

An Investigation of the Contributing Factors to Adolescent Deviant Behaviours in Rural Community Day Secondary Schools with Respect to the Social and Environmental Aspects

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Abstract

Cases of deviant behaviours among adolescents are rampant. The question that arises is as to what actually perpetuates deviance among adolescents. The study employed both qualitative and quantitative approaches in designs and it was conducted in the Central region of Malawi in Dowa district. Data was collected using questionnaires and oral interviews, and it was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. It was established that parenting techniques, peer group influence and school environment could contribute to adolescent deviant behaviours and that through counselling, discipline could be installed in schools. It was reported that adolescents were involved in deviant acts for the sake of conformity because they see their friends doing the same. Adolescents behave antisocially to be accepted and for association. At school adolescents get affected in one way or the other as they are socialised either positively or negatively by their fellow students and teachers. Counselling is identified as the proper and effective way of minimising delinquency among school going adolescents. Parents should provide parental care to their children. Schools should be located in conducive environments and students and teachers must observe social distance between them.

Keywords: Deviance; Affiliation; Reciprocal interaction; Ecological system; Social control

Introduction

Secondary school children are within the period of growth known as adolescence, a period which falls in between childhood and adulthood [1]. Adolescence is a time in which individuals experience physical and cognitive changes and they start making decisions [2]. The growing demands on decision-making have implications for the engagement in perilous behaviours. Adolescence has been described as a time of storm and stress to exemplify that it is a principally knotty period for the adolescents as well as for those around them. The storm and stress adolescent syndrome according to Hall [3] is characterised among others by mood disruptions, conflict with parents and risk taking behaviours. Arnett [3] also observes that adolescents have advanced rates of reckless, norm breaking, and antisocial manners than either children or adults. Participation in deviant behaviours can result to rigorous consequences. Therefore, it is indispensable to comprehend what contributes to and what potentially mediates the decisions to participate in deviant behaviours. Some theorists have presented models to explicate the social and environmental factors that contribute to the development of deviant behaviour. These theories furnish a conceptual construction for a better understanding of how social and environmental aspects contribute to adolescent deviant behaviour. The question that arises is as to what actually perpetuates deviance among adolescents. Is it a question of parenting techniques? Peer group influence? Or school influence? This study therefore sought to establish social and environmental aspects that impact on adolescent behaviours. In this case, social and environmental aspects such as family, peers and school were examined in rural Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS) in the Central region of Malawi.

Theoretical Perspective

Social learning theory

Social learning theory stresses on exposure to role models' behaviour. According to this theory, behaviours are learned through the observation of others engaged in a particular behaviour and the subsequent modelling of that observed behaviour [4]. Role models help in shaping the adolescent's self-efficacy in one's ability to do something or to learn something new. Seeing others, especially if they are similar to oneself, perform and succeed increases the observer's confidence in trying the task. For example, when an adolescent observes his peers purchase and inhale cigarettes it provides him or her with the necessary knowledge and skills to obtain and use tobacco [5]. Affiliation with deviant peers is associated with growth in delinquent behaviour [6]. Exposure to deviant peers has been linked to increases in a wide range of delinquent behaviours including drug use [7]. Social learning theory posits that learning is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context and can occur purely through observation, imitation or direct instruction, even in the absence of motor reproduction or direct reinforcement [4]. Bandura and Walters [8] argue that learning is not purely behavioural rather it is a cognitive process that takes place in a social context. Learning can occur by observing behaviour and by observing the consequences of the behaviour, thus, the notion of vicarious reinforcement. Social learning theory also elucidates the notion of reciprocal determinism that is; cognition, environment, and behaviour all mutually influence each other. This concept states that just as an individual's behaviour is influenced by the environment, the environment is also influenced by the individual's behaviour. In other words, a person's behaviour, environment, and personal qualities all reciprocally influence each other.

Theory of the ecology of human development

Ecology of Human Development model focuses on the settings within which the development occurs and the interactions of the individual within and across those settings [9]. The model integrates the various components that contribute to development, including the individual, the environment, and the dynamics of interactions that affect the individual within the environment [9]. Bronfenbrenner [10] came up with two propositions to emphasize the role of environment on human development. His first proposition states that in its early phase and largely throughout the life course, human development takes place through the processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interaction between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the persons, objects and symbols in its immediate environment. The second proposition states that the form, power, content and direction of the proximal processes effecting the development vary systematically as a joint function of characteristics of the developing person, the environment (both immediate and more remote) in which the processes are taking place, and the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration. It is argued that in order to understand human development one must consider the entire ecological system in which growth occurs [10]. Such systems include Microsystem, Macrosystem, Mesosystem, Exosystem and Chronosystem. These socially organised subsystems help, support and guide human growth.

Social control theory

Social control theory, developed by Hirschi [11], is a type of functionalist theory that suggests that deviance has the opportunity to manifest when the bond between an individual and society is weakened. Hirschi [11] assumes that the individual performing the delinquent act is "relatively free of the intimate attachments, the aspirations, and the moral beliefs that bind most people to a life within the law" [12]. Furthermore, it assumes that the potential for delinquency is present in every individual and those who do not commit delinquent acts were somehow prevented from doing so. Given this, it is therefore presented that an individual's decision to refrain from the participation in delinquent behaviour has been substantiated by training and is maintained by an individual's connection to other people such as peers, family members and institutions such as schools [11]. Nye [13] presupposes that all humans are born with the same tendencies towards deviance. However, only a few go against social norms due to social controls such as internal control, indirect control, direct control and legitimate need satisfaction emanating from the family environment. Nye [13] contends that variations in the strengths of these various controls result in variations in conduct ranging from conformity to deviance. Strong controls overcome people's baser instincts and produce obedience to social regulations. Weak controls, in contrast, permit innate animal impulses to surface and to be more freely expressed as deviance.

Differential association theory

It is a learning theory that focuses on the processes by which individuals come to commit deviant or criminal acts. According to the theory, created by Sutherland [14], criminal behaviour is learned through interactions with other people. Through this interaction and communication, people learn the values, attitudes, techniques, and motives for criminal behaviour. The differential association theory emphasizes the interaction people have with their peers and others in their environment. Those who associate with delinquents, deviants, or

criminals learn to value deviance. The greater the frequency, duration, and intensity of their immersion in deviant environments, the more likely it is that they will become deviant. This theory really focuses on how people become criminals, not why they become criminals. According to Sutherland [14], deviance is less a personal choice and more a result of differential socialization processes.

Research Setting

The study was conducted in the Central region of Malawi particularly in Dowa district. The targeted schools were Chibanzi, Tchawale and Golong'ozu Community Day Secondary Schools. The rationale for selection of the above schools was that they are typical rural Community Day Secondary Schools and suitable for the topic of study. Community Day secondary schools in Malawi and more so in rural settings are typified by deviance and delinquency among adolescents. Again, the above selected schools were easily accessible and close to one another, hence it was easy for the researcher to carry out the study.

Research Methodology

The study mainly employed both qualitative and quantitative research approaches in design, sampling, instrumentation and analysis. The two approaches were triangulated not only for purposes of corroboration but also to enhance and offset weaknesses of either approach used singlehandedly. The population for the study included teachers, students and parents. The study involved 90 students from three rural Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS) (30 students from each school) and five teachers from each school where data was collected. It also involved ten parents from the surrounding communities of schools. Students were sampled utilizing simple random sampling, hence probabilistic and deductive while teachers and parents were sampled utilizing purposive and snowball sampling respectively. Purposive and snowball sampling are non-probabilistic approaches hence inductive and inclining themselves towards the qualitative research approach. The study concentrated on senior secondary school students (Forms 3-4) for valid and reliable responses because it was assumed that students in such classes are mature enough to give the required information and many of them were perceived to be really at an adolescent stage. The study included experienced teachers preferably those who had a minimum of 3-years' experience. Parents were not spared as the primary socializing agents of children and they were believed to have necessary information regarding the actual causes of deviant behaviours among adolescents. Therefore, ten parents were interviewed from the surrounding communities. Data was collected by using self-administered open and closed questionnaires as a guide, and were distributed among teachers and students. Close ended questions were used for easy quantification and analysis of the collected data. Again, open-ended questions were useful because of their flexibility and respondents were given an opportunity to explain their responses. Self-administered questionnaires were used to allow a large number of respondents to be included in the sample and complete the process of data collection for a short period. For easy identification of subjects to be involved, questions were administered during school time. The researcher administered the questionnaires himself in all schools in order for clarification and interpretation of questions that were not clearly understood by the participants. With regard to the parents, oral interviews were employed as some were considered not able to read and write, and it was assumed difficult for them to understand the

questions. The study findings were analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively. Quantitative data analysis involved applying excel to compute frequencies and percentages as well as graphic representations of data such as pie charts, bar graphs and tables. Qualitative data on the other hand was analysed thematically with the recorded interviews being transcribed, coded and categorised into themes for interpretation.

Results and Discussion

The parenting techniques

The study has unravelled that adolescents nurtured by a single parent are more prone to deviant behaviour than those who have both parents. In relation to the data collected, Out of 84 students, 46 were of the view that adolescents who come from single parent families are prone to deviant behaviours. This represents 55 percent of the students involved in the study. However, 31 students, representing 37 percent, were of the view that adolescents who are nurtured by both parents are mostly deviance. Seven students, representing 8 percent, were not sure as to who are more prone to deviant acts between adolescents who come from single families and those who come from both families with both parents. Again out of 15 teachers, 11 teachers representing 73 percent were of the view that adolescents who come from single parent families are prone to deviant acts. However, 3 teachers representing 20 percent had the contrary view as they said adolescents who were prone to deviant behaviours were those who were nurtured by both parents. Only 1 of the 15 teachers which represents 7 percent was not sure as to who are more prone adolescents to deviant behaviours between those from single parent families and those with both parents. It is also important to note that out of 10 parents who were involved in the study 6 of them agreed that the more prone adolescents to antisocial behaviours are those who are looked after by a single parent than those nurtured by both parents. This represents 60 percent of the number of parents who participated in the study. On the other hand, 2 parents representing 40 percent pointed out that the more prone adolescents to antisocial behaviours are those who are looked after by both parents than those nurtured by single parents.

As noted in the foregoing it can therefore be summarised that the more prone adolescents to deviant acts are those nurtured by single parent families. This is in agreement with the Social Control Theory which assumes that two parents are better able to provide affection and supervision to their children than a single parent [15]. Dornbusch's study in 1985 verifies the social control theory's assumption by drawing the conclusion that two or more adults parenting, always result in greater social control [16]. This study shows that the more parenting a child receives; social bonds to the parents will strengthen, thereby decreasing deviant tendencies. This means that single parenting weakens social control hence increasing deviant tendencies. It was reported that the situation becomes worse when an adolescent is being raised by a female parent. It should be pointed out that Ecology of Human Development model focuses on the settings within which development occurs and the interactions of the individual within and across those settings [17]. This implies that the family as one of the components of socialization has the greater role in moulding the child to proper and acceptable behaviour. Therefore, single parenting means lack of proper direction and control of a child hence the child can easily deviate. It was indicated that the family as the first socializing agent has the potential and is responsible for adolescent behaviours and single parenting means inadequate social control towards

adolescent development and more likely culminates in deviant behaviour.

It was highlighted that adolescents from single parent families always deviate because they lack adequate support from their parents. Out of 109 participants 36 representing 33 percent, reported that lack of support from parents is one of the reasons why single parent adolescents are prone to deviance. It was suggested that many single parents find it difficult to support their children with all needs. As a result, children find their own ways of getting what they are lacking. For instance, children are involved in stealing other children's belongings at school because they are not provided for by their parents. Wills et al. [18] found parental support to be a protective factor for substance use arguing that support from parents is the glue that bonds adolescents to mainstream institutions and builds self-control. Windle [19] also showed that low perceived family support was inversely related to depression and delinquency in adolescents. As pointed out by Barnes [20] parental support is very essential for proper and prosocial behaviours of children. It was also reported that children raised by single parent families lack control from their parents. 33 participants out of 109 which represents 30 percent reported that adolescents who come from single parent homes are not fully controlled by their parents. Consequently, such adolescents are involved in all kinds of deviant acts such as smoking. This means that such children feel not prohibited from doing such antisocial acts. This is in line with Hirschi's theory which assumes that the individual performing the delinquent act is comparatively free of the intimate attachments, the aspirations, and the ethical beliefs that truss most people to a life within the law [12]. Suffice to say, Hirschi's theory postulates that the potential for delinquency is present in every individual and those who do not commit delinquent acts were somehow vetoed from doing so. Therefore, since they are not fully controlled, adolescents nurtured by single parent families are not debarred from being involved in deviant behaviours, and hence they are prone to delinquency. Nye [13] argued that strong controls overcome people's baser instincts and produce obedience to social regulations, and weak controls permit innate animal impulses to surface and to be more freely expressed as deviance. It is also important to note that out of 109 participants 28 participants which represents 26 percent, pointed out that adolescents from single parent families always lack proper and adequate guidance and counselling. Therefore, they are involved in all sorts of antisocial acts because they are not guided and counselled as to what they should do and how they should behave. Nye [13] emphasized the role of the family as an agent of socialization. This therefore assumes that all humans are born with the same tendencies towards deviance. However, such tendencies prevail because children are not guided and counselled in their families. It was reported that adolescents from single parent families lack information of the negative consequences of the particular deviant behaviour as a result they are likely to be involved in deviant acts such as drug use, skipping classes and sexual relationships. This is rooted in childhood reflecting the influence of family contexts where parents do not guide and counsel their children.

Peer group influence

It was revealed in the study that peer pressure is one of the contributing factors to adolescent antisocial acts. Relating to the collected data 54 students agreed that peer pressure could lead them into deviant behaviour and that some of them were involved in such behaviour because of the same. This represents 64 percent of the total number of students. Nevertheless, 11 students representing 13 percent

of all students disagreed with peer pressure as one of the contributing factors to adolescent deviant behaviour bearing in mind that a human being is a final judge of his or her behaviour and is always capable of controlling himself or herself. On the other hand, 19 students which represents 23 percent, were not sure as to whether peer pressure could lead to deviant behaviour or not. Again, Out of 15 teachers, 9 teachers which represents 60 percent were of the view that peer pressure could lead to adolescent deviant acts. Only 2 teachers, representing 13 percent, disagreed with the assertion that peer pressure as could lead to adolescent deviant acts. 4 teachers rendered a deaf ear and were not sure of their stand thereby representing 27 percent of the number of teachers involved. It should also be noted that out of 10 parents who were involved in the study 8 parents agreed that peer pressure was one of the contributing factors to adolescent deviant behaviours thereby representing 80 percent of all parents. 2 parents representing 10 percent were not sure of their stand and none of them disagreed.

From the above observation, it can be concluded that peer pressure is one of the contributing factors to adolescent antisocial acts. It was reported that many adolescents were involved in deviant acts because they see their friends doing the same. Therefore, for the sake of conformity other adolescents find themselves involved in deviant behaviours. It was suggested that many adolescents copy and behave antisocially in order to be accepted and associate with their fellow adolescents. In this case, they learn deviant acts from their friends as they are exposed to them. This concurs with social learning theory which stresses that behaviours are learned through the observation of others engaged in a particular behaviour and the subsequent modelling of that observed behavior [4]. It was noted that if an adolescent sees others, especially if they are similar to oneself, perform and succeed in a particular behaviour, this increases the observer's confidence in trying the task. Bandura postulates that if an adolescent perceives that there was a positive outcome when the role model engaged in the particular behaviour, the adolescent will be more likely to engage in the behaviour him or herself. Furthermore, it was suggested that role models help in shaping the adolescent's self-efficacy in one's ability to do something or to learn something new. For example, when an adolescent observes his peers purchase and inhale cigarettes it provides him or her with the necessary knowledge and skills to obtain and use tobacco [5]. Exposure to deviant peers has been linked to increases in a wide range of delinquent behaviours including drug use [7]. Deviant peer affiliation is a stronger predictor of delinquent behaviour [21]. It had been discovered that the majority of students were influenced by their peers in their decision-making. Out of 84 students, 39 students agreed that they were always influenced by their fellow students to be involved in deviant behaviours. This represents 47 percent of the students involved in the study. However, 28 students, which represents 33 percent, pointed out that they always copy their behaviours from parents. 17 students, representing 20 percent, said that they were always influenced by their teachers. Therefore, this highlights that many adolescents are always influenced by their peers in their decision making, hence by extension in antisocial behaviours. It was reported that through interaction with deviant peers adolescents were influenced and positively reinforced to do a particular deviant act such as smoking. This is in line with the Differential Association Theory which focuses on the processes by which individuals come to commit deviant or criminal acts. According to this theory, created by a Sociologist Edwin Sutherland [14], criminal behaviour is learned through interaction with other people. According to Sutherland [14], deviance is less a personal choice and more a result of differential socialization processes. It is therefore such interaction and

communication with deviant peers which enhances adolescents to learn the values, attitudes, techniques, and motives for deviant behaviours. In this case, those who associate with delinquents or deviants gain knowledge to value deviance and the greater the frequency, duration, and intensity of their captivation in deviant environments, the more likely it is that they will become deviant since they are influenced by those peers they are in contact with to make their own decisions. It is argued that exposure to deviant peers and to deviant value systems creates the motivation to offend [22]. This suggests that adolescents are viewed as being most likely to imitate the behaviour of those they have the greatest contact such as peers because their minds are corrupted by their peers' behaviours.

School influence

The study also revealed that some students easily copy deviant behaviours from their teachers. 41 out of 84 students which represents 49 percent agreed that they easily copy teachers' deviant behaviours. However, 43 students representing 51 percent reported that they are not easily carried away by teachers' acts. It was agreed that in one way or the other students were influenced by teachers' behaviours by copying teachers' deviant behaviour. As Santrock [23] puts it, at school everyone is affected in one way or the other by teachers and as children spend their years at school they are socialised either positively or negatively by their teachers. It was suggested that school location is the contributing factor to adolescent deviant behaviours. For instance, closeness to bottle stores. 34 participants out of 109 representing 31 percent supported this point. It was noted that where a school is located very close to bottle stores, students get attracted, they internalise and get socialised with people who come and spend their time in such bottle stores. As a result, some students become involved in drinking beer, smoking, and even sexual intercourse with prostitutes. It was also discovered that where the school is very close to the trading centre students were easily taken away by the behaviours of people around such trading centres. 29 respondents representing 27 percent reported that sometimes students were associated with people who sell marijuana at that particular trading centre and some with thieves. As a result, students become incorporated in chamba smoking and stealing. It was also discovered that female students could get attracted with businesspersons find themselves in love affairs with such so-called tycoons of that particular trading centre. Again, 29 participants representing 27 percent suggested that there were few and sometimes no role models to students in rural Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS). As a result, some students did not really appreciate the advantages of school hence deviant behaviours become prevalent in rural CDSS. This therefore explains that students go to school without any ambitions and goals. Such being the case they indulge in all sorts of antisocial acts since they do not mind and even do not know their future.

Measures that can be put in place to minimise cases of deviant behaviour in rural community day secondary schools (CDSS)

The majority of students who participated in the study agreed on counselling as a remedy for deviant behaviours. Out of 84 students, 37 students which represents 44 percent were of the view that counselling is the proper and effective way of minimising delinquency among school going adolescents. 22 students representing 26 percents opted for punishment as the means of minimising antisocial behaviour. Again, 16 students which represents 19 percent were of the view that

suspension of antisocial students for a period of time is the best way of minimising cases of deviance. At the same time, 9 students which represents 11 percent opted for exclusion of antisocial students as a means for rooting out cases of deviance. Again, out of 15 teachers, 7 teachers which represents 47 percent were of the view that counselling is the best way of minimising delinquency among school going adolescents. 4 teachers representing 27 percent suggested that punishment would minimise antisocial behaviour. On the other hand, 2 teachers representing 13 percent were of the view that suspension of antisocial students for a period of time is the best way of minimising cases of deviance. However, other 2 teachers which represents 13 percent opted for exclusion of antisocial students as a means for rooting out cases of deviance. It should also be pointed out that out of 10 parents who participated in the study, 5 of them representing 50 percent supported the idea that counselling is the best way of minimising delinquency among school going adolescents. Nevertheless, 3 parents representing 30 percent were of the view that punishment is the proper way towards the reduction of deviant behaviours. On the other hand, 2 parents which represents 20 percent stipulated that suspension of antisocial students for a period of time is the best way of minimising cases of deviance. It should be underscored that no parent put forward an idea of exclusion as a means to minimise cases of deviant behaviours among school going adolescents.

As noted above, it was therefore established that counselling is the proper and effective way of minimising delinquency among school going adolescents. It was suggested that through counselling discipline would be installed in secondary schools. In this case, it was indicated that adolescents in secondary schools must be advised and directed towards good and proper behaviours. Again, it was argued that school-going adolescents should be guided as to what is good and bad, and healthy and hazardous to their lives. As a result, good and acceptable behaviours will be promoted among adolescents. It was suggested that adolescents should be counselled on the values associated with behaviours that conform to the law so that they can adhere to such values. The assumption is that the more important such values are to a person, the less likely he or she is to engage in deviant behaviours. For example, youths who do not value the notion that it is a bad idea to skip school, and instead value spending the day smoking marijuana, are more likely to do just that [12]. Conversely, youths who, for example, share the belief that using illegal narcotics is wrong are less likely to participate in such behaviour. According to Hirschi [12], there is an important link between attitudes and behaviour, not in the sense that attitudes motivate people to commit crime, but rather that prosocial attitudes constrain people from committing the crimes they otherwise would have done in the absence of such social bonds.

Conclusion

It should be concluded that deviant behaviours in rural Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS) were the results of peer influence, family background and school influence. This therefore explains the notion portrayed by social and environmental factors as contributing factors to deviant behaviours. It was suggested that as peers interact they could influence one another to indulge in deviant acts. It is therefore such interaction and communication with deviant peers which enhances adolescents to learn the values, attitudes, techniques, and motives for deviant behaviours. It was also established that location of school could influence students' deviant behaviours. Locations like nearness to trading centres and bottle stores could influence one's deviant behaviour. It was also suggested that there were

few and sometimes no role models to students in rural Community Day Secondary Schools (CDSS). As a result, some students do not really appreciate the advantages of school, and with the combination of socialisation aspect, deviant behaviours become prevalent in rural CDSS. Students' family background was also noted to be another factor towards adolescent deviant behaviours. Students who come from single parent families were more prone to deviant acts than those who come from both parents families. It was concluded that counselling is the proper and effective way of minimising delinquency among school going adolescents. Through counselling discipline would be installed in secondary schools.

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