

A Survey of the Inmates of a Remand Home in Ibadan

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Summary

Odejide, A. O. and Toyé, S. A. (1976). *Nigerian Journal of Paediatrics*, 3 (2), 52. **A Survey of the Inmates of a Remand Home in Ibadan.** A Survey of the Ibadan Remand Home was carried out with a view to finding out the prevalent offences among the inmates, the possible socio-medical factors for their deviant behaviour, and the feelings of the offenders about the Remand Home. The common offences were petty stealing, truancy, and wandering. Assault or physical aggression was rare. It was considered necessary to separate the maladjusted children with purely 'neurotic' symptoms from the delinquents who committed criminal offences. Some of the factors found to be associated with juvenile delinquency among the group studied were family instability, divorce or separation of the parents, children living with distant relations, poor educational record and epilepsy.

THE laws of Nigeria (1948, Chapter 31) define a juvenile delinquent as a child or young person who has violated the 'children and young persons law' or the criminal code. Offenders according to this law, are classified as (a) Juvenile offenders against the criminal code, e.g., burglars, highway robbers, rapists, and murderers (b) children in need of care and protection, e.g., vagrants and truants, and (c) children beyond parental control.

Apart from the legal aspects, the literature on delinquency in Nigeria is sparse, despite an observed upsurge in its prevalence (Lambo 1965). Oloruntimehin (1970), in her controlled study, focussed on the family structure to explain some of the aetiological factors of delinquency. Her subjects were convicted delinquents in the approved schools in Lagos and she found significant relationships between delinquency and family instability. The study, however, did not show the frequency of offences committed by

the delinquents or the constitutional factors that could have contributed to their delinquent acts. Furthermore, the intended therapeutic effects of the approved schools on the offenders were not evaluated. These deficiencies in our knowledge of delinquency among Nigerian children prompted the present study, the aims of which were:

- (a) To ascertain the types of offences among the delinquents in a Remand Home;
- (b) To ascertain the physical health status as well as social factors contributing to their delinquent acts; and
- (c) To assess the inmates' views of the value of the Remand Home as a place of getting help.

Materials and Methods

Ibadan Remand Home was selected for convenience. Unlike an approved school that

caters for delinquents under the corrective orders, a Remand Home is usually a transitional home. Any child apprehended for an offence is temporarily lodged in a Remand Home pending social, medical and legal investigations and eventual disposal. Children awaiting repatriation to their nuclear families also use the Remand Home as a transitional home. Occasionally, young persons (ages 15-17) considered unsuitable for corrective training in approved schools are also detained in a Remand Home.

1. *Formal Interview Schedule*

Each child was interviewed in a private room using an Interview Schedule. Items on the proforma were subdivided into four categories, namely:

- (a) Personal data containing mainly demographic information and evidence of socio-cultural disintegration.
- (b) Case-history including source of referral and reasons for referral.
- (c) Medical history of childhood illnesses in the delinquents as well as in other siblings.
- (d) Family background including the socio-economic status, family size and pattern, religious affiliation and intrafamilial relationships.

Definitions of socio-cultural disintegration, family pattern and intrafamilial relationships were adapted from Lambo's (1967) study of adolescents transplanted from their traditional environment.

2. *Clinical Evaluation*

Each child was clinically examined. Clinical diagnoses were made on the basis of the history and clinical impressions.

3. *Documentary Sources*

The records (including the social workers' report on the family background), kept by the Remand Home in respect of each offender were examined, and relevant information extracted

from them. These documents proved valuable in cross-checking the reliability of the answers of offenders because in many cases the offenders came from nine different states of the Federation, and it was impossible to interview their parents.

4. *Informal interview of the Warden*

The Warden of the institution was interviewed informally to collect information on the categories of offenders in his care, the nature of work given to the offenders and the organizational set-up of the institution. The opportunity was also taken to watch the offenders while executing their daily rounds of activities such as eating, working, playing and attending the dispensary.

Results

The following categories of offenders were identified in the Ibadan Remand Home.

- (a) Offenders waiting for social and legal investigations and the eventual disposal of their cases;
- (b) Offenders awaiting repatriation to their family units; and
- (c) Offenders who by virtue of their ages (15-17 years) were considered unsuitable for corrective training in Approved Schools.

There were 49 boys and 15 girls categorised by the Warden of the institution on the first day of interview as follows: awaiting trial or investigation 18, awaiting repatriation 5, remanded 40 and referred case 1.

The ages of the offenders ranged from 6 to 17 years (mean age, 12.7). In general, the male offenders were older than the female ones; the mean age for males being 13.9 years, while the mean age for females was 11.4 years.

Table I shows the occupation of the delinquents at the time they committed their offences. 75 per cent of the offenders were either in school or working. It was found that out of the 49 offenders that went to school, 90 per cent voluntarily gave up schooling before getting to the

final year in the primary school. Some of the reasons given for withdrawing from school were lack of funds, poor educational performance, lack of interest in education and the desire to learn a skilled job such as motor driving. 38 (77.6 per cent) of the males and 11 (73.31 per cent) of the females went to school.

TABLE I

OCCUPATION OF THE DELINQUENTS

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percent of Total</i>
No job	16	25.0
Schooling	19	29.7
Non-skilled jobs	14	21.9
Apprentice in skilled jobs	12	18.7
Farming	3	4.7
<i>Total</i>	64	100.0

Thirty-four of the children were referred to the Home because of stealing; 22 were declared to be in need of care and protection by the law enforcing agents; five were beyond parental control, and one was committed for manslaughter. It was in only 2 out of the 34 cases of stealing that breaking into a house was involved while the other form of stealing was larceny. The one case of manslaughter occurred accidentally in the course of fighting. The children declared as being in need of care and protection were those found wandering or gambling. Ten of the sixty-four offenders had previous criminal records. Sexual offences were not reported in any of the cases. In a few cases, there was combination of offences like wandering and stealing. Among the 15 girls, 6 were apprehended for pilfering, 7 for wandering behaviour while 2 combined wandering with stealing.

Table II shows the ordinal position of the offenders in the family. 90.7 per cent of the offenders ranked 1st to 4th in their family units (nuclear or polygamous families). Almost half (46.88 per cent) of the cohort came from families having 1 to 5 children.

At the time of arrest, only 5 (7.81 per cent) of the respondents were living with both parents while 36 (56.25 per cent) were living with relatives. Table III shows that apparently healthy family atmosphere existed in only 31.25 per cent of the cases.

41 (64 per cent) of the offenders were diagnosed as having conduct disorders. These behavioural disorders took the form of stealing, assault, murder and uncontrollable aggressiveness. 22 cases (34 per cent) were diagnosed as neurotic behaviour disorder. Their maladjusted behaviour took the form of wandering away from home, pilfering and having discontinuous type of enuresis. These were the children classified legally as those in need of care and protection. At the time of the study, bedwetting was still present in 34 (53 per cent) of the cases. The only case of temporal lobe epilepsy was apprehended for truancy and wandering. Scabies and tinea infections were common in the population. History of hospitalization in childhood was obtained in only five of the sixty-four cases. None of the inmates had clinical neurological deficit.

59 of the 64 inmates expressed unhappiness and dislike for staying in the Remand Home. Some of the reasons given were the desire to be reunited with their parents, lack of opportunity to learn a trade, the desire to go back to school, the relative absence of freedom, and hard manual labour in the Remand Home. They all considered living in a Remand Home as a punitive measure.

TABLE II

Sex	ORDINAL POSITION IN THE FAMILY												Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	
Males	19	12	8	6	1	-	2	-	-	-	-	1	49
Females	7	2	3	-	1	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	15
Total	26	14	11	6	2	1	3	-	-	-	-	-	64
% of total Population	40.6	21.9	17.2	9.4	3.1	1.6	4.7	-	-	-	-	1.5	100

TABLE III

Sex	FAMILY SITUATION					Total
	Parents lived together happily	Parents lived together but quarrelled frequently	Divorced	Separated		
Male	14	5	22	8	49	
Female	6	2	4	4	15	
Total	20	7	25	12	64	
% of total Population	31.3	10.9	39.1	18.7	100	

Discussion

The preponderance of males among the offenders in this study is in conformity with the earlier observations in Nigeria (Asuni, 1963 and Oloruntimehin, 1970) and also in the Western world (Slater and Roth, 1969; Glueck, 1950). However, the relatively young age of the females as compared with those of males in the present series is very striking. One possible explanation could be the known sociological fact that girls mature earlier than boys.

As Asuni (1963) remarked, delinquency and maladjustment are both artificial nomenclatures. However, Rubin (1961) saw the need to distinguish the two terminologies. He defined delinquency as "what the law says it is" while he defined maladjustment as a term for "pupils who show evidence of emotional instability and psychological disturbance and require special educational treatment in order to effect their personal, social or educational readjustment".

The prevalent offences committed by the respondents in the study raised the question of whether all the offenders can be called delinquents or that they should be split into groups of maladjusted and delinquents. The common offences among the cohort were stealing, truancy and wandering. Pilfering was the commonest form of stealing and in the two cases of house-breaking, the children were used by adults. Offences against the person were rare.

It would appear that children declared as being in need of care and protection constitute a different group from those who committed criminal acts. Offences committed by juveniles in need of care or protection usually involve wandering with no visible means of livelihood, begging or receiving alms, and being exposed to moral danger. These offences do not seem to be in direct conflict with the society. It will therefore seem only fair that children apprehended for such offences should not be labelled or

treated as delinquents. A controlled study with a larger population of 'juvenile' offenders is indicated to refute or support this observed dichotomy. Oloruntimehin (1970) expressed a similar viewpoint when she commented that 'delinquency' as used in Nigerian Law goes beyond any legal definition of criminality. Also, Asuni (1963), in his "Preliminary Study of Juvenile Delinquency in Western Nigeria" talked of "active delinquent behaviour" from which he excluded wandering and being in need of care and protection.

In agreement with Asuni (1963), many features (social and psychological) were found to occur frequently among children grouped as delinquents as well as in those classified as maladjusted. Some of the factors that we found, were family instability depicted by parental divorce, separation and death, poor parent-child relationship, and low education of the delinquents. These findings agree with the observations of Asuni (1963), Lambo (1965), Cowie and Slater (1968) and Oloruntimehin (1970). Significantly enough, we found that the earlier rather than the latter members of sibships had the greatest predisposition to deviant acts. This could be due to the tendency of the elder children to slip out of control (Cowie and Slater 1968; Oloruntimehin 1970).

Pathological processes should also be considered along with social and psychological factors in the genesis of deviant behaviour. One case in the study, apprehended for wandering and aggressiveness turned out to be a case of temporal lobe epilepsy. Clinically, no obvious brain-damaged case was found but there were probably cases of minimal brain dysfunction that could have been identified if they were all subjected to electroencephalographic investigation. Overt evidence of scabies and tinea infections found among the population call for improved hygienic environment for the inmates and a regular visitation by a doctor. It is pertinent also to mention the need of a psychiatrist and/or a clinical psychologist for medical opinion after the apprehension and release of the offenders.

Almost all the inmates expressed their dislike for the institution. Their reasons varied from the desire to learn a job, desire to be reunited with their parents, relative absence of freedom, to the institution being considered a prison. These views would suggest that early disposal of offenders and an infrastructural reorganization of the institution to give it a better outlook are indicated.

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