

Strategies for Combating Crime among Youths in Nigerian Secondary School Environment

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Abstract: This study sought to identify the practical strategies for combating crime rates among youths in secondary schools in Aba Education Zone of Abia State, Nigeria. Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. The sample comprised 268 secondary school teachers and 1494 students in Aba Education Zone. A 38 item questionnaire was developed, validated and administered to the respondents. The results indicate that the practical strategies for combating crime rates among youths in the zone include among others, inculcating reading culture among the students, involving students in games and sporting activities as well as moral instructions. The researchers recommended that schools should keep the students busy by involving them in games and sports. Developing the culture of reading should be encouraged in the school and at home; parents should regulate the amount of time spent watching movies and also censor the kind of movies their children watch. Professionally competent counselors should be posted to schools.

Key words: Youth, crime, secondary schools, strategies, questionnaire, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Crime has been in existence since the inception of the world and it is an inevitable aspect of human society. Crime is one of the concepts that lack universal definition. This may not be unconnected with the fact that what constitutes a crime varies with time, space as well as from one society to another. Nevertheless, crime is defined by Siegel and Senna (1998) as a violation of societal rules as interpreted and expressed by the law which reflects upon opinion, traditional values and the viewpoint of people currently holding social and political power. Individuals who violate these rules are subject to sanctions by state authority, social stigma and loss of status. Scott and Marshall (2005) posit that crime is an offence which goes beyond personal sphere and gets into the public sphere, breaking prohibitory rules and laws to which legitimate punishments or sanctions are attracted and which requires the intervention of a public authority such as the state or local body.

Crime is an anti social behaviour which could be committed by individuals with emotional and behavior disorders. These behaviors fall significantly beyond the acceptable norms of their cultural and age group and they adversely affect the child's academic achievement as well as their relationship with others (Heward, 2006). Emotional and behavior disorders could be grouped under externalizing and internalizing behaviors. The internalizing behaviors include withdrawal and social immaturity while

the externalizing behaviors include fighting stealing, destruction of property, aggression, non compliance to instructions among others (Walker, 1995). According to Heward (2006) a consistent manifestation of some of these externalizing behavior disorders in early child development is the best single predictor of delinquent crime in adolescence. He noted that a great number of people believe that children who exhibit emotional and behavior disorder will stop them with time as they get older. However, research has shown that this could be true for some children who manifest internalizing behavior as withdrawal and fear but those who exhibit patterns of antisocial behavior and delinquent behavior such as stealing, destruction of property may not easily drop them (Nelson *et al.*, 2007). Walker *et al.* (2004) observed that children who enter adolescence with these behaviors stand a great risk of dropping out of school, being arrested and engaging in drug and alcohol abuse. Research has further shown that males with emotional and behavior disorder are generally arrested for crimes as assault and burglary while females have been associated with sex related offences such as prostitution (Snyder and Sickmund, 2006).

Crime has a number of causes which are generally determined by the social, economic and cultural conditions prevailing in any society or country. Smith (2007) identified some of the causes of youth crime as family breakdown, child abuse, family disruption, poor parental supervision, parenting or sibling criminality,

having teenage parents and unstable living conditions. In line with the above, World Youth report attributed some of the causes of youth crime to the negative consequences of social and economic development, in particular economic crises, political instability and the weakening of major institutions including the state, public schools and the family. The media such as television and video films have contributed much in the promotion of crime as students frequently watch movies that thrive in violence and physical elimination of enemies. Many researchers have concluded that young people who watch violent movies tend to behave more aggressively or violently, particularly when provoked (Oleksy-Ojikutu, 1987; Smith, 2007). Peer influence is another factor that causes youth crime. Some members of the peer group who involved in crime expose their peers to such crimes as stealing, forgery, rape and physical assault.

This study is anchored on the social learning theory by Bandura (1977) who is of the view that the learner plays a prominent role in cognitively selecting, organizing and transforming stimuli from the environment in which he/she is found. He stressed the import of social influences on learning and is of the opinion that people learn by direct experience and by observing others. When people learn and copy the behavior of others, it is called modeling. Modeling can weaken or strengthen aggressive responding. If the model is rewarded for behaving in aggressively, further aggression becomes more likely. If the model is punished for behaving aggressively, aggression becomes less likely. Accordingly, people learn by watching the events of the environment. By watching other people, they naturally learn new responses without first having the opportunity to make the responses by themselves. The basic premise of the theory is that behavior results from a continuous interaction between significant factors. It considers that people learn from one another through observational learning, imitation and modeling. By implication crime may be a learned behavior depending on what the child is exposed to in the environment.

There is evidence of crime among youths in Nigerian secondary schools. For instance, Oleksy-Ojikutu (1987) observed that these crimes include stealing, cheating, withholding of reports, physical attacks, drug abuse and addiction. Igbo also noted that secondary schools in Nigeria today are plagued with many crimes and social problems-a situation which she reported is often attributed to low moral standard of the youths. These crimes and social problems according to her include drug related problems, cultism, corruption and examination malpractice, forgery, prostitution, unlawful possession of dangerous weapons, stealing, pick-pocketing. Udeagha

(2011) also noted that there is still crime among the youths in secondary schools today. The author had cited the case of rape and stealing among the youths in Abia state secondary schools.

In Nigeria, today and particularly in Abia state, crime in schools and colleges is one of the most troublesome social problems. Not only does it affect those involved in the criminal incidents but it also hinders societal growth and stability. Aba is a major commercial center located in Abia State, South East of Nigeria. It is a business community where business, trading and money making is everyone's ambition. The location of major markets and numerous industries in the state make it a major attraction for rural and urban migration. Some of the people are usually not skilled and some are without any capital base but desire to get rich quick. The crave for riches sometimes leads some of the inhabitants into committing crimes like stealing, duping and outright fraud. For instance, in Abia State, according to Onwumere (2013), crime has become the order of the day, with the alarming and ever increasing crime wave. Armed robbery, kidnapping, illicit drug dealing, child trafficking and now the fastest growing crime in the state which is 'baby factories' pose a serious threat to the existence and image of the state as well as the safety of its citizens. In recent times, not <80 young girls between 13 and 20 year who claim to be students of either secondary schools or tertiary institutions in Abia state have been paraded by the police as a result of their involvement in 'baby factories' and child trafficking. They were all arrested at local hospitals and maternity homes.

Some measures have been taken to combat such crimes. The government on her part has made some efforts to combat crimes among youths in secondary schools. They instituted War Against Indiscipline (WAI) and also came up with some stringent measures against examination malpractices such as suspension or expulsion of offenders from the school as well as the arrest and trial of those who engage in child trafficking. These measures seem not to have yielded much result in combating crime rate among youths. Thus, this suggests the need to explore practical measures or strategies for combating crime rate among youths in secondary schools especially in Aba Education Zone of Abia State.

Purpose of the study: The purpose of this study is to determine practical strategies for combating crime in secondary schools in Aba Education Zone of Abia State. Specifically, the study sought to ascertain the various crimes committed by secondary school students in Aba Education Zone and the practical strategies that can be adopted in combating crime among students.

Research questions: Three research questions and three null hypotheses guided the study. These include:

- What are the various crimes committed by secondary school students in Aba Education Zone of Abia State
- What are the reasons why secondary school students engage in crime
- What practical strategies can be adopted to combat crimes committed by students in secondary schools

Hypotheses:

- H_{01} : There is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of secondary school teachers and students on the various crimes committed by secondary school students in Aba Education Zone of Abia State
- H_{02} : There is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of secondary school teachers and students on the reasons why secondary school students engage in crime in Aba Education Zone of Abia State
- H_{03} : There is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of secondary school teachers and students on practical strategies for combating crimes in secondary schools in Aba Education Zone of Abia State

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study adopted descriptive survey design. Descriptive survey, according to Nworgu (2006) are those studies which aim at collecting data on and describing in a systematic manner the characteristics, features or facts about a given population. The study was carried out in Aba Education Zone of Abia State. Aba Education Zone is made up of eight local government areas. There are 88 government secondary schools in the education zone (Planning, Research and Statistics (PRS), Department of Post Primary School Management Board Aba in 2015). Aba Education Zone was chosen because of the high incidence of crime among secondary school students in the area. The population of this study was (31,833 respondents comprising all the 1,934 secondary school teachers and all the 29,899 senior secondary class 2 students in the public secondary schools in the zone. The sample size for the study was 1762 comprising 268 teachers and 1494 SS2 students from Aba Education Zone. Multi-stage sampling technique was adopted to sample both the teachers and the students. Firstly, from the eight local government areas that make up the zone,

four local governments were randomly sampled. From the local governments, 24 secondary schools were randomly sampled. All the teachers as well as all the SS2 students in the sampled schools were used for the study. The instrument for data collection was researchers' constructed questionnaire titled "Combating Crime Rate Questionnaire (CCRQ). The instrument was divided into two-sections A and B. Section A dealt with the demographic variables of the respondents. Section B was divided into three clusters of 30 items. The first cluster investigated the various crimes committed by secondary school students in Aba Education Zone, the second cluster dealt with the reasons why secondary school students engage in crime in Aba Education Zone while the third cluster dealt with practical strategies for combating crimes in secondary schools in Aba Education Zone. The questionnaire was structured on a four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) 4 points; Agree (A) 3 points; Disagree (D) 2 points and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1 point.

The face validation of the instrument was established by five validates. One expert in special education, two in sociology of education, one in educational psychology and one in measurement and evaluation all in the Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Each was given the draft of the instrument to scrutinize with regards to adequacy, relevance and the suitability of the items. The experts deleted three of the items and reconstructed four items whose language was considered unsuitable. Their input was used for the modification of the instrument. The draft instrument was trial tested on a sample of 25 students and 10 teachers in Umuahia Education Zone which is outside the study area. The data from the trial testing were used to compute the internal consistency reliability estimates of the instrument using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability estimates obtained for clusters A-C were 0.94; 0.88 and 0.74, respectively. The overall reliability estimate was 0.86. The estimates were considered high enough. Total 1762 copies of the questionnaire were administered directly to the respondents in their various schools by the researchers and three research assistants. The research assistants were trained on how to administer and retrieve copies of the questionnaire. Out of the 1762 questionnaires administered, only 1740 were returned representing 98% return rate. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions. The acceptance point for the items was 2.50. In the present study, t-test statistics was also used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 probability level.

RESULTS

Research question 1: What are the various crimes committed by secondary school students in Aba Education Zone of Abia state? The data presented on Table 1 shows that the teachers agreed that examination malpractice, stealing, drinking of alcohol, gambling, physical attacks and forging results are crimes committed by secondary school students in Aba Education Zone as shown by the mean ratings of 3.56, 2.75, 2.52, 2.66, 2.63 and 2.89, respectively. The teachers disagreed that the use of drugs, abortion, rape, shop-lifting, breaking into offices, destruction of school properties and kidnapping with mean ratings ranging from 2.08-2.47 were crimes committed by secondary school students in Aba Education Zone of Abia State, Nigeria. The standard deviation which ranged from 0.69-1.29 is an indication that the respondents were not far from the mean in their responses.

The data also shows that the students agreed that examination malpractice, stealing, drinking of alcohol, gambling, physical attack and abortion with mean rating scores of 2.94, 2.73, 2.93, 2.51, 2.65 and 2.60, respectively, were crimes committed by secondary school students. The students disagreed with seven of the items namely, use of drugs, rape, shop-lifting, forging results, breaking into offices, destruction of school properties and kidnapping as crimes committed by secondary school students.

Research question 2: What are the reasons why secondary school students engage in crime Table 2 indicates that all the eight items were highly rated by the teachers and the students as reasons why secondary school students engaged in crimes. These include broken family, poverty, peer group's influence, imitation of friends in society, poor parental supervision, inadequate moral instruction, insatiable quest for things in vogue and the type of movies students watch. The mean scores of both the teachers and the students were above 2.50 which is an indication that all the items in the Table were reasons why secondary school students engaged in crimes in Aba Education Zone. The standard deviation ranging from 0.55-1.02 shows that the respondents were not far from each other in their ratings.

Research question 3: What practical strategies can be adopted to combat crimes committed by students in secondary schools.

The data presented on Table 3 shows that the teachers and students agreed that all the items are practical strategies for combating crimes since their mean ratings are between 2.73-3.42 which are all above the cut off mean of 2.50. The standard deviation of the items ranged from 0.69-1.22 indicating that the respondents were close in their ratings.

Table 1: Mean responses of the respondents on the various crimes committed by secondary school students in Aba Education Zone

Crimes committed by students	Teachers (n = 268)			Students (n = 1474)		
	Mean	SD	Dec	Mean	SD	Dec
Exam malpractice	3.56	0.69	A	2.94	1.29	A
Stealing	2.75	0.91	A	2.73	1.12	A
Use of drugs	2.31	0.89	D	2.33	0.85	D
Drinking of alcohol	2.52	0.88	A	2.93	0.97	A
Gambling	2.66	0.93	A	2.51	1.04	A
Physical attacks	2.63	0.87	A	2.65	1.03	A
Abortion	2.33	0.93	D	2.60	1.16	A
Rape	2.08	0.81	D	2.48	1.22	D
Shop-lifting	2.22	0.87	D	2.17	1.06	D
Forging results	2.89	0.98	A	2.39	1.07	D
Breaking into offices	2.31	0.98	D	2.31	1.22	D
Destruction of school properties	2.47	1.02	D	2.48	1.16	D
Kidnapping	2.14	1.25	D	2.19	1.22	D
Cluster mean	2.53	0.53	-	2.52	0.80	-

Table 2: Mean responses of the respondents on the reasons why secondary school students engage in crimes

Reasons why students engage in crime	Teachers (n = 268)			Students (n = 1474)		
	Mean	SD	Dec	Mean	SD	Dec
Broken family	3.19	0.89	A	3.17	0.90	A
Poverty	3.30	0.86	A	3.39	0.75	A
Peer group influence	3.42	0.55	A	3.37	0.85	A
Imitation of some adults in the society	3.97	0.77	A	3.33	0.86	A
Poor parental supervision	3.14	0.79	A	3.34	0.78	A
Inadequate moral instructions	3.17	0.77	A	3.21	0.84	A
Insatiable quest for things in vogue	3.31	0.69	A	3.29	0.75	A
The type of movies students watch	3.31	0.58	A	3.34	1.02	A
Cluster Mean	3.22	0.36	-	3.30	0.52	-

Table 3: Mean and standard deviation on the practical strategies for combating crime rate among youths in secondary schools in Aba Education Zone

Strategies for combating crime rate	Teachers (n = 268)			Students (n = 1474)		
	Mean	SD	Dec	Mean	SD	Dec
Inculcating reading culture in youth	3.14	0.89	A	3.37	1.09	A
Involving students in games and sport activities	3.11	0.92	A	3.25	1.06	A
Moral instructions	3.14	0.93	A	3.42	0.96	A
Parents ensuring that students carry out home assignments	3.19	0.88	A	3.27	1.03	A
Employing the services of guidance counselors	3.25	0.69	A	3.17	1.16	A
Involving students in the making of decisions that affects them	2.94	0.92	A	2.73	1.17	A
Parents monitoring the kind of movies their children watch	2.97	0.99	A	3.06	1.21	A
Introduction of entrepreneurial education	2.81	1.16	A	3.23	1.17	A
Parents monitoring the kind of friends their children keep	3.08	1.07	A	3.15	1.22	A
Cluster mean	3.07	0.36	-	3.19	0.81	-

Table 4: The t-test analysis on the various crimes committed by secondary schools students

Groups	Mean	SD	Level of Sig.	df	t-cal	Sig.	Dec
Teachers	2.53	0.53	0.05	1738	0.271	0.787	NS
Students	2.52	0.80	-	-	-	-	-

Table 5: The t-test analysis on the reasons why secondary school students engage in crime

Groups	Mean	SD	Level of Sig.	df	t-cal	Sig.	Dec
Teachers	3.23	0.36	0.05	1738	0-0.850	0.398	NS
Students	3.31	0.31	-	-	-	-	-

- H_{01} : There is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of secondary school teachers and students on the various crimes committed by secondary schools students in Aba Education Zone of Abia State

Results in Table 4 indicate that the two groups do not significantly differ in their opinions on the various crimes committed by secondary school students. The calculated t-value of 0.271 is less than the significant t-table of 0.787 at 0.05 probability level. This shows that there is no significant difference in the mean rating of teachers and students on the crimes committed by students. The null hypothesis is therefore not rejected:

- H_{02} : There is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of secondary school teachers and students on the reasons why secondary school students engage in crime in Aba Education Zone of Abia State

The result on Table 5 shows that 0.850 is significant at 0.398 and, therefore, not significant at 0.05 probability level. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of the teachers and students on the reasons why secondary school students engage in crimes. Based on this, the null hypothesis is, therefore, not rejected.

- H_{03} : There is no significant difference between the mean opinion scores of secondary school teachers

Table 6: The t-test analysis on the practical strategies for combating crimes in secondary schools

Group	Mean	SD	Level of Sig.	df	t-cal	Sign table	Dec
Teachers	3.07	0.61	0.05	1738	-0.742	0.460	NS
Students	3.48	0.81	-	-	-	-	-

and students on practical strategies for combating crimes in secondary schools in Aba Education Zone of Abia State.

The result on Table 6 shows that 0.742 is significant at 0.460 and, therefore, not significant at 0.05 probability level. This indicates that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of the teachers and students on the practical strategies for combating crime rate among students in secondary schools. The null hypothesis is not rejected.

DISCUSSION

There is evidence that the secondary schools students in Aba Education Zone of Nigeria commit various crimes. The results of the findings indicate that the various crimes committed by secondary school students in Aba Education Zone include examination malpractice, stealing, drinking of alcohol, physical attacks, gambling, forging of results and abortion. This finding is consistent with Oleksy-Ojukwu (1987) who found that the crimes committed by secondary school students include stealing, cheating, withholding of reports and physical attacks. The youths in this study did not engage in the use of drugs, rape, shop-lifting, breaking into offices, destruction of school property and kidnapping. This finding is contrary to the observation of Igbo who enumerated drug abuse, prostitution, unlawful possession of dangerous weapons and pick-pocketing as youth related crimes prevalent in modern Nigerian secondary schools.

The findings further showed that, in the opinions of the teachers and the students, broken family, poverty, peer group influence, imitation of some adults in society, poor parental supervision, inadequate moral instructions, insatiable quest for material things and the type of movies

that students watch were some of the reasons why secondary school students engage in crimes. This finding is in consonance with Smith (2007) who noted that family breakdown, inadequate parenting, child abuses/maltreatment, family disruption, poor parental supervision, having teenage parents and unstable living condition were some of the reasons why students engage in crime. The case of high crime rate in the area could be attributed to the fact that Aba is a commercial city. Most of the parents leave their homes early in the morning for their businesses and return late in the evening. Since, most of the students go to school from their homes, they could take the advantage of the fact that their parents are in their business centers to roam about the street and also engage in certain crimes with their peers. At home, they could also spend quite a good time watching different movies without being censored by their parents.

The study also showed the practical strategies for combating crime among secondary school students in Aba Education Zone. The strategies include inculcating reading culture in the students, involving students in games and sports activities, teaching moral instructions, ensuring that students carry out home assignments, employing the services of guidance counselors, involving students in making decisions that affect them, provision of equipped library facilities, introduction of entrepreneurial education and maintaining positive relationship between teachers and students.

The hypotheses tested showed that there were no significant differences in the mean responses of the teachers and students on the various crimes students engage in the causes of the crimes as well as the practical strategies to combat these crimes. These strategies could be considered more appropriate by the teachers and the students since they involve practical things that will keep the minds of the students busy. This is unlike some stringent measures such as sentencing a student on a jail term for examination malpractice which the students may think is not feasible.

CONCLUSION

This study indicated that in Aba Education Zone, students commit certain crimes which include forging of results, stealing, examination malpractice, physical attack of other students, abortion and drinking of alcohol. The study further showed that the causes of crime among students vary. From the findings, some of these crimes result from the parents being away from home most of the time while the students are left to watch "wild" movies. The absence of parents also gives room to be influenced by their peers negatively. The study showed some

practical strategies for combating the crimes and these strategies include the provision of equipped library facilities, ensuring that students carry out home assignments, employing the services of guidance counselors, engaging them in sports activities, introduction of entrepreneurial education and positive relationship between teachers and students.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made: schools should keep the students busy by involving them in games and sports. Those who perform well should be given some incentives; reading culture should be emphasized both in the school and at home. Parents should encourage their children to study rather than allow them to spend quality time watching television programs. As much as possible, parents should spend more time with their children to enable them to supervise their activities. Parents should censor the kind of movies their children watch. More guidance counselors should be trained and posted to the schools. The counselors should discharge their responsibility diligently.

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