



ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF POVERTY ON CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR AMONG YOUTHS IN BENUE STATE: A CASE STUDY OF KWANDE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREA

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Abstract: *This study explores the impact of poverty on criminal behavior among youths in Benue State, focusing on Kwande Local Government Area. It aims to identify prevalent criminal behaviors among local youths, factors contributing to their involvement in crime, and their perceptions of peer influence on criminal activities. Utilizing a survey design, the study administered questionnaires to 255 respondents and analyzed the data using descriptive statistical techniques. The findings reveal that economic empowerment significantly aids in crime reduction in Kwande. Additionally, acquiring relevant skills—such as fashion design, GSM repairs, mechanical and electrical work, and computer skills—helps keep youths engaged and away from criminal activities. The study recommends that the government create job opportunities and foster a supportive environment for businesses, enhance security for lives and properties, and raise awareness among parents about their role in preventing their children from engaging in crime. This includes monitoring their children’s social interactions and activities. Keywords: poverty, criminal behavior, youth, Kwande Local Government Area, economic empowerment, skills development, peer influence, crime prevention, Benue State.*

Keywords: *Criminal Behavior, Youths, predispose, perception.*

1.0

INTRODUCTION

Explanations for crime have taken various dimensions according to different theorists and others emphasize factors such as inequality, environmental influence, poor socialization process (Henslin, 2006). In this regards, criminal acts may be induced by many unforeseen factors and circumstances. Crime, according to Taylor (2006) could be seen as a fault of the social system whose institutions do not work equally for all its members. Sociologists look at the social environment in which individuals find themselves. Could it be that the problem lay not with the

individual but in the social condition under which the individual live? The concern here is why people should exhibit behavior that is in violation of established norms, violations that may ultimately result in their being labeled as criminal behavior in terms of social processes. Mostly, persons known to commit street crimes as reported in the crime index are poor, uneducated, often unemployed and residents of low income neighborhoods (Anasi, 2010). Would a socially and economically sound person turn out to be criminal? In this research work, there is need to understand the socio-economic background of most juvenile and criminals in order to draw correlations or otherwise between low socio-economic status (poverty) and criminal behavior. The youth of any society are one of the most important aspects of the society who, if vibrant, can help transform the society into a better one, but where the youth are involved in criminal behavior or deviant attitudes, they could undermine society.

The youth serve partly as a good measure of the extent to which a country can reproduce as well as sustain itself. The National Youth Policy and Strategic Plan of Action (2001) recognized that youth have for long been making important contributions to the development of their individual societies in the areas of agriculture defense, and transmission of cultural values and so on. This is in addition to the role they played during the colonial period and the struggle for self-rule in Nigeria. Youth are seen as the building blocks of society and also as the image of society. The United Nations Organization defines 'youth', as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by Member States. The Nigerian 1999 constitution also defines youth as individuals within the age range of 18 to 25 years. Abdullahi (2003) defined youth as any person in the period between early childhood and old age. This segment of the population is generally said to be active, restive, adventurous, mobile, and open to new ideas and innovations. In short, it is generally assumed that youth are more favorably disposed to change than the older generation who often resist change and innovation on account of their vast experiences as well as their age-old customs and traditions (Okolacha, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

The influence of youth in criminal activities has being a problem for long; this is because there are so many factors that impel them into criminal behavior. However, despite efforts at channeling their energies towards productive and norm-conforming activities, they have fallen into criminal behavior. Though not all, cases of crime have become noticeable in which youth play part. This could be as a result of the factors that affect them. Hence, it is important to examine the factors that affect youth that lead to criminal behavior. Youth belong to different segments of society and those that engage in criminal behavior need to be studied. Youth engagement in criminal behavior is common in cities across Nigeria. Using Kwande Local Government of Benue State as a case study to asses possible reason as to why youth indulge in crimes which include drugs and substance abuse, breaking and stealing, rape, prostitution, armed robbery and drug trafficking. These crimes are considered to be capital offence that can hinder the growth, development and productivity in the society.

Objectives of the Study

The general objective of the study is to assess the impact of poverty on criminal behavior among youths in Benue State: A case study of Kwande Local Government Area. The specific objectives are:

- i. To identify criminal behaviors peculiar to youth in Kwande Local Government Area.
- ii. To identify factors that predispose youth in Kwande Local Government Area to be involved in crime.
- iii. To assess youth perception on the negative impact of peer influence on crime in Kwande Local Government Area.
- iv. To identify possible ways in which the society can be able to reduce and eradicate the rate of crimes in Kwande Local Government Area.

Research Question

The study was guided by these research questions;

1. What are the criminal behaviors peculiar to youth in Kwande Local Government Area?
2. What are the factors that predispose youth in Kwande Local Government Area to be involved in crime?
3. How to assess youth perception on the negative impact of peer influence on crime in Kwande Local Government Area?
4. What are the ways in which the society can be able to reduce and eradicate the rate of crime in Kwande Local Government Area?

2.0

LITERATURE REVIEW

Criminal Behavior

According to Levitt (2012) particularly violent and antisocial behaviors, is considered to be a major social problem with complex causes. It is known that a myriad of environmental, social, and psychological factors are associated with increased risk of convictions for this type of criminality. Interrelated factors include poverty, poor housing, and high levels of social inequality in society, low educational attainment, poor diet, low self-esteem, and impulsivity. However, committing at least one criminal offense is almost normal for young males, with approximately one-third having a criminal conviction by age 30 in the United Kingdom. Self-report studies report even higher levels of criminality among both men and women. The peak for offending is in the teenage years, and most young people 'grow out of' crime. Programs that focus on early identification of children likely to offend and that provide social and educational interventions and monitoring can claim some success. For example, the Head Start program for children 3–5 years old in the United States has shown success in reducing crime and improving achievement compared with a control group. However, such interventions are time-consuming and require many resources to achieve significant but not dramatic improvements in outcome overall.

Factors that predispose youth to be involved in crime?

Insufficient Education

Mimasaka, (2005) therefore explain that the fallen standard of education in Nigeria coupled with overcrowded classrooms, lack of qualified teachers, lack of textbooks, and insufficient funding has push many schoolchildren on a path to crime. Children who have poor academic performance, poor attendance, face expulsion or drop out of school, their probability of committing crime is magnified. Leaving school early reduces the chance that juveniles will develop the social skills that are gained in school, such as learning to meet deadlines, following instructions, and being able to deal constructively with their peers. A child without a proper

education will eventually learn that he or she is at a disadvantage in the workforce. This feeling of hopelessness creates an environment ripe for youth crime and delinquent behaviors.

Corruption

Spencer, 2006 describe corruption as “many kinds of “irregular” influence, the objective of which is to allow the participants to make profits they are not entitled to, the method being the breaking of internal or external rules” (Spencer, 2006). The term “corruption” involves diverse processes which have different meanings within different societies and the concept of corruption does not mean the same thing across jurisdictions. Heidenheimer (2009), therefore, categorizes corruption according to social acceptance, positing ‘shades’ of corruption from ‘white’ (socially acceptable) to ‘grey’ to ‘black’ corruption (socially unacceptable). According to Rose-Ackerman (2000), corruption is “a symptom that something has gone wrong in the management of state (and/or society). Institutions designed to govern the interrelationships between the citizens and the states are used instead for personal enrichment and provision of benefits to the corrupt.” Ngwube & Okoli (2013) defined corruption as the involvement in illegal and/or dubious behavior, which destroys the moral fabric of society.

Corruption is pervasive in Kwande Local Government Area and has permeated the entire social structure of the Nigerian society. Funds meant for development projects which could have generated employment have been misappropriated, diverted, or embezzled and stashed away in foreign banks. Achebe (2013) observes that corruption in Nigeria ranges from budgeting abuses, political patronage, public funds being doled out to political allies and personal friends; the collection of mobilization fee or full payment without executing the contract, rewarding politicians who failed elections with ministerial appointments, re-assigning ministers and commissioners or council members who are involved in scandals to another ministry or department. Corruption accounts for the increasing rate of poverty, unemployment, violent and other criminal behaviors in Nigeria. Lawan (2009) argues that in Nigeria the dominant class using state apparatus has appropriated for themselves while the vast majority of the poor and the powerless continue to be ravaged by poverty and hunger, thereby engaging in criminal behavior for survival.

Drugs and Substance Abuse

Drug and substance abuse can impair judgment, resulting in criminal behavior, poor anger management, and violent behavior. Consistent and substantial evidence exists that supports the relationship between substance abuse and criminal behavior (Stephen, 2011). Brochor, (2001) study found that drug and alcohol consumption has influence on criminal behavior. They observed that drug and substance abuse hampers cognitive functions, and thus facilitates criminal behavior and over-exacerbates an individual’s aggressive behavior. For example, drug and alcohol consumption may give a false impression to a potential criminal that he/she will not be caught while committing a criminal act because if a criminal knows he/she will be caught in such an act they will be deterred.

Poverty

The concept of poverty have assumed not only local but global trend resulting in many countries administering numerous policies in a bid to curb this menace. Haralambos & Holborn, (2000) assert that poverty is a situation where a person is unable to acquire the minimum necessities that make for well-being. Poverty is marked by the inability to get good livelihood, have good house to live in, support oneself without depending on others, inability to acquire good

healthcare, good educational training etc. Akwara, (2013). Aiyedogbon&Ohwofasa (2012) posited that the definition of poverty varies among nations in magnitude and in scope. However, there are universally accepted indicators of what constitutes poverty. These indicators categorize poverty into absolute poverty and relative poverty. According to Akwara, (2013) absolute poverty means the inability of a person or group to provide the material needs for physical subsistence and the protection of human dignity. These materials include food, clothing, shelter, water, health-care services and basic education, etc. According to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS, 2010), poverty may be measured with some intrinsic parameters. They include inadequate access to basic necessities of life, environmental issues, poor infrastructure, illiteracy and ignorance, poor health, insecurity, social and political exclusion.

Youth perception on the negative impact of peer influence on crime

Although all adolescents may experience peer pressure, not all of them may succumb to negative peer pressure. This is due to the fact that backgrounds such as the family, social, academic and neighborhood or environmental, as well as other influences may differ. For example, the attitude of parents may enhance, escalate, reduce or prevent peer pressure. Some factors that can prevent the influence of negative peer pressure on children and adolescents are as follows:

- a. The avoidance by parents of over action and then threats when dealing with issues of association of children: Parents should not explode in such situations or circumstances; rather they should investigate thoroughly and wisely with care and patience correct in love.
- b. The readiness of parents and their ability to give gratification. Lack of gratification or insufficiency of gratification may give the child an emotional and psychological leverage to give in to negative peer pressure. (Crosswhite&Kerpelman, 2005).
- c. The ability of parents to apply the techniques of effective discipline and monitoring:

Adolescents and teens are characterized by excessive energy that needs to be exerted, which if not guarded, is channeled into negative tendencies. However, punishments must be moderate and not too harsh or excessive. When punishment or social control is excessively applied or too harsh (especially on girls), rather than stop non-conforming behaviour it may increase the child's nonchalant behaviour towards the punishment and parents expectation and desire. This situation may result in increasing social distance between the parents and the child. This is because, the child feels unloved and unwanted, and withdraws into his/her shell physically, emotionally, socially and psychologically. As a result communication is reduced, sometimes to the barest minimum. Then instead of a strong bonding to parents there is a detachment from parents as well as from the family norms and values they represent. Carlen, 2016, Knoester, Hayne, 2005, Crosswhite & Kerpelman 2005, argue that because the child sees the punishment as overly harsh unjust and unfair, or has need for gratification, he/she may begin to participate in criminal behaviour.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

The study adopted survey method to aid collection of data. The target population of the study was the entire people of Kwande Local Government Council. The sample size is 400 from the total population of 248,697 that constitutes the total population of the study area. The data for the study were obtained from primary and secondary sources. The primary data were derived from the close ended structured questionnaire administered to the youth on the assessment of factors

affecting youth criminal behaviour in Kwande Local Government Area. The questionnaire was administered to the target population who can read and write, while the interpretation method was employed to the respondents who cannot read and write.

4.0 RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Data Presentation and Analysis

Table 1: Demographic Data of Respondents

Variables	Frequency (F)	Percentage (%)
Sex of Respondent:		
Male	150	59.5
Female	105	40.5
Age of Respondent:		
15-24	60	27.2
25-34	150	54.4
35 and above	45	18.4
Marital Status:		
Married	95	23.5
Single	135	65.9
Divorce/Separated	25	10.6
Educational Qualification:		
Primary School	65	25.8
Secondary School	105	41.9
Tertiary School	50	19.7
Without Education	35	12.6
Occupation:		
Student	73	27.7
Business Person	62	20.5
Civil Servant	15	8.3
Not Doing Anything	105	43.5
Total	255	100%

Factors that Predispose Youth in Kwande Local Government to be Involved in Crime

Table 1: Outsiders Discipline of Child by Police Arrest

		Whether respondents friends has ever been arrested by the police before		Total
		Yes	No	
Whether parents allow outsiders to discipline child	Yes	25(48%)	95(47%)	120(47%)
	NO	36(52%)	99(53%)	135(53%)
Total		61(100%)	194(100%)	255(100%)

The finding in table 1 shows the responses of those whose friends were arrested by the police, in order to find out why a question on whether such youth come from the family that allows outsiders to discipline them a lot was asked. The result reveals that about 25 (48%) of the respondents said their parents do allow outsiders to discipline them, while about 36 (52%)

reported otherwise. This finding shows the risk involved in not allowing outsiders to discipline ones child, but if the family doesn't allow outsiders to discipline their child would leave such a child when they see him or with bad friends, such may lead the person to commit crime. Thus, it could mean that most of those youth who do commit crime their parents don't allow outsiders to discipline them.

Table 2: Child Interaction with Peers by Police Arrest

		Whether any of respondent friends had ever been arrested by police		Total
		Yes	No	
	Yes	65(47%)	53(44%)	118(46%)
	No	55(53%)	82(56%)	137(54%)
Total		120(100%)	135(%100)	255(100%)

The finding in table 2 shows that among those whose friends have been arrested by police for one crime or the other, 65 (47%) of them were allowed by their parents to interact with their friends including those arrested for one crime or the other, while 55 (53%) were not allowed to interact with their friends. While among those whose friends have never been arrested, 53 (44%) reported that they were allowed to interact with their peers outside and 82 (56%) were not. This finding implies that allowing youth to interact with peers outside may influence them into committing crime by those friends who engage in crime.

Table 3: Reason for not Allowing Children to Interact with Peers

		Whether one's friends can influence one to commit crime		Total
		Yes	No	
Why parent do not allow child to interact with peer outside	No response	75(44%)	20(45%)	95(45%)
	Avoid misbehaving	9(4%)	11(10%)	20(3%)
	Avoid unwanted friends	62(35%)	8(4%)	70(34%)
	Free from harm	18(10%)	17(30%)	35(10%)
	Don't know	7(3%)	10(6%)	17(3%)
	Just like that	9(4%)	9(5%)	18(4%)
Total		180(100%)	75(100%)	255(100%)

Table 3 shows that among those opined that one's friends can influence them to commit crime about 9 (4%) opined that parents don't allow their children to mingle with outsiders in order to avoid misbehavior, while 62 (35%) argued that it is to avoid unwanted friends. On the other hand, 18 (10%) were of the opinion that it is the only means to keep their youth from harm. Among those who think that one's friends cannot influence the person to commit crime, 20 (45%) of them did not respond to question of why parents don't allow their children to mingle with peers, 8 (4%) were of the opinion that it is meant avoid unwanted friends, 17 (30%) of them posited that it keep the youth away from harm, 7 (3%) had no opinion. This finding implies that one's friends can influence him to commit crime. Thus, this justify why parents don't allow their children to interact with peers so as to keep them away from bad friends.

Table 4: Interaction with Peers and How Time is spent with Peers

	How youths spend time with friends						Total
	Watching TV/Listening to radio	Discussion at joint (majalisa)	Play with football/basketball/volley ball	Play card	Smoke together		
Whether parents allow child to interact with peers	Yes	39(51%)	48(45%)	14(54%)	13(36%)	7(38%)	121(46%)
	No	36(49%)	57(55%)	9(40%)	22(68%)	10(62%)	134(54%)
Total		75(100%)	105(100%)	23(100%)	35(100%)	17(100%)	255(100%)

The information presented in table 4 on parents allowing child to interact with peers and on how these youth spend time with their peers show that those who asserted that they watch TV/listen to radio with their friends constitute 39 (51%) were allowed to interact with peers and 36(49%) were not. Among those who that joints cultist or gathering of group of friends 48(45%) were allowed to interact with friends and 57 (55%) were not. Among those who play games with friends, 14 (54%) of them were allowed to interact with friends and 9 (40%) were not. Among those who play card with their friends 13 (36%) of them were allowed to interact with friends and 22 (68%) were not. and among those who smoked with friends, 7 (38%) of them were allowed to interact with friends while 10 (62%) of them were not. The implication of this finding lies in the fact that the data shows high rate of youth whom parents do not allow them to interact with friends and that are expose to friends in situations where they can be influenced into bad behavior like in playing cards they could learn gambling and other bad behavior, joint cultist they could be initiated into bad groups, in watching TV they could watch the wrong films which could lead them into wrong sexual acts and so forth.

Perception on the Negative Impact of Peer Influence on Crime in Kwande

Table 5: Public Opinion on Factors Associated with Crime among Youth

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Broken Home	75	23
Drugs Addiction	91	45
Family Background	12	9
Community Upbringing	65	12
Peer Group Influence	12	9
Total	255	100

The information in table 5 indicates that (23%) of the respondents attributed broken home as the major factor responsible for crime, while (45%) believed that drug addiction is the most influential factor. However, (9%) opined that criminal behaviour is associated with family background, similarly, (9%) perceived peer group influence as the major factor, while (12%) chose

community upbringing as the major factor. Thus, all these factors could have negative impact on youth involvement in crime.

Discussion

The result of statistical analysis of hypothesis one revealed a significant relationship between skills acquisition and crime control in Kwande Local Government of Benue State, Nigeria. The study shows that relevant skills, keeps, occupied and discourages them from venturing crime. It was revealed that skills such as fashion and designing, GSM repairs, mechanical and electrical skills, computer skills can keep young people away from criminal activities. This finding corroborate with Okafor (2011), Ajufo (2013), Aremu & Ahmed (2011), Awogbenle & Iwuamadi (2011). They observe all that, when people are empowered they are equipped with skills and knowledge with which they will be able to earn a living and eschew violent crime. In this way, they will both be able to get paid employment or start up a business and earn an income that will make them avoid crime. From the result of hypothesis two, the study shows that economic empowerment has significantly contributed to crime control in Kwande Local Government of Benue State, Nigeria. The study revealed that when youths are given proper economic empowerment to support their business, this makes them financially independent and discourage them from venturing into crime. It shows that the economic empowerment such as access to micro-credit, soft loans, grants and setting up small and medium enterprise critical in keeping youths away from crime. This finding is in accordance with the works of Taga (2013), Gingiri (2001), Okaba (2005). They all observe that, one effective way of reducing crime is to make members of the society especially the youths productive by economically empowering them. The empowerment of individuals creates a sense of responsibility and promotes participatory development in the society.

5.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study was undertaken to examine Assessment of the Impact of Poverty on Criminal Behavior among Youths in Benue State: a case study of Kwande Local Government Area, this was achieved through collaboration with some specific objectives, which motives were: To identify criminal behavior peculiar to youth in Kwande Local Government , to assess youth perception on the negative impact of peer influence on crime and to identify possible ways in which the society can be able to reduce and eradicate the rate of crimes in Kwande Local Government Area in particular and Nigeria in general. The findings of the study were imperative to the conclusion that; relevant skills, keeps occupied and discourage youth from venturing into crime. It was revealed that skills such as fashion and designing, GSM repairs, mechanical and electrical skills, computer skills can keep young people away from criminal activities.

Recommendations

- The government should provide both jobs and enabling environment for businesses to thrive. This would make it possible for these unemployed youth to have something doing.
- Awareness should be created for parents on their role in helping their children not to grow into crime in the society. They need to be aware of the kind of friends their children mingle with, the time they spend and what they do during such times.
- Parent should also Endeavour to provide basic needs for their children; shelter, food, clothing, and so forth as the absence of these basic needs could push the child seeking to resort to whatever mean possible.

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