The Nexus of Ethno-Religious Values and Juvenile Delinquency in Nigeria

Akunesiobike CHIBUEZE Adindu[1*], Hassan, Ibrahim Muhammad[2], Cyril O. UGWUOKE[3]

[1,2,3]*Department of Sociology & Anthropolgy, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.*

Corresponding Author: Akunesiobike CHIBUEZE Adindu, Department of Sociology & Anthropolgy, Faculty of the Social Sciences, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

ABSTRACT

This study examined nexus between ethno-religious values and juvenile delinquency in Nigeria. The study employed a cross-sectional survey research design, while specifically employing a multistage sampling technique, which involved the use of simple random sampling, quota, availability and purposive sampling techniques. A total of 510 respondents were selected through this research design provided both quantitative data for the study. Following analysis of data, the study found that Majority of the respondents (63.1%) considered religious values as vital determinants behaviour (adherence/resistance). The result indicated that more than half of the respondents (53.5%) agreed to have engaged in delinquent behaviour at one time or another. Again, the findings hold that greater number (68.6%) of the respondents perceived laws in Nigeria as not favouring youth in one ethnic group. Furthermore the result showed that there was statistically significant relationship (p<.005) between consideration of religious values and engagement in any delinquent behaviour. The findings also revealed that there was no statistically significant relationship (p<.521) between engagement in any delinquent behaviour and perception of laws. Finally, the study recommended among others that religious values are important tools towards progress and coexistence in societies and therefore should be uniformed and sustained.

INTRODUCTION

Generally, value has been taken to mean moral ideas, general conceptions or orientations towards the world or sometimes simply interests, attitudes, preferences, needs, sentiments and dispositions. But sociologists use this term in a more precise sense to mean "the generalised end which has the connotations of rightness, goodness or inherent desirability". These ends are regarded legitimate and binding by society. They define what is important worthwhile and worth striving for. Sometimes, values have been interpreted to mean "such standards by means of which the ends of action are selected". Thus, values are collective conceptions of what is considered good, desirable, and proper or bad, undesirable, and improper in a culture. According to Haralambos (2000), a value is a belief that something is good and desirable. Values are socially approved desires and goals that are internalised through the process of conditioning, learning or socialisation and that become subjective preferences, standards and aspirations (Mukerjee 1949). A value is a shared idea about how something is ranked in terms of

desirability, worth or goodness. Familiar examples of values are wealth, loyalty, independence, equality, justice, fraternity and friendliness. These are generalised ends consciously pursued by or held up to individuals as being worthwhile in themselves. It is not easy to clarify the fundamental values of a given society because of their sheer breadth.

Values are general principles to regulate our day-to-day behaviour. They not only give direction to our behaviour but are also ideals and objectives in themselves. Values deal not so much with what is, but with what ought to be; in other words, they express moral imperatives. They are the expression of the ultimate ends, goals or purposes of social action. Our values are the basis of our judgments about what is desirable, beautiful, proper, correct, important, worthwhile and good as well as what is undesirable, ugly, incorrect, improper and bad.

Ethnic values are the values the characterise the value systems of ethnic groups and whose continued support helps to underpin notions of ethnic identity. This includes the values surrounding religious practice, taboos,

traditions, and traditional knowledge etc. Such values are threatened, shaped or maintained by the processes of cultural assimilation, multiculturalism, social integration and transculturalism etc. Furthermore, religious values are ethical principles founded in religious traditions, texts and beliefs. In contrast to personal values, religious-based values are based on scriptures and a religion's established norms. Various aspects of the significance of religious values have been considered with respect to novels their relevance to a particular religious group and in relation to human society (Ramsden 2009)

However, our society today to a significant extent has lost its sense of security, due to many factors. The rising wave of crime in the form of lawlessness has become one of the major issues of great concern in our society today. The youth is the future of the nation and as such it is pertinent to focus on the violent crime rate and youth involvement in the same and the implication it projects for the future. An increasing number of youth are getting more delinquently oriented and involved.

Juvenile delinquency, as used here, is a broad term for minor and major offenses committed by juveniles under the age of 18 years old. Generally studies look specifically at the ages of 10-17 years old and will include all offenses punishable by law against minors which include: violent crime index crimes (murder, manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault), property crime index crimes (burglary, larceny-theft, motor vehicle theft, arson, other assaults, and vandalism), weapon possession, drug abuse violations, driving under the influence, liquor laws, drunkenness, disorderly conduct, curfew and loitering, and running away (Crime in the United States, 2006, 2007).

Juvenile delinquency is an increasingly key topic of public concern, it is worthy to note that it is so because it is costly and damaging to the majority of the society, even though it is committed by minority of the same. Alarmingly, recent research and happenings have revealed that about 80 or more percent of crime committed in the nation and worldwide is perpetuated by youth and this is worrisome, because it has a serious indication for the future of the nation as a whole. Factors responsible for juvenile delinquency are many and inter-connected and these factors combine to make

probability of criminal behaviour in youths more likely. Therefore, this study is aimed at ascertaining the nexus between ethno-religious values and juvenile delinquency in Nigeria. The specific objectives of this study are as follows:

1. To examine whether religious values encourage youths to engage in juvenile delinquency in Nigeria

2. To ascertain whether youth who engage in delinquency perceive laws as favouring youth in one ethnic group in Nigeria

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Ethnic

Cox (1970) sees ethnicity or ethnic group generally as a socio-cultural entity while inhabiting the same state, country or economic area, consider themselves biologically, culturally, linguistically or socially distinct from each other and most often view their relation in actual or potentially antagonistic terms Azeez (2004) sees ethnicity as a sense of people hood that has its foundation in the combined remembrance of past experience and common aspiration. Among the first to bring the term "ethnic group" into social sciences was the German sociologist Marx Weber (1922) who defined it as those human groups that entertain a subjective believe in their common descent because of similarities of physical type or of customs or both, or because of memories of colonisation or migration; this belief must be important for group formation, furthermore, it does not matter whether an objective blood relationship exists. Weber maintained that ethnic groups are artificial i.e. a social construct because they were based on subjective belief. Nnoli (1978) defines ethnicity as a "social phenomenon associated with (communal) competition among members of different ethnic groups". While 'ethnic groups', are social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries and membership especially language, culture or both, with language constituting the most crucial variable in Africa.

Juvenile Delinquency

There is no universal definition of a juvenile or delinquency. The laws of different nations stipulate different age brackets for the juveniles. Juvenile delinquency refers to the violation of the criminal codes regulating the behaviour of young persons in the society. Besides, the concept of a juvenile is sometimes used

interchangeably with other concepts like a child, an adolescent and a youth. But the law is usually more specific in its definition of a child or juvenile or youth. The Children and Young Persons Act (hereafter referred to as CYPA) defines a child as "a person under the age of fourteen years". Also, the law defines a young person as "a person who has attained the age of fourteen years". The law, however, did not define a juvenile. However other indicators in the law show that the term refers to a person under the age of seventeen years. Juvenile delinquency broadly defined refers to any act in violation of criminal law, committed by a person defined under law as it juvenile, which if had been committed by an adult will be treated as crime or criminal conduct

Religion

The term religion carries a different meaning for different people. According to Johnstone (1975), the English word religion" has a Latin root, i.e. „Religare" meaning, „to bind together" which suggests the concept of a group or fellowship. Therefore, because of the richness and variety of the subject matter, opinion and understanding differ in theoretical conceptualization. According to Durkheim (1915), religion is conceptualised as a dichotomy on the basis of social facts by studying of the indigenous Aborigines of Australia and arrives saying that "religious phenomena are naturally arranged in two fundamental categories of beliefs and practices", the first being the „states of opinion" in the representation of the mind; the second determined modes of action" which is the practical side of life. Durkheims religious concept is focuses on the importance of the Aborigines „totem" a symbolic representation of their clan or society where he sees nothing in the practical meaning of the rites and rituals; rather he believes that it is in the sacredness of the totem that the rites and rituals are practiced to reinforce their group cohesion and solidarity which is seen to be the expression of collective consciousness. Adogbo (2000) defines religion as a feeling of absolute dependence on the supernatural being. According to Hamilton (2001) cited in Igboin, (2011), religion is seen to be the product of psychological factors inherent in all human beings and on the other it is seen as providing support for social values and social stability".

Religious Values

These are desirable ingredients or practice which is common to a religious group and which the group upholds. Such practices may include: love for one another, almsgiving, act of supplication, meditation, harmonious living among others.

Youth

Youth is defined as "the appearance, freshness, vigour, spirit, etc, characteristic of one who is young.": In the Nigerian context, the youth refers to people between 18 and 35 years. They constitute "all young males and females aged 18–35 which are citizens of the Federal Republic of Nigeria" (National Youth Policy of Nigeria, 2001). An individuals actual maturity may not correspond to their chronological ages. Youth can refer to the entire time of life when one is young, including childhood, but often refers specifically to the time of life that is neither childhood nor adulthood but rather somewhere in between. This word demands the qualities of youth, not a time of life but a state of mind, a quality of imagination, a predominance of courage over timidity, of the appetite for adventure over the life of ease (Roberts 2007). However, the youth constitute about 60 per cent of the more than 160 million people in Nigeria. While this definition may do justice to the age specification of the youth in Nigeria, it is, however, grossly inadequate with respect to the social character of young people in Nigeria. Using this criterion, some of the important youth categories that deserve mention are the street youth, college youth, school drop-outs and unemployed youth. The importance of delineating these categories is that it is one of the reasons why government policies targeted at young people often fail in Nigeria. Young people (male and female) and youth (male and female) are used interchangeably in this paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Denton, Pearce and Smith (2008), religion plays an important role in the lives of youth. Based on data from the National Longitudinal study of Adolescent Health and the Gallup Youth Survey religion among U.S. adolescents is relatively high and is an important aspect of their lives (Smith & Faris 2002). In 2000, the Gallup Youth Survey showed that more than half of adolescents ages 13-17 indicated that religious beliefs were very important to them (Gallup 2002). Similarly, the National Study of Youth and Religion indicated that 78 percent of adolescents reported believing in God (Denton, Pearce and Smith 2008). According to these data sources, many adolescents attend religious services and

activities routinely (Harris, 2011; Gallup 2002; Denton, Pearce and Smith 2008). The Gallup Youth Survey indicated that over 50 percent of youth attended religious services in the past week (Gallup 2002). Similarly, while examining descriptive findings of adolescent religious participation using three nationally reputable surveys of youth, Smith, Denton, Faris and Regnerus (2002) found that the majority of youth affiliate with a religious group and about half of American adolescents participate in religious services on a routine basis. Adolescents have also indicated the importance of religious institutions in providing them with assistance.

Religious institutions also teach the importance of developing respect for authority and provide a belief system based on a specific moral directive (Smith 2003). In a review of over 300 studies assessing the relationship between religion and delinquency, Johnson, Byron, Li, Larson and McCullough (2000) found that overall religion reduced various forms of delinquency. In their evaluation, the researchers found only one study in which religiosity increased the level of delinquency and this study used religiosity as a control variable whereas the other studies used religiosity as a central variable that was being measured. Similarly, in a meta-analysis of 60 studies, Baier and Wright (2001) maintain that several studies identify a statistically significant relationship in which religion reduces delinquency.

Despite the abundance of literature on the relationship between religion and delinquency, there are a number of limitations. Although most researchers agree that the most comprehensive studies specify a relationship grounded in theory, many studies lack a theoretical framework (Regnerus 2003a). Larson (1997) found that the effects of religion on delinquency remain significant even after controlling for delinquent associations, beliefs, and sociodemographic variables. The authors conclude that the effects of religiosity on delinquency are neither indirect nor spurious. For studies that have concluded that there is an inverse relationship between religiosity and juveniles' delinquency (Desmond, Soper, Purpura and Smith 2009; Simons, Simons and Conger 2004) there is conflicting data on whether religiosity directly affects delinquency rates or whether the relationship is indirect or spurious. In support of a direct relationship, Jang and Johnson (2001) found that the effects of religion on delinquency remain significant

even after controlling for delinquent associations, beliefs, and socio demographic variables. The authors conclude that the effects of religiosity on delinquency are neither indirect nor spurious (Jang and Johnson 2001). Although it is plausible to conclude that children who believe in religion and attend religious services are less likely to be involved in delinquent activity as a direct social control mechanism, there are other influences that may impact the relationship. This implies an indirect relationship between religion and juvenile delinquency. Some studies have concluded that religiosity has an indirect effect on delinquent behavior (Simons, Simons and Conger 2004).

Furthermore, for much of the twentieth century, crime and punishment have provided some of the most powerful symbols of the racial divide in America. In the early decades, lynchings, chain-gang style penal practices, and prosecutorial and judicial bigotry were common, particularly in the southern criminal justice systems (Bader & Desmond 2006). Throughout the United States, racial minorities were generally tried by all white juries in all white courtrooms, as was the case, for example, in the 1931–32 Scottsboro rape trial.1 In 1910, African Americans, who were about 11 percent of the U.S. population, were 31 percent of the prison population (Russell, 1998). African Americans accounted for 405 of the 455 of executions for rape between 1930 and 1972 (Bader & Desmond 2006). Sentencing laws were discriminatory, with the harshest sanctions given to blacks who victimized whites. The police were also instrumental in racial violence, by actively participating in, encouraging, or failing to restrain mobs (O'Brien 1989). Over much of the last century, police instigated or participated in race riots in cities nation-wide, and police behavior encouraged hostility toward and violence in minority communities.

Minorities, particularly African Americans, are generally overrepresented in the criminal justice system both as offenders and as victims. According to the *Uniform Crime Reports* (*UCR*) for 2003, African Americans (who were 12.7 percent of the population in 2003) were arrested for 37 percent of violent crimes (murder and non negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery and aggravated assault) and 29 percent of property crime (U.S. Department of Justice 2003). African Americans are disproportionately arrested for violent crimes and whites for burglaries and property crimes. Although most crime is committed by males, black women are

also disproportionately involved in the criminal justice system. The rate of black women under control of the criminal justice system is growing faster than for any other group, including black men and white men (Russell-Brown 2004). Blacks are victims of serious violent crimes at far higher rates than whites. In 2002, blacks were 6 times more likely to be murdered than whites; and although homicide levels have declined for all groups over the past decade, during the 1976 to 2002 period, rates were disproportionately high for African Americans at 47 percent of victims (Fox and Marianne 2005).

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopted strain theory to explain the findings. The strain theory is probably one of the most popular sociological explanations of crime and delinquency since it was first formulate by Robert Merton. Crime and delinquency have been explained as reactions or modes of adaptation to strain or frustration caused by disjunction between the culturally prescribed goals and institutionalized means for the realization of such goals. According to Merton in Fitzgerald et-al (1981), social structures exert enormous pressures on individuals. One of such pressures is that the social structure determines the nature of the aspiration of their citizens. The point is that, society prescribed goals that its citizens should pursue. However, the institutionalized means for realizing the aspirations are restricted by distribution of talents and opportunities, and by structural inhibitions. Furthermore, cultural goals are emphasized without corresponding opportunities on the means of attaining ends (Alemika & Chukwuma, 2001). Consequently, society creates the condition whereby the realization of the goals is emphasized to the detriment of the institutionalized means. Deviance arises when society places undue emphasis on realization of material aspiration
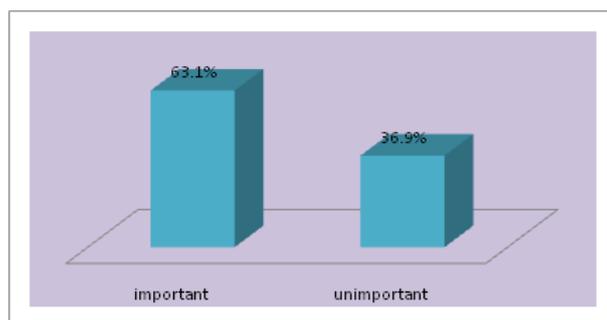
while at the same time ignoring or inadequately providing approved means for the achievement of these goals.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESES

1. Youth who do not consider religious values as important are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviour than those who consider it as such

2. Youth who engage in delinquency are more likely to perceive laws as favouring youth in one ethnic group than those who do not perceive it as such

METHODOLOGY

The study is carried out in Ohafia Local Government Area (LGA), of Abia State, Nigeria. The study adopted the cross-sectional survey design in generating data to answer the research questions as well as test the hypotheses. This research design is appropriate for collecting information from a section of a study population and also allows the use of a selected sample to describe or represent a large population at a given point in time. The study population for this study comprised males and females aged 18 years and above. The age range of the respondents falls within the adult age. It has a projected *population* of over 97,000 youth (https://www.vanguardngr.com*).* A sample size of 510 respondents was used for the study. This was drawn from the total population of the study. The study employed a multistage sampling technique, which involved the use of simple random sampling, quota, availability and purposive sampling techniques. The instrument used for collecting data in this study was the questionnaire schedule. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used for the analysis. Specifically, descriptive statistics such as percentages, the frequency tables was used in describing the respondents while chi-square (x^2), was used to test all hypotheses

RESULTS

Figure1. *Distribution of Respondents on how they consider religious values*

Source: *Field Survey 2018*

According to the Figure 1 above, (63.1 %) of the respondents considered religious values as important, (36.9%) of respondents considered it as consider religious values as unimportant. Majority of the respondents (63.1%) considered religious values as important.
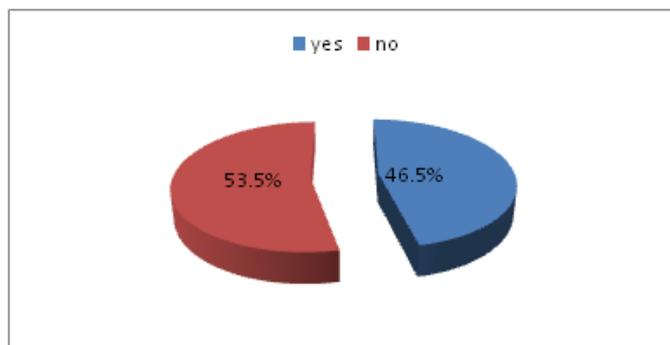

Figure2: *Distribution of Respondents on whether they think they have engaged in delinquent behaviour*

Source: *Field Survey 2018*

Figure 2, shows the distribution of respondents on whether they think they have engaged in delinquent behaviour. Data from the figure above shows that 53.5% of the respondents think they have engaged in delinquent behaviour while 46.5% do not think so. The result indicated that more than half of the respondents (53.5%) agreed that have engaged in delinquent behavior
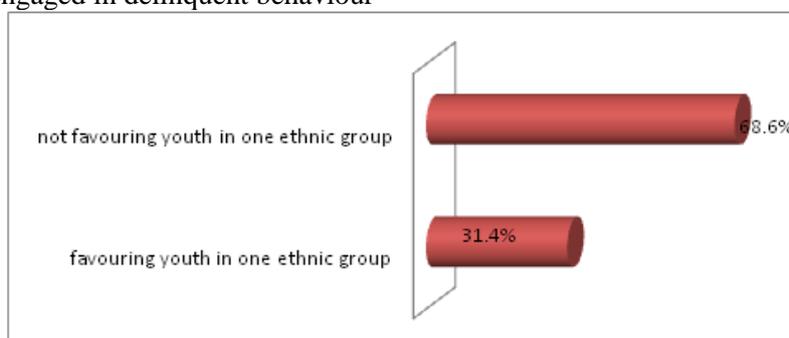

Figure3. *Distribution of Respondents on how they perceive laws in Nigeria*

Source: *Field Survey 2018*

The result from figure 1 shows the distribution of respondents by how they perceive laws in Nigeria. From the figure, it can be observed that the highest percentage (68.6%) of the respondents perceived laws in Nigeria as not favouring youth in one ethnic group and 31.4% perceived it as favouring youth in one ethnic group. The findings indicated that (68.6%) of the respondents perceived laws in Nigeria as not favouring youth in one ethnic group

TEST OF HYPOTHESES

Statistical Computation

Hypothesis 1

H1: Youth who do not consider religious values as important are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviour than those who do not consider it as such.

H0: There is no relationship between consideration of religious values as important and engagement in delinquent behaviour

Test Statistic: The Chi square ($\chi2$) statistic is employed in testing this hypothesis.

Significance Level: A significance level (α) of 0.05 was used in testing this hypothesis

Table1: *Cross tabulation of consideration of religious values and engagement in any delinquent behaviour*

Consideration of religious values	Engagement in any delinquent behaviour		Total
	Yes	No	
Important	150 (63.3%)	172(63.0%)	322(63.1%)
Unimportant	87(36.7%)	101(37.0%)	188(36.9%)
Total	**237(100.0%)**	**273(100.0%)**	**510(100.0)**

$\chi2$=.946, df=1, N=510, p< .005   **Source:** *Survey, 2018*

Table 1 is a cross tabulation of consideration of religious values and engagement in any delinquent behaviour. Consideration of religious values involves an index built from figure 2 that contains analysis on respondent's consideration of religious values. Engagement in any delinquent behaviour involves an index built from figure 1 that contains analysis on respondent's engagement in any delinquent behaviour.

Rejection Region: If p ≤ .05 reject the null hypothesis (H_o), but if p >.05, we accept the null hypothesis. The test is a one-tailed test.

With the computed χ^2= .946; df=1, the test shows that there was statistically significant relationship (p<.005) between consideration of religious values and engagement in any delinquent behaviour. Therefore, the substantive

Statistical Computation

hypothesis which states that youth who do not consider religious values as important are more likely to engage in delinquent behaviour than those who do not consider it as such is valid and therefore accepted.

H_1: Youth who engage in delinquency are more likely to perceive laws as favouring youth in one ethnic group than those who do not perceive it as such.

H_0: There is no relationship between who engagement in delinquency and perception of laws

Test Statistic: The Chi square (χ^2) statistic is employed in testing this hypothesis.

Significance Level: A significance level (α) of 0.05 was used in testing this hypothesis

Table2: *Cross tabulation of engagement in any delinquent behaviour and perception of laws*

Engagement in any delinquent behaviour	Perception of laws		Total
	Favouring youth in one ethnic group	Not favouring youth in one ethnic group	
Yes	71 (44.4%)	166(47.4%)	237(46.5%)
No	89(55.6%)	184(52.6%)	273(53.5%)
Total	160(100.0%)	350(100.0%)	510(100.0)

χ^2=.412, DF=1, N=510, p< .521

Source: *Survey, 2018*

Table 5 is a cross tabulation of engagement in any delinquent behaviour and perception of laws. Engagement in any delinquent behaviour involves an index built from figure 1 that contains analysis on respondent's engagement in any delinquent behaviour. Perception of laws on the other hand was measured with reported perception of laws analysis in figure 3. The category of yes was recoded as "engagement in any delinquent behaviour" while the category of no was recoded as "non-engagement in any delinquent behaviour"

Rejection Region: If p ≤ .05 reject the null hypothesis (H_o), but if p >.05, we accept the null hypothesis. The test is a one-tailed test. With the computed χ^2= .412; df=1, the test shows that there was no statistically significant relationship (p< .521) between engagement in any delinquent behaviour and perception of laws. Therefore, the substantive hypothesis which states that youth who engage in delinquency are more likely to perceive laws as favouring youth in one ethnic group than those who do not perceive it as such is not valid and therefore rejected. In other words, engagement in any

delinquent behaviour is not indeed influenced by their perception of laws.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

At this juncture, it is important to report the findings of the study with particular reference to the nexus between ethno-religious values and juvenile delinquency in Nigeria. From the analysis of data and consistent with findings in previous studies, there was statistically significant relationship (p<.005) between consideration of religious values and engagement in any delinquent behaviour. This is in line with the findings of Johnson, Jang, Larson and Li (2001) found that the effects of religion on delinquency remain significant even after controlling for delinquent associations, beliefs, and socio demographic variables. The authors conclude that the effects of religiosity on delinquency are neither indirect nor spurious.

However, the study found that the test shows that there was no statistically significant relationship (p<.521) between engagement in any delinquent behaviour and perception of laws. Russell-Brown (2004) asserted that African Americans are disproportionately arrested for violent crimes and whites for burglaries and property crimes. Although most

crime is committed by males, black women are also disproportionately involved in the criminal justice system. The rate of black women under control of the criminal justice system is growing faster than for any other group, including black men and white men.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The major objective of the study was to ascertain nexus between ethno-religious values and juvenile delinquency in Nigeria. The study focused on an area of consideration of religious values as important in influencing engagement in delinquent behaviour as well as perception of laws as influencing delinquent behaviour among the youth. However, this study has yielded important findings indicating that religious values are important and therefore should be sustained. The findings of this study have clear implications for policy and future research.

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