

CSS 105

Week 1 Lecture Note: Understanding Juvenile Delinquency

1. Introduction

Juvenile delinquency refers to the participation of minors (typically individuals under the age of 18) in illegal or deviant behaviours that violate societal norms and laws. This phenomenon has gained attention due to its implications for individuals, families, and society. Understanding juvenile delinquency is crucial for developing effective prevention and intervention strategies.

2. Definition and Basic Concepts of Juvenile Delinquency

Definition

Juvenile delinquency encompasses illegal acts, socially unacceptable behaviours, or violations of the law committed by individuals below the legal adult age. The specific age defining juveniles varies globally but is commonly set at under 18 years.

- **Key Features:**

- Involves minors
- Encompasses a range of behaviours, from minor infractions (e.g., truancy) to serious crimes (e.g., robbery).
- Often linked to developmental, social, and environmental factors.

Key Concepts

- **Juvenile:** A young person who has not yet reached legal adulthood.
 - **Delinquent Acts:** Behaviours considered criminal or deviant when committed by minors.
 - **Status Offences:** Actions deemed unlawful due to the individual's age, such as truancy, underage drinking, or curfew violations.
 - **Criminal Acts:** Serious illegal activities, such as theft, assault, or drug dealing, that may also apply to adults.
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3. Difference Between Juvenile Delinquency and Adult Criminality

Aspect	Juvenile Delinquency	Adult Criminality
Age	Offenders are typically under 18 years old.	Offenders are 18 years or older.
Legal System	Handled by juvenile courts with a focus on rehabilitation.	Handled by adult courts with a focus on punishment.
Accountability	Juveniles may be considered less accountable due to immaturity.	Adults are held fully accountable for their actions.
Penalties	Emphasis on counselling, probation, and education.	Emphasis on imprisonment, fines, or other punitive measures.
Types of Offences	Includes status offences unique to minors.	Focuses on crimes that violate the law for all citizens.
Purpose of System	Focused on rehabilitation and reintegration into society.	Focused on deterrence, punishment, and retribution.

4. Examples of Delinquent Behaviours

Minor Offences (Status Offences):

- Truancy or skipping school
- Underage consumption of alcohol
- Breaking curfews set by parents or authorities
- Running away from home

Moderate to Serious Offences:

- Vandalism (e.g., defacing public property)
- Shoplifting or petty theft
- Cyberbullying or online harassment
- Substance abuse (e.g., drug use or possession)

Severe Offences (Criminal Acts):

- Armed robbery
- Physical assault or fighting
- Drug trafficking
- Sexual offences

Contextual Examples in Nigeria:

- Cultism and gang-related violence in schools
 - Internet fraud (e.g., "Yahoo Yahoo")
 - Hooliganism during political campaigns or events
 - Begging and street crimes by displaced minors
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5. Why Study Juvenile Delinquency?

Social Relevance:

- **Understanding the Root Causes:** Delinquency often stems from family issues, poverty, or peer pressure. Studying it can uncover patterns that lead to prevention.
- **Protecting Society:** Early intervention reduces the likelihood of juvenile offenders becoming adult criminals, promoting safer communities.

Policy and Justice Implications:

- Informing policymakers to design effective juvenile justice systems.
- Shaping laws, policies, and programmes that address youth needs.

Academic and Professional Importance:

- Expands understanding of criminology and sociology.
- Prepares professionals (e.g., social workers, psychologists, and legal practitioners) to address juvenile issues effectively.

Practical Impact:

- Provides insights into rehabilitation and reintegration strategies.
- Encourages family and community involvement in delinquency prevention.

Global Relevance:

- Rising concerns about cybercrime, substance abuse, and violent acts committed by minors make it a pressing global issue.
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6. Conclusion

Juvenile delinquency is a complex social issue that affects individuals, families, and communities. Understanding its definition, distinctions from adult criminality, and underlying causes is essential

for effective prevention and intervention. As students, studying juvenile delinquency equips you with the knowledge to critically engage with societal problems and contribute to solutions.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some unique factors that contribute to juvenile delinquency in Nigeria compared to other countries?
2. How does the emphasis on rehabilitation in juvenile justice systems differ from the punitive approach in adult criminal systems?
3. What role do families and communities play in preventing delinquency?