



## **Prevalence of juvenile delinquencies as aftermath of minimal social control in primary and secondary schools in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The school as an agent of socialization and cultural preservation had served that purpose effectively and efficiently. The norms of the society were taught in the school and some were articulated as aspects of the school rules and regulations. The teachers used corporal punishment as well as other measures to engender discipline in the pupils. Discipline was held in high esteem from the colonial era until about the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In those days, both primary and post-primary school leavers lived exemplary lifestyles that are regarded as normative in the society. They were respectful, obedient, humble, morally sound and generally disciplined. Juvenile delinquency at that period was alien to Nigeria. However, towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century till date, Nigeria has witnessed a new trend of events. Pupils and under-age students now involved in cultism, truancy, rape, disobedience to teachers and elders, hooliganism, rudeness, alcoholism etc which are all regarded as juvenile delinquency. The above juvenile delinquencies have become a menace in society. It was found that the reasons for its prevalence were because teachers were banned from using corporal punishment to maintain social control, tort liability laws are made, and parents whose wards are flogged come to the school to avenge on the teacher. These made the teachers minimize their disciplinary role hence things fell apart. It was, however, recommended among other things that there should be a stiffer penalty on juvenile delinquencies; the age of responsibility to child-crime should be lowered; corporal punishment should be re-introduced though with caution; correctional homes should be built where juvenile offenders could be mentored and transformed to better citizens for positive functioning in societies.

**Keywords:** juvenile delinquency, social control, primary and secondary schools

### **Introduction**

Juvenile delinquency is an aspect of indiscipline or deviance. Deviance according to Macionis (1994:120) <sup>[1]</sup> is “the recognized violation of cultural norms. Norms guide virtually all human activities so the concept of deviance is also quite broad”. On the specific, Ayorinde (2014:190) <sup>[4]</sup> posits that juvenile delinquency is “a technical name referring to misbehavior that violates a stated law but committed by a young person or by an under-age person”.

Indeed, from the colonial era through the independence to the 1990s, juvenile delinquency was not common in Nigeria. The Nigerian society had been enjoying social stability as there was decorum. Societal members and indeed teenagers lived a good moral life and had respect for human dignity. In the schools in those days, teachers were allowed to use corporal punishment as a deterrent to acts of indiscipline. Other formidable mechanisms of social control used in the school include grass cutting, frog jump, kneeling down, rolling on the floor, fetching water, washing toilet etc. The graduates or school leavers of primary and secondary schools were well behaved because they were groomed well in not only academics (learning) but also in character. Their lifestyles were in conformity with the norms of society.

In sharp contrast, the pupils and teenagers of the contemporary era portray attitudes that are not normative. The school that is known for character moulding is no longer effective in that aspect of her role. Pupils and under-age persons are committing crimes that are regarded as juvenile delinquencies. Giving credence to the above,

experts in the sector adumbrates (as cited in Lawal, 2019) <sup>[10]</sup> that “the level of indiscipline has escalated in schools over the years. Teachers, as well as parents, express frustration at the number of serious offences, reported each week”.

The question is what are the causes of all these acts of indiscipline? Where shall we seek a solution? The society established education to solve her problems but is education (school) realizing its objectives? In these regards, Lawal (2019) <sup>[10]</sup> succinctly states thus

The school system is meant to impart knowledge and societal norms in children with a view to making them become responsible members of the society as they grow up but current acts of hooliganism are making that difficult to achieve. However, in the last 10 years, violence is becoming a norm in Nigeria’s primary and secondary schools (p.33).

The situation is worrisome and rather more hopeless as it involves pupils and teenagers who are supposed to be leaders of tomorrow. Worse still is the seeming incapacitation of the schools to engender social control. It is on this premise that this paper sets out to define concepts like juvenile delinquency and social control; juxtapose juvenile delinquency and crime; discuss reasons for classifying young offenders as juvenile delinquents in lieu of criminals; prevalence of delinquencies in lower levels of education; and juvenile delinquencies as aftermath of minimal social control in lower levels of education (primary and secondary schools) in Nigeria

## **Delinquency**

Delinquency refers to bad or criminal behavior usually of young people. The term delinquency covers a wide variety of infringements of legal and social norms, from behavior that is merely a nuisance to criminal acts such as theft. It is explained as the product of anomie or as the result of delinquent drift. Critical criminologists sometimes regarded it as an expression of opposition to dominant values and social inequality (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner 2000) <sup>[1]</sup>. Also according to Haralambos, Holborn, Chapman and Moore (2013:347) <sup>[7]</sup>, youth offending, or delinquency, refers to “criminal acts that are committed by young people. A new term anti-social behavior, is a wide variety of acts, often committed by young people, which disturb other members of society, without necessarily involving theft or violence of any kind”.

## **Juvenile**

Juvenile as a noun refers to a young person who is not yet an adult. Formally or by law, it is connected with young people who are not yet adults (Hornby, 2000) <sup>[8]</sup>. It is seen as an action or attitude that is silly and more typical of a child than an adult.

## **Juvenile Delinquency**

This is an act of committing a crime by a young person who is not yet an adult or who by law is yet regarded as a child. Explaining the term delinquency, Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (2000) <sup>[1]</sup> assert that

In criminology, it is typically specified as juvenile delinquency to indicate the high level of indictable offences committed by young males between the ages of 12 and 20 years. The typical crimes of younger males are larceny and breaking and entering, while violent crimes are more in the age groups over 17 years (p87).

Furthermore, juvenile delinquency has been described by Ayorinde (2014:190) <sup>[4]</sup> as “a technical name referring to misbehavior that violates a stated law but committed by a young person or by an under-age person. The term juvenile delinquency is an out-side school term for offences committed by minors or underage person”.

## **Social Control**

This means a situation where decorum is maintained in a group or a given society. It refers to the absence of violence in an organization, group, community or society. Parsons (1951) defined social control as the process by which, through the imposition of sanctions, deviant behavior is counteracted and social stability maintained.

## **Juxtaposition of Juvenile Delinquency and Crime**

It would be imperative to state that both juvenile delinquency and crime are regarded as deviance. Deviance according to Haralambos *et al* (2013:347) <sup>[7]</sup> “consists of those acts that do not follow the norms and expectations of a particular social group” Going further to explain deviance, Haralambos *et al* (2013) <sup>[7]</sup> stated thus

Crime and delinquency are the most obvious forms of deviance. Crime, or offending refers to those activities that break the law of the land and are subject to official punishment; youth offending, or delinquency,

refers to criminal acts that are committed by young people (p347).

The above excerpt, notwithstanding, some countries have laws that exonerate youth offenders. For example, the Nigerian Criminal Code Act and the Penal Code Act (as cited in Ayorinde 2014) <sup>[4]</sup> establish that

A child under the age of seven does not have criminal responsibility (criminal intent). A child between seven and twelve years can only be found responsible for an offence if it can be proved that he/she has the mental capacity to know that the offensive act should not have been committed. However, above the age of twelve, the person is deemed as fully responsible for the act or omission (p190-191).

With the understanding that age is the yardstick for determining whether an act is a crime or delinquency, it is also pertinent to know that the international age of adulthood is 18years. On this premise, therefore, if an adult commits a certain offence, it is referred to as criminal but if a person below the age of 18 years commits the same act, it is referred to as juvenile delinquency. The juvenile delinquent under the statutory age cannot be found guilty of criminal laws except proven otherwise. Juvenile offenders, when found guilty, are sent to Juvenile Homes for treatment and not for punishment. Some Nigerian prisons have Booster stations where juvenile offenders are treated.

## **Reasons for Classifying Young Offenders as Delinquents in Lieu of Criminals**

The idea of categorizing young offenders as delinquents are based on critical reasoning even if it may be reviewed as a mere legal stance by some scholars. This is because both the chronological age and maturity age of every individual must be considered in various issues. The age of reasoning is only attained when the individual child reaches a certain level (age) of maturity. At such an age, he develops a critical mind which guides his/her behavior and conduct. Meanwhile, Morse (as cited in Ayorinde 2014:191) <sup>[4]</sup> outlined the following reasons:

1. They are perceived as minors, immature persons that do not have advanced psychological capability to consider the consequences of their acts before acting;
2. Being adolescents, they have a stronger preference for risk;
3. They have a tendency to be impulsive;
4. They are more susceptible to peer pressure.

It is important to note that some offences are so grievous that even if the offender is within the statutory age, he would not be set free easily. For instance, the gang rape of an 18-year-old woman in Germany has sparked a dispute about lowering the age of criminal responsibility. Two of the suspects in the western city of Mulheim are aged 12 and the other three are 14. Germany does not prosecute children under 14. Their school has suspended all the five of them from school. Meanwhile one of the 14-year-old has appeared before an investigating judge (Gang Rape in Mulheim 2019) <sup>[6]</sup>.

Legal and security agencies use the term juvenile delinquency for crime management. School authorities rarely use it. Status offences is another categorization of juvenile delinquency. Status offences are not severe or

ruthless and are common in the school setting. Status offence is an age-related offence because such misconduct is illegal only if the offender is underage. This means that status offences are not offences if they are committed by adults (persons aged 18 and above) in Nigeria and some other countries. Some of the offences categorized as status offence include running away from home, drinking of alcohol, keeping bad friends or companies, engaging in sex or immoral acts, disobeying teacher, violating curfew, disobeying parents, skipping school, school bullying etc (Ayorinde 2014) <sup>[4]</sup>.

### **Prevalence of Juvenile Delinquencies in Lower Levels of Education in Nigeria**

Lower levels of education which refers to primary and secondary (post-primary) schools are now highly associated with juvenile delinquencies. In Nigeria, there is hardly a week that passes without reports of one type of misconduct or the other among the lower level of education pupils or students.

In support of the above, it is expected that the following instances would suffice.

In 2014, four secondary school students from St. Francis High School, Akuru namely Lawal Lateef (18); Felix Victor (17); Nsoani Stephen (18); and Festus Francis were arrested by Ondo State Police Command for being involved in cultism. In 2016, the police in Delta State arrested 28 teenage cult members belonging to a group known as "Future Trigger Boys". The boys aged between 13 and 16 years were rounded up during school hours following intelligence reports from members of the public. The police said these are children sent to school to study but regrettably, they form cult groups to terrorize their fellow pupils and the entire school. Since their arrest, many of their parents have been on police neck. In May 2017, seven secondary school pupils (from Iponri Senior High School; Akinto Senior High School, Surulere; Stadium High School; and Oloye Comprehensive College, Orile) were arrested and arraigned before an Ebute Meta Magistrate Court, Lagos for being involved in hooliganism. In September 2017, the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS), Ikeja arraigned 12 pupils of Oduduwa Junior Secondary School, in Lagos before an Ikeja Chief Magistrate Court for belonging to a cult. The pupils were arraigned before Mrs. B. O. Osunsami on a three-count charge of conspiracy and membership of Gangster Confraternity, an unlawful society. In 2018, the police said four teenagers, said to be cultists launched a violent onslaught on a school-armed with assault rifles. The media reports that the attack came some hours after the state's Ministry of Education expelled seven pupils the school found to be cult members. Again, in February 2019, the police apprehended two individuals for initiating 12 elementary and secondary school pupils (of Egan Primary and Secondary Schools, Igando) into the AWAWA Confraternity group in Lagos. The eldest and only female, a Junior Secondary School III student was the first to be initiated into the cult group and were allegedly instrumental in luring others in elementary One, Two, Three, Four, Five and Six to be part of the group (Lawal 2019) <sup>[10]</sup>.

Similar to the above instances are cases of notorious students of king Ado High School, Lagos who were arrested by the Lagos Neighborhood and Safety Corps (LNSC) in 2018. The arrested cult boys were Kadiri Ajala, Muyideen Ganiyu, Kayode Damilara, Idogun Yinusa, Yinka Adewuyi

and Laguda Kamal. One of the cult boys Wakilu escaped arrest. Narrating her ordeal, one of the victims, Alaka said that one of her school mates who is also a cult boy, Dare, took me away from school with a gun and when we got to the place at agarawu, I was asked to kneel down by seven boys. They took me away through tricycle. Dare and Wakilu covered my eyes with a black handkerchief. They poured something on my body, raped and initiated me. Dare slapped me three times and said I have been initiated; the 15-year-old girl said amid tears. The cultists are known as Supreme Boys Club. (Ayinla, 2018) <sup>[3]</sup>.

The issue of indiscipline in schools or misconduct by underage persons are inexhaustible. It is therefore not out of place to explore social control in schools.

### **Prevalence of Juvenile Delinquencies as Aftermath of Minimal Social Control in Lower Levels of Education in Nigeria**

In the past, corporal punishment was meted out to the offenders both at home and in the school. In those days, mere trespassing school field attracts punishment such as flogging or grass cutting. The school was quite a training centre for both intellectual and general discipline. In the school every senior student (even if a class ahead), the prefects as well as the teachers are disciplinarians. No offence goes without appropriate punishment or disciplinary action. There was spelt out rules and regulations of the school. Such rules and regulations are amplified by the Senior Prefect of the school as he goes to the morning assembly once or twice termly to read out the school rules and regulations to the entire school. The senior prefect wields as much power and authority as the school principal. The school during the period under review (30 years ago and beyond) uses such corrective measures like flogging, cutting of grass, digging a pit. Digging gutters, fetching water, pick pin, frog jump, kneeling down, lie down, rolling on the floor, rolling on a wet floor, washing toilet, digging ridges etc. Due to the presence and enforcement of the above disciplinary measures, there was social control within the school. The effect of the disciplinary action permeates the larger society as students lived a life of humility and displayed a disciplined lifestyle at their various families and homes especially during holidays. This indeed sustained the society then as there was decorum. During such period, mere telling lie was an anathema. Negative attitudes such as juvenile delinquencies are alien to the pupils and students. Giving credence to the above, Editorial (2018) <sup>[5]</sup> made a particularly apt comment thus

Before now, pupils in both primary and secondary schools were flogged by teachers for disobedience and disorderly behavior and it was never an issue. Pupils bore the punishment stoically, knowing full well that it was deserved. They never went back home to report such floggings to their parents. Even if they did, such parents were likely to punish the children further (p.15).

Unfortunately, these days, corporal punishment has been banned and much of the disciplinary measures applied in those years that kept the society in control have been banned. Teachers are now more or less toothless bulldogs that bark without a bite. In this situation, pupils and students portray such attitudes regarded as juvenile delinquencies. The introduction of teachers tort liabilities is also scaring

teachers from dealing with pupils or students. Tort suits against teachers have been increasing in number (Lamorte 1996) [9].

The situation is such that if a teacher flogs a pupil or student, parents or the student come for revenge. The ban on flogging, teacher tort liability and vengeance from parents or students cumulatively have a great effect on the teachers' disciplinary role in schools. Disobedience is now the order of the day and it is being suffered by not only the teachers but fellow pupils/students as well as the neighborhood or larger society. In support of the above, Editorial (2018) [5] stated thus

But things have since changed. Today's parents, who were themselves subjected to such corporal punishment as kids and who did not turn out as psychological wrecks, are the ones vehemently opposed to flogging in schools. Indeed, these parents encourage their children to report to them and never hesitate to take matters into their own hands by going to school to mete out punishment to the offending teacher for having the effrontery to flog their children. The recent case in Anambra State where a family went to the school and beat to death a female teacher who flogged their child is still fresh (p. 15).

The scenario now is hopeless. Things have fallen apart. The schools are no longer very conscious of character development rather cognitive development. In line with the above, Ajere (2013) [2] posits that

The school nowadays is regarded as a learning centre for certificate acquisition and white-collar jobs, not a social unit where members, the teachers and the learners interact to uphold social order for democratic models, shun anti-social behaviours like deviancy and juvenile delinquency which are capable of causing insecurity and instability in the society. There is the utter absence of social order and control in schools nowadays which is the concern of sociologists. Failure to arrest the menace is dragging the entire society into a doom and collapse (p. 112).

The worrisome aspect is that parents have forgotten the biblical adage which states "spare the rod and spoil the child". The teachers have been made to minimize social control and its adverse consequence is telling on the society at large.

### Conclusion

From the colonial era down to the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century both the school and the society at large enjoyed social order and social stability. It was the era when corporal punishment was in vogue and Juvenile delinquency was alien to Nigerians. The school products of that period were respectful, humble and generally disciplined. However, in the wake of the 1990s, corporal punishment and some other measures used as social control mechanisms were banned. Teachers were banned from flogging, teachers' tort liabilities were established, parents whose child were flogged started going to school to avenge the flogging on the teacher. Consequently, the teachers' hands became tied with regards to disciplining an offender, thus things fell apart which led to the prevalence of juvenile delinquencies in the contemporary Nigerian society.

### Recommendations

Based on the above findings and conclusion, the following recommendations were made:

1. There should be a stiffer penalty on juvenile delinquencies;
2. The age of responsibility to child-crime should be lowered;
3. Corporal punishment with caution should be introduced;
4. The law on tort liability should be abolished;
5. Parents should train and discipline their wards well at home before enrolling them in school;
6. State of emergency should be declared on indiscipline;
7. Guidance and counselling of pupils should be introduced from primary schools to post-primary schools;
8. Correctional homes should be built where juvenile offenders could be mentored and transformed into better citizens.

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