Sample Size for Research Activities. *Educational and Psychological Measurement, 30*, 607-610.

Law enforcement and Juvenile Crime (2008). *Juvenile Arrests 2008.* Law Enforcement and Juvenile Crime Commission

UNICEF (2020). Transformative Action to Accelerate Results for Children in Street Conditions in the Decade of Action (2020-2030): Technical Guidance. UNICEF