

Social Workers' Perception of Juvenile Delinquency Prevention In Nigeria: A Case Study of Lafia Town, Nasarawa State.

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Abstract

This study sought to investigate social workers perception of juvenile delinquency prevention in Nigeria. The major objective of the study is to understand the juvenile delinquency prevention and perception of social worker. While, specific objectives include to: Understanding juvenile delinquency mechanism that are available in Nigeria and to use the perception of social workers as a yardstick for measuring the effectiveness of these mechanism in reforming the offenders. The studies explore conceptual analysis and social control theory as a theoretical framework for crime prevention and control. The study used primary and secondary sources of data collection. The findings were that juvenile delinquency prevention was mostly situated within the family cycle. This was made evident in the perception of respondents that the family has a large impact on criminal behaviour, where caring, loving, diligent, responsible and righteous parents do not generally produce children who are prone to engage in generalized problematic behaviour. This was made evident in the perception of respondents that the family has a large impact on criminal behaviour. The study concluded and recommended that social disorganization in the society contribute significantly to deviance behaviour among young persons and therefore recommends that juvenile delinquency rights and responsibilities of children and parents should be made known to all concerned through the media and other accepted methods of communication; prevention strategies like the poverty eradication programme should be effectively implemented and encouraged. Family support policies are developed to strengthen the role of parents towards their children and reintegration in the society.

Keyword: Social Work, Juvenile Delinquency, Prevention and Control

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency is an offence or violation of children and young persons law or child right Act regulating the conduct of the young persons in the society. The Children and Young Persons Act (hereafter referred to as CYPA) defined 'a child as a person under the age of fourteen years'. Similarly, the law defines a young person as 'a person who has attained the age of fourteen years. An also, juvenile delinquency is a law breaking by young people which constitute social problem Daniel (2011). Suffice it to say juvenile delinquency broadly refers to any act in violation of criminal law, committed by a person defined under law as a juvenile, which if had been committed by an adult will be treated as crime or criminal code (Alemika, 2001).

It takes different meanings both to an individual and to the society. Thus, different countries have different approaches as regards prevention treatment, public attitude, legislative control and administrative practice. Stafford (2004) posits that the main law, the Nigeria's Children and Young Act (CYPA) adopted in 1958 amended 1960, stated that 'the child, by reason of his physical and mental immaturity, needs specific safeguards and care, including appropriate legal

protection, before as well as after birth'. This statement endorses the perception of children as a vulnerable group in the society deserving special protection. A perception that influences the philosophy of juvenile justice administration. Its purpose "to make provision for the welfare of the young and the treatment of young offenders and for the establishment of juvenile courts Gilbert (2001). It deals with children in conflict with the law, children in need of care and children considered to the young and under parental control (Alemika, 1978; Muncie, 1999).

Nigeria does not have a single nationally defined age of criminal responsibility but has adopted age demarcation under which responsibility may not be assigned depending the offence and circumstance. A child between the age of 7 and 12 will not be held responsible for his or her actions unless it can be proved that at the time of committing the offence the child had the capacity to know he or she ought to do so that it does not include so called status offences that are acts committed by juvenile which constitute a crime but are legal if the y are committed by adults (Jonson, 2004).

In Nigeria as in the case in most Common wealth countries, status offences (a delinquency or crime that

can only be committed by people occupying a particular status for example offence of treason, vagrancy, sexual immorality and violations of liquor laws) are punishable in court of law (Durrant, 2000). The law also provides for the establishment of a children's court that had jurisdiction to hear and determine all matters relating to young people below the age of 18 years. The law provides that the decisions of the juvenile court shall be for the best interest of the young persons (Henry and Lanier, 2006).

Crime prevention takes different forms aimed at reducing criminality. Hughes (1998) argues that all correctional ideologies can be legitimized by the rhetoric of prevention ranging from ideologies of incapacitation, deterrence and retribution of those of restitution, reparation and rehabilitation right through those of diversion, discrimination and finally abolition.

Conceptual Analysis

Social work is the professional activity of helping individuals, groups or communities enhance or restore their capacity for social functioning and create societal conditions favourable to this goal (Shaftoe, 2004).

Social work practice consists of the professional application of social work values, principles and techniques to one or more of the following ends, helping people obtain tangible service, counseling and psychotherapy with individuals, families and group, helping communities or groups provide or improve processes (Specht and Courtney, 1994; Daniel 2011).

Social worker assist individual and families with problems such as illness, poverty, drug addiction child and spouse abuse and mental health social workers form a vital link for patients between hospitalization and rehabilitation and their return to a normal and production member of the community (Gibert, 2001).

A major function of a social worker is interviewing individual client and families in order to assess the physical social and psychological needs of a patient. The knowledge of social worker in critical thinking skills within the context of professional social work practice it helps. To determine the value base on the profession and its ethical standards and principles and practice accordingly. The role of social workers perception of juvenile crime prevention is useful in theoretical frameworks supported by empirical evidence to understand individual development and behaviour across the life span and interact among individual between individuals and families, groups, organizations and communities (social worked Wright Edu, July, 2011).

Understanding Juvenile Delinquency Prevention

The concept of juvenile delinquency is used to

describe the deviant as the law breaking behaviour of some member of society. Similarly, delinquency connotes antisocial behaviour of children and young persons.

The juvenile delinquency prevention programme seeks to provide a solution to the plight of inner-city children by exposing these children to higher education, prisons and various enrichment activities such as museum and hiking, we believe they will become empowered to see that they do have a choice and it is there to make.

There is significant potential among the under privileged population to rise above stress life and reorganized that they deserve self respect and self confidence as well as to use their abilities to set goals and priorities for themselves (Lanier, 2006). According to Britt and Gottfreedson (2003) the most effective ways to prevent juvenile delinquency has indisputably to assist children and their families early on numerous state programs attempt early intervention and federal funding for community initiation has allowed independent group to tackle the problem in new ways. Other preventive measures include: parent child interaction training program, bullying prevention programme, prevention with the juvenile justice system, the Nebraska correctional youth feedings ending repeat offense, functional family therapy in effective prevent strategies, juvenile boot camper scare straight. This among other factors will help in juvenile delinquency prevention in the society (Henry and Lanier, 2006).

Social Control Theory of Juvenile Delinquency

The social control refers to structures or strategies and mechanism created by society for the regulation of human behaviour and for ensuring compliance to society's rules or laws (Igbo, 2008). In line with this conception, control theorist concern themselves with the issues of why people obey the laws of society, rather than people do not obey.

The basic point of departure of all control theories of behaviour is the assumption that there exist within any social system sufficient amount of temptation or negative forces which can drive people into non-compliant behaviour. Gottfredson (2003) observed that social control paradigm have adopted the general perspective of social control theory, but they have employed it in a converse form. Control theory is a theory of pro-social behaviour that has been used by criminologist to explain crime and delinquency.

The focus of control theories of crime is to discover and explain the controlling forces in behaviour that is those forces or factors which restrain the individual from breaking the law. The common argument or answer

which control theorists advance is that youths and adults alike conform to the law in response to certain controlling forces in their lives (Adler, 1998).

Scholars of social control regard as forms or mechanism of adherent to laws, norms, mores, customs, etiquette, ethnics etc. these social forces exert controlling influence over the individuals behaviour either directly, in directly or through internal controls. (Siegel, 2008). Indirect control is when a person refrains from misconduct because of the shame, Pain or disappointment a misdeed will cause significant other with whom he is related (Nye, 1958).

Contemporary studies of social control have been pursued at two different level of study one, the macro sociological perspective focuses on the formal systems of social control and the control of group. The second perspective anchored on the micro-sociological study of social control focuses on formal systems and personal control (Igbo, 2008; Hirschi, 2006).

Statement of The Problem

Juvenile delinquency prevention in Nigeria, particularly Lafia Nasarawa state is bedeviling with numerous problems among which are high rate of youth juvenile delinquency and recidivism among young offender in Nigeria society. Furthermore, there is also absence of prevention programs that will address the root cause of behavioural problems among young people. In Nigeria society, as elsewhere in the Africa country, the family plays a dominant role in nurturing a young person to be responsible and respectable individual in the community. However, the fabric holding the society together wears down due to social problems such as inequalities, poverty, unemployment, crime, and drug abuse among the young person.

The paper examines the juvenile delinquency programme with particular attention to reduce youth criminality in Nigeria society. Juvenile prevention which is geared on changing social environment and the motivation of offenders as opposed to situational juvenile delinquency prevention which involves reducing opportunities for crime.

Methodology

Data for this study was generated both from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources of data collection included the use of research instruments such as questionnaire in order to obtain first-hand information as well as to provide a standard of responses for the respondent for analysis. Data generated for the study were analyzed quantitatively and qualitatively. The secondary sources include the

review of relevant literature, magazine, newspaper, journey, technical report etc.

Discussion Of Finding

The study revealed that there is juvenile delinquency in Nigeria in general and Lafia to be specific. Social workers have different perception on the prevention of juvenile delinquency.

The finding of this study indicates that many measures have been put in place to prevent juvenile delinquency in Nigeria among others are socialization of youth on the right attitude to life, war. The study further indicates that punitive methods of sentencing do not help in juvenile delinquency prevention because in Nigeria young offenders are normally locked up in a place without thinking on any reformation of their lives. Social workers perceived many things in juvenile delinquency prevention in Nigeria, these are inadequate and ineffective in Nigeria, particularly in Lafia, Nasarawa state.

This finding also indicates that the criminal justice system strategies are ineffective. The police method of arrest to start with is bad and their treatment is inhuman, the court arrangement in the handling of juvenile and adult are treated in the same court. The prisons system in Nigeria accommodate both juvenile delinquency and adult in the same place whereby making juvenile to grow negatively in the hand of adult criminals.

Conclusion

The studies have shown in Nigeria particularly Lafia Nasarawa state that corporal punishment cannot succeed where good parenting and early intervention has failed in preventing youth criminality. It could as a matter of fact be counter productive, servicing to promote aggression and violence. For the justice system to win approval from the general population, it must not only work effectively but also be seen to work whenever any doubts are cast over impartiality, the image of the system becomes dented and it will require a considerable amount of time and energy to repair the demand.

Study examined the causes of the high number of youths with a background in young offenders institutions in Nigeria. Ultimately, young offenders remain the best possible way of eventually riding society of the problem of crime. The realization that adult criminal find themselves entangled into a complex web of criminal when it is too late to reform should be geared to saving. Therefore, juvenile delinquency is an offence committed below eighteen years. Juveniles are subjected to wider legal

restrictions and differential treatment within the criminal justice system. Juvenile delinquency has elicited many images of the child. Delinquency has been portrayed and defined as a condition of drift, maladjustment, pathology, disturbance, moral deprivation and unruly behaviour.

Recommendation

The study recommended that the rights and responsibilities of children and parents should be made known to all concerned through the media and other accepted methods of communication.

Preventive strategies like the poverty eradication programme should be effectively implemented and encouraged by providing and mobilizing adequate funds. Family support policies should be developed and adopted to strengthen responsibilities of parents towards their children.

Access to complaint mechanism and civil remedies should be provided for juveniles who are physically, sexually or psychologically abused and those who are at such risks.

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