MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS' ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR IN SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This work x-rayed students' anti-social behaviour in schools with a view to proffering management strategies for it in the school environment as well as at the family front. In doing this, the study reviewed important concepts related to anti-social behaviour such as types of anti-social behaviour, causes of anti-social behaviour and characteristics of anti-social behaviour. Consequently, some related literatures by some scholars were reviewed to buttress the study. The study adopted and reviewed the universal screening tools and procedures such as the Student Risk Screen Scale (SRSS) proposed by Drummond (1994) and the Systematic Screening for Behaviour Disorder (SSBD) proposed by Walter & Severson (1992) as effective identification and management strategies of addressing anti-social behaviour in schools. Furthermore, the study recommended that schools should train their teachers so they can be equipped with skills to identify the children with anti-social behaviours and intervene especially when they have not passed their third grade as after their third grade it may become increasingly difficult to intervene. Also, most efforts at curbing anti-social behaviour in children is focused on the school without adequate attention at the home environment where these

children came from, where the seed of anti-social behaviour is sown through parents attitude, peer group, etc. As a result, suggestion is made for an approach that will start from the family of these children as the saying goes "charity begins at home".

Keywords*: Anti-social Behaviour, Students, Schools, Children*

Introduction

When a woman gives birth to a child there is usually celebration which is borne out of the fact that some women are known to have lost their lives while giving birth, also a child is very important in a family because through the child the family lineage is continued. Also the child is the old age insurance of the parent as the same child would grow up to protect, provide and care for the parents especially as they grow old. The importance of a child cannot be overemphasized for they are the strength of their parents as the bible puts it in Psalm 127:4 that they are like arrows in the quiver of a warrior.

In Africa and most parts of the world, a person is said to be fulfilled if he is privileged to have a child and in some cases a male child, this is the reason why some men have gone as far as having more than one wife in search of a child or a male child. A woman is not fulfilled till she has given her husband a child and in some cases a male child because of the emphasis placed on having a male child. Some marriages have packed up today while some are at the brink of packing up due to the issue of childlessness. As important as children are, some families who are blessed with them are telling a different story as the children are exhibiting anti-social behaviour.

Anti-social behaviour is a pattern of behaviour that is verbally or physically harmful to other people, animals or property including behaviour that severally violates social expectation for a particular environment. Walker, Colvin and Ramsey (1995) refers to anti-social behaviour as a persistent violation of socially acceptable behaviour pattern.

School-beat (2020) see anti-social behaviour as any behaviour that causes harassment, alarm or distress to anyone. Sugai, Jeffrey and Hill (2020) citing Simcha, Fagan, Langner, Gerstan and Eisenberg (1975) see anti-social behaviour as any recurrent violations of socially prescribed patterns of behaviour.

Metropolitan Police (2020) citing anti-social behaviour Act 2003 and police reform and social responsibility act defined anti-social behaviour as behaviour by a person which causes or is likely to cause, harassment, alarm or distress to a person not of the same household as the person. Satcher (2020) see antisocial behaviour as when a person behaves in manner that causes or is likely to cause alarm or distress and the behaviour must have happened more than once.

As important as children are in the family some families are being bedeviled by children with anti-social behaviours. Children who are known to be the pride of their families suddenly begin to exhibit traits of anti-social behaviour which gives parents cause to worry: children now tell lies, engage in criminality, truancy, examination malpractices and other vices that are of concern to the family and the society. Schools are battling with one form of anti-social behavior or the other, it seems the School authorities are losing the battles against anti-social behavior as it is getting worst each passing day. In schools today, you find bullies who are terrorizing their fellow students which had caused some students to change from one school to another due to fear of continuing bullying. Secret cults are the order of the day in our university campuses and even in our secondary schools which has brought down the quality of education as most of the students do not take their studies serious anymore as they now depend on threatening the lecturers for marks. Lectures are disrupted as a result of secret cult activities of these students who do not have regard for life.

The saddest thing about it is that some of our girls, who are supposed to be groomed for motherly role are also involved in these activities. Our female children are no longer safe as most of the boys involved in anti-social behaviour such as secret cult intimidate them into dating and even having sex with them thereby losing their virginity which is one of the pride of a woman. In the past, when two students are fighting, they use their fist and if one happens to

throw the other on the ground, he stuffs sand or grass into his mouth as a final humiliation. But today, the scenario is different as they use knives, bottles and whatever weapon they can get hold of. The question that we need to answer is why are our children exhibiting anti-social behaviour. How did we get here and what is the way forward. It is these questions that necessitated this work. The objective of this work is to find out the causes of students' anti-social behavior and look for a way forward.

Types of Anti-social Behaviour

Student anti-social behaviour can be broken down into two components: presence of anti-social behaviour which could come in the form of anger, aggressive or disobedient behaviour, and absence of pro social behaviour such as communicative, affirming or cooperative behaviour (Rank 2020). Most children exhibit some form of anti-social behaviour during their development and different children demonstrate varying levels of pro-social and anti-social behaviour. Some may exhibit high levels of both behaviour i.e. the popular but rebellious child. Some may however develop low levels of both types of behaviours, i.e. the withdrawn, thoughtful child (Rank 2020). When a child exhibits hostility towards authority he is diagnosed with oppositional defiant disorder. When a child lie, steal or engage in violent behaviours he is diagnosed with conduct disorder (Rank 2020).

Schoolbeat (2020) pointed such behaviours as: Gathering of people in public places that intimidate others; Verbal abuse including that of homophobic or racial nature; Aggressive and abusive behaviour aimed at causing distress or fear to people; Harassment; Vandalism; and Graffiti to be anti-social behaviours. Metropolitan Police (2020) categorize anti-social behaviour into three depending on how many persons are involved. 1) Personal anti-social behaviour is when a person targets a specific individual or group. 2) Nuisance anti-social behaviour is when a person causes trouble, annoyance or suffering to a community. 3) Environmental anti-social behaviour is when a person's actions affect the wider environment such as public space or building.

Characteristics of Student's Anti-Social Behaviour

Children with anti-social behaviour exhibit a range of aggressive and coercive behaviour which include: physical aggression, caustic verbalization, non compliance and criminality. Others include impulsivity, poor interpersonal skills, ineffective cognitive problem solving skills and academic deficiencies that negatively impact teacher and peer-related adjustment (Lane, 1999). Frick (1998) revealed that anti-social behaviour is the major reason cited for referring youngsters to mental health services. Frick went further to give statistics that the prevalence of conduct disorder, which stems from anti-social behaviour, amongst children ranges from 2-6 million cases with dramatic increases in adolescence.

Children with anti-social behaviour tends to have no feelings nor do they care about others or show remorse for hurting others (Rank 2020). Achenbach (1991) after a careful study of anti-social behaviour grouped the phenomena into external behaviour such as aggression and delinquency and internal anti-social behaviours such as anxiety, depression and withdrawal. Hinshaw (1992) revealed that external anti-social behaviour is typical of the majority of student with anti-social behaviours and it tends to be more stable overtime, more resistant to intervention and consequently is challenged by a worse prognosis for remediation relative to internal anti-social behaviours. Children with external anti-social behaviour patterns tend to function at a lower level in cognitive, social and academic areas especially in reading skills, and are more likely to attract teacher attention than children with internal behaviours.

Causes of Students' Anti-social Behaviour

There is little consensus among social scientists at large with regards to the causes of anti-social behaviour, delinquency and crime (Mark, Kevin & Shanna, 2004). Bandura (1978) however pointed that people are not born with preformed repertoires of aggressive behaviour, they must learn them. Mark (2004) pointed that the social environment is among the causes of anti-social behaviour as people learn and gain information through observing the behaviours modeled by others as they interact with them. Mack et al (2004) went further by pointing that beliefs, cognitive process, values and

behaviours are largely shaped through ongoing interaction with the social environment.

The forms by which these children are taught anti-social behaviours are numerous as Mack et al outline some to include: adult modeling, television, association with anti-social peer groups, dysfunctional parent-child interactions, coercive school environment and so on. Anti-social behaviour in a particular child may be as a result of more than one contributing factors which may include: family problems such as marital discord, harsh or inconsistent disciplinary practice or actual child abuse, frequent changes in primary care giver or in housing, learning or cognitive disabilities or health problems.

Rate of Anti-Social Behaviour among Students

Mental health professionals agree and with the rising rate of serious school disciplinary problems, delinquency and violent crime indicate that anti-social behaviour in general is increasing: 30-70% of childhood psychiatric admissions are for disruptive behaviour disorder. A small percentage of antisocial children grow up to become adults with anti-social personality disorder, and a greater proportion suffers from the social, academic, and occupational failures resulting from anti-social behaviour. The rate of violent, anti-social acts committed by children is alarming approximately 2.6 million juvenile arrest were made in 1998 with 17% of all violent crimes being perpetrated by juveniles. Although boys tent to exhibit more behaviour problems relative to girls, anti-social behaviour demonstrated by females is increasing and the behaviours are becoming more violent in nature (Office of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention, 1999).

Lane (1999) pointed that it is not surprising that anti-social behaviour exhibited by children is on the increase because youngsters who demonstrate behaviours predictive of anti-social behaviour are currently ignored until their behaviour becomes explosive. Colvin (2001) also report that general educators are faced with the responsibility of managing problems that occur while delivering instruction. Although some teachers are adept at maintaining the dual functions of instructor and disciplinarians others struggle with

the task as a result these youngsters are more often referred to pre-referral intervention teams and to disciplinary agents at the school (Shaughnessy, Lane, Gresham & Frankenberger, in press).

Satcher (2001), Walker and Shin (2003) pointed that while there are child, family, community, school and cultural risk factors that increase the likelihood that children and youth will develop anti-social behaviours, there are also protective factors that are associated with decreasing the likelihood that anti-social behaviours will develop. According to Walker and Shinn (2003), education is one of society's most powerful tools for preventing displays of anti-social behaviours and intervening with at risk children and youth. Schools can provide a buffer against many of the maladaptive influences created by society by fostering instructional environments in which children and youth learn socially important values and skills.

Management Strategies for Anti-social Behaviour

There is an arsenal of universal screening tools and procedures such as the Student Risk Screen Scale (SRSS) proposed by Drummond (1994) and the Systematic Screening for Behaviour Disorder (SSBD) proposed by Walter &Severson (1992). The SRSS is designed to detect elementary age students who are at risk for anti-social behaviour. It is a seven item screening instrument. On it, teachers rate each student in their classroom on the following seven items: steal, lies, cheats, sneaks, low achievement, negative attitude and aggressive behaviour. Each item is rated using a four point likert scale ranging from frequently (3), sometimes (2), occasionally (1), to never (0). Total score range from 0-21 and are used to determine level of risk: Low Risk (range: 0-3), Moderate Risk (range: -8), and High Risk (9 or more). The SRSS is a reliable, cost effective, psychometrically sound procedure for distinguishing between students who do and do not show early warning signs of anti-social behaviour (Severson & Walker, 2001).

The SSBD is a three stage process used to screen all general education students to determine the extent to which they are at risk for externalizing and internalizing behaviour disorder. In this, the teacher assess the student by observing a target group of the students

in the classroom and on the playground: in stage one teachers are asked to systematically evaluate each student in their class in terms of internalizing and externalizing behaviours using nomination and ranking procedure. The three students who receive the highest ranking in each dimension pass through the first stage to stage two (Walker & Severson, 2001).

In the second stage, the teacher then completes two ranking measures, the Critical Event Index (CEI) and the Combined Frequency Index (CFI). Here, the student adaptive and maladaptive behaviour patterns are evaluated. Students who exceed normative criteria on these measures pass through to stage three.

In stage three, students are observed in the classroom and playground setting by a different school professional (e.g. school psychologist). Students who exceed normative criteria in stage 3 can be referred to a pre referral intervention team for subsequent assessment to determine an appropriate intervention (Walker & Severson, 2001).

Walker and Severson (2001) advocates for a universal, proactive approach to early detection such as the SSRS and SSBD to enable at risk students to be identified early so that intervention can be designed and implemented when these students are more amendable to treatment. The authors also pointed that such procedures provide a more systematic method of identifying those students at risk for anti-social behaviour relative to the rather subjective nature of the current pre-referral intervention process.

Mark et al (2004) suggest that since most of the children with anti-social behaviour most often begin their education experiences in the general education setting and pose a challenge to school faculty and staff that effective, efficient universal screening procedures be implemented to identify these children before the problems become more salient, also general and special education teachers be empowered with additional strategies to work with these children and intervention generated be refined to include components that will enhance the intended outcomes.

Mack, et al (2004) noted that anti-social behaviour can be identified as early as when the child is three and the window of opportunity for prevention essentially closes at the age of eight. As

a result, Mack, et al, suggests that schools adopt universal screening procedures to actively search for children with or are at risk for anti-social behaviour.

It is possible that children who exhibit anti-social behaviour may at some point qualify for special education. It is important to note that the label of anti-social behaviour does not qualify children for special education services. Many of these children begin their educational careers in the general education setting. Consequently, they are educated by several educators who report feeling ill equipped to manage the challenging behaviours exhibited by some of their students (Schumm & Vaugin, 1995). Lane (1999) suggested that general educators based on their complaint of being ill equipped to manage these children should become familiarized with the characteristics of this population and strategies for better serving them in general education classrooms.

Mayer (2001) suggests that schools should focus on engaging in an approach that will prevent anti-social behaviours from occurring and intervene with those children and youth who currently display behaviours that violate the social norm. Schools are challenged by the task of educating children with anti-social behaviour, one of the reasons outlined by Lane (1999) as schools subscribing to a reactive approach in addressing the problem, that many students who begin school with behaviour problem typically do not receive services until such time that a disability (e.g. learning disability, emotional disturbance) is diagnosed or significant academic underachievement is apparent.

Lewis and Daniel (2000) pointed that until diagnosis is made, school often rely on punitive procedure (e.g. office referrals, suspension) to control the behaviour of these students. A procedure which most research suggest are ineffective in meeting the needs of this group of children. Lane (1999) secondly outlined that intervention is not applied on time, that anti-social behaviour in children becomes increasingly resistant to intervention efforts over time if comprehensive interventions are implemented prior third grade.

Bullis and Walker (1994) pointed that it is possible to work with children at any time, however after third grade, the nature of

the intervention shift from prevention to remediation and would require greater intensity. Walker et al (1995) points that if the schools do not develop a plan for addressing anti-social behaviours, children with these behaviour patterns are at a heightened risk for a number pejorative outcomes such as academic failures, school dropout, substance abuse, criminality and welfare services.

From researches carried out by scholars aimed at preventing the development of anti-social development in students (Lane, 1999, Lane & Menzies, 2001, Lane, O'Shaughnessy, Lambros, Gresham & Beebe-Frankenberger, in press) one message has echoed consistently: teachers reported that they are ill equipped to effectively instruct those children who exhibit acting out behaviour.

It is essential that general and special education teachers receive training to better serve children with or at risk for anti-social behaviour. They need more explicit training to recognize early indicators of anti-social behaviour, implement class-wide and school-wide screening procedures (Walker, et al, 1995).

Colvin (1992) pointed that teachers should be trained to understand the acting out cycle of children with anti-social behaviour. Colvin (2001) went on to stress that the teachers should be equipped with training to utilize pro-active approach such as a well constructed lesson plans, physical layout of the classroom, group contingency plans to prevent problem behaviours from occurring during instruction. Elliott & Gresham (1991) in their contribution stress that the teacher should be equipped to implement a variety of reactive strategies such as different reinforcement, response cost, positive practice, non-exclusionary time out to manage problem behaviours that do occur.

Another way to tackle the problem of anti-social behaviour in students is to refine the pre-referral process as Lane, Mahdari and Borthwick-Duffy (2001) advocated for the pre-referral intervention team. The intention of the pre-referral intervention process is to decrease in appropriate referrals to special education by generating intervention specific to the child's particular areas of concern.

Satcher (2001) as well as Walker and Shinn (2003) advocated for education as a tool to tackle anti-social behaviour. They pointed that education is one of society's most powerful tools for preventing

anti-social behaviour and intervening with at risk children and youth. Therefore an important focus for schools is to engage in an approach that will prevent anti-social behaviours from occurring and intervene with those children and youths who display behaviours that violate the social norms (Mayer, 2001).

Conclusion

No child was born with anti-social behaviour rather it is something they picked up from the environments which they found themselves. Children learn and gain information through observing the behaviours modeled by others as they interact with them in the social environment such as dysfunctional parent-child interaction, anti-social peer groups, and so on. However, I want to point out that in as much as bad things are picked up from the environment especially the social environment, there are also good things to be picked up. What I mean is that a child because he has or had dysfunctional parents does not need to be like them because in everyone's heart there is good and there is evil, so even if evil things are happening around you, it does not mean you should copy. It was discovered that some students that got involved in anti-social behaviours were abandoned by their parents and in their bitterness turned out to become anti-social and if something is not done they may turn out to become parents that cannot show a good example to their children and so the sad circle continues.

The Way Forward

To prevent anti-social behaviours from occurring and respond to the behavioural needs of those students who are already exhibiting chronic problems behaviours, this study suggest as follows:

> Schools should engage in early primary prevention and intervention efforts, focus on structuring a school climate and culture that provides multiple opportunities to display and receive positive reinforcement for pro-social behaviour, provide a continuum of behavioural strategies and interventions and restrict their practices to those that are empirically proven programmes or

promising programmes that have evidence of effectiveness (Sugai & Horner, 1999).

It is suggested that early detection is one key to curbing anti-social behaviour in schools as a result teachers should be equipped with skills to identify traits of anti- social behaviour, intervene and where necessary refer the child to special education department. As it become difficult when the child has passed the third grade. It should be pointed at this point that having a reactive measure in place is not enough, what we need is a proactive measure and the best place to start is at the home front where the child imbibe the characters of anti-social behaviours. Parents should be sensitized on the impact of their behaviour to their children; be it positive or negative behaviour. Parents should watch what they say and do because children copy whatever they see and hear, it is very important that parents keep a close watch at their child: the kind of company they keep, what they bring home should be queried especially when it is clear that the child cannot afford it, there should be a curfew time and the child's movement should be restricted. I will round off by saying that a child should be caged so that when he grows up he will be able to fly.

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