

PILFERING AS A CHILDHOOD PROBLEM AMONG CHILDREN: A PARENTAL MANAGEMENT APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the problem of pilfering among the children. It defines what pilfering is and considers it to be a 'normal' behaviour among the underage children. It is a problem that can be easily solved. This paper critically explained the causative factors which can lead to pilfering and the reasons why the children steal from stores or the individuals around them. The effects of pilfering both on the children who steal and the victims of their behaviour are enunciated. The ways out of the problem are examined and the channels that should be taken to correct the wrong act are mentioned. The paper concludes by recommending that family should have, and uphold the standard of honesty which is the best policy. The children should be made to realise that the family members are not expected to go below this code of family ethics. The parents are expected to lay good examples for their children to follow in this regard. Recommendation was also made in area of parents being conscious of the needs of their children and giving those needs promptly to prevent them from pilfering to take care of those needs. Finally, it is recommended that parents should find time to tell fairy stories or tales which teach moral behaviours which their children could emulate, this is especially so in case of the parents, living in urban areas with their children, where the life in the cities has rubbed of the moral standard they need to teach their children. They need to lead the children on the path of righteousness.

Keywords: *Children; Steal; Pilfering; Parents and Problem.*

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INTRODUCTION

Children going against the norms and laws of their societies are not a new social phenomenon. Mbuba (2005) noticed that one of the biggest challenges facing society today is the problem of juvenile offending. Such offending has aggravated to the level of violence where children kill other children in the society (Smith and Sueda, 2008). According to Save the Children Sweden (2005), offences committed by children are perceived differently depending on factors relating to the social, economic and psychological conditions of families and communities. This perception is also related to the conceptualization of communities about childhood, and could be indicative of the types of treatment meted out to children after having committed an offence.

Stealing has been identified as one of the problems of indiscipline among children in the society (Asiyai, 2012). Theft, like rheumatic fever, is a disease of childhood and adolescence, and as in rheumatic fever; attacks in later life are frequently in the nature of recurrences (Bowly, 1944).

Shepard (2009) opines that stealing or pilfering is normal up to age six. Most children have taken things that don't belong to them from time to time, and while it is a problem that needs to be addressed, the occasional pilfering of someone else's belongings does not necessarily indicate a life of crime as an adult. Children, as a result of inherent self-centredness, have difficulty with the concept that other people have the same rights. Due to this basic lack of understanding, it is usually not productive to punish them. It is actually better, at this age, to patiently explain the concept and hopefully look for signs of understanding, no matter how fleeting (Shepard, 2009).

This paper is not written to show that pilfering among children is a serious and epidemic deviant behaviour in the society. However, it is an attempt to show that it is a social problem which exists among some children and can be easily overcome through the assistance of the parents and child psychologists in the society. The parents should be conscious of the fact that they have, perhaps, done the same thing when they were children.

Attempt was made in this paper to examine the causes, the effects and the ways out of the problem of pilfering among the concerned children, through the contributions of the experts in the field of child Psychology, and the recommendations made, are believed to be power tools in transforming our children to the life of conformity. Parents are counselled to approach the

problem with wisdom, otherwise, their natural inclination may bring responses that are wrong and destructive (Kane, n.d).

2 DEFINITION OF PILFERING

Pilfering is a petty theft or stealing in small quantities of variable item. It is a predatory crime in which a person deliberately takes someone else's property in a clever way on a continuous basis with a view to making the owner unsuspecting of the loss (Olowa, 2010; Anonguku et al, 2008).

According to Olowa (2010) and Anonguku et al (2008), pilfering could be in different forms based on the place of occurrence, the extent of occurrence, the background and the status of the pilfers and the effects on the victims. Children who are pilfers usually pilfer at homes (Stealing food, money, medication etc.) from their parents or other members of the family (Leonard and Banver, n.d). School is another place where pilfering takes place. Many children usually steal from their school mates and in some occasions, from their teachers. According to Hong and Ohno (2005), pilfering can equally take place in the market places. Children concerned may steal from supermarkets, restaurants and other public places.

Pilfering by underage children, should not be considered a serious and heart breaking problem. It is normal for some little children to engage in the act. Children, at a time in their lives, always wanted to have everything for themselves. The parents should not be over worried on their children who pilfer. With time and counselling from those parents and child psychologists the problem can be solved.

However, there are some identified reasons why children engaged in pilfering things. These causative factors are going to be explained so that the parents will get familiar with factors which may cause their children to pilfer.

3 CAUSATIVE FACTORS OF PILFERING AMONG CHILDREN

Factors which cause pilfering among children started from the family. Idogo (2011) was of the opinion that early childhood victimization, either through direct abuse, neglect, or witnessing parental domestic violence, has been shown to have demonstrable long-term

consequences for anti-social behaviour among children. A child that is being abused and neglected may find pilfering succour for his problem. Otu et al (2011) argued along the same view. Otu et al (2011) had the view that children in all sorts of deviant behaviour became delinquent due to their abused upbringing and inability to acquire quality education. Parents play significant roles in what their children become in life. Hence, the parental roles in whether a child will be conformist or deviant cannot be underrated. Idaka et al (2011) argued that socio-economic status of the parents is significantly related to deviant behaviour of the children. The socio-economic status determines the delinquent behaviours in the children or otherwise.

The area of children supervision by the parents is another factor which may lead to children, pilfering things. Sanni et al (2010) argued that children who are inadequately supervised by parents, whose parents fail to teach them the differences between right and wrong, whose parents do not monitor their whereabouts and activities are more likely to be delinquent. Stealing by children may be as a result of poor supervision and improper parental training.

Frailberg (1996) argued that many parents who have firm moral beliefs about lying, stealing, murder and destruction fail to transmit them to their children in a profound and meaningful way. Parents tolerate the moral lapses or even the absence or moral principle in their children beyond the period when we can expect a child to have incorporated moral values in his own personality. Hence, lack of socialization within the family seems to be the most recurring factors amongst the social causes of delinquency (Vanderchueren, 2004).

Freedom is another factor which may encourage pilfering among children. Children prefer autonomous and independent life that is free from adult control, thereby engaging in various delinquent acts (Fareo, 2012). Hood and Joyce (1999) explained that boys from rough families had greater freedom to roam streets and markets which provided the opportunities to raid shop, dockside and market stalls for petty items than those whose parents regarded as respectable. Pilfering was regarded normal among the boys with unlimited freedom.

A child needs to be admitted, love and cared for by the family. Where a child is unadmitted, disliked and rejected in the family, the life of such child is not secured. Enquiries have shown that remarkable proportion of children who, for one reason or another, had not lived securely in one home all their lives, but had spent long periods away from home, may end up becoming juvenile thieves (Bowlby, 1944).

Family disorganization is another factor which may cause delinquent behaviour in children, especially pilfering. Vanderchueren (2004) observed that changes in the traditional family and of the multiple family forms of today are one of the factors responsible for juvenile crime. These included single-parent families, families without legal ties, families of divorced or separated parents and homosexual couples. A child may not live securely under such families forms and such child may become delinquent i.e. pilfer.

Neighbourhood is shaped by the children and children can also be shaped by their neighbourhood (Oberwittler, 2004). Hence, a neighbourhood where most children are petty thieves may prompt others to steal. Another relevant factor to neighbourhood is urbanization. Done (2004) argued that countries with more urbanized populations have higher registered anti-social behaviours than those with strong rural lifestyles and communities; this may be attributed to differences in social control and social cohesion. Rural groupings rely mainly on family and community control as a means of dealing with antisocial behaviour and exhibit markedly, lower rates than urban societies who resort to legal and judicial measures. Therefore, urbanisation may encourage factors which may cause children to steal, whereas, rural areas have strong social cohesion which may prevent children from stealing.

One may wonder the reasons why children steal. There are many reasons for this and some of them are explained.

4 REASONS WHY CHILDREN STEAL

Peters (2006) explained that in children, the true internalization of ethical behaviour is still somewhat shaky. The kids are still in the process of developing a true conscience. Therefore, stealing at this stage may have profound meaning to them. Children may steal for different reasons. Shepard (2009) argued that some children may steal because they model their parents. Often, adult fail to realise that children learn more by watching than listening. When parents bring home from office things that do not belong to them, a message is sent that says stealing is OK in some circumstances. Hence, parents who pilfer may be the reason for their children doing the same thing.

Kane (n.d) argued that lack of self control is one of the reasons why children steal. Younger children have difficulty with self-control. A child may take something (although he knows that stealing is wrong), simply because he cannot help himself. A child may steal when

the child's basic needs are not being met. A child who feels that his needs are not being met will eventually take the matter into his own hands. For instance, if the child's school friends have pocket money and such child have a need for pocket money but the parents did not give, he may end up stealing money to take care of his needs. Hence, sometime children steal because they have no money of their own (Kane, n.d; Shepard, 2009).

Lack of emotional needs is another reason why children steal. A child, who does not have his emotional needs met, feels empty inside. These are children that are lonely or having trouble in schools or with friends, such children may feel unloved or that the parents are not interested in him. The rejected children or the jealous children may need something to substitute for the love which is, in their view, missing. Their pilfering career may start by taking a sweet which they may eat or hide, feeling superior because they have secret, and delighted because they have made a material gain. Hence, stealing is their way of expressing their discontent and to seek gratification (Kane, n.d; Lennhoff, 1966).

E-Christian Counselling (n.d) observed that children may steal somethings which excite their interest. Their involvement in pilfering is not as a result of needy situations, but for the sake of adventure. Hence, excitement and adventure are other reasons why children may steal things around them.

Peer pressure is another reason why children steal. Older children are pulled after what their friends do. If the child is with a group of children that feel stealing is exciting, the child may steal to be part of the group. Motivation for stealing especially for older children is to keep up with the Joneses' kid. Many pre-teens and teens will begin pilfering not only to secure items for themselves, but to give them to buddies in an effort to buy friends. A child may steal as a show of bravery to friends, or to give presents to family members or friends or to be more accepted by peers. Moreover, a child may steal to make things equal if a brother or sister seems to be favoured with affection or gifts. Children may also steal out of a fear of dependency; they do not want to depend on anyone, so they take what they need (Kane, n.d; Peters, 2006; eChristian Counselling, n.d).

5 THE EFFECTS OF CHID PILFERING

Asiyai (2012) opines than deviant children may never fulfil their potentials and as a result, become burdens to the society. Hence, if the problem of pilfering is not properly checked

among children, it may lead to such children not developing their potentials, and may cause a situation where those children would effectually become problem to the society. Unchecked pilfering may lead to a career of stealing, like Victoria May Floyd (Australian Army Museum Tanmania, n.d). Children who steal may likely play truancy and skip classes (National Arts Centre, n.d). Pilfering, when not solved, may push children to becoming street children, especially if such pilfering is carried out as a group activity (Faloore and Asamu, 2010). Children who steal may eventually turn to professional shoplifters; pick pockets, fraudsters and drug peddlers (Ikuomola, 2012).

Child pilfering, if not properly checked, may likely lead to parent abuse. Children that have gone wild beyond control may turn to monsters, terribly feared by their parents. Such children may continuously steal from their parents or grandparents who are the victims of their own blood. Hence, pilfering may lead to problem of parent abuse (Holt, 2009).

If stealing is persistent or accompanied by other problem behaviours or symptoms, the stealing may be a sign of more serious problems in the child's emotional development or problems in the family. Children who repeatedly steal may also have difficulty trusting others and forming close relationships. Rather, than feeling guilty, they may blame their behaviours on others, arguing that, 'since they refuse to give me what I need, I will take it' (eChristian counselling, n.d). Child pilfering may likely increase the country's overall crime situation. Although pilfering may not be seen as a serious deviant behaviour but it does increase the likelihood of soaring up the rate of the crime in the nearest future. Jones (2010) gave the example that overall crime situation in Jamaica increased as a result of children offending. Finally, pilfering has effects on the victims. These include financial losses, emotional disturbance, and in some cases, quitting of the business (Anonguku et al, 2008).

6 THE WAY OUT OF THE PROBLEM OF CHILD PILFERING

Worried parents, teachers and other adults should not reject child who pilfers. Rejection, if piles up may lead to a desire for revenge and pilfering may reach ever more serious proportions (Lennhoff, 1966). Instead, the parents should stay calm and not take the matter personally. Parents should not accuse or confront their children but instead, should make their children realise that what they do is wrong (Kane, n.d)

Parents should actively teach their children about property rights and the consideration of others. Parents should also be role model for their children. If you come with stationary or pens from the office or brag about a mistake at the supermarket check out counter, your lessons about honesty will be a lot harder for your children to understand (eChristian counselling, n.d).

Parents should consider whether the child has stolen out of a need for more attention. In these cases, the parents should make an effort to give more recognition to the child as an important family member (eChristian counselling, n.d).

In treating a child who steals persistently, a child and adolescent psychiatrist should evaluate the underlying reasons for the child's need to steal, and develop a planned treatment. Important aspects of the treatment will help the child learning the way to establish true relationships and help the family to support the child in changing to a healthier path of development (eChristian counselling, n.d).

7 CORECTING THE WRONG

Pilfering is wrong. Correction must be made. There are some ways of correcting the wrong of pilfering. The following are the highlighted steps that can be taken in correcting the problem of pilfering by E-Christian counselling (n.d):

- 1 Telling the child that stealing is wrong.
- 2 Helping the youngster to pay for or return the stolen object.
- 3 Making sure that the child does not benefit from the theft in anyway.
- 4 Avoiding lecturing or predicting future bad behaviour.
- 5 Making it clear that such behaviour is totally unacceptable within the family tradition and the community at large. They should be made to understand that stealing is not their standard (Hood and Joyce, 1999).

Kane (n.d) presents the following highlighted ways of correcting the wrong of stealing among children:

- 1 If your child has stolen from someone outside the family, your child must make restitution. The child must return what he stole from a store or from a neighbour. Have your child apologise. You should accompany the child to make the process of restitution easier for him.
- 2 If your child has stolen money from you, estimate what the child took and plainly tell the child that he must pay you back. He may do this by doing some work around the house.

- 3 Hide temptation. Do not leave money around where the child can find it. You can watch over his siblings' money for a while but do not tell them why. Do not send the child to buy something from store with a large bill.
- 4 Try to forget the incidence of the past. Do not repeat the past wrong deeds of the child.
- 5 You should find out the reason why your child stole. If he needs more attention make a special effort to give it to him. You may increase his allowance or pocket money and try to buy things he needs to make him look like his peer group, if you can afford it.
- 6 You should continue trusting your child. If your child is stealing, it does not mean he is bad or he is a thief or criminal. Do not label him bad.
- 7 Finally, be a model of honesty.

Children learnt by watching their parents. You should lay a good example about the property right of others. Try to be honesty in dealing with other people and their belongings. By doing this, your child will emulate and practice the same thing.

8 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Stealing among children is a common problem. It is like any other mistake your child makes. It is not a problem that should frighten the parents about the future of such child. It is something that has to be corrected with patience and wisdom. If pilfering is handled properly, you can correct this problem quickly and easily. Stealing is normal up to age six. However, after age six, they are beginning to better understand the concept of ownership, and the error of taking others' stuff. Once the children start to understand the concept of ownership, parents can then begin to set limits and discipline the child involves.

We have explained the meaning of pilfering in this paper. Its causative factors have been discussed. Moreover, the reasons why children pilfer or steal have been examined and ways out of the problem and the channels of correcting the wrong act of pilfering have been examined.

In giving recommendations, the parents should, in the first instance, understand that it is harder to fix children once they become criminals than they are when they first manifest signs of deviant or anti-social behaviour (Wallance, 2010). It is recommended that family should let the child know the family standard. Family should make honesty a code of ethnic. You should tell the child that, in your family, you do not steal from others. It does not matter whether the stolen object or material thing is cheap or expensive, or whether it is stolen from the store or individual.

Tell the child you are proud of the family's honesty and that you would not like it either, that anyone steals from you. Let your child understand this standard of family honesty.

Secondly, always be conscious of your child's need. Try as much as possible to offer reasonable and effective alternative to stealing. Since most children steal because they are in need, try to make provisions for their needs. You may increase the children's allowances or provide means of earning money for them by doing some domestic chores. This will enable the children to buy what they want. Help them to learn how to save and budget their money.

Thirdly, the parents need to watch over their behaviours. If parents are undercharged for items, find a wallet or a purse, they should returned them and let their children be a part of the process. Let them see how good it is to do the right thing, even if it was tempting to keep the money for themselves. This is a good way of instilling family's code of ethics in a solid manner.

In the fourth place, honesty should be cherished as the best policy by the parents. However, parents should not overreact when their children fall below the standard. Instead, parents should try to understand the behaviour, offer solutions to fix the problem. They should use the moment to teach their children where you and your family stand in terms of honesty and trustworthiness. The parents should understand that morality is often a work in progress, especially among children.

Finally, fairy tales may be told to the children, which contain those necessary elements of morals about what is good and what is bad. By these fairy tales, the child learns that the one who behaves well, obtains reward, and his behaviour is encouraged while the one, whose behaviour is bad, does not obtain the approval of those surrounding him and he is punished (Kansaye, 2005).

Telling fairy tales to the children is a daily activity in African rural areas (Villages). Such fairy tales (especially the ones related to tortoise and its cunning ways) are avenue of instilling morality into the rural children. Perhaps, this is one of the major reasons why rural children are less deviant when compared with children from urban areas. Parents in the urban areas should try to find time and do this (telling moral fairy tales) to their children.

Parents should not see pilfering as a big problem that cannot be overcome. If the recommendations made in this paper are adequately followed and the ways out of the problem and process of correcting the wrong mentioned in this paper are taken into cognizance by the concerned parents, it is going to be easier for those parents, in making saints out of their children that are pilfering.

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