Exploring Factors Contributing for Juvenile Delinquency in the Correction Center: The Case of North Gondar Adult Correction Center

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Abstract

Juvenile delinquency is becoming an emerging and dramatically growing social problem globally that has received wide recognition in recent years. Studies in different countries have indicated that children come to contact with legal issues as delinquents due to various psychological and socioeconomic factors and which are not strange to Ethiopian context. Most of the existing studies in Ethiopia focused to assess nature of treatment and legal frameworks towards delinquent children. Thus, this study revealed contributing factors for children’s delinquent behavior in the study area. To explore such factors, then, qualitative research approach with case study research was employed. For the accomplishment of the study nine juvenile delinquents and three key informants were participated. The relevant data were collected through in-depth interview, key informant interview, and document reviews. The gathered data were transcribed, coded, categorized and themed into meaningful interpretations and analyzed thematically.

The findings of the study revealed that children engaged in delinquent activities due to the influence of their peers, unemployment, immaturity, and low attachment/intimacy to their significant others. Juveniles are influenced to engage in different criminal activity depending on their existing conditions. As juvenile delinquency is becoming more visible and spread out in today’s society, due emphasis has to be given to work against these precipitating factors.

Key Words: Juvenile Delinquency, Unemployment, Attachment, Inmates

Introduction

Juvenile delinquency is becoming an emerging global problem that has been identified as an important research area. Juvenile delinquency is a growing social problem that has received wide recognition in recent years (Muncie, 2004). According to Muncie (2004), the number of boys and girls brought to the attention of the juvenile courts or the police because of delinquent behavior have mounted sharply, and their offences are often of serious. Juvenile delinquents who go through the juvenile justice system are rehabilitated and created ways in which prevention and intervention programs can be tailored to at risk youth before becoming juvenile delinquents (Derbouze, 2008).

While reasoning out for children’s engagement into criminal acts, Sahmeh (2013), suggested that the causes of offences made by delinquents were due to peer pressure, ignorance of the parents, poor socio-economic status, and lack of proper socialization.

In countries, like Ethiopia, where children constitute more than half of the population organizing an efficient prevention and rehabilitation system aimed at the correction of children who involves in crime is crucial to build up a better generation, which is the future of the nation (Andargachew, 2004).

In investigating the treatment and the law practice of juvenile delinquency in Ethiopia, (Motti, 2008), revealed that under the Ethiopian law juvenile offences are governed by the ordinary criminal law for the purpose of determining criminal liability. In other study, Yodit (2015) focused on the Ethiopian criminal justice policy analysis and the finding suggested that the policy has not been properly implemented and evaluated and there are no preventive mechanisms for juvenile offenders.

As many of the reviewed literatures revealed, studies conducted in Ethiopia primarily focused to assess treatment conditions and legal practices of juvenile delinquency. Thus, to better devise effective treatment mechanisms and to put efficient policy decisions, understanding factors behind such criminal offences by minors has paramount importance.

Study Design
To primarily understand perceptions and views of participants in a natural context, qualitative research approach with case study method for descriptive purpose is employed. As Stated by Creswell (2007), multiple case study helps the inquirer to illustrate the issue and show different perspectives on the issues. Therefore, to show the multiple subjective experiences of juvenile delinquents in the adult correction, the researchers choose this research method. Qualitative data were collected from twelve purposively selected participants (nine juvenile delinquents, and three key informants) through in-depth interview and key informant interview. The data were collected through in-depth interview, key informant interview, and document reviews. The researchers used the assigned pseudo names and codes in order not to use their real name of in-depth interview participants and key informants respectively. The gathered data were transcribed, coded, categorized and themed into meaningful interpretations and analyzed thematically. Besides, secondary data were used to compare the findings of this research with the previous similar undertakings.

Results and Discussion

Table 1: Background of in-depth interview participant

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudo Name</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Duration of Stay in the Center</th>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>Family Situation</th>
<th>Types of Offences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abebe</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemma</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6 months</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Stabbing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adane</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>No family</td>
<td>Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desta</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>4 months</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Fighting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kebede</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3 years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Murder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haile</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8 months</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tariku</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7 months</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belete</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No family</td>
<td>Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mekonin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>3 months</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Theft</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Background of the Study Participants

As clearly illustrated in the table 1 above, the in-depth interview participants’ background is presented based on their gender, age, duration of stay in the correction center, educational level, family situation, and types of offences they committed. Besides, the background of key informants is presented in the table 2 below.

Table 2: Background of Key Informants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assigned Code</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Educational Background</th>
<th>Year of work Experience</th>
<th>Job</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KII-1</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Diploma in Management</td>
<td>26 years</td>
<td>Inspector</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KII-2</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Degree in psychology</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KII-3</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Diploma in TVET</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Correction Directive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Factors for Juvenile Delinquency

Under this section the contributing factors for juvenile delinquency is presented based on participants’ points of view. The finding revealed that there are different contributing factors for juvenile delinquency. Since there is no single factor for delinquent behavior, there are different reasons that are revealed by participants for their delinquent acts. The main factors/reasons behind commission of criminal activities by juveniles are identified as peer pressure, low parent-children
attachment/intimacy and lack of family supervision, juvenile unemployment, and immaturity of the juveniles.

**Peer Pressure**

The influence of peers was found to be one of the factors that lead juveniles to delinquent acts. The data gained from in depth interview and key informant interview confirmed that Juveniles involved in delinquent acts due to their peer pressure. To support this, Haile stated how he gets involved in criminal acts as follows:

After I came here in Gondar, I have got a friend and we were living together by selling gums; but one day he told me to break a shop and steal money, after we did as he said and get in to the shop the police arrested my friend. Then, he exposed me as I was with him and both of us get jailed. My friend at the first place raised the idea and I was get involved in theft.

Based on Haile’s response, it is understandable that he gets involved in delinquent acts because of his friend’ idea and he was convinced by his friend and considered theft as a possible way to get money. The argument of another in-depth interviewee, Belete, is not different regarding the strong role of peers in teaching criminal behaviors and presented as follows:

My mother died when I was child and I grew up with my stepmother. My father went to military after he got married with my stepmother, as my father left, I couldn’t live in peace and harmony with my stepmother and forced to leave the home. Even when I was with my father, I do not have agreement or tranquility with him, because I didn’t want to attend my education and this is because of my friend. We dropout from school and start cheating, since I am not comfortable at home, I prefer this way of life style and I choose to be with my friend. Even after I am detained here no one come to visit me.

As it is explained in the above, Belete didn’t want to attend his education or schooling because of his friend and started cheating while he was with his father and this creates disagreements between him and his father. This indicates that juveniles may involve in criminal acts while they are with their families by the influence of friends. Sometimes the influence of peers is strong enough that delinquents resist their family’s advice and supervision rather they are inclined to be convinced by their peers to get involved into criminal activities. In fact, the way family members treat and respect each other and the nature of familial bond determine peer pressures influence. Thus, Belete lacked such strong bond and treatment from his family members and easily exposed to accept his friend’s advice which leads him to the wrong way. The in-depth interviewee, kebede's explanation, of course, with sight difference, also supported the significant role of peers in forcing juveniles in to delinquent acts. Kebede explained how he gets involved in delinquent act as follows:

I spent much of the time with my cousin, though I live with my parents. Unfortunately, one day while I was with my cousin, we get my cousin’s enemy alone and my cousin insisted me to attack the enemy. Initially, I wasn’t to assist him but when I get them fighting, I supported my cousin and the enemy get killed. Then, we were cuffed and sent to the police station that we convicted/sentenced and came to the correction with my cousin though he was released by warrant/security and the whole criminal act is put on me. Since then, I was here for the last three years and I didn’t exactly know how long I may stay here.

This indicates that for the juvenile’s involvement in delinquent acts, intimate family members or relative’s insistence to fight and expecting company during fighting leads to unfortunate commit of criminal acts. Because, intimates initiate fight for deliberate reasons and this invites others around to get involved in such acts and ultimately ended up with being juvenile delinquent. On this point, one of the key informant interviewees, KII-1 supported and described as follows:

Juveniles are easily vulnerable for being involved into criminal acts. This means that juveniles get the chance to learn and immediately imitate criminal behaviors and skills from their members of family or friends with bad behavior and a criminal history in the community. Therefore, there would be a high probability to be involved in criminal acts for juveniles.

The findings with this regard showed that the social interaction and the nature of social environment and neighborhood/community situation exposes juveniles to get access to criminal
behaviors and facilitate them get involved into the criminal activities. Juveniles’ easily learning and imitating skills from peers of criminal history would play and additive role for their fast and straightforwardly exposure to these acts. Even though, peer pressure is one of the reasons for juvenile delinquency the other possible factors would be lack of intimacy or attachment among parents and children. The subsequent paragraphs describe details as how lack of or poor degree of intimacy among parents and children resulted in the development of children’s criminal behavior.

Low Parent-Children Attachment or Intimacy

The finding indicated that lack of close attachment or interaction among parents and children/juveniles are the contributing factor for juveniles’ delinquent behavior. Participants of in-depth interview revealed the distant attachment with their parents has great contribution for their current behavior. The in-depth interviewee, Haile’s description strongly supports this argument and presented as follows:

The relationship I had with my family was far/distant and this was because my father and I were always in quarrel. He used to say to me that I do not want to see you anymore and do not come to my house, and then I am forced to leave home. Even if I stayed with my father, we could not live in peace, we do not have good relationship from the very beginning. Since the time I left home, I did not see my family and I do not have any information at all.

This shows that, the nature of family’s attachment and supervision have significant contribution for juveniles’ or children’s behavior. The way family members treat and socialize those matters a lot in children’s behavioral development and future dream. When significant family members pushed the children away or family members are reluctant to solve the disagreements between parents and their children, children choose to escape from home and incline to be with their peers/friends who have delinquent behavior. With regard to this, key informants also suggested that the relationship among parents and children have significant impact for juvenile’s involvement in delinquent activities. Disagreements in the family allow juveniles to leave their family and home environment and let them live with friends having different criminal behavior or criminal history. For instances, the key informant interviewee (KII-1) revealed that:

Juveniles involve in criminal act if there is no close interaction between children and parents, and if parents are not watching out where and with whom their children spend their time, pave the way for juveniles to develop delinquent behavior and engage in different illegal activities.

This implies that, parent-children relationship is basic for familial sustainability and stability; if the intimacy in the family is weak, there would be instability and less control and supervision of their children. In this case, the distant relationship among children and parents are one of the contributing factors for juvenile’s involvement in delinquent acts. Similarly, the key informant participant (KII-3) supported the above concerning concepts as follows:

The causes for juvenile delinquency are absence of family supervision, if family doesn’t follow up their children, friends with whom their children hangout and places that children spend time create a high probability for the development of juvenile delinquency among their children. The other thing is that the distant family-child attachment and interaction also has its own impact on the juvenile’s way of behaving.

As it is pointed out child parent attachment and family supervision have paramount importance for the determining children’s way of behaving and nature of relationship that exist among them. Thus, children with low attachment or distant interaction/relationship have probability of attaching themselves with peers who invite them to the undesirable behaviors and develop deviant manners which ultimately lead them commission of crime. When care, support and supervision are lesson, or non-existent, children losses significant figure and model of their life, and thus, their dreams will be hijacked and end up with delinquency.

Lack of source of income

Juvenile unemployment especially whose age ranges between 14 and 15 is an emerging reason that paved the way for juveniles to engage in illegal activities. Participants of in-depth interview and
key informants revealed that juveniles’ unemployment has significant contributions for juveniles’ engagement in criminal or delinquent acts. Adane, one of the in-depth interviewees revealed that:

I came here with my friend because we stole someone’s phone. We stole the phone because the man who was with us left the phone in the Bajaj we are in and we agreed to take it. I do not know how the man reported but finally we are cuffed by police and came here being sentenced one year and four months. The reason we took the phone was mainly because I do not have family and job. I thought that if I took the phone, it may cover my food and sleeping stuffs but it failed and I was captured by police and came here for detention.

As it is revealed in the interview, children get involved in to criminal activities when they didn’t have other sources of income to win their daily bread. Similarly, Belete, the other in-depth interviewee explained how his unemployment exposed him to the delinquent act and describe in this way:

Even if my friend made me this way, I have no chance than doing the same thing because I do not have food, cloth, and shelter or jobs to lead my life. In order to get those things, I have to have money and to have money I am forced to steal, that is why I am labelled as delinquent. Since I don’t have sources of income, I thought I have to do what I have done.

This implies that, juveniles’ unemployment and lack of sources of income, facilitates ways to be delinquent or involve in delinquent acts. Some of them perceived the delinquent acts as an option to get money and afford what is necessary for their livelihood and this is the possible cause for juveniles’ engagement in criminal activity. To support this concept the key informant interview participant (KII-3) suggested on the cause of unemployment for juvenile delinquency in this way:

The other causes for juvenile delinquency are related with lack of job opportunities or unemployment, juveniles those between the age of 14 and 15 involves in criminal activity because of they do not have anything to do or anything that enable them generate income. The other thing there may be similarity between boys and girls causes for delinquent acts, it is to mean delinquent acts committed by boys also performed by girls; like cheating, beating/fighting, stabbing, and murder they came here by sentencing as offender of the listed crimes and we can say it has similarity.

Additionally, the finding obtained from key informant participant (KII-3) indicates that lack of job opportunities or unemployment is a significant contributory factor for juvenile’s delinquent behavior. The participant tried to show the similarity of causes among females and boys’ juvenile delinquency. Females’ juveniles also involve in criminal acts due lacking of job opportunities or unemployment. Even though, lack of job opportunities or unemployment is among the causes for juvenile delinquency, juveniles’ immaturity also suggested as a predictive factor for juvenile delinquency.

**Juveniles Immaturity**

The data gained from participants indicates that juvenile’s immaturity as one of the predictive factors for juvenile delinquency. All key informant interview participants (KII-1, -2 & -3) described juvenile immaturity as significant factors for juvenile delinquency and as it is what they are experienced. According to key informant interview participants, juveniles’ immaturity, or lack of awareness about the seriousness or simplicity of the crime or consequence of committing delinquent act, allow them to engage in delinquent activities. KII-2 revealed that:

In addition to lack of family supervision and peer influence, juveniles’ immaturity or lack of awareness is one of the major causes for their delinquent behavior. We were conducted a kind of action research in guidance and counseling department last year and we found that the causes for majority of juvenile delinquents between the age of 15-20 were peer influence. Some of them came here because of their aggressiveness or behavioral problem and those under the age of 14 are due to lack of awareness or their immaturity. Most of adults commit crime intentionally; it means they think about the act before they are doing it. But juveniles are not like that of adults, they commit crime by peer influences or unintentionally.

Similarly, KII-1 supports the concerns raised by KII-2 and she described as;
Juveniles involve in delinquent acts or in crime because of their immaturity and lack of awareness about the simplicity (misdemeanor), seriousness (felony) and the consequence of delinquent acts.

This shows that, juveniles’ maturity determines the level of juvenile involvement in crime or delinquent acts. It is raised as a significant factor that leads juveniles to commit crime. In addition to the above listed participants, concern KII-3 also suggested that;

The other thing there may be similarity between boys’ and girls’ causes for delinquent acts, it is to mean delinquent acts committed by boys also committed by girls, like cheating, beating, stabbing, and murder they came here by convicting as offender of the listed crimes. However, this all is due to lack of family supervision and juveniles’ immaturity.

This implies that, in every delinquent act boy and girl juveniles involves due to their immaturity or lack of awareness. Besides other significant contributory reasons for juvenile delinquency, juvenile immaturity is one of the predictive factors for those under the age of 14. Generally, as the data gained from in-depth and key informant interview suggests that, the causes for juvenile delinquency were peer pressure; lack of attachment or intimacy between parents and children and lack of family supervision, juvenile unemployment, and immaturity are the possible causes that pave ways for juveniles to engage in criminal acts.

Discussion

The finding revealed that there are different contributing factors for juvenile delinquency and peer pressure is among the predictive factors for juvenile involvement in delinquent acts. Juveniles are influenced to engage in different criminal activity depending on their existed conditions. In line with this, Sisay (2016), Betelhem (2014) and Motti (2008) mostly discussed the causes for juvenile delinquencies are peer influences and broken families are possible factors that contribute for juvenile criminal behavior. This indicates that, family dysfunctional facilitates juveniles to be exposed for a delinquent act by their peer influences and participants family situation shows its linkage with juveniles’ delinquent behavior.

Unemployment is revealed in the study as the other cause for juvenile delinquency. The data indicated that juveniles between the ages of 14-15 are engaged in delinquent acts due to their unemployment. This is associated with their economic situation, which results status differences among juveniles. In relation to this concepts Bimal (2013), stated that the socio-economic instability is often linked to persistent unemployment and low incomes among the young, which can increase the likelihood of their involvement in criminal activity. In addition, Patrick (1998) suggested that the observable causes for juvenile delinquency in Africa are rapid urbanization in the new states, instability within family structure, lack of employment and educational opportunities, lack of parental control, and individual maladjustment. On the other hand, juveniles are exposed to delinquency because of their low attachment or intimacy with their parents/care giver. Children relationship with their parents/caregivers determines their level of involvement in criminal acts. The finding shows that the distant interaction or intimacy between parents and their children is among the causes that contribute for juvenile delinquency. Consistent with this finding Selamawit (2014) and Flore (2003), revealed that the causes of child delinquents are differ from older juveniles and the possible risk factors are poor parent-child relationships or insecure attachment among families and family dysfunction are also thought to play an influential role in the initiation and maintenance of criminal behavior. The study finding revealed that juvenile immaturity is among the major predictive factors for juvenile delinquency. It implies that the immaturity of children needs family supervision, unless it may pave ways for them to develop criminal behavior. Lack of family supervision is majorly stated as other contributory factors for juvenile delinquency in relation with juvenile immaturity.

Implications

As juvenile delinquency is becoming more visible and spread out in today’s society, due emphasis has to be given to work against these precipitating factors. Thus, future researchers have to carry out intensive study to have clear and broader image of the juvenile delinquency and realize
primarily leading factors for the development of criminal intent among minors. Besides, social workers have to play different roles and creating conducive environment for children in their micro, mezzo and macro level practice settings by developing suitable models of intervention. The study also has an implication for policy formulators to articulate policies or legal frameworks that assist low-income families and children living in impoverished environment.

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