

PSYCHO-SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF JUVENILE DELIQUENTS OF NORTHERN NIGERIA ORIGIN AT A BORSTAL TRAINING INSTITUTION, IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Background: There are differences in culture between the northern and southern parts of Nigeria as far as religion, childrearing practices, and socialization of children are concerned.

Objective: The aim of this study was to obtain information about juvenile delinquents of northern Nigerian origin since this group has not been much studied and reported in the past.

Methods: The Borstal Training Institution at Kakuri, Kaduna was selected for the study. Only juvenile delinquents of northern Nigeria origin and living in the north at the time of encounter with the law and subsequent incarceration were recruited into the study. The interview was conducted using the 74-item Ife-McGill Health and Education Survey Questionnaire.

Results: Although the law of Northern Nigeria defines delinquents as children less than 16, persons as old as 29 years were being admitted to the borstal institution. These children had fairly highly educated parents, in good occupations, from stable homes.

Conclusion: It is extremely important for the authorities in Nigeria to be stringent in the implementation and application of the law related to delinquency.

Key words: *Psycho-social, Delinquents, Borstal Institution, Kaduna*

INTRODUCTION

Young persons or offenders are persons who were less than 18 years old when they committed the alleged offence. In terms of criminal responsibility, juveniles are further classified according to age brackets as follows: ¹ (i) Children below the age of 7 years are not criminally responsible for their acts or omissions; (ii) Children between the ages of 7 and 12 years are only liable for their criminal acts or omissions if they are found to have a capacity to know that their acts or omissions are wrong in law. The test of knowledge here is subjective; (iii) Children above 12 years but below 14 years are responsible for their acts or omissions, which constitute an offence; (iv) While young persons (14 but below 18 years) are criminally responsible for their acts or omissions.

The Laws of Borno State of Nigeria² define a juvenile delinquent as a child or young person who has violated the 'Children and Young Persons Law'. A 'child' is any person who has not yet attained the age of 14 years and a 'young person' is a person who has attained the age of 14 years but has not attained the age of 18 years. In contrast, in the British Children and Young Persons Act,³ children are defined as those aged 0-14 years while young persons are those aged 15-17 years. However, children below the age of 10 years are not regarded as capable of criminal responsibility, because they are deemed incapable of criminal intent (*doli incapax*). For Children over 10 years and under 14 years, it must be proved that they know the nature of their act and know it to be morally and legally

wrong (mischievous discretion). In other words the British law assumes that children in this age group do not have *mens rea* (guilty state of mind) unless it can be proved otherwise. The determination of criminal responsibility on the basis of age was left, just like the American Law, to the discretion of the Juvenile Court.

In the USA the laws define a delinquent child as "any child under the age of 18 years who has violated any law of the State or any county, city, town, or village ordinance, who by reason of being wayward or habitually disobedient, is uncontrolled by his parents". Thus a child under the age of 18 years who violates the penal law is not designated a criminal but is called a juvenile delinquent. He retains a civil status, and his disposition is determined in much the same way as a person who is legally defined as mentally ill.^{4,5}

There is relatively substantial number of publications on juvenile delinquency in Southern Nigeria,^{6,11} but there is a dearth of literature on this topic in Northern Nigeria (only one is known to the authors¹² despite an observed upsurge in the prevalence of juvenile delinquency.^{8,10,11} The El-Nur's study¹² is sociological, focusing attention essentially on the patterns of delinquency in Borno and Yobe states of Nigeria. There are differences in culture between the northern and southern parts of Nigeria as far as religion, childrearing practices, and socialization of children are concerned.^{7,9} In addition, the penal code in the north is different from the criminal code in the south. It is therefore, desirable to conduct studies in the north concerning

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delinquency patterns and their determinants with a view to comparing the results so obtained with results from the South.⁹ This need prompted the present study. The study is aimed at describing the socio-demographic and other characteristics of juvenile delinquents of Northern Nigeria, identifying the types of offences committed by the Delinquents, identifying the factors associated with their delinquent acts.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The Borstal Training Institution at Kakuri, Kaduna was selected for the study. The institution is located on the outskirts of the southern sector of Kaduna City. The Nigeria Prisons Service, through a staff complement of 16, giving a staff-trainee ratio of 1:17, administers it. It was the only approved school in northern Nigeria that catered for delinquents under the corrective orders. Although its primary catchment area is northern Nigeria, it is also known to receive delinquents from some of the southern states in the country. It is only for boys. The school was opened in 1962. Over six Christian religious organizations visit the Institution every week to conduct worship and pastoral counselling.

SUBJECTS

For the purpose of this study, the authors defined "a person of northern Nigeria origin" as any person whose parents' or any of his grandparents' origin can be traced to a community indigenous to northern Nigeria or any person whose parent(s) is a citizen of Nigeria by naturalization and has resided in northern Nigeria continuously for an aggregate period of not less than 10 years. Northern Nigeria is defined as the region controlled by the Sokoto Caliphate (approximating to the areas of present-day Kebbi, Zamfara, Kwara, Kaduna, Sokoto, Katsina, Kano, Jigawa, Plateau, Niger, Adamawa and Taraba States and Abuja (the Federal Capital Territory) and Borno Empire (present-day, Borno and Yobe states). It also includes Kogi and Benue States, communities around the Niger-Benue valley.¹³ Only juvenile delinquents of northern Nigeria origin and living in the north at the time of encounter with the law and subsequent incarceration were recruited into the study.

All the juvenile delinquents found in the Institution at the time of the study, and who satisfied the inclusion criteria described above, were interviewed individually by one of the authors (MWA) and three research assistants. The main difficulties we encountered during the interview were that the respondents were suspicious of strangers and some refused to talk at all. They were assured that the interviewers and the study were unconnected with the institution or its officials, and that the information given would be kept in confidence. The interview was conducted in privacy, in a room provided by the institution. The Central Admissions Register, kept in the Records Department, was also examined to corroborate some of the information given by the subjects. The interview was conducted using the 74-item Ife-McGill Health and Education Survey Questionnaire (Morakinyo, Prince Personal Communication), and it took between 10 and 15 minutes for each subject/respondent to be interviewed. All the subjects consented and cooperated.

Some of the officers in the institution especially the Principal and Heads of Departments (Workshop, Welfare, Medical and Administration, Sports, Inmates Affair and Environment) were interviewed informally and important points about the officers' personal experiences with the interviewed delinquent children and their parents were noted.

Data were analyzed using the statistical software package for social science SPSS version 11 for windows (SPSS, Chicago, IL, USA). Results were presented using descriptive statistics, frequency tables, means and standard deviation.

RESULTS

The total population of delinquent persons at the institution at the time of the study was 278. Out of these, 105 (37.8%) were found to be of northern Nigeria origin and resident in the north at the time of the admission to the institution. These formed the respondent group.

The ages of the respondents ranged from 12 to 29 years (the mean age = 17 years and SD \pm 11.7). Only about a fifth, 20.95%, fell within the age ranges of children and young persons. The age distribution is shown in Table 1.

The distribution of the parents according to type of religion is as displayed on Table 2. The distribution of the type of religion practiced by delinquents reflects the distribution of religion of their parents in the northern region. Islam is practiced by 67 (63.8%), Christianity 32 (30.5%), Traditional Religion 2 (1.9%) and No Religion 4 (3.8%).

Seventy (66.7%) of the parents of the delinquent children were married, 33 (31.4%) divorced, widowed, separated, deceased or they had unmarried mothers. The marital status of the parents of the delinquent children is shown on Table 3.

Table 4 shows the ethnic distribution of the parents of the delinquent children. Sixty-six (62.8%) of the delinquents' fathers were predominantly from the Hausa-Fulani ethnic group. The fathers of another 20% belonged to ethnic groups which are in northern Nigeria.

Table 5 shows the Educational level of the delinquent children. It was found that about 86% of the subjects had had some form of western education while none had been to the Quranic School. Ten (9.5%) delinquents dropped out of schooling before getting to the final year in primary school, 12 (11.4%) dropped out of schooling before getting to the final year in the Junior Secondary School (JSS) and 16 (15.2%) dropped out of schooling before getting to the final year in the Senior Secondary School (SSS). Four (3.8%) dropped out of schooling before getting to the final year in the Teachers College (TC). Those who had full secondary education or more were less than a third (29%) of the sample studied. Table 6 shows the educational level of the parents of the delinquent children.

Some of the reasons given for dropping out from formal education were: (a) lack of funds 22 (23.6%), (b) delinquent acts such as truancy, stealing, hooliganism and wandering- 28 (30.1%), (c) poor educational performance-18(19.4%), (d) physical illness -10 (10.83%) and (e) there was no information on 15 (16.1%) delinquents.

Table 7 shows the types of occupations the parents of the delinquents, classified according to the International

Labour Organisation's (ILO) International Classification of Occupations. It can be seen that more than 50% of the delinquents had parents who were engaged in occupations classified under major groups 0 and 1, they had fairly high levels of education and associated with middle to upper socio-economic strata of the society. This is compatible with the levels of education found and shown in Table 6.

Table 8 shows the nature of offences leading to committal to the approved school. Forty-four of the children were sent to the Institution because of being beyond parental control; 40 were referred because of stealing, 12 because of football hooliganism and 5 were declared in need of care and protection by the law enforcing agents There were combination of offences like wandering, stealing and beyond parental control.

Table 1: Age distribution of the delinquents of northern Nigeria origin resident in the north at the time of encounter with the law

Age (in years)	Legal Category	Number of Delinquent Children	% of Total
12-14	Children	10	9.5
15-16	Young Persons	12	11.4
17-19	Late Adolescents	39	37.1
20-29	Young Adults	44	42.0
TOTAL		105	100

Table 2: Religion practiced by the parents of the delinquents

Religion	Father (% of Total)	Mother (% of Total)
Islam	68 (64.8)	67 (63.8)
Christianity	32 (30.4)	32 (30.4)
Traditional	3 (2.9)	3 (2.9)
No Religion	2 (1.9)	3 (2.9)
TOTAL	105 (100)	105 (100)

Table 3: Marital status of the parents of the delinquent children

Marital Status	Number of Delinquents	% of Total
Married	70	66.7
Divorced	11	10.5
Widowed	7	6.6
Unmarried Mothers	3	2.9
Parents deceased	10	9.5
Parents separated	2	1.9
No Information	2	1.9
TOTAL	105	100

Table 4: Ethnic group of the parents of the Delinquents

Ethnic group	Father (% of Total)	Mother (% of Total)
Hausa	54 (51.5)	52 (49.5)
Fulani	12 (11.4)	12 (11.4)
Kanuri	1 (0.9)	1 (0.9)
Tiv	4 (3.8)	3 (2.9)
Igala	4 (3.8)	5 (4.8)
Nupe	1 (0.9)	4 (3.8)
Idoma	3 (2.9)	3 (2.9)
Igbira	5 (4.8)	4 (3.8)
Yoruba	7 (6.7)	5 (4.8)
Angas	1 (0.9)	1 (0.9)
Other Ethnic Minorities	13 (12.4)	15 (14.3)
TOTAL	105 (100)	105 (100)

Table 5: Education levels of the Delinquent Children

Education Level	Number of Delinquent Children	% of Total
No Schooling	12	14.4
Nursery School	1	1
Some Primary School	10	9.5
Completed Primary School	12	11.4
Some Junior Secondary School (JSS)	12	11.4
Completed Junior Secondary School (JSS)	15	14.4
Some Senior Secondary School (SSS)	16	15.2
Completed Senior Secondary School (SSS)	16	15.2
Some Teachers College	4	3.8
Completed Teachers College	4	3.8
Some Technical College	0	0
Completed Technical College	3	2.9
Quranic Education	0	0
No Information	0	0
TOTAL	105	100

Table 6: Educational levels of the parents of the delinquent children

Ethnic group	Father (% of Total)	Mother (% of Total)
No Schooling	22 (21.0)	44 (41.9)
Some Primary School	6 (5.7)	10 (9.5)
Completed Primary School	8 (7.6)	6 (5.7)
Some Secondary School	6 (5.7)	3 (2.9)
Completed Secondary School	12 (11.4)	11 (10.5)
Some Col. (Polytechnic, etc.)	3 (2.9)	7 (6.7)
Completed College	10 (9.5)	10 (9.5)
Some University	2 (1.9)	2 (1.9)
Completed University	35 (33.3)	10 (9.5)
No Information	1 (1.0)	2 (1.9)
TOTAL	105 (100)	105 (100)

Table 7: Occupations of the parents of the delinquents

Occupation	Father	% of Total	Mother	% of Total
Major Group O (professional, technical, managers, administrators, and related workers)	29	27.6	13	12.4
Major Group 1 (clerical officer, salesmen and related Worker)	25	23.7	48	45.6
Major Group 2 (farmers, fishermen, hunters, lumber men and related workers)	20	19.0	9	8.6
Major Group 3 (workers in mines, quarry and related Workers)	2	1.9	2	1.9
Major Group 4 (workers in operating transport business)	4	3.8	0	0
Major Group 5 (workers in operating transport business)	11	10.5	0	0
Major Group 6 (craftsman, factory operators and related Occupations)	2	1.9	7	6.7
Major Group 7 (manual workers and labourers)	3	2.9	7	6.7
Major Group 8 (service and related workers)	3	2.9	16	15.2
Major Group 9 (other workers n.e.c. * and workers in Occupations unidentified or not reported)	3	2.9	3	2.9
No Information	3	2.9	0	0
Total	105	100	105	100

*Not elsewhere classified

Table 8: Nature of offences leading to committal to the approved school

Nature of offences	Number of delinquent
Stealing	40
Disobedience (beyond parental control)	44
Arson	4
Wandering	19
Assault	9
Need for care and protection	5
Wilful damage	4
Murder/Manslaughter	2
Rape	3
Football hooligans	12
Danger to animals	13
Suicidal Acts	1
Drug Abuse	4
No Information	0

DISCUSSION

During their stay in the approved school, normally lasting 3 years, emphasis is placed on character building, vocational training, intellectual development (education), and religious activities. In some cases, juveniles may be released after 9 months stay in the institution (but this is subject to good behaviour). Every trainee inmate must

compulsorily learn a trade in the school before he is discharged. These vocational courses prepare the boys for Government Trade Test Examinations.

The finding in this study should be interpreted cautiously against the background of the following limitations: (i) the lack of a control group (ii) limited validity of the instrument used and (iii) the representativeness of the sample in that the pattern may be different if the study were to be carried out in another part of northern Nigeria.

The delinquent subjects were generally older than those reported in a previous case-controlled study carried out in a borstal in southwestern Nigeria using a similar instrument.¹⁹ About 50% of the delinquent sample in that study was between the ages of 15 to 17 years and 42% were between the ages of 12 to 14 years. The difference could possibly be because some influential parents with delinquent over-aged (above 17 years) children "arrange to have them dealt with under the less stringent Children and Young persons' law". The children are consequently remanded in a borstal rather than a prison. The former being less stigmatizing for the family and its living conditions are humane.⁴ About a third of the fathers of the subjects had had university education, and more than half were in white-collar jobs (Tables 6 and 7). If this explanation were true, then it would mean that the laws were not being strictly applied in the northern part of the country. This observation was re-echoed in an article captioned 'Do not commit over-aged to the Borstal Institution' published in a national daily newspaper.¹⁴ The implication of having a mixture of young and old

delinquents in a borstal home is the tendency for the older, more experienced, delinquents to further harden the younger children. The presence of these older groups makes it difficult to compare our sample with those in institutions in Britain and the United States of America where they are more likely to adhere to the stipulations of their laws as cited at the beginning of this paper. Therefore, it is extremely important for the authorities to be stringent in the implementation and application of the law related to delinquency.

About 66.6% of the study sample went to school beyond primary school level, a figure that is higher than the 30% recorded in southwestern Nigeria using similar instrument.¹⁰ A previous study⁷ reported a much lower figure of 10% of their delinquent sample went to school beyond primary school level.

About 69% of the parents of the delinquent sample in this study had secondary school education and above. The findings also suggest the differences in the operational definition of education in this study and previous studies. The levels of education of the delinquent children considered were not their level of education prior to their incarceration into the institution.

There was no Quranic pupil in the institution at the time of the study. The socio-cultural dynamics of northern Nigeria encourage traditional Islamic education. According to Hake,¹⁵ almost all Moslem parents in northern Nigeria are in favour of Quranic schools because Islam and Arabic are taught there. The parents feel that the Mallams of the Quranic schools are better than many public schools teachers, being more honest, trustworthy and devoted to their work. The Mallams teach morality and religion.

Quranic pupils (popularly known as "Almajirai" in the North) tend to express their overt behaviour through the last two definitions of juvenile delinquency under the "Children and Young Persons Law (1993)".² A child who becomes a beggar or wanders, due to socio-cultural reasons or other connections could not be termed a delinquent in the proper sense of the concept.

This does not necessarily mean that this type of education protects delinquency. There could be the factor of social class bias in that the mentors of the Quranic school pupils could not afford the cost of placement of these pupils in the Borstal Institution. Further study in other parts of northern Nigeria is necessary to study the possible role played by Quranic Pupils (Almajirai) in delinquency.

Over one quarter of the delinquent, children were from broken home in this sample. Their parents were divorced, widowed, separated, deceased or they had unmarried mothers. Previous studies⁶⁻¹¹ also reported association between delinquency and broken home.

The ethnic distribution of the parents of the delinquents was predominantly Hausa-Fulani ethnic group as expected. The institution is located in Kaduna, the former regional capital of northern Nigeria, where this ethnic group is predominant.

CONCLUSION

Previous studies also reported association between delinquency and hooliganism.^{16,17} and zoo-sadism¹⁸ This finding suggests that new forms of delinquent behaviour are emerging among children in northern Nigeria. The explanations could be the growing interest in football among youths in Nigeria and the effects of violence on television on these children.

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