

THE INFLUENCE OF JUVENILE DELINQUENCY ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF YOUTH AT NAGULU REMAND HOME IN NAKAWA DIVISION, KAMPALA

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the impact of juvenile delinquency on the mental health of young offenders at Nagulu Remand Home in Nakawa Division, Uganda. It was guided by the following objectives, To establish the effects of vocational training programs on mental health of juveniles in Nagulu remand home in Nakawa division, Uganda, To explore the effects of academic enrichment programs on mental health of juveniles in Nagulu remand home in Nakawa division, Uganda and to examine the effects of social development programs on mental health of juveniles in Nagulu remand home in Nakawa division, Uganda. Juvenile delinquency is a critical social issue with far-reaching implications for the well-being and future of affected individuals. This research aims to explore the correlation between delinquent behavior and mental health challenges, focusing on factors such as depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders among the juveniles. Through a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both quantitative data from structured surveys and qualitative insights from interviews, the study provides a comprehensive analysis of the mental health conditions of juveniles in the remand home. The findings indicate a significant relationship between juvenile delinquency and mental health problems, with a high prevalence of psychological distress among the inmates. The study also highlights the role of environmental, social, and institutional factors in exacerbating these mental health issues. The research underscores the need for targeted interventions to address the mental health needs of juvenile delinquents, recommending enhanced mental health services, rehabilitative programs, and policy reforms to improve the outcomes for these young individuals. The study contributes to the existing literature on juvenile justice and mental health, offering valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and researchers in the field.

Key Words: Juvenile Delinquency, Mental Health, Youth

INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquency remains a pressing global issue, with rehabilitation programs playing a critical role in addressing the behavioral and mental health challenges faced by young offenders (WHO, 2019). In various parts of the world, effective initiatives have been implemented to support the reintegration of these youth into society. For instance, in New York, the Crossroads Juvenile Center provides a nurturing environment that allows young offenders to engage in productive activities such as education, vocational training, and manual tasks like farming, cooking, and artistic pursuits, all of which contribute to their rehabilitation (Poggio, 2020; Agarwal, 2020). The center's focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment has led to a marked decrease in the number of cases requiring continued rehabilitation, as well as a significant drop in recidivism rates (Poggio, 2020).

Globally, juvenile delinquency rates fluctuate, with many youths relapsing into criminal behavior after release, often due to incomplete rehabilitation or insufficient family support (Shali, 2019). Despite the challenges, well-structured rehabilitation programs, such as those endorsed by the Ireland Child Care Act (2021), demonstrate that comprehensive education, training, and moral guidance can reduce recidivism by as much as 90% (Odera, 2023). However, the effectiveness of these programs varies, as some young offenders continue to struggle with reintegration due to unaddressed mental health issues and inadequate support systems (Agarwal, 2020).

This study aimed to explore the influence of juvenile delinquency on the mental health of youth at Nagulu Remand Home in Nakawa Division, Kampala, by examining the challenges faced by the delinquents and the effectiveness of existing rehabilitation efforts within the institution.

MAIN BODY

Research conducted in 2024 in the United States reveals that young people with prior incarcerations are returning to the justice system at concerning rates (BJSSR, 2024). According to data from the Bureau of Justice Special Report (BJSSR), spanning thirty states, of the 404,638 juvenile offenders released from rehabilitation centers in 2005, approximately 47.8% were rearrested within one year and 76.6% within five years (BJSSR, 2024). The overall recidivism rate among juveniles released from these centers stands at a troubling 80% (BJSSR, 2024). Furthermore, research by the Casey Foundation in the USA indicates that between 48% and 62% of these youths are re-incarcerated within two years of release, with 38% to 58% facing new charges or arrests (Agarwal, 2020). These high recidivism rates are largely attributed to poorly implemented programs that fail to address the individual needs of delinquent juveniles and do not offer effective alternatives to crime and substance abuse (Atienzo, 2019).

In various African rehabilitation remand homes, there are significant challenges in effectively rehabilitating juvenile delinquents due to insufficient funding and overcrowding, despite being a primary goal for policymakers (Burfeind & Bartusch, 2020). A study conducted in Ghana to

evaluate the effectiveness of juvenile rehabilitation institutions aimed to assess the country's compliance with both international and local humanitarian standards (Hoffmann & Baerg, 2021). The research highlighted that the facilities, which were constructed in 1964, have not undergone renovation since then, resulting in severe deterioration (Hoffmann & Baerg, 2021). Furthermore, the rehabilitation centers suffered from critical understaffing, with only six social workers shared between the boys' and girls' institutions, each fulfilling multiple roles including counselor, teacher, and supervisor (Hoffmann & Baerg, 2021). Juveniles often exceeded the mandated three-year stay, providing them with extended time to acquire vocational skills (Hoffmann & Baerg, 2021). The juvenile rehabilitation efforts in Ghana were deemed ineffective primarily due to insufficient funding and a heavy reliance on support from the United Nations Children's Fund and Non-Governmental Organizations, as the government showed reluctance in financing skills training (Hoffmann & Baerg, 2021). This situation has led to a high reported recidivism rate of 64 percent over five years, reflecting the shortcomings of the rehabilitation system (Hoffmann & Baerg, 2021).

In Uganda, juvenile rehabilitative programs at the rehabilitation remand homes include three main types: vocational, academic enrichment, and social development programs. These programs are designed to address juvenile delinquency, yet instances of rehabilitated juveniles returning to criminal activities have been reported (Odera, 2023). There is a shortage of professional staff skilled in juvenile rehabilitation, and the use of coercive strategies in managing juvenile delinquents often exacerbates their deviance (Wambugu, 2024).

In 2019, around 15,503 juvenile offenders underwent processing in statutory children's institutions as first-time offenders, contrasting with 7,498 in 2018, revealing elevated levels of juvenile delinquency in Uganda. According to the Uganda National Bureau of Statistics (2019), 37 percent of 4,200 juvenile delinquents released from rehabilitation remand homes returned to criminal activities, resulting in their re-arrest.

Addressing the increasing recurrence of repeat offenses among juvenile delinquents, it is imperative to establish efficient programs (Burfeind & Bartusch, 2020). Current rehabilitation initiatives designed for this group frequently fail due to ineffectiveness or inadequate implementation, resulting in elevated re-offense rates (Atienzo, Baxter, & Kaltenthaler, 2019). Consequently, there is an urgent demand for rehabilitative strategies tailored to the specific requirements of juvenile offenders, providing them with viable opportunities for successful societal reintegration and reduced likelihood of relapse.

RELATED LITERATURE

The vocational program involves providing juveniles with job-specific technical training aimed at preparing them for careers. This program emphasizes hands-on instruction and skill development across various career fields to help delinquent juveniles learn how to lead productive lives (Atienzo, et al., 2019).

Vocational training programs have been adopted by both developed and developing countries, and research indicates that these programs have a beneficial impact on participants' employment opportunities, particularly in developing nations (WHO, 2019).

According to a 2024 National Assessment of Vocational Education in the United States report, nearly every young person in rehabilitation facilities was enrolled in some kind of vocational programme. This research showed that the juveniles' earnings while they were still in the centres benefited from such vocational training in the short- and medium-term. Additionally, the study discovered that juveniles involved in these vocational programs took more academic courses and achieved better academic outcomes (U.S. Department of Education, 2024).

According to a global meta-analysis, youth vocational training in low- and middle-income countries led to employment 50% more frequently than comparable programmes in rich countries (WHO, 2019). This finding suggests that vocational training might help reduce criminal behavior, although this has not been extensively researched. While some studies in the United States have examined the impact of vocational training on criminal behavior, their results have been inconsistent. For instance, a review of the JOBSTART program, which aimed to improve outcomes for high-risk youth, found that vocational training had short-term positive effects in preventing criminal activities and delinquency (U.S. Department of Education, 2024).

In New York, vocational programs go beyond traditional fields like construction and manufacturing, offering training for diverse sectors such as human services, business, and healthcare. The specialisations covered by these programmes are extensive and include cosmetology, carpentry, masonry, advertising art and design, computer graphics, television production, business and computer technology, auto mechanics, engine technology, flower design, urban forestry, and carpentry (Melissa, 2019).

In South Africa, there has been a decline in vocational training quality due to the practice of placing low-achieving students into these programs, which has compromised their standards and effectiveness (Atienzo et al., 2019). However, significant efforts and resources were directed in the late 1990s towards reforming vocational training institutions to enhance the perception of vocational education as being as competitive as academic programs (Shali, 2019). Reforms aimed to integrate academic and vocational education, but these efforts did not lead to academic success for students who had previously underperformed in academic classes. This failure may be attributed to poor implementation, where reforms were carried out in a fragmented manner or with an excessive focus on academic improvement, contrary to the legislative vision for vocational training (Atienzo et al., 2019).

In Uganda, vocational programs were previously undertaken by those who had bypassed formal academic education (Ndegwa, 2024). However, recent changes in the rehabilitation remand homes have shifted this trend, enabling juveniles to engage in vocational programs alongside their academic pursuits (Odera, 2023). Juveniles now have the opportunity to choose vocational programs based on the trades they are interested in (Kikuvi, 2021). After completing their chosen

vocational training, they undergo certification by an independent organization. Those who succeed in the vocational examination receive certificates that enhance their chances of securing skilled employment more effectively than individuals with informal training (Ndegwa, 2024). These vocational programs are thought to offer juveniles a competitive advantage in the job market, as they are equipped with the certified knowledge and skills necessary for specific career paths, thus bridging the gap between education and the workforce (Kikuvi, 2021).

Previous research indicates that vocational training can lead to beneficial behavioral changes. However, many youths continue to engage in criminal activities even after their time in rehabilitation remand homes. Therefore, it was essential to explore the impact of vocational training programs on the mental health of juveniles in these facilities in Uganda. This investigation aimed to understand the juveniles' perceptions of vocational programs and assess whether these programs have had any positive or negative effects on their behavioral changes. Additionally, it sought to identify if there were other significant factors contributing to the juveniles' reoffending after leaving the rehabilitation center.

METHODOLOGY

The research study utilized an explanatory sequential mixed methods design in which quantitative data was gathered first, and then qualitative data was gathered to supplement and elaborate on the quantitative results (Creswell, 2014). The design followed a sequential order, starting with quantitative methods and then moving to qualitative approaches. In this research, data was gathered from juvenile delinquents who are in their final year at the remand home.

The study focused on a target population of 164 juvenile delinquents residing in selected rehabilitation remand homes. It specifically examined those who are in their final year of rehabilitation and have been identified as having made significant progress towards completing their stay in the remand homes. The purpose of the study was to interview 22 key informants, including welfare officials from the Naguru rehabilitation detention home, academic teachers, administrators, and vocational instructors, in order to gather comprehensive data on the effects of rehabilitation programmes on the mental health of juveniles.

The total number of juveniles in their final year of rehabilitation at Naguru Remand Home was expected to be 142. Considering the limited sample size, the researcher has concluded that in order to improve the study's accuracy, it is crucial to include all 142 juveniles from the study sites who are in their last year of rehabilitation in the sampling frame (Morris, 2024). The complete juvenile population in their last year of rehabilitation was included in the sample frame through the use of census sampling. In order to complete this procedure, each juvenile who were in their last year of rehabilitation was listed.

A sample of important informants was chosen using a purposive sampling approach. The main informant respondents for the study were pre-identified by the remand home administration based on their seniority within the department and their departmental experience in academics, vocational training, administration, and social development welfare.

Data collection started as soon as the required study permissions was obtained. In order to make the key participants young offenders in their last year of rehabilitation feel more at ease, gain confidence, and foster a relationship of trust, the researcher and a research assistant included them in a variety of play activities. This strategy was necessary to establish a setting where interviews with the juvenile offenders under study took place utilizing prearranged interview questions. Data verification and cleaning was be done during the data collecting process, and at the conclusion of each field day, the consistency and completeness of the data was examined.

The descriptive method of data analysis was used to try and explain occurrences in statistical terms either as they happened or after the fact. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 was utilized to analyze the quantitative data that has been gathered. Various statistics pertinent to social sciences were coded and recorded by this SPSS programme, making it easier to manipulate data that has been kept. It made data processing and summarizing possible for thorough analysis. By transforming data into frequency counts, including percentages and frequency distribution tables, SPSS version 21 was used to investigate correlations between factors and define the demographic profiles.

Qualitative data was represented in a non-numerical format and analyzed inductively through narrative analysis. This approach emphasized key aspects of the research to interpret the findings through descriptive language.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The data collection began with a pilot study, which was followed by the main study, potentially adding complexity to the research process. However, to manage this complexity, research assistants were employed to assist with the data collection tasks.

There was a possibility that the data collection tools might not be easily interpreted by the respondents. To address this issue, research assistants were available to clarify any difficult questions for the respondents.

Some respondents provided inaccurate information due to self-reporting errors. To ensure the accuracy of the data, both the researcher and the assistants engaged in the data correction process.

FINDINGS

Table 1: shows the Juveniles that are enrolled in the vocational training programmes

Basic needs	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	100	65
No	54	35
Total	154	100

Source: Primary Data 2024

Data was provided on the participation of juveniles in vocational training programs at the remand home, a majority of the juveniles, 100 out of 154 (65%), had participated in vocational training programs. This indicates that vocational training is a widely accessible and utilized rehabilitative service within the remand home. However, 54 juveniles (35%) had not taken part in any vocational training programs. This suggests that while vocational training is prevalent, there's still a substantial number of juveniles who do not have access to or do not participate in these programs.

The findings highlighted the importance and reach of vocational training as a rehabilitative service at the remand home. The majority participation reflects the emphasis on preparing juveniles for future employment through skill development. However, the significant minority not participating indicates potential barriers or gaps in the program's reach and effectiveness. The data underscored the significant role of vocational training programs in the rehabilitative efforts at the remand home, with a majority of juveniles participating. However, the substantial minority not involved in these programs highlights the need for addressing barriers and ensuring broader access and participation. A comprehensive and inclusive approach to vocational training can contribute to more effective rehabilitation and better outcomes for the juveniles.

DISCUSSIONS

During the interviews one of the Government Official responded that:

"The official capacity of Nagulu Remand Home is designed to accommodate 120 juveniles. This capacity ensures that we can provide adequate supervision, educational programs, and rehabilitation services to each child in our care and also the Nagulu Remand Home functions primarily as a remand home for juveniles awaiting trial. However, it also serves as a reception center where newly admitted juveniles are assessed and processed before they are either sent to trial or placed in more permanent rehabilitation programs."

A UN Official's responded that:

"The institution is built to hold around 120 juveniles, but this number often fluctuates due to the varying rates of intake and release. It's crucial that we

monitor this capacity to maintain effective rehabilitation and care services and we observe that the young offenders here are predominantly male, with ages ranging from 12 to 18 years old. Many have had disrupted or limited education, often dropping out of school at a young age. This educational gap is closely linked to the types of crimes they commit, such as theft and drug-related offenses, which are often driven by economic necessity and a lack of positive prospects."

A Community Leader said that:

"Nagulu Remand Home is mainly a remand facility, but it does take on the role of a reception center as well. This means that juveniles are first brought here for initial processing and assessment before any further legal or rehabilitative steps are taken and the majority of juveniles at Nagulu Remand Home are boys aged between 14 and 17. Many come from disadvantaged backgrounds with limited access to education. The crimes they commit often reflect their socio-economic conditions, including petty theft, burglary, and occasionally more serious offenses. The lack of educational opportunities and support systems contributes significantly to their involvement in these activities."

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. It is recommended that the vocational training programs be diversified to cater to a broader range of interests and abilities among the juveniles. This could include introducing more varied skills such as digital literacy, tailoring, carpentry, and entrepreneurship, which are more aligned with the current job market and future opportunities.
2. Implementing personalized training plans that consider the individual strengths, interests, and future aspirations of each juvenile could greatly enhance the mental health benefits of these programs. By aligning the training with their personal goals, juveniles are likely to feel more motivated and optimistic about their future.
3. To improve the effectiveness of the vocational programs, there should be a concerted effort to enhance the resources and infrastructure available. This includes providing

modern tools and materials that are essential for effective hands-on learning and ensuring that training environments are conducive to learning.

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