



PROPERTY CRIMES IN GAMBELLA MUNICIPALITY, ETHIOPIA : EXAMINING THE SOCIAL PROBLEMS

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Abstract:

This study examined the ongoing social problems in Gambella sub-towns. Specifically, evolving property crimes in Gambella municipality. The researcher used qualitative research approach to explore the factors that are attributed to property crimes. In this particular study, social learning and social control theories were used as baseline to explain the reasons why certain teenagers are involved in illegal activities i.e. property crimes. Panel of five teenagers inmate were targeted for focus group discussions and their discussions were utilized as data needed for this research paper. Lack of parental advice, unemployment, peers influenced, chat, alcohol, and marijuana addictions were found to be the reasons why property crimes increased in Gambella's five sub-towns or "Kebeles."

Keywords: parental advice, unemployment, peers influenced, Chat, alcohol, marijuana, sub-towns.

Introduction

A crime is defined as any act that is contrary to legal code or law. According to Crossman (2017), there are different kind of crimes, from crimes against persons to victimless crimes and violent crimes to white collar crimes. However, this particular research focused on property crimes in Gambella municipality in Ethiopia. Crimes against properties involve theft of property without body harm such as burglary, larceny, auto theft and arson (Crossman, 2017). As in any society, Gambella society has experienced unprecedented social changes and in turn the unprecedented social changes have brought a numerous societal problems such as crimes against properties. Gambella is one the fastest growing cities in Ethiopia with different demographic make-up. In the 1980s G.C., Gambella town used to have three “kebeles” (sub-towns) i.e. (01, 02, & 03) but in the course of social, economic changes, and growth of population, Gambella had added two more sub-towns (04 & 05) “Kebeles”. The influxes of migrant workers from other parts of Ethiopia and the influx of South Sudan refugees have effects on Gambella sub-towns expansion and social changes. Sudan civil war in the 1980s, and the current ongoing South Sudan’s civil war have affected Gambella region in many ways. Property crimes and small arm smuggling are some of phenomenon attributed to social problems in the region. In the absence of good governance and male criminal justice system in the region, property crimes and violence crimes have increased.

The arrivals of new comers and the expansion of sub-towns have brought some "social crisis" within Gambella’s communities. These social changes may include both social and economic changes. In the course of this paper, social and economic changes are discussed in the context of criminological theories. Social control and social learning theories are applied as baseline for property crimes causations. According to Nirmala (2009), crimes against property involve theft of goods belonging to others, burglary/robbery of cell/mobile phones on street or victims’ homes, theft, motor vehicle theft, and arson etc. (p.89). This research mainly focused on robbery of cell/mobile phones. Therefore, the researcher explored the reason why these juveniles are engaging in the property crimes. The researcher also wanted to know if lack of employment, peers influences, and lack of parental advice were attributed to property crimes. Chat, alcohol, and marijuana are also considered as the main independent variables that influenced teenagers to involve in property crimes.

Historical Background

In Western societies, crimes are classified according to the harms they cause to human being or property. The more serious crimes were grouped into categories based on the harm those crimes entailed, such as harm against life, against physical integrity, against honor, against property, and etc (Nirmala, 2009, P. 87). The magnitudes of crimes also weigh the punishment. According to (Nirmala, 2009), “Much of these type of crimes are committed by an alienated and self-destructive underclass individuals. Another is the drug-crime related problem, which are attributed to the frequent property crime problems. Some drug-intoxicated individuals commit property crimes while under the influence of drug substance.

At the same token, property crimes in Gambella Kebeles (sub-towns) are committed by individuals who are either addicted to “chat, “alcohol, or other drugs. Property crimes are the by-products of social changes. In the 1980s G.C., one can hardly see anybody underage drinking alcohol or chewing “Chat” in Gambella sub-towns but in the 2000s G. C. almost every underage youths in Gambella are addicted to both “chat” and alcohol. When someone is addicted to drug substances and he/she is unemployed, the chance of robbing or stealing someone properties is very high. Crimes against properties involve theft of property without body harm such as burglary, larceny, auto theft, and arson (Crossman, 2017). Property crimes in Gambella's towns not only against properties but the perpetrators also harm the victims, if she or he resisted.

Therefore, this phenomenon becomes pandemic and it requires academic work to find some kinds of solution, if there are. *The purpose of this research is to alert stakeholders in communities about the ongoing social problem i.e. crimes against properties.* Do substance like Chat, alcohol, and marijuana addictions attribute to property crimes? This qualitative inquiry explored the reason why these underage youths involved in the property crimes. The researcher tended to identify individuals who have involved in property crimes. Thus, the researcher identified Gambella Regional State Prison as *setting* where information or data can be collected from individuals who are sentenced for committing property crimes. The researcher has observed property crimes being committed in Gambella town for more than three years. Interviews in regards to property crimes were conducted in Gambella Regional Prison. The inquirer in this research selected the Gambella Regional Prison as site where the cases can be identified and compared them with the outside cases. In this case, focused group discussion were conducted in Gambella Regional State Prison for three consecutive days i.e. 30/09/11 to 02/10/11 E.C.

The causes of property crimes

(A) Chat: Chat is an amphetamine like psycho stimulant chewed by over 10 million people globally including Gambella, Ethiopia (Ongeri et al, 2019). The majority of Gambella's youths are addicted to chat. When an individual is addicted to chat, he/she is more likely to be addicted alcohol and marijuana as well. Ongeri et al. (2019) study concluded that psychotic symptoms are significantly elevated among chat user. If someone is addicted to a certain kind of substance such as chat, alcohol or marijuana and he/she is unemployed, the chance of committing property crimes is very high. Craving for substances are attributed to property crimes in Gambella's five sub-towns. While the use of this drug is widespread in eastern Africa, including the Horn of Africa, surveys and anecdotal data show that its use has become cosmopolitan, with users now living in Europe and North America as well (Alele et al. 2013). According to Alele et al. (2013), the ingestion of chat produces sympathetic activation characterized by euphoria, increased intellectual efficiency and alertness, anxiety, high blood pressure, and other effects. Usually, after chat users got stimulant, they want to refresh themselves with alcohol such as beer and etc. Based on oral story, people who are addicted to chat lose their sexual interests as well. Therefore, chat users not only commit criminal activities



(B) Alcohol: Alcohol abuse can affect human body both inside and outside. Even though alcohol consumers are unable to see the damage drinking causes to their internal organs, it's important not to ignore the warning signs of alcoholism. Sometimes the harmful effects aren't discovered until much later in life, making it difficult to reverse many health complications (Galbicsek, 2019). Alcohol can have effects on almost all human organs including brain, heart, bones, liver, and etc. Heavy drinkers are more likely to lose their appetite and weight. In Gambella's five sub-towns, consuming alcohol beverage by youths becomes a symbol of "civilization". During holidays whether be Christian holidays or Muslim holidays, Gambella's youths ranging from 12-24 years old consume more alcohol than other youths in Ethiopia. However, on the daily basis under ages juveniles in Gambella's five sub-towns consume alcohol, Chat, and other drugs. This is a social problem and the researcher have observed and witnessed for more than three years. It is an evolving social crisis or problem that need Gambella Regional Government to do something about it.

(C) Marijuana: Marijuana refers to the dried leaves, flowers,, stems, and seeds from cannabis sativa plant. Marijuana is the most commonly used illicit drugs in the world (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2019). In Gambella five sub-towns, marijuana is use in combination with chat and alcohol. Although this illicit drug is used by handful youths in Gambella, Ethiopia, it effects on the health of the users cannot be underestimated. Most of the youths who are consuming marijuana in combination with chat and alcohol are more likely to be mad. According to National Institute on Drugs Abuse (2019), marijuana use may have a wide range of effects on both physical (breathing problems) and mental. In Gambella, Ethiopia, youths smoke marijuanain combination with Chat, Alcohol,



Since these youths are unemployed, they are compelled to steal anything that has financial values i.e. mobile or cell phones and etc. to satisfy their craves. Usually, thieves know when to steal and who to steal. Most of the times, the thieves in Gambella sub-towns do their illegal activities when it is raining and when electric power goes off at night. Youths who reside in 04th sub-town don't commit property crimes in 04th sub-town but they go to other sub-towns to commit property crimes.

Theoretical Perspective

(A) Social learning Theory: Akers et al.'s (2009) social learning theory proposes that criminal behaviors are "learned in interaction with other persons (criminal persons) in a process of communication. Akers et. al.'s (2009) study said that "the basic assumption in social learning theory is that the same learning process in a context of social structure, interaction, and situation, produces both conforming and deviant behavior" (pp. 86 &89). Akers and Sellers argued that people who are differentially associated with criminal peers are more likely to increase their criminal behaviors; at the same time, they are more likely to decrease their conformity to conventional social norms (Akers & Sellers, 2009, p. 89). Most of the times, the thieves in Gambella sub-towns attack their victim in group. One would "hang" the victim and the others search for mobile cell phones, money, or anything that can be exchanged with money. The youngster learned criminal behaviors from the older youths.

(B) Social Control Theory: Hirschi's (1969) social control theory begins with the general proposition that delinquent acts result when an individual's bond to society is weak or broken (Akers & Sellers, 2009, p. 129). Hirschi's social bond/control theory is one of the new versions of social control theories. Mostly this theory focuses on the nature of juvenile delinquencies (Hirschi, 1969). In general, Hirschi's social control theory is composed of four "elements" of bond i.e. attachment, commitment, involvement, and belief (Akers & Sellers, 2009).

(i) Attachment to others: The more insensitive people are to others' opinions, the less they are constrained by the norms that we share with them; therefore, they are more likely to violate these norms (Akers & Sellers, 2009, p. 129). This element of social control theory explains exactly how the youths in Gambella sub-towns live their lives. The youths who are involved in property crimes are not attached to their parents' or societal norms and nor to their school norms.

(ii) Involvement: Involvement refers to one's engrossment in conventional activities, such as studying, spending time with the family, and participation in extracurricular activities (Akers & Sellers, 2009, p. 130). In the light of this element of social bond, juveniles become involved in delinquency when they are not busy doing something (Jobi, 2015). In the last four years, the researcher have observed that Gambella's youths go around during school times. Therefore, it is an indication that parents don't know what their children are doing during school times and they don't even follow up with school officials.

(iii) Commitment: Commitment refers to the extent to which individuals have built up an investment in conventionality or a "stake in conformity" that would be jeopardized or lost by engaging in law violation or other forms of deviance (Akers & Sellers, 2009, p. 130).

(iv) Belief.: The concept of the belief in social bond theory is defined as the endorsement of general conventional values and norms, specially the belief that laws and society's rules in general are morally correct and should be obeyed (Akers & Sellers, 2009, pp. 130-131).

Focus Group Discussion:

During focus group discussion with five inmates or prisoners panel, most of the inmates confessed that they were tempted by their peers or friends who were thieves. Majority of the inmates lived with single mothers, stepmothers, relatives, or other family members. Like other criminals, all five panel insisted that they were wrongly convicted. They blamed either their friends or law enforcements for their convictions. The ages of inmates who participated in group discussion ranged from 12-17 years-old. When asked if any of them had pay job, none of them never had a pay job in their lives. Most of the participants' education levels were up to 9th grade only. Even though majority of the participants were habitual or repeated offenders, they insisted that they were arrested only one time-but their friends were in prison more than one time.

While the participants were already sentenced to two or three years in prison, they still claimed that they were suspect. Of course, some of them claimed that they were in prison for months without charges. As far as substance addictions are concerned, all the participants didn't admitted that they were addicted to any drug. During focus group discussions, denial was one of the patterns the researcher have noticed. Inmates' behaviors throughout the world are characterized by denial, deceit, cheating, and etc. Therefore, prisoners in Gambella Regional State are not exceptional to these characteristics; their behaviors could be even the worst. Social control and social learning theory perspectives have exhibited in this particular focus group discussion. Lack of parental advice and friends' influences were mentioned several times in the discussions. Thus, it is empirical to suggest that bad friends and lack of parental advices are independent variables that attributed to criminal activates in Gambella five sub-towns. Chat, alcohol, Marijuana, cigarette, and other substances addictions are the main factors that prompted the youths to commit property crimes in Gambella sub-towns.

Conclusion

In the course of this research, it became clear that chat, alcohol, marijuana, and cigarette addictions are the main independent variables that compelled these poor youths to commit property crimes. In addition to these variables, friends' influences and lack of parental advices are also independent variables that prompted the youths to commit criminal activities. Socio-economic changes in any society comes with many social problems or social crisis. Institutions, such as family, education, and religion are the parts of the social system and they act to bring about order in society (Nirmala, 2009). Therefore, if family backgrounds are dysfunctional, the chances are the children within the broken family are more likely to involve in criminal activities. If family and their educational levels are low, the chance of being criminals are high. Lack of religion affiliation in any given society can also bring social disorder.

Robert K. Merton (1938) noted that economic crisis and a general breakdown of the normal social conditions created “deregulation” of social and moral rules. This deregulation which he called “anomie”, could lead to all sorts of social deviances including suicide and crimes. In Gambella sub-towns, "deregulation" of social and moral rules have been routinely seen. In the 1980s G.C., the phenomena of suicides were unheard of in Gambella sub-towns/Region-but in the 2000 G.C. youths in Gambella sub-towns routinely commit suicide. Suicide had never been in Gambella culture. However, in other parts of Ethiopia, it is a common social pattern.

Recommendations / Policy Implications

Chat, alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs addictions are deadly diseases in Gambella sub-towns and it is an evolving social crisis or social problem that needs Gambella Regional Government to do something about it. In the course of this research, the researcher have noticed that Gambella Youths will not be protective members of the society in the near future. Therefore, Gambella Regional Government should take a firm actions by initiating programs such as job creations mechanism, and to prevent substance i.e. alcohol, chat, marijuana, and etc. control mechanisms, and drugs counseling mechanisms. These mechanisms could be initiated jointly with institutions like local and international churches, Gambella University, both local and international NGOS. Job creations, substance preventions, and counseling mechanisms could be carried out in combination. Gambella Regional Government institutions should be the spear heading the suggested programs.

The researcher is very much concerned about the future of these chat generation. If the Regional Government doesn't take a solid actions against substance additions in Gambella, we will not have productive generations in the future. During the Derg era in the 1980's, under 18 years old youths were not allowed to get into bar or drink alcohol and they were not allowed to smoke cigarettes either. Chat at the time was not popular among the youths. There were very handful chat users in Gambella sub-towns and they were not under ages.

The substance controlling mechanism was very successful and the Derg generations are our today's leaders and intellectuals. Could the current government do the same thing to protect our generation future? Of course, yes. If the

Government has the commitment or will to do so, it is possible. This research is strongly recommend that the Regional Government should take serious action to eradicate and to control property crimes in Gambella as compulsory goals. In order to start the recommended controlling mechanisms, consultations with all stakeholders are very essential. In Gambella, most of the time financial problem is considered to be hindering grounds. However, if the Regional Government is serious to save our future generations, money can be generated.

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