

JUVENILES IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW: MECHANISMS TO PROTECT OR REOFFEND?

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ABSTRACT

The main function of Juvenile Rehabilitation Centres is containment and rehabilitatory. This study was conceived to investigate mechanisms that have been put in place to protect youths in conflict with the law. The study was undertaken in the Western Area of Sierra Leone which has the capital, Freetown. Respondents to the questionnaires were a bulk population of forty of the offenders in the two Juvenile Detention Centres that consented to take part in the study. Focused Group discussions were held with stakeholders including community members of the Juvenile Delinquents and staff of the Juvenile Correctional Centres.

Results revealed that mechanisms are still inadequate despite the passing of the Child Rights Act in 2007. Separate courts for juvenile offenders' courts have not been created and there are no educational facilities for offenders who are awaiting sentences even though some of them spend over a year before they are sentenced. However, only one of the offenders is a reoffender and all of them stated that they have developed a negative attitude towards reoffending. Inferential statistics revealed that the following determinants were significant at P value of 95 percent confidence level: counselling and education for developing a positive attitude to reoffending.

Recommendations include: ensuring that all efforts be made for Juvenile Delinquents not to be detained before their convictions; they should have access to formal schooling whilst awaiting trial and Social welfare workers should have follow-up mechanisms to ensure these juveniles are properly integrated into society to ensure that reoffending does not occur.

KEYWORDS: Juvenile Delinquents, Mechanisms, Conflict with the Law

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