

A study on the causes of juvenile delinquency and its prevention by the community

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ABSTRACT

Juvenile Delinquency is one of the serious problems where almost all the societies of the world are facing and Meghalaya, Shillong is not an exception. The present research study in Meghalaya, Shillong aims to explore the causes that lead children or youths to commit offenses and how as a community we can take preventive measures to help in curbing the rise of juvenile offenses. Exploratory research design was used for this study. The samples for this study were 26 respondents who was supposed to be Teachers, Headman, Police, Officers from the Juvenile Observation Home, Social Workers and Teachers but only 18 of them responded and out of the 18 respondents 7 of them were teachers and 11 of them belongs to the police department. A Semi-structured Questionnaire and thematic analysis was used for data collection and analysis. After the study was conducted, it was found out that the major causes that leads children to commit offences are Peer pressure, Adolescence phase (Emotional instability and personality), financial instability, Environmental factors (Family background, parental skills and surroundings) and Social Media. It was also found out that Education plays a major role in shaping the beliefs system and moral values and that Community and schools can come up with awareness programmes, role plays and counselling to help the youths to learn how to engage in positive self-appraisal, deal with conflict and aggression.

Keywords: *Juvenile, Delinquency, Prevention, Community*

Since the human civilization, crime has been one of the most dominant problems including the crimes committed by children. Today, more than ever the problem of Juvenile Delinquency is present in all the societies, and Shillong is not an exception.

In Shillong, the problem of Juvenile Delinquency is a relevant issue and this can be seen from the statement given by the Additional Superintended Vivek Syiem in the article of “The Shillong Times” where Syiem stated that “In East Khasi Hills alone, between the years 2007 to 2011, petty crimes have increased by almost 2 per cent every year”. He also talks about the reasons behind the rise in crimes committed by delinquents and point out the increase of child beggars where these children are being used for begging and collecting

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scrap and is of the view that nothing has been done to ensure the safety and security of these children. In the article, Syiem stressed on the importance of support Systems in the city and point out that there is lack of infrastructure, awareness and human resource in the state. Syiem also pointed out that there is a need for proper roadmap in dealing with juvenile crimes and the best solution is synergy and communication between the welfare officers and the community. Syiem stated that “Police have a big role to play and the primary concern in dealing with juvenile is not asking the question “what” and “How” but “why” with special attention to their background, constraints and circumstances”. (Shillong Times, 2013)

Juvenile Delinquency is one of the serious problems where almost all the societies of the world are facing. Children as we know are vulnerable groups in the population which needs utmost care and protection. It is important to note that due to their vulnerability, there is a chance that these children might be ill-treated and directed into undesirable channel by the surroundings. It is however the utmost fact that despite protection and care, children have from time to time indulged in deviant behavior. (Marpna, 2017). Children as we know are the foundation stones of any Nation on which our future stands. They are also the future leaders of the country and the creators of the nation wealth

It is important to note that the concept of Delinquency is complex and varies from one country to the other and no single definition may suit all nations. It varies from one place to the other as what is forbidden to one may be allowed in the other place. Let's take the example of USA and India, where in USA defying parent's authority, skipping from school is treated as delinquent acts whereas in India it is not (Muregasan, 2014). In India vandalism, theft, street hawking, black marketing and others are treated as juvenile delinquency (Shipra, 1993).

Juvenile delinquency is becoming very prevalent in today's society. According to Muregasan (2014) India has the world's largest number of children and at the same time the largest number of vulnerable child population. Sharma (2010) is of the view that India has witnessed an increase in both crimes committed by the children as well as crimes committed against them.

There was a landmark in the criminal justice administration in India when the juvenile justice (care and protection of children) Act of 2000 was passed. Before 2000 when either a girl or a boy commits an offence, he/she was called juvenile delinquents but after the commencement of the J.J Act 2000 a boy or a girl below the age of 18 years if they commit an offence they shall be considered as the juvenile in conflict with law (Jaiswal, 2005). The Government in 2015 passed the Juvenile Justice (care and protection of children) Act 2015, which provides the trail of juveniles age 16-18 years as an adult if involved in heinous crime. (The Indian Express, 2015)

There is a trend of increase in Juvenile crimes not only in India but world over. India is increasing in the rate of juvenile crimes and it is a serious concern for the Nation and solutions to end this problem need to be sought carefully (Agarwal, 2017). According to the law enforcement and juvenile crime (2008) there were about 6,318 youths aged 10-17 who got arrested. In the article by Baruah (June 15,2016) from The Times Of India reveals that Assam topped the list of Northeastern states with the highest rate of juvenile delinquency followed by Meghalaya while Nagaland registered the lowest numbers of children in conflict with the law since January 2014. The Indian Express (october22,2019) reveals the data from the National Crimes Record Bureau (NCRB) where over 40,000 juveniles were caught

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across the country in 2017 for their alleged involvement in various crimes ,with 72 percent belonging to the age of 16-18 years.

Statement of the problem

Meghalaya, Shillong, no doubt, is facing a number of problems when it comes to juvenile delinquency, despite of being developed, as a state we are lacking behind in controlling the rates of crimes. The statement given by Additional superintendent of police (crime) Vivek Syiem on the newspaper of The Shillong times dated 3rd June 2012 where he said that the rise of major and petty crimes in the city is attributed to influx, population growth and increase in the number of street children and he also stated that in East khasi hills alone, between 2007-2011, petty crimes have increased by almost 2 percent every year. No doubt that there are various reasons that influence the deviant behaviour of the adolescents like poverty, family relations, peer-pressure, illiteracy, and many more. A balance of prevention and intervention strategies is important in the community targeting the youths to help reduce the number of crimes rise. (Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency prevention, 2008).

Research Questions

1. what are the causes that contribute to juvenile delinquency?
2. What is the role of the community in preventing juvenile crimes or juvenile delinquents?

Objectives

Therefore, the objectives of this study are to determine,

1. The causes that contribute to juvenile delinquency and
2. To explore the roles of the community in preventing juvenile crimes.

Significance of the study

This study is an urgent need as the growing incidence of delinquency is posing serious menace in the state. It is also important as most of the studies based on the causes of juvenile crime and its role of the community in preventing juvenile crime has not been done much in Shillong. This research is needed as the nature and severity of crime rate is increasing and is a serious menace for every society which needs to be curbed at the earliest. As we know that the children of today are the future representatives of tomorrow and therefore efforts should be made to save them from indulging in criminal behaviors and undesired situations. Therefore, this study will help the society to realize the causes of juvenile crimes and to suggest preventive and curative measures given by the community in preventing the rate of juvenile crimes and recidivism.

METHODOLOGY

The area of the study for this research is in Shillong, East khasi hills district. The researcher uses exploratory design in this study as there are limited studies done on “the causes of Juvenile crimes and prevention by the community” in Shillong. So, by using this design the researcher has been able to explore new ideas and has acquired more knowledge about this topic. The samples for the study were both Males & Females of the police department, officers of Juvenile home, Social workers, Rangbah Shnong or Headman of the localities and Teachers. For this study, the researcher kept in mind the non-availability of the respondents, so for better accuracy of the results, the researcher contacted and distributed the questionnaire through WhatsApp and emails to 26 participants known to the researcher. Out of the 26 respondents, only 18 of them responded. Out of the 18 respondents 7 of them were

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teachers and 11 of them belongs to the police department. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. After the data was collected from the required respondents, the researcher had analyzed the data by using thematic Analysis (Braun and Clarke) and Microsoft Excel using pie charts to describe the socio demographic profile. Keeping in Mind the ethics, the researcher gave the consent form to the participants before conducting the research. In the consent form the topic of the study and a brief introduction of the study were clearly mentioned. The consent form also mentions that the identity of the participants will not be revealed and they can withdraw from the study at any time without giving any reason to the researcher. It also mentions about the recordings that it will be deleted once the researcher completes the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio –Demographic Details of the participants

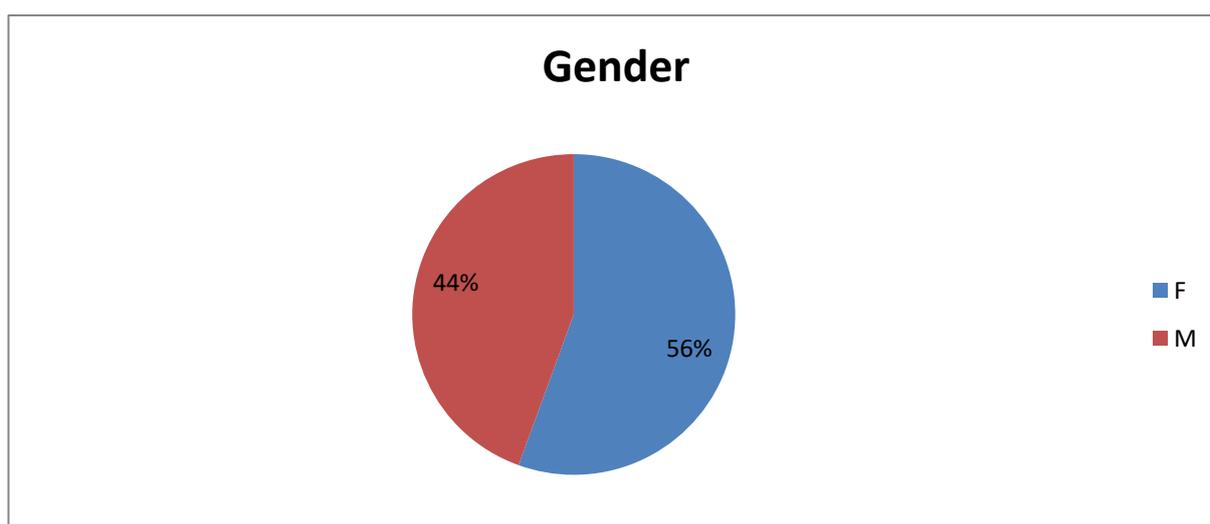


Figure 1: Of those respondents interviewed, 44 % were males and the remaining 56% were females. It was noted that there is a higher number of Female respondents as compared to Male.

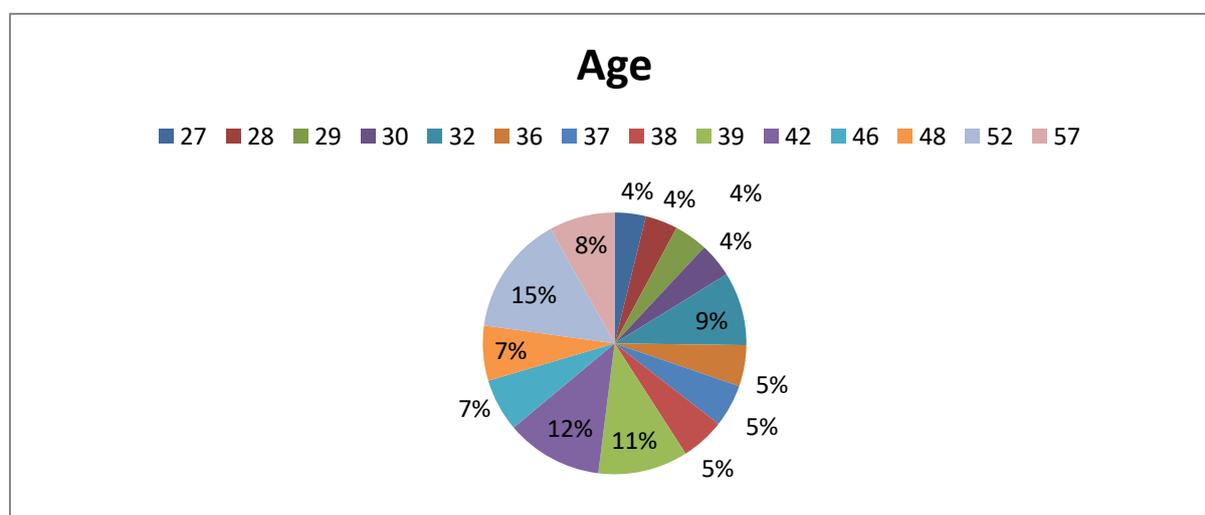


Figure 2: as seen in the figure, out of the 18 respondents interviewed many of the respondents have belonged to different age groups.

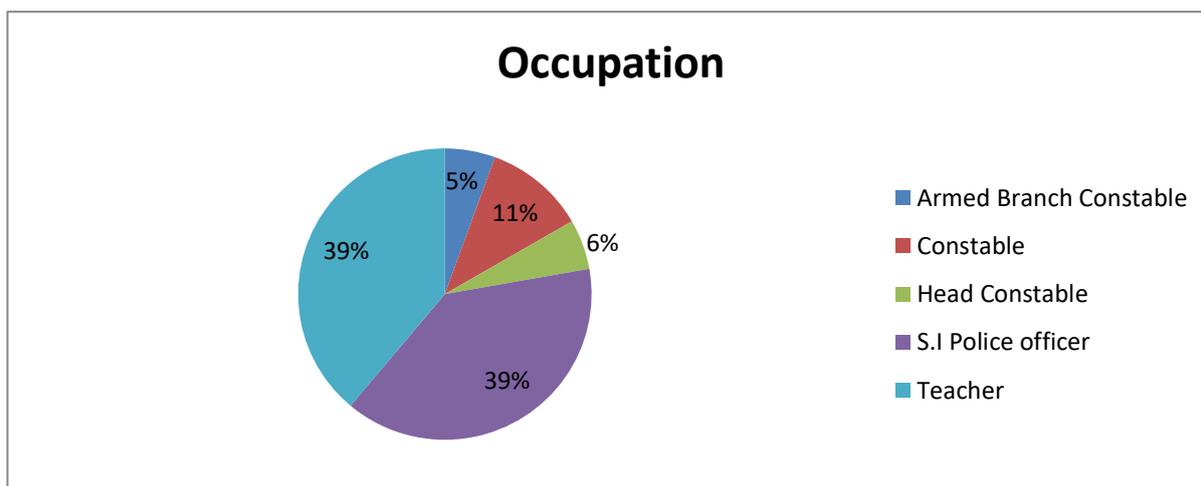


Figure 3: Out of 18 respondents interviewed, the highest respondents were from S.I police officers and teachers (39 %) and the rest were from Armed branch Constable (5%) which is the least, constable (11%) and Head constable (6%).

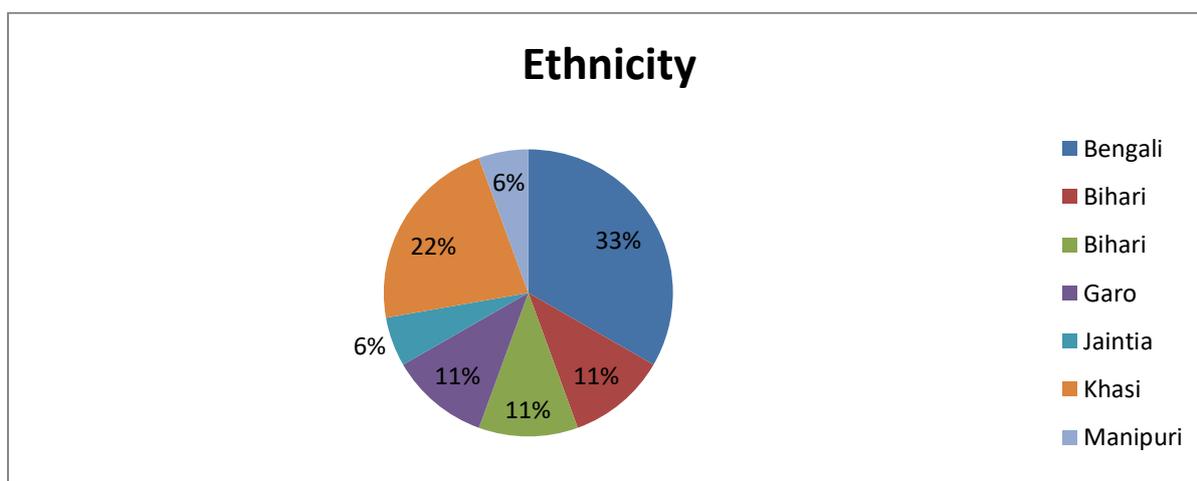


Figure 4: It illustrates the ethnicity of the respondents which shows that out of 100% , the highest number of the respondents belongs to Bengali community (33%) and the least is Jaintia (6%).

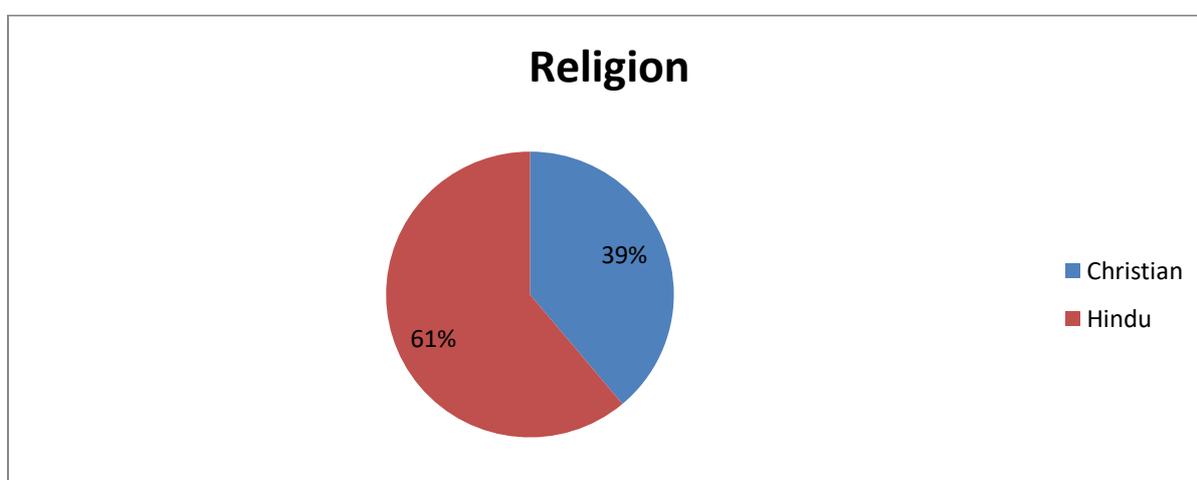


Figure 5: Out of the 18 respondents interviewed, 61 % of them were Hindus and the rest 39 % were Christian.

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From the study that has been conducted, the major findings that the researcher found based on the first objective i.e., causes or risks that contribute to Juvenile Delinquency are:

Peer Groups – It is seen that Peers plays a major factor in whether a juvenile becomes a delinquent (Murray et.al, 2012). According to the findings, many of the respondents when asked about the causes of juvenile crimes most of them pointed out the fact that being in a bad company of friends or peer pressure is the major cause that leads to juvenile delinquency as children can easily be influenced. There are also many studies or research that talks about the causes of juvenile delinquency where one major risks factors or causes is usually peer pressure. The study conducted by Vitulano (2010) on a sample of 89 children aged 8-12 years found out that at low levels of impulsivity peer delinquency was positively associated with child delinquency.

Adolescence phase (Emotional Instability and personality) – Adolescence phase or the emotional instability is another reason for the risk's factors in juvenile delinquency. A child's personality is rendered unbalanced through lack of love and affection, emotional insecurity, Emotional problems of jealousy, inferiority and being thwarted are very common during this period and because of this phase the state of mind inspires the child to commit an offense (Muregasan, 2014). It is also seen that from the findings many of the respondents talks about the age of the child “these delinquents start from an early age say 8 years or so and some of the others are of the view that they are not emotionally stable, character of the child and so on”. It is also seen from the findings that these individuals are lacking behind emotionally and mentally and some of the respondents view that some children are in search for their needs and wants and when these children are not cater to the needs they develop a kind of insecurity in their life and they may be turned to a juvenile delinquent. The findings are related to the study conducted by Healy and Broner consisting of 143 delinquents who revealed that 92% of the delinquent have emotional disturbances.

Financial instability- Uday Shankar in his study reveals that as many as 83% of the children come from poor families. It is seen that most of the offenses committed by the juveniles like Theft and Murder result from the urges for the three basic needs i.e., food, clothing and shelter and not to forget to mention about the jealous desires for luxurious life as well. The findings from this study reveal that poverty compels children to join hands with gangsters and become delinquents. From the findings it is also seen that most respondents pinpoint the fact that financial instability or poverty is another cause of delinquency. It is also seen that the financial crisis that one can face leading a child in turning to delinquency and this can be seen in the study conducted by Mishra (1994) on 22 juvenile delinquents in Orissa in juvenile jails which found out that most of the delinquents come from low income and low status groups.

Environmental factors (Family background, parental skills and surroundings) - It is to be noted that Environmental factors plays a major role leading a child in becoming a delinquent. From the findings it is seen that many respondents are of the same view that family background or parental skills is held responsible for delinquency. Many Other respondents are also of the view that these children who turned to delinquency is because they don't get proper guidance and proper care and because they are facing Problems in the families due to parental fights and because they don't get proper security. Studies revealed that family structure plays a major role on delinquency (Amato& Keith, 1991; Price & Kunz, 2003; Rankin, 1983). It is to be noted that environmental factors like the surroundings or neighbours where the child is being born and brought, his peer groups, etc is important as

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if not looked at properly may turn a child to delinquency. In simple terms it is the environment and the social context that provokes his action. Discrimination and the societies neglecting also play an important role as this can make the child feel unworthy of him and make him do the things that he doesn't want to do. It is seen from the findings that respondents talk about the discrimination that is going on in the society which leads a child to delinquency.

While talking about the surroundings it is also important to talk about the school environment where a child is being brought up. It is noted that many respondents also talked about the school conditions which play a major role in a child's life. According to Mishra and Biswal (2018) the increase in crime rates is due to their failure in school. Failure in school leads to disinterest in learning, isolation of the child and the perception of not receiving emotional support from its surroundings leads to the aggressive behavior or delinquency. It is also important to note that poor performance in school leads a child to commit offenses. From the findings it was also noted that many respondents viewed school as a factor that can either stop or control the rates of juvenile crimes or it may be a cause that leads to crime.

It is also necessary to note that the risk factors of delinquency are also due to the marital discords or divorce of the parents. In the findings it is seen that most of the respondents didn't mention much about the marital discords or parental divorce but according to studies, Children witnessing marital discord are at a greater risk of becoming delinquents. Research has also shown that there is an association between the exposure to parental divorce and marital conflicts in the youth and can have a psychological distress in adulthood (Amato & Sobolewski, 2001). Price and Kunz (2003) conducted a Meta-analysis involving 72 studies that involved divorce and juvenile delinquency. After the study was conducted it was found out that children from divorced homes have higher rates of delinquency as compared to other children.

But from the analysis it is seen that most of the respondents didn't even mention about parental divorce or marital discords. This may be due to the differences in culture and the environment.

Social Media

The effect of Media world is strong and real and it has become a vehicle through which youth perpetrates acts of violence like bullying, harassment, gang-related crimes, etc against their friends, family members and their relatives. The findings from the study show that most of the respondents pinpoint that social media are playing a major role which leads the youngster to commit such crimes which can be seen from the study conducted by Patchin and Hinduja's (2013) on a sample consisting of 4441 youth between the ages of 10-18 years from 37 school districts, it was reported that approximately 20% of youth in 2010 reported that they have been experiencing cyber-bullying victimization and 20% reported bullying others through cyber space at some point in their life.

From the second Objective i.e., Role of the community in preventing Juvenile Delinquency the major findings are the following:

Educational factor and institutes- Education plays a major role in shaping the beliefs system and moral values. The findings reveal that educational institutes and educating the mindsets of individuals play an important role in preventing crimes. Many of the respondents were of the view that educational institutes should hold programmes like the anti-bullying programmes or role plays to create awareness amongst the youth. Many

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respondents also viewed that teachers can mould the student's lives as they are their second parents. As teachers one should not treat the child unequally and should be able to understand the Child's needs and support them. While talking about the role of the educational institutes in preventing crimes, it is necessary that teachers also participate in the activities and adopt some measures which includes that teachers should provide moral education and social norms which will be very helpful for the students in their future lives. Parental education is also necessary as it is the responsibility of the parents to provide their children the information necessary so that the children will prevent from committing crimes. So, in that case as a community one can ensure educational programmes.

Community programmes- From the findings and analysis it was found out that many respondents when asked about the role of the community, most of them viewed that community is one major factor that can contribute in preventing crimes. It was found out that creating awareness in the locality can play a big role in stopping crimes. According to Agarwal.D (2018) there should be community participation and sensitization when it comes to matters relating to juvenile delinquency. From the Findings it shows that Community programmes are important to get in touch with the youths and the family members in order to help them with the problems they are going through. Community programmes like creating awareness in the locality where the local people can participate can change the conditions of the neighbourhood. As mentioned, community programmes also include the role of the police departments and social Medias. The role of police plays a major role in preventing and protecting a juvenile from committing an offense.

Role of counselling- As suggested by many respondents, it is seen that one of the best roles that a community can play to prevent juvenile crime is by counselling the young souls. From the analysis it is clear that Counselling and proper guidance to children and families is one of the most effective ways to prevent juvenile delinquency at an early stage. In the study conducted by Muregasan (2014) on 148 juveniles reveals that 42.6 % of the children liked counselling and psychological treatment which is one of the reformation methods for prevention of antisocial behaviour. Counseling can also help to provide support and remove the fear of inferiority complex, fear and many other issues that many children are facing nowadays.

CONCLUSION

In Conclusion, delinquency is increasing at a fast rate in the society and prevention is important so as to curb the rise of crimes committed by children. It is important to note that the attitudes and behavior of the children largely depend on the surroundings that a child is born and brought up to. So as a community it largely depends on us how to help the children and inculcate the positive attitudes in their daily lives. The present study reveals some of the major causes of juvenile crimes such as peer pressure, social familial factors as family, addiction, poverty, Influence of social Media, etc and how as a community we can prevent these crimes. The study also reveals that parents need better understanding in dealing with their children and Teachers, Police and education also plays a major role in preventing crimes and there is a need to improve the community and institutions so as to help in curbing the rise of crimes in the society. Lastly, It is important that as counsellors, parents, teachers and others to create awareness about the moral education and behavioural modification amongst the youth as they are the future representatives of the country.

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Since the study on the causes of juvenile crimes and its prevention by the community and similar topics in Meghalaya, Shillong are still limited, the researcher hopes that the current study will help readers and for other scholars to further research on this similar topic.

Recommendations

This study provides several recommendations to people who are involved in dealing with juvenile delinquents matters. Firstly, educational institutes should provide counseling sessions and awareness programmes to their students who need helps in terms of emotional instability, family issues and other related issues and awareness programmes like anti-bullying prevention programmes, role of social Medias, etc. are needed to be inculcating in their curricular activities. Secondly, the government needs to build more protection homes for the street children so that they won't have to take the wrong path for their living. Thirdly, there is a need to train more officers who are dealing with juvenile delinquents and proper parental guidance programmes should be inculcated in the community. Finally, there should be more counselors, social workers and others who are willing to spread awareness on matters dealing with delinquency in the society.

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Conflict of Interest

The author declared no conflict of interest.

A study on the causes of juvenile delinquency and its prevention by the community

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