

Factors Responsible for Juvenile Delinquency in Post War Sierra Leone

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Abstract—This research was conducted to investigate the factors responsible for juvenile delinquency among pupils in schools in Kono District after the long lasting civil war. It is agreed that juvenile delinquency is on the increase in Sierra Leone after the war. It is therefore very important for the government to be aware of the causes and effects of juvenile delinquency among pupils in order to minimize it or otherwise put a stop to it.

The research work was undertaken in the Kono District, using two secondary schools namely Koidu secondary school in Koidu town and the Islamic secondary school, Koidu. A sample population of eighty [80] pupils, that is [40] from each school.

In carrying out this research, questionnaires, interviews and observations were used to collect data. The researcher also made use of considerable existing data in journals, newsletters and libraries.

It was discovered that most of the pupils got involved into delinquent acts because of the traumatic experiences such as drug addiction, looting, aggression and host of other problems which they were exposed to during the war. This has had negative impacts on them and the society as well. It is therefore necessary that intensified trauma counseling services be provided for these pupils in their various schools in order to minimize juvenile delinquency in the schools.

I. INTRODUCTION

Some philosophers and educators like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle believed that there are different factors such as peer group pressure and poor home adjustments sometimes influence children's behavior and lead them into delinquent activities. These factors and many more are responsible for juvenile delinquency in Sierra Leone until now.

Juvenile delinquency is an anti-social concern to all Sierra Leoneans irrespective of the race, culture, religion or ethnic background. The present society can be referred to as a degenerating society in its norms and values when we consider the high rate of juvenile delinquency in schools. It is true that juvenile delinquency occurs in other countries but, the consequences of the ten years civil war in Sierra Leone have exposed quite a very huge number of juveniles in secondary schools to crime related activities.

Juvenile delinquency is a legal term that indicates violation of the law by pupils less than eighteen years of age and who exhibit behavior punishable by law. When a pupil below adult age, commits an act that could result to arrest by police, he/she is said to have committed a delinquent act.

Many of our children reached the school going age during the period of anarchy in the country. As there were not many schools or other formal institutions during the war to inculcate into our pupils moral values of decent society, many of these pupils remained untrained, unrefined, unmannered and

delinquent. Juveniles may commit status offences like truancy, loitering, absconding or index crimes like armed robbery, rape, murder which are criminal offences and are therefore considered morally wrong and punishable by law.

It is also very important to note that juveniles are mostly adolescents whom we also refer to as teenagers. It is a period of stress and storm as it takes place between childhood and adulthood in an individual's life. At this stage, they do things with no hypothesis and they do not mind regretting their actions but only if they satisfy their needs and desires. They may break the law because of their basic needs or destroy people's property as a way of revenge for what they regard as injustice.

Juveniles in every society tend to portray similar characteristics most of which have negative effects/impacts. Once they enter secondary schools, they become very anxious to assume adulthood, yet they are uncertain of the correct channel to carry out the roles. They are therefore always in conflict with the adult world because their attitudes are not in conformity with society's norms and demands.

It is worth noting that juvenile delinquency was low in Sierra Leone but, with the rapid advancement in technology in the world, coupled with the ten years civil war, the country is now characterized by high crime rate and other anti-social problems. As a result of the circumstances mentioned above, there are apparently very serious social, cultural, moral and criminal problems amongst pupils in the renewed national school system.

At the moment, the government, school authorities and parents are faced with the problem of juvenile delinquency in schools. For the purpose of this investigation, the researcher is going to base his study on all cases of juveniles who have broken the law whether arrested or not. This will be based on manifestations of delinquent acts to the extent that they are called difficult boys or girls. Juveniles are not treated as adult criminals and sent to the court of law or prison, but to a juvenile court which deals with young law breakers. When children become habitual delinquents, they are sent to Remand homes.

This work is an investigation into the extent, causes and effects of juvenile delinquency among secondary schools in Kono District taking Koidu Secondary School and Islamic Secondary School Koidu as a case study.

Objectives

1. To identify the delinquent acts that are common in schools

2. To identify the causes of juvenile delinquencies in schools after the war
3. To identify the extent of juvenile delinquency in schools
4. To identify the effects of juvenile delinquency on the individual and the society.

II. METHODOLOGY

The research took the form of a survey. The survey method proved very appropriate as it gave room for the work to be done with large groups of school children, especially as they were the main focus of the study. School authorities, pupils and parents were the population sample.

The study on juvenile delinquency was both qualitative and quantitative. It was qualitative because it involve the description of the causes and effects of juvenile delinquency in selected secondary schools in Kono and quantitative in that tables with figures were used to determine the incidence of juvenile delinquency in the schools.

The sample for this research was taken from two schools in Kono. The schools included were Koidu Secondary School and Islamic Secondary School. Koidu and both are Co-educational schools. The schools were choosing using the simple random sampling method. The sample population for this research was eighty (80) students; that is forty (40) from each of the selected schools, twenty (20) Teachers’ that is ten (10) from each school, the two principals from each of the schools, the two counsellors and ten (10) parents, that is five (5) from each of the two schools.

In this research, a single instrument did not prove worthwhile; therefore a combination of research instruments was made use of. These include questionnaires, structured interviews and unstructured interviews. Desk research or use of reference materials and observation methods also proved useful.

Questionnaires were prepared for students of the selected schools targeted. The principals, teachers, and counsellors were also given questionnaires to respond. The questionnaires were used because the subjects were literate enough to answer the questions.

Some people do not like filling questionnaires. They see it as boring especially if they consider it long and time wasting. Therefore, pre-coded questions were prepared especially for the school children. These were written in straight forward language with some of the questions requiring a “Yes” or “No” answer.

The usefulness of the interview method cannot be over emphasized, because important information, which may not be given in the questionnaires, can be answered orally.

Questions for the interview with the parents of students were carefully written in a way that the crucial issues were asked in different ways to solicit the appropriate responses.

This was not necessarily formally presented or written on paper; but supplementary question which needed responses were casually asked.

This researcher made considerable use of existing data. Details on juvenile delinquency in schools were researched in Libraries. Journals, newsletters and radio programmes were also useful.

The questions were first piloted or pre-tested. A random sampling of the population was done where in teachers and students were worked with. Here the questions that proved ambiguous were adjusted. The final draft of the questionnaires were delivered in person to target groups so as to ensure proper handling and return, especially the student’s questionnaires. The interviews with the parents were done in person in their homes. Interview guides were prepared for the parents. A face-face interview with the parents of the selected schools was done by appointment. Responses were recorded and data analyzed.

Data collected during the research were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. A detailed description of findings was done with the use of specific percentages, tables and figures.

III. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

TABLE 1. Common delinquent acts in schools

Delinquent Acts	Number of Responses	Percentages
Disobedience to authority	6	8%
Bullying	8	10%
Stealing	10	13%
Truancy	13	16%
Drinking of Alcohol	4	5%
Smoking	5	6%
Absconding	5	6%
Damage to school	5	6%
Aggressiveness	5	6%
Cheating	11	14%
Drug Addiction	8	10%
TOTAL	80	100%

The table above shows the common juvenile acts in schools and the numbers against them shows the rate at which these acts are committed in schools. From the table, it can be observed that truancy which has a crime rate of 16% is the most common delinquent act followed by cheating and stealing with 14% and 13% respectively and 10% each for bullying and drug addiction.

The lowest common delinquent acts committed in schools include disobedience to authority which is committed at a rate of 8% followed by damage to school property, smoking, aggressiveness and absconding with 6% for each and 5% for acts associated with drinking of alcohol.

The committing of these delinquent acts by pupils in schools will not be unconnected with problems which the children might have experienced as a result of peer group influence, lack of parental love and care, close location of schools to ghettos and video center and the war.

The figures showing the rate at which these acts are committed show that most of the pupils under investigation exhibit delinquent behavior in one or more of the offences listed in table one. As a result of the prevalence of the acts mentioned above, the researcher became interested to further investigate and outline the causes of delinquent acts mentioned in table one.

TABLE 2. Shows Causes of Juvenile Delinquency in Schools

Causes	Number of Respondents	Percentages
Petting of children	7	8.75%
Lack of parental love and care	6	7.5%
Peer group influence	13	16.25%
The war	20	25%
Poor and uninteresting curricular activities	2	2.5%
Inadequate guidance and counseling	4	5%
Lack of trained teacher	3	3.75%
Lack of concern for leisure time	10	12.5%
Family size	2	2.5%
Low self esteem	3	3.75%
Close location of schools to ghettos, clubs or video center	10	12.5%
TOTAL	80	100%

Table 2 shows the causes of juvenile delinquency in schools and the numbers against them shows the rate at which they impact/affect the students.

The above table shows that 25% of the students believe that the main causes of juvenile delinquency in schools is because of the war while 16.25% of the students attribute it to peer group influence.

Another 12.5% of the students attribute the causes of juvenile delinquency to lack of concern for leisure time and close location of schools to ghettos, night clubs or video center while 8.75% and 7.5% attribute it to petting of children and lack of parental love and care respectively. The remaining 17.5% of the students attribute the causes of juvenile delinquency to inadequate guidance and counseling, lack of trained teachers, uninteresting curricular and family size with 5%, 3.75%, 3.75% and 2.5% and 2.5% respectively.

One can therefore conclude that the war which is responsible for the highest causes of juvenile delinquency in schools cannot be unconnected with the bad experiencing like drinking alcohol, drug addiction, looting, aggressiveness, vandalism and a host of many others to which the children were exposed during the war.

After a careful investigation into the prevalence of juvenile delinquency, the researcher was able to outline the following causes of juvenile delinquency among the selected secondary schools under investigation. These are:

Petting of Children

There is a saying that “train up a child the way you want him to be”. From my investigations, this saying is not normally observed or put into practice by most parents especially in the case of the first and last born children of the parents. They tend to show too much love to such children to an extent that they have little or no time to monitor or even control or counsel them. Such children are normally left to do things as they like leading them into acts of juvenile delinquency. They do not even punish them for such act which is contrary to the saying “spear the rod and spoil the child”.

Lack of Parental Love and Care

Children/youths especially during adolescence, feel a strong need for belonging. Youths who belong to families expect some understanding from parents. During this period of

their lives, they need the spiritual, moral and financial support of their parents. It is the duty of the family to provide the child with his basic needs of food, clothing, shelter, Medicare and love and care. If the child is deprived of those basic necessities, he/she will be forced to go out in order to satisfy these needs. In the event, they may become wayward and defiant just to satisfy their desires thereby involving into juvenile acts.

Peer Group Influence

Peer group formation normally results into juvenile delinquency. A peer group is a group of equals with different socio-economic, cultural and political backgrounds. They meet together in order to form a group. If such groups are not well monitored, children can go astray. The group has its norms and values which each member should abide by and in most cases; children listen to their peers more than their parents.

Close Location of Schools to Social Institutions like Ghettos, Night Clubs or Video Centers

Most schools today is surrounded by ghettos, video centers or night clubs. Such schools are not properly fenced in order to restrict the movement of pupils. Students are normally influenced by these institutions letting them to boycott classes for such social activities. They take to drunkenness and smoking. Such children are always the most troublesome in the school, found flouting authorities, bullying and destroying school properties and playing truancy.

The Rebel War

The eruption of the rebel war in this country led many youths into taking drugs that are harmful and had made them to have no regard for authority and parents, but to do things contrary to the norms and values of the society. The conscription and abduction of juveniles during the war where they were introduced to crimes like theft, alcoholism, drug abuse, arson, rape and murder also increased the incidence of juvenile delinquency.

Poor and Uninteresting Curricular

There is a saying “all work and no play make jack a dull boy”. In schools where the focus of the administration is only on the cognitive developments of the students in order to bring good results and neglecting the affective and psycho-motor developments, the curricular for such schools will become uninteresting and boring. If the students are deprived from participating in games and sports, which relaxes their brain, they may resort to truancy in order to find avenues out of the campus where they play games.

Inadequate Guidance and Counseling

The lack of support from some school authorities and inadequate provisions of facilities for counseling coupled with the heavy work load in schools is also another cause of juvenile delinquency. Counselors are expected to teach the same number of periods as other teachers as such little help is rendered to the large number of students who still experience

stress or trauma in their school or at home. This serves as one of the reasons responsible for delinquent behavior in schools.

Lack of Trained Teachers

A teacher who is not trained and therefore cannot vary his methods of teaching to present his subject matter to the students, his class will become boring and uninteresting. The result is that during the period of such a teacher, the children may sneak out of the class to other areas of attraction where they may get involved into delinquent acts.

Lack of Concern for Leisure Time

Most times, the children roam about the streets or village during their leisure time and in the process, they get involved into bad behaviors. However, if the leisure time of the individual is well taken care of then he will not get involved into bad behavior.

Low Self-Esteem

Juveniles with feelings of inadequacies, inferiority and having poor self-image and low self-esteem frequently engage in delinquent behavior in an attempt to bolster their self-esteem.

Family Size

The family when planned will most times bring up a good child. But when the family is not well unified and ordered the child may exhibit deviant behavior resulting into juvenile delinquency. Such children are normally on their own and not under parental guidance. Such cases happen as a result of either single parenting, broken homes, poor parental behavior or authoritarian parenting.

unaware of the delinquents acts committed by their children or wards. According to them, the reason for this ugly situation is that they are most of the time out fending for their living and much time is not spent with the children to discuss their problems. As a result of this, most of the children are denied love and affection which leads to emotional instability in the children. Some of these children resort to delinquent behavior because of neglect from parents and guardians’ resulting in low self-esteem in the children.

From the analysis of the teacher counselors in the schools, the investigations show that conflict situations produce harmful effects on the behavior and emotion of the children. They agree that the frequency of delinquent acts is on the increase in the schools. From the studies conducted in the schools under review, the increase stands at 45% for Koidu Secondary School and 55% for Islamic Secondary School Koidu.

The lack of support from school authorities, and the inadequate provision of facilities for counseling coupled with the heavy work load in schools, as teacher counselors are expected to teach the same numbers of periods as other members of the teaching staff, the counselors are of the opinion that much is not being done in the schools by way of trauma counseling because of the numerous problems they face in school.

The counselors are of the opinion that because they render little help to the large number of children experiencing stress and post traumatic disorders in schools, this serves as one of the reasons responsible for the increase in delinquent behavior in schools.

An Outline on the Effects of Juvenile Delinquency on the Individual and the society

The effects of juvenile delinquency on the individual and the society are negative when looked at from all perspectives as delinquents are always a menace to the society. Below is an outline of some of the effects of juvenile delinquency on the individual.

One of the effects of juvenile delinquency on the individual is that delinquents are exposed to health hazards. Children who get involve into delinquent acts like smoking, drug abuse and alcoholism are susceptible to disease like tuberculosis or may go mad because of the use of drugs such as marijuana, cocaine or morphine which may later result to death.

Juvenile delinquency also has an effect on the physical appearance of the individual. Juvenile delinquents especially the drug users who often look thin and sometimes appear shabby, haggard, angry looking and lack grooming. That is, they do not comb their hair or have little or no time to have their birth.

Another effect of juvenile delinquency on the individual is stigmatization. Once the child has been spotted as a delinquent especially as a drug addict, a thief or truant, they are often despised by friends, neighbours and sometimes by parents which makes them to be socially isolated.

Sometimes, juvenile delinquency among school children leads to poor academic performance. Their thoughts are

TABLE 3. The extent of juvenile delinquency in schools after the war.

Extent of Acts	Responses	Percentages
Strongly agreed	8	40%
Agreed	6	30%
Disagreed	2	10%
Not sure	4	20%
TOTAL	20	100%

Comparatively, table 3 shows that 40% of the teachers strongly agreed and 30% of them agreed that there is an increase in juvenile delinquency in schools after the war than it was before the war. The percentage of those that disagreed and those that responded not sure which is 10% and 20% respectively are new teachers with less years of teaching experience in the schools.

In terms of principal’s opinion, the investigation showed that they have received more complaints on delinquent acts of pupils after the war than it was in the schools before the war. They believe that the frequency of such behavior is on the increase in the various schools. The increase is between 60% to 70% after the war as compared to 30% to 50% before the war. The increase in deviant behavior is not unconnected with the unpleasant experiences during the war.

Parents and guardians’ also made astonishing revelations in connection with the extent of juvenile delinquency in schools after the war. From interviews with parents and guidance, investigations show that about 50% of them are

always disorganized and are inattentive in class because their minds are always focusing on activities outside the class room than listening to the teacher when teaching. In the end, they become dropout because they cannot measure up to the standard of the school.

Moreover, juvenile delinquency in schools makes a child to be rebellious. Some juvenile delinquents fight their companions, members of staff, become hooligans during school competitions. They use foul and abusive languages, are disrespectful to authority, provoke and gossip members of staff and even classmates.

Also, when children become habitual delinquents they engage in status offences like lying, stealing from the bags of their friends and parents, cheating during examinations, this may lead them into committing index crimes like robbery, vandalism, murder or rape which may land them into prison.

Furthermore, because delinquents are despised and socially isolated by their community, the juvenile develops low self-esteem and poor self-image which makes him consider himself as a failure in life.

Effects on the Society

Just as juvenile delinquency has a negative effect on the individual, so also it has negative impacts on the society.

One of the negative impacts of juvenile delinquency on the society is that the society is exposed to a lot of health hazards for example; juveniles who are engaged in prostitution are vulnerable to sexually transmitted diseases like HIV/AIDS, gonorrhea or syphilis. These diseases are contagious and fatal. Once a prostitute has been infected, then the society 70% of which is made up the working class and are also sexually active in the society are at risk of being infected.

Another impact of juvenile delinquency on the society is that when children become habitual delinquents of status offences like truancy, stealing or lying, this may lead them into becoming notorious criminals and may get involved into armed robbery, house breaking, murder, rape or vandalism in the society. This might keep members of the society in constant fear for their lives and property.

Juvenile delinquency also leads to lawlessness in society. Juvenile delinquents become rebellious to authority. They often do not obey law and order and are disrespectful to authority. They are vulgar and rude and use abusive languages on elders in the society.

Moreover, juvenile delinquents who become dropouts are vibrant during political crisis such as strike and demonstrations. They are often used as thugs by politicians during elections and can be easily recruited into becoming rebels during any armed rebellion against the legitimate government.

Furthermore, because of their low self-esteem, they hardly make any meaningful contribution to the development of the society or the country in which they find themselves.

IV. SUMMARY

The findings of this study reveal that juvenile delinquent acts are found in the two schools visited. These acts include

disobedience to authority, truancy, cheating, stealing, and many more which are exhibited by the pupils.

The response of all the targeted groups believe that even though delinquent behavior had been in schools before, the rate and severity is high now as compared to the past. This is as a result of the experiences the children went through during the war, which is now affecting their behavior in school.

Another contributing factor to the delinquent behavior of children is due to their parents lack of attention to perform their social responsibilities to their children. Lack of love and care, provision of other basic needs and poor parental supervision affect the self-esteem of the child which may lead to poor adjustments in school. Children with feelings of inadequacies, inferiority and having low self-esteem and poor self-image frequently engage in delinquent acts to bolster their self-esteem.

The counselors on their part revealed that very little trauma healing therapy is been done in schools. This has resulted to post traumatic stress disorders (PSTD)

According to the school authorities, delinquent behavior is on the increase in their schools because of the bitter experiences the children went through during the decade civil war. They thought that punishment was the solution to delinquent behavior but it proved futile. Principals did not put premium on counseling as the facilities are not provided. The support of corporal punishment over counseling led to further delinquent behavior as the children feel that they are punished for the bitter experiences they went through during the war.

The research in the nutshell made these findings about juvenile delinquency in school:

- ❖ That the pupils studied experienced very ugly situations during the decade civil war in the country.
- ❖ Juvenile delinquency is on the increase especially after the war and it is common in all the schools.
- ❖ That because the principals did not put premium on guidance and counseling, very little trauma counseling was carried out in the schools to assist the children.
- ❖ Parents and guidance have neglected their social responsibilities to their children by failing to provide them with love and care and their basic needs of food, clothing and shelter and Medicare.
- ❖ Counselors should make use of their skills to encourage parents to work in collaboration with them to make referrals instead of hiding their children's delinquent behavior.
- ❖ Delinquent acts are common in all the schools and are on the increase after the war.
- ❖ Juvenile delinquency occurs as a result of petting of children, peer group influence, lack of parental love and care, poor and uninteresting curricular and many more.
- ❖ The pupils understudied had very bitter experience during the war.
- ❖ Juvenile delinquency has negative impact on both the individual and the society.
- ❖ Little value was placed on guidance and counseling in schools to help children cope with their traumatic experiences.

- ❖ Parents continue to give little attention to the needs of their children.

V. CONCLUSION

From the summary of findings in chapter four, it can be concluded that the rate of juvenile delinquency is gradually increasing and has untold consequences.

However, it is interesting to note that the families of most of the children being studied suffered from inhuman treatment. This distorted the ideas of the children and their families' ability to assist them to grow smoothly and normally.

During the war, children suffered from traumatic experiences which led them to interact negatively with their peers and adults around. This has created problems and adjustment for them in the schools.

Also, from observations, some delinquent acts are as a result of normal adolescent stresses that have increased because of the ugly or traumatic experiences of the war that destroyed the pupils coping skills which led the children to have low self-esteem about themselves. Because these pupils are faced with the task of making decisions about their future, there is the need for them to be detraumatized in order for them to come to terms with their war experiences. Guidance and counseling is therefore needed so that the children may benefit from their educational experiences and may develop fully all their powers, capabilities and self-esteem.

Recommendations

There is no problem without a solution. Based on this and the results of the findings, the researcher is therefore making the following recommendations or suggestions as a way of minimizing the incidence/extent of juvenile delinquency in our school in Kono District in particular and in Sierra Leone as a whole.

- ❖ Trained and qualified counselors should be attached to all institutions of learning.
- ❖ Parents should show love and affection for their children by providing their basic needs and discussing their problems with them.
- ❖ Laws should be enforced by government to prevent children from engaging in delinquent behavior such as drinking of alcohol, smoking or gambling.
- ❖ Government should censor the types of films played and the postal displayed should be to the norms, values and culture of our society.

- ❖ The curriculum should be interesting and modified from time to time in order to meet the trend of the society.
- ❖ Schools should provide adequate recreational facilities in order to prevent students from going out of the school compound in search of these facilities.
- ❖ Schools should not be located close to social institutions such as ghettos, video/film halls and night clubs.
- ❖ Teachers and parents should neither send pupils to buy cigarettes or smoke in front of them.
- ❖ Parents/guidance should encourage pupils to read books or play educative games during their leisure time.
- ❖ Teachers should be discouraged from using obscene languages in the presence of pupils.
- ❖ Approved schools should be built in all district headquarters in the country where delinquent children are trained in capacity building.

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