

SOUTH AFRICAN INSTITUTE OF RACE RELATIONS
CAPE EASTERN REGION

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. JUVENILE DELINQUENCY

with special reference to Urban African Townships

V. C. Qunta, B.A.

Of recent years this subject - Juvenile Delinquency - has received the attention of men and women the world over, and only days ago it was the subject of a conference in Johannesburg. But like most matters that seem urgent to us, laymen, it recurs like an evergreen topic that quickens interest and whips up public awareness for a while only to be allowed to slide into the dusty drawer of matters that need attention.

Definition: Delinquency is defined as Psychological and or Socio economic mal-adjustment that makes individuals offend against the property and persons of others in such a way that society has to punish them officially.

As the entire civilized world is worried about juvenile delinquency one is inclined to think that civilization as we know it today, the civilization that was founded mainly upon the Bible and its teachings, upon ancient Philosophy and upon the sweat, blood and tears of the giants of the past is on the way out as something that cannot be accommodated in the make up of the rising generations and society, a society that looks with contempt on truth and honour. But this God forbid, for it is unlikely that the past which has given rise to this wonderful era, the jet, the superonic and the atomic age, the age of science that is wiping out the word impossible from the English language, - it is improbable that all this has been wrong and that all these great lives and their great deeds were a lie and in vain.

Causes: While discussing the causes we should note that all social problems are due to a multiplicity of causal factors as well as to interaction of factors, e.g., a single cause may only create a condition while another may decide the issue, as: unemployment leads to poverty which in turn leads to theft or robbery.

(a) Fundamental Causative Factors: (i) The Socio-Political set up of our multi-racial society with the African at the bottom of a pyramid of power; anti-social acts as compensation. (ii) Clash of culture and contact of races; the diversity of potential between black and white groups and individuals. The African juvenile and adult delinquency due chiefly to personality and group maladjustment. (iii) The breakdown of community standards

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of behaviour - lack of an urban pattern of behaviour which is socially accepted and motivated by the consciousness of being a member of a group. Individuals perform anti-social acts without fear of social stigma and censure. Then parallel to this is what we may call the idealisation of personal violence and efforts to outwit the officers of the law.

(b) Socio-Economic Causes: All these emanate from the socio-economic set up, e.g. poverty, bad housing, restrictions on African labour and lack of vocational education and guidance, lack of adequate play space and recreational facilities, lack of home, school and communal discipline, lack of suitably trained social workers and social research.

(c) More Immediate Causes: (i) Adult delinquency where parents never seem to have known the ordinary human habits that make the difference between man and beast: what chance have they to bring up socially acceptable children? (ii) Illegitimacy - disrupted homes - underpayment of bread winners; $\frac{3}{4}$ of delinquent children in the Port Elizabeth area come from this group.

Observations: (i) In African Urban Communities, especially in the Port Elizabeth area, the external causative factors are more powerful than the internal ones as the former lead to psychological rationalization as a form of compensation, thereby reinforcing the effect of the internal causative factors: e.g. all the causes of delinquency are projected to the dominating white race or group which gives the "we group" i.e. the African community no chance for self examination.

(ii) Urbanisation serves to increase the rate, incidence and variety of crime and delinquency even among adults.

(iii) Conflict among the older people themselves and between the older and the younger regarding desires and aspirations - the change of the idea of the word achievement to the younger generation and the slum child.

Incidence: House-breaking, theft, assault, stabbings and rape and general contempt of law and order are common and seem to gain ground daily.

(a)
Remedies: Essential and Fundamental: This problem, or rather, this social cancer, juvenile delinquency, in general, instead of being the concern of well-meaning but powerless bodies such as the Institute of Race Relations, who at best can only touch the fringe, should be regarded as the foremost concern of all the governments and the United Nations together with the commercial world, and accorded financial resources on as generous a scale as is given to war time production of arms and peace time research into the instruments of horror such as the hydrogen

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bomb and allied products. In South Africa I should like to see it replace the Native Problem in importance.

(b) The humanisation of that soulless and seemingly Godless thing that thrives on so-called cheap labour, whether it be Native or White, as long as it is human labour. At this rate there will ~~not~~ even be expensive labour available some day, as this cancer is allowed to destroy society as we have known it.

(c) The widening and liberalisation of Curricula in Non-European schools. It is not likely that any race is limited fundamentally in ability in teaching, nursing, law and medicine. One would like to see the opening up of technology, art, music, engineering, in fine: education unlimited and untrammelled, to explore what gifts and genius God has given His children.

Immediate and Urgent: Residential classification of persons according to educational, cultural and economic standards. (ii) Well appointed Children's Homes instead of adoption by individuals. (iii) Housing and clearance of slums. Housing to consider different classes as above. No need of boasting by Municipalities as if surprised at doing good essential to self and community. (iv) Immediate establishment of bars to sell European liquor and stoppage of kaffir beer raids. 10/6 bottles of brandy costs £1 to £1-5/-, plus risk of arrest, fine and/or imprisonment. Raids lead to concoctions. (v) Ruthless dealing with dagga peddlers. (vi) Allow the Africans to take measures to cure juvenile delinquency in their areas, e.g. Korsten residents told they were doing police work, same in Johannesburg and the Africans called irresponsible and relying too much on Europeans. Recreational grounds, Halls. Not all are boxers and ruggierites. Increase inter-racial intermingling, only good can come of it.

Above represents the notes on which Mr. Qunta's address was delivered in Port Elizabeth on 26th March, 1956.

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